THE DAILY CLIPS

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CHAPEL HILL—N.C. State's Carrie Leger is comfortable with the ways her university regulates the relationship between athletes and their tutors. And yet, the fear of the unknown always lurks, Leger told a roomful of other college academics and athletics staffers Monday.

"I think we feel as good as we can in terms of tutoring," said Leger, an associate athletic director, "but also recognize a determined individual can do a bad thing."

Her words elicited some knowing head nods Monday from others familiar with the challenges that campuses face in providing academic support services to athletes.

Tutors are vetted, trained and given strict guidelines to adhere to, all to make clear that ethical lines cannot be crossed.

And yet, that line does get breached. At UNC-Chapel Hill, a tutor's misdeeds led to football player suspensions last fall. As a result, a task force was created to examine the intersection of academics and athletics on the state's public campuses.

The group spent two hours Monday kicking around ideas to improve tutoring and academic support oversight, admissions and other issues related to college athletes.
Among the emerging themes: the level of responsibility a university bears for helping student athletes who are underprepared for college. Several task force members said institutions can't let athletes flounder, that resources must be put in place to help them along.

But that can be tricky, others acknowledged. There's a fine line between help and cheating.

"We bring some kids who aren't ready, so we have to provide some support," said East Carolina Chancellor Steve Ballard, chairman of the task force. "But how much help is too much? You can cross that line in a hurry, so you have to be very clear."

The task force will meet at least a couple of times more. Later this year, it will issue a formal report to UNC system President Tom Ross.

**Fears of fraud**

Much of the discussion Monday centered on academic fraud, a concept task force members struggled to define in clear terms.

Jack Evans, the UNC-CH business professor who until recently served as UNC-CH's faculty athletics representative, said students can be confused at times because professors don't all define cheating the same way. Some will encourage students to share drafts of a paper, seek advice from others or even share work, while others consider all those things forms of cheating.

"One faculty member will encourage practices of sharing that another faculty member will not accept," Evans said. "It creates a challenge if one is going to define what academic fraud is and what it isn't. It gets very hard to get beyond a basic principle."

The relationship between tutors and college athletes was illuminated late last year when UNC-CH acknowledged that some of its football players had received improper academic help from a tutor within the athletic support program.

"It was probably a wakeup call for the UNC system," Ballard said Monday. "If it could happen at Chapel Hill - and I think they probably had the best tutoring mentoring system - it could happen anywhere."
Enforcing standards

It isn't unusual for universities to admit a student who doesn't meet academic standards if he or she offers an unusual skill - often the ability to shoot a basketball or run fast with a football.

But the process by which campuses make those decisions varies greatly. UNC Charlotte's six-step approach is particularly rigorous. Some or all of it may be trumpeted by the task force as a way to vet these prospective students.

At UNCC, faculty members have a say early in the process. The coach and athlete must submit a written plea, after which the campus faculty athletics representative interviews the applicant. Eventually, the campus chancellor must sign off before the student is admitted.

"It is pretty intense," said Lisa Hibbs, who directs UNCC's athletic academic center. "Most coaches have to make a choice. Is this student worth it or not? It has to be a very, very important recruit."

At UNCC, just a handful of athletes go through this process each year. At NCSU, 15 to 25 receive this special consideration, Leger said. At UNC-CH, about 20 do, Evans said.

The athletic support function can be costly. It's on the rise at UNCC because that campus will add about 100 athletes soon when it debuts a football program.

Brian Battle, UNC Greensboro's senior associate athletic director, was blunt in describing how best to make improvements.

"Improve academic oversight?" he said. "More people. More money."

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The story so far

Late last summer, the NCAA and UNC-Chapel Hill began looking into allegations that some Tar Heel football players had received improper benefits from agents.

Subsequently, UNC-CH determined that some players had also gotten improper academic help from a tutor within the university's academic support program.
The agent issue forced the departure of then-assistant coach John Blake. Fourteen players sat out at least one game, while seven missed the entire season.

Now, a UNC system task force is examining the relationship between academics and athletics at UNC-CH and all its campuses.
A task force appointed by University of North Carolina President Tom Ross on Monday began discussing how best to balance academics and athletics on the system's campuses to avoid more instances of misconduct.

Ross formed the 13-member group after problems with cheating cropped up at some UNC schools. An initial report is expected by May.

Last fall, 14 members of the UNC-Chapel Hill football team missed at least one game because of allegations of improper benefits from sports agents or academic misconduct. East Carolina University also reported problems to the NCAA involving a tutor and athletes.

"We are really looking at integrity within all divisions of athletic endeavors. We want to make sure that we are doing all we can to protect that," said ECU Chancellor Steve Ballard, who heads up the task force. "It's a huge job."

Ballard said the process is complicated because of the diverse group of campuses and athletic programs in the UNC system.

