

SPORTS CALENDAR

FRIDAY, SEPT. 2

- **MEN'S SOCCER**
at VCU, 8 p.m.
Richmond, Va.
- **WOMEN'S SOCCER**
vs. Davidson, 5 p.m.
Fetzer Field
- **VOLLEYBALL**
vs. LIU, 12:30 p.m.
San Francisco, Calif.
- **VOLLEYBALL**
vs. Fresno State, 5 p.m.
San Francisco, Calif.
- **CROSS COUNTRY**
at Wake Forest, 6 p.m.
Winston-Salem

SATURDAY, SEPT. 3

- **VOLLEYBALL**
vs. William & Mary,
12:30 p.m.
San Francisco, Calif.
- **VOLLEYBALL**
at San Francisco, 7 p.m.
San Francisco, Calif.
- **FIELD HOCKEY**
at William & Mary, 1 p.m.
Williamsburg, Va.

SUNDAY, SEPT. 4

- **MEN'S SOCCER**
at Richmond, 1 p.m.
Richmond, Va.
- **WOMEN'S SOCCER**
vs. Yale, 1 p.m.
Fetzer Field

BLOGGIN'

■ **VIEW FROM THE PRESS BOX**
Check out the Sports Desk's new blog to sound off on the fate of the football team this season.
go to: www.dailytarheel.com

Ashe, newcomers to lead Merritt leaves Heels plugging holes in defense

BY DEREK HOWLES
ASSISTANT SPORTS EDITOR

Marcus Storey? Gone.
Jamie Watson? Bye-bye.
Tim Merritt? See ya later.
Corey Ashe? O.K., so one of our four ain't bad.

Actually, that very well could be the case for the 2005 North Carolina men's soccer team.

Forwards Storey and Watson, who along with Ashe (a junior forward) led the Tar Heels with 18 points apiece last year, were snatched up in the 2005 MLS SuperDraft. Center back Tim Merritt, the defensive anchor and unquestioned team leader, followed suit, and those departures stripped preseason No. 17 UNC of more than 40 percent of its offense, not to mention valuable upperclassman leadership.

First glance might suggest that the Tar Heels, who finished last season with a disappointing 10-9-2 record after a preseason ranking of sixth in the country, will have their work cut out for them, especially on offense. Coach Elmar Bolowich, however, takes a decidedly different view.

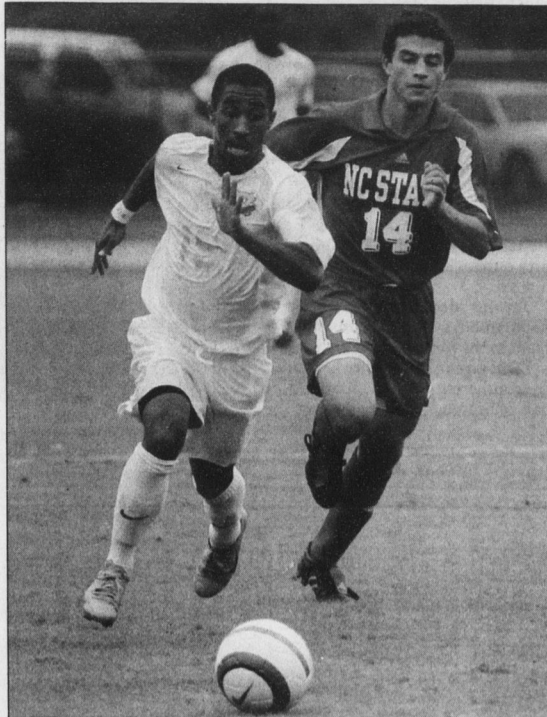
"I think overall our team will score more goals than we scored last year," he says. "We'll be more of a threat this year to teams because of the depth and the mobility we have up front. We still have speed with Ashe and (junior forward) Ben Hunter, but it can't just come from Corey Ashe — it has to be a shared load."

Hunter, an NAIA All-American who transferred to UNC from the University of Rio Grande in Ohio, will be expected to take on a sizeable share of that load, as will freshman forward Stephen Bickford, the 2004 NSCAA/adidas High School National Player of the Year.

Ashe, for one, is confident that the relationship between the strikers will be a productive one.

"The chemistry up front, it's coming quick," he says. "We're still learning from each other, but I don't think it'll take that long. ... I think the best way to approach it is for me to know that I have a good supporting cast. I mean, we lost two valuable assets, but we picked up some great players."

"I do think with the addition of (Hunter and Bickford), it takes a little bit of the pressure off me



DTH FILE PHOTO/BRANDON SMITH

North Carolina forward Corey Ashe (15) was UNC's leading goal scorer last year and is expected to carry much of the offensive burden this season.

because they're just as good as I am. Defenders will have to change the way they play me because they're just as much of a threat."

