

Player reaction

By PETE MITCHELL
Staff Writer

Mixed feelings among gridders

There are plenty of people who'll swear it was Bill Dooley who drove them to drink while watching the Tar Heels in Kenan Stadium the past 11 years.

Third-and-22 draw plays, roll out passes, 30-carries-a-game tailbacks and pass the bottle, please.

After coaching six bowl teams and three ACC championship teams, he is suddenly and startlingly departed, and his move to Virginia Tech should have a sobering effect on everyone who is even remotely concerned about Carolina football. The Tar Heels must literally go back to the drawing board.

The news of Dooley's resignation after taking a team to an ACC championship and the Liberty Bowl came as quite a surprise to the media. By and large, UNC students are glad to see the conservative-minded coach leave. And as for the mood at Ehringhaus Dorm, the football players themselves aren't celebrating, but then they're not passing the box of Kleenex around either.

"We've got to start all over from scratch now," linebacker Buddy Curry said. "He said he loved us and North Carolina, but this is a new challenge for him and we have to accept it."

Coming so late, Dooley's announcement puts the entire football organization in turmoil for next year. Jim Dickey, the Tar Heels' defensive coordinator, had already left for Kansas State, taking with him linebacker coach Gary Darnell. Defensive end coach Al Groh left for the Air Force Academy. Dooley is taking his remaining assistants except for Jim Donnan. This poses an obvious adjustment problem for the players.

Dee Hardison, the All-America defensive tackle who has played the last of his collegiate football, doesn't envy his teammates a bit, no matter who Dooley's successor is.

"I'm glad I'm finished now. When everybody told me he was leaving, I thought they were joking," Hardison said. "I wouldn't want to have to adjust to all these changes these guys are gonna have to go through."



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— Amos Lawrence

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— Mike Salzano



"None of us have gone through this before," Curry said. "But we're confident we can adjust to whoever the new coach is. Anyway, the coaches are a help, but it's the players who win or lose the games in the end."

The players had no more idea this would happen than anyone else. Dooley met with them Monday afternoon and explained why he was leaving Carolina after one of his best seasons ever. Amos Lawrence, UNC's exciting freshman tailback, was especially startled to hear the news.

"After we won the conference and went to the Liberty Bowl I'm real surprised that he left," Lawrence said. "But I can't say I'm disappointed. I kind of wanted a coach to come in and change our offense to maybe a veer instead of an I-formation. Maybe now that will happen."

As for possible replacements, UNC Athletic Director Bill Cobey is searching everywhere. If the successor is to come from within the Carolina ranks, it would probably be Donnan, who has served as jayvee coach,

head recruiter and offensive backfield coach under Dooley.

"I'd like to see Donnan get it," junior guard Mike Salzano said Monday. "He's been here awhile, he knows the people and we wouldn't have to adjust as much. Things would get back to normal a lot sooner around here. I'm still surprised to see Coach Dooley go; he had a good situation down here."

Indeed, things were looking up for the 43-year-old coach. After a 3-7-1 year three seasons ago in which Dooley's popularity was at its lowest point, he has taken his last two Carolina teams to bowl games and bagged his third ACC championship.

The huge increase in salary and dual role as head coach and athletic director at Virginia Tech is certainly part of his reason for leaving Chapel Hill. But he'd had similar offers in the past (from Miami, Fla. last year) and never accepted until now.

The other half of the answer might have been revealed Sunday when the Gobblers' new A.D.-head football coach was introduced to an enthusiastic crowd during the Tech-St. Bonaventure basketball game. In Blacksburg, the athletic program is in trouble, and Dooley has a chance to be the savior, something he would never be at Carolina.

He coaches winning football — few can contest that — but to coach in the same town as Dean Smith, you've got to be more than a winner. You've got to be an innovator as well. Despite his record, Carolina fans have grown impatient with Dooley and his brand of football.

"I didn't pick this college because of coach Dooley," Curry explained. "But I'll miss him."

"I'm pretty sad to see him go," Salzano said.

Intramural officials meeting set today

A meeting for all intramural managers is set for 4 p.m. today in 304 Woollen Gym. and anyone wishing to become an official is set for 7 p.m. today in 304 Woollen. Another meeting for intramural officials

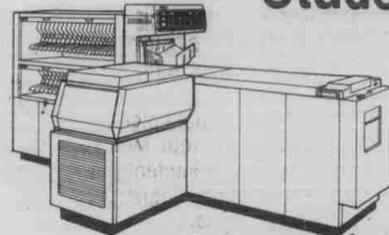
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