



# Blue is back

## Tar Heels beat Illinois for first title since 1993

By Jeff Wirick  
Times-News

ST. LOUIS — Donned in a light-blue sweat suit, flanked by college basketball's all-time winningest coach, Michael Jordan strolled through the halls of the Edward Jones Dome on Monday night flashing his luminous smile.

"I'm happy," the most famous player in North Carolina basketball history said before disappearing into the locker room.

Twenty-three years after his memorable baseline jumper gave the Tar Heels a national title, Jordan's alma mater did it again.

This time, the images — Marvin Williams' tip-in to give North Carolina the lead for good, Raymond Felton's steal and three free throws in the final 25.8 seconds to seal it, Sean May's game-ending rebound — were nearly as dramatic in a 75-70 victory against top-ranked Illinois.

They were also just as satisfying. "This is a special moment," North Carolina junior David Noel said. "Everyone's going to remember it for the rest of their life."

Sean May posted 26 points and 10 rebounds to earn the Final Four's Most Outstanding Performer award. But, as coach Roy Williams pointed out minutes after the game, this wasn't about one player.

"This was a victory for North Carolina's team," said Coach Williams, who won his first national title in his fifth Final Four.

Felton (17 points, seven assists), swingman Rashad McCants (14 points), forward Jawad Williams (nine points) and Marvin Williams (eight points, five rebounds) also played key roles.

All those contributions were needed to fend off an inspired team and vocal pro-Illini crowd.

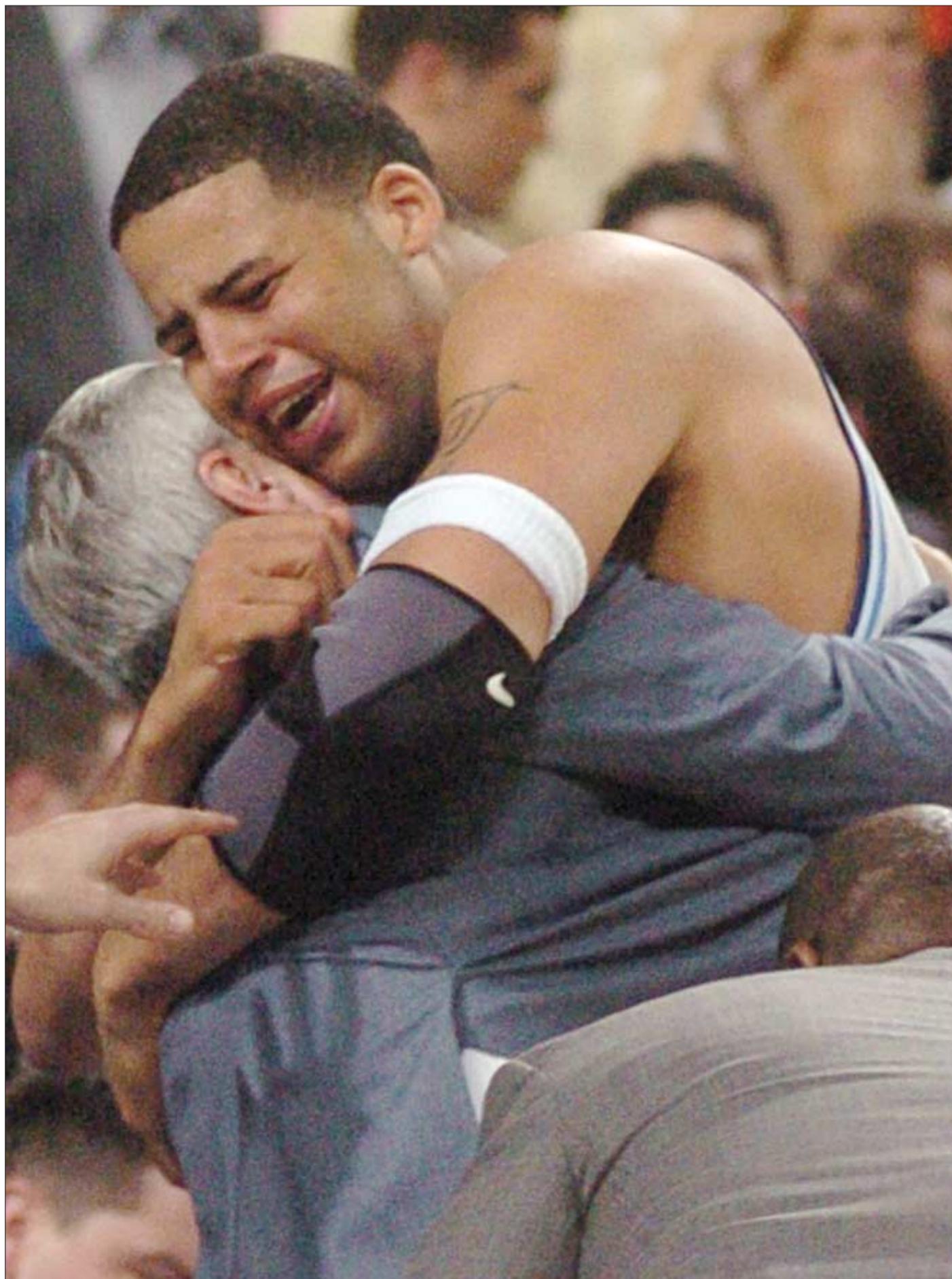
Just a 2½-hour drive from Illinois' campus, Illini fans converged on St. Louis during the past few days to see if their team could claim the school's first national championship.

