

# WAITING HIS TURN

Mitch Trubisky ready to take control of Tar Heels

By C Jackson Cowart  
Sports Editor

Mitch Trubisky sat on the bench, waiting patiently to hear his name. He knew he wouldn't. As a red-shirt, the North Carolina quarterback was fortunate to even make the short trip to Raleigh in 2013. But with only a few players at his position,

Trubisky became a last-resort backup.

This was unfamiliar territory for the first-year quarterback. He came to campus as the top dual-threat commit in the country, and he had never ridden the bench in his life — not when healthy. But eight games into his first collegiate season, he hadn't played a snap.

This wasn't the plan. He was supposed to be the centerpiece of the Tar Heels' offense, not a spectator to it.

He knew his time would come; he just didn't know when.

In the third quarter, senior starter Bryn Renner collided with two Wolfpack defenders. Fractured left shoulder — his career was finished.

"Everything was starting to move fast, because I didn't know if I was gonna go in or if I was gonna continue to watch," Trubisky said.

"A part of me was like, 'Oh, I think I need to keep my redshirt.' But the other part of me was like, 'I hope they put me in the game, so I can really get my shot right now.'"

The Tar Heels turned to Marquise Williams — then a red-shirt sophomore — to close out the game. But then there was Trubisky, redshirt in hand and the starting quarterback job within his grasp.

So shortly after the game, the coaches came calling. Not for Trubisky, but for his parents.

"We said basically, 'It's up to you,'" said Jeanne, Trubisky's mother. "If you think he's ready, then pull it. If not, then don't pull it."

He wasn't ready.

The next week, Williams started against

Virginia — posting a passing, rushing and receiving touchdown against the overmatched Cavaliers. Three years later, Trubisky is yet to start a game.

"Looking back on it, you never know what would have been different if I went in there," said the red-shirt junior, who enters this season as UNC's starting quarterback. "But everything works out for a reason."

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In Mentor, Ohio, everyone knows his name.

To his family, he's Mitchell. To the tens of thousands that packed the stadiums of Northeast Ohio every Friday night, he's Mr. Football.

To Steve Trivisonno — the head coach of Mentor High School — he's someone else entirely.

"They used to call him Brett Favre," he said. "He was that kind of kid."

Trubisky made his name from a young age — winning five straight Punt, Pass, and Kick titles and commanding a spread offense in the state championship game when he was 10-years-old.

After a broken ankle shortened his junior varsity season, Trubisky entered his sophomore season with something to prove on the varsity stage. Senior do-it-all quarterback Colton Wallace manned the Mentor offense, yet Trubisky was clearly the more gifted passer.

But he wasn't ready — not in his coaches' minds. So he sat on the bench, waiting to hear his name.

Week after week, Trubisky rotated into the game — usually on third-and-long — and delivered strikes to his teammates. But the next play, Trivisonno would give the nod to the athletic veteran.

"You're always frustrated when you think you're better," Jeanne said. "But

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DTH/JOSÉ VALLE, ALEX KORMANN

## Elijah Hood tries to grasp his own expansive mind

The junior running back's talents extend past the football field.

By Brendan Marks  
Senior Writer

Maybe this is all too much to handle, too lofty for a man with a mind he does not fully understand.

His intellect is extraordinary. But under control?

No. His thoughts have no discernible beginning or end. They move in a circle — no, in a zigzag, with the arrow always pointing the opposite direction. Or maybe they're even more untraceable than that. Maybe they weave and wind and overlap. Maybe they're squiggles.

So, is this too much to expect?

Don't ask Elijah Hood, North Carolina's junior running back. He didn't choose to be this way, with the thoughts and the questions and above all, the curiosity.

"I just have a brain that likes to know and think," Hood says. "I really don't know what the deal is with that."

He shrugs. "It's just I already know what I am. I wanna know more about the other stuff. And the more I know about other stuff, I think the more I end up knowing about myself."

So you see, Hood is destined for something better, but who the hell knows what?

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The bird is colorful, mostly a bright green. Hood is two years old, yet he's been given naming rights.

One Eye, he decides. The bird has two.

His mother, Melica, is confused. It takes her a year to figure out Elijah's thought process.

"You know in the cartoons, the pirates always have a bird and they have the patch over

one of their eyes?" she says.

"It's like that. Pirates having only one eye.

"For somebody that was two, that was a lot of complex thinking."

