

# Dorn trying to regain past glory

By DAVE GLENN

Sports Editor

Sometimes Torin Dorn looks back and thinks about what might have been.

Always, he refuses to dwell on it. On the fateful football afternoon of Sept. 5, 1987, Dorn's promising career as a UNC tailback involved more twists and turns than most players have in an entire season.

It was UNC vs. Illinois, the season opener in Dorn's sophomore year. It soon became the game that put Torin Dorn on the pages of UNC record books — and on the trainer's table of the UNC locker room. It also started the ball rolling in a bizarre series of events that turned Torin Dorn, big-name running back, into Torin Dorn, no-name defensive back, in a span of two years.

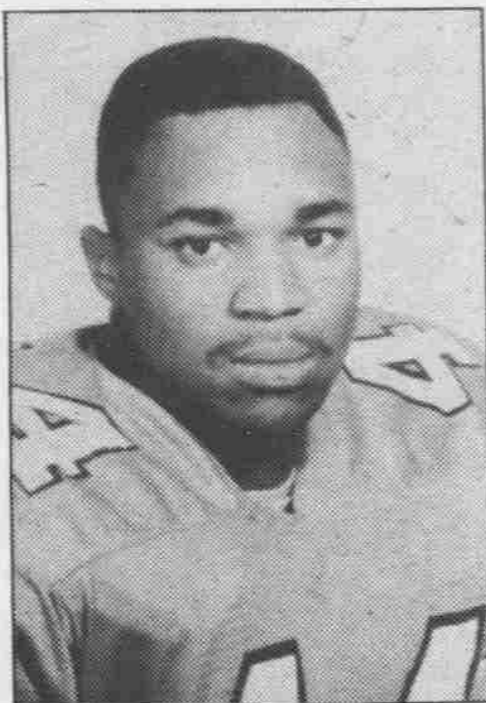
Dorn, now a senior at North Carolina, remembers it all too well.

He recalls the second half in particular — one play in particular — as a frustrating turning point in his life as a Tar Heel.

Kenan Stadium, third quarter, UNC leading 24-7, only a few minutes after Dorn's 56-yard touchdown run gave him a UNC record of 134 yards in the third quarter alone:

"It was the same play I scored a touchdown on," Dorn remembered. "We had run a sweep left, scored a touchdown, came back a couple of plays later and ran the same play. I went around end, and it looked like the exact picture-perfect play that had happened before. I was cutting back on the defensive back, and I was like 'Wait a minute, this can't be true, this play is happening all over again.' You know, *deja vu*."

"But instead of cutting across the grain, I cut back to head upfield, and a linebacker grabbed me from be-



Torin Dorn

hind. He tackled me, fell on my ankle and turned it over."

Thus ended a 69-yard sprint and an afternoon that saw Dorn slash his way to 165 yards (his career high at UNC) on only 15 carries. With it went the true effectiveness of a sophomore sensation who burst onto the Carolina scene nine months before with a 101-yard performance, on seven carries, as a true freshman in a 1986 Aloha Bowl loss to Arizona.

And thus continued the frustrations of the 1985 Michigan Player of the Year out of Southfield High School, where Dorn was a Parade All-America selection as a senior.

Even there, amidst the numerous honors and awards he received while doubling as free safety on defense, Dorn played in only six and a half games during his senior year due to an ankle injury. Of course, he did manage to squeak in 1,239 yards while averaging 9.6 yards a carry. He also

scored 16 touchdowns and had two interceptions for an 8-1 conference co-championship team.

Perhaps his high school nickname, "Boy Wonder," explains how he also found the time and good health to letter four times in track (he was state champion in the 400 meters as a junior) and once in basketball. His accomplishments came as no surprise to those who knew him well.

But his decision to attend UNC, at a time when Dick Crum's Tar Heel squads were coming off of two consecutive mediocre seasons, was a major surprise and disappointment for the likes of Clemson, South Carolina and UCLA. That's not to mention all the Big Ten schools that came knocking at the Dorns.

But to the decision-maker himself, it was a simple choice that made a lot of sense.

"I asked myself where I wanted to be — even if I wasn't playing football," Dorn said. "And the University of North Carolina struck me first."

