

Curry, Stability Return to Tar Heel Offense

By MIKE OGLE
Assistant Sports Editor

No more converted anything under center.

No more endless strings of running plays.

No more boring offense. He's back.

North Carolina junior quarterback Ronald Curry returns to action Saturday for the first time since collapsing under Georgia Tech's Greg Gathers with a torn Achilles tendon on Oct. 9.

With him returns the Tar Heels' hopes.

Curry led the team in total offense by 373 yards in 1999 despite going down early in the second quarter of UNC's fifth game. He passed for 330 more yards, threw for more touchdowns, rushed for as many touchdowns and rushed for more yards per game than any other Tar Heel.

The offense was chaotic at best in his absence. North Carolina crossed the goal line just six times in the post-Curry portion of the season and could not manage more than 12 points in any game until the season-ending 38-0 romp of Duke.

But now he's back, and he's got something to prove.

"That season is all behind us," said Curry, a 6-foot-2, 200-pound Hampton,



DTH/DAVID SANDLER

Quarterback Ronald Curry led the Tar Heels in total offense by 373 yards despite suffering a season-ending injury in the fifth game of the year. He completed 120-of-257 passes for 682 yards in 1999.

Va., native. "We're looking forward to this year and years to come. We're not going to live in the past. Things happen.

They happened for a reason, and a lot of people forgot about us."

Defenders around the ACC have not

likely forgotten about the throwing and scrambling talents Curry possesses. But he could even be better this season.

"I think his mind is sharper than it was before," wideout Kory Bailey said. "He takes command of the huddle better than he did last year, and he gives us confidence while we're in there to make big plays."

Curry won't be leaned upon so heavily in new offensive coordinator Mike O'Cain's scheme, which stresses a balance between the run and pass. Curry also has a talented group of young receivers to look for downfield in Bailey, Bosley Allen, Sam Aiken and Jamal Jones.

Backing up Curry at quarterback are senior Antwon Black and sophomore Luke Huard.

Black saw his first collegiate action at quarterback in the second half of the season in 1999. He is a mobile quarterback who completed 11-of-23 passes for 139 yards and two interceptions.

Huard, a traditional drop-back passer, started four games for the Tar Heels last year. He connected on 29-of-75 attempts for 256 yards, one touchdown and two interceptions.

If all goes according to plan, Black and Huard's contributions will come mostly on the practice field. Curry has some unfinished business to take care of.

"I know the expectations were high when I first got here," he said. "Hopefully, they still are."

Offensive Line Excited by New Blocking Schemes

By ADAM D. HILL
Staff Writer

Coaching staffs preparing to square off with North Carolina could consider scrapping the time-honored practice of scouring videos from the previous season to grasp the nature of the 2000 Tar Heel offensive line.

In fact, former N.C. State offensive line coach Robbie Caldwell didn't even bother setting up a VCR to see what he had to work with at his new post at UNC.

"I did not watch any offensive film from last year," Caldwell said. "I didn't want to form any preconceived ideas about the personnel."

Preconceptions will likely prove futile for a unit that has not played many game minutes together. Seniors Cam Holland, Louis Marchetti and James Wagstaff and sophomore Isaac Morford have played for the Tar Heels, but not as a starting unit. Rounding out the line is junior center Adam Metts, who is known as one of the fiercest competitors on the team.

"I think we're adjusting well," Wagstaff said. "I can see us gelling now. We're starting to come together."

Not only does the unit have to gel, but it will be responsible for anchoring a line that is schematically different from last season's.

Caldwell expects to use several different blocking schemes, including a man scheme, a zone scheme and a mixture of the two.

"What we hope to do is change the tempo for the defensive line when they are attacking," Caldwell said. "That is probably a big change from last year."

The players have welcomed the change.

"Everybody likes the offense, especially the blocking schemes," Wagstaff said. "We're real positive. We have a lot of faith in the offense."

Wagstaff and his fellow offensive linemen channeled their enthusiasm for the new offense into personal development during the offseason. Wagstaff dropped nearly 20 pounds of excess baggage from his 365-pound frame, making for a quicker, more mobile player at right tackle.

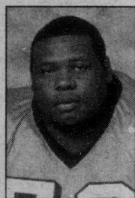
The linemen participated in a program Caldwell called "fat man aerobics" during the summer. The exercises were aimed at increasing the players' metabolisms and trimming their waists.

"We're going to go out there and try to get 70 plays a game," Marchetti said. "If we've got a 17-play drive, we want to be out there the whole time and not sucking wind."

The linemen's quickness has improved through the aerobics, allowing for a more dynamic style of play.

Such an improvement will help the Heels, as the unit will have to manage the task of blocking for the newly installed option game and a running back corps that features three freshmen.

"We have a lot of talent back there,"



UNC right tackle James Wagstaff lost 20 pounds from his 365-pound frame so he could improve his quickness.

Wagstaff said. "It's up to us to make the holes for them.

"I believe in all of our running backs. They can make some good cuts off our blocks that enable them to get some good yardage."

The strategy is set, and the pieces are in place. The linemen have overcome the most strenuous part of their new venture. Now, the unit must focus on putting it together in a game situation.

"They've really done a great job soaking

it all in," Caldwell said.

"Now we have to eliminate the nerve factor. Some of them haven't played a great deal, and we get a little jumpy when we get in a stadium, particularly when there are people in there."

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