

Like Kiffin, Wolfpack football will surprise

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DTH Staff Writer

Editors note: Each year ACC Operation Football travels to the conference schools. This preview is the first of a seven-part series.

There is an air of mystery surrounding the 1981 N.C. State football team. With Monte Kiffin at the helm, there is always a degree of uncertainty. One never knows when the second-year coach will parachute out of a plane or show up at practice disguised as the Lone Ranger.

It's hard to take him seriously, but when Kiffin said the Wolfpack had some uncertain question marks to be answered, he did so with a straight face.

One concern for State will be whether the squad can successfully convert from a twin-veer offense to the power-I formation.

Kiffin said the change was made to open the passing game. "We can throw more play-action passes from the I-formation," he said. "I feel that we can utilize our quarterback's talents to the fullest."

"I also think defenses are catching up with the veer. They're learning to read the option."

In the I-formation the tailback carries much of the offensive load. So far, however, no running back at State has asserted himself as the clear choice to start.

"Right now, Larmount Lawson is number one," Kiffin said, "but he hasn't played a snap in a State uniform."

To make matters worse, promising running back Chris Brown quit the squad last week and State's top two fullbacks, Dwight Sullivan and Andre Marks, have been plagued with nagging injuries.

The unstable situations at running back could force to use highly-touted freshmen Joe McIntosh or Vince Evans. Both drew raves from coaches as high school seniors, but Kiffin said he didn't want to push them into the limelight prematurely.

One position Kiffin need not worry about is quarterback. Directing the new offense will be junior Tol Avery, who finished fourth in the Atlantic Coast Conference in total offense last season. An option quarterback his entire career, Avery has worked diligently at his passing game, to help diversify State's attack.

The Pack's strongest asset, literally, may be its offensive line. Tackle Chris Koehne, an All-American candidate, anchors a line that averages 260 pounds. Todd Eckerson is the other tackle; juniors Chuck Long and Earnest Butler are the guards; Jeff Nyce is the center.

"My biggest worry with the offense is that we don't have enough depth," Kiffin said. "If someone goes down, we only have unproven kids."

Nowhere is this more evident than at tight end, where two walk-ons, Rufus Friday and Bob Longmire are competing for the starting role. After Friday and Longmire, Kiffin has to look to his scout team to find a tight end — a key position in the I-formation.

Defensively, ten starters return from last year's 6-5 (3-3) squad but again depth could be a problem, especially in the front line.

Senior Al Dellaporta returns at middle guard while Dennis Owens and Greg Steele are slated to start at tackle. Ricky Etheridge, a steady performer, and Danny Lute, who sat out last season for disciplinary reasons, are the defensive ends.



Coach Kiffin

When quizzed about his linebacking corps Kiffin becomes excited. "I've got one All-American, two kamikazes and one guy who feels no pain," he said. "I love defensive players like that."

Topping the list of linebackers is senior Robert Abraham. Abraham, who led the Pack in tackles a year ago, has drawn preseason recognition from Playboy magazine. Andy Hendel and Vaughan Johnson have been singled out for their vicious hits and Sam Key is the man with a great tolerance for pain.

In the secondary, State has six players who started at one time in their careers. Dee Dee Hoggard, Perry Williams, Hillery Honeycutt and Nat Brown saw the most action in 1980 due to injuries to Donnie LeGrande and Louie Meadows. But LeGrande and Meadows return to give State possibly the best defensive backfield in the conference.

"We'll have a good year," he said. "We're pleased to have so many veterans returning, but starters don't always determine your season. Backup people are the real key since few teams go through a season without injuries."

Football notes

Recruit Griffin moves to No. 1 flanker

Freshman Larry Griffin is slated as the No. 1 flanker on the UNC football depth chart, Coach Dick Crum said in a press conference Tuesday afternoon.

Sophomore Mark Smith went into fall practice as the starter but since Smith has little game experience (one catch for seven yards) coaches took a good look at freshmen.

Griffin was an All-region quarterback at Great Bridge High School in Chesapeake, Va.

