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DELAY OF GAME

Davis living up to expectations

Credit Cameron Sexton with saving the Butch Davis bubble.

Before last Saturday, quarterback T.J. Yates' absence hung over North Carolina's season like a plague. With the starter out from a foot fracture for most of the season, the Tar Heels' 2-1 record at the time looked like the farthest beyond .500 UNC might get this year.

No. 1 backup Mike Paulus had shown nothing except the ability to throw the game away, and an offseason full of hype had dissolved into the Kenan Stadium turf.

But out of the deep end of the depth chart, Sexton came through, and UNC climbed out of a 14-point deficit.

And Davis delivered exactly the kind of exhilarating win that UNC needed.

Davis' expectations had been ballooning since his hiring as the head coach in Nov. 2006. It didn't matter that he was a complete outsider whose last visit to Chapel Hill had been to pick up his son Drew from golf camp — the new coach (and his resume) commanded loyalty.

He rebuilt Miami into a title-winning program, and he would rebuild here, too.

The UNC athletic department was the first to pledge allegiance. A 4-8 record through his first dozen games at UNC? Dick Baddour gave him a \$291,000 raise

**JOE MCLEAN**

I GOT MY NAME ON THAT CAKE

and a one-year contract extension.

At the time, UNC fans were ticked. A Daily Tar Heel letter to the editor called for an end to money "lavished on UNC's trophy coaches." An editorial a day later suggested the program would "be better off letting him go and finding someone who is more committed to actually rebuilding our program." Both compared it to the ultimate UNC groaner — tuition increases.

But soon enough, fans began to hop on board with Davis. In 2007, the season-opener was sold out. In 2008, all 36,250 season tickets were sold before mid-July. And the bubble kept inflating.

Yates showed up on a sleeper list for the Heisman. The Tar Heels were picked second in the ACC Coastal Division, and expectations continued to rise.

With 18 returning starters, all signs pointed to this being the year Davis would

shine. The streak of six years without a winning record was history, we thought.

A mediocre performance against McNeese State let a little air out, but the 44-12 Rutgers showcase on Thursday night national TV more than made up for it.

But two weekends ago, the balloon of hype was nearly deflated. UNC blew a 14-point lead and lost at home against Virginia Tech, supposedly its only rival for the division title. Yates was out, and the redshirt freshman Paulus threw two interceptions in his first meaningful playing time in collegiate football.

The Tar Heels even had 14 penalties for 121 yards, and who else could the blame fall on but Davis and the coaching staff?

So against Miami, the whole bundle of expectations was — get this — expected to burst. The Tar Heels were underdogs against Davis' former school on a year when the Hurricanes were on the upswing.

Instead, they turned it into a 4-point victory. Call it a gift from John Bunting though Sexton's 242-yard, two-touchdown, zero-interception comeback was unlike most games he had in the Bunting era.

The win took UNC one step closer to a winning season and a bowl bid. But more importantly, it puts some more weight behind those hopes we all had for Davis.

Ron Stutts and the WCHL Championship Sports Crew

Chapel Hill - Carrboro's
1360 WCHL
News, Talk & Tar Heels Station

Uniquely qualified to bring you the Tar Heels!

**Football
SATURDAY**
UNC vs. Connecticut
Kick-off at 7:00pm
Gameday Lineup

During the Week...

Monday

7:00 AM Monday Press Conference with Coach Davis

Tuesday

7:00 PM Butch Davis LIVE

Thursday

7:00 PM The official kickoff with Jeff Hamlin

Pre-Game4:00 PM Countdown to Kick Off with Ron Stutts
5:00 PM Off the Top Sports, Live from Top of the Hill
6:00 PM Tar Heel Sports Network Pre-Game**Post-Game**10:00 PM Tar Heel Sports Network Post-Game Show
11:00 PM Ham's Postgame Party**THE MOST COMPLETE COVERAGE OF UNC FOOTBALL ON THE AIR!**