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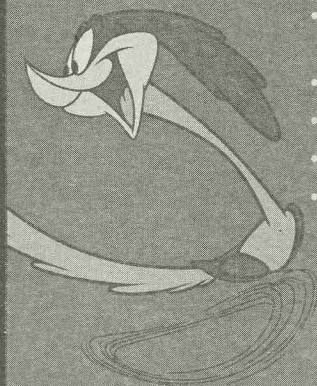
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**1. Miami** The only thing that stands in the way of the real national champions of 2002-winning this year's title is devastating injury problems - or a schedule that has Fiesta Bowl back judge Terry Porter call all 13 of their games. Miami replaces Willis McGahee with a back that was ahead of him on the depth chart before he injured his knee (Frank Gore) and replaces overrated Ken Dorsey with Florida transfer Brock Berlin.

**2. Kansas State** For the first time since 1999, the nation's best conference didn't send a representative to the BCS title game last year. That will change this year, but it won't be the usual suspects: Oklahoma, Texas or Nebraska. Bill Snyder's KSU team, winners of at least 11 games five out of the last six years, still has its usual ultra-soft nonconference schedule, but that won't hurt the Wildcats in the BCS rankings if they run the table in the Big XII.

**3. Oklahoma** Since unexpectedly winning the national title in 2000, the Sooners have been just as good every year since, except they go to sleep in one or two regular-season games every year. Expect the same to happen this year, and Oklahoma will fall just short of the big game once more.

**4. Southern California** No team better personifies the notion that coaching can win you ballgames. With defensive-minded Pete Carroll teaming with offensive guru Norm Chow, USC may have been the best team in the nation at the end of 2002. This season they have the best defense outside of Norman and a great quarterback developer in Chow.

**5. Michigan** The Wolverines get the slight nod over their hated rivals because of a favorable Big 10 schedule (no Penn State or Wisconsin; Ohio State at home). Running back Chris Perry, who scored four touchdowns in his Outback Bowl MVP performance, will need to be a consistent threat in order to avoid teams from keying on the John Navarre-to-Braylon Edwards show.

**6. Ohio State** Winners of seven games decided by seven points or less last year, the "Luckeyes" will have to be equally fortunate this season if they expect to repeat. Yes, they have 11 starters back on offense, but the most important, running back Maurice Claret, is out for six games. Road trips to Anna Arbor, Madison and Happy Valley certainly don't help either.

**7. N.C. State** Call me a homer if you wish, but the talent, schedule and coaching is in place for a darkhorse national title run. Chuck Amato is 0-1 against defending national champions as a head coach and is still undefeated at Florida State homecomings, which is precisely when the Wolfpack draws the Noles this year.

**8. Auburn** The Sporting News went as far to rank the Tigers No. 1 in the nation, which seems a little strange because I feel a little odd ranking them this high. Still, an NFL-caliber linebacking corps and a dependable running game should allow Auburn to at least win SEC West.

**9. Maryland** Scott O'Brien, Bruce Perry and almost an entire defense return for head coach Ralph Fridence. O'Brien

# KEEP YOUR EYES ON THESE 25

MATT MIDDLETON COMMENTARY

may be the most underrated signal-caller in the league, but injuries are still a looming problem.

**10. Pittsburgh** Opposing teams will no doubt be sick of seeing Rod Rutherford to Larry Fitzgerald this season. In the year of the receiver, Fitzgerald may be the best of the bunch and will be helped by a defense that returns seven starters.

**11. Virginia Tech** Over 800 yards and nearly 10 touchdowns is a pretty good line for a backup. This year there's no denying runner Kevin Jones is the man in Tech's run-oriented offense, but who will he be taking the handoffs from, incumbent Bryan Randall or freshman Marcus Vick?

**12. Texas** For those of you that stop watching college football in early September, Texas is probably the four- or five-time defending national champions. No team plays better on paper than Mack Brown's Longhorns, and I'm not buying the things-have-changed hype for one second.

**13. Florida State** How pedestrian does a 17-9 record for FSU look? That's precisely the record the Seminoles have carded the last two seasons. Expect FSU to mildly rebound from last season's finish outside the top 20, but a brutal nonconference schedule (at Florida, Colorado, Miami, at Notre Dame) eliminates the outside shot at New Orleans.

**14. Virginia** Take about your all-time gaffs. Virginia was picked to finish eighth in the ACC last season, yet

destroyed Maryland in its season finale to finish tied for second and just a game out of first. This year, like many teams in the ACC, the Cavaliers will have to deal with increased expectations.

**15. Tennessee** A record of 8-5 isn't acceptable when you have the collective weight of an entire state on your back. Casey Clausen has started 31 games at quarterback and is undefeated in 31 games. With road dates at Miami, Florida, Auburn and Alabama, that streak won't last long.

**16. Georgia** One has to wonder where the leadership is going to come from this year after the SEC champions lost 10 starters and suffered some off-the-field trouble this spring. The Bulldogs, however, do return the league's offensive and defensive players of the year.

**17. Wisconsin** The traditionally bore-you-to-death Badger offense will be getting an overhaul this season. Quarterback Jim Sorgi, whom coach Barry Alvarez believes might be his best thrower ever, has maybe the league's best pro prospect to throw to (receiver Lee Evans) and can still hand off to Anthony Davis.

**18. Louisiana State** There aren't many stadiums in the country more intimidating than LSU's Tiger Stadium. To their benefit, the Tigers' record will be affected by the fact that Georgia, Florida, Auburn and Arkansas all visit Death Valley. Sixteen returning starters from a team that tied for first in the SEC West might help too.

**19. Purdue** I wonder how many times the Boilers saw the replay of their fourth-down loss to Ohio State this spring? Nineteen starters are back for Joe Tiller, whose team ended the season on an upswing, downing favored Washington.

**20. Penn State** A favorable schedule (Wisconsin, Ohio State at home; no Michigan) will help keep the Nittany Lions, who lost almost their entire offensive repertoire, from falling too far.

**21. Arizona State** With all the preseason hype surrounding Washington's Cody Pickett, it's hard to believe ASU's Andrew Walter is the conference's leading returning passer (3,877 yards, 28 touchdowns).

**22. Oklahoma State** The only other team in the nation besides N.C. State to return a 3,000-yard passer, 1000-yard rusher and 1000-yard receiver, the Cowboys will no longer have the luxury of sneaking up on their Big XII foes.

**23. Washington** Following a year in which head coach Rick Neuheisel was fired after betting on - and winning - a high-money NCAA tournament pool, Washington returns a great quarterback and a receiver that had a PlayStation-like 94 catches for 1,454 yards. The Huskies open the season at Ohio State and have the offense to pull off the upset - but I wouldn't bet on it.

**24. Notre Dame** The Irish had their luck run out late last season after winning their first ten games, then being blown out by USC and N.C. State. The offense must improve this season and will be aided by the return of Julius Jones.

**25. Missouri** Disciplinary coach Gary Pinkel has a quarterback that he might as well just turn loose. The man behind center, dual-threat sophomore Brad Smith, is one of nine starters back on offense.

# To: TECHNICIAN

Due to the adrenaline-pumping, boom-boxing, convulsion-inducing excitement over N.C. State football this season, I thought it'd be appropriate to give this space to the biggest Wolfpack fan I know. He's a tad crazy and his name has been withheld to protect him from potential legal action. Enjoy! - ANDREW B. CARTER

This is the year, man. This is big-time. This is something special. This is great. Huge. Awesome. Big. Can you feel it, man? I mean, can you feel it?

Wolfpack football. Man, let me tell you. I've been tailgating since January. Everyday, I'm out here, just drinking. Smelling the air. Throwing up. Throwing the football to myself. After Jacksonville, the day after I got back, I came here. Just me. My boss said I couldn't work out of old Red (that's my van - it's red), so I told him to stick it where he picks it. I didn't care if it was nose or butt, just whatever, you know. Who needs that job anyway? Living in old Red, it saves time and money. It's fine - I just eat the critters that get stuck in the engine. I'm much happier out here. In the parking lot. Got a nice view of the stadium. The sun looks glorious when it rises over the steel bleachers. I see the way the light reflects off the beautiful steel bleachers. Wish I could paint, man. I'd paint the world's greatest painting. And I don't mind sleeping outside, on gravel and dirt. I sleep in my shoulder pads, helmet and jock strap, so I'm good. I slept on the field one night, man. Right on the 50. Smelled that grass all night - that sweet, heavenly grass. Woke up getting the all-living hell beat out of me by a cop. Got arrested for that. I don't care. And you know what? I don't mind getting mauled in the middle of the night by wild animals. If that's the role Chuck has for me, then - that's cool. I just wanna be a part of the team.

Got old Red a generator back when it snowed. I didn't want to, but my good nipple got frost bite and damn near fell off in the winter. That woulda been bad. I've been playing the video game. NCAA 2004. Spent my last 50 bucks on it. We're loaded, man. Bad things, man. Bad things. I beat everybody, like, 80-7. Except Carolina. I beat them 607-0. Set it on 15-minute quarters and just, just went crazy. I tell you, we're going to come at you like a rabid bunch of smelly beast-things. Who's with me? Just tear into you and eat your bones. I can't wait. I feel sorry for Western Carolina. But we've been waiting for this too long, man. Been way too long. Hold on - beer time.

But that's okay. Cause you know why? I can feel it. We've got that Philip Rivers - man, he's what my dad used to call, "good." I saw this one game he played in, man. Unbelievable. Threw for like eight touchdowns. Did you know he's got a wife? And a kid? Wow. Yeah. My wife left me in February. Said she "didn't want to live in a van." Said she "couldn't live with a guy who had his boxers autographed by a bunch of 20-year-old football players and who sleeps in those same boxers every night and those boxers smell real bad." Said she "couldn't be with a guy who

loved Chuck Amato's chest more than mine." If you're listening, honey, I never said that. I don't think. I can't remember.

I've got this pig here, man. It's been cookin' slow since March. Come game-time, tomorrow, the meat's gonna be so tender and

soft and barbequey. I can't wait to eat it. But you know what won't be tender and soft? Our defense. They will punish you, even if you aren't naughty. This defense, man, it's like...whoaaa. I've seen 'em practice, man. They don't know it, but I'm up in the trees. I've got my binoculars up there, man, up there in the nest. That's what I call it. I'm up there every day, man. Watching. The defense is doing things. Just horrible, brute things, man. It gives me nightmares. Bad dreams. I wake up with the shakes just thinking about...about Manny Lawson man ... about Manny Lawson just coming around the line and running like a cheetah and BOOM. Then I wake up. Usually with tears. Reminds me of Saigon in '75.

I'm just so glad I'm a part of the team.

