HOOPS IN HALTON













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The Niner Times is UNC Charlotte's student-run news publication founded in 1947 and has received both state and national recognition.

We cover campus happenings, news and events in the city of Charlotte and North Carolina and topics that are important to students.

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Emmanuel Perkins/Niner Times

Upcoming UNC Charlotte events

Orchestra performs Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony
Nov. 19, 7:30 p.m.
Robinson Hall, Anne R. Belk Theater

Women's Basketball at Davidson
Nov. 21, 7 p.m.
John M. Belk Arena

Football vs. Navy
Nov. 28
Jerry Richardson Stadium

CAB's Comedy Show
Nov. 20, 6-8 p.m.
Cone University Center, McKnight Hall

Thanksgiving break
Nov. 25-28

Final Exams, Dec. 4-10

Niner's Comics: Norm's first words

Aisha Karim | Staff Illustrator



Have any comic suggestions? Scan the QR code or reach out to our Design Editor

NOTES FROM THE NEWSROOM:

Let Thanksgiving breathe!

Tre Holland | Sports Editor



We are midway through November, and the smell of turkey, sweet potato pie and Dallas Cowboys vs. Detroit Lions football is in the air. Iconic Thanksgiving images immediately come to mind: cornucopias, pilgrim hats and pumpkins. I yearn for the food coma that follows after eating entirely too much food, the family football game and the inescapable scramble for all the good leftovers the day after. Yet my friends are already making plans for Secret Santa, where they will go on vacation and a turkey leg has not even been touched.

Thanksgiving has devolved into a precursor, a stepping stone giving Christmas an extra month to bask in its glory. Christmas decorations are already being hung, stores are stocking Christmas items and my own job is already making Christmas-themed food. I do not want to seem like some Scrooge or Grinch, but seeing Christmas trees, red, green and white lights, and candy canes before Thanksgiving bothers me. Let me make one thing clear: I do not hate Christmas. But before we start wondering if we made Santa's final naughty or nice list, please let me enjoy my turkey leg while I kick my feet up and watch the Cowboys and Lions.

UNC Charlotte Board of Trustees approves tuition increase

Kyle Boucher | News Editor

On Nov. 12, the UNC Charlotte Board of Trustees voted in favor of a proposed 3% tuition increase for in-state undergraduate students and a 5% increase for out-of-state undergraduate students and all graduate students.

The proposal will go to the UNC System Board of Governors, which will make the final decision on whether to pass it. The next Board of Governors meeting is Nov. 19.

For in-state undergraduate students, the current tuition cost is $3,926 per year. If the proposal passes, tuition will increase to $4,043 per year. This would be an increase of $117 per year, or about $59 per semester.

Tuition for out-of-state undergraduate students would increase to $23,119 per year. In-state graduate tuition would become $5,590 per year, and out-of-state graduate tuition would become $23,822 per year.

Previously, tuition for in-state undergraduate students increased by 2.99%, or $114, for the 2026-2027 academic year. In the same time period, out-of-state undergraduate tuition increased by 9.99% ($2,000), and in-state graduate tuition increased by 9.98% ($483).

The University expects to gain around $3.65 million from the proposed tuition increase. It plans to spend around $1.8 million of that to increase teaching investments, specifically to improve the student-to-faculty ratio, which currently sits at 19 students per faculty member.

The University also plans to spend $1.1 million on student success initiatives to maintain the current 4-year graduation rate, and $750,000 on student support services, including student academic resources and campus infrastructure.

"We look at it from a student perspective in affordability, knowing that those cost pressures that affect us also affect them and their families, and so we want to be mindful of those considerations," Rich Amon, vice chancellor for business affairs, said in the Board of Trustees open hearing.

Purpose of the proposed tuition increase

The University proposed this tuition increase to the Board of Trustees due to rising inflation, insufficient state funding and stagnant tuition rates. Prior to the 2026-27 academic year, tuition rates at Charlotte had not risen since 2017.

"Over the last many years, we at UNC Charlotte have been more effective and efficient than any other institution, and we have received considerably less in appropriations than those other institutions," Amon said. "UNC Charlotte has been both low-appropriated and low-tuition."

According to the University's calculations, inflation for higher education costs has risen about 3.3% per year over the last 9 years, resulting in a 39% compound increase over that time with no increase in tuition.

Megan Khor/Niner Times

Charlotte tuition vs. other UNC System institutions

During the Board of Trustees meeting, Amon noted that Charlotte has one of the lowest tuition rates in the UNC System.

"Our tuition, relative to other UNC System schools, is $260 less than UNC Asheville. To put that into context, [it is] below App State, below Greensboro, below Wilmington and below ECU by almost $600," Amon said.

The UNC System says Charlotte must stay in the bottom quartile of in-state undergraduate tuition and fees compared to other institutions nationwide. Charlotte is also asked to remain in the third or higher quartile of schools for out-of-state undergraduate tuition.

The UNC System wants Charlotte's in-state undergraduate tuition to stay low and its out-of-state undergraduate tuition to stay high.

Board members response to proposal

Board member Lawrence J. Shaheen Jr. brought up a concern with the tuition increase:

"The constitutional guidance that we have is that we can only raise tuition when we absolutely have to. For in-state undergraduates, I do not see the immediate need [to increase tuition] today," Shaheen said.

He went on to talk about how the recent midterm elections saw major shifts in political power, specifically in states like North Carolina, which flipped from Republican to Democratic representatives in Congress.

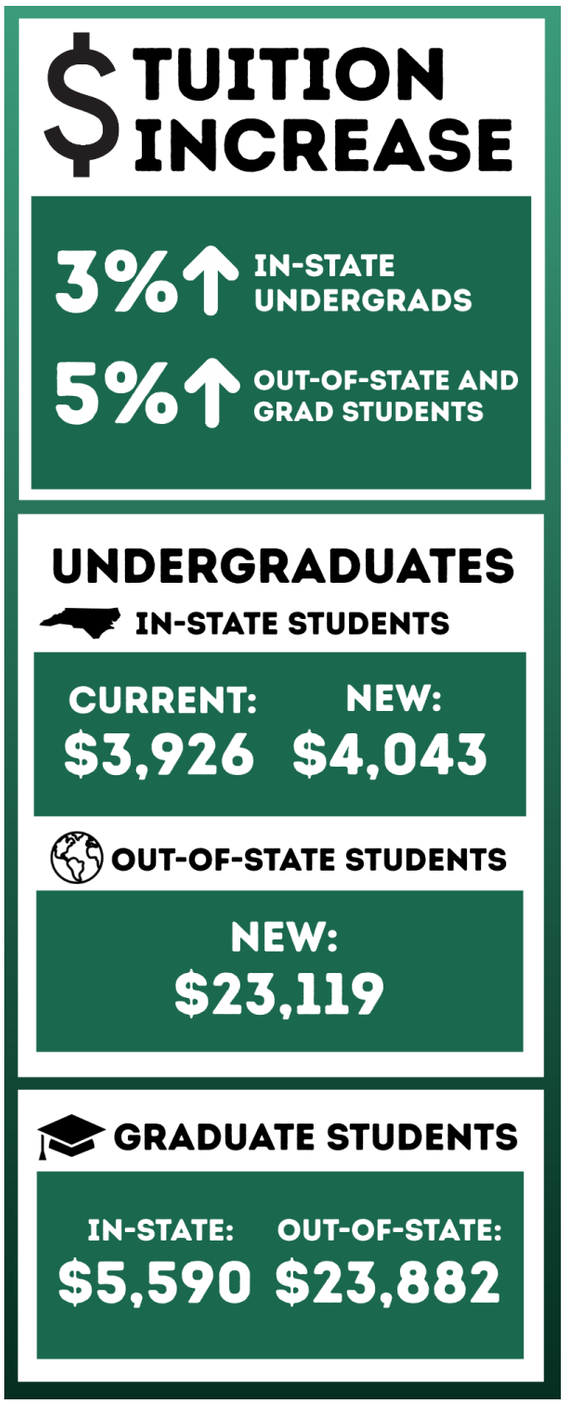
"What we saw in the electoral makeup on Tuesday, Nov. 3, was a reaction to the cost of living," Shaheen said.

