

Former UNC football players a hit in the pros

By ERIC WAGNON
Staff Writer

The best football team in the Atlantic Coast Conference year in and year out can be found in Clemson, S.C., yet NFL scouts seem to have quite an affinity for Chapel Hill. UNC ranks 10th nationally in the number of former players on NFL rosters. No other ACC school — even Clemson — ranks in the top 20.

That statistic places North Carolina's football program in a group with such traditional powers as Southern Cal — the top school on the list — Penn State, Oklahoma, Alabama and Notre Dame.

Lawrence Taylor of the New York Giants and Kelvin Bryant of the Washington Redskins have made probably the most publicized impact on professional football among former UNC players. While Taylor and Bryant have not worried over the last month about making their respective clubs, numerous recent UNC stars have been working in various NFL camps to make some team's 45-man roster.

Former UNC running back Derrick Fenner has also received significant publicity over the last three years. Unfortunately for him, the publicity has been negative. Fenner's fall from grace started with an academic suspension for the 1986 Aloha Bowl, then his UNC career quickly ended in April 1987 after a cocaine and weapons charge. Fenner was charged two months later with first-degree murder. The murder charge was later dropped, but Fenner was sentenced to four years of probation for the former charge.

The Seattle Seahawks apparently thought that a 10th-round pick was worth the possibility of Fenner's story finally ending in a riches-to-rags-to-riches saga. At this point, Fenner looks as if he may play up to the potential he showed in 1986, when he set an ACC single-game rushing record with 328 yards vs. Virginia.

While Fenner has taken a long road to the NFL, last year's All-ACC Tar Heel center Jeff Garnica has simply had to prove himself on the field. That task has proved very difficult as he first went to Tampa Bay, then to Indianapolis. Garnica's quest ended there after the Colts released him on Monday. Obviously an extremely talented lineman, Garnica, listed at 256 pounds during his senior year at North Carolina, was hampered in the pro ranks by his relatively small size.

Size is one concern the Denver Broncos do not have with their third-round draft pick, former Tar Heel offensive tackle Darrell Hamilton. At 6-6, 292 pounds, Hamilton adds a behemoth presence to any offensive line. He is also touted as an extremely fine pass blocker. However, he may need to develop his overall technique to compete effectively in the NFL.

Hamilton was the only graduating senior from the 1988 squad to be picked in the NFL draft. Several other 1988 Tar Heels, including Garnica, signed as free agents. Offensive tackle Creighton Incorminias signed with the New England Patriots but was released on Aug. 24. Wide receiver

Randy Marriott signed with the Chicago Bears but was released on Monday. Defensive back Howard Feggins spent this August in the Patriots' camp. He was released on Tuesday, so that the Patriots could meet their first cut limit of 60.

While the Patriots released Incorminias and Feggins, the New England defensive line, at least, still has a tint of Carolina blue. In the fourth round of the 1987 draft, the Patriots selected former Tar Heel nose tackle Tim Goad, and the pick proved to be a steal.

Goad turned out to be an All-rookie performer, starting from game three after Brent Williams, a four-year veteran, was moved to left defensive end. Among a host of seasoned veterans, a major national football magazine ranked Goad as the sixth-best nose tackle in the NFL.

Another defensive lineman from the Class of '88, defensive end Reuben Davis, also ended up exceeding expectations. As only a ninth-round pick of the Tampa Bay Bucs, Davis was a longshot to even make the team. He not only made the team; he excelled for the Bucs, especially against the run. Davis finished his rookie season with 61 tackles, three sacks and an additional 12 stops behind the line of scrimmage.

Eric Starr, North Carolina's 1987 leading rusher with 550 yards, had a much more inauspicious rookie debut last season, spending the entire year on Chicago's injured reserve list. Under the NFL's Plan B free agency system in which teams can only protect 37 players, Starr was left unprotected and was subsequently picked up by the Miami Dolphins.

After three exhibition games, Miami decided that Starr was not the answer to their rushing woes and released him on Monday.



DTH file photo

Recent graduates of the Tar Heel football program, such as Tim Goad and Rueben Davis, make UNC a favorite stop for pro scouts

How Nolan Ryan struck me out, looking

Dave Glenn
Sports Editor

I stood in the Arlington Stadium parking lot on Aug. 10, 1989, with a look of unbridled joy and amazement on my face.

Finally, I was there, the home of the Texas Rangers. It didn't matter that the Rangers were mired in fourth place in the American League West, or that they were playing the woeful Detroit Tigers.

It was a special moment in the life of a baseball addict. I was getting to see another major league baseball stadium. It was my seventh such introduction, and the most impressive for someone who was weaned on a circular concrete cocoon otherwise known as Veterans Stadium in Philadelphia.

