



Tobacco Road: Duke, Carolina, N.C. State, Wake Forest, and the History of the Most Intense Backyard Rivalries in Sports

Alwyn Featherston

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As the 2005 NCAA men's college basketball season entered conference tournament play, three of the nation's Top Five rated teams came from the state of North Carolina--a fact that highlighted the sports-rich tradition along the famed "Tobacco Road." Not since the Yankees, Dodgers, and Giants all played in New York City has so intense a sports rivalry been contained within such a small geographical area. Four basketball powerhouses--Duke, North Carolina, North Carolina State, and Wake Forest--grew up within just thirty-four miles of each other (though Wake eventually moved across-state to Winston-Salem), and they've staged classic battles throughout the decades. Most recently, at least one of these four teams has made the Final Four in nineteen of the past twenty-three seasons, and won the national championship seven times during that period; in 2005, three of the four schools advanced to the Tournament's "Sweet 16." These interstate rivalries have featured such great college players as Michael Jordan, David "Skywalker" Thompson, Christian Laettner, Bobby Hurley, Tim Duncan, Grant Hill, Rasheed Wallace, Jerry Stackhouse, and Johnny Dawkins, while also including legendary coaches such as Dean Smith, Jimmy Valvano, Mike Krzyzewski, and Roy Williams. Meanwhile, the greatness of these four teams has created intense "backyard" rivalries often described as "civil wars" by sportswriters and cultural critics alike. Alwyn Featherston, a seasoned sportswriter and historian, examines the history of college basketball along Tobacco Road.

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