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DTH FILE PHOTO

Kicker Casey Barth, who is only five field goals away from breaking the UNC record, hit a career-high 49-yard field goal against N.C. State in 2010.

Barth ready to make big kicks

By Michael Lananna
Assistant Sports Editor

Undermanned and inexperienced, the North Carolina special teams squad entered last season gravely weakened by the ongoing NCAA investigation.

But if Patrick Peterson felt any sympathy at all, he certainly didn't show it.

On opening night, the Louisiana State kick returner blew through UNC's depleted forces, chewing up 257 return yards and scoring a touchdown in the 30-24 Tigers win.

With the performance, Peterson exposed a weakness that continued to plague UNC throughout last season. The Tar Heels' net average of 40.6 yards per kickoff last year placed them second to last in the ACC.

"Last year, just because of everything that happened, we had a lot of young guys out there, and we were kind of experimenting a little bit," senior place kicker Casey Barth said.

"I think this year with those guys from last year on it and with some other guys that couldn't play last year, we're really going to put it together and do some big things."

Along with Barth, the Tar Heels will return deep snapper Mark House, holder Trase Jones and starting punter C.J. Feagles, who as a redshirt freshman averaged 37.5 yards per punt.

Barth, though, is the unit's cornerstone, and he's coming off what might be his finest season in Tar Heel blue. Last year, Barth converted 19 of his 22 field goal attempts, succeeded in all 38

extra point tries and, in a game against rival N.C. State, set a new career high with a 49-yard field goal.

But the kicker's defining moment undoubtedly came during the 30-27 Music City Bowl win against Tennessee. Not only did Barth make the game-tying field goal late in the fourth quarter of that game, but he also delivered the final blow in the second round of overtime.

"Casey has shown that he can (make a big kick late in the game), so I have nothing but confidence in him because I've already seen him do it," interim head coach Everett Withers said. "Casey is one of those guys that I believe we can count on to do a lot of good things in the kicking game for us."

Barth has been counted on for much of his Tar Heel career, as evidenced by the fact that he is five field goals away from passing the school record of 54 — a record his brother Connor set four years ago.

But even with that milestone in sight, the kicker is intent on refining his craft.

After making a 54-yard kick off the upright during training camp, Barth said he'd like to extend his field goal range to 50 yards or more. He hopes to do that by kicking more aggressively, finishing through the ball for additional power.

"I don't like missing right," Barth said. "I leave my hips open, and I kind of feel like I hit it weakly. And for me, if I do miss, I want to miss left and long. I want to show I have some legs."

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UNC offensive linemen roll deep

The Tar Heel offensive line boasts experience and depth.

By John LaMantia
Staff Writer

As redshirt sophomore Bryn Renner prepares to take the reins at quarterback this season, he will lean heavily upon a veteran offensive line that returns four starters and has the potential to be one of the best in the ACC.

Jonathan Cooper, a 6-foot-3, 310-pound left guard, is entering his third year as a starter on the offensive line. Cooper is the most experienced lineman with 23 starts in his first two seasons.

"I feel like all the older guys on the offensive line are leaders," Cooper said. "James Hurst, he's just a rising sophomore, and he's one of the biggest leaders on the team."

Hurst, a freshman in 2010, saw playing time in all 13 games at left tackle and started the final 12 games of the season.

"The LSU game was the first time I got to play, and I was pretty

nervous going in," Hurst said.

"But this is what I wanted. I wanted to come in and play early."

Cooper said Hurst is one of his best friends on the team, and after playing beside each other all season last year, the two linemen form an imposing left side of the line.

"We are comfortable with each other now," Hurst said. "We can do our own thing and learn blitzes and trust one another completely."

Senior Cam Holland brings experience at the center position, making 19 starts during his sophomore and junior seasons.

On the right side, juniors Travis Bond and Brennan Williams will likely start at right guard and right tackle, respectively.

While experience is important, there is no substitute for size on the offensive line — and North Carolina has plenty of it. The starting offensive line averages 319 pounds, a size that could be tough for opponents to overcome.

The Tar Heels will have depth off the bench with senior Carl Gaskins and redshirt freshman Russell

Bodine expected to see significant playing time. Cooper also praised freshman Landon Turner for his drive on the field and in the film room.

"We do have a lot of depth, and I think that's going to be a huge advantage to us," Hurst said. "I know that was one of (coach Sam Pittman's) big recruiting goals, to build a 10-man offensive line."

Most importantly, Renner has the utmost confidence in the men charged with keeping him out of harm's way.

"In these first seven practices, I have never seen an offensive line like we have just explode off the ball and create holes," Renner said. "I can't say enough about them."

Typically an under-the-radar part of a team, the offensive line has been vocal about their desire to lead the way on offense.

"We want that pressure in order to make our offense go," Hurst said. "We're excited about it, and we're glad the people are seeing it now."

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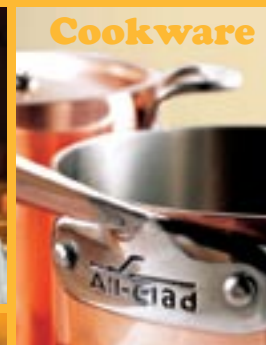
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DTH FILE PHOTO

Quarterback Bryn Renner throws a pass in practice. Renner has completed just one pass in a game for UNC.

Inexperienced Renner has big shoes to fill

By Jonathan Jones
Senior Writer

In four years as North Carolina's starting quarterback, T.J. Yates passed for a school record 9,377 yards and 58 touchdowns.

Redshirt sophomore Bryn Renner, his heir apparent for the 2011 season, has a career stat line of 1-for-2 for 14 yards.

"I've had a tremendous amount of reps over the past three years that I've been here, so I think that's helped me out a lot," Renner said.

"Granted I've only thrown two passes, but I really think those practice reps really count to me, and they matter. I view them as game reps because I go full speed and everyone else does, too.

"In hindsight, yes, I would have liked to have gotten in, but sitting back these past two years, I feel like a veteran even though I haven't played yet."

Practice reps are all Renner has to go on as he enters the season as the most highly anticipated North Carolina quarterback to debut since Darian Durant in 2001.

Former UNC football coach Butch Davis bemoaned that

Renner didn't get enough snaps in games and admitted after the 42-17 spanking of East Carolina that he wished Renner got more playing time.