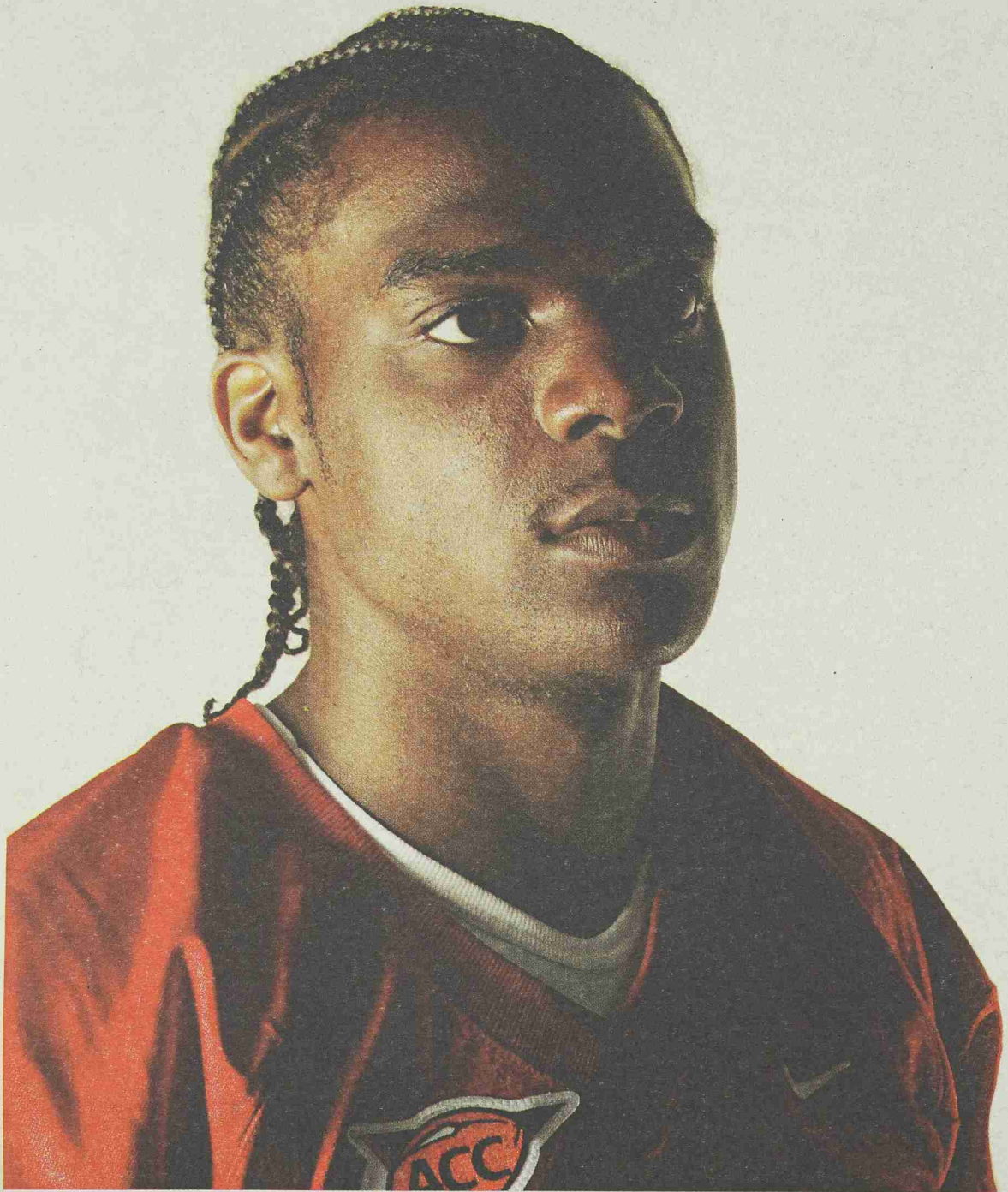
Oh, and we're fast, too. This team will hunt you down, and eat your brains if they are hungry for brains. And that's true. I've seen it happen with the scout team. The brain-eating stuff. It's like poetry of destruction.

I've watched this Gator Bowl tape I have like, 982 times. Seeing all those hits and passes and touchdowns and intensity gets me pumped all over again. Makes me dizzy sometimes. I have to sit down. Gets me all thinking about Philip and T.A. and Jerricho, man. Those guys are my boys, man. We've been hanging a lot this summer. Well, when I say a lot, I mean, they've been way over there, in that big new building, and I've been chillin' here, in the van. But it's cool, daddy. They know I'm a part of the team. Why else would I be wearing a uniform?

You know, I never graduated college. Big surprise. So I'm thinking of walking on. Still have some eligibility left. But maybe I'll just sit out here and tailgate some more. Yeah, that sounds good. I'll just do that, whatever. Hey, good talk. I'm pumped. See you out here, man. Stop by for some pig. Bring a woman. I haven't seen a woman in months. Please?

HOOOOOOWWWWWWL.

From: THE FAN



# MIND GAMES

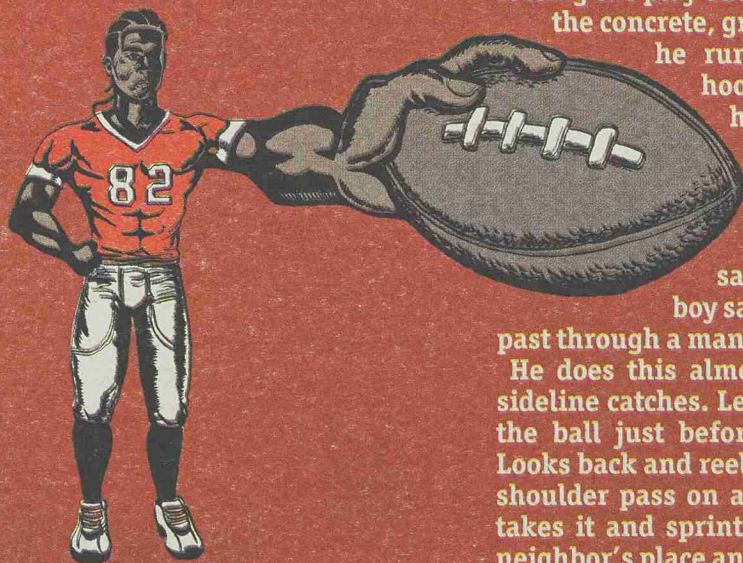
In the shadow of his parents' blue and white house roosted on a lazy Alabama hill, a boy with bear-paw hands and touchdown dreams pretends to be Jerry Rice. His stadium is the concrete street outside his home, the yardage marked by mailboxes and trash cans and parked cars.

Traffic blitzes past the line of scrimmage, forcing the play out of bounds, which is beyond the concrete, gray curb. When play resumes he runs post routes and button hooks and outs and fades as his buddy, Joe Montana, spirals the football in his direction.

Just like Jerry, he always makes the catch. "I never saw him drop *anything*," the boy says years later, looking at his past through a man's eyes.

He does this almost every day. Practices the sideline catches. Leans over the curb and grabs the ball just before he steps out of bounds. Looks back and reels in a masterpiece over-the-shoulder pass on a bacon-crisp post route. He takes it and sprints to the end zone, past the neighbor's place and three mailboxes down.

## Touchdown, Jerricho Cotchery.



Story by Andrew B. Carter  
Photos by Tim Lytvinenko

He was never the fastest, but nobody could ever catch him. Not at home on the street where he caught passes from friend Van Harris (or, Joe Montana), not on a real football field, not in life. In the Norwood section of Birmingham, Ala., Cotchery ran often — on the football field since he was four, toward the end zone. On the basketball court, toward a lay-up. In the streets, away from trouble. In middle school, away from gangs. In high school, toward success. Speed, say some, isn't his forte. But what good is speed without endurance? What good is speed when you just can't run any longer? Lil' Jerricho — as his mom, Katie, calls him — has never found out.

He's still running.

On the N.C. State football practice fields, he runs like he's chasing down a Philip Rivers pass to win a game in late November. He practices with Sugar Bowl intensity, yet it's only August. "Watch No. 82," the coaches will say, encouraging a flash gaggle of young receivers to heed the example set by a soft-spoken senior with even softer hands. Cotchery's work ethic is so good off the field, his mind so focused in practice, he's flipped the old "practice-like-you-play" adage. Now it should read, "Play like you practice." And he does.

In three years, Cotchery has gone from an unheralded, forgotten recruit to one of the most prolific wide receivers in N.C. State history. He's grown from a 6-foot-1 offensive afterthought to a guy that plays like he's six inches taller with go-go Gadget arms. He's grown into a Montana-Rice type relationship with his quarterback. He's grown from a shy Alabama kid who once was afraid of interviews — "I was very intimidated," he says — to a confident spokesman. He's gone from one of the worst high schools in his state to a four-year college. From one of 13 brothers and sisters to the first member of that group to attend a four-year institution. He's gone from being a kid to being The Man. It wasn't always so.

Back in the place where he grew up too fast — in Birmingham — Cotchery saw too many friends, teammates and familiar faces trudge into a nasty underworld of gangs, drugs and crime. He remembers the guys who could have been where he is now — in college, playing football, with dreams alive. "A ton of guys in my neighborhood, even if they didn't qualify through high school, they could have gone to junior college," Cotchery says. "They were very talented. But they chose otherwise."

His eyes on a painful past, Cotchery recalls a teammate of his in high school, a guy who was a great player. "Him and his brother, they got locked up for a murder charge," he says, head shaking. "They got involved in drugs. I look at all that and just try to use it as an example."

See, Jerricho Cotchery is always using things as examples. Always studying, always learning. As a kid, he was Jerry Rice on the field. Off it, he imitated his older siblings — 13 in all — and followed their guidance. He remembers everyone who has shaped his life. His late, great grandmother, who made sure he ate his butter beans before drinking any Kool-Aid. She gave the family a home after the Cotchery house burnt down when Jerricho was just four. His brother, Sedic, who guided him away from trouble. He taught him not to be a knucklehead. His parents, Katie and Bob, who showed him the meaning of hard work. They taught him to love, the meaning of family. "We don't believe in 'step,'" Katie Cotchery says of Jerricho's numerous step-siblings. "We believe in being brothers and sisters." His high school coach, Nathaniel Kelly, who gave him discipline, hope. He taught him to play football. Jerricho remembers the neighborhood, too.

"My neighborhood? Whoa," Cotchery says. "I looked up to a lot of people in my neighborhood because that's where all the talented people were. Some of them got caught up



I'VE WORKED MY TAIL OFF MY WHOLE LIFE, BUT I'VE STILL GOT A TON OF WORK LEFT.

—JERRICHO COTCHERY

in the wrong things. It was hard for me, because I was still hanging with those people. But they used that to tell me I needed to stay away from it. I still admire them for that."

Funny thing is, people in the neighborhood started looking at Jerricho as an example, too. Especially when he became a local legend at for coach Kelly at Phillips High School. Bob Cotchery remembers walking in the house one day only to find Jerricho counseling the neighborhood youth, about 15 children. Just sat 'em down and talked about life.

"Jerricho's got so many fans down here," says his dad. It's tough *not* to be a fan. In a sport where some players think touchdowns are awarded for trash-talk, Cotchery goes about his work in silence. He doesn't believe in whining. He doesn't do complaining. He's not too vocal, but can be when needed. "I lead by action," Cotchery says, "and when it's my time to speak, everybody will probably listen because I've showed them what I'm trying to do."