Now, the 6-1, 202-pound Dorn is preparing to strike back — by knocking on the doors of a few opposing wide receivers — as a rookie on defense.

After three up and down years as the Tar Heels' "tailback of the future," Dorn now wears the crown of "cornerback of the present" for UNC head coach Mack Brown.

Brown said Dorn's tremendous athletic ability, coupled with his past history of injuries, played a pivotal role in last spring's decision to confront Dorn with the possibility of moving to defense.

"Torin could conceivably play both ways during the season," Brown said. "Certainly, we would prefer not to do that. But he is capable of doing it if needed."

Dorn remembers the day the coaching staff brought up the possibility of moving to the giving end of the hitting process.

"Last year after the season we had meetings with our position coaches to analyze the whole year and how you felt about the job that you did," Dorn said. "The question arose when I got hurt again last year and they said 'How would you like to try defensive back?'"

Dorn said he was hesitant at first, but eventually warmed to the suggestion.

"I asked my mother and father what they thought about it and they said 'Give it a try and if you don't like it you can go back to offense,'" Dorn said. "I went over and tried it during the spring and fell in love with it."

But with this new love came the demise of his first love, tailback. The tales of the time may say that the first love is the toughest to break, but Dorn said he has no room in his life for such "would-haves and could-haves."

"I really can't say that I enjoy one more than the other," Dorn said. "But there is a special joy you get out of hitting people. At defensive back, you get to hit instead of taking hits. At running back there's a lot of glory. You're in the limelight."

"But at defensive back, you're out there on an island by yourself. Just laying a hit on somebody — letting them know you're there — that's just a different kind of thrill."

Dorn, philosophical about his new role, seems to have done quite a bit of thinking about his place in a Tar Heel program that's in the process of a rebirth of its own.

"You're out there by yourself with

80,000 people looking at you," he said. "If a wideout beats you deep, the crowd is going to look at you, and you're going to be the villain. But if you come back and make a good play, an interception, you're going to be the hero. You just have to have the mentality that, if you get beat, you have to come back, pick yourself up, and try it all over again."

But dealing with the possibility of getting beat doesn't seem to be nearly enough to put Dorn on the "defensive."

"At defensive back, you can only keep a receiver covered for a couple seconds," he said. "Nobody is that good. Lester Hayes, Everson Walls and those guys get beat sometimes. I'm just learning the position, and I know I'm gonna make some mistakes. All I have to do is make sure I do the little things right and good things are going to happen."

He sounds positive, and he breeds optimism among his teammates. But the man they call "TD," as his initials and past performances merited, said he will miss one favorite cheer of Kenan Stadium's Tar Heel faithful.

In 1989, as the high schoolish cheer "Whaddya want — TD — What's that — Touchdown!" rings from the rafters, Dorn will probably be just another face in the crowd, hidden among his adopted family in a defensive huddle somewhere on the home team sideline.

Dorn admitted the cheer gave him a boost in years past, though he wasn't about to accept full responsibility for its origin. "That cheer has been around for a long time," he said. "I just happen to have the right initials."

Maybe it's back to the "Boy Wonder" moniker, or perhaps "INT" would now be appropriate, but "TD" said it's difficult to forget about the high hopes and shattered dreams of Torin Dorn, tailback.

