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Duke's dreams of five fulfilled

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Jack Grady, sophomore, center, gets excited before watching the broadcast of the National Championship game between Duke and Wisconsin on Monday, April 6, 2015 at Cameron Indoor Stadium. The Herald-Sun | Alex Tricoli

Things got tense in Cameron Indoor Stadium during the second half when Wisconsin came out of the locker room with an initial push, and they stayed tense throughout the remainder of the game.

During the final minutes, students poured down from the top level of the arena and came down on the court where the team normally played to watch them clinch another National Championship in Indianapolis.

With little more than 30 seconds left, freshman Tyus Jones sank two free throws, bringing the lead to five, where it would stay for the rest of the game.



Still, students held on to each other for support, especially as freshman Justise Winslow missed both his free throws.

But with only about five seconds left, it didn't matter, and Duke won their fifth National Title with a final score of 68 to 63.

For students present to witness the televised game in Cameron Indoor, it was almost as good as watching their team live.

"I've never felt so much emotion in Cameron Indoor, even against UNC," said sophomore Jack Grady.

The students at the front of the line for the National Championship watch party at Cameron Indoor Stadium waited for more than an hour to watch Duke face off against Wisconsin, but that was nothing compared to the weeks they'd spent sleeping in tents for other Duke basketball games throughout their college careers.

For this season's game versus Notre Dame, senior Chris Podracky said, they'd had to start lining up the night before the game to be ensured a seat.

So arriving at Krzyzewskiville at 6:45 p.m. before the doors opened at 8 didn't seem like much of a sacrifice to him and senior Jeremy Fischer – and it guaranteed them spots at the front of the line.

Neither of them made it to the Final Four watch party at Cameron Indoor, but Podracky knew he didn't want to miss watching the National Championship on the big screen.

"I've seen video (of Cameron Indoor) from the 2010 finals," he said. "If we win tonight, it's going to be crazy."

Fischer agreed, saying that he's never been to a watch party and that he didn't want to miss the opportunity.

But both realized that there was a lot on the line – like Coach Mike Krzyzewski's fifth national title.

"It's kind of a high-risk, high-reward kind of thing," Podracky said.

"It's scary," Fischer agreed. "But it's exciting."

Some students were too superstitious before the game to even comment on the potential outcomes of the game – or their plans for afterward.

"Maybe we'll go to a bonfire," freshman Jonathan Gans suggested, and freshman Joel Kelly made him knock on a piece of wood, not knowing that they'd be burning wooden benches later at the bonfire.

For Gans, Duke basketball is a relatively new love.

"I just knew I wanted to go here, and as soon as I came I became a huge, huge fan," he said.

Kelly said he feels “incredibly lucky” to witness a successful NCAA run during his freshman year.

Although he knows in the back of his mind that this could be the peak basketball season during his time at Duke, he said he’s “not dealing with that yet.”

“I trust Coach K,” he said. “I’m not scared of the future.”

But senior Sabrina Zeller is glad the peak is happening as she’s on her way out.

She said that although she didn’t come out to the Final Four watch party, she and junior Anna Torre decided to come to Cameron Indoor Monday because “we figure this is like the only chance in our lives.”

Torre said that they waited almost a month for tickets to this season’s game against UNC.

She said that students gathering to watch the National Championship mirrored the feeling of living in a tent in Krzyzewskiville.

In both instances, she said, she felt a spirit of camaraderie while being “surrounded by Duke students waiting so passionately for the same cause.”

Torre said she was glad to be watching the last game of the season at Cameron Indoor.

“I really don’t think you can capture this feeling anywhere else on campus,” she said.

As students poured into the beloved stands from which they’d cheered on their team all season, the atmosphere could only be described as one thing: loud.

From screams whenever freshman center Jahlil Okafor appeared on screen to coordinated chants of “You suck” during the announcement of Wisconsin’s lineup, the students’ cheers rocked Cameron Indoor.

Sophomores Hunter Hutchinson and Martha Leplae-Arthur were front and center for this season's game against UNC. They were happy to be back in the same spot Monday night, even though the team wasn't there this time.

The pair also went to the Final Four watch party, but both agreed that Monday's turnout was much better.

Not only undergraduates were in on the celebration. Randall Ware came straight from work at Duke Hospital and wore scrubs to the watch party.

"It's a National Championship," he said. "You're never going to get to experience that again."



When Duke won the tip and scored first, Duke students settled in for 40 minutes of screaming for their team.

After trading the lead several times in the first half, halftime saw the Blue Devils and the Badgers tied at 31, drawing mixed emotions from the students.

Sophomore Spencer Neff said he was still completely confident, but his friend, sophomore Xavi Ramos, said, "I'm the opposite. I'm really nervous."

Ramos said the atmosphere Monday in Cameron Indoor was better than any live game he'd ever attended.

He said that being with this many of his fellow students made him feel unity not only with the student body, but also with the team.

"I feel like (the team trusts) in us as much as we trust in them," Ramos said, adding that the team couldn't have gotten this far without the support of the Cameron Crazies.

He said that cheering in Cameron Indoor has taught him the importance of hard work and perseverance.

"Something that we've believed in all year is coming to success," he said. "It's kind of motivation to work toward greater things all year. We've worked our butts off – cheering on the team and in academics – all year, and this shows us anything is possible."

Sophomore Julia Brett, a student athlete on the swimming and diving team, echoed this theme of unity, saying that the basketball players also support the swimming and diving team.

"It just shows how tight-knit the Duke athletic community is," she said.

Although Brett expressed trepidation about the tie at the half, she said she was happy to be watching such an exciting game.

"This is what we've been waiting for," she said. "We want a good game. We want something to rally behind like, 'Hell yeah, Duke's going to get the job done.'"

And get the job done they did. Less than an hour later, students were pouring out of Cameron Indoor and over to Duke Campus for a celebratory bonfire.

Some of the students hadn't yet grasped the significance of the win.

"I'm almost stunned," said Jack Grady, who cheered from the very front row of Cameron Indoor. "I'm so ecstatic it's kind of gone beyond emotion. I'm just kind of wandering around shrugging at people like, 'Wow, that just happened.' I called my mom, and even she was like, 'Un-freaking-believable.'"

But some of the students were more visibly excited.

"I feel incredible," said Joseph Bassey. "I feel like such a Blue Devil right now. I have honestly never felt as much of a Blue Devil as I do right now. I'm so proud of Tyus, Jahlil, Grayson Allen – 16 points out of nowhere!"