Nonetheless, Renner seems ready to assume the throne at quarterback this season. He almost has to be.

Backing Renner up are junior Braden Hanson and freshman Marquise Williams. Hanson saw action during Renner's redshirt season but had as many completions (two) as interceptions.

"Bryn Renner has been a guy that you can see him growing every day. And not just football, but just leadership skills — with the offense, with the defense," interim head coach Everett Withers said.

"He's just one of those guys that everybody on the team likes. And we're going to need that from him."

North Carolina fans will see a different style of quarterback than what they were acquainted with for four years in Yates. Renner is faster and more agile than Yates and will likely be able to create more outside the pocket.

But despite that difference, he took a lot of notes while watching Yates perform on the field.

"We're still in contact right now. He's just still helping me, we're talking each other through things, and he's a great friend," Renner said.

"The things I learned from him most were how to prepare — how to get your body and get your mind ready for a 12-game season. And it's a long haul. And everyone knows that."

Senior wide receiver Dwight Jones will be Renner's No. 1 target this season after Jones' breakout junior year saw him finish with 62 receptions for 946 yards.

But Renner will be blessed with several other threats at wide receiver, including juniors Erik Highsmith and Jhay Boyd. In 2010, Highsmith had 25 catches for 348 yards and three touchdowns.

"When (Renner) first came here, he was a very fiery guy. But that's just his nature, his personality," Jones said.

"I don't think it's really changed, but I think it's calmed down a little bit, just his demeanor. But it's good to have a fiery quarterback like that ... it pumps me up too."

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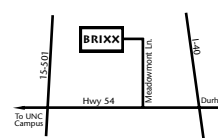
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Coples grabs defensive line spotlight

By Kelly Parsons
Sports Editor

North Carolina defensive end Quinton Coples might be one of the best NFL prospects in the nation, a reputation that could limit his production this season if opponents gang up to shut him down.

But with junior defensive end Donte Paige-Moss anchoring the UNC defensive line right alongside him, Coples doesn't mind being the center of attention.

"It'll give each other a better chance to make plays," Coples said. "They just can't double team me and leave (Paige-Moss) open or double team him and leave me open. I feel like it's great and helps the defense out a lot."

The pair of projected first-round draft picks will headline the 2011 UNC defensive line, which has been one of the most talked-about positions during the offseason.

According to an ESPN.com report, the NCAA returned to Chapel Hill in May to question Coples about his attendance at an NFL draft party. But just more than a month later, the NCAA cleared the Tar Heel of any wrongdoing.

Coples' innocence was no doubt a relief for interim head coach Everett Withers, who said he expects the preseason All-ACC selection to be a leader on the North Carolina squad this season — in whatever capacity that may be.

"He understands that whether his numbers increase, decrease, stay the same, somebody else on our defensive line is going to have some production because of his abilities," Withers said.

"And to me, that shows a little bit of maturity about what Quinton Coples is about."

Last season Coples moved from defensive end to defensive tackle and he recorded 59 tackles and a team-high 10 sacks — an achievement which ranked in the top five for defensive tackles

"Be aware, that's what I would say. Be aware of the Carolina defense."

Quinton Coples,
UNC defensive end

nationally.

In 2010, Paige-Moss was second on the team in tackles for loss and sacks, and he recorded a season-high 10 tackles against North Carolina State.

And through the pair's proven excellence, Coples and Paige-Moss have set the bar high for the UNC defenders around them.

"When (Coples) goes down inside, he's very deceptive with his hands and his speed," offensive lineman Jonathan Cooper said. "Donte Moss, he's just speedy and powerful. I mean, those are two tough guys to defend against. You see them in practice and they make us a lot better."

Between the bookends of Coples and Paige-Moss, defensive tackles Jordan Nix and Tydreke Powell will bring both experience and quickness to this season's defensive line.

Powell, also a preseason All-ACC selection, was one of two defensive players to start in all 13 games in 2010.

Nix, a 2008 transfer from Northeast Oklahoma A&M College, started just two games last season for the Tar Heels, but recorded 18 tackles and recovered one fumble.

The outlook for the North Carolina defensive line is good, and expectations for the unit are high.

And to opponents, Coples has but one warning.

"Be aware, that's what I would say," Coples said. "Be aware of the Carolina defense. We're definitely going to come and the objective is to punish."

Contact the Sports Editor
at sports@dailytarheel.com.

Jones to lead squad of young receivers

By Brandon Moree
Assistant Sports Editor

New North Carolina starting quarterback Bryn Renner has seen very limited game action, and similarly, many of his potential targets don't have much experience, either.

With a young receiving corp, Renner will likely lean heavily on senior wide receiver Dwight Jones in 2011.

Jones, who received honorable mention All-ACC honors in 2010, led North Carolina with 62 receptions and 946 yards — a total good for fifth in UNC history.

Also returning to the receiving core will be juniors Erik Highsmith and Jheranie Boyd. Joshua Adams, a redshirt sophomore from Cambridge, Mass., is the only other wide receiver on the roster who is not either a transfer or a true or redshirt freshman.

Highsmith had 25 catches last season and scored three touchdowns, including a 39-yard touchdown catch just before half-time in the Tar Heels' win in the Music City Bowl.

Boyd opened the season last year with a huge game against Louisiana State — in which he had 221 yards on 6 catches and a

"He's a talented guy. We've got to find ways to get the ball to Dwight."

Everett Withers,
Interim head football coach

touchdown. In that game he set the North Carolina record for the longest play from scrimmage, scoring on a play from its own 3-yard line.

Boyd failed to keep up that pace for the rest of the season and only had 89 receiving yards in the other 12 games.

The new faces will be looking to Jones and the other experienced receivers for leadership this season, and Jones already has a game plan in place.

"We just got to come out and make big plays every day and just move the chains," Jones said. "That's our expectation. We know as receivers, we catch the balls. We have to do big things for our offense if we want to win games."

As for helping the new quarterback adjust, Jones knows that his own performance on the field can go a long way in helping Renner settle in as the new facilitator of the North Carolina

offense.

"Coming in, this is going to be Bryn's first time at the collegiate level," Jones said. "I know I have to come in and make a lot of big plays for Bryn to give him great confidence so he can come out every night and do his thing."

