

# Peppers Not Alone on Line

**All-ACC Julius Peppers has a strong supporting cast on North Carolina's talented and hungry defensive line.**

By JAMES GIZA  
SportSaturday Editor

A nickname exists that could suit North Carolina's defensive line very well, although it might not put the fear of God into any opposing offenses this season:

Julius and the three other guys.

It's not exactly the Fearsome Foursome, but when you've got a player like junior Julius Peppers on your line, an equitable moniker can be hard to come by.

Peppers, named a second-team All-America defensive end last season after leading the nation with 15 sacks (one short of Lawrence Taylor's UNC record) and setting a school record with 24 tackles for loss, certainly will get the bulk of the attention from every offensive line the Tar Heels meet this year.

And for that very reason, the play of his three linemates — end Joey Evans and tackles Ryan Sims and Will Chapman — will be crucial to the success of the unit and the defense as a whole.

"We're just going to play," said Sims, a senior, who had 52 tackles and six

sacks and earned honorable mention All-ACC honors last season. "You've got to pick your poison: either Julius or us other three guys."

"I mean, we don't get as much publicity — we're still just the other three guys. But if you're going to double-team one person, that leaves only one person on another."

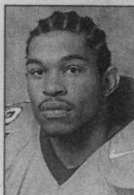
"And we feel that we can beat any single block. So we're just going to go out there and make plays."

Evans, a senior, played in every game and had 38 tackles as a backup last season, including 11 for loss.

He recorded eight sacks, second on the team only to Peppers, and was named UNC's co-most improved player on defense.

Chapman also came off the bench in every game last year as a walk-on freshman, averaging 19.2 snaps per game and finishing with 31 stops. His performance earned him a scholarship this season.

Sims, meanwhile, a third-year starter who should be one of the top tackles in the conference this season, is arguably



UNC defensive end Julius Peppers needs 12 sacks to break Greg Ellis' school record of 32.5.

the most talented and important player on the UNC defense after Peppers.

Even so, the Tar Heels' opponents likely will gamble frequently and put two or more blockers on Peppers, who needs 12 sacks to break the school record of 32.5 held by Greg Ellis and plans to enter next year's NFL draft.

"Actually, I'm kind of hoping that they do that," Evans said. "Sometimes, I don't necessarily think they were definitely focusing on him (last season) because all of our defensive linemen could step up at any time. But hopefully they will do that now and allow us to make more plays and help our team win."

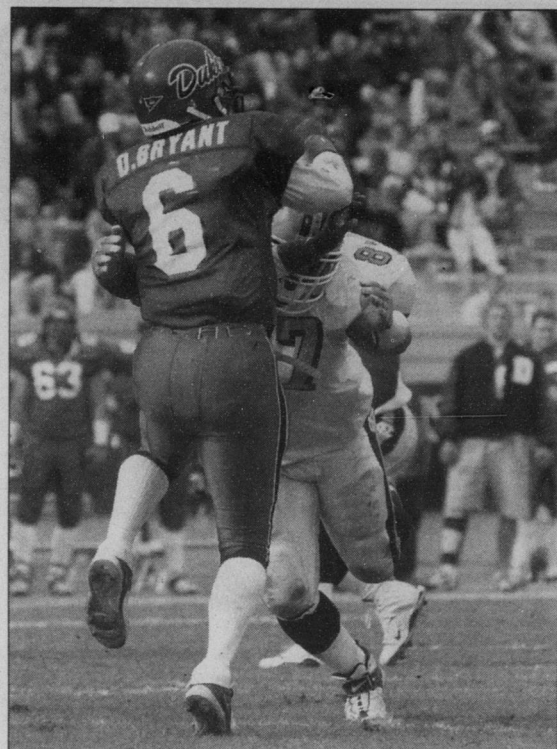
"We have a lot of experience. We've all played together for a couple years now. We all gel; we all have our different strengths."

Peppers, for one, isn't worried about his supporting threesome being able to take advantage of blocking schemes devised primarily to stop him.

"I think this is the best line in the country that nobody knows about," Peppers said. "It will be a breakout season."

Will teams be able to focus on Peppers the entire season? They'll surely try, but they could run into a problem if the three other guys make them pay for it.

Said Sims, "It's not going to last long."



DTH/JEFF FOULAND

North Carolina defensive tackle Ryan Sims (right) hits Duke quarterback D. Bryant. Sims had six sacks for a loss of 36 yards last season.