Ron Ingram, longtime preps writer for the Birmingham News, characterized Cotchery in high school as "a leader when Phillips was most in need of leadership." Located right across the street from the projects, Phillips stood an artifact until it shut down two years ago. One of the oldest schools in Alabama — built in the 1920s — Phillips was one of the last schools to be desegregated. Back in the 1970s, Civil Rights rallies roared in the same gym Cotchery would play basketball in some 25 years later. The school deteriorated over time, falling prey to hounds of gangs and roguery that roamed its halls and prowled its neighborhoods. In 1981, Nathaniel Kelly took over as football coach.

"It was a tough place," remembers coach, two years retired. "When I first got the job people told me that I'd never win there. We had struggles — gangs and drugs. You had so many students who weren't athletes that tried to pull the kids down. They saw the type of discipline we were trying to instill. We had better athletes walking the halls,

but they did not want to go by the guidelines."

Had to be tougher than Dick Butkus to work at a place like Phillips. Hell, this was a place where kids got jumped in the bathroom for being from the wrong neighborhood. Guys like Jerricho Cotchery were the exception. "He was a good boy," says his momma, voice energized with so much pride it could power a lighthouse. "We didn't have no problems out of Jerricho. He wanted to play his sports. And he loved school. Loved school."

He didn't always. At the beginning of his sixth-grade year, Cotchery went to class the first two days, then wouldn't go back. Said his stomach hurt. "We found out, the reason he didn't want to go to school was because the children were pressing him to join a gang," says Katie Cotchery. "And he was kinda scared of them. But my husband went up to them and said, 'Listen here, I'm the leader of the gang in my family.' And Lil' Jerricho went back to school the next day and had no trouble with 'em."

Of course, having a Dad in Cotchery's neighborhood was about as common as having a Mercedes parked in the driveway. "Most of my friends, they grew up in one-parent homes," Cotchery says. "Some of them got into trouble, a lot of trouble. Not having a father figure ... it played a big role in them getting into things they shouldn't have." But Bob Cotchery was always there. He instilled into all his children the importance of putting religion first. Of making the right choices. Of valuing an education.

When Cotchery briefly toyed with the idea of turning pro after his junior season, his mom was scared. The receiver could have been drafted, and made things easier for the parents that worked so hard for so long. But Katie Cotchery didn't like that idea at all. That's how bad she wants her son to get a degree. "He knows I want that in my hands," she says. "When he gets it, and they put in his hands, he knows he's gonna have to give it to me and put it in my hands. It will be the best thing to ever happen in the whole world to me. I never got my college degree."



His parents won't let Jerricho forget how fortunate he is. "Whenever Jerricho calls home," Bob Cotchery says, "he knows what he's gonna get. 'Don't forget to say your prayers. Put God first. Then education, then football.'"

Before every game, before every time out of the tunnel at Carter-Finley Stadium, Cotchery prays. He knows too well it could be his last time on a football field. He knows how fast life can be stolen. Seen it firsthand.

One summer Saturday when he was 15 — the summer before his junior year at Phillips — Cotchery, Wolfpack teammate Corrie Dawson and friends Karlos Dansby and Brian Talley piled into a car with sweat dripping from their bodies after an AAU basketball practice in Tuscaloosa. Usually, the coaches of the Alabama Ice would rent a van for these occasions. They'd go around the state, picking up players, dropping them off. But the four friends from Birmingham decided to ride together. Brian — the driver — entered the car without his shirt. "He was hot, from practice," Cotchery recalls. When Brian put his shirt back on, he took his seat belt off. He never did put it back on. Didn't have time. Moments later, a front tire blew. Brian lost control of the car. It flipped too many times. When it rested on the other side of the freeway, three young men sat a trembling mess of nerves, blood and bruises. Jerricho, a twisted web of limbs in the seat belt, was the last to get out. With shards of glass piercing his arms — pieces were still coming out two years later — he looked in the driver's seat, and no one was there. Corrie stood in shock. Karlos, now a star linebacker at Auburn, kept shaking his head at the body that lay across the freeway. Brian Talley died at the hospital.

"That was a hardworking dude," Cotchery says, trying to find the right words. "I was hardworking, but I took some of that from him. At practice, you know how dudes try to ease up, you'll tell your partner, 'Ease up today, don't try to go too hard.' He never agreed with that. He worked hard everyday to try to be the best he could be."

Jerricho still has B.T. written everywhere. He's got a rose from the funeral back at home. A heart full of memories, too. "It was hard," he says, "But it motivated me because I

"YOU SAY, 'HE'S NOT AS FAST AS THEY ARE,' OR, 'HE'S NOT AS QUICK AS THEY ARE,' HE'S CAUGHT SOME BIG PASSES IN BIG GAMES. AND THEY SAY, 'YOU CAN'T GO DEEP WITH HIM.'"

## HOW MANY TIMES HAS HE CAUGHT THE BALL DEEP? OR OUT-JUMPED OR OUTFOUGHT A DEFENDER?

THERE'S ONE THING TO GO DEEP WITH SPEED, THERE'S ANOTHER THING TO CATCH IT."

—CHUCK AMATO, N.C. STATE HEAD COACH

knew it could have been me. I know God kept me here for a reason, that's the way I look at it."

Maybe that's why he's so serious now. So focused, so determined. "When he hit the practice field," coach Kelly remembers, "there was no nonsense. No bull going on. Everything was serious. He'd never smile or anything, he'd just go about his work."

Off the field, Cotchery is just as passionate about music. When life grew to be too much, he wrote. Books full of songs. Mostly rap. Sometimes he'd shut himself in his room, plop on the bed and listen to the radio for hours. He'd write songs on paper, and even recorded some CDs back home. If football doesn't work out, he thinks a career as a rapper might. "But I'd rather see him catch touchdowns on Sundays," says his brother, Sedric. Just in case, Cotchery plans to make recording connections whenever he has the time. A few of his teammates have similar interests, and DeMarcus "Tank" Tyler knows someone with a recording studio in Fayetteville. But could his love for music ever overtake football? "Whoa, noo, no, no, no," Cotchery says, laughing. "Nothing can take over football."

His dreams are what inspired him to become the type of receiver he's become, but his work made it possible. When Cotchery was a sophomore in high school — "it kills me to say this," he says now — he loved Florida State. One Saturday he fell in love with a new team — N.C. State. The Wolfpack lost to FSU that day in 1997, but Torry Holt caught five touchdowns. Soon, Cotchery had a new favorite player. "I knew this was the place I wanted to be, because I wanted to do what Torry Holt was doing — get five touchdowns [in one game]," Cotchery says with a golden grin.

The Pack wanted Cotchery, too. Joe Pate, key recruiter and defensive line and special teams coach under Chuck Amato, remembers asking several coaches in the state and around Birmingham who the best player in the area was. "Everyone of them mentioned Jerricho Cotchery," Pate says. "I watched him on film, Chuck watched him on film; we really liked him. For whatever reason Alabama and Auburn really didn't recruit him. We don't go on what other people recruit." Their loss. Who would have imagined a guy who's developed into one of the best receivers in the college game escaping the grasp of Alabama and Auburn?

"In the second round of the state playoffs, his team played Philip [River's] team," Pate remembers. "And Steve Rivers was a guy I would ask about players, too. And I just asked him, just to see, 'What do you think about the Cotchery kid?' And he said, 'I think he's the kind of receiver that Florida State's been playing with.'"

Despite the high accolades, some thought Jerricho should have played basketball. Nobody is doubting his decision now, especially not Philip Rivers. In that state football playoff game, Rivers, who played safety in addition to quarterback, intercepted a pass intended for Jerricho.

The two met again in the state basketball playoffs, with much less success for the current quarterback. "They beat us like 80-40," Rivers recalls. "And [Jerricho] guarded me actually. I had about seven points and fouled out. He had me frustrated."

Now, the pair is frustrating people together. But unlike Rivers, who starred from the start, Cotchery had to wait.

His breakthrough game came in 2001 against Maryland when the then-sophomore caught 11 passes for 123 yards. It was a contrast to his freshman year, in which Cotchery was disappointed in his production. "He kind of got frustrated his freshman year up there," remembers Sedric. "He didn't get the ball ... he almost wanted to leave. I said, 'Stick in there.' Last year, you saw what happened. I've always seen that potential, but a lot of people didn't."

Now they all do. Cotchery enters this year already in the top 10 in school history for receptions, yards and touchdown catches. With 1,300 yards, he'll join Torry Holt and become only the second Wolfpack player ever to amass 3,000 career receiving yards. All this from a guy who caught six balls for 75 yards his freshman year.

"He's just a tough, hard-nosed football player, and let me tell you something — No. 17 will always know where No. 82's lined up," says Amato. "Because he knows if he throws the ball anywhere near him, he'll probably come down with it."

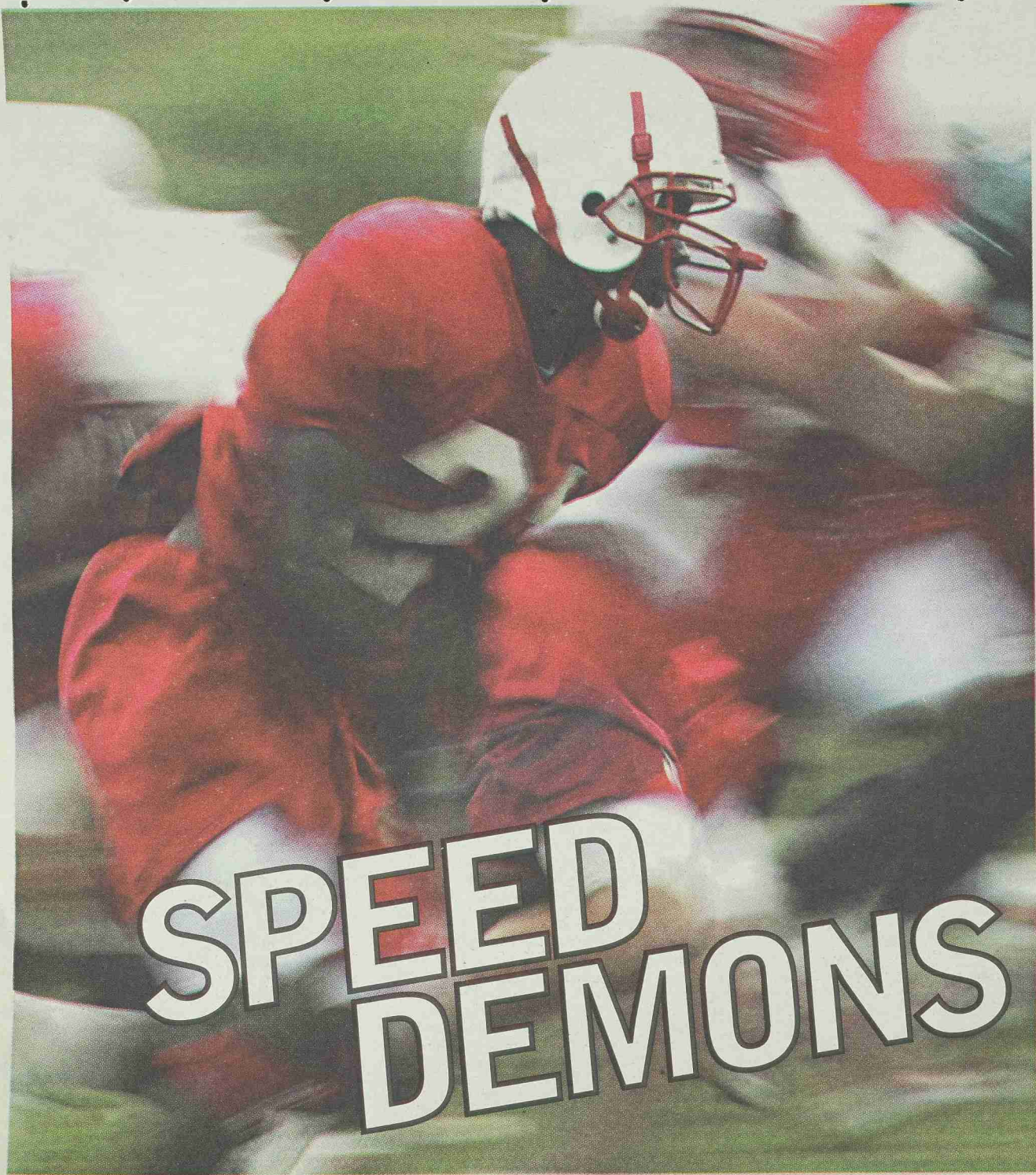
Out of high school, Cotchery was the type of player Amato doesn't seem to recruit any more. He wasn't Deion Sanders fast, and he wasn't too strong, either. After a rigorous conditioning program, however, Cotchery can now bench 400-plus. He's shaved time off his 40. He hasn't grown taller, but given his ability to jump, that doesn't matter.