A fountain just a few blocks from the Edward Jones Dome had orange water flowing out of it. An electronic bank sign flashed "Go Illini" in between telling pedestrians the time and temperature.

The Tar Heels turned those orange-clad fans blue after a few clutch plays in the closing minutes.

After blowing a 15-point, second-half lead, Marvin Williams tipped-in Rashad McCants' miss with 1:25 left to break a 70-70 tie. On Illinois' next possession, Felton cut off Luther Head's pass that was intended for a perimeter shooter.

Felton drew a foul, but made only one of two free throws. That gave the



Peter Schumacher / Times-News

North Carolina coach Roy Williams, left, receives a giant hug from tournament Most Outstanding Player Sean May. The Tar Heels beat Illinois 75-70.

See **BLUE** / Page B2



Peter Schumacher / Times-News

North Carolina coach Roy Williams cuts down a piece of the net following Monday night's victory.

## Roy Williams finally rights a wrong

ST. LOUIS — Roy Williams had it wrong. His team got it right.

O! Roy is good enough. North Carolina was better than Illinois on Monday night, and the Tar Heels delivered the elusive national championship to their coach.

The sympathy for Williams' close calls can cease forever, the celebrating in Chapel Hill can go on for the foreseeable future.

The Tar Heels, once a tattered bunch who couldn't stomach their former coach, found the inner fortitude to win a national championship in a showdown that turned out every



Bob Sutton

bit as dramatic as a championship game should at the Edwards Jones Dome. The Tar Heels won 75-70, a test of survival against the nation's top-ranked team.

"That was a special moment," Williams said of the immediate aftermath. "And I think in really truly special moments, most people don't think really clearly."

It was easy to see that Williams was mixing elation

with relief.

Williams, who said he couldn't simply show up and make right the ills that had hit the program so hard, guided the team back to glory. He had plenty of help, with a crafty performance from foul-plagued point guard Raymond Felton and a dominating presence from center Sean May.

And just enough from everyone else wearing the white jerseys with blue trim.

"I'm so happy for these seniors because of what they've been through," Williams said. "They took me for a ride."

It was both smooth and bumpy during the final, but for

the most part the Tar Heels turned in a vintage performance in the championship game. They used the parts that seem all so well-conditioned for the greater good.

It took Williams just two seasons to put North Carolina back on top of the college basketball pecking order. Even for such an elite program, it made the incredible climb in such short order.

"This doesn't mean he's a better coach than he was yesterday, like he said," May said. "This means when you talk about some of the great coaches out

See **RIGHTS** / Page B2

### Coming tomorrow

The men's college basketball season is finished, and we have the wrapup.

The Atlanta Braves open on the road against Jack McKeon's Florida Marlins.

### Contact us

The Times-News welcomes comments on its coverage, as well as suggestions for stories. Dial 227-0131 and ask for the newsroom or dial editors for this section direct. Their telephone numbers and e-mail addresses are listed at right.

■ Bob Sutton, Sports editor, 506-3050, e-mail: bob\_sutton@link.freedom.com  
■ Stephen Schramm, Preps coordinator, 506-3052, e-mail: stephen\_schramm@link.freedom.com



Much of the local content of each day's Times-News is posted on our Web site. The address is [www.thetimesnews.com](http://www.thetimesnews.com)