Interim head coach Everett Withers knows that Jones' experience will be key to the success of his new quarterback, and the new coach said he likes the attitude that Jones comes to play with.

Surrounding Renner with playmaking teammates on the field on Saturdays, Withers said, is crucial.

"Dwight's a competitor. He's one of those quiet guys that competes," Withers said. "He's a confident guy. He's a talented guy. We've got to find ways to get the ball to Dwight."

But the wide receivers aren't the only inexperienced unit for the North Carolina squad.

With the departure of tight end Zach Pianalto, senior Christian Wilson and junior Nelson Hurst are the only tight ends with game experience.

Last season, Hurst and Wilson combined for only six catches.

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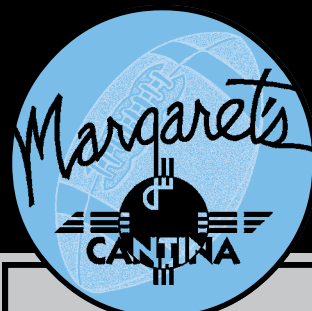
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DTH FILE PHOTO

Running back Ryan Houston carries the ball up the field. Houston, who redshirted last season, will return to Kenan Stadium on Saturday against JMU.

Returning running backs ready to make an impact

By Mark Thompson
Senior Writer

Ryan Houston could very easily become Bryn Renner's best friend this season.

Houston, who is expected to lead the North Carolina backfield this season, was withheld from the first five games of the 2010 season until he was cleared in the NCAA's investigation into the UNC football program. Houston then elected to redshirt to have a full senior year of eligibility.

The decision followed a breakout junior season at North Carolina, in which the 245-pound power back rushed for a career-best 713 yards and nine touchdowns, leading all UNC rushers in both categories.

But don't expect the same Houston to take the field in 2011. In fact, don't expect any familiar faces in the backfield.

Leading rushers Shaun Draughn and Johnny White graduated, and a new cast of running backs has taken their place.

Redshirt freshman Giovanni Bernard came to North Carolina in 2010 as the No. 12-ranked running back in the nation by Rivals.com, but he didn't play a down of football after he tore his ACL on the third day of fall practice.

"It's a blessing just to be able to come back out here and to know that I'm 100 percent and to be able to show everybody that I'm 100 percent. And to show everybody that I am better than I was in high school," Bernard said.

In high school Bernard rushed for 1,528 yards with 18 touchdowns on 160 carries as a junior — nearly 10 yards per carry.

Division I football might dwarf prep ball, but Renner seems to think Bernard is prepared for a good year.

"I think he's kind of like (NFL running back) Maurice Jones-Drew," Renner said. "He's very quick. He makes great jump cuts in the hole. I think that's what we need."

That's high praise for a player who hasn't taken a single handoff at North Carolina. But interim head coach Everett Withers expresses the same sentiments about Bernard.

"I know as a coaching staff we want to take care of him because we think he's going to be exceptional," Withers said. "He epitomizes to me what you look for in a tailback and what you want as a student athlete on your campus."

Bernard's willing to do whatever the team needs. Line him up in the backfield or in the slot, he won't question it — just as long as he gets the chance to impact the game.

"I see myself fitting in anywhere," Bernard said. "Whatever they feel I need to do to help this team win, I'm going to do it."

Another player who has already tried to fit in a few other positions is A.J. Blue. Blue was a former quarterback with whom the Tar Heels attempted to run a Wildcat offense in 2009.

In some respects, each of UNC's backfield options has struggled to consistently contribute in the past. Two are returning from a missed season, and Blue is looking to add what he can in a new position.

But all three are hungry.

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Withers and Renner go into 2011 with new leadership roles and big shoes to fill.

By Kelly Parsons
Sports Editor

When Bryn Renner learned that coach Butch Davis had been fired, the quarterback had to let it all sink in a little bit. Even though Renner — whose father coaches Davis' son Drew at East Chapel Hill High — had yet to start a football game at North Carolina, he and Davis shared a close bond.

But while it was tough to see Davis go, Renner wasn't going to let anything shake his focus less than six weeks away from kickoff.

This was his year.

So when defensive coordinator Everett Withers was promoted to interim head football coach just days after Davis' dismissal, Renner paid him a visit.

Both Renner and Withers had the tall task before them of following in the footsteps of great success, but Renner wanted to let his new coach know they were in this together.

"I just went to his office and said 'We're ready to get this thing going,'" Renner said. "I let everything kind of settle down, and I just wanted to get back to playing football.

"I think that's what the team wanted to do, so I just wanted to let him know we had his back and whatever he needed, I was going to be there for him."

A leader emerges

On Dec. 30, 2010, four-year starting quarterback T.J. Yates took his last snap as a Tar Heel in North Carolina's 30-27 overtime win against Tennessee in the Music City Bowl.

For the Tar Heels, the first bowl win in nine years was a reason for celebration. But for Renner, it was also his cue to get back to work.

He had spent his first two seasons at North Carolina in the shadow of Yates' record-breaking college career. But on that December night, the torch was passed.

"I sent a text (to the team) just saying that we're going to keep this going, and we're going to do bigger things than the Music City Bowl," Renner said. "I sent it to all the underclassmen and had a little meeting with them, just trying to get their mind right for this upcoming season."

Renner might only have two pass-attempts to his name, but to those around him, he's a seasoned veteran.

Renner didn't get on the game field very often, but



DTH FILE PHOTO

Bryn Renner clutches the football at practice. The quarterback has attempted just two passes in games for North Carolina.

during his season as backup quarterback, he relished every practice rep he could get.

And Renner's determination — even when nothing but his own growth was on the line — quickly caught Withers' eye.

"I used to challenge Bryn every day when I was the defensive coordinator to go down there and light us up on the scout team," Withers said. "Some of those guys would really, truly get upset with him because he would tear us up in practice. But he made us better.

"From that point, when I first had my association with Bryn, I said, 'This is a special guy right here.'"

A last-minute change

Like Renner, Everett Withers had never been "the" guy.

For 24 years, the former Appalachian State defensive back had served in a variety of different coaching roles for multiple college and professional football teams, but he always had someone on the squads to answer to.

On July 28, all of that changed.

"I want those guys to know me a little bit better on the other side."