Shaheen continued, saying that in-state students already live in North Carolina and their families already pay state taxes. He also argued that the $114 tuition increase for the 2026-27 academic year did not significantly increase the University's ratings.

Chancellor Sharon Gaber argued for the tuition increase, stating that hiring more faculty is an immediate concern for the University.

"We have the worst faculty-to-student ratios in the [UNC] System; we have to invest in more faculty," Gaber said.

Shaheen later proposed a substitute motion of a 0% increase in tuition. A substitute motion is a change to the University's proposal that any board member can recommend; in this case, Shaheen Jr. recommended that the University not increase tuition for this year. After a board vote, the substitute motion was denied.



Art Education BFA becomes a BA, sparks backlash from students

Kyle Boucher | News Editor

The Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.) in art with a concentration in art education will be changed to a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), reducing the number of art education-specific classes students take.

The B.F.A. in the art education degree program prepares students to become art teachers, providing a well-rounded understanding of all major forms of art and how to apply that knowledge to young artists, from elementary school children to high school and college students.

Students currently enrolled in the B.F.A. will be able to finish the program, but all incoming students will only be able to enroll in the B.A. program.

The University provided the Niner Times with this statement:

"The change to the art education degree program is not a budget-related decision. There has been no budget cut to the arts. The Bachelor of Arts degree requires fewer art-specific courses than the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, while maintaining the 120 credit hours required for graduation. The change is intended to give students greater flexibility in their coursework."



From B.F.A. to B.A., what will change?

The switch from B.F.A. to B.A. in art education will decrease the number of art history, art education and art studio classes in the program. Art history and art studio classes are designed for several different art majors, and the art education classes are specifically designed to instruct students how to teach art skills to others.

Now, students pursuing a B.A. in art education will take fewer art classes and more general education classes, including courses in teaching methods, special education and teaching basic subjects like mathematics or English. These are classes that any education student can take, regardless of discipline.

Third-year Nora Kelly, majoring in art education, talked about the differences between the teaching methods used by general education teachers and art teachers.

"General education teachers, especially if they are in elementary school, are going to have around 25 kids in their class, and they're going to see those kids every single day throughout the school year," Kelly said. "But if you're an art teacher, you're seeing every class in the school for a little chunk of time each week, and that classroom management is completely different."

Art education students also worry that learning to teach general education subjects like math or science is less relevant to art teachers than courses that focus specifically on teaching art.

The B.F.A. in art education required four classes in art foundation studios, four classes in art history, eight elective art studios, five classes in art education and two classes in regular education.

The eight elective studio courses include one class in painting or drawing, one class in print media, two 2000-level studio electives, two 3000-level studio electives and two additional studio electives of the student's choosing.

The B.A. will require four classes in art foundation studios, three classes in art history, five elective art studios, four classes in art education and four regular education classes.

The five elective studio courses include one 2000-level 2D course, one 2000-Level 3D course and three additional studio electives of the student's choosing.

"With the new B.A. program, it'll be less art education and art studios, despite being an art education major," Kelly said.

Currently, several faculty members in the Art Education program are retiring, putting the program in transition as the University considers hiring new faculty to replace them.

> "As art teachers, we are already expecting to face challenges with budget cuts to education and the devaluing of the arts once we graduate, so it's extremely disheartening to already experience these issues at a university level,"
>
> - Nora Kelly, third-year art education major









Backlash from art education students

Several art education students have related the change in the art education program to the recent phase-out of the Arts + Architecture Honors Program this semester. Many students feel these recent changes threaten the art programs at Charlotte.

"As art teachers, we are already expecting to face challenges with budget cuts to education and the devaluing of the arts once we graduate, so it's extremely disheartening to already experience these issues at a university level," Kelly said.

Another concern among art education majors is that without as many art studio classes, students will be less prepared to become art teachers themselves. Many of the elective art studios offered for the art education major are foundation classes and do not teach higher levels of art skill.

"In North Carolina, the expectation for art teachers is that you are proficient in around five different disciplines, like drawing, painting, printmaking, ceramics or digital media," Kelly said. "As an art teacher, you're expected to basically be a jack-of-all-trades so that you can then teach everything to your students."

Students have also noted continued demand for freshmen to join the art education program and the need for more art teachers in the workforce after graduation.

"We were told that there wasn't enough interest [in the art education program], but that has not been true. There are more freshmen coming into the major, as opposed to previous years," Kelly said.

Ava Weaver/Niner Times

Carolina Renaissance Festival returns for 33rd year

James Cloeman | Staff Writer

Kendall Maye/Niner Times







The Carolina Renaissance Festival has returned to Huntersville, North Carolina, for its 33rd year, bringing hundreds of guests each weekend with its many attractions and events. The weekend of Nov. 7-8 brought Pirates' Christmas Weekend, with pirate-themed music, shows and a costume contest.

At the fairgrounds, comedy acrobat trio Barely Balanced performed at the Palace Theater. They had the entire crowd laughing as they stacked on top of each other. Over in the Queen's Tournament Arena, guests cheered as knights jousted, searching for victory.

The Renaissance Festival also has a variety of small businesses that sell at the festival. Craftsmanship was on full display as handmade products abounded, and guests browsed around costume shops where they could buy simple accessories or entire pieces of armor.

Commentary: The open prediction market and its perilous foreshadowing

Jeremiah Carroll | Staff Writer

Over the past two years, sports betting and open prediction markets have increasingly become the new norm for online gambling. With relentless marketing strategies across social media and other platforms, wagers in the U.S. rose to at least $166.94 billion in 2025 and continue to surge in 2026.

Yet, behind these numbers lie deeper ethical concerns: the decay of public morality, the transition of real-time events into entertainment, and the undermining of how society engages with reality.

With platforms such as Kalshi and Polymarket being embedded into digital spaces and media consumption, a critical question emerges: are prediction markets creating a harmful digital dystopia that desensitizes people through financial incentives?

Kalshi and Polymarket and their gamification

Founded with the intent of financializing the future through crowdsourced forecasting, both platforms share a core mechanism that lets users buy and sell "yes or no" shares on real-world events.

Established in 2018, Kalshi took a stricter regulatory route by registering with the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC). After winning a crucial court ruling in 2024, Kalshi was greenlit to let Americans trade on political outcomes and current news.

Polymarket, launched in 2020, took a more crypto-native approach. By making cryptocurrency its main transaction method, it bypassed traditional banking and scaled globally during high-stakes events such as elections and geopolitical crises.

Both platforms have seamlessly integrated into the digital realm through embedded media feeds. By partnering with major news networks and sports partnerships, they reduce complex, black-and-white real-world issues into simple monetary bets, desensitizing younger audiences by attaching financial rewards to live events.

In addition, Kalshi and Polymarket overwhelm audiences with excessive ads across social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Their marketing relies heavily on influencer campaigns, popular street interviews and meme recreations to normalize prediction markets, making speculative gambling feel harmless.

These platforms actively condition audiences to view gambling as entertainment, normalizing wagers on everything from political elections and geopolitical crises to even the weather, accelerating social divisions and nudging the digital world closer to dystopia.