"You say, 'He's not as fast as they are,' or, 'He's not as quick as they are,'" Amato says. "He's caught some big passes in big games. And they say, 'You can't go deep with him.' How many times has he caught the ball deep? Or out-jumped or outfought a defender? There's one thing to go deep with speed, there's another thing to catch it."

Jerricho Cotchery — even when he dreamed of being Jerry Rice — didn't drop anything. He didn't then, outside his parents' blue and white house, and he doesn't know, in front of 50,000 screaming fans in red. But it's one thing to be a quality athlete, and another to be a quality person. It's one thing to say things, another to back it up. It's one thing to be helped, another to give back. Cotchery has backed it up, and given back. And when his days in a football uniform are over, whenever or wherever that may be, he wants to coach. He wants to work with high school kids. Be the kind of leader he was led by when he was growing up. But for now, he's got work to do. "I've worked my tail off my whole life," Cotchery says. "But I've still got a ton of work left."

He's right. His hands aren't nearly as good as his heart.





# SPEED DEMONS

# CHUCK AMATO THINKS THE DIFFERENCE IN SPEED BETWEEN HIS FIRST TEAM AND THIS YEAR'S VERSION IS NIGHT, AND DAY. HE'S RIGHT.

Story by Jon Page

Even the fastest people do some things slow.

For Manny Lawson, it's walking.

For Troy Graham, it's talking.

And for Tramain Hall, it's getting dressed.

"I'll be the first one in the locker room and the last one to leave," Hall said. "I take showers slow and I get dressed slow. My mom tells me I dress like a woman."

But regardless of Lawson's leisurely gait, Graham's deliberate drawl and Hall's affinity to look as good as he plays, there's one place where they're all frighteningly fast, where they're all dressed in N.C. State red – the football field.

Ask cornerback Greg Golden just how fast the Wolfpack's wide receivers and defensive backs can be and the junior's face brightens up like lights on the scoreboard.

"Oh man, our team is fast," Golden said. "You throw a pass one way and you have 11 guys at the ball before the guy catching the ball even knows it."

State coach Chuck Amato won't go as far as his players to say his team is the fastest in the ACC, but there's no denying it's the fastest squad he's had in his four years in Raleigh. The difference between his first team and this year's squad, he says, is immeasurable.

"I can tell you right now it's not even close," said Amato. "If we ran a track meet against my first team when I was here, it wouldn't even be close. We're so much faster and quicker right now than we've ever been. It's what I want."

What Amato really wants is a conference championship, and he knows it will take more than improved speed from his skill-position players.

"There are all kinds of 5-foot-10, 180-pound kids that run a 4.5 [in the forty-yard dash] or better," said Amato. "There are not a lot of 6-foot-4, 230-pound youngsters that run too fast"

True, there aren't too many 6-foot-4, 230-pound speedsters on the team. Try 6-foot-7, 254 pounds instead – that's how big defensive end Mario Williams is, and he runs the forty-yard dash in 4.6 seconds. Or how about Lawson? At 6-foot-5, the outside linebacker and part-time track star recorded State's fastest time in the 60-meter hurdles during the 2002 indoor season with a time of 8.55 seconds.

"You could tell when [Manny] first put on the track uniform and stepped out there that he's an athlete," said assistant track coach Gail Olsen. "He's quite a physical specimen."

Due to offseason football training, Olsen had limited time to work with Lawson. All he had time to do was make sure Lawson could hit the board, take off correctly and land safely.

"Outside of that it was just Manny bringing a lot of speed to the board and using his power and strength in jumping," said Olsen.

While Lawson was the only member of the football team to participate in track and field last off-season, he's not the only one with a wealth of track experience.

Graham, a 400-meter dash state champ in high school,

also excelled in the 400 for State until last season when he decided to skip track in order to better prepare for football. Cornerbacks Lamont Reid and A.J. Davis were also state champions in high school, Reid in the 100-meter dash and Davis in the triple and and long jumps.

In fact, there are so many fleet-footed athletes in football cleats that many of the players say they've never been around a faster group of guys. While it sounds like a bold statement, Olsen says they might be right.

"They have a ton of speed with defensive backs and wideouts," said Olsen. "[If you take Miami] as an example, they went and scored a ton of points in the sprints at their conference meet with just football players. A lot of the better sprinters in college are football players."

Closer to home, three of the top five performers in the 60-meter dash at the 2002 ACC Indoor Championships were football players, but Davis warns that speed on the track doesn't necessarily translate to the field and vice-versa.

"On a track, I can float," Davis said. "I've seen people who aren't fast on the track be real fast on the field. It's all about adrenaline. Take Terrence Holt. He may not have been fast on the track but when he was out on the field it was like he was running a 4.3."

Rover Andre Maddox says it's a matter of desire.

"On the field there's that desire to get where you need to be," said Maddox. "There's an adrenaline, an emotional charge to get there and you either have it or you don't."

Davis thinks his teammates in the defensive secondary have it.

"You probably won't see a long run or pass broken against us this year because we have so many people that can run guys down," said Davis. "It just can't happen because we'll close on them so fast."

That allows cornerbacks such as Golden, Reid, Davis and Dovonte Edwards to gamble sometimes by going for an interception instead of the tackle.

"We know if we happen to miss that interception that we have ten more guys that are going to be there and have our back and make that tackle," Golden said.

As for making catches on offense, quarterback Philip Rivers says this year's array of wide receivers in Jericho Cotchery, Sterling Hicks, Richard Washington, Brian Clark, Hall and company is the greatest corps he has played alongside in his career. According to Rivers, it's not very often that he overthrows anyone.

"They go get it," said Rivers. "If I ever throw one short, Richard Washington just [smiles, points to the end zone and] tells me to throw it out there and he'll go get it."

While Rivers is reading the defense, searching for an open receiver, offensive linemen should be sticking to their blocking assignments, but even second-team All-ACC tackle Chris Colmer admits it's hard not to occasionally steal a glance at his teammates streaking down the sidelines during practice.

"I was watching them run some routes and I was thinking, 'I wish I could run like that,'" said Colmer. "It's amazing. They can fly. They look like cheetahs or some

kind of wild animal."

Strength and conditioning coach Todd Stroud won't take credit for the Pack's influx of speed, but the 17-year coaching veteran has helped many players shed valuable tenths of a second from their forty time over the years. He attributes that success to proper form in the weight room, specifically in squats and the power clean. While other programs implement what Stroud calls "gimmick drills," he says there's no secret to the speed of the Pack.

"You'd like to think it's a magic formula, but it really is our coaches doing a great job of recruiting probably more so than anything else," said Stroud.

A former nose guard at Florida State, Stroud only times players in the 40-yard dash once a season, citing that it wastes a day better spent training. And while Manny Lawson boasts the fastest 40-yard dash time (4.32 seconds) by Stroud's stopwatch, there's no lack of debate among Pack teammates about who is really the fastest.

So who is it?

Washington, so confident he is the fastest, looks appalled when posed with the question, while Davis doesn't even blink an eyelash before affirming, "It's me."

Graham favors Andy Bertrand. Williams gives the nod to Davis. Hall has his money on Washington. But State's speed specialists have no plans to hold a race and determine the Pack's fastest man anytime soon. For now, they're more excited about a new season and the chance to prove they are the fastest team in the league.

"I'm ready," Hall said. "Sometimes I don't [sleep]. I'll just get up and sit on the edge of my bed and think, 'It's almost time.'"

