



Brian Johnston and All-American Micah Moon (39) are the towers of strength on an otherwise suspect Tar Heel defense that returned only four starters

Defense is young, but the potential is still there

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North Carolina has a tradition of great defense, and defensive coordinator Denny Marcin says the 1984 defense has the potential to live up to the tradition.

But "potential" has become almost a cliché for youth, and the Tar Heel defense is definitely young.

Head coach Dick Crum agrees with Marcin that the youth on defense could be a problem for the Tar Heels early in the season.

Defense

"I think we have good young people on defense," Crum said. "We just don't have a lot of experience, and I can't emphasize enough how important that is on defense. If an inexperienced player makes a mistake on offense, it can cost you a couple of yards or perhaps possession of the ball. On defense, it can cost you six points."

Only four starters return from a defense that was at times the top squad in the nation a season ago, and two of those starters will be playing the same position. But Marcin is confident that the people he has can do the job.

"Just like in the past, the kids are going to be aggressive and run to the football," Marcin said. "We do have some positions that lack battlefield experience. We've

got the capability to be a very good defense, but beating on yourselves you don't find out too much. We should find out in a hurry, though, facing a back like (Navy's Napoleon) McCallum in the first game."

One returning starter who has been to battle and has done his share of beating up on opponents is senior linebacker Micah Moon.

Moon, who was the only ACC player named to the Playboy preseason All-America squad, has been moved from his inside linebacker slot to the outside to provide stability for the defense and to take better advantage of his athletic ability.

Moon was spectacular in his junior season, leading the Tar Heels in solo tackles with 73 and topping it off with a 21-tackle showing in the disappointing loss to Florida State in the Peach Bowl. Moon was named CBS defensive player of the game for his performance that day.

Marcin said moving Moon was important for many reasons.

"It's tough to have two young guys on the outside," Marcin said. "It was a move that we needed to make. We felt we needed to take someone and put them out there, and we felt that he could adjust the easiest to that position."

"We had several players in the middle that we felt good about, so that made the move easier."

Moving Moon to the outside could provide the Tar Heels with the kind of big play threat they

had with players like Lawrence Taylor and Mike Wilcher, and it could make Moon one of the most exciting pass rushers in the country since his pass coverage responsibility will be reduced.

An injury to Joel Freeze, who along with Noel McEachern was projected as a starter at the outside spot opposite Moon, made the move that much more important, Marcin said.

Daryl Parham and Ron Burton will provide depth outside.

"It's probably for the best that we moved Micah when we did, because that was one move we didn't have to make after the injury," Marcin said. "We still have some good players in the middle."

Manning those spots in the middle will be Carl Carr, a 214-pound junior whose main asset is his speed (4.6 seconds in the 40) and Troy Simmons.

Simmons missed the entire 1982 season with a knee injury that he suffered in preseason practice, and Marcin said that he is just now beginning to play up to his capability after favoring his knee a season ago.

Backups in the middle will be 228-pound redshirt freshman Brett Rudolph, who Marcin said is probably the fastest of all the inside linebackers and is good enough to start, and junior Tim Rorrer.

"All of them have been told that they will play in every game and

that they will get good quality playing time, not just in the fourth quarter when we're blowing somebody out," Marcin said.

The defensive line returns some experience in right tackle Brian Johnston and nose guard Dennis Barron, and they will provide stability.

Freshman Reuben Davis will start at left tackle, but he has a tough task to replace departed All-American William Fuller. Freshman Donnie Wallace and Jeff Ray, who was moved from tight end in the spring, will provide depth at tackle, and freshman Carlton Bailey and senior David Boggs could both see time at nose guard.

Several players with experience return in the defensive backfield, including preseason all-ACC selection Larry James at left cornerback. Larry's twin brother Barry will man the strong safety spot, with Tim Morrison starting at free safety and Walter Bailey at right cornerback.

Steve Hendrickson, a senior who was a starter a year ago, will be the nickel back and see plenty of time as Morrison's backup, Marcin said.

"We feel good about the defensive backs, and the more games they get under their belt the better off they will be," Marcin said.

Marcin could have said that about any area of his defense. The more experience they get, the better off they will be. But Marcin



Denny Marcin

doesn't want people to expect his defense to be flashy too soon.

"Early, we just want to play good, sound, fundamental defense," Marcin said. "Then, after a few games and if we have done well, we can move on and do some other things."

"The key to any good defense is the ability to stop the run, and we hope we'll be able to do that," Marcin said. "If you can either stop the run or stop the pass, you are in pretty good shape, but when they can either run or pass, well, then you're in trouble. If you can stop one or the other, then you've got a chance."

"We'll find out early if we can stop people."