

Syracuse

Orange (Now Orangemen)

By Nathan Lee Adamus

Syracuse squeezes out a win with Warrick's block

As Syracuse head coach Jim Boeheim walked onto the court for the 2003 NCAA Championship game against Kansas, something was oddly familiar. Sixteen years ago he stood in the same Louisiana Superdome, prepping his team for Syracuse's first national title appearance against Bobby Knight's Indiana Hoosiers. But the dream of a first national title was dashed when Indiana's Keith Smart hit a pull-up jumper from the baseline with 3 seconds left to crush Jimmy B and his merry bushel of oranges.

The Superdome was conjuring up bad memories, but he knew that there was something special about his '03 squad. Yes, the stage was the same, but the performers were different. The '03 team would have never let Smart get that shot off. Defensively they were longer than the '87 version and the additional height made their 2-3 zone a nightmare for opposing big men and 3-point shooters, something that played a key role in the 2003 championship game.

The '03 team started the offseason by losing two guards to other colleges, and freshman Billy Edelin to a 12-game suspension. Saying the Orangemen (Note: the name was not changed to the Syracuse Orange until the following year) were a young team is an understatement. They had just two seniors on the roster, including Sudanese-born Kueth Duany. Expectations were low for the youngsters, particularly after a loss to Memphis in the season opener, but the team bonded under freshmen Gerry McNamara (PG) and Carmelo Anthony (F), finishing the regular season 23-4.

A second round loss to Connecticut in the Big East tournament didn't bode well for team morale going into the NCAA tournament, but the additional rest proved beneficial as #3 seed Syracuse tore through #14 seed Manhattan in the round of 64.

Next up was Oklahoma State and their sensational junior transfer Tony Allen (G). The stifling Syracuse defense held Allen to just 10 points, while Orangeman guard Billy Edelin shot 8 for 12 from the floor to score a game high 20. The Cowboys were never able to decipher the 'Cuse zone and Boeheim and company rolled to a 68-56 victory.

In the Sweet Sixteen, the Orangemen landed 10th seeded Auburn. The Tigers were fresh off a huge upset over 2nd seeded Wake Forest. What should have been an easy win for Syracuse turned into one of its toughest

NCAA Champions

2003



▲ Syracuse head coach Jim Boeheim has led Syracuse to 5 Big East Tournament titles. He trails only Duke's Mike Krzyzewski for the most wins all-time in NCAA history.

games of the tournament. Syracuse jumped out to an early 19-7 lead and carried the momentum into halftime up 37-27. The Tigers scurried into the locker room with no answer for the 'Cuse zone, but came out in the second half showing their teeth and roared to within 1 point with 6:51 left.

Then Carmelo Anthony took over. Anthony, who was held scoreless in the first half, drained Syracuse's next 7 points to stretch the lead to 8. Auburn shot well in the second half, going 7 for 15 from 3-point land, but it wasn't enough and the Orangemen held off the Tiger attack to win 79-78.

The 1-point victory meant Syracuse would face #1 seed Oklahoma. What should have been a hard-fought battle turned into a blowout. Melo was unstoppable, netting 20 points and grabbing 10 rebounds, while sophomore forward Hakim Warrick added 13 points