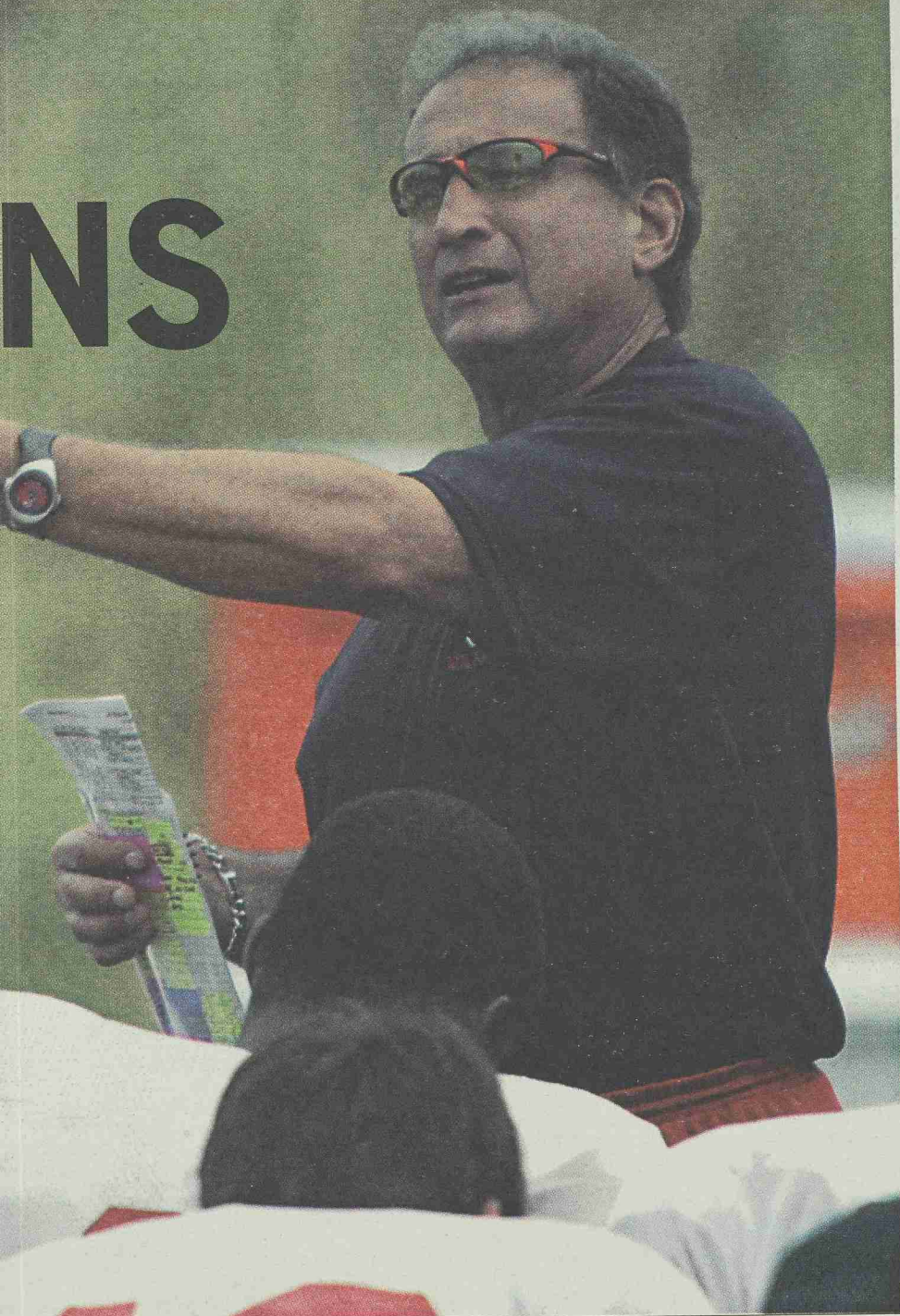
And game time – just like the Pack – is coming fast.



# GREAT EXPECTATION



# NS



A RECORD-SETTING YEAR HAS GIVEN THE **WOLFPACK FOOTBALL PROGRAM** NATIONAL PRESEASON ATTENTION THAT'S SETTING THE STAGE FOR MAYBE ITS MOST ANTICIPATED SEASON EVER.

Story by Matt Middleton  
Photos by Tim Lytvinenko

**That hill** always seemed to be a different shade of green. Lush and vibrant in the early months of the football season, more and more dormant as the year progressed.

As it stood overlooking the playing field at Carter-Finely Stadium for 35 years, it survived a steady, steadfast trample of patrons, some interested in the game, others more engrossed with socializing or tossing around their own pigskin. That hill saw its share of memories, too.

A heap of Ted Brown's ACC-record 4,602 rushing yards. The shock in 1986 when Erik Kramer's Hail Mary found Danny Peebles in the back of



the end zone to best South Carolina by a single point. Or more recently when the scoreboard that stood at its crest almost surreally read Wolfpack 24 FSU 7 late on that hot September afternoon in 1998. By 2001, however, three and a half decades was deemed long enough. Its requiem took place over the course of that summer as it was replaced by the Wendell Murphy Football Center and plush permanent seats in the south end zone. The revamped appearance not only gave N.C. State the look and feel of a big-time college football program, it affirmed a commitment between school and sport, as if to say "Here are your top-of-the-line facilities, now go win some championships."

Which is exactly what a former son of the program had vowed to do since his hiring three seasons ago.

Nowadays, people are starting to take notice of Chuck Amato and the school at which he spent four seasons playing linebacker. Sports Illustrated ranked the Wolfpack No. 8 in the nation with the school's name on its cover. When the first Associated Press poll was released, the Pack found itself just outside of the top 15, its highest preseason rating since 1975 — and the first in 10 years. The entire clamor came on the heels of last year's record-setting 11-win season that included victories over Notre Dame and Florida State and has greatly increased the publicity of the university.

"Putting N.C. State's name on the front of a magazine like that draws a national audience that otherwise might not know much about the school," said Chancellor Marye Anne Fox.

And so it is with that audience watching that the most anticipated season in the history of N.C. State football lingers on the horizon — a season by the declaration of its coaches, players and fans of great expectations.

#### "I'm not going to lower my standards."

Some snickered when Chuck Amato talked of a national title at his introductory press conference in January 2000. While they were still chuckling at his gaudy, unrealistic dreams, he choked up when discussing his former coach at State, Earle Edwards.

Later they were laughing at his jokes, his one-liners that drew quick comparisons to another former Italian Wolfpack coach, James T. Valvano, who won over the hearts of Raleigh long before he wooed the admiration of a nation in his fight against cancer.

What Amato inherited by his own self-admission was a team that wouldn't even make the third-string at Florida State, where he spent 18 years as an assistant to Bobby Bowden. Nevertheless, he approached the job with fire and grit, something that caught the eye of Fox during the hiring process.

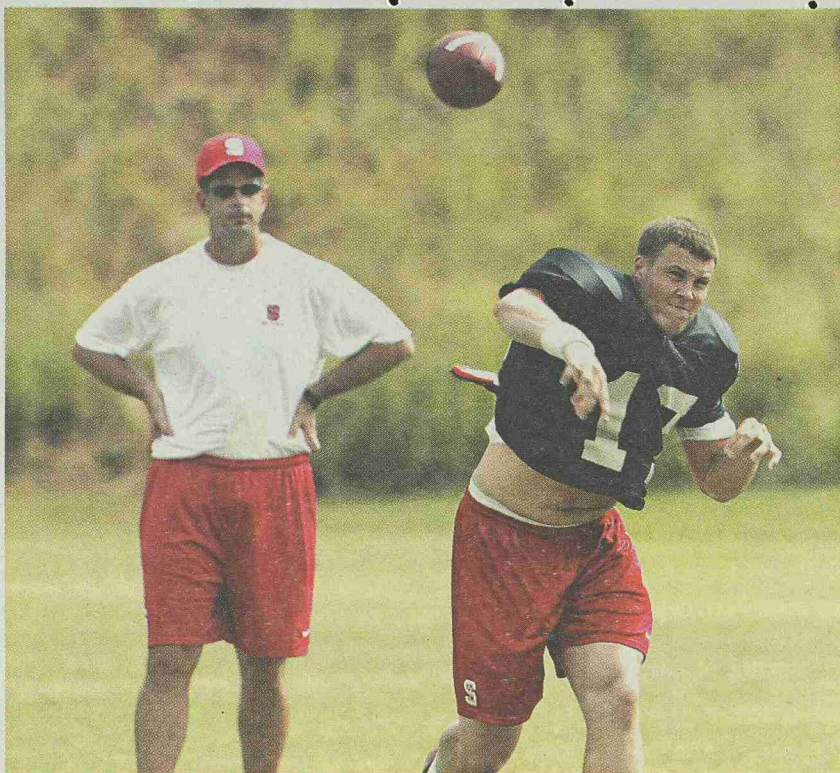
"We wanted someone to inspire the team, and his enthusiasm level clearly motivates his team," said Fox.

Taking the job in full stride, Amato laid out a championship plan and was fortunate enough that one of his first recruits, quarterback Philip Rivers, is on pace to leave the program as possibly the school's all-time greatest player.

"He came in with a lot of enthusiasm and on a mission," said Rivers. "He tells us all the time he's not going to lower our standards, we're going to have to come up to his. That's the way it's been and it's showed every year."

It didn't take long for people to realize the kind of attitude Amato had brought from Tallahassee. In just his second game as head coach, the Pack almost miraculously rallied to defeat Indiana on the road in a game that foreshadowed the team's season-long penchant for late-game heroics that included rallying from a 24-0 deficit to win the Micron PC Bowl.

"I'll never forget that locker room up at Indiana," said Amato. "The excitement in the locker room was just like



“ HE TELLS US ALL THE TIME HE'S NOT GOING TO LOWER HIS STANDARDS, WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO COME UP TO HIS. THAT'S THE WAY IT'S BEEN AND IT'S SHOWED EVERY YEAR. ”

- PHILIP RIVERS

the excitement I experienced eight months prior to that in the locker room when we won the national title at Florida State.”

Amato and the Pack gave the ACC more excitement that year, winning six games in come-from-behind fashion en route to the team's most wins since 1994.

"He gives players the attitude that we just won't lose," said junior cornerback Dovonte Edwards.

The following season debuted a revamped Carter-Finley Stadium that at times resembled more of a construction zone than football venue. State was rewarded with another bowl trip to Florida, where many of the team's standout performers were freshman from Amato's first full recruiting class. More importantly, that season laid the groundwork for a record-setting year in 2002, which in turn, has the team and its fans talking of the once-taboo of a national title.

"The facilities, the great coaching staff — it started from him saying 'We're going to build a championship program,'" said Rivers.

And that's precisely what Amato has done in order to sell his team to high-profile recruits. Building mainly from his former fertile recruiting area of Florida, Amato signed a top-20 class two of the last three years, with this season's

being called the best in school history by virtually every recruiting expert. There were six players from Florida on the team when Amato arrived. Now there are 30.

"That's the message we give to them when we recruit. We say 'Come be a part of it [building a championship program]. That's why some of them came here,'" said Amato.

One by one they did come, oblivious to the fact that the program had never been anything more than an afterthought, even in its own state.

"[The program] has had a big jump," said freshman Mario Williams, a native of Richlands and rated a national top-five defensive end by some publications. "Before I didn't really keep up with N.C. State, but now they've shocked a lot of people; they proved a lot of people wrong. N.C. State is a rising program; they have big things ahead of them."

"When I was growing up, it just seemed like a mediocre ACC team that really didn't excel too much, but wasn't at the bottom of the league," said Edwards, another North Carolina native. "But I knew coming in that was all about to change with the Coach Amato era."

#### Shooting for every game

The success of the team isn't the only thing that's changed. With an 11-win season, a two-game winning

streak over ACC behemoth Florida State and a bowl-game shellacking of the program of college football, Notre Dame, expectations amongst players and fans alike are soaring at unforeseen rates.

"The expectations have changed because we've set our goals so high," said Rivers. "We want to be a championship team and win the conference. We're recruiting top-notch players and bringing them in here, and we expect them to come in and play right off the bat."

Just like he did himself. In four years, Rivers has progressed from a self-described worrier concerned only with receiving the snap from his center to a legitimate Heisman candidate with his own web site who's on pace to hold almost every school passing record. His winning attitude was passed on to the classes that came in after him, many who believed shooting for a national championship is a predetermined objective.

"If you don't set that goal for yourself, why are you even on the field?" said loquacious junior Greg Golden.

Golden's tune is remarkably different from the younger days of senior tackle Chris Colmer, one of the last remaining Mike O'Connell recruits on the roster.