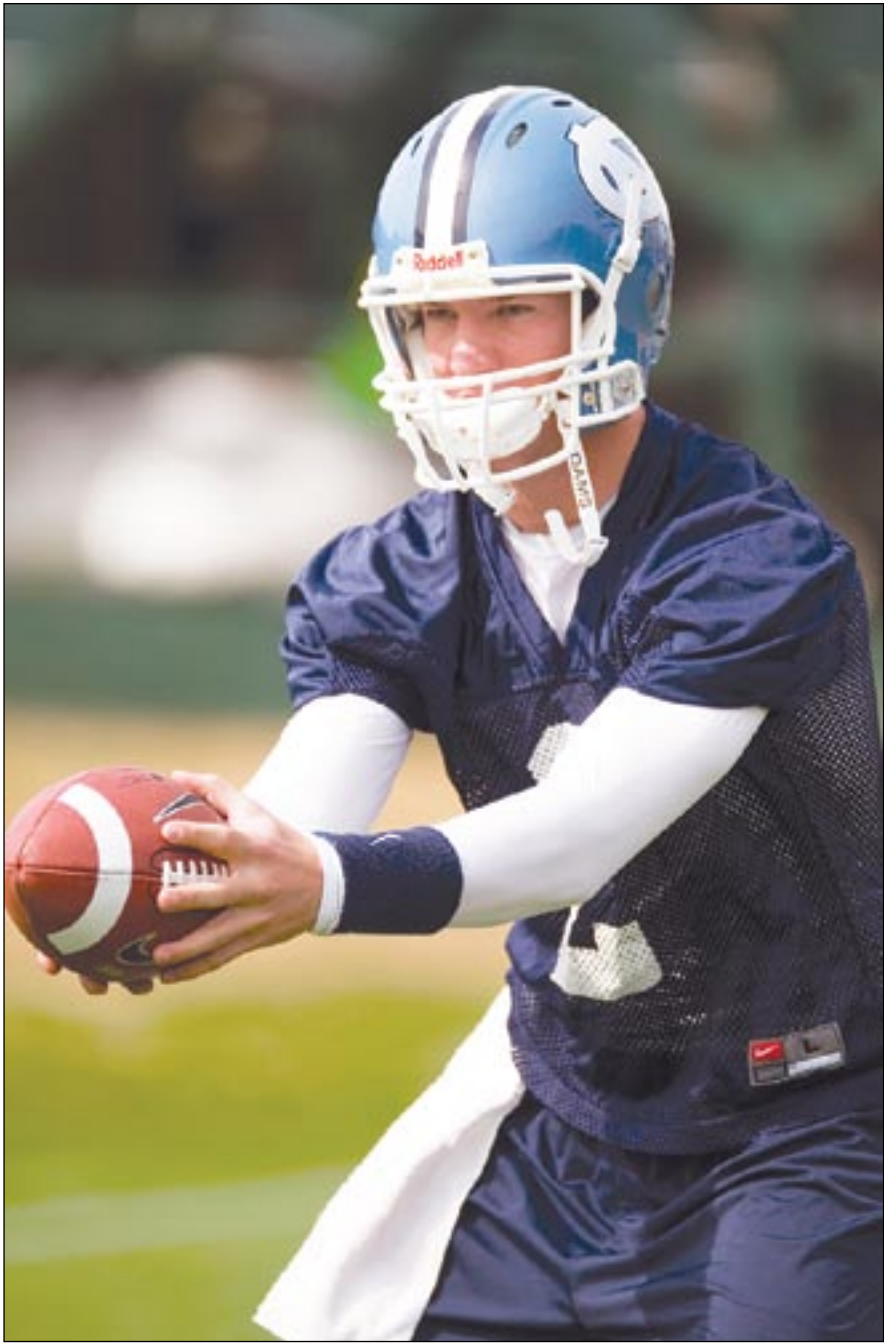
Everett Withers,
Interim head football coach

After spending three seasons as defensive coordinator for UNC, the opportunity for Withers to become a collegiate head coach fell in his lap when he was promoted to fill the interim position.

With just six weeks to spare until kickoff, Withers knew he had a lot to learn. And the defensive-minded coach knew just where to start.

"I spend a lot of time with (the offense), trying to get to know them and also encouraging them," Withers said. "I've been on that other side for so long, that I feel comfortable now with what's going on on the defense. I want those guys to know me a little bit better on the other side."

But beyond learning the X's and O's, Withers faced the task of uniting a team that had just been blindsided by change.



DTH FILE PHOTO

Renner hands off the ball at practice. The redshirt sophomore played backup quarterback to T.J. Yates in 2010 and will take his first snap as a starter against James Madison.

Davis had been known as a player's coach, and many of the North Carolina football team members were sad to see him go.

Davis brought in several top recruiting classes during his four-year career at UNC, and the veteran coach helped put North Carolina football back on the map.

But much to safety Matt Merletti's delight — and surprise — the coaching transition was much smoother than he expected.

"He obviously has a way bigger role than he's used to, and he's done a much better job than I think anybody anticipated," Merletti said.

"It's like he's always been the coach. With everything that happened a few weeks ago, with coach Davis leaving, nobody's even thinking about that. Everybody's just focused on the game."

In this together

As Renner took questions from reporters Monday after the first game-week press conference of the season, he sat comfortably on a chair in front of a plaque

2011 FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	LOCATION	TIME
Sept. 3	vs. James Madison	Chapel Hill, N.C.	3:30 PM
Sept. 10	vs. Rutgers	Chapel Hill, N.C.	12:30 PM
Sept. 17	vs. Virginia	Chapel Hill, N.C.	3:30 PM
Sept. 24	at Georgia Tech	Atlanta, Ga.	TBA
Oct. 1	at East Carolina	Greenville, N.C.	8:00 PM
Oct. 8	vs. Louisville	Chapel Hill, N.C.	TBA
Oct. 15	vs. Miami	Chapel Hill, N.C.	TBA
Oct. 22	at Clemson	Clemson, S.C.	TBA
Oct. 29	vs. Wake Forest	Chapel Hill, N.C.	TBA
Nov. 5	at NC State	Raleigh, N.C.	TBA
Nov. 17	at Virginia Tech	Blacksburg, Va.	8:00 p.m. ET
Nov. 26	vs. Duke	Chapel Hill, N.C.	TBA



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Everett Withers speaks to the media at a press conference on Monday. At the conference, Withers announced the team captains and talked about Saturday's game against JMU.



