

Offensive transfers key secondary

By LEE ROBERTS
Sports Editor

Quick: name a great defensive back who played at North Carolina in the last five years.

There is, simply put, no answer to that question. While great offensive backs have been synonymous with the Tar Heels over that span, the defensive backfield has long been a North Carolina Achilles' heel.

So last spring the UNC coaches devised a wicked little scheme for 1985 — construct a defensive backfield that is downright offensive.

Literally.

The North Carolina defense will have a new look this year, featuring five defensive backs. And three of those backs were offensive players last year.

Larry Griffin and Norris Davis, wide receivers in '84, and Antonio Goss, a running back last year, all made the switch to defense last spring. Two have starting jobs and a third played extensively last Saturday against Navy, and — shudder at the thought — all could be keys in making the backfield stronger than it's ever been.

"Oh, I don't think there's any question," defensive backs coach Dale Evans said, "the backfield will be better this year. Those moves have helped our defense."

Griffin and Davis both made key interceptions in the 21-19 win over Navy. Griffin's came on the Navy three-yard line and stopped an apparent Midshipmen scoring drive, and Davis' came with 4:36 left in the game, setting up Brad Lopp's winning touchdown.

Switching Goss and Davis to the other side of the ball wasn't as big a surprise as the transfer of Griffin. After all, Goss and Davis had both been defensive backs in high school and both are young (Goss a redshirt freshman and Davis a sophomore).

But Griffin, a fifth-year senior who'd come to UNC as a quarterback and been switched to wide receiver, where he played for four years, was a bit more unexpected. In fact, Griffin himself was in shock and more than a little reluctant when coach Marc Dove asked him last spring to consider the switch.

"My first thought was, 'I can't do this!'" Griffin said recently, smiling at the recollection. "I'm a

senior, I know the offense, and it took me a year to learn it. I just thought, God, I couldn't make it."

He told coach Dove he didn't think he wanted to switch. But Dove, as well as head coach Dick Crum and the rest of the coaching staff, told Griffin he could just try defense out in the spring and if he didn't like it, switch back to offense.

Griffin went back to his room and thought about it. He talked to trusted ones about it. To friend and fellow wide receiver Earl Winfield, to his brother, to his high school coach, Ron Forrestra.

He thought about his 1984 season. "I had problems last year," Griffin said. "Maybe relaxing a little too much, not concentrating hard enough. Coach Forrestra said, 'maybe this change'll help you.'"

Finally, Griffin decided the change would help him. "From that time on, I've thought like a defensive back," he said. "You can't turn back."

And the dividends from that change have paid off quickly.

Listen to these people commenting on Griffin's change of position: Linebacker Carl Carr: "Any questions we had were answered on the first day of practice."

Coach Evans: "Larry is a great athlete at any position."

Crum: "It was amazing. On the first day of practice he was better than any guy we had out there last year. He may be one of the best defensive backs we've ever had."

But couldn't Griffin's inexperience at the position lead to some key mistakes come game time?

"He was there all spring and didn't make any mistakes," Crum said.

Griffin picked off a pass and batted away a few others in the spring games. Can it be that easy? Has the change just been fun times for Griffin from Day One?

"It has surprised me," Griffin said of the success of his switch, "but it hasn't been simple. You have to get used to hitting people. The first several days of spring practice I didn't think I'd make it. I was very sore — bumps and bruises all around."

But now it is Griffin doling out the bumps.

The other two, Goss and Davis, have been a major help to the defense, as well. "Both have the



Tim Morrison (28), shown returning an interception vs. N.C. State, is back at free safety.

opportunity to be impact players," Evans said. "Norris is big, quick, tough — a good athlete. I think Antonio will be a great athlete."

Davis, at the strong safety, or stud position, looked to be the starter as fall practice ended. While listed second on the depth chart at the newly-established ram position, Crum said Goss could be the starter by opening day.

The ram is a combination linebacker-defensive back. He has to be big and strong enough to play the run, but with enough speed to cover the pass. Evans described the ram as "a different type of athlete."

Goss, at 6-4, 213-pounds, looks to fit that bill after spending his redshirt year as a running back. "With William Humes and Brad Sullivan ahead of him at tailback, we felt Tony was good enough he could contribute someplace else," Crum said.

Davis, like Goss at running back, was a talented player in a position stockpiled with talent — wide

receiver. The presence of Eric Streater, Earl Winfield, Eric Lewis, Randy Marriott, Quint Smith, Junnie Demery and Kenny Miller convinced Davis his playing time would have to be found at another position.

"I was shaking," Davis said of his first day at defensive back. But soon Davis had his opponents shaking. He can hit, and hit hard.