"When I first got here, we were always thinking we're going to come in and win eight games - we're going to shoot for all of them, but we really think we can get eight," said tackle Chris Colmer. "Now we come into the season and we're going to shoot to win every game for real."

Which is what Amato would expect even though he is exercising caution when discussing the lofty goals of the upcoming year. At the annual ACC Media Day in Georgia, Amato told the media to go get a drug test when told his team had hypothetically been picked to win the league.

"We haven't finished higher than fourth, what makes you think we're going to finish first?? he asked. "We're moving forward, there's no question about that, but before we think about winning a national title, we need to win a conference title."

"Could we take a step back before going forward? It could happen, but that doesn't mean we're faltering, because I most definitely think we are going in the right direction."

### The talk of the state

There's nothing unusual about a car tailgating in the parking lot of Carter-Finely on a weekend in late August.

But on a Sunday on the 10th of the month in the pouring down rain?

Yes. On the Wolfpack's annual "Day of Champions" earlier in the month, sure enough, a single tailgating car enjoyed a torrential downpour while gilling underneath a tarp some four hours before the commencement of festivities.

It was a clear sign of how excited and eager State fans are

## A NUMERICAL LOOK AT THE CHANGES THE WOLFPACK FOOTBALL PROGRAM HAS UNDERGONE SINCE THE

### ARRIVAL OF CHUCK AMATO.

Year	2000	2003
Previous season's wins	6	11
First-team All-ACC selections from that year	1	5
Preseason AP rank	-	16
Predicted ACC finish	7	2
National rank of incoming recruiting class*	-	8
Bowl teams on upcoming schedule	5	8
Number of Floridians on roster	5	29
Season tickets sold	24,425	34,500
Number of school passing records held by Philip Rivers	0	14

\*According to SuperPrep magazine

to begin the 2003 season.

"I've not ever seen anything like it," said Bobby Purcell, who has spent the past 23 years at State, 11 as executive director of the Wolfpack Club, the school's booster organization. "It really is the talk of the state right now. People that haven't been fans before are becoming Wolfpack football fans."

Purcell added that the only thing that rivaled the current feeling

of exuberance in and around Raleigh was the celebration during the 1983 national title run by Jim Valvano's Cardiac Pack.

But that was following a championship. A national championship. The last championship of any kind won by Wolfpack football was way back in 1979, when no one on this year's team was even alive.

Yet excitement bordering on a national title celebration is almost palpable in Raleigh. Season tickets were sold out by May, and at the end of the year construction will begin on a 104,000-square foot press box and luxury seat building that will stretch from end zone to end zone. Plans to fill in the north end zone with permanent seats are also in developmental stages, according to Purcell.

For Fox, the excitement is "normal behavior" to her after she spent over two decades at the football-crazed University of Texas. She hired Amato to compete at a national level and win championships. The former of those goals has been initially met.

With the expectations surrounding the program this year, the latter is a goal many around the program insist is nothing but unattainable.

Even if the hill isn't there to witness it.



Television cameras were abundant at the Wolfpack's preseason media day. In front of the cameras, Amato talked of the promising season that awaits his team.

TIM LYTVINENKO/TECHNICIAN

# N. CAROLINA TAR HEELS

## JUSTIN SELLERS

A 2002 season that saw the North Carolina football team go 3-9 overall can only be summed up by one word: ugly. "It was one of the toughest things I have ever been through as a football player or coach," said head coach John Bunting.

"We didn't have the stamina to hang in there during the fourth quarter last season. Even though [the games] weren't ugly on the board, they were ugly on tape."

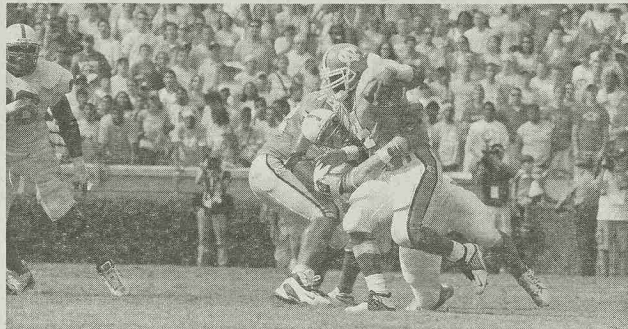
Two reasons -- a highly touted passing game and a recommitment to the running game -- stand for Bunting's confidence in his team being able to compete against a tough schedule that features non-conference games against No. 20 Wisconsin and No. 23 Arizona State, as well as the usual slate of ACC games.

With quarterback Darian Durant returning for his junior season and a talented, yet young receiving core of Adarius Bowman, Jesse Holley and Mike Mason ready to debut, the Tar Heels will have more options to go to with the pass, something they didn't

have much success doing last year when Durant battled injury trouble.

But with Durant's most obvious target last season, wide receiver Sam Aiken, gone, he will now look to Bowman, Holley and Mason to help lead the Heels' air attack. Bowman was ranked the No. 1 wide receiver in the state of Tennessee, while Holley was his high school's all-time leader in receptions (106), receiving yards (1,449) and touchdown catches (27). And then there's Mason, who was ranked the No. 1 wide receiver in North Carolina by ESPN's Tom Lemming, after a senior season that saw him rack up 66 receptions for 1,100 yards, both of which were single-season school records.

With a talented passing game, Carolina is hoping its running game will pick back up, creating a more balanced offense. Not since 1994 has UNC led the conference in rushing, and not since 1997 have the Tar Heels featured a 1,000-yard rusher, two key parts that Bunting has focused on for laying a strong foundation when it comes



TECHNICIAN FILE PHOTO

to running the ball in 2003.

"It's critical," he said. "We ought to be significantly better. I think it's the most competitive situation."

Coming off a brilliant spring is tailback Chad Scott, a junior transfer from Kentucky, who led the Wildcats in rushing in 2000 with 611 yards. That statistic helped him earn first-team freshman All-SEC honors.

"Scott adds a lot," said Bunting. "He sees

the hole and hits the hole better than anyone we've had. He turns a six-yard run into a 15-yard run."

The Tar Heels also feature veterans Jacque Lewis and Willie Parker, as well as newcomer Ronnie McGill. All that's left is determining which horse Bunting will look to ride when it matters the most.

"I think we have a chance to be a lot better," said Bunting. "Now, I'd like someone to step forward and become the man."

# CLEMSON TIGERS

## JON PAGE

Minutes before an interview session with reporters at the ACC Football Kickoff in Greensboro, Ga., Clemson senior John Leake jokingly posed a question of his own to Philip Rivers.

"You going to say anything stupid?" Leake asked.

"I might," said Rivers.

"Just for fun." Leake shared a harmless laugh with Rivers, though he would soon be the one biting his own tongue.

"Everybody's angry, everybody's disappointed, everybody wants to win more games," Leake told reporters of Clemson's 7-6 mark in 2002. "No one wants to sit there and go to [the Humanitarian Bowl] or the Tangerine Bowl."

The hard-hitting linebacker stopped himself, realized his near-blunder in bashing two of the ACC's allotted bowl games and corrected himself, "not to say those are bad bowls. But everybody wants to go to a BCS Bowl or the national championship."

It's an attitude prevalent throughout Tiger Town, where fans tend to overlook

the fact that head coach Tommy Bowden directed Clemson to a bowl game in each of his first four seasons- the first time a Clemson coach accomplished such a feat.

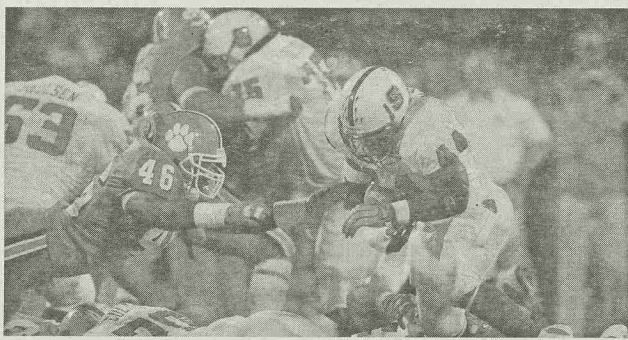
But even after another mediocre season, culminated by a 55-15 pasting from Texas Tech in the Tangerine Bowl, Bowden says he isn't sweating the heat in Death Valley.

"If you win a lot of games you're rumored to leave and if you lose a lot of games you're rumored to leave and that's the nature of the profession," said Bowden.

Although he says he won't adjust his coaching style, Bowden did toughen up his offense in the spring.

When Willie Simmons' departed to Florida A&M for his senior year, Charlie Whitehurst will be the undisputed leader at quarterback and instead of orchestrating a helter-skelter, no-huddle offense - a Bowden staple since his arrival at Clemson - the sophomore will likely spend most of his time under center in the I-formation.

When Whitehurst isn't handing the ball off to running backs Yusef Kelly, Kyle Browning, Reggie Merriweather or Duane



TECHNICIAN FILE PHOTO

Coleman, he has no short list of targets to dial up at wide receiver.

Veterans Kevin Youngblood and Derrick Hamilton combined for 111 catches and 1,193 yards last season, but junior Airese Currie stole Hamilton's starting spot.

"[Currie] has been our most consistent player in the preseason among the receivers," said Bowden. "He makes big plays."

Paving the way for those big plays will be a tested offensive line that returns four of its five starters, including senior Greg Walker.

On the other side of the ball, Clemson only returns five starters, but looks strong.

"It's shocking to me how good we can be [defensively]," said Leake. "We've got a lot more emotion this year. There were times last year when I wasn't emotional at all."

Leake will anchor the linebackers and 2002 Freshman All-American Justin Miller will solidify the secondary.

But there's no denying who the leader is. "I'm going to carry the defense. If something goes wrong, blame it on me," said Leake.



# DUKE BLUE DEVILS

## RYAN REYNOLDS

The streak now sits at 25. It dates back to 1999 when the Duke Blue Devils defeated Wake Forest 48-35. Since then Duke has lost 25 straight ACC games, but the players and coaches are optimistic that 2003 is the year "the streak" finally comes to an end.

Duke returns 20 starters on a team that came close to defeating ACC foes Virginia, N.C. State, Clemson and UNC-Chapel Hill last season.

Two returning starters are rushing duo Chris Douglas and Alex Wade. Last season Douglas rushed for 640 yards and two touchdowns, while Wade carried the ball for 979 yards and four touchdowns.

"It's important [the ACC losing streak] but having a winning season is more important to us," said Wade. "Obviously, having a winning season means that we're going to have to win some ACC games. It doesn't occupy our every thought. We know that we're going to break that streak at some

point this season.

"We hope it's going to be the first game, but if not we'll find another way to do it."

The success of the Blue Devils running game should continue to improve this season behind an experienced offensive line, which returns all five starters.

"Physically, just looking at our football team," said Duke head coach Carl Franks. "We've got big linemen and big running backs. We can go out there and have a chance to physically match up with people."

