

# The Coach

## Mack Brown hopes his positive approach pays off

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Will Rogers may have never met a man he didn't like, but the new UNC football coach seems to have gone the great American philosopher one better.

Mack Brown has never met a man who didn't like him.

Or so it would seem.

As soon as Brown was hired last December to succeed Dick Crum as the head man of Tar Heel football, thousands of words praising UNC's choice appeared in newspapers all across the state. Brown was young, personable, imaginative, driven and inexhaustible — in short, everything Crum was not.

After a decade of conservative play-calling, one-word press conference answers and an omnipresent feeling of paranoia and inaccessibility surrounding the football program, UNC was ready for a change. When Crum finally agreed to resign on Nov. 30, one could almost hear a collective sigh of relief echoing throughout the tree-lined campus.

Athletic director John Swofford's two-week, nationwide search yielded a handful of candidates for the position — including Air Force's Fisher DeBerry and Holy Cross coach Mark Duffner. Swofford even offered the job (only half in jest) to Nebraska legend Tom Osborne.

All along, though, Swofford wanted to hire Brown, a 37-year-old native of Cookeville, Tenn., who had served for the past three years as head football coach and AD at Tulane. While in New Orleans, Brown garnered national attention as the savior of a dying Green Wave program. After struggling through 1-10 and 4-7 seasons in Brown's first two years, Tulane went 6-6 last year, losing to Washington in the Independence Bowl.

Just as the Green Wave seemed ready to "turn the corner," as Brown puts it, they lost their vibrant young coach to North Carolina. As it turned out, Brown and UNC had been eyeing one another for quite some time.

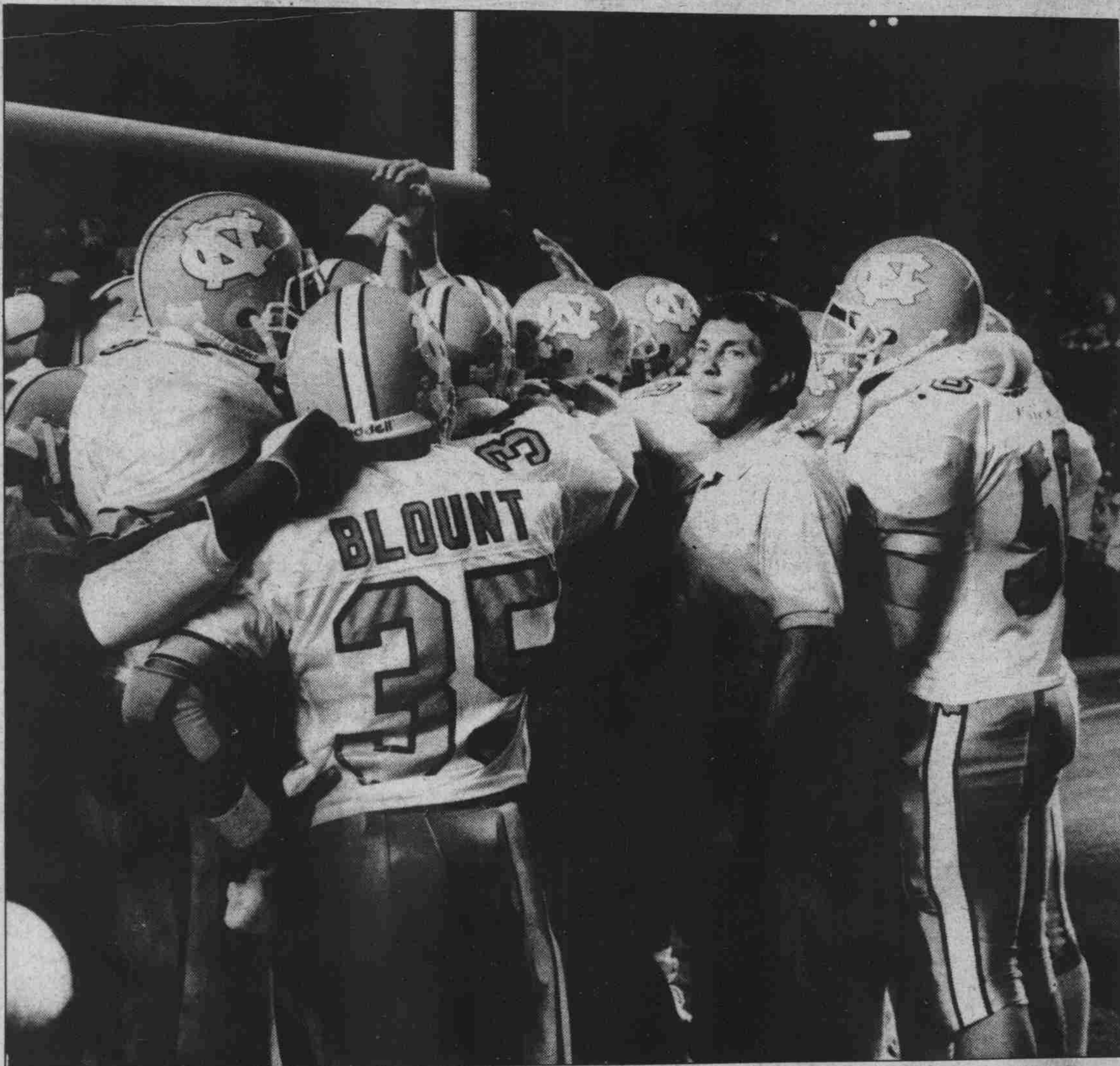
From 1974-1984, Brown's coaching travails had sent him crisscrossing America, taking him, in order, to the campuses of Florida State (his alma mater), Southern Mississippi, Memphis State, Iowa State, Louisiana State, Appalachian State and Oklahoma. At each of those stops, he learned a little more about his profession, all the while enhancing his reputation and preparing for his big break.