## Questions Exist in Backfield

By ADAM D. HILL  
Staff Writer

A great uncertainty exists within the North Carolina running back corps.

Four legitimate candidates — all of whom have played other positions — vie for the starting fullback job, while two sophomores battle for the tailback spot.

Adding to the confusion, UNC's leading rusher in 2000, tailback Brandon Russell, has moved to receiver.

Moreover, new offensive coordinator Gary Tranquill is adding a more motion-oriented offensive scheme.

But in the midst of this uncertainty, UNC coach John Bunting feels confident that his new-fangled unit can accomplish its most basic goal: to gain yards.

"I think that we have excellent runners," Bunting said. "We should be able to run the ball this year."

Running the ball is something that the Tar Heels have not been able to do successfully in the past few years. Last

season, no UNC ball carrier averaged more than 47 yards per game, and the team averaged only 148.5 as a unit.

Tailbacks Willie Parker and André Williams have played well thus far, both building on successful freshman years.

Parker, who rushed for 355 yards last season, exploded in the Tar Heels' Aug. 11 scrimmage for 127 yards, including a 78-yard touchdown scamper.

Williams, a big, powerful rusher, provides a nice contrast to Parker's elusive style. The back from Durham has adapted well to the more mobile offense.

"I think the new offense is great for us," Williams said. "It gives us a chance to utilize all of our talents on us, which is going to throw the defenses off balance."

Aside from the tailback position, the Tar Heels still have questions at fullback.

Richard Moore, a former linebacker and quarterback, is the front-runner in the race for the starting job.

"Coach Tranquill calls me a jack-of-all-trades," Moore said. "But I'm a full-

back right now and am concentrating on that."

While Bunting said Moore gets the job done by playing mistake-free football, freshman fullback Madison Hedgecock excels with his catching skills.

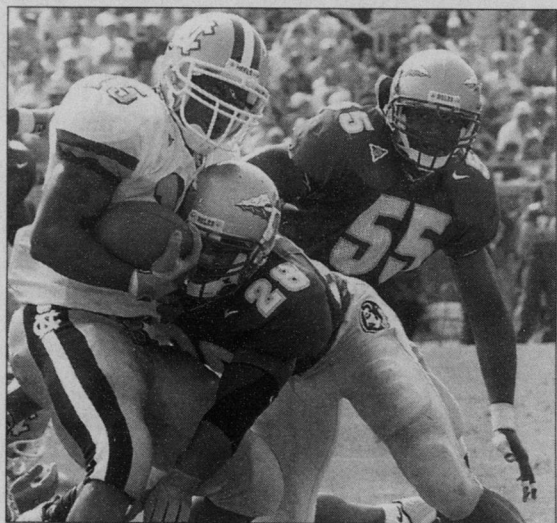
Hedgecock fits nicely in Bunting's offense, where all running backs will be expected to catch the ball. James Faison and Kitwana Jones round out the other fullbacks.

Faison, a walk-on who played seven positions in high school, is the only UNC returner with experience at fullback.

Recruited as a linebacker, Jones is still adjusting to the offensive schemes.

Regardless of who takes over in UNC's chaotic world of running backs, the general feeling is that the intense competition for a starting slot in the backfield will bode well for the offense.

"Running backs are competing, and the offensive line is doing its job," Faison said. "We are expecting to reap some benefits."



DTH FILE PHOTO

UNC sophomore tailback Willie Parker (15) rushed for 355 yards in 84 carries in 2000. He scored four touchdowns.

### DEFENSIVE BACKS

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fastest 40-yard dashes on the team — he will have to provide more consistent coverage to keep the Tar Heels' defense tight.

"Tenuta stresses all the little points," Waddell said. "That's going to make a big difference this year."

Junior DeFonte Coleman, who started the final eight games of last season, will start at safety. He said he thinks Tenuta will give the defense the lift they need.

"All you have to do is look at (Tenuta's) record," Coleman said. "If he has confidence in us, it will show on the field, no matter who is out there."

Sophomore Dexter Reid will get the chance to prove himself at free safety. Reid picked off one pass and had six deflections in 2000.

Although Hood is the only senior in the secondary, Reid, Coleman and Waddell all survived last year's frustrations.

"We know what it's like to be at the bottom," Hood said. "So we don't have anything to lose."

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