Junior quarterback Adam Smith threw for 2,031 yards, 12 touchdowns and nine interceptions last season. He also ranked sixth in the ACC with a 118.9 pass efficiency rating, but the Blue Devil offense only managed to average a dismal 18.9 points per game.

The defense returns nine starters but must replace a gaping hole at defensive end. Shawn Johnson, the Blue Devils only first-team All-ACC selection a year ago, unexpectedly transferred to a Division I-AA school.

Additionally, Duke's entire starting secondary returns from last season. Junior Kenneth Stanford headlines the secondary unit. The cornerback tallied 52 tackles, three interceptions and 11 pass breakups last season.

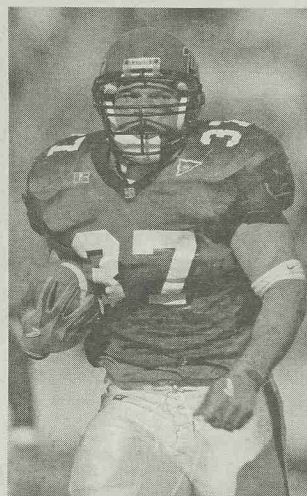
The coaching staff has made some changes for the 2003 season, hoping it will improve the team's chances of having a winning season. Franks voluntarily relinquished his role as the team's offensive coordinator and gave the position to Jim Pry.

Unlike other ACC teams this season, Duke lacks depth at almost all positions and will have to stay relatively healthy if it wants to be competitive against ACC opponents.

"The depth part is where we're not as strong, but our depth is better than it was," said Franks. "We're quicker and faster too."

Even though Duke hasn't won an ACC game since Franks' first year as head coach, he feels he has instilled the correct thoughts into his players minds in order to have a successful 2003 season.

"I set the tone for what we do," said Franks. "For the way the team approaches the off season and spring practice. When I first got [to Duke], I had to tell everyone



ACC PHOTO

how they were supposed to think and act. Now, guys like Alex Wade and Matt Zielinski, and others, they go tell people why we're doing things."

# FLORIDA STATE SEMINOLES

## AUSTIN JOHNSON

Bobby Bowden may agree that his offseason was full of turmoil, but he still contends to have full control over his program.

Sure backup quarterback Adrian McPherson was put on trial for a gambling misdemeanor, and defensive tackle Darnell Dockett was charged with felony grand theft. Those problems, along with situations like quarterback Chris Rix missing the Sugar Bowl after failing to take an exam, have caused doubters to dispute the idea that Bowden can still control his program these days.

Bowden sarcastically tossed the notion aside.

"We're out of control, but we suspended him [Dockett] for the Sugar Bowl. Chris Rix missed a test and we're out of control," he said.

But the team's problems aren't just off the field.

The Seminoles finished with a 9-5 record last year, winning the ACC, but going 2-4 out of conference and getting beaten in the

Sugar Bowl by Georgia. Senior linebacker Michael Boulware admits the off-the-field issues have been a distraction.

"I don't think it's too much to overcome. That's one thing about Florida State, we've always been able to reload and bounce back," Boulware said.

In spite of everything, the Seminoles are still pre-season favorites. They have a defense returning all 11 of its starters and plenty of talent on offense despite the questions that linger on that side of the ball.

The biggest question is which Chris Rix will show itself this season. Rix has shown the potential to be a great quarterback, but has also been inconsistent and prone to make poor decisions in the pocket. Statistically, he had a great year, throwing for 2,743 yards, completing 57.7 percent of his passes and throwing 23 touchdowns.

But after a loss against Notre Dame where he threw two interceptions and no touchdowns, he was benched in favor of McPherson.

Another offensive question mark is how Greg Jones' knee will hold up during the season. He was a Hesiman Trophy candi-



ACC PHOTO

date and the ACC's leading rusher before going down in the third quarter of a game against Wake Forest.

The defense should be a strong point for the Seminoles this year. Last season it was giving up an average of 366 yards a game and especially had trouble defending the opponents' passing attack. Only Duke gave up more yards in the air per game last year.

Boulware wants to see the defense put the fear of Florida State back in its oppo-

nents.

"We've definitely lost the fear. Back in the days, people used to be scared, fearful, and they just wanted to come out alive against Florida State," said Boulware, "Now, people respect us, they know we're a good team, but they have that sense of hope that they might have a chance if they give it all they have and don't give up."

"We want to knock that out of them as soon as we can."

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**Close Talker**

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olives, with choice of grilled chicken, steak or tofu.

## QUESADILLAS

**Sherman Klump**

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**John Coctostan**

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**I Said Posse**

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(vegetarian)

## NACHOS

**Rupriect**

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(vegetarian)

**Billy Barou**

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choice of chicken, steak or tofu.

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and shredded cheese

**Fat Sam**

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salsa, shredded cheese, guacamole and sour cream.

# 2003 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	CITY	TV	TIME
08/30/03	Western Carolina	Raleigh, NC		6:00 p.m.
09/06/03	Wake Forest	Winston-Salem, NC	ABC	12:00 p.m.
09/13/03	Ohio St	Columbus, OH	ABC	12:00 p.m.
09/20/03	Texas Tech	Raleigh, NC		TBA
09/27/03	North Carolina	Raleigh, NC		TBA
10/04/03	Georgia Tech	Atlanta, GA		TBA
10/11/03	Connecticut	Raleigh, NC		1:00 p.m.
10/16/03	Clemson	Raleigh, NC	ESPN	7:45 p.m.
10/25/03	Duke	Durham, NC		TBA
11/01/03	Virginia	Raleigh, NC		TBA
11/15/03	Florida State	Tallahassee, Fla.		TBA
11/22/03	Maryland	Raleigh, NC		TBA

## STAFF PICKS

### ACC STANDINGS

1. N.C. State 94 (7)
2. Florida State 85 (2)
3. Virginia 78 (2)
4. Maryland 73
5. Clemson 47
6. Wake Forest 39
7. North Carolina 34
8. Georgia Tech 23
9. Duke 18

TECHNICIAN SPORTS EDITORS AND STAFF CHOOSE THEIR TOP TEAMS AND PLAYERS FOR THE 2003 FOOTBALL SEASON.

#### ACC DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Michael Boulware, Florida State linebacker 7  
 Randy Starks, Maryland tackle  
 Greg Gathers, Georgia Tech end  
 Kendyll Pope, Florida State linebacker

#### NATIONAL CHAMPION

Oklahoma 4  
 Texas 3  
 Kansas State  
 Miami  
 N.C. State  
 Virginia Tech

#### ACC OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Philip Rivers, N.C. State quarterback 10  
 T.A. McLendon, N.C. State running back

#### HESIMAN TROPHY

Roy Williams, Texas wide receiver 4  
 Kevin Jones, Virginia Tech running back 3  
 Frank Gore, Miami running back  
 Cody Pickett, Washington quarterback  
 Philip Rivers, N.C. State quarterback  
 Kellen Winslow Jr., Miami tight end

# GEORGIA TECH YELLOW JACKETS

## BRIAN GROSSMAN

As the curtain opened on the 2001 college football season, Georgia Tech found itself ranked in the top 10 in the country according to most preseason polls and also as a dark horse candidate for the national championship. Just two seasons later, the Yellow Jackets find themselves picked for nearly last in the ACC.

The team that was once the obvious pick for number two in the ACC behind Florida State has fallen on hard times that do not look to improve much this season.

Last season under first-year head coach Chan Gailey, the Jackets were disappointed by the losses of star running back Tony Hollings to a knee injury and Greg Gathers, Georgia Tech's career leader in sacks, to a kidney ailment.

Gathers still may not be up to full strength this entire year.

"Gathers is continuing to get strength

and stamina back," said Gailey earlier in the summer. "He was not cleared for spring practice and has yet to be cleared for summer practice but he has been practicing with our team as far as conditioning... It may be another year away before he reaches 100 percent. We may see only 90-95 percent of Greg."

To be successful this season, Gathers must come back from his medical redshirt year and

contribute significantly. The Yellow

Jackets also face a rash of academic ineligibilities that claimed 16 players.

One of those players was Hollings, which is obviously a devastating blow to the team.

"It seemed like last year with all the injuries, it was always something," said senior linebacker Daryl Smith. "There was so much to deal with."

Replacing Hollings at running back and

the question mark that is Greg Gathers are not the only mysteries surrounding this season.

At quarterback, A.J. Suggs struggled last season in remaining consistent, while red-shirt sophomore Damarius Bilbo also failed to get a firm grasp on the starting job and has moved to wideout.

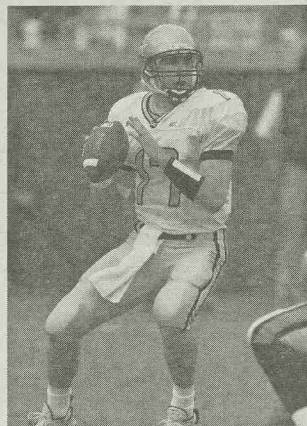
"It's really hard to say [who will start at quarterback]," said Smith. "If you can come in and you're capable and able to make plays and make good decisions, I'm fine with whoever the quarterback is."

Suggs, the former Tennessee transfer and heir to Peyton Manning, will compete with true freshmen Reggie Ball and Patrick Carter for the starting quarterback job.

"I think we know exactly what A.J. gives us right now," said Gailey. "He's a veteran guy that has played - he hasn't played well consistently, but he's done some good things from time to time...but initially, we have to check out the unknown."

Unfortunately for Georgia Tech, the unknown looms large, which is why many newcomers will see immediate action.

"I'd say of the 20 recruited freshmen, probably 15 of them are going to have to come and contribute fairly significantly,"



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said Gailey. "They're going to have to learn the game in a hurry; their learning curve is very short."

So is the patience of the fans and boosters of the Yellow Jackets.

# MARYLAND TERRAPINS

## JOE OVERBY

The combination of longtime ACC ruler Florida State's off-the-field problems and five losses in 2002 has led many to believe the ACC is no longer the Seminoles' yearly scalping ground. With several teams rising towards football prominence, the ACC is finally on its way to achieving a balanced conference and is no longer considered FSU and the eight dwarfs.

Of the teams challenging the Seminoles for league prominence, perhaps the quickest and most surprising suitor has been the Maryland Terrapins. A football doormat for most of the 1990s, the Terps have suddenly become an ACC heavyweight, garnering an Orange Bowl berth and a Peach Bowl victory over tradition-rich Tennessee in the past two seasons, setting the stage for high expectations.

"They're pretty high for us, but the only expectations we really need to worry about are the ones we set for ourselves," said se-

nior safety Madiou Williams.