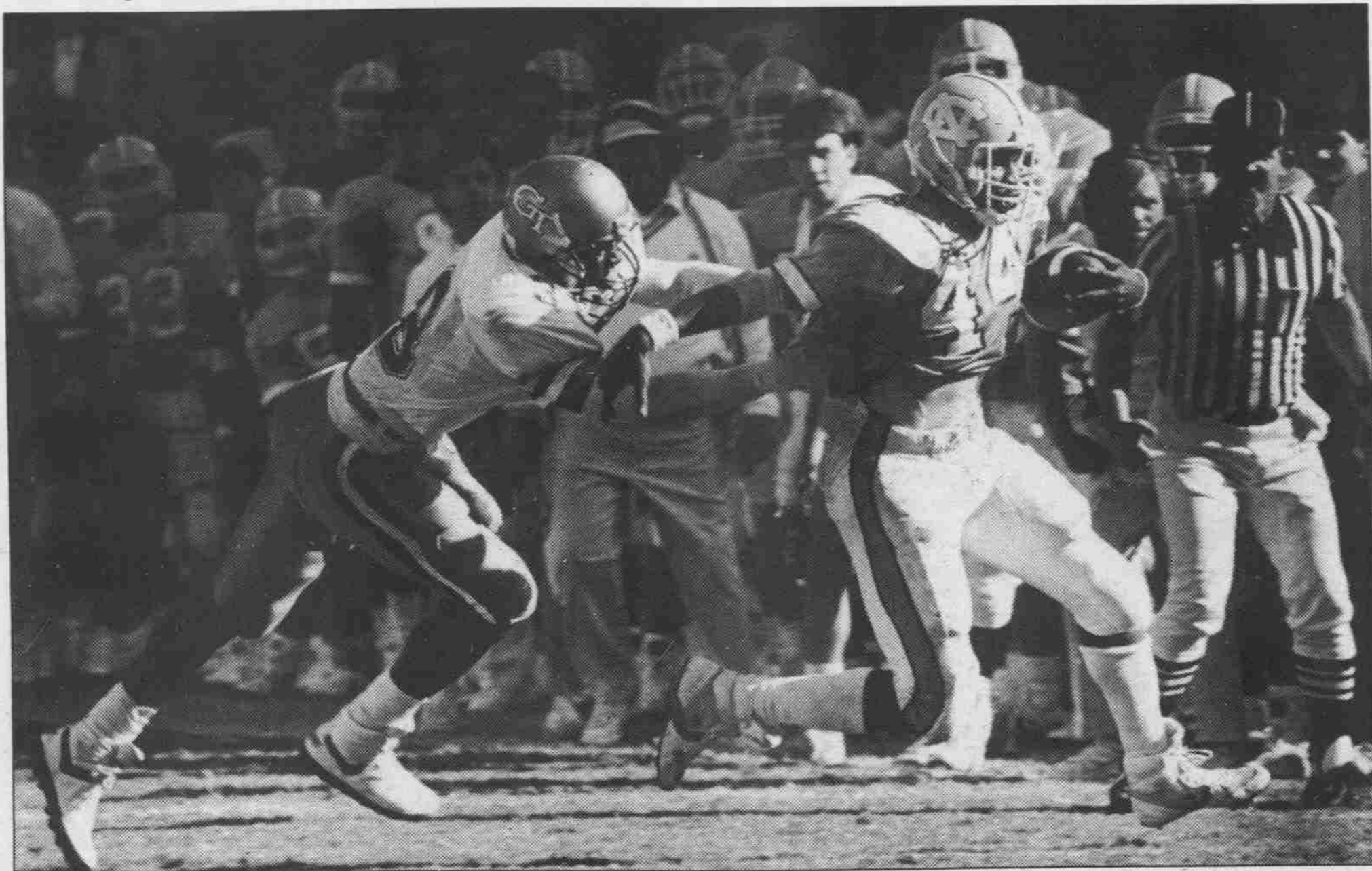
"I've thought back quite a few times," Dorn said. "Like, if I didn't hurt my ankle my sophomore year, where would I be right now? Or, if I didn't hurt my back last year, what would have happened? But life isn't based on would-haves and could-haves. You have to adapt and move on, because the people who adapt the best are the ones who survive."

"I had dreams of being a 1,000-yard rusher, to have my name put up there on a roster with the other greats. But those things just got brushed aside and knocked down. Right now I'm a starting defensive back and I'll do whatever it takes there to help this team win."

His first opportunity for that endeavor will come Sept. 9 — almost exactly two years after the record-and ankle-shattering Illinois game — as the Tar Heels host VMI to open the 1989 campaign.

Torin Dorn, cornerback, said he's over the past and ready to go. Well, almost.

"There's going to be some kind of nostalgia there, after three years of running the ball and now looking out there and somebody else has taken over your duties," Dorn said, before breaking into a smile. "But right now I've found a new love, and that love is defensive back."



Senior Torin Dorn, now a cornerback, will switch from scoring touchdowns to preventing them.