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DTH FILE PHOTO

Brandon Tate would offer a serious threat to any opposing defense and especially now, flanked by the likes of Hakeem Nicks and Brooks Foster.

## Strong receiving corps will be asset for UNC

BY SAM ROSENTHAL  
SENIOR WRITER

Entering the season, one position on the North Carolina football team comes to mind before all others: wide receiver.

That happens because the Tar Heels' receiving team, by-and-large one of the better units in the ACC last season, returns this year almost completely intact.

Most importantly, UNC's triumvirate of Hakeem Nicks, Brandon Tate and Brooks Foster returns — Nicks for his junior season and Tate and Foster for their senior campaigns.

Last season, the Tar Heels' passing offense ranked 5th in the ACC, despite featuring a first-year quarterback in T.J. Yates, to accompany a running game which never found any sort of consistency.

Now that Yates and his receivers have a year's worth of experience together and the ground game seems solidified, North Carolina's wideouts rival any in the conference.

Nicks leads the pack as an All-America candidate who set the school record for receptions last year with 74 and racked up the third-most receiving yards in school history with 958. He finished second in the ACC in 2007 with 79.8 receiving yards per game and third in the conference with 6.2 catches per game. Nicks also tied Tate for the team lead in reception touchdowns with five.

This season, Nicks strives to become North Carolina's first-ever 1,000 yard receiver, and he needs only 65 receptions and 830 receiving yards to break UNC's career records in those categories.

"We inherited somebody with Hakeem Nicks that had a great reputation," Davis said.

"The thing that we impressed upon Hakeem is that if you're the only good receiver that we have, if the other guys don't mature and come along and become a big part of the offense, it really is a pretty easy chore to take one guy away.

"And that's where Brandon and Brooks, I think they do a great job of complementing Hakeem."

Last season, Tate led the team in yards per reception (19.2), and he and Foster combined to average 4.7 catches and 77.8 yards per game. And both, in addition to their roles on special teams, are threats to rush the ball on reverses at any time.

Along with its talented trio, the Tar Heels' aerial attack includes senior Cooter Arnold — a converted cornerback — and junior Kenton Thornton. As for tight ends, senior Richard Quinn and sophomores Zack Pinalto and Ed Barham likely will split time.

Last season, Pinalto fulfilled most of the tight ends' pass-catching duties, tallying 204 yards on 24 receptions while also playing H-back.

With such an array of weapons, North Carolina's offense boasts a reliable passing unit which should cause headaches for many a defensive coordinator during the season.

If they equal or surpass their 2007 performance, and the team's running game and defense improve, the Tar Heels could start winning games that they would have lost last season.