It might seem trivial, but it's a connection nonetheless. It doesn't matter that it's between a real bird and a cartoon one. This is the first; more will follow. It's the spark.

That early ability to see one eye where there are two doesn't go away. It surfaces in Lego towers and chapter books and building blocks.

One of his early schools, Charlotte Montessori School, fosters his curiosity. Hood learns to knit, garden, do arts and crafts. It is an eclectic and unusual mix of talents.

It is also the beginning.

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At age five, that curiosity leads Elijah to the football field. His father played before him, and his uncles, and his grandfather. He'd start with flag football and work his way up.

Or not.

"I was a rough kid and I said, 'I'll tackle people anyway,'" Hood says. "They kicked me out of the game."

So, he waits until he's seven, and then picks up like he never left. He's a defensive lineman at first, one of the big kids who hits people.

He switches to running back in middle school and finds a home. His sophomore year at Charlotte Catholic High School, his first as the varsity starter, he runs for 34 touchdowns and almost 2,000 yards. Before long, every major college football program — Alabama, Ohio State, Michigan — is begging Elijah to join.

He narrows his choices to two: Notre Dame and UNC. Continue the Catholic tradition, or stay close to home?

He picks Notre Dame.

"I thought that's where I

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DTH/ALEX KORMANN

Defensive tackle Nazair Jones (90) practices pass rushing the quarterback during a team training session on Tuesday afternoon.

## For Nazair Jones, sacrifice equals success

The UNC defensive tackle endured a long and painful road back to the gridiron.

By Logan Ulrich  
Senior Writer

Once a week, Nazair Jones makes his way along the carpeted floors in the bowels of Kenan Stadium to poke his massive frame into the athletic trainer's office.

Hey Kenny. Hey Naz.

The trainer takes a tube about six inches long marked "Enbrel" from the fridge and gives it to North Carolina's star defensive tackle. His hands envelop it completely. He takes the top off of the tube to expose the needle, swabs a bared thigh with an alcohol wipe — this week it's the right leg, next week it'll be the left — and sticks the needle into the muscle.

It takes 15 seconds, tops. After almost 170 injections, Naz has gotten quite good at this. It's pain now or more pain later. And it's been a long time since he wasn't hurting.

He was hurting the first time he met Coach Larry Fedora. They were talking in the weight room at Roanoke Rapids

High School. Fedora had come to see the player people were saying could be the next great Tar Heel defensive lineman. He hailed from the same area that produced Kareem Martin and Kentwan Balmer, but people saw shades of Julius Peppers when they watched him play.

But, at that moment, even a ghost would have been bigger than Naz.

He had recovered enough from his illness to graduate from a wheelchair to crutches, yet the once robust, 250-pound player Fedora had seen wrecking opponents on film had wasted away in only a month.

After a few minutes of conversation, he interrupted Fedora.

Coach, do you mind if I sit down? The pain is ... I just can't stand up.

"I walked away from there, him weighing 218 pounds, thinking, 'Man, he's going to be lucky if he ever gets to play the game,'" Fedora said.

### Sacrifice equals success

The odds were against Naz from the beginning.

He was the son of a single mom in Roanoke Rapids — one of the poorest cities in the country. And for a while, he was running with the wrong crowd. His

mom thought her son would be pulled under sooner or later. So, Naz made some changes.

When he was 16, he emblazoned the words 'sacrifice equals success' in ink on his left arm. Reaching his dreams cost some friendships, but in his own words, eff it.

"I kind of created that mentality when I go into a lot of things," Naz said. "Just say eff it and just go about it."

Homework due for a class? Extra conditioning because the first-years don't know how to practice hard yet? Just eff it and just do it, Naz says.

A shot every week to blunt pain that's been constant since 2011? That's easy — just eff it and do it. Sacrifice equals success.

"I think that tattoo really explains his journey to where he is now," said senior defensive end Mikey Bart, who was a part of the same recruiting class as Naz and will start alongside him this season. "He's overcome a lot."

After his team lost in the playoffs his junior year of high school, Naz came home and fell asleep playing video games on the couch, trying to numb the pain of the loss. He woke up the next

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**TRUBISKY**  
FROM PAGE 1

when there's a senior ahead of you, you just be patient and work hard."

Finally, Trubisky earned the starting nod after outdueling Willoughby South star Ray Russ in a 48-47 win. Six wins later, Trubisky had piloted a 1-3 team to the playoffs.

