

Receiving Depth Not a Problem

UNC returns a deep corps of wide receivers to execute new motion offense of coordinator Gary Tranquill.

By BEN DESANTIS
Staff Writer

Two days before fall practice began, North Carolina sophomore tailback Brandon Russell was told he would be lining up for the 2001 season a little wider than usual.

At wide receiver, Russell, who led the 2000 Tar Heels with 508 rushing yards, said the transition to the new position has been difficult but enjoyable.

"At first, it was confusing, (but) now I'm feeling pretty comfortable," Russell said. "I love it; I love the job."

Russell joins a receiving corps that is among the ACC's deepest.

UNC returns seniors Bosley Allen and Kory Bailey and junior Sam Aiken, who combined last year to catch 101 balls for 1,594 yards and nine touchdowns.

Bailey, who finished second on the team in receiving in 2000 with 32 catches for 550 yards and two touchdowns, said the group's talent and experience are comparable to any other receiving corps in the nation.

"I think we go four or five deep better than a lot of teams in the country," Bailey said. "I'm really excited about the things we're going to be able to do this year."

Much of the excitement comes from the new offensive system implemented by UNC first-year offensive coordinator Gary Tranquill.

At first some of the receivers admitted they at first were skeptical of Tranquill and his schemes.

But after several weeks of practice, some of the wide receivers began to express their confidence with the new playbook.

"(Tranquill's) been in the business for a while, and he expects as long from you," said Allen, who led the team with 40 catches for 634 yards last season.

Bailey said he expects Tranquill's offense, which includes more pre-snap motion, to improve the team's performance.

"I think Coach Tranquill's put in a lot more shifts and moves and things before the snap of the ball that we're really not used to around here," Bailey said.

"And it makes it a little more exciting to see things like that going on - making the defense move and be more uncomfortable than they would be if we were just standing around."

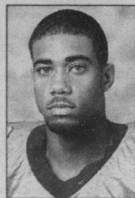
The starters also said should one of them become injured, the backup receivers could fit comfortably into the offense, citing junior Chesley Borders and senior Danny Davis as backups who particularly have impressed them.

"The young people who came in, they're picking up real good," Allen said. "We have a lot of depth at wide receiver and a lot of experience. So, we plan on excelling and making big plays this year."

And big plays are what the Tar Heels' offense will need early on as three of the team's first five games are against pre-season top-10 teams, including Oklahoma and Florida State.

Despite the tough schedule, Bailey said the coaching staff's enthusiasm has been contagious and that the team is expecting immediate results.

"This is not something they came in to build over the course of time," he said. "They came in and set the bar high, and they expect us to live up to it now."



UNC wide receiver Kory Bailey had two TDs and 32 catches for 550 yards, second on the team.

Tight Ends Focus on Better Blocking

By JAMES GIZA
Sportsaturday Editor

Last season, the North Carolina football team talked about throwing to its tight ends more frequently, and the plan never really came to fruition.

Chances are, it won't happen again this season. And with good reason.

Gone are Alge Crumpler and Dauntae Finger, who formed one of the more formidable tight end tandems in the conference and are now in the NFL.

Left to fill their gaps is a pair of guys who have played mostly special teams, a walk-on and a freshman recruited as an offensive lineman.

Mix in a young, inexperienced offensive line and you've got a prime recipe for what tight ends coach Ken Browning is calling "tight-end-by-committee."

No, the UNC tight ends won't see the ball coming their way much. But they know their role.

"We just kind of want to be like an extra lineman out there," said junior Zach Hilton, who saw 95 snaps at tight end last year. "So that we can line up on either side or both sides and be able to

take care of more linebackers and down linemen."

Hilton and Doug Brown, who also played primarily on special teams in the past, should compete for the starting job. Others who could vie for playing time are walk-on Kevin Sergent and Chase Page, who played offensive line and tight end in high school.

Browning said Brown has been the most consistent blocker, while the 6-foot-7 Hilton has been the most consistent in the passing game. It's not surprising, therefore, that the Tar Heels will be rotating players at the position.

"We've got some guys that have, I think, improved both mentally and physically with techniques and just the knowledge of the system," Browning said. "It's a new system for them, so



UNC tight ends coach Ken Browning said the Tar Heels could use several different players at the position.

even the guys that have played the position here before are still in a learning mode to a degree.

"And I've been pleased with their progress. They've worked extremely hard, and I think they're getting better."

But Browning admitted they're not quite as solid with their blocking as they need to be.

"If you don't do every little thing right, the block doesn't work out, the scheme doesn't work out," Hilton said. "So we're just trying to make sure during every drill, every rep we're doing it perfect so that it becomes a habit."

The Tar Heels even have worked a bit with two-tight end formations in non-goal line and non-short-yardage situations.

But they'll have to wait for their personnel to become more skilled and comfortable before they can break those sets out in a game.

"The fact that we have competition at the position definitely helps elevate all of our level of play," Hilton said. "We're just coming along a lot better with knowing our assignments, doing our techniques right and just doing the little things right as a unit."

THE SPIRIT OF COMPETITION.

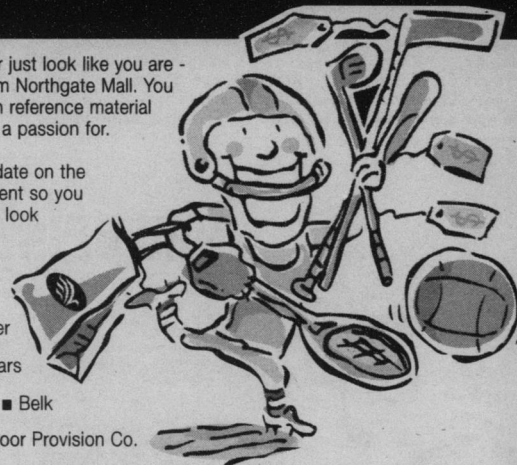
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