

Runnin' Bulldog Sports

Sports Talk

Hello, and welcome to this edition of Sports Talk. I'm your host, Randy Capps. Welcome back to "the web!"

School is back in session, and that means it's time for football. There's your topic--let's have some calls.

Hey Randy. This is Cary from Concord. I heard that you don't think the Panthers are any good. Say it ain't so!

Sorry, Cary; it's true. And it must be a huge disappointment to the zillions of Carolina fans out there. Other sportswriters know that the Panthers have problems, I'm just the only one with enough guts to say it.

First of all, they can't score. Kerry Collins is out for six weeks with a broken jaw, but that doesn't matter. Panthers' receivers have never been accused of having good hands, so there is no one to catch his passes anyway.

But they can run the ball, right? Wrong. Johnson and Biakabutuka are talented runners, but both fullbacks from last season have left for greener pastures, leaving Carolina with a serious blocking problem.

Defense? Good as always, but with one huge difference. Kevin Greene and his 14.5 sacks from last season are at home on the couch watching television--probably Monday Nitro. The point is, he's not playing for the Panthers anymore, and that's bad news.

So, what's the verdict? With a little luck, 9-7. Without it: 7-9 or 8-8. Just remember, you heard it here first.

Let's take another call.

Hey Randy. This is Nate from Nashville. I'm a student at the University of Tennessee, so naturally I want to talk about college football. Who's going all the way this fall?

You're going to love this, Nate. Most of the major powers are missing something this year. Florida State needs a tailback. Florida needs a proven quarterback. The same goes for Penn State and a host of others.

Tennessee doesn't really have a running game, but they do have #16. That's right; Peyton Manning decided to stay in school (what a novel concept) and try to win the Heisman and a national title.

Guess what? He's more than good enough to do both. And if he and the Volunteers can survive a trip to Florida on Sept. 20, they'll be the best team in the land come January.

Next caller, please.

Hey! This is Jay from Johnson City. I know you go to Gardner-Webb, but you can admit that Carson-Newman is the best team in Division II.

That said, how do your Runnin' Bulldogs and the rest of the South Atlantic Conference shape up?

Yes, Carson-Newman is the top gun in the conference and the nation. Catawba and Mars Hill are solid in the conference as well. As for GWU, you can read the preview just like everyone else. I'm done. See you at the games!

Football team looks to '97 and beyond

by Randy Capps
sports editor

Welcome to the program.

The 1997 football season promises to be a historic one -- perhaps not in the win-loss column, but in other ways that matter just as much.

New head coach Steve Patton is after more than just victories on the field. He's looking for triumphs off the gridiron as well.

"We want to work hard, have fun and be more spiritual as a group. We want to graduate more players and build a program that everyone associated with Gardner-Webb can be proud of, win or lose," Patton said.

But, like it or not, coaches are ultimately judged on the luster of their records, and despite a 2-9 mark in 1996, expectations for the Runnin' Bulldogs run much higher this fall.

Patton has talent to work with on both sides of the ball.

Taking the snaps at quarterback and shouldering a huge portion of the offensive load will be sophomore Clint Conner.

Conner was last season's South Atlantic Conference Offensive Freshman of the Year. In a '96 campaign that redefined the expression "baptism under fire," Conner showed considerable poise and talent in the face of an otherwise dismal season.

Conner will have to master a new, more complex system this fall, but Coach Patton feels that he is up to the challenge.

"We'll have to build the offense around him. He's competitive, smart and very coachable," Patton said.

Conner is only one part of the offensive puzzle for this team. Transfer Courtney "CoCo" Henderson will see plenty of time at tailback this fall. He played for Patton last season at North Greenville, and knows the system well.

Although he is not very big (5' 9" and 185 lbs), he is more than fast enough to make up for it. He is the game-breaker that every successful team needs.

The major problem with the offense is the line. Injuries to Billy Henderson and



Keon Stewart (59) and Chris Mintz (87) work out on the blocking sled in preparation for the upcoming season. The GWU football team will open the season August 30 at 7:00 p.m. at Spangler Stadium against Johnson C. Smith University.

(Photo by Richie Ellison)

Kevin Cruise have hurt the depth and chemistry of what is the most vital part of any offense.

"We moved some people around some (on the line). They'll improve and develop as they play together. We'll just have to make the best of it," Patton said.

Depth is a concern for the coaching staff on the other side of the ball as well.

The players they have available are talented. Brian Brooks, a transfer from N.C. State, and Chris Mintz, a transfer from UNC, will lead the front four.

The linebacking corps is led by senior Bo Shannon. In defensive coordinator Will Houthouser's attacking scheme, look for players like Wes Schenk, Keon Stewart and Ventress Williams to have big years in the new system.

Kareem Jordan and Shon Dawkins are penciled in at the corners, while Tim Dasher and Bryant Foster will see action at safety. It will take time, but Patton believes it will all come together.

"The defense is making progress. The line is solid and the linebackers are pretty good--we just need to cut down on our mistakes," he said.

Mental errors killed the Runnin'

Bulldogs in '96. Coach Patton knows that in order to be successful, the same can not happen this fall.

The season kicks off this weekend against Johnson C. Smith. The Golden Bulls return a lot of weapons from last season's 7-3 squad. It's been a long preseason, and Patton and his troops are anxious to get started.

"We're tired of hitting each other. We want to get out and hit somebody else. They're (Johnson C. Smith) probably a little farther along than we are, but we're going to go out and play hard, and try not to make mistakes and see what happens," Patton said.

Patton not only has a major rebuilding job on his hands, but has also landed in one of the nation's toughest conferences.

The South Atlantic Conference features Carson-Newman (the trendy pick to win the Division II national championship), in addition to tough teams like Catawba, Mars Hill and Newberry. So, the possibility exists that the Bulldogs will be much improved, but not win many more games than last season. Patton knows that long-term success takes time.

"My job is to come in here and build on what we have and get better every game. I can't concern myself with what other teams have because I'm trying to build a program here," Patton said. "And even if it doesn't happen this year, I believe that it will eventually happen," he added.

One thing is for sure about the upcoming season: this Runnin' Bulldog football program will be headed in the right direction.

How fast they get there is anyone's guess.

Pilot staff: Karen Brower, editor; Randy Capps, sports editor; Richie Ellison and Amanda Williams, photographers; Kimberly Adams, Sherril Bradey, Chad Delzell, Richie Ellison, Angela Flanagan, Nic Floyd, Mary Gettys, Cyndi Higgins, Justin Hutto, Takiya Patrick, Jenny Rogers, Suzanna Saadi, Megan Setzer, Shannon Spencer, Frank Spurlock and Brianne Taylor

Advisors: Mr. Bob Carey and Ms. Jennifer Carlile

To contact us: Campus Box 313 and Campus Phone 4389

Coming next issue: A complete 1997 Runnin' Bulldogs fall sports preview