It wasn't until junior year that Trubisky's name climbed up national recruiting boards. The top programs in the country started calling the Trubiskys, who visited seven different states looking for the quarterback's new home.

But Trubisky wasn't the only hot name at quarterback. "We went to two or three visits to Ohio State, and the recruiting coordinator finally came up and said, 'It becomes

a waiting game right now,'" his father Dave said. "And as soon as Mitchell heard that he's like, 'Okay, that's it, I'm not waiting around for these guys anymore.'"

When then-UNC quarterbacks coach Blake Anderson came to Mentor after the 2011 season, Trubisky had to act fast.

So he and Trivisonno packed up and headed to Chapel Hill for a day trip. It didn't take long before the quarterback knew where he wanted to be.

Before the trip back to Ohio, Trubisky called his parents to tell them the news: He wanted to be a Tar Heel.

"It was a whirlwind, and we were kind of stunned," Dave said. "Because that was the only school we didn't go visit with him."

Dave pressed his son on the

pros and cons of the school: the weather, the distance, the offensive fit. But Trubisky had no doubts about his decision. He was ready.

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Trubisky couldn't wait any longer.

After redshirting the 2013 season, the second-year quarterback entered the spring with a starting role in his sights. But after leading UNC to a bowl win in 2013, Williams still had the edge in a fierce positional battle.

"Some days we didn't like each other, some days we loved each other ..." Trubisky said. "You're both fighting for a job; you're both fighting for your dreams."

Trubisky traded offseason reps with his older teammate,

both in the spring game and throughout practice. And when training camp rolled around, he felt confident that this would be the year.

But Coach Larry Fedora had different plans, naming Williams the starter after the Tar Heels' first game of the 2014 season.

Throughout the year, Fedora brought in Trubisky at random intervals — something all too familiar to the former Mentor star. A touchdown here, an interception there — It made no difference.

Trubisky's dreams of starting for the Tar Heels were slipping away. Week after week, he watched from the sidelines as Williams led the way. What was he doing this for?

"I was always thinking, 'Well, if I'm not gonna get my opportunity here, maybe I

need to go somewhere else."

He thought of his NFL aspirations and playing time and the distance to home. But his teammates knew what he was capable of. And they made sure to remind him.

"I told him I loved him," said senior Ryan Switzer, his roommate for four years. "I told him that God has a different plan for all of us. I knew that I wanted the best for him, whether it was leaving or staying."

"But I told him if he would stay, his time was going to come."

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When Trubisky roamed the streets of Chapel Hill to celebrate his birthday on Aug. 20, nobody stared or yelled when he entered the room.

He prefers it this way — a

quiet night in the place he's grown to love with the friends that kept him there.

"You can't leave those people behind, because it's all about love, man," Trubisky said. "I love these boys."

On Saturday, Trubisky will finally assume his rightful role at the helm of the UNC offense, as the No. 22 Tar Heels take on No. 18 Georgia in the Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game in Atlanta.

"He's been preparing this for three years. He's about as ready as a first-year starter could be," Dave said.

And Trubisky knows it's worth the wait.

"God's got a plan," he said. "So I've been waiting my turn. Stand up, Mitch. They're calling your name."

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**NAZ**  
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morning and stood up to go to the bathroom. Then, his upper body locked.

"I stood up, and I was just kind of stuck there," Naz said. "I had to call for my mom and my little sister to come help me out."

What followed were months in different hospitals seeing different doctors — who each had different theories about what had happened to him.

Finally, they found an answer. Complex regional pain syndrome: lasting pain

that typically occurs in an arm or leg after a clear trauma and often afflicts women in their 40s.

Naz didn't fit most of those boxes, but the condition was there in his lower back regardless. By the time they'd figured it out, he was in a wheelchair, unsure if he'd ever walk again.

"It was crazy, because you don't go from healthy to almost paralyzed in a night's sleep," Naz said.

His weight had plummeted along with his recruiting stock, and he faced an uphill journey to get both back. The only reprieve from the pain

*"There were times and nights that I didn't believe I would get it back."*

**Nazair Jones**  
Defensive tackle

was Ibuprofen and sucking it up.

He spent a lot of time asking why. He asked everyone: family, doctors, God. No one could give him an answer. No one could tell him if he would be okay; all they could do was stand by him.