DTH/ALLISON RUSSELL

Everett Withers spent three years as North Carolina's defensive coordinator before being promoted to interim head coach in July. Withers, who played defensive back at Appalachian State, is in his 24th season of coaching.

Contact the Sports Editor
at sports@dailytarheel.com.

Tigers look to overcome last year's losing season in 2011

By Matt Cox
Staff Writer

Despite bringing in a third consecutive highly touted recruiting class, Clemson coach Dabo Swinney's job depends on improving last year's 6-7 record — the school's first losing season since 1998.

Since taking over halfway through the 2008 season, Swinney has compiled a 19-15 overall record

and led the Tigers to the 2009 Atlantic Division title.

But so far, he has failed to overcome Clemson's reputation as a perennial underachiever.

"We hear it, but we're not focused on that inside," said defensive lineman Brandon Thompson about the pressure on Swinney.

"We're just focused on being great players, being dominant players, and if we do that right... it's all going to fall in line."

Thompson is one of five returning starters for a Clemson defense that led the ACC in scoring defense last season. But in 2011, the Tigers have the tall task of replacing last year's ACC Defensive Player of the Year Da'Quan Bowers and leading tackler DeAndre McDaniel.

Tony Steward, the nation's top-rated linebacker in the class of 2011, will attempt to help fill that void.

"We brought in a strong freshman linebacker corps and I feel like all of them are going to come together with the veterans," Thompson said. "I'm looking forward to them getting on the field."

The offense returns eight starters from the 2010 season, but will rely on inexperienced sophomore Tajh Boyd to replace Kyle Parker at quarterback.

Swinney hired offensive coordinator Chad Morris, who coached with Auburn's Gus Malzahn at Tulsa, to implement a style similar to that of Auburn's.

"I felt like this offense was going to really feature the skill set of Boyd," Swinney said. "I want to be one of the top offenses in the country. I felt like this was going to allow us to become that."

This season, Boyd will throw to last season's leading receiver DeAndre Hopkins and wide receiver Jaron Brown, who had more than 100 receiving yards and a touchdown against UNC last season.

The arrival of two top-five receivers in the 2011 recruiting class gives Boyd plenty of options in the passing game.

Contact the Sports Editor
at sports@dailytarheel.com.

UNC secondary affected by offseason shake-up

By Chris Moore
Staff Writer

In many ways, the North Carolina offseason has been one of turmoil.

And unfortunately for the Tar Heels, it affected a position that could least afford adversity.

North Carolina graduated three senior starters from last year's secondary, leaving just three players — Jabari Price, Matt Merletti and Charles Brown — with significant playing time in the defensive backfield.

Cornerback Mywan Jackson, a promising freshman last year, left the program in early August.

Price, a projected starter at cornerback, injured his hand in preseason practice and will likely miss at least six weeks of action.

But despite the question marks that surround the secondary, coach Everett Withers said the corps has improved tremendously in a short time.

"Some of those guys were thrown into the mix," Withers said. "I think one thing that's evident out in practice so far is that we're going to be a good secondary."

The unit will look to seniors Brown and safety Jonathan Smith to be leaders for the secondary.

Brown, who sat out all of last year and will sit out the first game of the 2011 season, brings the most experience as well as six career interceptions to the field.

Smith, who was also sidelined for the entire 2010 season, has embraced his chance to get back on the field and be a positive role model for younger defensive backs.

"He's right now probably playing as good as anybody in the secondary," Withers said. "And we

expect him to lead."

Smith worked on the practice squad to make the transition back to the games easier.

"I've seen a lot of football, been in a lot of situations, so that's definitely helped a lot," Smith said. "Also, because I was doing scout team for the whole year, I wasn't just sitting out and completely off the field."

Sophomore Tre Boston, who was moved from cornerback to safety this offseason, has slid back to cornerback to fill the injured Price's slot.

Merletti, a proven special teams player for the Tar Heels, will start at safety to begin the season.

With so many shake-ups, the unit has had to work hard to get ready for the start of the season.

"The biggest thing that we've actually seen improvement in ourselves is just the chemistry," Smith said. "Just getting back into the groove of things and keeping chemistry and communication with the younger guys."

But despite the confidence Smith and Withers have displayed in the secondary, results still need to come on the field.

All four starters — Brown, Smith, Merletti and Boston — have just nine combined interceptions. But facing a Tar Heel offense that should be proficient in passing this year will undoubtedly help the secondary prepare for game day.

"We've got a good offensive passing system," Withers said. "And if we can do well versus those offensive passes in practice, then I think we've got a chance to be really good on Saturdays."

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Glennon to lead Wolfpack in new role

By Brandon Moree
Assistant Sports Editor

In his junior season, Russell Wilson led N.C. State to an 8-4 (5-3 in the ACC) season, an outing that was strong enough to land the Wolfpack in the Champs Sports Bowl in Orlando, Fla.

The Wolfpack beat West Virginia 23-7 to win their first bowl game since 2005, due largely to Wilson's 275 passing yards and two touchdowns.

The win put N.C. State in the final top-25 rankings for the first time since 2002.

The quarterback turned second baseman also played minor league baseball with the single-A Asheville Tourists. But as Wilson tried to split time between sports, head coach Tom O'Brien decided to make a change.

In April, O'Brien released Wilson from N.C. State, and the former Wolfpack quarterback will play at Wisconsin this season.

Taking the reins and the snaps for the Wolfpack this season will be Mike Glennon, a 6-foot-6-inch, 225-pound graduate student from Centreville, Va. Glennon has been the backup quarterback since he was redshirted in 2008, but that's no knock on Glennon's talent.

"He's going to be awesome," redshirt senior tight end George Bryan said.

"I think everybody's going to be really surprised and really pleased about how good he is. I can just tell when he's throwing the ball, the way he runs offense, the way he knows defenses. I just know he's going to be successful."

O'Brien knows a little something about quarterbacks, and he knew what he was getting with Glennon even before the young signal caller came to N.C. State's campus.

As a senior, Rivals.com ranked Glennon as the third-best quarterback in the nation. Stanford quarterback and potential top

NFL draft pick Andrew Luck was fourth on that list.

