

COVERING THE DEMON DEACONS

FOOTBALL

Emerging star

A healthy tight end Ben Wooster could provide big boost to passing game

By Sam Walker

In every college football game, there are a handful of plays that usually determine its outcome. They shift momentum, alter the score or solidify the status quo. And in those moments, a player who is poised and focused in the “big” moment often emerges.

One year ago, tight end Ben Wooster looked to be one of those players who could focus and shine in the big moment. He was preparing to enter his junior season coming off an outstanding spring, and even Wake Forest offensive coordinator Steed Lobotzke was confident Wooster would become a big part of the Wake Forest offense in 2008.

“People don’t know Ben Wooster, but they’re about to find out,” Lobotzke said one year ago. “Ben was our leading receiver in the spring, and that’s something in this program because that just hasn’t been the case (in the past). And that’s in yards and catches. The league will know Ben Wooster at the end of this season because he is tall, he is fast, he catches the football, and Riley (Skinner) loves throwing it to him. I’m calling it. He’s going to have the best year of any tight end since we’ve been in charge here in seven years.”

Lobotzke had plans to utilize Wooster’s height, speed and hands often last year, but due to injuries, the season Lobotzke was visualizing didn’t quite materialize. It just might this season.

Wooster’s best statistical game came in last year’s season opener at Baylor, when he had six receptions for 90 yards, including a 43-yard touchdown grab. It was an auspicious beginning. As it turned out, 20 of his 24 catches came in the first five games of the year. Wooster started 10 games, but missed the Miami and Duke contests because of a strained hamstring, and an additional handful of nagging injuries hampered his ability to be a threat throughout the year. Despite injury leading to inconsistency, he finished third on the team in receptions. That was then.

Being poised and focused in key moments extends well past football for Wooster. Equanimity will be essential for the career for which he is preparing. The senior who came to Wake Forest from Greater Atlanta Christian School, the same school that produced former Deacon running back Micah Andrews, wants to become a doctor. He is already well on his way.

Over the last three summers, Wooster shadowed Dr. Michael Morris, an orthope-



Senior Ben Wooster caught 20 of his 24 passes last season in the first five games before injuries slowed him down.

dic specialist back home in Georgia who actually operated on him when he was in high school. Wooster observed procedures such as knee replacements and saw life as an orthopedic specialist in its authentic form. Over the past three spring semesters, Wooster has also volunteered in the Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center Emergency Room — a place where a calm and steady demeanor is also essential.

“It just worked out that I ended up in the ER because I needed a night shift,” Wooster said. “They want you to work four consecutive hours, and I didn’t have four consecutive hours in the day with class, practice and training. So the emergency room shift was 8 p.m. to 12 a.m., and that worked out perfectly.”

Wooster’s role in the ER, as he described it, was more of a liaison between the medical staff and the families

of those admitted for care. “Every case is different, and it’s something you have to solve quickly so it can be brutal,” Wooster said. “I was the guy who put the doctors with the families and got the status of patients, updated the families in waiting, and I would go out and console. But they train you how to handle different situations.”

See WOOSTER, Page 4

Worth the wait

This is the year for former receiver/safety Jonathan Jones at linebacker

By Jay Reddick

Four years is a long time. But for some people, the passage of time feels even longer than the calendar will admit.

Jonathan Jones is one of those people. He came to Wake Forest four years ago as a wide receiver eager for playing time. Today, after two position changes, two frustrating injuries and plenty of time waiting on the sidelines, he knows that, finally, it's time.

He enters preseason drills as the projected starter at Sam linebacker, right in the middle of the defense.

The Deacs' opener against Baylor on Sept. 5 should be Jones' first as a starter for Wake Forest at any position. The fact that it's where all-everything Aaron Curry patrolled last year isn't putting any extra pressure on the Madisonville, Tenn., native.

"I think AC was the best in the game last year," Jones said. "To have that standard ... I know what it looks like. I just have to put the work in and reach for it."

No one doubts that Jones has put the work in. He's added about 25 pounds to his 6-foot-3 frame during his time in Winston-Salem (he weighs 240 pounds now), and he's done it without sacrificing much of the quickness that has been his calling card.

Defensive coordinator and linebackers coach Brad Lambert said Jones has found the proper balance between speed and power.

"He has the ability to come off the edge pretty fast," Lambert said. "He's athletic enough to drop in space and blitz, and



Senior Jonathan Jones looks forward to his opportunity to start at linebacker for the Deacons.

he's developed the strength to take on tight ends and linemen."

Not bad for someone who never played linebacker before the spring of 2008.

