

Mack the Magician conjures hope

Tar Heels mix quick defense with green offense for '89 show

By DAVE GLENN

Sports Editor

Put UNC head coach Mack Brown in a desert, and he'll find a way to make a living selling umbrellas.

And that is a very good sign for a down-but-not-out North Carolina football program.

The Tar Heels, coming off one of their worst seasons in history, face an uphill battle again in 1989. But, somehow, coach/salesman/psychologist Brown managed to convince an ultra-talented group of freshmen to come to a 1-10 team with great hopes and expectations.

There is certainly no talk in Chapel Hill of a conference championship or a bowl game. A winning record? Possible, but unlikely. But don't say it too loudly.

Brown sticks to a more basic approach. "The number one thing we have to do is get our players to have a better self-image and gain confidence," Brown said. "Once we put ourselves in a position to win a close game, we have to have what it takes to go ahead and win it. A lot of that simply comes with confidence."

A lot of that confidence began to take root during an intense off-season conditioning program under the tutelage of Athletic Fitness Director Rich Tuten, a name spoken more and more often in all UNC athletic circles. Tuten, in his second year at UNC, has helped produce an improved combination of speed and strength evident on the practice field in the spring and summer months.

Add that to the new and improved

schedule — which replaces Oklahoma and Auburn with VMI and Navy in the first four weeks of the season — and the Tar Heels seem well along the road to respectability.

Of course, glaring problems certainly exist.

Start with a defense that gave up the most points in the history of North Carolina football. Add in the departure of tailback Kennard Martin (see accompanying story), who led the ACC in rushing a year ago, and a serious lack of depth and experience at all positions, and you have quite a different scenario.

Suddenly, 1-10 seems a realistic possibility once again.

But Mack Brown has a plan, just as he did at Tulane five years ago, when his team went from 1-10 to 4-7 to the Independence Bowl in his first three years. However, this one is quite a bit different.

From the originator of the powerful "Mack Attack" offense at LSU, where Brown was offensive coordinator in 1982, comes a faster, stronger Tar Heel defense as the building block of a restructured program.

Yes, this is much of the same defensive unit that gave up almost 400 points a year ago. But there are some new faces, some experienced faces and some faces from the other side of the ball.

Welcome ex-tailbacks Reggie Clark and Torin Dorn to the defensive backfield. Move impressive sophomore Doxie Jordan to free safety, his natural position, and throw in the steady, experienced hand of



Second-year head coach Mack Brown hopes his positive attitude will translate into UNC wins in 1989

senior Clarence Carter and you have quite a foursome. How well they work together remains to be seen, but the talent is there, something that could not be said a year ago.

The Tar Heels' defensive front seven is confronted with the job of stopping the run between the tackles, a task too tough for last year's personnel, and putting some pressure on the passer. Enter Brown's magic wand once again.

The Tar Heels' second-year head coach shifted sophomore tackle Roy Barker to nose guard in the spring, a move that enabled a bulked-up Dennis Tripp to move back outside to tackle. At the other tackle is a slimmed-down version of man/mountain Cecil Gray, a popular preseason pick for All-ACC honors.

The ripple effect of the moves on the shallow front line enabled 6-1, 245-pound Willie Joe Walker to move to linebacker in a further effort to stop the run. But the bulk of that job will fall to the Tar Heels' leading tacklers a year ago, inside linebackers Dwight Hollier and Bernard Timmons. Hollier was possibly the best freshman linebacker in the country last year, and Timmons is fully recovered from off-season knee problems. Senior John Reed, junior Don Millen and sophomore Eric Gash will also see time in the second line of defense, perhaps the only area of the team where UNC can go two deep at each position with confidence.

Last year, a horrendous defense made anything produced by an average Tar Heel offense a moot point. This year, the roles may be reversed.

Problems abound for Brown almost everywhere on the offensive side of the ball. All-America candidate Pat Crowley, a 6-3, 283-pound senior at right guard, is an island of consistency amidst a sea of disarray.

Without Martin at tailback, the school with more 1,000-yard rushers than any other is frighteningly thin at the position. Senior Aaron Staples, who carried the ball just six times last year, is backed up by speedy sophomores Randy Jordan and Eric Blount (a wideout last year) and freshmen Antuam Williams and Derrick

Henderson. Of those four, only Blount has ever suited up in Tar Heel blue. In any case, fullback Michael Benefield will be heading the charge. The 5-8, 205-pound junior has become a leader by example.

Brown has temporarily silenced talk about much-heralded freshman quarterback Chuckie Burnette by firmly handing the job to senior Jonathan Hall, who seems to be back on track after a seemingly endless struggle with his right (throwing) shoulder. Brown said he wouldn't put Burnette into a situation that he didn't think he could handle. Of course, Brown didn't have to say that. Should Hall falter, the newest Burnette looks like the odds-on choice to get the call.

Joining Crowley in his attempt to protect Hall and lead the way for Benefield and Co., senior center Carl Watts and junior transfer Kevin Donnelly have filled two of the voids

left by the departure of stalwarts Jeff Garnica, Darrell Hamilton, Creighton Incorminias and Steve Steinbacher.

Freshman Alec Millen, who looks like the heir apparent to Crowley in a long list of successful Tar Heel offensive linemen, takes over at left guard. Sophomore Andrew Oberg gets the nod at right tackle, while junior behemoth Bill Boyd (6-8, 288) waits in the wings. Brian Bollinger, a 6-5, 238-pound sophomore tight end, will usually serve as a sixth offensive lineman on the field in the UNC offensive sets.

Blount's move to tailback turned the UNC receiving corps into the Green Team. That is, senior Kurt and a parade of talented but untested freshmen. Speaking of Parade, watch out for high school All-American Julius Reese, a real burner. Other candidates for the starting positions include Raleigh Millbrook High standout Bucky Brooks, Durham Jordan High's Randall Felton and a pair of Virginians, Corey Holliday and Joey Jauch, a red-shirt freshman. A recent injury to Green, a broken clavicle that will sideline him for at least six weeks, means this group will have to grow up in a hurry.

The kicking game could be a strength for the Tar Heels in 1989. The much-traveled leg of punter Scott McAlister returns for his sophomore season, while Clint Gwaltney, a savior as a freshman last year, is the front-runner for the placekicking duties.

The Tar Heels' alter ego seems ready to surface for the 1989 football season. A stronger, faster and deeper defense should give the Tar Heels' offense a chance to pull out a few victories. Unfortunately for Mack Brown, he may have fewer offensive weapons than at any time in his career.

A .500 season would be an overwhelming success in Mack Brown's second year at the helm of the UNC program.

All he needs is a productive quarterback, a cohesive offensive line, a few freshman contributors and an injury-free season to get it done.

Anybody want to buy an umbrella?



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