

The Old and the New

Goss-led linebacker corps tries to overcome key injuries with youth

By **CHRIS SPENCER**
Assistant Sports Editor

Linebackers are the heart of any football team's defense. Well, of course, you might say, that's because they are right in the middle of all the action.

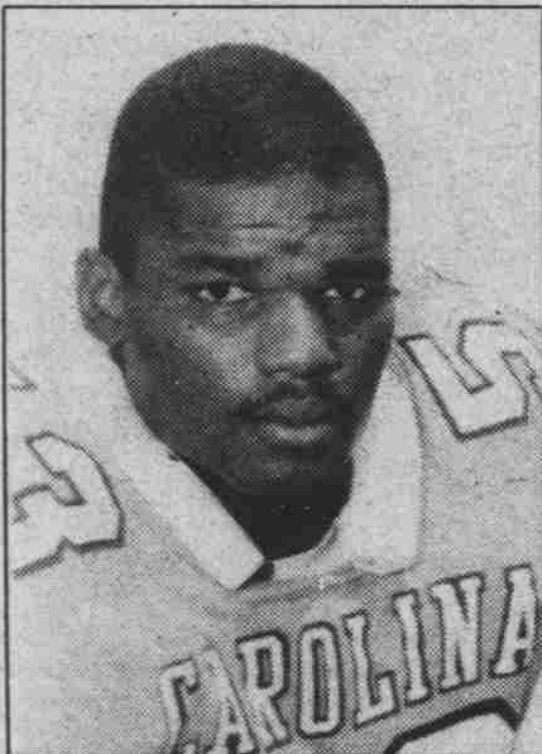
But on this year's North Carolina squad, it is more than that. For on a team with very little experience both in game situations and playing together, this is one unit that is experienced.

"We are definitely going to make the defense this year," said senior Mitch Wike, who was injured in the opening game at South Carolina and may miss the remainder of the season. "Linebackers on all defenses have to make the plays and be the leaders, so it'll be really important for us to help those younger guys in the line and in the secondary by busting out every play and setting the example."

"If the play goes wrong — we are a young defense, so there'll probably be a few of those — we'll just have to keep everybody's heads up."

Wike normally plays alongside redshirt freshman Dwight Hollier, and the two are flanked by junior John Reed and senior Antonio Goss at the outside slots. But with Wike gone for a while, and maybe the season, due to a perforated small intestine. It happened early in the game, and Wike already had six tackles by that point.

Unfortunately for the Tar Heels, their strongest position is also the one



Dwight Hollier

rocked hardest by injuries. Besides Wike, sophomore Bernard Timmons and senior Leonard Dempsey are down, both beset with knee injuries. Both should return for the Oklahoma game.

Wike is a 6-foot-2, 224-pound, fifth-year senior from Brevard who has been a solid performer over the years for the Tar Heels. He has seen it all, and he is refreshed by the change in the Tar Heel coaching staff.

"It's funny, it's like coming in as a freshman again with the new beginning," he said before the season began. "It's exciting, because usually as a fifth-year senior they've got

everything planned out for you. Now everyone's eyes are open and there's a newness in the air."

He also likes to joke around, too, saying of his and Goss' senior status, "Tony and I are probably the only ones to get treated for arthritis in the training room."

Wike teams up with Goss to provide some strong leadership for the defense. While Wike is in the solid, tough mold of a Dick Butkus, it is Goss who has the ability to turn an offense from the hunter to the hunted.