"We knew coming out of high school he was really a talented individual," O'Brien said. "He can make every throw on the football field, and of all the guys we've coached at BC — of which four have started in the NFL — he has as much talent as any of them."

Wilson wasn't the only impact player to leave a void in the roster this season, as linebacker Nate Irving graduated and was selected in the third round of this year's NFL draft by the Denver Broncos. Last season Irving led the Wolfpack in sacks.

"Nate was a big playmaker, and he always found himself in the right place, which made him a good player," redshirt senior linebacker Audie Cole said.

"We probably wouldn't have been as good last year without Nate. But I think this year with Terrell (Manning) and my experi-

ence, and then D.J. (Green) being as good of an athlete as he is, I think we're going to be just fine for another year."

After earning his 100th career win in the Champs Sports bowl, O'Brien will have his hands full as

he pushes his team to come from behind the shadows of Wilson and Irving and develop their own identity behind Glennon.

Contact the Sports Editor
at sports@dailytarheel.com.

Rutgers will lean on top-rated recruit for revival

Six years ago, in his fifth season as head coach at Rutgers, Greg Schiano convinced a local high school tailback to stay at home and help reverse the fortunes of Rutgers football, a program looking for its first winning season in 12 years.

Three seasons, three bowl games and nearly 5000 rushing yards later, that tailback — Ray Rice — had taken the Scarlet Knights from the Big East out-house to the league penthouse before he departed for the NFL in 2007, entrenching the program as an annual BCS contender.

But after a 4-8 season in 2010, and just four conference wins in the past two seasons, Schiano finds himself counting on another homegrown halfback in 2011.

Rutgers faithful have already begun the comparisons between Rice and freshman tailback Savon Huggins, hoping the latter can resurrect a rushing attack that mustered just 1,200 yards all last season, good for 11th worst in Division I.

Huggins was the nation's fourth-best high school running

back in 2011 according to both ESPN and Scout.com, making him the highest-ranked recruit in Rutgers history.

That kind of forward momentum might be just the boost required to transform a rather vanilla Scarlet Knight offense into something truly potent in 2011.

Schiano has yet to anoint Huggins the starting tailback for the Scarlet Knights' season opener against North Carolina Central — a week before Rutgers heads to Chapel Hill — but Schiano has made it clear that the freshman is definitely in the running for the starting job.

"I think it's gonna be a kind of play-it-by-ear-type situation," Schiano told ESPN.com.

"Savon's definitely going to play. I don't know -- depending on what we run the first play of the game, will it be Savon, or will it be De'Antwan Williams, or even (redshirt freshman) Jawan Jamison, I don't know how that's gonna go."

In new offensive coordinator Frank Cignetti's pro-style system, a consistent rushing attack should take some pressure off sophomore

quarterback Chas Dodd and allow him to connect with a stable of talented wideouts, led by juniors Mark Harrison and Mohamed Sanu.

The pair combined for nearly 1,250 yards and 11 touchdowns last year and will welcome the return of senior Tim Wright, who was slated to start a year ago before suffering a season-ending knee injury.

A higher-powered offense may be needed in order to compensate for the Scarlet Knights' defense, which must replace four of its top six tacklers.

Huggins reminded the defense just how far it must come in a recent intrasquad scrimmage, torching the first-teamers for 168 yards.

And though critical of his unit's performance, middle linebacker Steve Beauharnais was able to point to at least one bright spot from Huggins' big day.

"Obviously, it's not good when he does it against us," Beauharnais told the Newark Star-Ledger. "On the good side, he's on our team."

From staff and wire reports
Compiled by Kevin Minogue

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Blue Devils ready to end postseason drought

By Jonathan LaRowe
Staff Writer

Duke hasn't qualified for a bowl game since 1994 — the longest postseason drought in the ACC.

But don't tell that to senior safety Matt Daniels.

"Matt Daniels expects a championship, just like the rest of the Duke community should expect, just like the rest of my teammates should expect," Daniels said.

But before any talk of contending for a championship, Duke must improve upon a defense that ranked 108th overall in the country in points allowed per game.

"The defense was last in a lot of categories, and we're just trying to find ways where we can improve that," Daniels said. "I'm really excited about this defense. We have a lot of talent out there on the field."

While the defense still has a lot of work to do, the offense was much more respectable in 2010. The Duke passing attack finished 22nd in the country in passing yards per game last season.

But the running game was far behind, ranking only 104th in rushing yards per game.

"We didn't run the ball as effectively as we wanted to," quarterback Sean Renfree said. "But the running game will certainly go up and as the running game goes up, I think the passing game will as well."

For the first time since he took over as head coach in Dec. 2007, David Cutcliffe did not improve upon his team's win total from the previous year.

After taking the reins from former head coach Ted Roof, who managed



DTH FILE PHOTO

Former UNC wide receiver Hakeem Nicks scores a touchdown against Duke in Durham in 2008. Last season, UNC beat the Blue Devils 24-19.

only one win in 2007, Cutcliffe won four and five games respectively in 2008 and 2009 before falling to only three wins last year.

But Cutcliffe knows that he has a quarterback that is capable of big things.

"He has got to utilize his athleticism and do the things he was doing the last part of the year, and he's got the chance to be a great player," Cutcliffe said. "Not a good player, but a great player."

In his first year as the starter, Renfree threw for 3,131 yards and 14 touchdowns. But he also threw 17 interceptions.

Renfree admits that he has to take better care of the football.

"I can make smarter decisions, that's going to help," Renfree said. "You don't have to think you can win games on every single drive."

During ACC media day, Cutcliffe

preached about the importance of competition within his team.

"Old fashioned competition is what makes any business better," he said.

With five of the last six games against UNC being decided by one score or less, Duke may be poised to end a seven-year drought against the Tar Heels.

But if the Blue Devils are going to qualify for a bowl game and contend for a championship, it will most likely be as an underdog.

And that is a role that the Blue Devils are happy to take on.

"This year's our year to be that Cinderella team," Daniels said.

"You know that team that no one expects to do anything big. I think this year is ours."

Contact the Sports Editor at sports@dailytarheel.com.



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ECU seeks improved season with McNeill

Factors are stacking in East Carolina's favor as the team moves into a far different role from the one it played just a year ago.