The decline of moral ethics through prediction markets

As open prediction markets gain mainstream traction, it's no surprise they are susceptible to serious ethical concerns.

One of the more glaring issues facing Kalshi and Polymarket is that privileged individuals with access to private information can trade on outcomes that they can directly influence.

In traditional financial markets, this practice is known as insider trading. In prediction markets, individuals tend to bypass detection through third-party trading, using friends, family members or unlinked associates to place wagers on their behalf without raising any red flags.

These manipulated odds help create a self-fulfilling prophecy that misleads the public into believing a specific outcome is favored, distorting media discourse to boost a trader's profit.

For example, on Sept. 30, 2026, Polymarket launched an event contract on its platform for users to predict whether any members of the "Cornell 7" would be charged with a felony sex crime before the market's scheduled close on Jan. 31, 2027.

This faced severe backlash from users, survivor advocates and online petitions, accusing Polymarket of "gamifying gang rape," yet the wager accumulated $450,000 in trading volume. Polymarket pulled the contract on Oct. 17, 2026, but desensitization had already taken root in the minds of users.

In addition, Kalshi allows users to bet on certain geopolitical events and foreign relations, including wagers on U.S.-Iran nuclear deals and Chilean-Bolivian diplomatic status. This frivolous treatment of international affairs slowly desensitizes the public to high-stakes global crises.

What could this mean for the future?

If people continue to participate in the rise of open prediction markets, the future risks normalizing a digital dystopia fueled by crippling gambling addictions.

Data shows that a vast majority of users lose money on these platforms, while a mere 0.04% of accounts extract nearly 70% of total profits. This proves that prediction markets operate on a predatory basis, funneling wealth to a tiny elite at the expense of many.

Open prediction markets also act as a loophole for gambling addicts. Because they are regulated by the CFTC, they can bypass state-mandated gambling laws, allowing users legally banned at the state level to easily sign up for platforms like Kalshi and continue betting.

Open prediction markets do not predict the future but rather manipulate it through a self-fulfilling feedback loop. When monetary incentives reward those who distort public narrative and exploit human tragedies, society will slowly desensitize itself by reducing current events to nothing more than speculative wagers.

Carolina Garcia/Niner Times



Courtesy of Kalshi & Polymarket

The promising road ahead for Charlotte women's basketball

Shane Reese | Asst. Sports Editor

Charlotte women's basketball has improved every year since hiring head coach Tomekia Reed in April 2024, and this season is looking to be no different.

Starting the 2026-27 season with a home opener against the University of Richmond, the Spiders exposed the 49ers' underdeveloped defensive communication. They connected on wide-open 3-pointers all night, one being a half-court heave to end the first half.

But Richmond is an established program led by head coach Alisa Kresge. Hired by the Spiders on April 11, 2026, Kresge was the winningest coach in program history at the University of Vermont.

A combination of profound coaching experience and a team that finished 26-8 last year made for a mismatch between the Spiders and 49ers. In addition to being a well-coached, disciplined squad, Richmond also saw a 30-point performance from sophomore guard Aneisha Scott.

After the season opener against the Spiders, Charlotte traveled to Lubbock, Texas, to face Texas Tech University. The 49ers had a catastrophic shooting night, only making one 3-pointer as a team.

The Red Raiders defeated the 49ers 64-37, handing them a 27-point loss and dropping Charlotte to 0-2. Freshman guard Mariah Sain was the only starter to make multiple shots or score more than 10 points.

It's unrealistic to predict that the 49ers will have a disappointing record based on the first two games. In its game against Longwood University on Monday, Nov. 9, Charlotte proved it is impossible to judge a team based on the first few matchups of the season.

Comeback win vs. Longwood

Reed went with a different starting lineup against the Lancers, giving redshirt senior guard Audia Young and sophomore forward Isis Johnson-Musah their first starts of the season. Junior guard Zoe Best and two other starters in the first two games came off the bench.

Longwood led by five points after a back-and-forth first half, draining multiple 3-pointers that made it tough for Charlotte to keep pace. The Lancers also forced 11 turnovers in the first half that turned into 19 points.

Charlotte's turnovers persisted into the second half, committing 10 more that Longwood capitalized on for the largest lead of the night. The Lancers led the 49ers by 18 with three minutes remaining in the third quarter.

Desperately trying to avoid a 0-3 start, Reed made much-needed substitutions and adjustments to get Charlotte back in the game. Junior forward Alana Rouser and senior guard Da'Brya Clark subbed in for Young and junior forward Destinee Salgado.

After Reed's substitutions and defensive adjustments, the 49ers held the Lancers to seven points in the fourth quarter, while Charlotte had its highest-scoring quarter so far this season with 29 points.

An offensive onslaught paired with a swarming defense helped the 49ers overcome the 18-point deficit to defeat the Lancers 86-72.

Sain and Johnson-Musah had exceptional performances as starters, but it was Charlotte's bench that sparked the comeback.

Depth on the bench

Rouser was the 49ers' leading scorer even though she came off the bench, finishing with a near-perfect shooting night. She had 21 points, shooting 8-for-9 in just 19 minutes.

Though she started all but one game last season, Best finished with 11 points, four rebounds, three assists and three steals off the bench. Best still played 32 minutes despite coming off the bench, proving that Reed still depends on her as the primary ball handler.

While she only played eight minutes, Reed's decision to sub in Salgado played a large role in Charlotte's first win. She finished with eight points, four rebounds and a steal.

Salgado gave the 49ers two opportunities for second-chance points amidst their comeback effort and was the only player to make all of her free throws.

Charlotte's win against Longwood featured a lot of promising things. Proper substitutions and coaching adjustments, adequate bench production and timely rebounding were all on key. All three must be on display if the 49ers want to finish November above .500.

Upcoming matchups

The 49ers' next game is a home matchup against Wofford College. Charlotte defeated the Terriers 73-59 last season on Nov. 22, 2025, forcing 17 turnovers and tallying 12 steals.

If the 49ers can bring the same defensive energy, they can start a win streak and get their second home win of the season.

After playing the Terriers, Charlotte travels north to face NBA legend Stephen Curry's alma mater, Davidson College. The 49ers won the previous meeting 71-61 on Dec. 14, 2025.

Back-to-back games end November basketball for the 49ers, as they travel to Naples, Florida, for the Florida Gulf Classic. They will face the University of Central Florida and Texas A&M University on Nov. 27 and 28.

Charlotte squeaked past UCF 66-64 in their last meeting, but has not played Texas A&M in over 20 years. Both games will be the 49ers' biggest challenges so far this season.



Emmanuel Perkins/Niner Times

How Charlotte volleyball fell from top 5 to bottom of the conference

Shane Reese | Asst. Sports Editor

No one expects to be at the bottom of the conference, but someone has to come in last.

As of Nov. 15, Charlotte volleyball holds that title. The 49ers ended the regular season on a 12-match losing streak, sitting at 1-15 in conference play and 4-23 overall. Their final loss came in a sweep against Florida Atlantic University (FAU) on Sunday, Nov. 15.

The 49ers came into 2026 off one of their best seasons in recent years, finishing the year 17-12 and competing in the conference championship. Unfortunately for Charlotte, the players who achieved those feats are gone.

Charlotte's star players from last season were all seniors or graduate players, and they left big shoes for freshmen and sophomores to fill.

Having everyone on the floor play well, night in and night out, is only one part of a successful campaign. Great coaches help, but player leadership is a vital ingredient to a winning season in any sport.

This season, the 49ers struggled to rise above a lack of senior leadership on the squad, and it shows in their final scores.

