



Offensive Lineman's Dilemma

The job of the offensive line is to block for the ball carrier and prevent big, bruising defenders from crushing him. Mark Salzano, left, Carolina's big junior offensive guard, blocks for quarterback Matt Kupec. Salzano is adding some experience to Carolina's line this year. Backup quarterback Clyde Christensen, right, finds out what a painful experience it is when an offensive lineman misses an assignment. Staff photos by Joseph Thomas.



A star in the trenches

Salzano emerges to anchor young offensive line

By PETE MITCHELL
Staff Writer

When you're talking about the best offensive linemen to play for the Tar Heels in recent years, Ken Huff, Mark Cantrell, Mark Griffin, Robert Pratt and the like are invariably mentioned.

So when the subject came up and UNC offensive line coach Pat Watson included junior right guard Mike Salzano in this creme de la creme, there was bound to be some skepticism.

After all, coach, the guy missed all last year with a torn up knee, and the running attack hasn't exactly been devastating in Carolina's big games this season.

Still, Watson insisted "there's no doubt he's as good as anybody Carolina's had up front in a long time."

As proficient as Huff or Craig Funk? "He ranks with the best," Watson said. "Salzano is the quickest we've ever had at guard and he's gettin' bigger."

After such a strong endorsement, Salzano, No. 68 in the Tar Heels' offensive unit, certainly commands some attention. The 6-foot-3½, 235-pounder from Durham might not be ready for the Hall of Fame, but at this point in the season he's as important to Bill Dooley's "winning-it-in-the-trenches" offensive strategy as De Hardison is to the defense.

Salzano's emergence this year has allowed Dooley the proverbial sigh of relief, having been faced with serious offensive line problems during preseason. After blocking for Mike Voight so he could have another 1,000-yard season, Cantrell, Funk, Griffin and Tommy Burkett all graduated. Experience became a precious commodity.

Salzano started his freshman year, but the injured knee sidelined him the entire 1976 season. John Rushing, Bobby Hukill and Scott Davison had limited playing time in the past, and Watson had to import Steve Junkmann from the defense to complete the starting interior lineup.

Salzano, a pre-season All-ACC pick, is the leader of the group, according to Watson. He solidified a dubious situation the first four games, giving the others an opportunity to prepare for the conference season.

"With all our inexperience, we stressed fundamentals a lot more this year," Salzano said. "The coaches placed more responsibility on me, but I don't think any more pressure. The reliance on the experienced guys and seniors especially isn't as intense as last year; it seems like everyone is taking it on themselves."

While part of the blame for the Tar Heels' inability to move the ball against Kentucky and Texas Tech rests with the linemen, they aren't the whole story. Salzano and company have had to protect three different quarterbacks, all with

different styles.

As for the ground game, one minute they're blocking for the 250-pound Billy Johnson at tailback and the next for the slithering Amos Lawrence.

These aren't excuses but obstacles to a young offensive line's development as a group.

At this stage Salzano is a legitimate contender for the Jacobs Blocking Trophy, which goes to the best blocker in the league. Depending on forthcoming conference performances, he might be All-ACC material, which "would be nice, but we'll just have to see how it goes."

Awards or no awards, Mike Salzano will figure largely in any Tar Heel successes for the remainder of the season. He's a good offensive guard, possibly the best in the conference. And maybe, just maybe, he'll be making his way into more discussions about UNC football greats.

Women's golf ahead by one stroke

North Carolina took a surprisingly narrow one-shot lead Thursday after the cold and windy first round of the North Carolina Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women State Golf Tournament at Grandfather Mountain.

Cathy Graham and Brenda Rich each shot 84 for Carolina to tie for second place individually. Carolina has a total of 345, followed by Wake Forest with 346 and Duke with 352. Play in the 36-hole event concludes today.

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Ping-pong tournament sponsored

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