

## Duke in ACC title hunt

### Blue Devils look for first bowl bid since 1960

Usually when anyone says "Duke is in the running for the ACC championship", those of us who follow the Atlantic Coast Conference pay such a statement no mind.

Duke is always in thick of things as far as basketball goes, and the Blue Devil soccer team (1986 NCAA champions) has been among the nation's best for years.

But as soon as someone places the word "football" in between "ACC" and "championship", the phrase takes on a whole new meaning. The first impression is that someone fresh from a lifetime overseas has probably confused football with soccer. Little do they know that football as we know it in Durham, is merely a three month layoff before basketball season takes off.

Surprise, folks. Football Americana is alive and well at Duke University. Never mind that the soccer team made the NCAA playoffs and that the post-Danny Ferry era still finds the Blue Devils ranked in the Top 10 in many preseason polls. Listen up: Duke is in the running for the ACC football championship. Wait a minute. Duke?

Yes, Duke. The same team that not only brought us game-breaking quarterbacks such as Ben Bennett, Steve Slayden and Anthony Dilweg, but sieve-like defenses, usually among the worst in the ACC. The masters of the 49-48 defeats. The same Blue Devils whose annual gridiron highlight (note the singular form) would depend on whether or not they defeated North Carolina.

Beating North Carolina in 1989 would be icing on the Blue Devil cake (losing to North Carolina would jeopardize their credibility as football team). Wallace Wade Stadium, a place where Rice Krispies used to echo, is now filled with 34,000-plus standing room only crowds out to watch the Devils make a serious run at the ACC crown, and a possible Bowl bid.

Duke is currently the hottest team in the ACC with six straight victories. The 7-3 Blue Devils are 5-1 in the conference and are tied with Virginia for the ACC lead. The Blue Devils, coming off a

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thrilling 35-26 victory over N.C. State, must defeat North Carolina in their final game and hope that Maryland upends Virginia in the Cavaliers' season finale. A 6-1 tie at the end of the season means that both will share the title despite the fact that Virginia beat Duke earlier this season.

While sharing the ACC championship would be a definite morale-booster for the football program, it could also propel the Blue Devils into their first Bowl appearance since the 1960 Cotton Bowl. Duke has strengthened its bowl chances even further by breaking into the Top 25 for the first time since 1971.

Theoretically, the ACC champion gets an automatic bid to the Citrus Bowl. A tie for the championship would favor Virginia because of their higher national ranking. (UVA is No. 16; Duke is No. 25).

All rankings aside, Duke does, in fact, possess one of the most explosive offenses in the country, averaging more than 486 yards-per-game, led by Alabama-transfer quarterback Billy Ray (David Brown has proved to be more than an adequate backup for the injured Ray). Randy Cuthbert controls the ground game for the injured Roger Boone and All-American receiver Clarkston Hines is always a threat to break a game wide open. Duke could arguably be one of the most exciting teams to watch, if your fancy happens to be a high-powered offense that racks

up a lot of points (almost 40 points a game in the last five weeks).

Before handing out those Bowl invitations, let the stats speak for themselves. The Blue Devils are atop three of the four team offensive categories, and the defense, Duke's worst enemy for several seasons, has gradually improved, particularly against the rush. Billy Ray leads the ACC in passing; Hines is second in receiving, and Cuthbert ranks third in the ACC in rushing. Ray also leads the ACC in total offense.

Let the record show that Duke's three losses this season have been against some pretty reputable programs: No. 11 Tennessee, No. 18 Virginia and South Carolina, who just recently dropped out of the Top 25. Duke also shocked the college football world by defeating Clemson earlier this season and disposed over a highly regarded N.C. State squad last weekend.

Despite the fact that Duke might be snubbed by the folks from the Citrus Bowl, the Blue Devils' accomplishments this season may not be for naught. Word is now out, although not officially, that Duke may be well on their way to All American Bowl on December 28. Texas Tech is the leading candidate to face the Blue Devils, while Syracuse has also been mentioned as a possible opponent.

At a time when the Blue Devil faithful has usually written off Duke's football season and are counting the days till the opening tip-off, basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski will find himself sharing the spotlight with football coach Steve Spurrier, his potent offensive attack and a new and improved defensive unit this December.



Photo by Scott Lansing

Kevin Alderman feels the impact of Saturday's loss to Wingate.

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