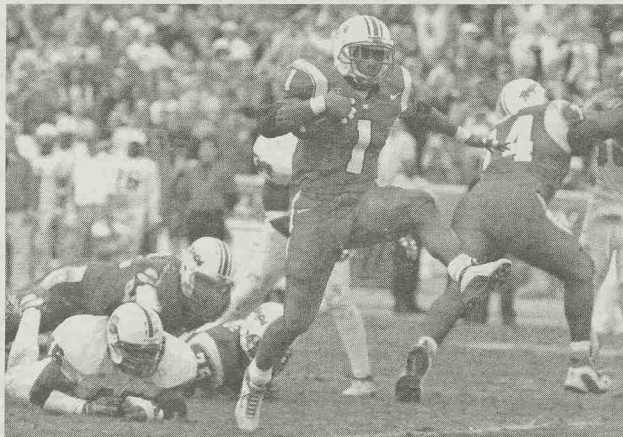
On the offensive side of the ball the Terps could be dangerous, led by offensive-minded head coach Ralph Friedgen. Senior Scott McBrien leads a senior-heavy offense that returns six starters from 2002. McBrien passed for 2,497 yards and 15 touchdowns in 2002. Additionally, the Terps return Bruce Perry, the ACC's Offensive Player of the Year in 2001.

"He's bigger and stronger, I just hope he's as fast," said Friedgen. "I'm very proud of Bruce - the maturity he's shown and the hardship he's endured to come back."

What's more, Maryland's defense should be one of the best in the ACC once again this season.

Maryland returns nine starters from a defense that finished 2002 second in the ACC in total defense (338.8 yards per game) and first in scoring defense. The Terps, however, will be burdened with the loss of first-team All-American linebacker E.J. Henderson.

"As a unit, everybody is going to have to



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step up their game so we can all overcome the hole that E.J. left us," said Williams. "But we have a couple of guys that are just as capable of replacing him."

The defensive line heads into 2003 as one of the deepest and talented units in the ACC. Second-team All-ACC tackle Randy

Starks recorded 93 tackles and 6.5 sacks in 2002.

The Terps' secondary is perhaps the best in the ACC: athletic, experienced and returning all starters from 2002. Among the returnees is first-team All-ACC junior cornerback Domonique Foxworth.

# VIRGINIA CAVALIERS

JAY KOHLER

What's up with the Virginia Cavaliers? Last season, they were picked to finish eighth in the conference. Keep in mind that's only one slot above the spot that Duke is picked to finish in football just about every year. Perhaps spurred on by being stuck next to Duke in the preseason polls, the Cavaliers went 9-5 (6-2 in the ACC) and finished tied for second in the ACC with Maryland.

"We were definitely aware of [being picked eighth]," said defensive back Almondo Curry. "But we knew we had more on our team to win more games. I could feel it in the weight room and the practice field."

A year later, Virginia is the preseason No. 4 pick in the ACC and even received five first-place votes at the ACC Kickoff. A lot of credit for last season's success goes to ACC Coach of the Year Al Groh and ACC Player of the Year Matt Schaub. On the field,

however, the man who will be the deciding factor for Virginia is Schaub.

"This quarterback (Schaub) is going to give us a real good chance to win games," Groh said. "Phil Simms made the Giants feel that way, Bledsoe made the Patriots feel that way. Certain quarterbacks can do it for their teams. At a point, Tom Brady made New England feel that way. Matt Schaub did that for our team this year."

The Cavs certainly believe that last year's fantastic performance wasn't a fluke, since they launched [www.Schaub4Heisman.com](http://www.Schaub4Heisman.com) in July. Voters, however, haven't given Schaub that little trophy just yet since

Schaub must prove that last season's 147.46 efficiency rating was the norm and that the 2001-2002 season's 118.76 rating was just an example of sophomore growing pains.

What's more, tailback, Wali Lundy, set an ACC freshman record last year by gaining 1,670 all-purpose yards.

With the offense doing so well last season, the defense found itself doing rather



TECHNICIAN

poorly at times. The defense gave up over 420 yards per game, which was good for next to last in total defense in the ACC. Improvement would be the name of the game in Groh's 3-4 defense this season and much of that defensive improvement will start with the linebacking core.

Senior Raymond Mann, Juniors Rich Bedesem and Bryan White and Sophomore Darryl Blackstock should all look to start.

It will probably take the combined effort of these four to replace the loss of Angelo Crowell, who was a first-team All-ACC player last season.

If they don't pan out, freshman Ahmad Brooks will be looking to take a starting job. His senior year of high school, Brooks was the USA Today national defensive player of the year.

# WAKE FOREST DEMON DEACONS

TAYLOR FRANCIS

The 1990s weren't a very friendly decade to Wake Forest, but then again, what period of time was?

Winners of just three bowl games in the history of their program prior to last year, the Demon Deacons added one more to that total with a stunning 38-17 victory over Oregon in the Seattle Bowl to finish 7-6.

Accompanied by 2001's 6-5 record, this season marks the first time the Deacs are coming off back-to-back winning seasons since 1987-88.

"I think we surprised a lot of people outside the program who weren't used to seeing a team play as hard as we do now," said senior safety Quintin Williams. "When we went to Seattle, it felt like we were the home team because the whole city was cheering for us."

What makes Grobe's quick improvement more impressive is that it has been done

without many superstar athletes.

"We're really not going to find a whole lot of ready-made kids to come to Wake Forest, but I don't think we have to," said head coach Jim Grobe. "A lot of times we may take a kid that's an inch shorter, a kid that's 20 pounds lighter, a kid that may be a half-step slower, but because of his work ethic, character and his desire to be a college football player, we might be able to develop that guy into an All-ACC football player."

But with success comes increased expectations and with an improved and balanced ACC, anything is possible for Wake Forest from a second-consecutive bowl berth to finishing at the bottom of the ACC.

Grobe will rely heavily on a group of young, relatively inexperienced players on offense. Only three starters return for the Demon Deacons and all three find themselves on the left side of the offensive line.

"We may be a left-handed football team going into the season," said Grobe.

Behind the offensive line will be sophomore quarterback Cory Randolph and several running backs highlighted by sophomore Chris Barclay.

Randolph will be expected to perform well, but the team's run-oriented attack will place most of the pressure on Barclay and the other runners.

"We gave our tailback the ball an average of 37 times a game last year, so we can't get by with one guy," said Grobe.

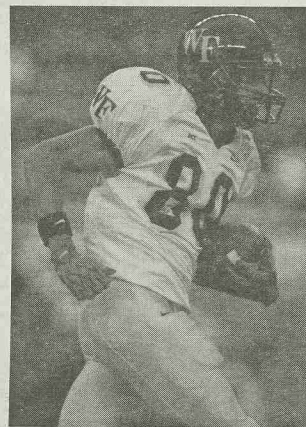
Eight starters return to Wake's unusual 3-3-5 defense, but the three players that left formed the entire front line of that unit. Two of those linemen went to the NFL, including first-round pick Calvin Pace, leaving some very big shoes to fill.

With the heavy losses up front, more duties will fall to a secondary full of underclassmen.

"All those secondary guys and linebackers are going to have to be our playmakers and the guys up front will just have to be tough," said Grobe.

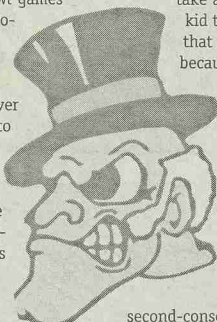
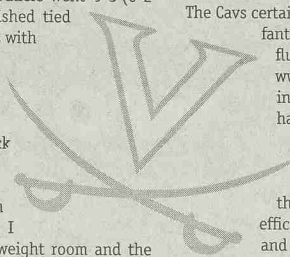
Entering his third season after his matriculation from Ohio, Grobe remains optimistic despite the notion that he could face his most difficult season yet.

"We're really young right now but in some



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cases, some of the young guys that are going to be playing for us this year are more talented than some of the old guys we lost," said Grobe. "If our young guys will step up and play with some intensity I think we'll have a chance."





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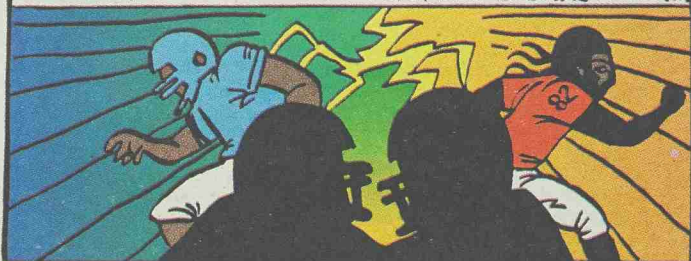


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to stop it!



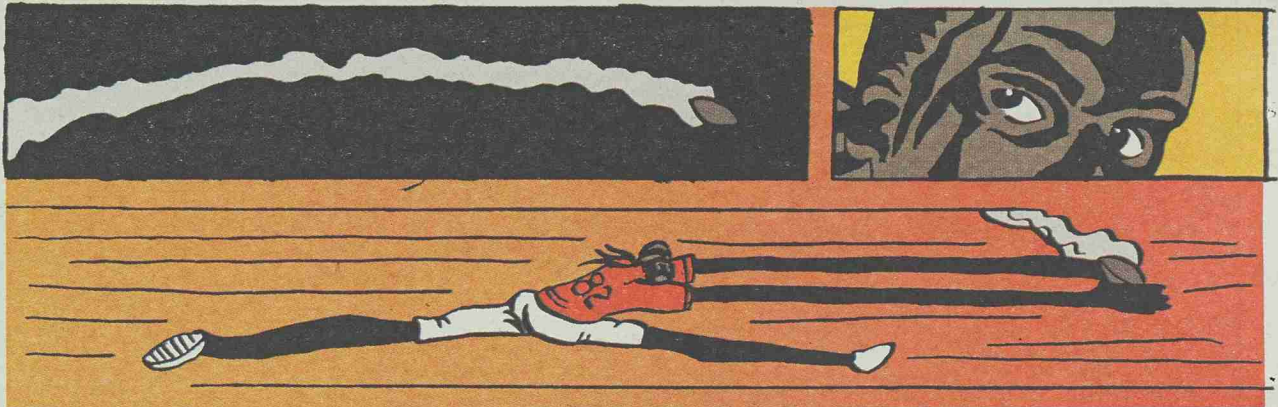
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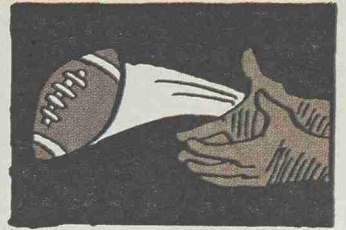
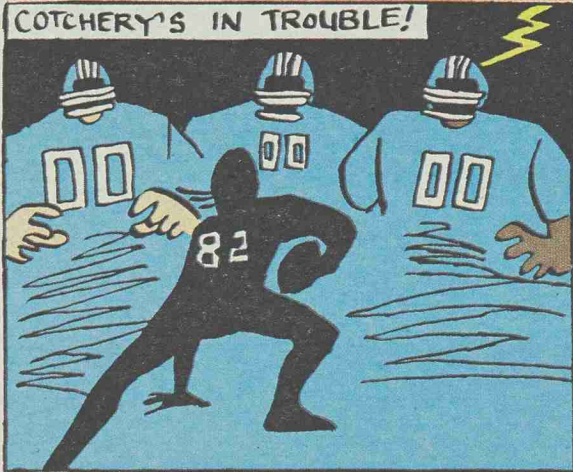
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