"There were times and nights that I didn't believe I would get it back," Naz said. "But thank God I did."

**Worth the pain**

In one sense, the story is over for Naz. He's gone through rehab, regaining his weight and strength. He's rebuilt the muscles that atrophied. He's cried himself to sleep in the hospital bed at night, and on Saturday, he'll run onto the field at the Georgia Dome and play the game he loves again.

Almost five years after being too weak to bear the weight of his own body, Naz has become the cornerstone of the UNC defensive line.

In 10 games in 2015, he amassed 40 tackles and displayed a knack for making big plays in big games.

In the ACC Championship against Clemson, he notched six tackles and his second career interception — diving for the catch after he stuck his tattooed left arm in the air to deflect the pass himself.

Shades of Peppers indeed. But the scars don't go away. The pain doesn't go away. He weighs 310 pounds now, but

he can't forget what it felt like to be a shadow of that. To be vulnerable and weak and still have someone like Fedora believe in you enough to give you a shot. One that will hurt, yes, but one that makes the pain worth it.

"I'll never forget that day," he said. "Him seeing me like that at my worst, I realized that he took a chance on me giving me a scholarship to come here. I appreciate him for that because not a lot of people took that chance."

"I try to give him everything I've got."

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**HOOD**  
FROM PAGE 1

wanted to be," Elijah says. "The more I thought about it, I thought it's a little far. It's not close enough to home."

"I have grandparents and I wanted them to be able to come to my games instead of just watching me on TV."

So he switches, from the heralded high-profile program to the uncelebrated homegrown one.

His grandparents come to every home game. His grandmother, Gladys, calls from the stands no matter the noise.

"And whenever he hears that call, he looks straight up," she says, "and then I raise my hand and he knows that we're there and he'll be all right."

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Elijah's alone, in one of the seven rows of seats in this white-walled room. It's not bright. A little sunlight trickles through the stained-glass windows of the chapel. Elijah's eyes are shut.

It's his free period at Charlotte Catholic, a time to study or play or snag a bite to eat. Or, in Elijah's case, to pray.

"It was a time for me to be quiet and sit and talk to God on my own," Hood says. "Ask him to keep me humble, keep me strong, keep me within His wisdom."

For all the thoughts Elijah has, all the directions on the compass he could seemingly go, his faith remains a constant. An altar server from the age of nine. Grace before meals as young as five. God, no matter everything else going on in his mind, is forever present.

"He knows where his power comes from," Edward Hood, Elijah's grandfather,

says. "His power comes from God, and he gives God the glory and the praise for all that he's capable of doing."

How fitting, then, that the boy with the biblical name somehow grows to a similar stature. To lift a football team to glory, sure, but is that really what matters?

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There's a final question. "A greater purpose than football?" he says. "I can see it. I can see football as a beginning."

"It's obviously not something that's the end-all of who I am, not the least bit. If you've been asking people now, you probably know football is merely a piece of Elijah Hood."

A sizable chunk, perhaps — Hood's 1,463 yards rushing

and 17 touchdowns last season contributed to one of the nation's top scoring offenses.

But his conversations reflect he knows more. His thoughts flow from fiscal analysis to the philosophy of language to chess. Getting his pilot's license to being an Eagle Scout to printing paper. Black holes to information sciences to the show "How It's Made."

Always learning. Always taking in everything he can.

Consider that, and then this: his ultimate legacy will transcend the sport that has given him glory. How? It's impossible to say. Even his own expansive mind is still waiting to find out.

But listen to those closest to him, from two walks of life. They see it.

"Even if you took football away from him, he'd still have

an impact on this universe," running backs coach Larry Porter says. "That's just the type of young man he is."

And then his actual family. "Football will not be his life's work," Melica says. "He's going to accomplish something better. Some people you just feel that way, and I've just always felt that way."

The potential is there. The curiosity. The intelligence. It's lurking.

"I want a completely human experience," Elijah says. "I don't know anything else. There's so much to do in the world, and so much to know, and I'm trying to get as much of it as I can before I go. That's about it."

Maybe he can handle all this, after all.

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UNC runningback Elijah Hood (34) scores a touchdown on a 28-yard run against Illinois last season on Saturday, Sept. 19, 2015.

# Potent backfield, veteran line bolster rush offense

Elijah Hood will lead a dangerous ground attack in 2016.