"He (Griffin) came to us and asked to be moved to flanker because he saw an opportunity to play," Crum said. "He's been a pleasant surprise and he'll play a fair amount this year."

came to school overweight and it did not set too well with Crum. The Jacksonville native weighed in about 10 to 15 pounds heavy. "If he gets down under 220 we'll give him a shot as backup tailback," Crum said.

Crum is happy with the progress of freshman Micah Moon, 6-foot-2, 210 pounds, who has been switched from linebacker to fullback. "We need a backup fullback so we tried him there," Crum said. "He'll be a big, strong fullback and he'll get some playing time."

Backup tight end Clifford Powell, expected to see a lot of playing time this year, is out for the season after a growth was

removed from his shoulder. Doctors say the growth was the size of a football and had been growing for six or seven years. It was discovered during spring drills.

Kids Day will be Sunday at Kenan Stadium. The public is invited to the stadium at 1:30 p.m. for an autograph and picture-taking session with the Tar Heel football players and coaches.

All-conference linebacker Darrell Nicholson reported to practice 12 pounds lighter than last year. Crum pointed to Nicholson as one of the most impressive performers after the first week of practice. Nicholson said he would have more quickness and mobility.

Freshman running back Eddie Colson



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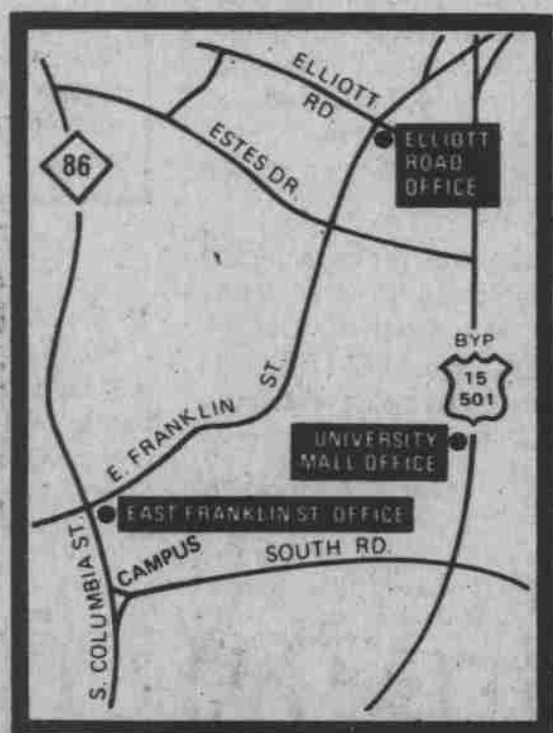
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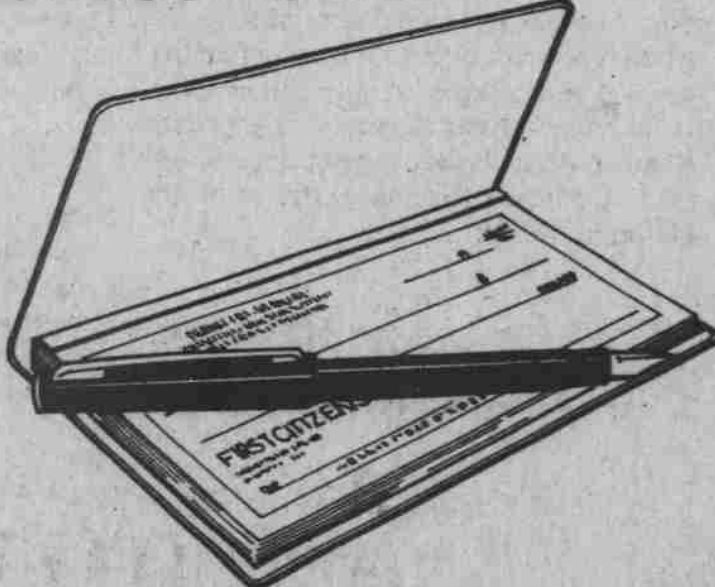
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