It was at Appalachian, where he was head coach in 1983, that Brown caught Swofford's attention. The Mountaineers went 6-5 that season, including a surprising victory over Wake Forest.

Though Brown spent just one season in Boone, Appalachian's athletic director, Jim Garner, still raves about his old football coach.

"Mack Brown is the future of college coaching," Garner says. "He could be in the Bear Bryant class. He has coaching ability, charisma, honesty and integrity. He's an excellent coach, and, more importantly, he's a tremendous person."

"I think hiring him is the wisest move North Carolina has made since they hired Deah Smith."



New coach Mack Brown is well-liked by all who know him, including his players

Garner isn't the only person to draw a comparison between Brown and Smith.

"I don't think you'll ever find a more people-conscious person than Mack Brown," says Gil Brandt, the director of player personnel for the Dallas Cowboys. "Mack is also a fine football coach. He is one of the bright young coaches in America today."

"I think maybe the best way to describe (Brown) is to say he's a young Dean Smith. I like to think of him as being like Dean was when he first started at Carolina 27 years ago."

Like the three coaches before him (Crum, Bill Dooley and Jim Hickey), Brown will have to grapple with the Dean Smith legend when recruiting against the Clemsons and South Carolinas of the world. Whether Brown will ever be able to erase, or at least soften, North Carolina's reputation as a "basketball school" remains to be seen.

"Basketball at this school has maintained a certain level; football has been up and down," Brown says. "The question that's being asked is can Mack Brown and his staff get the thing back to where it's supposed to be, and can it be maintained? Those will be questions that will be unanswered for four to five years."

At a school where the students and alumni are accustomed to success, where even a near-deity like Smith was hanged in effigy early in his UNC career, Brown knows his task will not be easy.

"We're way behind, and it's going to take us a while to get this thing back up to where it needs to be," Brown says. "There's something about this school that people expect us to win. People are not patient. But I think that's good. We are working to re-establish a tradition here. We were working more to build one at Appalachian and at Tulane."

"We've had one winning season in

the last four (at UNC), which is not good. We haven't won the conference championship since 1980. We want our school to compete for and win the conference championship. That's something we expect to do."

The one recurring rap on Brown is that he is a vagabond coach, a Lou Saban-type; the kind of person who enjoys the initial challenge of rebuilding infinitely more than the arduous task of maintaining a level of excellence once it's achieved. Indeed, the longest period of time Brown has spent at any one school during his coaching career was the four years he stayed at Southern Mississippi, from 1974-77.

What's more, many have questioned his ability to win as a head coach. The Big 8 championship ring Brown wears on his right hand was earned as an assistant under Barry Switzer at Oklahoma. As the head honcho, Brown's record is just 17-29, including this season's opening loss

to South Carolina last Saturday.

"I'm still an unanswered question in this whole deal," Brown admits.

While the jury may still be out on Brown as far as the media is concerned, the consensus among the Tar Heels themselves is firmly in Brown's favor.

"Coach Brown's door is always open; he really cares about all his players," says Jeff Garnica, UNC's senior center. "That's what's great. He really, really cares about you. Not just as a player, either. He wants you to come in anytime you're having a problem with anything."

"Coach Crum wasn't a real enthusiastic or outgoing person, I guess. Coach Brown seems a little more personable. There is a definite difference between the two as far as how they come across."

Mack Brown is a man with no enemies, only fans.