By Blake Richardson  
Assistant Sports Editor

It's pretty hard to imagine a better scenario for North Carolina's rushing offense. Junior running back Elijah Hood is a formidable force by himself. He ran for 1,463 yards on 219 carries in 2015 — the third-highest yardage total in the ACC and second-best in UNC history. "I feel like I've just started," Hood said. "I've got more." People are already talking about the preseason All-ACC player, who enters his second season as a starter. How could they not? The 6-foot, 220-pound back from Charlotte averaged 6.7 yards per carry and scored 17 touchdowns in his sophomore season.

But Hood is not UNC's only dangerous running back. Senior T.J. Logan rushed for 400 yards and five touchdowns in 2015, adding another 151 yards and a touchdown receiving. He did this while splitting carries with Hood and former Tar Heel quarterback Marquise Williams. "We just got a bunch of playmakers," quarterback Mitch Trubisky said. "And it's awesome to see them carry the ball, and it just makes it easier for me in the pass game." Of course, UNC lost some versatility with Williams graduating. Williams holds the school record among quarterbacks for career rushing touchdowns (35) and career rushing yards (2,458). In 2015, he ran for 948 yards on 158 carries — a feat that will be tough to replace. Still, don't dismiss Trubisky as a potential runner. "Mitch can run," Coach

Larry Fedora said. "He can run. If those two guys got in a race, I don't know who would be the fastest." What made Williams such a powerful runner was his physicality. Fedora noted Williams' ability to motor through defenders and draw energy from hits. "We don't hit our quarterbacks in practice, so the jury's still out on how that's gonna happen (for Trubisky) as we go," Fedora said. "If he can do what Quise did, running the football, more power to him. We will take it." And for its backfield threats, UNC boasts a strong stable of capable blockers. The Tar Heels' offensive line is powerful and experienced, with three seniors projected to start. Every first-year on the line has redshirted and has an upper-classman teammate at the same position.

"We are a tight unit," senior center Lucas Crowley said. "In the summer, we had a few different O-line events. We had a cookout, or whatever it may be. So we are a tight unit. "In my mind, we are one of the tightest units on the team." That camaraderie will be crucial in games, where communication is the cornerstone of effective blocking. With an experienced line and a dynamic backfield, the Tar Heels are set for a strong season on the ground. Hood said they just need to stay focused on the practice field. "Everyone can do the stuff that we are coached to do out here," Hood said. "We've just got to do it. It's up to you and your mindset and overcoming your body with your mind at this point of camp. "This is where champions are made."

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# Tar Heel passing attack more than meets the eye

Mitch Trubisky will throw to a stable of veteran receivers.

By Mohammed Hedajji  
Senior Writer

If you stand just far enough away at a North Carolina football practice, squint your eyes and tilt your head, you'll swear you're still watching last year's Tar Heel passing offense. But don't let your eyes fool you. At first glance, the UNC passing attack hasn't changed one bit: still a blur of blue and white gliding down the field, one play at a time. And for the most part, the passing unit is comprised of many of the same parts — including six of its top-seven pass-catchers from the 2015 season. "You got all the same guys back, pretty much ..." said junior running back Elijah Hood. "You've just got a different quarterback." Enter Mitch Trubisky. After competing for the starting quarterback spot the past two years, the redshirt junior finally earned his place this offseason. But Trubisky's promotion isn't the defining difference in this season's passing attack. With one full cycle under Coach Larry Fedora's system, the UNC passing offense is starting to reap the benefits of the work it has put in — making the unit greater than the sum of its parts. With a strong core of veterans, chemistry is the staple of the UNC passing offense this season. And while the biggest change has been under center, the unit's cohesiveness begins with Trubisky. Since he arrived at UNC in 2013, the quarterback from Mentor, Ohio has put in enough time with the starters

