Former UNC back rests knees, will give USFL a try in spring

By PAUL GARDNER

Billy Johnson does not look like your typical bartender. Maybe a bouncer, but not a bartender.

Johnson has 230 pounds packed on a body that is not much over six feet tall and he looks tailor-made to run over any defensive back who might get in his way on the football field. Johnson would be doing that, too, if not for the current NFL strike and, more important, a bad pair of knees that are keeping him off the gridiron and behind the bar at Chapel Hill's Pegasus these days.

Johnson, who finished his career at UNC in 1980, played sparingly for the Cleveland Browns in 1981. He was released from the pass-happy Browns midway through the season. The Browns were looking for a big, fast back with a receiver's hands. Johnson, who was known primarily as a blocker in college, was not the man they had in mind.

"I think I learned a lot from that experience," Johnson said of his first encounter with the NFL. "First of all, I grew up. I had to discipline myself because I didn't have someone looking over my shoulder to tell me I should be at this meeting or that meeting all the time. Secondly, I realized that I should have considered my decision to sign with the Browns a little more carefully.

"I was a little star struck by the NFL

and had dollar signs in my eyes. I didn't think about the Dolphins' offer as much as I should have."

The Miami Dolphins remembered Johnson when he was released, though. He was invited to camp, and was feeling pretty good about his chances to make the team when his left knee began to swell up. The pain and danger of walking with a limp forced Johnson to leave camp.

The doctors told Johnson that he was probably born with the defect. His knee caps are naturally weak, but the huge thigh muscles that account for the nickname "Horse" just tear the knee caps apart. The only thing that can heal the joints is rest and time.

Johnson, despite the handicap, is an eternally cheerful and optimistic person. Right now he has something to look forward to with optimism. Johnson just signed a two-year contract with the Philadelphia Stars of the United States Football League.

"I think this is the break I've been looking for," he said. "Everyone coming into the league is starting fresh - on the same level. This is different from the NFL where rookies have to compete with an established player for a job."

Not too bad for a guy who didn't start playing prep athletics until his junior year of high school. As one of nine children growing up in Buckingham, Va., Johnson had no way to get to and from school for practices and games. His junior year, though, the high school got a bus. He still had to hitchhike seven miles to the bus stop, but that was better than the 20 miles he previously had hitched to

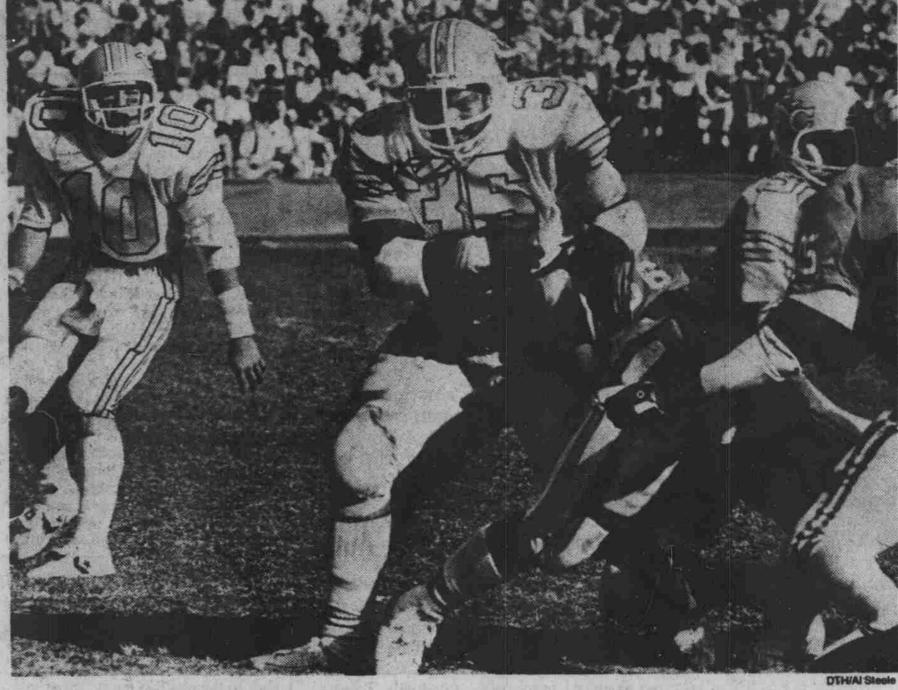
"My coach talked me into playing football my junior year, so I went out. My junior year I was a fullback, but I was moved to tailback my senior year," he

The move turned out to be a good one because Johnson rushed for more than 2,000 yards, 200-plus yards per game, and scored 18 points per game. He broke all of his high school's records and signed with North Carolina. He also found time to play basketball and compete in track in high school

"I realized during my freshman year at Carolina that I wasn't going to play much at tailback, so I asked to be moved to fullback," Johnson said, "I didn't mind blocking for Amos (Lawrence) and K.B. (Kelvin Bryant). I realized my job was to help them get their yardage and I was to get the short, tough yardage when it was needed. I got enough satisfaction out of the tailbacks' 1,000-yard seasons to make up for my lack of carries."

Johnson is working on a degree in recreation and will then go for a physical education degree so he can coach and work with children. He said he wished he could have had an opportunity to compete at an earlier age, but now encourages children to get involved when they're

"I tell the kids how much fun sports



UNC fullback Billy Johnson runs for a touchdown against Clemson two years ago ...will try to make a comeback in the pros with the Philadelphia Stars of the USFL

1. Georgia 9-0-0

3. Arizona State 9-0-0

4. Nebraska 8-1-0

5. Penn State 8-1-0

7. Washington 8-1-0

9. Florida State 7-1-0

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10. Arkansas 7-1-0

2. SMU 9-0-0

6. LSU 7-0-1

8. Pitt 7-1-0

are and what great experiences they can get from them. But I also stress the importance of studying," he said. "They can't expect to just go through high school as an athlete because they will get to college and find themselves in trouble.

