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No drama, just a nifty handshake

BY DAVID ELY
SENIOR WRITER

The elements are all there for a feud. An old-school, not-so-friendly position battle.

Shaun Draughn receives the bulk of the carries on first and second down and before North Carolina reaches the goal line. But once the Tar Heels get inside the 5-yard line, Ryan Houston checks in and bursts through the line for the touchdowns.

With some backs, that scenario could fester into jealousy between the player who scores and the one who doesn't.

Fortunately for UNC, Draughn and Houston harbor no ill feelings toward each other.

Both are quick to comment on the other's virtues, and both know that North Carolina's running game has evolved into a potent weapon because of what the other brings to the team.

"If I was on a fantasy team, I'd take Shaun," Houston said Wednesday.

"I'd rather take Shaun — his yard-per-carry is crazy. He's got good vision, and he explodes through the hole like a bat out of you-know-what."

Much like how Houston is quick to point out Draughn's big-play capability, Draughn doesn't hesitate to acknowledge Houston's superior individual strength.

"I think Ryan's a more downhill-type guy, try to get the good yardage," Draughn said before Tuesday's practice.

"I'm not as big as Ryan, so I've got to make people miss with my moves. I'm strong, but I'm not as strong as Ryan."

That combination of speed and strength keeps opposing defenses guessing and forces coordinators to scheme ways to stop two completely different backs.

As the duo further has become entrenched in the North Carolina offensive game plan, there hasn't been a scarcity of highlights.

Houston has seven touchdowns on the season, while Draughn has chipped in with two and a number of long runs.

And it's during those moments when it becomes clear there's no animosity between either tailback.

Whenever Houston or Draughn score or break off a long run, the Tar Heel tandem partake in an elaborate celebration that Draughn sketched this summer.

The two run up as if they're about to bump chests, and then abruptly stop, turn and walk away. Moments later, they each turn back around, embrace and then leap in the air for a dramatic chest bump.

"You know, most people do the chest bump," Draughn said. "When we came up, people were expecting us to do the chest bump."

"So we walked away and acted like we weren't going to, and then turned and did it. It's just a little, I dunno, a little choreography, I guess you could say."

Houston sees it as a good indicator that there's no tension between the two.

"We're just having fun out there, trying to be unique," Houston said.

"Everybody thinks that me and Shaun really hate each other and all this crazy mess. We just want to show our bond together."

According to Draughn, the celebration also adds a little bit of excitement to the rest of the team.

It's not just a statement of the duo's friendship; it's a way to fire up the rest of the Tar Heels and introduce some "swag" to Kenan Stadium.

"Some people have seen us do it, but everybody else was like 'Man, I didn't even know y'all had the handshake,'" Draughn said.

"They were like, 'That was hot, that was hot.'"



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