

# Offense Might Get Some 'Pep'

Don't be shocked if Julius Peppers gets his mittens on the rock tonight.

Don't be surprised at all. All season, people have been talking about Peppers getting a chance to show his offensive stuff on the national stage.



MIKE OGLE  
O.G.

Coaches, fans and reporters. The time has come — tonight on ESPN at No. 23 Georgia Tech with Peppers now in the Heisman Trophy race.

Let's examine the facts.

Fact: Peppers rushed for 3,501 yards and 46 touchdowns in high school. Fact: Peppers is a beast. Not only that, but he's a beast with great hands, as displayed in his three interceptions and his skill on the hardwood.

Fact: Through eight games, Peppers has 43 tackles (17 for loss), 8.5 sacks and leads all linemen in the land in picks.

Fact: Can't nobody hold him down. Oh, no. He's got to keep on moving.

Getting a chance to move the ball on offense would skyrocket his stock.

Media relations offices pump lots of dough into Heisman campaigns. Posters, T-shirts, mouse pads and screen savers galore are sent to voting sportswriters.

What is UNC doing? It started sending periodic postcards that mentioned the Heisman part way through the season. Mostly they tout him for the other awards because defenders don't win the Heisman, no matter how dominant.

There's a reason the player on it is cradling a ball. No purely defensive player has ever won the 66-year-old stiff-arm statue. Two linemen have won — Notre Dame's Leon Hart in 1949 and Yale's Larry Kelley in '36. Both were ends on both sides of the ball when they were eligible to do more than block.

Cornerback and '97-winner Charles Woodson is the closest comparison to Peppers. Woodson made spectacular plays, including eight picks, 44 tackles (five for loss) and a sack for Michigan. But being allowed to receive, run and return punts pushed Woodson over the edge. He even completed a pass against Wisconsin. Woodson had four touchdowns and 588 all-purpose yards.

According to ESPN.com, Peppers' pick at Clemson was "the kind of play you build a Heisman campaign around."

In a sportsillustrated.cnn.com chat Tuesday, Peppers addressed his offensive possibilities: "The coaches have been talking about trying to get me the ball, but I'm not sure when they're going to add it to the game plan. There's been talk about it, but I don't know when it's going to happen."

So who does? OG: Has Julius been attending running backs meetings?

Running backs coach André Powell: Julius Peppers? No. Nah.

OG: You don't have any plans to use him?

AP: He has not been in a running backs meeting this year.

OG: He won't be making any appearances on the offensive side?

AP: I can't say that. I've got no comment on that. You'll have to wait and see.

OG: Why can't you say?

AP: Because that's just one of those need-to-know-basis deals (laughing).

OG: So you're saying it's possible?

AP: I don't have any comment on that. Anything's possible.

Now we go to tailback André Williams.

OG: Has Peppers been involved in the running game in practice or meetings?

AW: No (laughing and looking away). He hasn't.

OG: He hasn't?

AW: No, nuh uh (smiling).

OG: Why are you laughing?

AW: Because (smiling) I mean, I don't know. It's funny (laughter continues).

OG: Any talk on the team?

AW: No (looking away).

OG: No?

AW: No (softly with eye contact).

OG: What would you think if that happened?

AW: It'd be good (laughs) to see Pep in there doing his thing.

OG: How do you think he would do?

AW: I think Pep would do good. He ran the rock at Southern Nash High School. He was a great tailback. I think he'll do good, a fine job back there. I don't think anybody can tackle him, especially not one person.

Fact: Peppers is a semifinalist for the Lombardi Award for the nation's top interior lineman. He's a Nagurski Award candidate as the nation's top defender. Those he doesn't need help with, but now he's listed as one top-five Heisman candidate by Sports Illustrated, ESPN.com and The Sporting News.

Fact: Through eight games, Peppers has 43 tackles (17 for loss), 8.5 sacks and leads all linemen in the land in picks.

Fact: Can't nobody hold him down. Oh, no. He's got to keep on moving.

# Season's Future On Line for UNC, Ga. Tech

**Game and time:** North Carolina at Georgia Tech. Kickoff is at 7:35 tonight.

**Site:** Bobby Dodd Stadium

**TV/Radio:** ESPN will provide national coverage. The Tar Heel Sports Radio Network will provide live radio coverage; its flagship station is WCHL 1360 AM.

**Records:** North Carolina is 5-3, 4-1 in the ACC. Georgia Tech is 5-2, 2-2.

**Series:** Georgia Tech leads 17-16-3.

**Personnel Update:** North Carolina — QB Ronald Curry (left hamstring) is probable. DT Will Chapman (left knee), SS DeFonte Coleman (left shoulder) and WR Isaiah Robinson (right knee) are out for the season.