A lack of senior leadership

Last season, the 49ers roster listed three graduate players and four seniors. A graduate libero and outside hitter were the squad's offensive and defensive anchors.

Charlotte's former libero, Anika Thompson, earned American Conference Libero of the Year, and former outside hitter Kristen Birmingham was named an AVCA All-Region Honorable Mention. Thompson, Birmingham and Jessica Ricks were tabbed to First-Team All-Conference.

This season, there are no graduates or seniors on the roster, and only three are upperclassmen. The oldest players are junior libero Erin Lehman, junior libero Chloe Maugh and junior setter Harper Hall.

Freshman outside hitter Clara Briley leads Charlotte in kills, points per set and service aces. Maugh and Hall lead in digs and assists.

A freshman leading in more categories than upperclassmen is a great sign for the future, but it is not sustainable for immediate success.

Matches against non-conference opponents gave younger players practice before conference play, but the lack of experience always shows up in the end.

Fierce competition in conference play

Charlotte started conference play with a 3-0 loss against East Carolina University on Sept. 23. Since then, the 49ers managed just one victory in conference play.

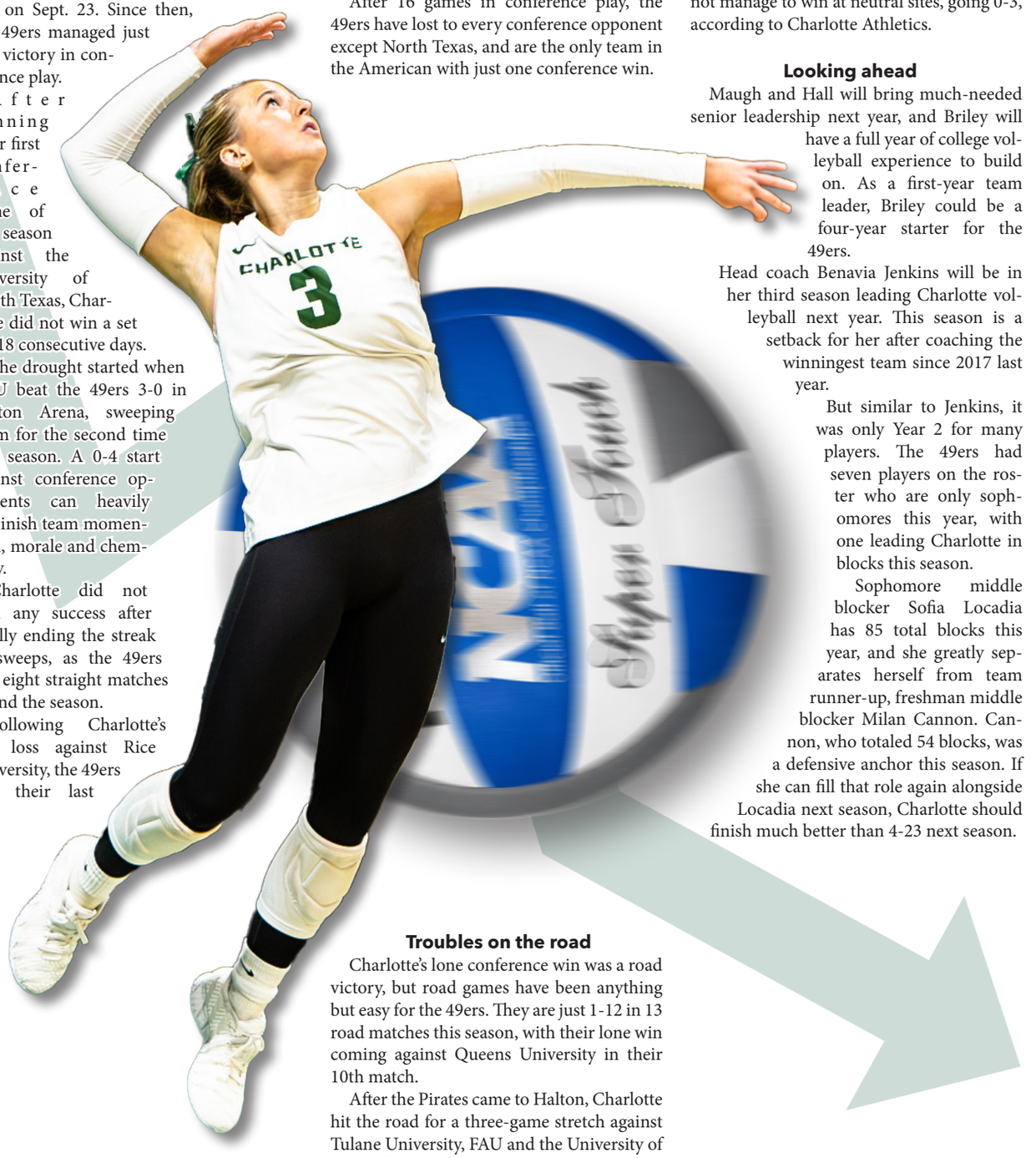
After winning their first conference game of the season against the University of North Texas, Charlotte did not win a set for 18 consecutive days.

The drought started when ECU beat the 49ers 3-0 in Halton Arena, sweeping them for the second time this season. A 0-4 start against conference opponents can heavily diminish team momentum, morale and chemistry.

Charlotte did not find any success after finally ending the streak of sweeps, as the 49ers lost eight straight matches to end the season.

Following Charlotte's 1-3 loss against Rice University, the 49ers lost their last match of the season 3-0 to the FAU Owls. FAU's victory gave Charlotte its 12th sweeping lossof the season and handed the team its final loss of the year.

After 16 games in conference play, the 49ers have lost to every conference opponent except North Texas, and are the only team in the American with just one conference win.



Nyjhon Rhymer/Niner Times

Troubles on the road

Charlotte's lone conference win was a road victory, but road games have been anything but easy for the 49ers. They are just 1-12 in 13 road matches this season, with their lone win coming against Queens University in their 10th match.

After the Pirates came to Halton, Charlotte hit the road for a three-game stretch against Tulane University, FAU and the University of South Florida.

When the 49ers' brutal road stretch ended, the troubles followed them back to Charlotte.

In addition to the challenges they face in opposing schools' arenas, Charlotte could not manage to win at neutral sites, going 0-3, according to Charlotte Athletics.

Looking ahead

Maugh and Hall will bring much-needed senior leadership next year, and Briley will have a full year of college volleyball experience to build on. As a first-year team leader, Briley could be a four-year starter for the 49ers.

Head coach Benavia Jenkins will be in her third season leading Charlotte volleyball next year. This season is a setback for her after coaching the winningest team since 2017 last year.

But similar to Jenkins, it was only Year 2 for many players. The 49ers had seven players on the roster who are only sophomores this year, with one leading Charlotte in blocks this season.

Sophomore middle blocker Sofia Locadia has 85 total blocks this year, and she greatly separates herself from team runner-up, freshman middle blocker Milan Cannon. Cannon, who totaled 54 blocks, was a defensive anchor this season. If she can fill that role again alongside Locadia next season, Charlotte should finish much better than 4-23 next season.

A bittersweet ending for Charlotte women's soccer

PJ Sullivan | Staff Writer

On Nov. 11, Charlotte lost to the UAB Blazers 2-1. The game ended with a game-winning goal by UAB in the 76th minute. This loss ended Charlotte's semifinal run in the American Conference Women's Soccer Championship.

Despite an unfortunate season-ending loss, Charlotte still put up a solid season, finishing 11-7-1 overall and 6-3-1 in conference play. This record led Charlotte to No. 2 in the American Conference for the second year in a row.

