

Sports



Redshirt freshman Deems May got his first start at quarterback Saturday, with mixed results

DTH/David Minton

Secondary learns hard lesson

COLUMBIA, S.C. — Tar Heel coach Mack Brown has stressed all along that his young defense would have to "bend and not break," and keep away from the big play.

But in their season-opening 31-10 loss Saturday night before 73,275 screaming Gamecocks, the Tar Heels couldn't help it. Junior quarterback Todd Ellis went after the Tar Heel defensive secondary, with his speedy, scrappy wideouts doing the most damage after they hauled in his passes.

The first big play came at the 6:15 mark of the first quarter. After a Hamp Greene field-goal attempt fell short from 52 yards, Ellis moved to his own 49 with a 14-yard shoe-topper to Anthony Parlor.

After an incompletion, he lobbed the ball to 5-foot-9, 175-pound junior tight end Carl Plott, who went up with strong safety Dan Vooletich at the 27, picked the ball out of the air, wriggled away from Vooletich and streaked to the end zone for a 10-0 Gamecock lead.

After that, the Tar Heels stifled any further big plays and closed in on South Carolina 10-7 after a 43-yard touchdown off a reverse by junior Randy Marriott.

But just when Ellis seemed to cool off, even catching his own batted pass for an 11-yard loss, the Greensboro

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native, who is already being touted as a Heisman Trophy candidate, turned up the heat, converting some pivotal conversions with his laser-like passing.

"The thing that hurt was those third-down conversions," said Tar Heel free safety Victor Bullock. "We would play good on first and second down, and on third down he (Ellis) would hit for the big play. That really hurt us."

Facing a third-and-16 from his own 37 right after the Ellis-to-Ellis backward completion, he checked off a play at the line of scrimmage and instead sent Parlor on a diagonal to the right sideline, one-on-one with Tar Heel junior defensive back Larry Whiteside, who made his first start Saturday.

Parlor cradled the perfectly-thrown, 31-yard pass with Whiteside all over him at the Tar Heel 32.

Ellis struck again a couple of plays later on third-and-15. This time, it was to Parlor's backup, freshman Robert Brooks, and he caught an Ellis bullet for a wide-open, 18-yard gain

over the middle to the Tar Heel 18.

"Those conversions were really big," Bullock said. "We felt if we went into halftime down by three, that would give us confidence coming out for the second half. But those two conversions really hurt us."

In the second half, the Tar Heels were able to contain the speedy Gamecock wideouts better.

Ellis cooled off, too, except for a 33-yarder to Green in the third quarter. That was okay, though, because Green took over, slashing and sprinting his way to 100 yards on 21 carries and single-handedly ending any Tar Heel hopes for a comeback.

That fact wasn't lost on UNC coach Mack Brown, who made the decision early last week to start May over more experienced junior Jonathan Hall.

"For a young, inexperienced freshman that hasn't played in a college ballgame before, against one of the top four defenses in the country, Deems did a good job," Brown said. "We knew he was inexperienced coming into the game. But I thought Deems handled the blitz really well most of the night. We think Deems is going to be a good football player."

The 6-foot-5, 220-pounder hails from Lexington High School, where

May angry with himself after tough opening night

COLUMBIA, S.C. — That Deems May had a rocky first outing as North Carolina's starting quarterback came as a surprise to no one.

Redshirt freshmen just don't step in and dominate at the college level, especially when they're playing the most important position on the field and the opponent is one of the fiercest in the land.

Even the great Bernie Kosar, who led the University of Miami to the 1983 national title as a redshirt freshman, looked horrible in his first game, a 28-3 loss to Florida.

But just because he wasn't supposed to succeed doesn't mean May wasn't downright steamed about his lack of success against South Carolina.

"I could have played 100 percent better," May said, after playing all but the last two offensive series Saturday in UNC's 31-10 loss to the 19th-ranked Gamecocks. "I wasn't nervous; I wasn't uptight. I just didn't hit them when I had to, and we didn't convert the third downs when we needed to."

On the evening, May went 13-for-34 passing for 121 yards. He was sacked once for a loss of seven yards.

While those numbers were certainly unimpressive, May's receivers deserve a portion of the blame, too. Of May's 21 incompletions, nearly half could be classified as dropped balls.

That fact wasn't lost on UNC coach Mack Brown, who made the decision early last week to start May over more experienced junior Jonathan Hall.

"I had a few drops, but most of the time it was my fault. "It seemed like we'd get going, we'd get a few first downs, and then we'd just stop. We'd always have a couple bad plays that hurt us. A dropped pass here, a bad pass there. That kind of stymied the offense."

Despite the fact he was able to direct the offense to just 10 points against the Gamecocks, May's teammates were impressed with the way

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he earned Parade All-American honors as a junior before a knee injury caused him to miss most of his senior season. He sat out last season and watched as the highly touted Mark Maye struggled to fulfill the massive expectations people had for him.

The expectations are much more modest for May, who besides sharing the same phonetic surname as last year's quarterback bears an alarming resemblance to Maye, now a backup for the NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

But even if the public's perception of May's ability is reasonable, the self-expectations of the man himself can sometimes be overburdening.

"I put a lot of pressure on myself to complete every pass out there," May said. "I got a little mad at myself. I had a few drops, but most of the time it was my fault."

"I had fun; I liked being back out there," he said. "I've just got to be better. I didn't perform as well as I'd like. I don't like losing."

he handled himself.

"I think he played pretty well, picking up the blitzes and stunts," said Darrell Hamilton, UNC's senior offensive tackle. "A few times guys were right in his face and he still got the ball off, sometimes for completions. I think he played like a seasoned veteran. He didn't look like it was his first game."

One of the most important components of a quarterback's leadership skills is his ability to control the offensive huddle. For it is in that circle of 11 men, meeting before each play to briefly map out strategy, that the great quarterbacks win their teammates' respect.

According to Hamilton, May has already done that.

"The quarterback has to be the leader, and he stood up to that," Hamilton said of May. "A couple times, when other guys were talking in the huddle, he'd tell them to be quiet because it's his huddle. He has great poise, that's what I like about him."

The one thing people have to remember about May's Saturday showing is this: it was his first "live" action in almost two full years.

When asked how it felt to be back on the field, leading a team and shrugging off the hits of enemy defenders, May smiled.

"I had fun; I liked being back out there," he said. "I've just got to be better. I didn't perform as well as I'd like. I don't like losing."

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