Georgia Tech — None reported.

**The key matchup:** The Tar Heels have scored 30 or more points in consecutive games. It's no coincidence that in the last two games they averaged 226.5 rushing yards and André Williams compiled 238.

Williams, who made his first career start against Florida State, has 493 yards on 150 carries. No UNC back has gained more than 534 yards since Jonathan Linton had 1,004 in 1997.

Yes North Carolina, there is a running game.

"I attribute it to everybody growing up on offense and coming together as one," Williams said.

Running backs coach André Powell agrees it has been a learning process.

"Everybody's beginning to understand a little bit better the things we're trying to do," Powell said. "When you make big plays in the passing game, that has a tendency to make people play a little bit softer."

Tonight, redshirt freshman quarterback Darian Durant, in his first start, will need the running game to establish itself to take some pressure off him in the pocket.

Just one problem. Georgia Tech sports the ACC's stingiest rushing and total defenses, anchored by an imposing front seven. The Yellow Jackets have allowed more than 106 yards running once. They also lead the conference with 28 sacks.

"They're an active defense," said UNC coach John Bunting. "They make you think. They make you work. The key to any success we may have will be to be able to control that front seven."

Powell said Georgia Tech will make his players' jobs difficult because there will often be unblocked defenders. But they'll have to overcome the swarming Jackets in spite of that.

"They crowd the ball. They make it hard for you to run," Powell said. "We're going to take what the defense gives us."

**Final analysis/prediction:** It's all

on the line as college football's spotlight shines on Bobby Dodd Stadium tonight.

UNC needs this win to have a serious chance at the ACC title and a BCS bowl

birth.

"This game has great ramifications," Bunting said. "The loser of this game probably is out."

## The Lowdown on Tonight's Game

**North Carolina Tar Heels at Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets**

(5-3, 4-1 in the ACC) Bobby Dodd Stadium, 7:35 p.m. (5-2, 2-2 in the ACC)

### Head to Head

**UNC's Rush vs. Tech's Front Seven:** Greg Gathers et al stuff the box and allow 102.6 rushing yards per game. UNC hasn't proven it's consistent enough to win this battle, but coming close could be enough. **Edge: Georgia Tech.**

**UNC's Pass vs. Tech's Secondary:** Quarterback Darian Durant won't be rattled in his first career start. He won't have to be to struggle against the conference's second-best pass defense. **Edge: Georgia Tech.**

**Tech's Rush vs. UNC's Front Seven:** The Jackets rush out of necessity led by Joe Burns' 89.9 yards. The Tar Heels stuff runners like it's their jobs and no doubt remember the number Burns' pulled on them last year. **Edge: UNC.**

**Tech's Pass vs. UNC's Secondary:** Both teams rank atop the ACC and 19th in the nation in these respective categories. If George Godsey's line can buy him any time, he'll pick UNC's secondary apart. **Edge: Georgia Tech.**

**Special Teams:** Tech ranks above UNC in punting, PAT kicking, kickoff returns and kickoff coverage. Junior Luke Manget has never missed a PAT in 118 tries — an ACC record. **Edge: Georgia Tech.**

**The Bottom Line — UNC 20, Georgia Tech 17**

COMPILED BY MIKE OGLE

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Bunting recently had his 1971 ACC championship ring resized and is now wearing it in place of his Super Bowl ring. He said a lot of his players have wanted to touch it.

In order to get their own rings to wear, the Tar Heels also will have to stifle the Jackets' George Godsey, Kelly Campbell and Joe Burns. Godsey and Campbell form a potent pass-and-catch combo, and Burns scored four touchdowns and ran for 123 against UNC last year.

Bunting compared Georgia Tech's complex offense to what former offensive coordinator Ralph Friedgen took to Maryland. UNC held the Terrapins to 276 yards and 23 points despite a 0-3 turnover margin. They average 440.2 and 35.4.

"They're going to try to establish their running game first to open up the passing game," said defensive end Julius Peppers. "That's our main thing on defense to first stop the run and make them pass. Then

if we get them in passing situations, with the blitz packages that we've got and our defensive line, I think we're good enough to get pressure on the passing game."

The Tar Heels proved they can shut down potent offenses against FSU and Clemson. They're coming off their first bye week since the week before the upset against the Seminoles and have made it difficult to bet against them.

"I don't know what's normal about the game of football," Bunting said. "All you have to do is watch games every week. There's nothing normal about it at all. It starts with the shape of the football itself. Anything can happen any week."

UNC is 3-0 in ESPN Thursday night games. Tech is 6-6. The last time UNC defeated Tech was a Thursday night 16-13 decision on the road in 1997. Expect another defensive battle of like outcome.

**UNC 20, Georgia Tech 17**

— Compiled by Mike Ogle

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