Head coach Sinead Byrne, in her second season with the team, led the way to back-to-back double-digit wins. Individual performances from Charlotte also helped the 49ers to another winning season. Senior forward Evie Craven was a huge offensive threat. Craven and other players earned individual awards for their play throughout the season.

Strong finish in conference

Charlotte's start of the season was very up and down. They picked up some solid wins, including a shootout win on the road against Mississippi State University. However, even with solid results to start the year, the team still struggled early in conference play, going in with a 4-3 record.

The start of conference play was not kind to Charlotte. Against Florida Atlantic University Owls, the 49ers had a two-goal lead. Then the Owls scored three straight goals to give the 49ers a 3-2 loss. After this loss, things would turn around for the 49ers.

Charlotte only lost two more games in conference play. The 49ers forced four shutout victories and ended conference play with a win to clinch a spot in the American Conference Championship.

Charlotte started the first round with a rematch against FAU. This time, Charlotte held on to win with a final score of 2-1. This would be the first win in the championship since 2023. In the semifinals, they fell short against UAB.

Even with the semifinal loss, this is still an improvement on previous seasons and could be something the team builds on for future championship runs.

Byrne shines in second season

Byrne's position as the women's soccer head coach was not certain when she first joined the team. In January 2025, she joined as an assistant coach; as the year went on, she became interim head coach before finally landing the permanent head coaching job in October 2025.

Before Byrne took over, the team finished with a 4-8-7 record. However, in her first year, the team saw a big improvement, finishing with ten wins before getting eliminated in the first round of the conference championship.

For Byrne, this year would be much similar to her first season. Charlotte finished with 11 wins and got their first conference championship game win under Byrne. While this improvement may seem small, it is still an impressive turnaround from a team that struggled just a year before Byrne took over.

All-conference selections

Throughout the season, multiple players stepped up and helped make the 49ers one of the top seeds in the American. Five players received all-conference honors, including two first-team all-conference selections.

Craven provided the 49ers with dominant offensive play. Her eleven goals led the team, earning first-team all-conference honors and the 2026 American Offensive Player of the Year. The senior finished her college career leading the 49ers' offense.

The other first-team all-conference selection for the 49ers was graduate defender Rachel Logue. She started the year as the American Conference Defensive Player of the Week, and her solid play didn't stop there. She played the most minutes of any Charlotte player and was a big contributor to the multiple shoutouts the 49ers had throughout the season.

Junior defender Penelope Rich would finish second-team all-conference for the 49ers. She played in every game for the 49ers and, like Logue, provided strong defensive play throughout the season. She also scored a game-winning goal for Charlotte, which helped her earn American Conference Defensive Player of the Week in October.

Senior midfielder Lucie Bertrand would also finish second-team all-conference. She provided consistent offensive play throughout the season with five goals. Bertrand also finished with two game-winning goals for the 49ers. She won the American Conference Midfielder of the Week award for back-to-back weeks.

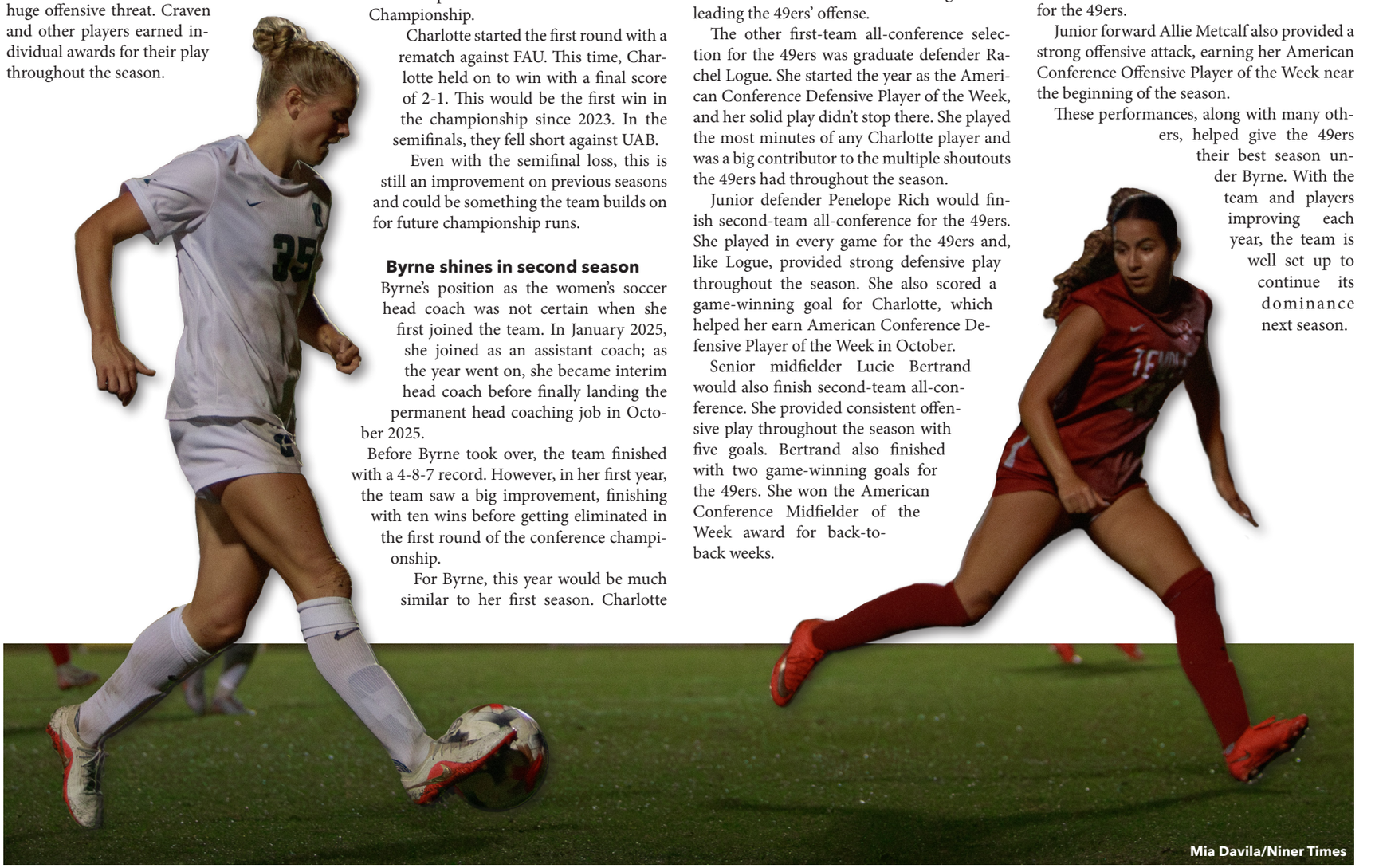
The last player to finish with conference honors was senior midfielder Annabelle Walker, who finished third-team all-conference. Her four goals and five assists throughout the season provided Charlotte with consistent play.

While the rest of the team did not finish with conference honors, several players played important roles that helped the 49ers during the season. Graduate goalkeeper Harlee Head was the main player behind the net for Charlotte. She finished the season with two American Conference Goalkeeper of the Week honors. Her 66 saves helped the 49ers force multiple shutout games.

Junior midfielder Grace Keighley also played a vital role for the team; she finished the year with seven assists, which was the most for the 49ers.

Junior forward Allie Metcalf also provided a strong offensive attack, earning her American Conference Offensive Player of the Week near the beginning of the season.

These performances, along with many others, helped give the 49ers their best season under Byrne. With the team and players improving each year, the team is well set up to continue its dominance next season.



