

JAGS
FROM PAGE 1

Three years later, and while it's not yet time to consider the Jaguars as being all-around championship caliber, one title has now been brought home – congratulations to the Carrboro High women's state 2A cross country champs! – and as the 2009 fall sports season proved, the Jags are, overall, on their way up, and right now you'd have to squint to see the ceiling. A number of Carrboro Jaguar teams are building from a solid foundation with a ton of talent.

A new beginning

While most students, many of whom were former Chapel Hill or East Chapel Hill High attendees, entering the doors of Carrboro High School three years ago worried about finding a new spot at lunch, buttering up another set of teachers and making enough friends to survive their remaining high school years, many were faced with additional uncertainties.

What will my new soccer coach be like? Will I make the football team? Can the field hockey team compete against the likes of the already-established powerhouses across town?

Being a student-athlete is at the core of many kids' high school dreams, and switching teams midway through can be tough. In sports such as field

hockey or lacrosse, where Chapel Hill and East Chapel Hill High reign supreme, it was, for the new Carrboro student-athletes, akin to leaving the perpetual champion New York Yankees for the ever-rebuilding Pittsburgh Pirates midway through a season.

portant to learn from those mistakes, and our guys have done a great job of resilience, bouncing back from setbacks."

After two years at the bottom of the standings, the 2009 season was a breakout year for the Jags. The team won its first home game, beat cross-town rival East Chapel Hill for the first time, won its first conference game and made the 2A playoffs.

Quarterback Derek Bryant also was there from the beginning, starting at quarterback as a freshman – a great opportunity, but a potentially daunting task. Bryant was competing against defenses that had been training and lifting weights at the high school level for years. He spent more time on the ground than celebrating in the end zone.

"As juniors, a bunch of our starters remember getting beat pretty badly almost every game as freshmen," Bryant said. "That helps now when we're preparing for those same teams; it's motivation."

Bryant and his teammates went through the losses, the ridicule from classmates and their own second thoughts. It brought them closer and forged a friendship that allowed them to overcome the odds of succeeding any time soon.

"We definitely struggled together," Bryant said. "I think that's what makes it so fun now, the fact that we all struggled together. And now that we are suc-



Carrboro High School football players Nasser Omar, a junior wide receiver (wearing the hat), Derek Bryant, a junior quarterback (standing, right) and Sam Cooper, a senior kicker.

cessful, it makes it sweeter."

"They are a brotherhood because they've seen more adverse situations than a lot of kids their age, and they've done it together," Tudryn added. "They've shared success and failure, and it's a beautiful thing to witness. The fact that they shared these things together makes lasting memories; there is definitely that cohesion with the guys."

Learning curve

Cohesion may well be the primary reason the athletic landscape at Carrboro is looking brighter these days, but there are other reasons, most more tangible than that.

Last year was the first that most teams had enough skilled players to form junior varsity squads. Because there were no seniors the first semester, the

Carrboro community getting behind a school and a sports program.

Tudryn said he remembers a time when the stands were empty, and his athletes had to feed off their own voices and motivation.

"Now, you come to a Friday night football game and it's a great atmosphere," Tudryn said. "I go to Weaver Street Market the week after and some random person I've never met in a Carrboro football shirt says, 'Hey, coach; congrats.'"

Mundia remembers when his players used to wear East Chapel Hill High T-shirts to practice and he had to remind them that Carrboro sports are what's here and now.

"It's a beautiful place, because everyone at Carrboro High School ... is really positive, everyone is really pulling for each other," Tudryn said. "Their peers are behind them, the community is behind them."



Justin Tama, a senior midfielder for Carrboro High School's soccer team, moves the ball toward the goal in a recent practice. In the background is coach James Mundia.



Seniors Hailey Johnson, left, and Lexi Xenakis of the Carrboro High School field hockey team compete for control of the ball in a recent team practice.

Sure, it can be seen as a challenge to overcome; but for teenagers, it's more likely to be seen as an obstacle.

Head football coach Jason Tudryn was there from the beginning and offered some perspective on the challenges of his first three years of coaching.

"You have to learn how to fail in life in order to be successful, and I think it's hard for kids nowadays to put themselves in an environment where they won't be successful," he said. "It's im-

UNC NOTES FRANK HEATH

Heels halt skid, tame the 'pack

The UNC men's basketball Tar Heels received big-time contributions from nearly everyone who saw court time on Tuesday night at the RBC Center, bringing home a 77-63 victory over the N.C. State Wolfpack, and breaking a three-game losing streak.

It was midway through the second half, though, before the Heels took off.

With 17:04 left in the game, State point guard Javier Gonzalez followed a missed shot by teammate Dennis Horner to give the Wolfpack a 43-38 lead. Gonzalez, who has improved significantly this year, had lit up Carolina for 15 points in a 4 1/2 minute stretch, and the Tar Heels appeared to be on the edge of a dangerous precipice they have come to know all too well this season.

Then, for an agonizing 2 1/2 minutes, the score remained at 43-38. State missed four shots and committed a foul and the Tar Heels missed four shots from the floor and clanked a pair of free throws.

At the media timeout, with 15:55 remaining, Carolina was 0-5 from the floor in the second half, and with 14:36 remaining – after State guard Scott Wood deflected a Will Graves jumper out of bounds to give the Tar Heels possession underneath – UNC still did not have a second-half bucket.

It was at that moment that guard Dexter Strickland, along with fellow freshman Travis Wear, checked into the ballgame for the Tar Heels. Ten seconds later, off a swing pass from Strickland, point guard Larry Drew knocked in a three-pointer from the right wing to end the drought for Carolina and pull the Heels within two.

Less than a minute later, following a missed three by State's Wood, UNC forward Deon Thompson dropped in a short jumper off a setup pass from Drew. Another 50 seconds later, Strickland scored on a driving layup in transition to give the Tar Heels back a lead they would not relinquish.

By the time Strickland checked out of the game with 7:31 remaining, the Tar Heels held a nine-point lead, 56-47. The freshman guard's line during that stretch was seven points, a steal and an assist, and he also helped hold Gonzalez, who had been hotter than a pistol minutes earlier, without a basket for a crucial seven minutes. It was an 18-4 UNC run while Strickland was in the game.

Carolina extended its dominating stretch to 28-6, for a 66-49 lead with 3:57 remaining, and the outcome was for all intents and purposes settled.

Along with Strickland's 14-point night, Thompson put together his best game in weeks, Drew had perhaps his best performance ever (18 points, 7 assists, only one turnover) and Ed Davis gutted out 12 points and nine rebounds in 28 minutes on a bum ankle.

Graves pulled down nine boards, and even freshman John Henson – a non-factor through the Heels' first 19 games – left his mark on the game, blocking three shots, grabbing two rebounds and scoring on a driving layup during a four-minute stint in the second half.

But with all that said, Carolina's guard play – which had been hurting during the team's ugly 1-4 January swoon – was the catalyst for this win, and it will be critical if the Tar Heels expect to crawl the rest of the way out of the hole they find themselves in. One of the biggest keys to Carolina's improved play against the Wolfpack was that the Tar Heels limited their turnovers, committing just 10 for the game, while remaining aggressive from the perimeter.

Over Carolina's recent rough patch, Strickland, Drew and the other UNC guards have been dangerous to the team, erratic at best, committing turnovers in large batches that inevitably led to crippling runs by the opposition. On Tuesday night against State, the UNC backcourt, especially Strickland and Drew, showed that it can also be dangerous to opponents.

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