At the beginning of the 2010 season, the ECU football program faced several key changes.

After serving as an assistant coach at Texas Tech for a decade, ECU alumnus Ruffin McNeill accepted his first head coaching position at his alma mater.

Eleven of the 20 football coaches, including McNeill, were new to East Carolina in 2010, and the Pirates lost more letterman players at the end of the 2009 season than any other college FBS team in the country.

And after posting a 6-6 regular season record in 2010 and losing to Mayland 51-20 in the Military Bowl, the Pirates felt the loss of their graduated playmakers.

But despite disappointments, McNeill and his squad tried to take away positives from a lackluster season.

"We were able to do some things that were overlooked at times," McNeill said at ECU's media day. "To be one of two first-year staffs in the country to win five or more conference games was a third positive from a year ago."

Some of the failures from the 2010 season caused McNeill and his coaching staff to move from a 4-3 defensive lineup to a 3-4 scheme.

McNeill and his staff are well-versed in the 3-4 system. But perhaps more important than the advantage ECU looks to gain from the defensive switch is the presence of a more experienced coaching staff on the sideline.

"One of the things that helps is keeping your staff together," McNeill told ECU Pirates.com.

"Continuity with the coaching staff is key. If you look at some of the best programs in the country, they've kept their staffs intact. We were very fortunate to keep our staff together this year."

The continuity in staff and a returning starting quarterback are two advantages the Pirates will have against North Carolina when the two play this year.

North Carolina outscored East Carolina by 25 points in the



DTH FILE PHOTO

East Carolina defenders attempt to stop a Tar Heel football player at Kenan Stadium. In 2010, ECU lost to North Carolina 42-17 in Chapel Hill.

second half of last season's game and the Tar Heels cruised to a 42-17 win.

For the Pirates, pulling out a win in the Oct. 1 game would serve as a measure of how far they've come in just one year.

But the ultimate goal is still a Conference USA title.

"We just have to give (the offense) the chance to move

the ball up and down the field," linebacker Justin Dixon told the Fayetteville Observer.

"If we can do that, then we could put two or three more wins on the board. That would put us right up there in the conference race."

*From staff and wire reports
Compiled by Marilyn Payne*



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SCANLIFE

Miami bogged down by ineligibility

By Ryan Davis
Staff Writer

The University of Miami and its football program may be under more scrutiny at the moment than any other team in the nation, and

the Hurricanes will start its 2011 campaign without key players.

The NCAA announced Tuesday that eight players, including quarterback Jacory Harris and second-team All-ACC safety Ray-Ray Armstrong, will miss at least

one game and have to pay back benefits before becoming eligible again.

When Miami's ineligible players return to the field, the Hurricanes will return six offensive starters from last season's 7-6 campaign.

The majority of those returners make up the Hurricanes' offensive line — a position in which Miami returns four of five starters from last season, including preseason All-ACC selections center Tyler Horn and guard Brandon Washington.

At the ACC Football Kickoff in Pinehurst, Horn said there's no question that new coach Al Golden is bringing a sense of urgency back to Miami.

"Fans can expect a new energy," Horn said. "I know you hear that all the time, but you can expect a new energy and players who are excited to play for the University of Miami and win games."

The question marks start to show up when you zoom out to

Miami's skill positions. Top 2010 receiver Leonard Hankerson and running back Damien Berry must be replaced, and senior quarterback Jacory Harris has been battling sophomore Stephen Morris throughout the summer for the starting job.

Harris, who will miss just one game due to ineligibility, was disappointing as often as he was brilliant over the course of his junior campaign, throwing more interceptions (15) than touchdowns (14).

Morris, on the other hand, was impressive while starting the final four regular season games for the Hurricanes — earning a 125.01 quarterback efficiency rating and compiling 1,240 passing yards.

After Notre Dame defenders intercepted three of Harris' first seven pass attempts in the 2010 Sun Bowl, he was replaced by Morris, who impressed Miami fans yet again.

Although he threw an interception

of his own, Morris brought life to a stagnant Miami offense, completing 22 of his 33 passes for 282 yards and two scores.

Miami's defense could return up to seven starters to a stingy group that allowed only 150.5 passing yards per game last season. It's a unit that boasts two preseason All-ACC selections of its own in linebacker Sean Spence and safety Ray-Ray Armstrong.


Armstrong will miss six games due to ineligibility, while Spence will miss just one.

With a solid defense in place, preparing a successful starting quarterback and replacing 2010 veterans will be at the top of Golden's to-do list.

It's a tall task, but there are plenty of talented players in Coral Gables ready to step up and fill the void. The only question for Miami is whether or not they will.

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Georgia Tech getting the hang of defensive scheme

By Zach Hamilton
Staff Writer

Georgia Tech enters its fourth season under head coach Paul Johnson amid a myriad of highs and lows surrounding the football program.

A positive for Georgia Tech is that Johnson's option-based spread offense has been extremely effective in his first three seasons in Atlanta, disproving pundits and dumbfounding defensive coordinators.

Analysts may question its effectiveness, but the Georgia Tech players have faith in Johnson's flexbone offense.

"We led the nation in rushing (last year)," senior halfback Roddy Jones said. "You can see that we moved the ball, and we moved the ball very well."

The Yellow Jackets averaged an NCAA-best 323.3 rushing yards per game in 2010, including a 372-yards rushing performance in Georgia Tech's 30-24 victory in Chapel Hill last season.

Another positive for Georgia Tech is that players on the other side of the ball are starting to grasp second-year defen-

sive coordinator Al Groh's 3-4 scheme.

"I feel like we've definitely gotten over the hill," senior defensive tackle Logan Walls said.

"The hardest part was learning how the communication process (works), how we go from safeties to linebackers down to the defensive line. I think the defensive line and the defense is all on the same page."

The Yellow Jackets have a lot going for them in 2011, but a variety of on- and off-field issues could prove to be crucial this season.

Off the field, Georgia Tech is in the process of appealing NCAA sanctions that were passed down in July.

Georgia Tech faces the vacation of its 2009 ACC championship, a fine of \$100,000 and four years of probation as sanctions for failure to cooperate with an NCAA investigation into the Yellow Jackets' football and men's basketball teams.

"It is what it is and you just move forward," Johnson said about the sanctions. "You go on. The administration will handle it from here."