"Some of the plays Norris makes remind me in a way of Lawrence Taylor," Griffin said of his fellow transferee. "It excites me to see him play."

To top it all off, the Tar Heels have some talented returning defenders. Derrick Donald, second on the team in interceptions last year, and Eric Starr will man the left cornerback position.

Seniors Darryl Johnson and Tim Morrison are both quick, hard hitters at free safety, and both will see plenty of playing time. Morrison is probably the quickest player on the defense, while John-

son brashly predicted he'd have an interception a game this year.

Howard Feggins, a 5-9, 196-pound steel ball, started Saturday at the ram position, and Walter Bailey backed up he and Goss. Bailey was having a fine season in 1984 before injuring his knee against Memphis State. Despite missing the last four games of the season, Bailey still wound up fourth among defensive backs on the team in hits and second in passes broken up.

Danny Burmeister and Jim Jauch will back up Griffin, while John Keller and Joel Freeze will back up Davis.

But the offensive transfers are the ones who'll probably make the biggest difference in this year's defensive backfield. They'll know what their offensive opponents will be thinking this fall, because they've been on that side of the field before.

And the havoc they could wreak may just be downright offensive.

Marcin switches defense to a new eight-man front

By MIKE WATERS
Staff Writer

Every year spring football practice yields renewed hope. Each rapidly approaching fall season breeds excitement.

A lot of the excitement in the University of North Carolina camp this August didn't always have to do with the offense and optimistic talk of an air game.

No, a lot of the locker-room patter this year concerns a slightly varied defensive look. A look that, unlike the rumored inclination to the pass, should stick around for the entire season.

"Basically, it's an eight-man front," defensive coordinator Denny Marcin said of the new alignment. "We use four linemen with two inside linebackers and the two strong safeties which make up the eight-man front."

If that sounds a lot like a normal 4-2 defense with two safeties assigned more responsibility for the

run, it is. "It's very similar to some of what we did last year," Marcin said two weeks before the Navy season opener. "Hopefully, it will create some blocking difficulties and free up the linebackers."

The success of the eight-man front will hinge on a multitude of interrelated factors. First, the front four must keep the offensive linemen off the linebackers, as always the strong suit of the UNC defense. Second, the same line must provide more of a pass rush.

Finally, the safeties, who are responsible for the run as well as pass coverage, must key this new defense. If guys like Norris Davis, Darryl Johnson and Antonio Goss can't stop the run while concentrating on the pass, then teams like LSU, Florida State and Maryland will run around end all season.

The line received a big blow when it was learned junior guard Dennis Barron, who injured his knee in the 21-19 win over Navy

last week, would be lost to the team for the season. His probable replacement is either freshman Chris Jacobs or junior Mike Johnson.

"The defensive line's job is to keep the offensive line off the linebackers," Barron said before the injury.

Defensive end Ron Burton puts it even more bluntly, "Our inside linebackers have to be able to run all over the field. As usual, linebacker is our forte."

Still, much will depend on an improved pass rush and Marcin hopes that a fourth lineman will give him just that.

"We should have a better pass rush," Marcin said. "That usually comes with playing experience. That's what makes the difference." Marcin believes that inexperience was the main cause of last year's difficulties.

"It hurt us early last year," the UNC coach said. "We stayed with

vanilla defenses for the first few games. We improved. I don't think we would have been where we were if we hadn't done things that way," Marcin added.

"Last year our defense was put down because we didn't get many sacks," Barron said. "We'll get more this year."

Linebacker Carl Carr, along with Brett Rudolph, will be one of the main beneficiaries of the new look. Carr had 85 hits last year including 41 solo tackles. Look for him to pad those figures. He had 27 tackles, five unassisted, in last week's 21-19 win over Navy.

"We're going to do a lot of stunts and whatever we've got to do to get to the quarterback," Carr said. "We're just going to line up and go after them."

Sophomore nose guard Tim Goad realizes the possible added sacks, but refuses to forget about the run. "It's gonna help us rush (the passer) a lot more than last

year," Goad said.

Add to that assessment Burton at one end and tackle Reuben Davis' 131 hits and 48 solo tackles, and maybe UNC has the line to make this defense work. However, questions must still surround an unproven secondary.

Marcin is optimistic.

"The guys we have in there — Norris, Feggins, Johnson and Goss — are all in the 6-3 range," Marcin said. "They take up more space when they take their drops. They are good athletes."

The secondary is the one crucial part of this defense that can't be compared to anything at UNC in the past. UNC hasn't had a pass defense in awhile. Marcin hopes an added pass rush and the use of a total of five defensive backs will end that unwanted tradition.

It will have to end in order for the eight-man front to succeed in the face of the toughest UNC schedule in recent years.