## **Tar Heels Advance to Elite 8**

Written by Jackie Finlan Friday, 29 April 2011 20:34

UNC's Holly Zoeller scored a try during her team's two-point win over UCSD. (Andy Mead photo)

Blaine, MN - It was a heart-pounder for North Carolina, as it held off a late-surging UC Davis to win 12-10 in the first round of the Women's DI College Championships.

"It's one of those games when you're so glad it's over," UNC coach Johnathan Atkeison said. "You're staring at the touch judges and waiting for them to just blow the final whistle.

"It was a forwards' battle today," Atkeison continued. "UCSD has some big, physical girls, and we're going to feel it tomorrow."

As was the story for many teams at the three playoff locations, wind was a major factor in today's game strategies. While UNC had the wind to its back in the first half and did well to pin UCSD in its end, it couldn't control its lineout throw-ins. Flyhalf Kimber Rozier also struggled with the inconsistent wind and erred on a couple of penalty attempts, but nailed the conversion kick that made all the difference.

The backlines struggled to build any fluidity and had to tighten up their offense. Even though the teams couldn't open up the game as much as they would have liked, UNC inside center Jessica Meidinger was extremely effective in building some momentum. She fought for a hard-earned try, stripping the ball from the offense, then wrestling to stay inbounds as UC San Diego attempted to push her to touch. Rozier converted the try, 7-0.

"UCSD was so big that we'd have trouble bringing them down and tying up the ball," Atkeison said. "But Meidinger cleaned up a lot of ball and was able to hawk balls down in tackles. She had eagle-eye vision and went right for it."

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UCSD continued to use its size to wear down North Carolina, which rolled in some fresh legs in the forwards to keep up with the physical toll. UNC had one more score left in its bag, utilizing its superior team speed to allow Rozier and wing Holly Zoeller work some magic in the open field. Rozier converted Zoeller's score for the 12-0 lead five minutes into the second half.

And that's precisely when San Diego began to mount a counterattack. After a penalty goal, UCSD converted its lone try of the game to pull within two, 12-10. For the final 10 minutes, UNC's defense held off a determined San Diego side for the win.

Atkeison tipped his hat to the forwards, who are still trying to work out their scrummaging and were outmatched physically. Freshman hooker Ava Lane, who made her first start during the South Championship final, made some great contributions around the field and came through with a stolen put-in during a crucial UCSD scrum in their end. Prop Renata Buchanan was also a force around the pitch and matched San Diego's terrorizing forwards with some intimidating penalty runs of her own.

"The girls are really excited," Atkeison said. "It's been a long time since we've been to the Elite 8. Even though we were the lower seed heading into this game, we knew we had a shot at advancing. Since we lost that game against East Carolina [during league play], we've had to win every game since [to get to nationals], and they've answered the call. It's been a huge victory to get to this point, and the girls realize that everything beyond that is a bonus."

Army now awaits North Carolina in tomorrow's quarterfinal. The cadets dominated New Mexico to a 76-5 win, were able to work its bench, and will be less battered than the Tar Heels. The winner will see the victor of the Navy vs BYU game at the Final Four in two weeks' time.