

UNC Looks to Start Season on Right Foot

North Carolina limped out to a 1-4 start last year and hopes to win its first season opener in the last three years.

By BRET STRELOW
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North Carolina football coach Carl Torbush has never claimed to be a mathematical genius.

The number crunching he has done in his head since the end of last season has been short and simple. Add a few wins, subtract a few losses, and the Tar Heels have a respectable season.

Of course, that's not how 1999 played out.

"I can promise you that if we were 4-1 after those first five games, we wouldn't have ended up at 3-8," Torbush said.

Torbush is not Albert Einstein, but he did know the Tar Heels' fate would be decided in the first five games of last season.

North Carolina played the top four ACC squads in its first five games of the year. The Tar Heels mustered only a win against nonconference foe Indiana. A 3-8 season was well in the works.

North Carolina has a much more favorable schedule to begin this season. That doesn't mean the Tar Heels can sigh with relief, though.

UNC has set many goals for the upcoming season, but few are attainable if it looks past the first task at hand: Tulsa. "We expect to win the first game," Errol Hood said. "That's our goal right now - to win the first game. After that, the other goals will come."

Those other goals include winning the mythical state championship and

appearing in a bowl game. Torbush also mentions an ACC and national championship because he is obligated to.

North Carolina has high aspirations for a team that posted a 3-8 record last year. But these aren't last year's Tar Heels.

For one, UNC has required the services of its top offensive and defensive players. Quarterback Ronald Curry and linebacker Brandon Spoon sat on the sidelines last year with season-ending injuries. Spoon suffered a torn biceps tendon in the second game of the year, and Curry tore his Achilles in the fifth game.

Curry and Spoon did not commiserate with each other about their respective injuries last season. They talked only briefly of the pain they both endured.

Curry knows how important he and Spoon are to the Tar Heels' hopes for an improved season.

"Me and Spoon are two people who they depend on heavily," Curry said. "I was on offense, he was on defense. Two vocal leaders, two people who when things need to be happening, they can look at us."

Curry will depend on an otherwise inexperienced group of starters to help him on offense. He will be joined by redshirt freshman Willie Parker at tailback and five offensive linemen who didn't start a game last season.

Bosley Allen, who severely injured his knee against N.C. State in 1998 and missed all of last season, returns to the wide receiving corps.

"I believe we have the weapons to be a really good offensive team," new offensive coordinator Mike O'Cain said.

The Tar Heels are loaded with weapons on defense, which has been taken over by new coordinator Ken Browning.

North Carolina will start three seniors - Spoon, Sedrick Hodge and Merceda Perry - at linebacker. Spoon is the only player ever to be nominated for the Butkus Award for four consecutive seasons.

Junior safety Billy Dee Greenwood headlines a secondary that performed better than Torbush expected it would a year ago. Greenwood led UNC with 118 tackles, but he would be happy making



DTH-CARA BRICKMAN

Sophomore Julius Peppers had six sacks last season, including four against Wake Forest. Peppers, who led the team with 10 tackles behind the line of scrimmage, said he expects greatness out of himself this season.

half that number this year because that would mean runners were being tackled before they got into the secondary.

Greenwood is joined in the secondary by Hood, who developed into one of the best cornerbacks in the ACC.

Returning starters Julius Peppers and Ryan Sims anchor the defensive line and are preseason candidates for All-ACC recognition. Peppers had six

sacks last year, while Sims made six tackles behind the line of scrimmage.

The defense is filled with confidence after it limited N.C. State and Duke to a combined six points in the final two games of last season.

"Last year, we were working on this year," Perry said. "We just wanted to end up on a good note."

Some players aren't looking at the final

two games of 1999 as an ending. Rather, it will serve as the start of the program's resurgence that will continue through the first game of the 2000 campaign.

"You can just tell by the way people walk around that we expect to win now," Hood said. "We've been through the hardest part - we've got that crazy season over. Now it's time to ball, it's time to win."



UNC quarterback Ronald Curry missed the final six games of 1999 after suffering a torn Achilles tendon.



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Errol Hood, left, tied for second in the ACC with five interceptions in 1999. UNC gave up a combined six points in wins against N.C. State and Duke.

UNC '00 Schedule

Sept. 2	Tulsa
Sept. 9	at Wake Forest
Sept. 16	at Florida State
Sept. 23	Marshall
Sept. 30	Georgia Tech
Oct. 14	N.C. State
Oct. 21	Clemson
Oct. 28	at Virginia
Nov. 4	at Pittsburgh
Nov. 11	Maryland
Nov. 18	at Duke

North Carolina

1999 record: 3-8 (2-6 in the ACC)
Head Coach: Carl Torbush
(14-21 overall, 11-13 at UNC)

Home Field: Kenan Memorial Stadium (60,000)

Returning Starters: 4 offense, 10 defense

Key Returnees: TE Alge Crumpler, QB Ronald Curry,

CB Errol Hood, DE Julius Peppers, LB Brandon Spoon

Key Losses: FB Deon Dyer, PK Josh McGee, P Brian Schmitz

Strengths: The Tar Heels played much of last season without

their top offensive player in Curry and top defensive player in

Spoon. They are back this season. UNC has a new offensive

coordinator in Mike O'Cain and a new defensive coordinator in Ken Browning.

Weaknesses: UNC will start five different players on its offensive line this season,

and kicker Jeff Reed has never played in a game. The punting job is up for grabs.

Keys to season: North Carolina hasn't won a season opener since 1997. UNC must

get off to a strong start because its schedule gets tough during the middle of the year.

Key Game: Oct. 14 vs. N.C. State



Carl Torbush