to ensure the offense doesn't miss a beat. "Mitch was my class quarterback coming in, so we lived together," senior wide receiver Ryan Switzer said. "There were late nights where we'd go to the indoor and throw. I know Mitch and the ball that he throws just as well as anybody." But while the unit's chemistry started at the quarterback position, it will go as far as UNC's veteran receiving corps takes it. As proven veterans Switzer, Mack Hollins and Bug Howard enter their final season, they have all developed into leaders for the offense. But of the three, one has embraced his role as a vocal leader for the entire team. "Mack, obviously," center Lucas Crowley said. Hollins earned his place, performing at a high level on offense and special teams and setting an example for the rest of the team. And while the senior will be the No. 1 option at receiver this season, Fedora believes he has already started making his biggest contribution to the team. "Leadership," Fedora said. "He's the guy who's been out there the most. He's the guy who understands the intensity." Despite helping his team to its best offensive season ever in 2015 — when the Tar Heels ranked first in the ACC in scoring offense and third in passing offense — neither Hollins nor his fellow receivers landed a spot on the 90-player Maxwell Award watch list for 2016, awarded to America's College Player of the Year. They aren't on many pre-season radars, but UNC's veterans will lean on chemistry and leadership to try to establish themselves as a top passing attack in the country. After all, they are more than meets the eye.

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# UNC special teams set to break records in 2016

The Tar Heels take pride in the third phase of the game.

By David Adler  
Senior Writer

Larry Fedora has always coached his special teams unit to make game-changing plays. The kicking and punt return teams rose to that challenge in 2015, making plays that fueled North Carolina's 11-win season. "We created a culture through our special teams of what it takes to be successful," Fedora said. "And it's very, very important to us." In 2015, senior placekicker Nick Weiler converted all 67 of his extra points and 20 of 23 field goals — good enough to put him on the 2016 pre-season Lou Groza Award

Watch List. Over the summer, Weiler tried to hone his accuracy by picking up a new hobby. "I read an article last year about (NFL kicker) Adam Vinatieri, and apparently that narrow focus he gets when he's shooting during archery really helps him since it's similar to kicking," Weiler said. "So I picked up a bow and just started doing target practice in the backyard." While Weiler has stabilized the kicking game, the punting game remains a mystery. None of the three punters that UNC used a season ago emerged as the go-to guy. The punting inconsistencies led Fedora to put a call in to Prokick Australia to see if he could find a punter from down under. Now, 27-year-old first-year Australian Tom Sheldon is battling with senior Joey

"I picked up a bow and just started doing target practice in my backyard." Nick Weiler  
Senior kicker

him, as far as understanding the different situations that come up in the punt game, so just getting him to familiarize himself with it is fine," Fedora said. "(Sheldon) and Joey are competing like crazy right now and it's pretty close." When it comes to kick returns, Fedora's mind is made up. Star punt returner Ryan Switzer has expressed interest in giving kick returning a shot. But Fedora said he likes having T.J. Logan fill that slot. Logan, a senior, has returned kicks since his first year at UNC. Logan has averaged 25.1 yards per return in his career, and he's scored three career touchdowns off kick returns. Switzer will set his sights on the NCAA career punt-touchdown record instead. With seven career punt-

return touchdowns, Switzer is one punt-return touchdown away from tying Wes Welker and Antonio Perkins' record. "I would lie to you if I said I didn't want it," Switzer said at the ACC Football Kickoff.

"At the end of the day it would be really nice to go down in the record books as the best punt-returner that played college football." @david\_adler94\_sports@dailytarheel.com

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# 'Rude Boys' prepared to wake up doubters this season

**UNC's defensive backs are motivated by a lack of respect.**

By Jeremy Vernon  
Assistant Sports Editor

For Des Lawrence and the rest of the North Carolina secondary, it's respect — or the lack thereof — that is motivating them this season.

Two seasons ago was a low point for the position group. In 2014, the Tar Heels ranked 101st out of 125 Division-I teams with an average of 257.4 passing yards per game. This was one of the major reasons why North Carolina gave up a staggering 39 points per game on the year.

But in 2015, the secondary turned things around — thanks to the emergence of cornerbacks Lawrence and M.J. Stewart.

The pair helped UNC climb into the top 20 nationally in interceptions, passing yards allowed and opponent passing efficiency.

Now, that level of play has become a new norm for the group — one it fully intends to live up to in 2016.

"We basically set a new

standard for Carolina defense," Stewart said.

"I mean, keeping people out of the red zone, keeping people from scoring — that's become our new standard. And so now, instead of doing it, we expect it."

But despite the confidence within the group, national media have been hesitant to praise the Tar Heel secondary this offseason.

Aside from Lawrence earning first team All-ACC honors earlier this summer, the names of North Carolina corners and safeties have been left off most preseason teams and award watch lists.

"The Rude Boys" are using the lack of notoriety as bulletin board material ahead of the upcoming season.