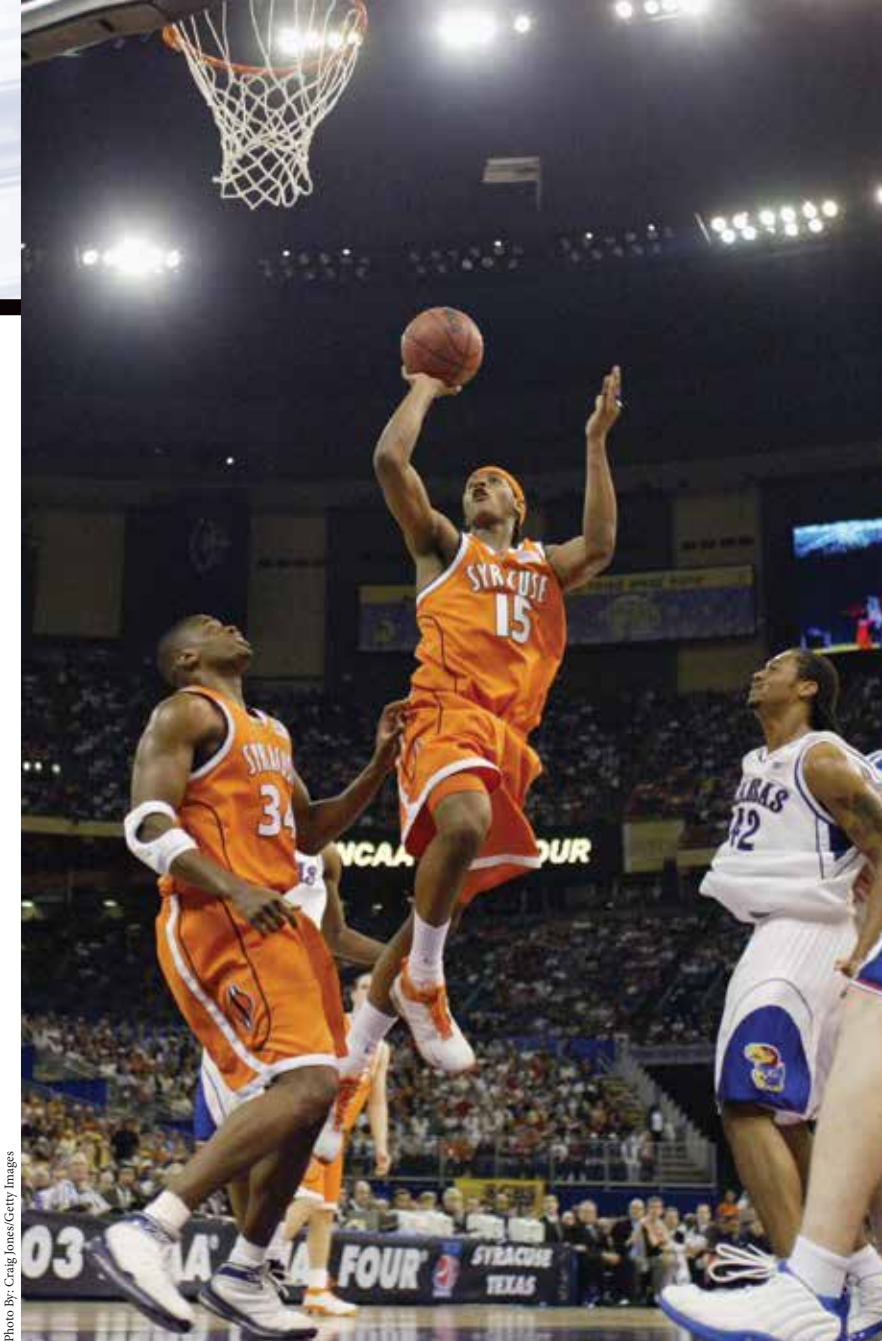


Photo By: Craig Jones/Getty Images

2003 Tournament

Louisiana Superdome
New Orleans, Louisiana

Championship:
Syracuse 81 – Kansas 78

Final Four Results:
Syracuse 94 – Texas 84
Kansas 94 – Marquette 61

Tournament MVP:
Carmelo Anthony (Syracuse)

Winning Coach:
Jim Boeheim

Season Record:
30-5

Top Players:
Carmelo Anthony
Gerry McNamara
Hakim Warrick
Billy Edelin

◀ Carmelo Anthony (15) is a 7x NBA All-Star who currently plays for the NY Knicks. Melo led the NBA in scoring in 2013.

to go along with his 9 boards. Oklahoma never got close and the Orangemen peeled apart the Sooners 63-47.

In the Final Four, Syracuse lassoed the #1 seed Texas Longhorns. The game turned into an offensive battle between Carmelo and Texas forward Brandon Mouton. Mouton was 5 for 9 from downtown, but his 25 points weren't enough to offset Melo's 33 points and 14 rebounds. Gerry McNamara had his biggest game of the tournament scoring 19, and Warrick once again made his presence felt with 18 points and 7 boards. Syracuse won easily 95-84 and faced another Big 12 opponent, Kansas, in the championship game.

Before the Final Four game against Texas, Boeheim reflected on his 1987 run in the Superdome. "I had a tremendous experience there for five days, 39 minutes and 56 seconds there," Boeheim said. "I'm gonna try to get that other four seconds in this time." Little did he know that his third championship game appearance would also come down to the last few seconds.

Syracuse was up 76-64 with 5 minutes left, but Kansas rallied behind seniors Nick Collison (F) and Kirk Hinrich (G) to close

the gap to 80-77 with under a minute remaining. After 'Cuse's Kueth Duany made a free throw with 24 seconds left to give Syracuse an 81-78 lead, Kirk Hinrich launched an errant three and the game appeared over. But Hakim Warrick missed both of his free throws to give the Jayhawks another opportunity. Kansas advanced the ball and Hinrich ended up with the rock at the top of the key. He jumped as if to take a long 3-pointer, then swung the ball to Michael Lee (G) who was wide-open in the corner. Lee rose up and the ball glided off his fingertips with 3 seconds left...

It was 1987 all over again, but this time Syracuse had the long arms of Hakim Warrick. Warrick came out of nowhere to slap the ball into the front row with just 1.5 seconds remaining. Hinrich took one more contested shot at the buzzer, but it was way off the mark. With several members of the 1987 team in attendance, Boeheim and Syracuse managed to clear the 4-second hurdle to claim their first and only national title. The Orangemen may not have been ripe to start the season, but by the end of the year, they were fresh for the picking. **MM**