I love to work with the kids, and I hope what I tell them will have some influence on them."

471

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381

364

358 323

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211

The AP Top 20

11. Clemson 6-1-1

13. Notre Dame 6-1-1

14. Michigan 7-2-0

17. Alabama 7-2-0

18. Maryland 7-2-0

15. Oklahoma 7-2-0

16. Southern Cal 6-2-0

19. West Virginia 7-2-0

12. UCLA 7-1-1

Field hockey drops disappointing trio at ODU

North Carolina's field hockey team entered the Old Dominion Tournament at Norfolk, Va., Saturday morning with an 11-5 record and the knowledge that two wins over the course of the weekend would probably secure the team a slot in the elite 12-team NCAA playoff field. But by late Sunday the Heels were 11-8 for the season, 0-3 for the weekend and finished for the year.

Coach Karen Shelton still believes that UNC is one of the top 12 teams in the nation, but "we didn't win when we had to win and we don't deserve to be in the playoffs," she said. "We had our chance. We're just a little young. We're almost there, but we're just not quite consistent

Saturday's 2-1 loss to Old Dominion

Sport of the Mind."

was particularly tough because the teams had stayed close until the end. Despite being outshot 40-2, North Carolina carried a 1-0 lead from the first period and held the grip for a tie until ODU scored with only 37 seconds to play in the game. Senior Kim Knickerbocker scored the UNC goal, the final one of her career. Freshman goalie Jan Miles turned in a stellar performance, withstanding the barrage of Lady Monarch shots to chart a

On Sunday, Carolina turned in a weak showing in a 2-0 defeat at the hands of Springfield before playing Maryland a very respectable 1-0 game in the weekend's, and the season's, finale. Previously, Maryland had dealt UNC a

vice which provides information or

Tues., Nov 9

8-10 pm

Carolina Union

Loses speed 32 Open wide Spanish 33 Auricular

THE Daily Crossword by Emory H. Cain

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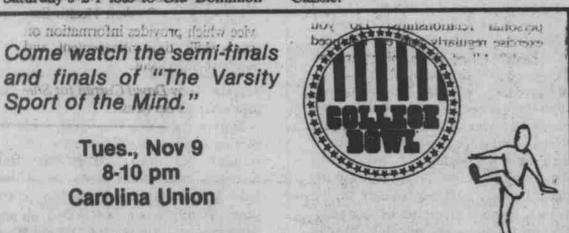
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31 Driving

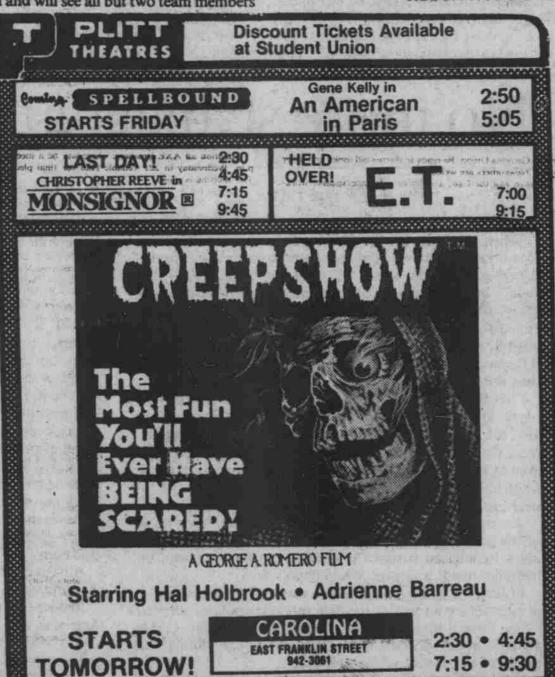
"We played well against Maryland," Shelton said. "We just had trouble getting the ball in the back of the goal."

The weekend action at Norfolk put a somber lid on an outstanding season for the North Carolina field hockey team that was highlighted by victories over powerhouses William & Mary and Virginia. Virginia has been selected for the NCAA playoffs and is the ACC's only representative.

Shelton is looking forward to next season and will see all but two team members

return. Connie Walton and Knickerbocker, both fine players and team leaders, are the team's only seniors. In fact, the team is so eager to prepare for next year's season that Shelton said, "We've already started." After a season marked with almosts (especially at the end), Shelton expects the experience gained in UNC's "trial by fire" schedule to pay dividends next year. Maybe by then, they won't have to settle for just "close."

- ROBYN NORWOOD

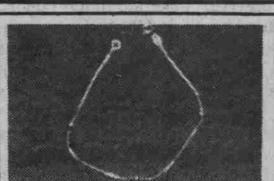


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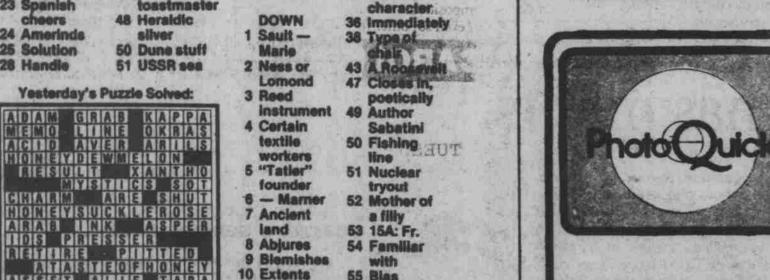
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