Mia Davila/Niner Times

Men's basketball and March Madness: The 21-year search for a golden ticket

Sean McGuffin | Staff Writer

When the final buzzer sounded on March 18, 2005, Charlotte fell to the NC State Wolfpack 75-63, ending its NCAA Tournament run. It was a disappointment for Charlotte fans, but nobody leaving the DCU Center in Worcester, Massachusetts, knew that the 49ers would see the longest tournament drought in program history.

When Charlotte made the 2005 NCAA Tournament, it was no shock to students and alumni. They were far from a favorite, but the 49ers were a consistent conference contender and tournament regular, competing in seven of the previous 10 seasons.

Not since that chilly day in the Syracuse Regional has the men's basketball team been dancing; in the 21 years since, Charlotte has been out of contention, on the doorstep and everything in between.

To win the Atlantic 10

When Bobby Lutz took over the Charlotte 49ers in 1998, he inherited a winning culture. Between previous coaches Melvin Watkins and Jeff Mullins, the team made four NCAA Tournament appearances and multiple rankings in the AP poll.

Lutz kept the ball rolling at the start of his tenure, making the second round in 1999. The school saw four more tournament berths under Lutz, with the last coming in 2005. The 2004-05 season was big for Charlotte as it was their last season in Conference USA (CUSA). After 10 seasons of competing in CUSA, the 49ers jumped ship to the Atlantic 10.

An iconic mid-major conference featuring schools like Xavier University, the University of Dayton and Saint Louis University, Charlotte struggled to adapt to its new home. The 49ers finished second in their first year in the conference, but failed to rank higher than fourth in subsequent years. After a disastrous 2010 conference tournament, Charlotte fired Bobby Lutz, ending an 11-year tenure with the program. Lutz was the last coach to lead the 49ers to March Madness.

Return to CUSA

Ohio State University assistant coach Alan Major took over the program in 2010, leading the 49ers through their final year in the Atlantic 10 in 2012-13. Major's best finish was eighth in the Atlantic 10, with a worst finish of 13th. In the 2013-14 season, the 49ers returned to CUSA, hoping to regain the dominance seen in the Bobby Lutz years.

Charlotte's return to conference dominance was short-lived, as Major would only last one more season before cutting his second year short for health reasons. He would not return to the team. The 2010s continued to be a decade of struggle with a coaching carousel of Ryan Odom, Mark Price, Houston Fancher, Ron Sanchez and Aaron Fearne.

During this time of instability, Charlotte once again made a conference jump, leaving CUSA for the American Conference. The American is far more known for its football, but the league still includes mid-major powerhouses in the University of Memphis, Wichita State University and the University of South Florida.

Charlotte entered the American in 2023 under interim coach Aaron Fearne. A season with more questions than answers resulted in the closest Charlotte had been to dancing since the Lutz years, culminating in the most recent sellout of Halton Arena and a 67-52 win against the ECU Pirates.

The 49ers would be knocked out of tournament contention after falling to Temple University in the American Tournament Quarterfinals. The optimism around Fearne faded with the 49ers falling back to Earth in the following seasons. Fearne was let go after a 2026 conference semifinal appearance.

By the numbers

More than 200 universities have made March Madness appearances since Charlotte's last appearance in 2005. Of those, 45 were first-time qualifiers, including Queens University, North Carolina Central University and Gardner-Webb University.

The last time Charlotte made the dance, campus was a much different place. Multiple buildings we have today — including Woodward Hall, Popp Martin Student Union, Mebane Hall, CHHS, EPIC, Duke Centennial Hall, Jerry Richardson Stadium and Levine Hall — were either under construction or not yet built.

Since the last tournament appearance, the University has shattered enrollment records, built a Blue Line station on campus, formed a football team that transitioned from FCS to FBS, and earned Carnegie R1 status.

At 21 years, the current tournament drought remains the longest in school history, surpassing the nearly decade-long drought from 1978 to 1987. But many members of the 49er faithful see new head coach Wes Miller as their way back to the dance.

Miller time

Replacing Aaron Fearne in 2026, head coach Wes Miller departed Charlotte's former CUSA rival, the University of Cincinnati, and returned to the state where he made his name. Miller won a championship as a player in 2005 with the UNC Tar Heels and made two tournament appearances while coaching at UNC Greensboro.

While Miller's winning ways did not come to fruition at Cincinnati, many see his homecoming to the old North State as a reset. Miller attended youth basketball camps with Bobby Lutz in Halton Arena and spent time around campus as a child.

Highlights of that 2005 season show Halton Arena packed to the brim with students, alumni and supporters from all around the Queen City, creating a hostile environment for any team that played in the Gold Mine. With attendance rising and four-star recruits signing, some see Miller as the era-defining coach Charlotte has needed since Lutz's departure. Expectations are high in Miller's first season, but time will tell if he has a drought-ending tournament berth on tap.





Emmanuel Perkins/Niner Times







Chasing the crown: Charlotte falls short of conference title

Jacob Brindle | Video Editor

The two-time American Conference champions, Charlotte men's soccer, entered the tournament hoping to win a third title in four years. After two hard-fought victories, the 49ers earned a spot in the championship game on Nov. 14. Charlotte's historic tournament run ended heartbreakingly when they lost to the Tulsa Golden Hurricane 3-4 in a penalty shootout.

From comebacks to revenge against rivals, and the FAA ground stop, here is everything that happened during Charlotte's tournament run.

Round 1: 90 minutes not enough, Raggett's goal is golden

Charlotte entered the tournament as the No. 3 seed and faced a familiar opponent, Florida International University (FIU). The history between these teams fueled an incredible matchup. FIU and Charlotte met in the semifinals in the 2025 conference tournament, hosted by the 49ers. The then-seeded No. 4 FIU defeated No. 1-seeded Charlotte in an 11-10 final decided by penalty kicks.

Both teams did not forget last year's result heading into Round 1. Charlotte's seeding allowed them to host FIU in the opening round on Nov. 11, and it benefited the team tremendously.

The 49ers scored in the 38th minute with a goal from sophomore defender Wiktor Pucilowski, giving Charlotte a momentum swing. Charlotte's aggressive play turned against them in the second half, as the Panthers found themselves in an exceptional position and earned a penalty in the 48th minute.

FIU graduate forward and American Conference Offensive Player of the Year Santi Possu calmly slotted it home to tie the game 1-1. The drama was far from over; Charlotte scored an own goal to make the score 2-1 just two minutes later. Possu found the rhythm in the 60th minute, scoring again and extending the lead to two goals.

As the light at the end of the tunnel dimmed, Charlotte fought hard with their backs against the wall.

In the 70th minute, senior forward Natsuki Ogata scored on an assist from junior forward Mikey Raggett, making it 3-2. Now in a one-score game, head coach Kevin Langan and company unleashed a final all-out attack in a desperate bid to force overtime.

It looked as if FIU would walk out of Jen Gaber Field with back-to-back upset victories in the conference tournament, but the 49ers had other plans. Senior forward Larry Noel scored in the 89th minute to force overtime against FIU for the third consecutive season.

The game ended in a golden goal, a format of overtime in which the next goal wins. Charlotte's aggressive play paid off in golden-goal overtime, earning a penalty kick that Ragget scored. Charlotte fans erupted into cheers as the 49ers found revenge on the biggest stage and advanced to Round 2.

Round 2: Charlotte proves a ranking is just a number

After Charlotte's incredible opening game, the team felt confident heading into the conference tournament semifinal on Saturday, Nov. 14, facing another familiar foe in the Missouri State University Bears.

Just two weeks earlier, the Bears traveled to Charlotte for the regular-season finale, where the winner claimed its share of the conference regular-season championship. Charlotte got embarrassed in the team's biggest game of the season, losing 4-2 and missing the regular-season championship. Charlotte had already beaten one rival and was determined to make lightning strike twice.

