



# Speed Kills at Deep South

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STORY & PHOTOS BY GLENN NELSON

FBC won a second straight Deep South Classic title behind its aptly named point guard, Nikki Speed.

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. - With a name like Speed, you'd *better* be fast. And one basketball-playing Speed in particular - Nikki - certainly lives up to her surname.

As in Speed kills.

As in Speed killed the Blue Chip Elite of Louisville, Ky., helping FBC (Finest Basketball Club) Blue defend its Deep South Classic title with a 68-54 victory in the championship game at the University of North Carolina's Dean E. Smith Center on Sunday. After a somewhat slumberous start, the Southern California-based team got a huge hit of Speed, who mostly hit an assortment of pull-up jumpers to account for 10 of her game-high 16 points in the first half.

"I'm proud of her," coach and FBC director Ray Mayes said. "She's been working hard on it. Now it's a real shot."

It didn't seem very real the day before, when Speed complained of an inability of getting her

feet under her and the shot feeling off.

What difference, exactly, did a day make?

"Confidence, I guess," Speed said, adding that she felt FBC needed her perimeter touch to ease the defense inside against the likes of [Jasmine Dixon](#), the physical, 6-foot-1 guard who is ranked No. 4 in the 2008 class (Speed is No. 13).

It was, in fact, Dixon who slammed the door shut with six points during the final 6 1/2 minutes, right after Blue Chip made one final rush, slicing FBC's lead all the way down to six points, 58-52.

The two FBC mainstays were a decided advantage against a Blue Chip team that surprised with a series of dominating wins that got them the championship bid. In addition to good overall quickness and structure, Blue Chip had guards Asia and Adia Mathis, the former a 2012, living at the free-throw line because of their attacks on the rim, plus 6-footer Brittany Wilson and 6-2 Janae Howard slinking inside for hoops.



Nikki Speed



Jasmine Dixon



In the end, the massive speed and overall length of FBC prevailed.

Earlier in the day, FBC got all it could handle before it could subdue Cincinnati's Finest and, especially, recent Tennessee commit [Amber Gray](#). Blue Chip had an easier time in running away from the Rhode Island Breakers and their star post, [Heather Buck](#), the No. 23 prospect in 2008 by HoopGurlz.com. Gray is ranked 15th, nationally.

Though last year's edition sent eight players to major Division I programs, FBC arguably is a better team this year. Kirsten McCarthy of West Covina, Calif., the tournament MVP, and [Rebekah Gardner](#) of Fontana, Calif., and a UCLA commit, both are long and skilled and had solid weekends. The rest of the team has very good size, but combined with a variety of skillsets that range from 6-5 Dannielle Diamant's perimeter shooting to 6-4 Talia Caldwell's brute, inside strength.



Heather Buck

Speed makes for the perfect conductor because of her swiftness with the basketball and ability to pressure all over the court. Somewhat ironically, it was her fast-track approach that prompted her to work on another tactic.

"A lot of people say I want to drive all the time," said Speed, who recently led Marborough to its first-ever state champion-

ship. "I wanted to give defenses something else to think about."

While a pull-up jumper can make a speedy ballhandler nearly impossible to stop, a point guard who knows how to change speeds is a critical component to a championship team. Speed used to be in overdrive all the time, but adroitly mixed transition attacks and halfcourt strikes where FBC used quickness of rotation and penetration to ring up points.

"She's learning how to be a point guard," Mayes said.

Which means understanding that some races can be won even at reduced Speed.