As for the defense, Bolowich says he's confident that junior Ted Odgers, who started 16 of 21 games for the Tar Heels last season, can slide into Merritt's vacated center back position without missing a beat.

What's more, UNC returns goalkeepers Ford Williams, a senior captain, and mop-topped junior Justin Hughes. They'll combine to form a steady presence on a relatively inexperienced defense, one that will try to emulate its performance in the second half of last season (when it allowed just 10 goals in 10 games) rather than the first half (19 in 11).

Still, the defense could surrender six goals a game, and it might not matter, at least not according

BY DAVID MOSES
SENIOR WRITER

When the North Carolina men's soccer team was eliminated from the NCAA Tournament by George Washington last season, the entire squad was visibly upset.

But perhaps nobody took the loss as hard as senior captain Tim Merritt.

Seemingly always the one doing the screaming and the yelling, Merritt brought an intensity and leadership to the field for North Carolina that seems to be difficult to replace.

"Definitely, I think Tim Merritt was a great player and a great leader," junior Corey Ashe said.

North Carolina not only will have to replace Merritt's on-field leadership, but also his ability to anchor the defensive backfield while still providing an offensive threat.

Undoubtedly UNC's strongest defender a season ago, Merritt was also fourth on the team in scoring with 10 points (three goals and four assists) giving the Tar Heels a balanced attack throughout.

Despite his absence, UNC coach Elmar Bolowich said players already are beginning to step up.

Bolowich said junior Ted Odgers will replace Merritt on the field.

"It doesn't affect us that much, losing Tim Merritt," Bolowich said. "We moved Ted Odgers into the center back position, and he's that kind of leader back there, so I'm looking forward to seeing how that works out."

The pressure will be on Odgers, as his teammates are expecting him and Michael Harrington to anchor the defense this season.

"(With) Odgers and Michael Harrington in the back, we have intelligent, fast and athletic defenders in the back this year," Ashe said.

While Odgers and Harrington will pick up the slack for Merritt on the field, North Carolina will

"Definitely, I think Tim Merritt was a great player and a great leader."

COREY ASHE, UNC FORWARD

look to goalkeeper Ford Williams to provide the relatively inexperienced team with the leadership it desperately needs.

"Ford Williams is absolutely a leader," Bolowich said. "He had a few struggles this preseason, but he's ready to go. And being a team captain by the vote of his peers shows what they think of him."

After losing Merritt to MLS along with his former teammates Jamie Watson and Marcus Storey, UNC loses three of its top four scorers, with only Ashe suiting up for the 2005 campaign.

With team chemistry being one of UNC's major concerns last season, the absence of Watson and Storey may actually benefit the team.

"I don't think everyone was on the same page last year, but this year everyone is on the same page," Ashe said. "The biggest thing is team chemistry. I think last year we read our own press, we were preseason ranked No. 3, we had a top-five recruiting class."

"Guys forgot what they had to do. Negativity comes, we were struggling for answers, and I think as a result the team chemistry was off."

Like many seasons in recent memory, UNC starts the campaign as a legitimate national title contender.

Those lofty dreams have no chance of being realized unless they are able to replace Tim Merritt, both on and off the field.

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@unc.edu.

QUICK FACTS

- **Coach:** Elmar Bolowich
- **2004 Record:** 10-9-2
- **Postseason:** Lost to George Washington in NCAA 1st round
- **Returning Starters:** Corey Ashe, Michael Harrington, Ted Odgers, Adam Sloustcher, Andre Sherard, Ford Williams

to the half-joking Ashe.

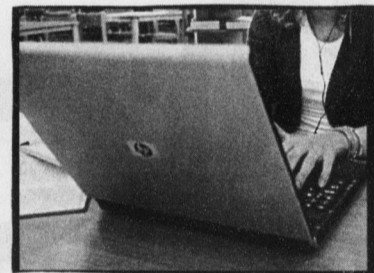
"We had trouble putting the ball in the back of the net last year," he says. "If you would've asked us last year to score seven goals, we wouldn't have been able to. This year, we could."

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Share your space, but live on your own.



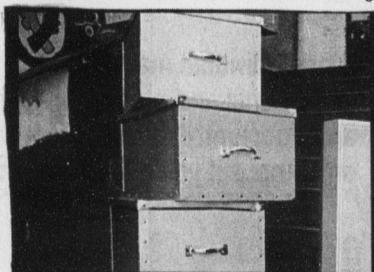
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HP Laptop



Bedding



Storage

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