

Revamped secondary can run with the best



DTH/David Surowiecki

The UNC secondary, with the help of newcomers, now has some speed to back up its confidence

Linebacker

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effective," he said. "It's a very unselfish, hard-working, technique-oriented group."

Gash, a 6-2, 220-pound sophomore who played on back-up and special teams last season, will be expected to take charge on the field this year, Thompson said.

"I feel really comfortable with outside linebacker," Gash said. "I understand the concept of the position."

Starting at inside linebacker will be Hollier, a 6-2, 235-pound sophomore, and true freshman Thigpen. They will be backed up by junior Timmons, who was sidelined with a leg injury last spring, and senior John Reed, who has started at outside linebacker for the last two seasons.

In his freshman season Hollier led the Tar Heel squad in tackles, with 70, and hits, with 117. Torbush said

Hollier has made considerable improvement since his rookie year.

"I feel really good about Dwight right now," he said. "He's a hard worker and he has a chance to be an outstanding ball player."

"I'd just like to contribute to the team in a way that will help us to be the best team we can be," Hollier said.

The surprise on the defensive lineup is Thigpen. "He reminds me of Dwight, but probably a little bit faster," Thompson said.

The inside linebackers' youth could work in their favor, as is the case with the entire defense. There are eight underclassmen starting defensively.

Torbush said the defensive outlook should brighten considerably this year.

"In my mind, at no time last year were we as good as we are right now,"

he said.

Some strengths of the linebackers, Timmons said, are quickness and lateral running, but the Tar Heels' second line of defense is not as consistent as it would like to be. But this group has worked hard to improve on last season's effort.

"The inside and outside linebackers know where to drop more than last year," Timmons said. "You won't see too many passes dropping behind us."

If their athletic ability and aggressive attitude are any indication, the Tar Heel linebackers should meet their own and their coaches' high expectations for an outstanding season.

"They're young, eager to learn, and very anxious to play," Thompson said. "This is the best collective group of guys I've seen."

By JAY REED

Assistant Sports Editor

As an old saying goes, the best offense is a good defense.

For North Carolina's youthful 1989 gridiron group, defense will be an integral part of the team's success. Leading the stalwart force on the other side of the snap will be a relatively inexperienced but excited defensive secondary.

"Collectively they have 13 varsity college football game starts under their belt," said secondary coach Vince Hoch, "and six of them are Doxie Jordan, and he's out this week."

But the lack of experience might just surprise some opposing quarterbacks.

The group that always gets talked about last in a football discussion (and media guides for that matter) will get an early opportunity to shine and gain some deserved acclaim.

The newest members of this blossoming secondary are Torin Dorn and Reggie Clark.

Dorn, a 6-1, 202-pound senior from Southfield, Mich., flip-flops from a well-established place in the offensive backfield to a projected starting position at left cornerback. The former tailback has already been picked in some polls to be a pre-season All-Atlantic Coast Conference defender.

Clark also moved across the line of scrimmage to secure a place in the defensive backfield. The 6-1, 212-pound junior from Charlotte left a wide receiver post to take over as strong safety.

For both Clark and Dorn, defensive experience is lacking, but their enthusiasm and athleticism will be a well-needed addition to the back.

"Reggie's very versatile and Torin has natural ability with his speed and quickness," said senior secondary reserve Larry Whiteside.

The other two proposed starters will be Doxie Jordan and Clarence Carter.

Jordan, a 5-11, 179-pound free safety, started the 1988 season at cornerback, but, because of Dorn's conversion, the Hampton, Va., sophomore returned to the position he played in high school.

Because of a recent motorcycle injury, however, Jordan will be unable to start in the season opener

against VMI. In his place will probably be true-freshman Rondell Jones, a 6-3 190-pounder from Sunderland, Md., who defensive back coach Vince Hoch has very high hopes for.

Carter, a 5-11, 190-pound senior out of Toledo, Ohio, was used in a reserve role for the 1988 season and will bolt in to position as starting right cornerback for '89.

The secondary is being praised by the coaching staff as well as spouting an abundance of confidence themselves.

"I think the sky's the limit (for the secondary)," said Hoch, a 19-year veteran of college coaching. "I'm optimistic about their ability. I'm optimistic about their enthusiasm."

Dorn, who has the potential to become an all-star in just one season, decrees that the secondary utilized the spring practices to obtain essential team work for its '89 opponents.

"The secondary we have right now went through the spring together, and I think we built some kind of bond between us," Dorn said. "We have a certain feel for each other right now, and we have a whole lot more confidence than maybe some of our guys had last season."

But, what is the key to their success?

"Last year (the coaching staff) just sat back and let us play, but this year they have given us a definite role," Jordan said.

And what is that role? "Making big plays early in the season," Whiteside said.

For players like Jordan and Whiteside, it will be to hold together an untested group of athletes and be role models for the younger players.

And, for Clark and Dorn, their role will be to insert a spark into a part of the UNC team that has not been around in a long time.

"I just have to go out there and give 110 (percent)," Clark said.

"If we keep our intensity and confidence levels up and do some good things right off the bat," Dorn said, "I think you'll see some good things as the season goes along."

The role of the secondary is crucial to the Tar Heels' success in '89.

"They make or break any defense, or any team for that matter," Hoch said.

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Offense

are returning lettermen Carl Watts and David Boon at center, Brian Bollinger and Deems May at tight end, and fifth-year sensation Pat Crowley at guard (see story, page 8).

The vacated tackle positions will be filled by two inexperienced but capable players. Gone are starters Darrell Hamilton and Creighton Incominias. Now vying for the top roles are Oberg and junior transfer Kevin Donnalley. Depth may be a problem with junior Bill Boyd as the top backup on both sides.

Watts, shifted from guard, can do a solid job at center. With more game experience at this spot, he may develop into one of the top centers in the ACC. Boon saw limited action last year behind graduated All-ACC player Jeff Garnica and is back in reserve this season.

Tight end is a center of uncertainty for the Tar Heels. Bollinger, with experience as the number three

man in 1988, will most likely start. He is a fine blocker despite seeing minimal playing time last year. May shifted here from quarterback after spring workouts, and Craig Brown, a red-shirt freshman, will be top backup.

Inexperience is a problem at all positions on the offensive line — except right guard. Crowley is arguably one of the most skilled linemen in the nation. He is a three-year starter and two-time All-ACC selection, and ranks now as a top All-America candidate. His fine spring performance has created an expectation of excellence for his final year as a Tar Heel.

Millen, at left guard, has enough potential to fill the slot and should prove an indispensable addition to the starting lineup.

Due to age and accomplishment, Crowley is the motivator on the team. And he has become a special inspiration to Millen. Millen finds himself

in the same position Crowley was in three years ago. After a red-shirt year, Millen will start at guard and play opponents three and four years his senior. Crowley is a stabilizing force for the young starter.

"I try not to let anything faze me," Millen said. "I have to look to Pat. I worry about stuff like that. Pat may not think so but I do. He knows he's the leader on the squad and off the field. I try to model myself after him."

If all the new starters gain necessary experience this season, then Tar Heel fans can expect a continued legacy of greatness on the offensive line. They may not have to wait long for results, either. According to Millen, "The offensive linemen won't be considered pansies this year. We're going to be good." Chalk one up for confidence.

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