In Charlotte's opening round, the story was offense and scoring, but it was the opposite against the Bears. Both defenses stood tall early, with only six shots for each team in the first 45 minutes. Redshirt senior goalkeeper Alex Svetanoff was a key contributor to the scoreless half, saving a shot and commanding his backline to resist pressure from Missouri State.

The 49ers flipped the switch in the second half. In the 53rd minute, junior forward Elias Arsvoll found himself in position on a run. Arsvoll scored his first goal of the season, assisted by Pucilowski in a win-or-go-home matchup.

Tensions remained high for both teams, and time was in Charlotte's favor. In the 80th

minute, Noel and junior midfielder Xavier Holloway created an excellent run that found Raggett on the end for the goal, making it 2-0.

The intensity on the field and in the atmosphere gave both teams a boost heading into the final minutes. Missouri State's aggressiveness backfired when Holloway found the back of the net to make the score 3-0, draining Missouri State's fighting spirit.

Charlotte ended the game with a 3-0 victory, asserting dominance over a nationally ranked team that beat them at home two weeks prior. With the win against the Bears, the 49ers punched their ticket to the American Conference Championship game for the first time since 2024.

The American Conference Championship: Heartbreak in Oklahoma

Charlotte played two incredible games on its way to the final, yet the tallest mountain was yet to be climbed. The No. 1-seeded Tulsa Golden Hurricane was the final opponent Charlotte had to defeat to secure an NCAA tournament bid. All the odds were against Charlotte, as Tulsa had played fewer games and hosted the tournament.

The 49ers' issues began before the game, as the FAA issued a nationwide ground stop that affected sports teams traveling across the country. The original 8 p.m. kickoff was rescheduled for 4 p.m. the same day. Both teams lost four hours of preparation heading into the championship, and it showed early.

The first 10 minutes were a standstill, as neither team created chances or put pressure on the other. Both teams knew their offensive firepower and wanted to avoid giving up an early lead. The defense-first game saw just three shots in the first half.

Charlotte found its flow in the second half, creating solid chances and making the right runs to potentially take the lead. Though the 49ers found themselves in a good position, Tulsa junior goalie and American Conference Goalkeeper of the Year Carlito Saylon stood tall against Charlotte's electric attack. Neither side found a breakthrough after 90 minutes, meaning Charlotte returned to a familiar situation: golden goal overtime.

This time was different. Saylon continued to resist Charlotte's pressure, making multiple saves in overtime. No winner was decided after the golden-goal overtime, and penalty kicks were imminent. Each team took five penalties. Charlotte converted their first attempt, while Tulsa missed.

Tulsa went on to convert the next four penalty kicks, and Saylon saved two of Charlotte's penalties, crowning the Tulsa Golden Hurricane conference champions and clinching an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament.

Charlotte's incredible tournament run ended in heartbreak, but the 49ers left everything on the pitch.

Scores

Round 1

Charlotte 3-2

Round 2

Charlotte 3-0

Championship

Charlotte 3-4* Tulsa

0-0 Reg.
3-4 PKs



Owen Bandy/Niner Times

Opinion:

RATE MY PROFESSORS is not that serious

Lindsay Hawkins | Staff Writer

Rate My Professors is a well-known platform used to gauge how difficult a class or professor may be. The site can help students manage their workload, especially when they begin taking more intensive courses. However, many students hear similar complaints about Rate My Professors every semester. Many professors dislike Rate My Professors for a multitude of reasons, but the main one is that the reviews are neither entirely accurate nor entirely exaggerated. This can be true; however, these grievances often make me more concerned than when I first viewed a professor's Rate My Professors page.

Rate My Professors provides an overall rating of a professor on a scale from one to five, and also allows anonymous students to comment on why they left a particular review. As a user of the site, you can also filter by course if the teacher has multiple classes. Ultimately, it is a useful tool for students. However, that does not mean all reviews are fair, accurate or free of exaggeration.

To use Rate My Professors without being swayed by bias, it is important to filter for the class you are signing up for. The site lists the class's quality and difficulty levels, along with other factors like a student's final grade, whether attendance is mandatory, whether the class was for credit, whether there was a required textbook, and whether the student would take the class again. This is usually followed by a paragraph explaining the reasoning behind all the previously filled-out fields. Some reviews are genuine, others are not.

Users should take into account how many "bad" reviews there are for their specific class rather than the overall count. Seeing that a professor has a 2/5 overall can seem scary, but sometimes when you filter by class, the reviews can look better. In the past, this has convinced me to take a class with certain professors anyway despite the overall score. In those instances, I have not experienced a class negative enough to warrant a low score. Most times, at least one review reveals information that completely changes my understanding based on other reviews. They may mention something like extra credit or that lecture recordings are offered.

Sometimes reviews state that a professor is "rude" or "mean," but should that be a main concern? Should we not focus more on their teaching skills, difficulty and fail rate? A professor being nice is definitely a plus. Although, as long as you learn something, how much does that really matter? You can dislike a professor as a person and still appreciate what they are teaching and genuinely learn something.

Something that may not be common knowledge is that professors can also respond to reviews. This does not typically happen, but it can signal that, even if they have bad reviews, they care about their jobs and the feedback students provide.

There are also other ways to gauge a professor's skill, such as teaching awards. While awards cannot be given to everybody, knowing that your professor has an award should be comforting. For example, the UNC Charlotte Award for Teaching Excellence. These awards include a category for tenured and teaching-focused faculty.

One final thing to consider is that sometimes all professors offered for a class have low scores. Bad ratings do not stop students from taking classes with certain professors. Students may be more wary, but ultimately there is often a class that must be taken no matter who teaches it.

In some circumstances, professors try to prepare students for the "real world," and sometimes that can come across as harsh. Students may feel targeted or that a professor is out to get them because of this. However, no one should be "out to get" each other. Both sides misunderstand the other's motivations.

A student's opinion is simply just that, an opinion. New students will come to their own conclusions, and past opinions may not be changed. In the future, all parties involved should take Rate My Professors with a grain of salt, understanding that there are other measures of excellence and that one person's bad experience may have been another person's great experience.





Opinion:

We need to do more with Belk Plaza

Sean McGuffin | Staff Writer

Belk Plaza is a strange place in 2026. For most students who live south of campus, it is a necessary part of the walk into central campus, and the area has access to many class buildings, including Rowe, Colvard, Kennedy and Macy. But despite the relatively high foot traffic and multitude of nearby classes, Belk Plaza seems lifeless — especially when you look at Cauble Quad at the center of campus. Cauble Quad is always bustling with tables, food trucks and events, while Belk Plaza has a fountain that still isn't working halfway through the fall semester.

But for many alumni of a certain age, Belk Plaza was where everything happened: protests, student org events and even the Charlotte International Festival. The question is not only how this once-significant area was left behind by the University's progress, but also how we can restore Belk Plaza and use the space to its full potential.

The roots of a new campus

In 1961, the Macy and Kennedy buildings opened for the inaugural semester for the campus we know today. The campus consisted of the two buildings and a concrete sidewalk between them. Hardly what you would call a "quad," but the path through the grass would slowly evolve into a proper college quadrangle.

As more buildings went up on Charlotte's original campus, the large central space became a meeting spot for students between classes to get some fresh air. Yet there was no name for the space until 1970, when Charlotte's campus would receive its first iconic structure: Belk Tower.

For whom the bell tolls

A.G. Odell, the architect of Charlotte's early campus, had always wanted a bell tower in the middle of campus to add some height to the area. It was originally going to be modeled after the bell tower at St. Andrews University, which was also designed by Odell. Bonnie Cone rejected the idea in favor of something more unique to Charlotte. In 1970, with money donated by the Belk Family, the Belk Tower was erected on Charlotte's campus, giving a name to what we now know as Belk Plaza.

