

UNC must win 2, but CarQuest bid still conditional

BY LISA ZARANEK
STAFF WRITER

North Carolina might be packing its bags for Miami in a few short weeks.

Only three conditions must be met for the Tar Heels to be considered for the CarQuest Auto Parts Bowl at Joe Robbie Stadium on Dec. 30.

Georgia Tech must lose to Georgia. Maryland must lose to Florida State. And the Tar Heels must win their last two games against Duke and N.C. State.

Assuming those three things materialize, the Tar Heels will likely receive an invitation to the CarQuest Bowl in Miami, despite the fact that they will have the same record as Maryland and Georgia Tech.

Mitch Morrall, director of communi-

cations for the CarQuest Bowl, said the selection committee tends to favor North Carolina over both Maryland and Georgia Tech.

"Maryland is very localized in their following and fan support," Morrall said. "Georgia Tech has a similar problem."

Fan following is a major consideration for the selection committee to weigh in the decision-making process. Morrall said UNC would have much more appeal nationally and would draw more people to the CarQuest Bowl, according to attendance figures from past years.

And the fact that Joe Robbie is hosting next year's game between Maryland and Florida State is another consideration for the selection committee.

"Being that Maryland is going to be playing Florida State here (in Joe Robbie

Stadium) next year, it's definitely more interesting for us to bring North Carolina than a different team," Morrall said.

But Morrall added that the season is far from over and that North Carolina still must make it through the lengthy selection process if the qualifying conditions are met.

"We've built a relationship with Maryland too, so we're definitely going to consider them hard as well," Morrall said.

If the Tar Heels are invited and accept the invitation, they will face the third-ranked team in the Big East.

At this point, Syracuse and Miami are tied for second. Assuming both teams are tied at the end of the season, it is more probable that the Tar Heels would face the Orangemen than the Hurricanes.

It would be a chance for UNC to avenge its Sept. 2 loss at Kenan Stadium.

The CarQuest Bowl is sending a representative to Saturday's game against Duke for scouting purposes and to meet with UNC Athletic Director John Swofford, who could not be reached for comment.

While two of the qualifying conditions — the Georgia Tech and Maryland losses — are beyond North Carolina's control, the Tar Heels must hold up their end of the bargain if they expect to see post-season action.

At least part of their fate rests upon the upcoming backyard brawls against Duke and N.C. State.

If the Tar Heels win both, they will qualify for a bowl game. If they lose, they will be home for the holidays.

In their last matchup, the Tar Heels pulled out a last-second touchdown to beat Duke by one point. But that was last year when both teams had winning records by this point in the season.

Gone is the 8-4 record; the Blue Devils will be lucky to post four wins this season.

The Tar Heels have already reached that feat, but they have not shown much consistency. But Morrall said that North Carolina does not need to prove anything in these next two games.

"At this point, we'd be looking just for the winning record just because of where we get to pick," Morrall said.

"If you're going to go on a two-game winning streak, you're going to be on a high, and you're going to be winning. How you do it is really irrelevant to us."

But suppose Georgia Tech and Maryland lose, and UNC wins its final two games. There is still a slight possibility

that the selection committee may decide to invite Maryland instead.

In that case, there is always the Poulon/Weed Eater Independence Bowl, which will be held Dec. 29 in Shreveport, La.

Glenn Krupica, executive director of the Independence Bowl, outlined the three main criteria the selection committee uses in determining whom to invite.

Krupica said they first look for the best team available outside the conference tie-ins. They also consider how many people the school will bring from a fan standpoint. The final criteria rests in the team's attitude about playing in the Independence Bowl.

One of the seeds is locked in with the No. 5 or No. 6 ranked team in the Southeastern Conference.

"Within our SEC arrangement, we'd love to have LSU," Krupica admitted. "I think we'd be fine if we went with Georgia or Auburn too. But LSU seems like a very distinct possibility."

Krupica said the selection committee is considering a variety of teams, but they do not think they will even have an opportunity to invite UNC.

"We believe that, should Georgia Tech not qualify, the CarQuest Bowl will take North Carolina," Krupica said.

Krupica spoke with Swofford on Wednesday morning about North Carolina's chances for an Independence Bowl invitation. Krupica said he was confident the Tar Heels would meet the selection committee's criteria.

"I would think that Mack Brown has a lot of following here and that they definitely would bring some people," Krupica said. "There's no doubt. They'd be a good representative for the bowl game."



Johnson sprained his ankle last week.

LJ's injury has Tar Heels searching for right mix

BY JOSEPH ROLISON
ASSISTANT SPORTSATURDAY EDITOR

North Carolina tailback Leon Johnson missed most of this week's practice and is listed as very questionable entering today's game with Duke because of an ankle injury.

The apparent loss has left UNC with a muddled picture at both fullback and tailback. The Tar Heels now boast just four scholarship players in the backfield. Star tailback recruit Andre Barkley decided to transfer earlier this year.

LJ sustained the ankle injury in last Tuesday's loss to No. 6 Florida State.

"No. 1, you'd like to have (LJ) involved in practice before a ball game," UNC coach Mack Brown said. "The second thing is if you put him in the ball game and he hasn't been touched all week, you don't want to hurt him worse and you don't know whether he can cut."

"Right now, he's a big question mark."

In the middle of the tailback shuffle are Jonathan Linton, who has spent the past

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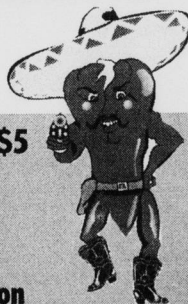
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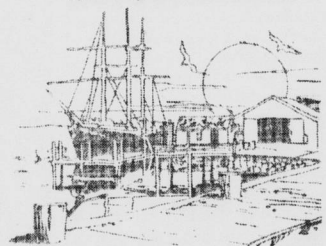
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