

SOPHOMORES

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virtually every offensive play, a sophomore — or sophomores — will touch the ball.
"Unbelievable. Talent that ain't even surfaced yet," Little says of his class. "I mean, the sky's the limit. We have the potential to do it."
"We just have to come out here and prove to everyone what we can do and show it."

Even with all that talent, there is no question that Austin, Williams and Little are anchors of the team.
Williams, in particular, commands the respect of his teammates, even without saying a word.

After earning freshman All-America honors last season, Williams is one of the elder statesmen of the secondary. It's his name that teammates interrupt their interviews to call out.
He's also played a pivotal role in building the chemistry that is so apparent among his teammates.

"I think it gives us a better chance to win because you know how to get the other guys going and how to push his buttons, how to get him hyped," Williams says.
"If you're friends like that, you care about that other person and you don't want to let them down."

Austin makes the biggest splash in any gathering. He is heard before he is seen, and he's hard to miss at 6 feet, 3 inches, and 305 pounds — ask him and he'll offer to put you on the "Marvin Austin Meal Plan."
His physically imposing presence is complemented by a magnetic personality, and those traits combine make him the most talented Tar Heel defensive lineman

since a guy named Julius Peppers wore No. 49.

"There's just no other person like him; what he can do can't be matched," Little says, adding that he calls Austin "Marvin the Martian."

"He's physically unmatched. Then when he steps on the field, he feels like no one can block him. And that's the way you have to play, with that confident swagger."

It's fitting that Little and Austin share not only an extreme confidence but also a close chemistry, as both are players Davis wooed in his first summer as coach. Each claims credit for getting the other to come to UNC.

They also don't hesitate to combine the words "national championship" and "Carolina."

"When I came here, I didn't shoot to be just a good player on a decent team," Austin says, as Little vigorously shakes his head in agreement.

"I came here to try and go for the big dance — I'm trying to play under the lights with the blimp in the sky."

That brashness stems from an enormous confidence in Davis as all three players pepper their speech with the phrase "like coach says."

"Coach Davis and the things that he's done — win the Super

Bowl, coach with great coaches, the teams that he's been around — I think that he can take this program to another level where we can compete for a national championship every year," Austin says. Again, Little and Williams nod their approval.
That faith also has rubbed off on Yates, who this time last year was caught up in the whirlwind of being a first-year starting quarterback.

Fast forward to 2008, and Yates exudes the air of a seasoned veteran.
"Last year I was cramming like I was studying for an exam, just trying to remember all the plays," Yates says.
"We've been doing it so long now ... I'm a lot more relaxed, a lot more confident."

That attitude runs through the sophomore class, so many of whom played extensively last year, and Davis has noticed.
"You can just see, daylight to dawn, how much more progress they've made in the last six months because of the experience that they got to play last year."

It's a good thing for UNC, because the bell's about to ring for round two.
Contact the Sports Editor at sports@unc.edu.

UNC faces 'explosive' Cowboys

Tar Heels 3-7 in openers since '98

BY RACHEL ULLRICH
SPORTS EDITOR

Butch Davis faced the McNeese State Cowboys once before.

While Davis was at Miami, he coached the Hurricanes to a win — a 61-14 win, to be exact.

But he doesn't expect the same from this year's McNeese State — a team that outscored its opponents by more than 200 points last season and has on its resume a 76-0 victory from 2006.

FOOTBALL PREVIEW

A preview on McNeese State's season. **INSIDE**

press conference.
"They've had several successful football seasons, obviously last year being 11-1, and typically their program is marked by having very, very fast skilled players."

So Davis will try once again to lead his team to a victory past McNeese State's spread schemes.

"They're going to run a spread offense that, when you're playing a spread offensive team, you really need to be disciplined. You have to. It is assignment-related football."

McNeese State has never played an ACC opponent (Miami was in the Big East when they met in 2000), but the Cowboys have a 1-8 record against Football Bowl Subdivision schools — it beat Louisiana-Lafayette last year.

Starting tailback Greg Little has big expectations for UNC's opener — he knows they're talented, yes, but he said his team can handle them.

"We do see holes in their defense, and we're going to try to exploit them early," he said, adding a further goal — a big victory, "killing the ant with the sledgehammer."

"It's a lot of eyes on us right now, and that's why we have that mentality about the ant and the sledgehammer. We're just going to try and obliterate teams."

"McNeese is a very explosive, fast football team; historically they've always been that way."

BUTCH DAVIS, NORTH CAROLINA FOOTBALL COACH

But North Carolina, which beat Football Championship Subdivision James Madison to open last season, hasn't won back-to-back season openers since the 1997 season.

And Davis insists his UNC team is not overlooking the Cowboys team that grabbed the second overall seed in last year's FCS playoffs.

"We talk to our football team that, you know, how well you play to a high percentage is more about you," Davis said. "It's how you prepare, it's how you play on Saturday, and you don't have any control over

the opponent.
"I can't tell you whether they've had good practices or bad practices. I can't tell you whether they're prepared to play. All we can do is control our own fate."

And so UNC starts its journey for obliteration, ant-killing and a top spot in the ACC Coastal Division.

The first stop, McNeese State — or, as Little calls them, "some guys from Louisiana who're fast."

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@unc.edu.

THE LOWDOWN ON SATURDAY'S GAME

 **McNeese State vs. North Carolina** 
(0-0) Kenan Stadium, 6 p.m. (0-0)

HEAD-TO-HEAD

- UNC rush vs. MSU front seven** 
Greg Little gave the Tar Heels stability at tailback at the end of 2007. This is his first chance to prove UNC has a legitimate running game. Coaches have been raving about Shaun Draughn, as well. **Edge: UNC**
- UNC pass vs. MSU secondary** 
T.J. Yates is coming off shoulder surgery and could be tentative out of the gate. But that doesn't change the fact that Hakeem Nicks, Brandon Tate and Brooks Foster are just too good to be held down. **Edge: UNC**
- MSU rush vs. UNC's front seven** 
Despite losing Kentwan Balmer and Hilee Taylor, UNC returns more than enough muscle on the defensive line to give any team trouble. Marvin Austin will spend most of the day in the MSU backfield. **Edge: UNC**
- MSU pass vs. UNC secondary** 
The UNC secondary returns three starters from last year's team, including freshman All-America Deunta Williams. UNC will try out its new corners Johnny White and Richie Rich to give the team more speed. **Edge: UNC**
- Special Teams** 
McNeese State has an All-America kicker, but he's still got to kick to return specialist Brandon Tate. North Carolina still doesn't know who will start at kicker, but the coverage teams are solid. **Edge: UNC**

The Bottom Line — North Carolina 44, McNeese State 14
COMPILED BY POWELL LATIMER

TAR PIT

FROM PAGE 1
planning several new promotions and giveaways.

The department plans to pass out foam noodles for Saturday's game and will continue to do so at future games if the crowd enjoys them, said Rick Steinbacher, associate athletic director of marketing and promotions.

If McNeese State does not score during Saturday's game, everyone

in the student section will get a coupon for a free Hardee's burger.

It's part of a new partnership between UNC and the fast-food company.

Promotions for future games include the Hardee's Tar Pit Challenge, in which one student will be selected to attempt a field goal. If the student is successful, the student section will receive another prize from Hardee's.

With the new changes, CAA officials said they hope student spirit will rival that of UNC basketball games.

"Many people offer that football will always be secondary here at Carolina due to our basketball success and publicity," Coonin said.

"We in the CAA disagree. ... We are altering our ability to support the team and coach Davis in the best way possible. We will be the 12th man on the field for the Tar Heels."

Contact the University Editor at udesk@unc.edu.

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