The quad was in the perfect location at the time; it provided a pathway from class buildings to Atkins Library and the Cone Center, which was the Student Union at the time. It quickly became the heart of campus, with something happening in the space every day. Festivals, fundraisers, Greek life recruitment, art showcases and even protests were common in Belk Plaza.

As Charlotte's campus grew, the area remained the social hub for 49er students and alumni. In 2016, the Belk Tower was taken down due to structural issues, with many blaming this for the area's decline; but tower or not, Belk Plaza's fall from grace seemed to be inevitable.

Suffering from success

Accessibility is what initially made Belk Plaza the social hub of campus, but with every new building, Belk Plaza was pushed further and further toward the edge of campus. By 2007, the center of campus had shifted to the other side of Atkins Library with the construction of the Popp Martin Student Union. Around it sat large lecture halls and the 9,000-seat Halton Arena directly across from it. Not to mention its close proximity to North Village and the Engineering Campus.

Since then, the University has moved everything from the Homecoming festival to blood drives to what is now known as Cauble Quad — a reflection of the University's current state, bigger and better than the space-age Belk Plaza. But an area as integral to school history as this should not be left to collect dust.

Reviving Belk

Belk Plaza today is a shell of its former self. Apart from the touching tribute of the Constellation Garden, the space sits with empty benches and a dry fountain. The sounds of students chattering and organizations gathering have been replaced by the quiet footsteps of students with AirPods in, and at night the only life you will find is the food delivery robots. For many students living in North Village or east of campus, they can go a whole week without ever setting foot here.

But for organizations or classes based in the south side of campus, the area is prime real estate for events. For the arts department, the quad could be used once again as a de facto backyard for the Rowe Arts Building, to publicly display works created by Charlotte students. International Studies has started utilizing the area more, with tents giving students information. But the biggest player in bringing the area back is the University itself.

In the past, almost every school-sanctioned event took place in Belk Plaza: Greek bed races, the International Festival and even charity events. While, yes, Cauble Quad has the size and modern buildings, Belk Plaza could sustain a good crowd while utilizing an underappreciated side of campus.

Charlotte's campus has grown at an unprecedented rate over its 80 years. While our new areas are great and should continue to be used, don't forget about the small courtyard tucked away in the southeast of campus, where the original 49ers laid the groundwork for the university we have today.

Satire: Researcher claims Bonnie Cone is haunting Charlotte's football team

Noah Hughey & Martin Limon-Jimenez | Staff Writer

It is a well-established fact that the UNC Charlotte football team is bad. Scientists have researched and wondered for years as to why this is the case, often to no avail. But it seems a new theory might finally hold the answer: Bonnie E. Cone, founder of UNC Charlotte, cursed our football team.

The late Cone famously did not want Charlotte to have a football team, and while some cite a "lack of evidence" to claim this was merely a rumor, totally real, new evidence disproves this claim. This new evidence comes from Dr. George H. Ost, a professional medium and leading paranormal researcher who began investigating Charlotte in mid-2026 due to suspicions of paranormal activity and has been trying to contact Cone's ghost.

As suspected, Ost confirmed that not only did Cone never want a football team, but she is the reason why we have lost so many games. After the Oct. 10 game against the University of North Texas, Ost claims to have discovered a green, sludgy ectoplasm oozing from the field.

"I believe that is the leftover residue of Bonnie from the game hard at work, preventing the Charlotte 49ers from claiming victory," Ost said.

Skeptics would have you doubt that the spirit of Charlotte's founder would linger in the mortal realm for almost 30 years just to damage the football team's reputation, especially considering that Charlotte does, amazingly, win some games. But Ost believes something deeper is at work to explain this discrepancy.

"After a rousing ouija board session on the football field last night, Ms. Cone did seem to confirm that her powers are waning as the stadium expands," Ost said.

It seems, at last, Jerry Richardson Stadium's $70 million expansion has a justifiable explanation. In what Ost called a "shadowy, back-door meeting," which was revealed to him in a series of prophetic dreams, University administrators and key paranormal community firms worked together on a three- to four-year plan to expand the stadium — but more importantly, to seal the ghost of Cone out.

Once complete, the stadium's expansion will not only increase total capacity but also contain ancient runes designed to prevent spirits of the deceased from haunting the designated area for up to 100 years. Administration officials declined to comment on the plan or whether they will perform the ritual to renew the runes on Oct. 13, 2127, when their power ceases to be effective.

There are some ethical concerns about the runes, such as whether it is the admin's right to restrict what is rightfully Cone's domain. But also, according to texts from the time of their creation, the runes require the sacrifice of "one's most cherished love." But according to Ost and other paranormal experts, Charlotte's unique case has a loophole that avoids unnecessary violence.

"Because it is the football team they are trying to protect, they have found a way that the sacrifice can be one tremendously bad game that particular season, followed by stellar performance for the rest of the year," Ost said.

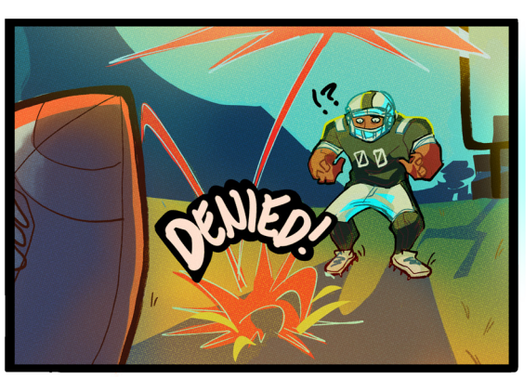
What such "stellar performance" from the Charlotte 49ers will look like, or whether it is even possible, is yet to be seen. Although, perhaps, Charlotte's surprise victory in the Oct. 17 game against the Temple University Owls might be taken as an early sign of the sacrifice's success.

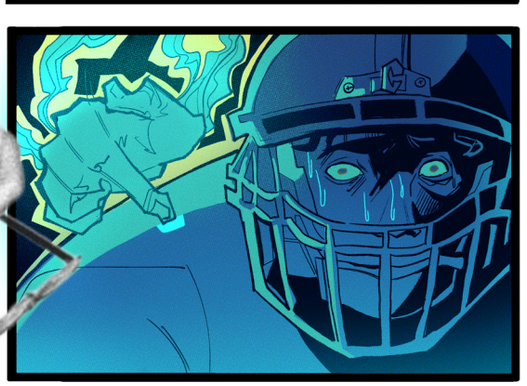
When asked if there were any plans to capture and condemn the ghost of Cone, Ost claimed to be unaware of any such plans being immediately in the works. However, he did note that because of her legacy on campus, there may be plans put in place to allow her to serve as a poltergeist in some other, less important part of campus, such as one of the humanities or arts buildings.

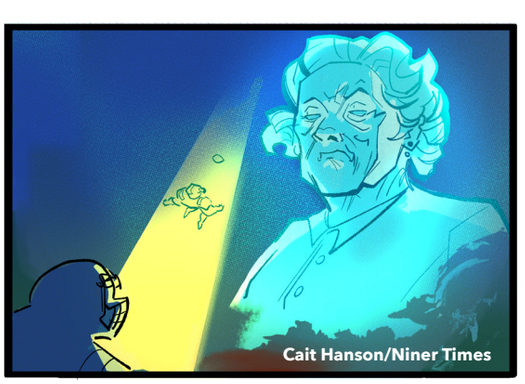


Courtesy of UNC Charlotte









Cait Hanson/Niner Times