Nolan Ryan, a living legend of baseball, was on the mound. A former pitcher myself — though of the left-handed, junk-balling variety — I was beaming in anticipation of the hard-throwing right-hander, baseball's all-time strikeout king. But, for now, the Ryan Express was going to have to wait while I soaked it all in.

I could see the fans — who would soon become my neighbors in near-

history in the hours to come — in the center field bleachers as I walked outside the stadium.

I could see the bright lights. I could see the popcorn vendors. I could smell the real green grass and hear the crowd abuzz.

Here I was, an old man by college standards at 21, a kid again. If I had my beat-up old Little League glove with me — the same one that caught a home run off the bat of Houston Astros' star Cesar Cedeno when I was six years old — I would have demanded to bring it inside.

I paid eight dollars for two general admission tickets (OK, so I'm a cheap date) and wandered wide-eyed toward the left field bleachers.

My pulse quickened as the clock approached 7:30, five minutes before game time, and the heavens opened.

Yes, it started raining. Hard. The sky was dark, very dark. Black, in fact. It was the opposite of the glorious scene I witnessed from the outside.

At that very moment, I felt like a combination of Ziggy, Charlie Brown and a Columbia football player.

As we raced to protection, I innocently spotted a wonderful-looking young blonde selling programs. "How much?" I asked, in a unique display of intelligence. "Two dollars," she said, eyes sparkling. So I handed the money over and, meaning every cheesy word of it from the bottom of my heart, said, "Thanks, you don't know how much this means to me." She smiled. I smiled back.

It had stopped raining. A deep voice rattled through the names of Cecil Espy, Rafael Palmeiro, Ruben Sierra and Harold Baines as we returned to our new seats, better ones. Of course, we did race past a couple of old ladies in "Don't Mess With Texas" T-shirts. Rough world out there.

I particularly liked it when announcer reached the name of the

Rangers' third baseman. "STEEEEEEVE BOOOOOO-SHELLLLLLL" came the call from above. He is also known simply as Steve Buechele in print to the Rangers faithful, who affectionately yell "BOOOOOO" every time he steps to the plate. I couldn't help but wonder if he ever gets confused.

Then, it was simply "Nolan Ryan." Yes, the simple good ol' country boy — he of 100 m.p.h. fastball fame — was closing in on his 5,000th strikeout. From Hank Aaron to Paul Zuvella, victims came, saw and went, beating a path of frustration to and from the opposition's dugout.

Five thousand strikeouts. Heck, even if you went to He's Not Here every night, it would take you almost 14 years to reach that kind of magic number.

I didn't see number 5,000 — that came two starts later, in Arlington — but I did enjoy one of the most exciting pitching performances I have ever seen.

I looked on in awe of his compact delivery, his driving legs, his perfect

follow-through. He had a lot of walks. And a lot of strikeouts.

And he had allowed no hits, zero, through eight innings.

The story I was going to tell my grandchildren — whether they like baseball or not, of course — immediately changed. Not only did I see Nolan Ryan pitch, but he pitched a no-hitter. And he was 42 years old. And it was just days before his historical 5,000th strikeout. And Sparky Anderson was there, too.

But there was Ryan, a man who has taken the ball every fifth day for 22 years and counting, firing away. One out in the ninth.

Two more outs and he would have his record sixth no-hitter. My two-dollar program felt priceless.

Then, it happened. Dave Bergman punched a shot to shallow left field for a single. It was over, with the quickness of a 100 mile per hour fastball.

As I dropped back into reality, I felt as if Nolan Ryan had struck me out, looking.

At least I'm not alone.



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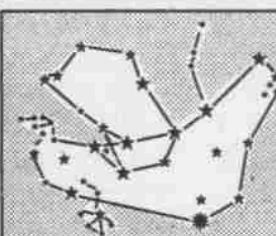
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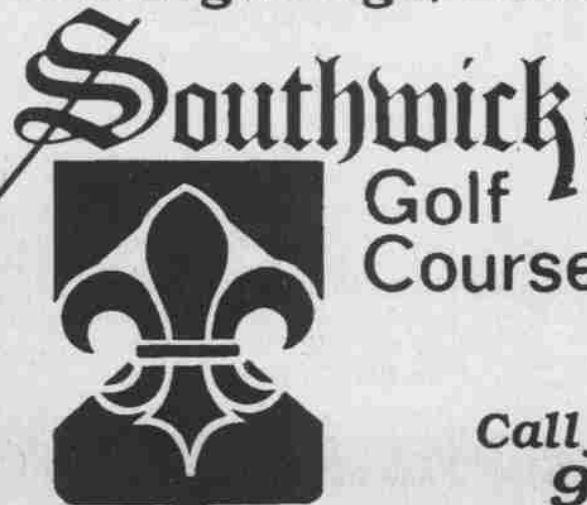
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