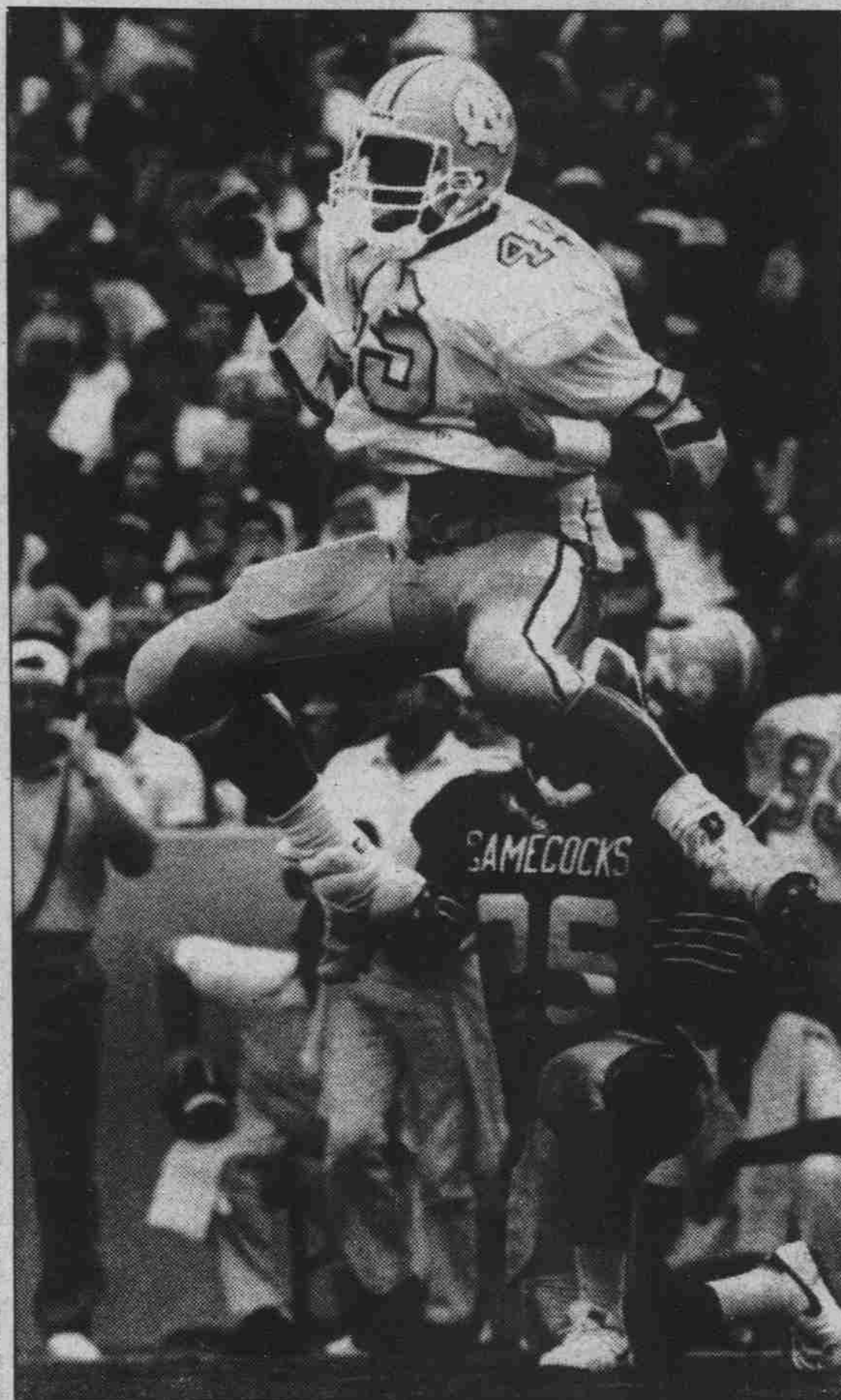
The 6-4, 228-pounder from Randleman spent his first two years at UNC at strong safety before moving to outside linebacker last season. Goss started all 11 games there last year and was the lone bright spot in a 28-0 loss to Oklahoma, with six tackles, two assists and two quarterback pressures.

Goss also had seven solo tackles and a fumble recovery later in the year in the 13-10 loss to Clemson.

Last Saturday, he burst through the line on the play before the Gamecocks' first touchdown and exploded into quarterback Todd Ellis, only to see an apparent fumble he caused ruled an incompletion.

Like Wike, Goss feels the Tar Heel defense can be a good one with perseverance. "If we can stay healthy

See **LINEBACKERS** page 18



Linebacker Antonio Goss celebrates after breaking up a pass

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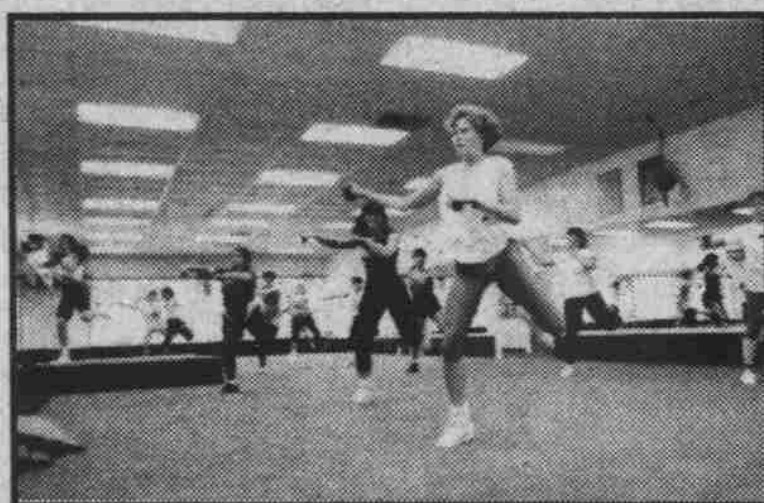
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