"I just think that our biggest thing is to carry a chip on our shoulder," Lawrence said. "And I think it allows us — it allows Donnie (Miles) to get over 120 tackles in a season, it allows M.J. to get four picks, it allows me to do the same to get as many PBUs and tackles. So it just keeps us competitive."

Each member of the secondary's starting quartet brings his own skills to the table.

*"Nobody's off the hook. Everybody, like we say, we gotta be rude."*

Donnie Miles  
Senior safety

Lawrence excels at blanketing receivers and tackling in the open field. Stewart uses his athleticism to make plays. Donnie Miles is a force in the run game. And Dominique Green — perhaps the most overlooked of the unit — has produced consistently when called upon.

But the one thing the four-some share is a desire to be better. They know what it took to get this far, and they know what it will take to continue to hone their craft.

Now they just have to get the rest of the unit on board.

"Nobody's off the hook. Everybody, like we say, we gotta be rude," Miles said. "We gotta live by that motto of being rude, and that's being disciplined. That's being sound in our technique. That's doing our job, and that's making plays and being competitive."

North Carolina will kick off



DTH/ALEX KORMANN

UNC cornerback M.J. Stewart breaks up a pass intended for receiver Bug Howard during practice.

its season against Georgia in the Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game on Sept. 3 in Atlanta. So far, there hasn't been much belief that the Tar Heels can keep up with an SEC power, let alone win the ball game.

But that's just what UNC,

namely the secondary, wants to hear.

"Somebody told me that they expected the score to be 40-13 Georgia," Stewart said. "That's a total blow to our defense. They basically told us we're not going to show up.

And we love that."

"I get joy when I hear that, because people just sleep on us. And that's what I like, because we'll wake you up sooner or later."

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# Jones, Dalton highlight revamped rush defense

**The Tar Heels hope to keep last season's miscues in the past.**

By John Bauman  
Staff Writer

North Carolina's run defense had somewhat of an existential crisis following the 2015 Russell Athletic Bowl.

Baylor ran down UNC's throat 84 times, amassing 645 rushing yards on 7.7 yards per carry. The Tar Heel defense also allowed the Bears to score seven rushing touchdowns.

UNC defensive coordinator

Gene Chizik said he watched that Baylor game eight or nine times this offseason.

Junior linebacker Cayson Collins said that game, and memories of the poor run defense, stayed with the team all summer.

"We've still kind of had that taste in our mouth," Collins said. "The coaching staff still, we've talked about that (Baylor game), and they've said that's something that haunts them every day."

Junior safety Donnie Miles watched some of the game tape from last season before training camp, and he said it made him sick.

"I needed to see that

(Baylor game) and the Clemson game," Miles said. "I looked at it and broke it down and (have) seen where I could have been better, how I could have made plays for my team to prevent some of the things that happened when things broke down."

Much of North Carolina's run defense does fall on Miles when things break down. From the safety position, he makes the tackle when the running back gets past the defensive line and linebackers. That happened all too often last season, as Miles led the team in tackles with 128. Only two were tackles for loss. This offseason, the Tar

Heels lost their next two leading tacklers from 2015 — linebackers Shakeel Rashad and Jeff Schoettmer — to graduation. In to replace them are Andre Smith and Cole Holcomb, along with returning starter Collins.

One of the main priorities for the new linebacking core is cutting down on leaky yardage — what Chizik defines as yards the opposing running backs get after contact. Finishing tackles could save two or three yards per run, and that adds up over the course of a game.

The defense will also have a new look up front. Nazair Jones and Jalen Dalton are

the Tar Heels' new pair of defensive tackles. It's the line's job in the run defense to occupy blocks, draw double teams and create open lanes for linebackers to shoot through. Jones draws double teams, and the Tar Heels hope pairing him inside with a dynamic athlete like Dalton will create problems for opposing offensive lines.

Dalton spoke at length during camp about the "deeper knowledge" he and the other defenders have acquired. In year two under Chizik, players are starting to grasp the 4-3 defense.

"It's mainly the same plays," Dalton said. "It's just each

player knows — I know for the defensive line, we know what the linebackers are doing on plays, and we know what the safeties and cornerbacks are doing because we are all tighter together."

The revamped run defense has a tough road ahead. The schedule offers no respite, with Georgia, Pittsburgh and Florida State coming in the first five games of the season. North Carolina is hoping a deeper understanding of the whys behind the defense, coupled with an infusion of new talent, will make a difference in 2016.

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