On the field, the Yellow Jackets face the challenging task of competing with a very young squad.

Johnson said his team will rely on leadership from the more experienced players as the younger players — many of whom were redshirted last season — are brought up to speed.

Jones and junior quarterback Tevin Washington will seek to effectively replace departed starting duo of halfback Anthony Allen and quarterback Joshua Nesbitt.

In 2010, Allen was the ACC's leading rusher with 1,316 yards, and the Allen-Nesbitt duo combined for 2,222 total rushing yards.

In their second year of Groh's 3-4 scheme, the Yellow Jackets will try to improve from last year — when Georgia Tech finished ninth in the ACC in both scoring and total defense.

North Carolina travels to Bobby Dodd Stadium on September 24th, where the Tar Heels haven't won since 1997.

Contact the Sports Editor
at sports@dailytarheel.com.

The Daily Tar Heel

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Virginia Tech looks to repeat ACC title run

By Pace Sagester
Staff Writer

Since joining the ACC in 2004, Virginia Tech has won the conference championship four times, including three of the last four.

The Hokies have appeared in four of the six ACC title games, twice as many as any other school in the conference. Virginia Tech

is also the only program in the country to win at least ten games in each of the past seven seasons.

This season, however, coach Frank Beamer will debut a very different Virginia Tech squad.

The 2011 edition of the Hokies will be without their entire starting backfield from a year ago, as quarterback Tyrod Taylor and running backs Darren Evans and

Ryan Williams bolted for the NFL.

Defensively, Virginia Tech returns a meager five starters from last season's ACC Championship team. With so much turnover for the defending champions, it seems 2011 might be the year a team can steal the Hokies' crown.

"The league is getting stronger every year," Beamer said. "The programs are all getting better. You have to be good but you also have to be lucky."

Luckily for Virginia Tech, red-shirt sophomore Logan Thomas and junior David Wilson are poised to fill the void in the backfield.

Thomas is faced with the monumental task of filling Taylor's shoes at quarterback. The two are very different players, as Thomas is much more of a pocket passer than Taylor and stands five inches taller.

But for Thomas, the comparisons to Taylor are going to be hard to avoid.

"There is no doubt that some of Tyrod has rubbed off on Logan," senior wide receiver Danny Coale said. "He definitely learned some things, but I think he is a natural born quarterback. He takes a lot of pride in his position."

Like Thomas, Wilson will also have to outrun the shadow of his predecessors, as Evans ran for over 1,000 yards in 2008 and Williams ran for over 1,500 yards in 2009.

Wilson showed glimpses of greatness as the third string back in 2010, running for five touchdowns with limited touches.

Defensively, the Hokies will have to battle back from an uncharacteristically weak season in 2010. Virginia Tech ranked 52nd in total defense a year ago.

"Last year we were 52nd," preseason All-ACC safety Eddie Whitley said. "I don't even want to say the number again. That was outrageously high. We need to do better."

Led by All-American cornerback Jayron Hosley, who led the nation with nine interceptions last season, Beamer will try to right the ship on defense in his twenty-fifth season at Virginia Tech.

Despite Virginia Tech's inexperience on both sides of the ball, the Hokies are confident the road to the ACC title still runs through Blacksburg.

Contact the Sports Editor
at sports@dailytarheel.com.



DTH FILE/ALLISON RUSSELL

A UNC defender tackles a Virginia Tech player. UNC lost to the Hokies 26-10 in Chapel Hill in 2010, and the Hokies went on to win the ACC title.

London promotes 'winning attitude'

By Michael Lananna
Assistant Sports Editor

For Virginia, 2010 was supposed to be a year of transition. On paper, though, very little actually changed.

Under new coach Mike London, the Cavaliers once again finished at the bottom of the Coastal Division, going 4-8 (1-7 in the ACC).

But London, who compiled a 24-5 record during his two years as Richmond's head coach, remains committed to injecting life into the struggling football program.

"I talk about winning and the attitude of winning," London said. "The only way you develop an attitude of winning is winning games ... and that's a mindset and development that's been missing for a while."

As the Cavaliers enter the 2011 season, they'll have to find a way to replace the 2,799 passing yards and 14 touchdowns senior quarterback Marc Verica supplied a year ago.

Sophomore quarterbacks Ross Metheny and Michael Rocco were the frontrunners to snag the starting spot, and London announced Monday that Rocco will start Virginia's first game against William & Mary.

"You don't want it to carry on and linger because you can't give four guys or three guys the reps to try and find out who number one is," London said. "We're going to find out early who one and two are."

Rocco will be leading an aerial attack that was potent a year ago.

The Cavaliers finished third in the ACC in passing offense with 265.5 yards per game, and their leading receiver, senior Kris Byrd, remains in the fold.

In total Virginia will return 17 starters, including senior cornerback Chase Minnifield — an ACC Preseason Team selection. Minnifield ranked fifth in the nation with six interceptions and was a bright spot for a defense that at times struggled to keep points off the board.

While much of the starting lineup will be returning on both sides of the ball, London said he wouldn't hesitate to dip into his newest recruiting class.

"It's hard from the line position because it's an issue of being strong enough and things like that," London said.

"But there's a lot of young men on this team of skill position that can run, catch, do things with the ball, so we're looking to see if we can take advantage of that. If they're ready, then we're ready."

UVa. will get their first taste of ACC action in Chapel Hill on Sept. 17, and if the team hopes to improve on last season's 1-7 conference performance, it'll need to play cleaner games.

Virginia averaged the third most penalty yards per game in the NCAA last season, drawing 98 flags. Avoiding penalties will be a key issue for London as he tries to lead a football renaissance in Charlottesville.

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Wake Forest

Following a lackluster 2010 season in which his team finished 3-9 with just one win in ACC play, Jim Grobe and Wake Forest are ready to put last season in the rearview mirror.

With a young, albeit experienced, offense in Winston-Salem, the turnaround will start and end with the defense.

Louisville

Complacency won't cut it for Louisville this season.

Coach Charlie Strong, who is in his second year at Louisville, refuses to let his team relax despite last year's unexpected 7-6 record and bowl win.

And being ranked seventh in the eight-team Big East Conference, there's a lot to prove for the young squad led by only 16 seniors.

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