



DTH/DAVID SANDLER

Senior linebacker Sedrick Hodge ranked third on the Tar Heels with 79 tackles last season. North Carolina will start three seniors at linebacker.

# Spoon Returns to Anchor Mature Linebacking Unit

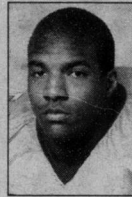
By **BRET STRELOW**  
Assistant Sports Editor

Brandon Spoon has always thought the current group of North Carolina linebackers had the athletic ability and talent to rival some of its predecessors.

Now that he is back from a season-ending injury and can join fellow seniors Sedrick Hodge and Merceda Perry, Spoon thinks the trio can finally duplicate the production of those other units. "We know how to fit in with each other," Spoon said. "It's kind of like when Brian (Simmons) and K

(Kivusama Mays) played together. This is the fourth year with these guys, and we know what each other is thinking a lot of times."

Spoon returns to the field after suffering a torn biceps tendon against Indiana in the second game of last season. He



Tar Heel senior Merceda Perry ranked second on the team with 83 tackles last season.

said after a while it bothered him to watch the linebackers play because he wanted to be out on the field so much.

But Spoon did what he could to help Perry and Hodge. He had seen the offenses of UNC's opponents many times, and he gave pointers to Perry and Hodge on how to defend them.

Spoon tried to keep his coaching to a healthy minimum, though.

"I didn't want to pressure anybody," Spoon said. "I didn't want to act like I was the coach. I wasn't."

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## Line Wants To Restore Pride on 'D'

The UNC defense gave up 190.7 rushing yards a game last year to rank last in the ACC and 95th in the nation.

By **MATT TERRY**  
Assistant SportSaturday Editor

Last spring, Julius Peppers helped lead the North Carolina basketball team to the Final Four.

This fall, his task is a far more modest one: help the defensive line — and the UNC football program — regain some lost pride.

The 6-foot-6, 270-pound defensive end is the focal piece of a young line that, if nothing else, looks to be much improved from the inexperienced 1999 version.

"Defensive end starts with Julius Peppers," head coach Carl Torbush said. "He can truly be a great player. As a football player, his athletic skills are really very unusual. You don't have a guy who is 6-6 and 275 pounds who can bend and move around like a 6-footer."

"If he stays healthy, with the work habits he's developed over the last two years, he's got a chance to become an outstanding player."

Last season, Peppers garnered freshman All-America honors while leading the Tar Heels with 10 tackles for loss and six sacks.

Starting opposite Peppers at the other end position will be senior Ross McAllister, who was second on the team with eight quarterback pressures a season ago. The duo should create plenty of havoc in opponents' backfields.

"I know what I'm doing right now," Peppers said. "As far as when last year started, I really didn't know much about playing playing defensive end."

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## Secondary Looks for Support Up Front

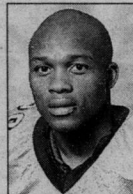
By **JAMES GIZA**  
Assistant SportSaturday Editor

It's probably unfair to say that senior safety David Bomar was solely responsible for saving his coach's job, but he definitely had two hands in it.

It was Bomar's tackle, after all, of wide receiver Chris Coleman inside the 1-yard line on N.C. State's final offensive play that salvaged a 10-6 North Carolina win and, in a way, coach Carl Torbush's position at UNC.

For Bomar, who replaced injured safety Quinton Savage and started the last four games of 1999, it was the defining moment of a breakout season. The Durham native — a walk-on as a freshman — averaged 14.3 tackles in the 10 games he started and finished the year fifth on the team with 67 tackles.

"He came in as a walk-on and couldn't run fast enough," Torbush said. "He wasn't quite big enough and wasn't quite quick enough. All he did the last four games was make 52 tackles and be named national defensive player of the



Junior Errol Hood and redshirt freshman Michael Waddell will start opposite each other at cornerback for UNC this season.



week end, quite honestly, probably had a big deal in saving my job with that tackle on the 6-inch line. So without a doubt, he will start this year."

"I never thought anything would happen like that," Bomar said of his rise to a starter. "I've just been real fortunate. The Lord's blessed me so much, and I stayed out here and worked hard and stuck through it."

Last season, he stuck through a UNC secondary that was extremely porous at

times, yielding an average of 183.3 yards per game in the air and surrendering 11 touchdowns. This year, however, should be different.

Starting alongside Bomar at safety will be junior Billy-Dee Greenwood, who led the Tar Heels with 118 tackles last year, a troubling statistic for the UNC defense. With injured linebacker Brandon Spoon out for the bulk of the season, Greenwood and the rest of the defensive backs found themselves having to be much more mindful of the run.

Spoon's return means the secondary should be able to concentrate on what became an afterthought during some games last year — guarding the pass.

"I saw a lot of run last year on third and medium to long," said Greenwood, who picked off one pass and broke up seven more. "So if the guys up front hold up, along with the return of Spoon, I can focus more on the pass and become a more complete defensive back."

Junior Errol Hood and sophomore Michael Waddell will start at cornerback. Hood established himself as one of

the premier corners in the ACC last season, recording 58 tackles, 11 pass breakups and five interceptions, which tied for third in the conference.

Waddell, meanwhile, practiced with the team last year but was sidelined as an academic partial qualifier. He is already eliciting high expectations.

"He walks our fastest receiver down from 40 yards across the field," Spoon said. "The speed he has is unbelievable. If he can get his technique down and concentrate on his fundamentals, he can be unbelievable. He can be just as good as Dre' Bly and Robert Williams who we had in the past."

Others who should see time in the secondary are redshirt freshman safety Dexter Reid, sophomore safety DeFonte Coleman and sophomore cornerback Kevin Knight.

"The secondary was without a doubt the area that was our biggest concern a year ago, and rightfully so," Torbush said. "Right now it's an area we've probably got as much experience on and depth in defensively as we've had in a while."



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