At Sequoyah High School, Jones played some safety, some running back and even a little bit at quarterback but spent most of his time becoming a top-notch wide receiver. That's what coaches projected when they recruited him in 2005, and he

spent his redshirt year training at that position.

But he has still never caught a pass in a college game. In camp before his first year on the active roster, Jones tore ligaments in his left wrist. By the time he had healed the following spring, he had been moved into the defensive backfield.

He spent his sophomore year getting some snaps at safety and on special teams,

Jonathan Jones file

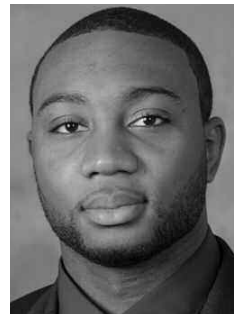
Class: Senior
Major:

Sociology, with a minor in Entrepreneurship
Hometown: Madisonville, Tenn.

Position: Linebacker

A second

sport? Jones played basketball along with football at Sequoyah High. He was good enough that he skipped football his sophomore season to concentrate on basketball, and he was recruited by several colleges in both sports. Then reality set in. "I thought basketball was going to be my ticket to the big time," Jones said. "But I didn't realize I was 6-3 and playing post. My AAU coach put me at guard, and the transition — I didn't really have enough time to learn the new position."



but in the spring of 2008, as he continued to add strength and size, the coaches slotted him as the backup for Curry.

"He was moved to safety because we had a need for depth over there," Lambert said, "but as he started growing, we found he was a more natural fit at Sam. His body is so long that he was having trouble keeping his weight down, so it made sense. You never know. When a guy finds

See JONES, Page 6

WOOSTER

Continued from Page 3

As a health and exercise science major, Wooster has seen the research side of medicine, too. Wooster had the unique opportunity to present the results of a research project he was helping conduct as part of his major to the American College of Sports Medicine Conference in May in Seattle, Wash.

Last summer, Dr. Peter Brubaker of the Wake Forest University Health and Exercise Science Department was leading a research project on the cardiovascular risk profile of collegiate football players. Using Wake Forest football players, Dr. Brubaker and his research team performed echocardiograms and looked at the cardiovascular health of college football players currently playing the game. The results were a bit surprising.

"It was more of an informal presentation," Wooster said. "We gave it to people who were just interested in that particular realm of cardiology. But it just worked out

Ben Wooster file

Class: Senior
Major: Pre-med major in health and exercise science

Hometown: Suwanee, Ga.

Position: Tight end

Top Athletic Achievements:

Academic All-ACC as a sophomore and junior; Dean's List; ACC Honor Roll



that my academic adviser, Dr. Brubaker, told me they were trying to get a grant for this study, and once the grant came through, it worked out that I could do my honors research with him.

"There have been studies on retired professional football players, and these studies have shown they have enlarged hearts. But (until now) there had been no study done to identify when the heart actually

began growing in size. Our hypothesis was that this would begin during the collegiate years. That's the first time you are working out so intensely and when the caloric intake is up and you're trying to gain weight. But it was a null hypothesis. We found they were healthy, perfectly normal. It was a pleasant null hypothesis."

On the football front, Wooster wants to have that outstanding season that Lobotzke's believes can happen if he stays healthy. As a senior, Wooster understands it's his last opportunity and that it could lead to a possible NFL career. The 6-5, 235-pound Wooster ranks among the top-20 tight ends as ranked by Rivals.com following collegiate spring practices. He is also one of 30 tight ends named to the preseason watch list for the 2009 John Mackey Award, given annually to the top collegiate tight end.

"That's an interesting situation, but a lot of that will depend on how my senior season goes," Wooster said. "If I have a good season, then I think that opportunity might be more realistic for me. I'm excited for that, and I got a letter today that said I'm

going to be on the watch list for the East-West Shrine Game (a post-season collegiate all-star game). I get e-mails and letters from possible agents, but I don't know much yet. Until then, I just want to focus on this season.

If there's any foreshadowing to a great senior campaign for Wooster, look back to the EagleBank Bowl when Wake Forest trailed Navy 19-14 with 12:30 left to play. The Deacons responded with an 80-yard drive with Wooster catching a tough 8-yard touchdown pass in the back of the end zone on third down. The play shifted momentum, altered the score and ultimately led to victory. Wooster was focused and poised in the big moment.

"I'm really excited about the upcoming season," Wooster said. "I love the offense we're running now, and we have a lot of guys back this season, so it's really just the offense's time to step up. We have full confidence in our defense, and the only thing they're lacking right now is experience. But we really feel like we have the most veterans on our side of the ball, and we're looking to do big things."