

# Linebackers draw from added bulk, experience

BY MICHAEL CLARKE  
ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

After finishing last or next to last in all but one defensive category in the ACC in 2002, North Carolina will have to improve on all fronts if they hope to not finish at the bottom of a much tougher conference this year.

A huge part of that improvement depends upon the play of a linebacking corps that contributed to an average of 221.2 rushing yards allowed per game last season — last in the ACC.

A lack of depth, multiple injuries and abundant inexperience left North Carolina's linebackers unable to stop the run or put much pressure on the quarterback in 2002.

"Last year is last year," said middle linebacker Doug Justice. "We're going to forget about it. We're going to move on. This is a new year. We're going to do different things this year with our defense."

"We're going to play hard for four quarters, close, and finish."

This team's linebackers enter the season with more experience and are more imposing physically after a greater commitment to conditioning over the summer.

"We've got more depth, we're a little bit bigger and a little bit stronger," said defensive coordina-



DTH FILE PHOTO/BRIAN CASSELLA

North Carolina linebacker Doug Justice finished second on the team last year with 97 tackles and will anchor the unit this season.

tor Dave Huxtable.

Some of this depth comes from the addition of several freshmen linebackers who will get playing time right out of the gate. Most notable among these is Melik Brown who has competed to put his name at the top of the depth chart at the strong-side linebacker position.

While these freshmen will get playing time and probably will make a difference at linebacker this season, it seems most likely

that many of them will begin their collegiate careers on special teams.

UNC coach John Bunting is drawing from his own experience as a collegiate and professional linebacker to determine a timetable for inserting these freshmen into the starting lineup.

"I think all of them are going to be excellent," Bunting said. "They are going to touch the field right away, there's no holding them back. They might end up being starters before it's all over. Right now I project them to be core special teams players and that's saying something."

Regardless of who begins the season as the starters, Huxtable figures the Tar Heel linebackers to be greatly improved.

"Our linebackers are much better after last season," he said, "and I'm looking forward to seeing what we can do."

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DTH/GARRETT HALL

Junior defensive tackle Chase Page said he hopes a year of experience will help the North Carolina defensive line improve against the run.

## Increased expectations for improved defensive line

BY WILL ROBINSON  
STAFF WRITER

The word "redemption" is the motto for the entire North Carolina football team this season, but it may apply most to the defensive line.

A look at last year's ACC defensive rankings reveals one thing: the Tar Heel defense has everything to prove. Run defense, last. Scoring defense, last. Opponent third-down conversions, last. The list goes on.

Unlike last season, however, the unit has experience and depth to go along with the motivating bitter taste of last year's humble pie.

"Now that they've been out there, they've experienced it, tasted it, I'm expecting a lot better performance and a lot better results this year," said defensive coordinator Dave Huxtable.

With no seniors left in the unit, a tandem of juniors will be counted upon for leadership: tackles Chase Page and Jonas Seawright and end Jockes Dumas.

Page, the line's leading returning tackler, started every game last season. Seawright is a menacing presence at 6 feet 6 inches tall, 326 pounds and continues to improve

in Huxtable's system.

"Jonas Seawright has come a thousand miles," Huxtable said. "He's moving much better and again is working hard at what we're teaching."

At end, the 6-foot-6 Dumas could be poised for a breakout year after a strong close to last season. Freshman Kyndraus Guy has been a preseason surprise at the position.

"They're talking about not redshirting (Guy)," said junior Madison Hedgecock. "As of right now, I think they're going to play him. He comes off the ball harder than anyone I've ever seen."

Page believes cohesion will be the biggest factor in the defensive line's success.

"Last year, a lot of times we had young guys out there who didn't really know what they were doing," Page said. "If one guy messes up, it ruins everything, so we're trying to get everyone to buy into the scheme."

"If we do what we're supposed to do and play real hard, I think it'll work out."

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