"Everybody faces some of these things, but probably not all areas of risk are the same on each campus," he said.

The panel is looking at a variety of issues, including making sure players know the rules and what defines cheating, and the best way to train tutors so they know what type of help isn't allowed.

"I think we also have to consider very heavily technology and online classes. How do we define academic fraud or academic integrity?" said Angelia Nelson, assistant athletic director at Elizabeth City State University.
Members are also talking about how institutions waive admission standards when an athlete doesn't qualify. One example being studied is a six-step process at UNC-Charlotte that involves faculty.

"It only takes a few athletes, as we found out in our institution, to really embarrass the institution," Ballard said.
Wreck kills ECU grad student
By Gina Childress
The Wilson Times
Tuesday, March 22, 2011

WILSON — An East Carolina University graduate student lost her life in a violent, head-on crash Monday morning on U.S. 264 Bypass near Black Creek Road.

Police say 24-year-old Amanda Kelly, a native of Ontario, Canada, was operating a 2000 Ford Taurus that hit a second vehicle head-on. Kelly was pronounced dead at the scene. Police confirmed Kelly was a graduate student at ECU. The wreck occurred about 8:30 a.m.

Johnnie Page III, 31, of Sims was operating a 2006 Chevrolet Silverado 2500 and also was injured. He was treated at Wilson Medical Center and released.

Personal items and debris from both vehicles were strewn along the usually busy highway. The roof of Kelly's Ford Taurus was removed by emergency workers and could be seen on the ground behind her vehicle.

A portion of U.S. 264 was closed for about five hours as the Wilson Police Department's Strategic Traffic Enforcement Patrol unit worked to investigate and reconstruct the accident. The final report will be made available at the conclusion of the investigation, officials said.

Police spokesman Sgt. John Slaughter said Kelly was traveling eastbound on U.S. 264 Bypass toward Greenville near the 45-mile marker when she ran off the road. Investigators say it appears she overcorrected her vehicle in an attempt to regain control, causing her to travel into the center median. She crashed through the wire guardrails and into oncoming traffic.

“Ms. Kelly's vehicle then collided head-on with Mr. Page's vehicle,” Slaughter said. Because the investigation is in the early stages, there was no indication as to what may have caused the wreck. Officials said they did not believe alcohol was a factor.

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A woman who was an East Carolina University summer school student on June 30, 2009, testified at the double-murder trial of James Richardson Tuesday, saying she and friends watched the events unfold from a vantage point.

Carmen Kellum said she saw a tall black man in a white T-shirt run from a fight outside The Other Place just after 2 a.m. that morning, saw him get in a white BMW, drive the wrong way south on Reade Street, turn right onto Fifth Street, then stop in front of the nightclub and fire five or six shots into the crowd standing outside.

Kellum was the first witness called by prosecutor Clark Everett on Tuesday. She said she heard the man yell, "You all better get back inside."

Kellum said the man was the only person to get into the BMW, after lingering a few moments around the car.

She described the route he took, using an electronic video map that Everett provided. After the shots were fired, Kellum and her friends hid behind a tree while she called 911 to report the shooting, she said.

Previous story
A close friend of accused murderer James Richardson told jurors at Richardson's capital murder trial Monday that he saw one man speed past him in a white car moments before shots rang out on June 29, 2009.
Richardson, 33, a former J.H. Rose standout who played professional basketball in Europe, is accused of killing two men while driving a white BMW down Fifth Street and firing a 45-caliber handgun out of the window. Monday was the first full day of testimony in his trial. He could be sentenced to death if convicted of the crime.

Corio Antonio Arrington, serving prison time for unrelated charges, said in court and in a recorded police interview that he was with Richardson and Richardson's brother, Andre, when Richardson was ejected from The Other Place nightclub on Fifth Street. He said he pulled Richardson away from a large number of people who jumped on him outside the club, then watched Richardson run down Fifth and turn the corner toward where his car had been parked on Reade Street.

As Arrington and Richardson's brother walked through a convenience store parking lot toward the car, he watched a car drive past him and turn the corner onto Fifth Street, headed toward the club, he testified.

He said he didn't see the make of the white car that sped past him.

“I just got a glance. I couldn't see who was in the car. I don't think I saw more than one person,” Arrington said.

Arrington told defense attorney Jeff Cutler that he put his hand in the air to flag the car down, but it just sped by. “I felt like if it was James, he woulda stopped,” Arrington said.

Cutler asked Arrington if he made any statements to officers who picked him up at his mother's house the next day to bring him to police headquarters for questioning.

“I don't recall that. I'm a forgetful person in the mind,” Arrington said.

Arrington's descriptions of events at The Other Place and earlier that night at Dr. Unks matched, for the most part, those of others who testified Monday to being there at the same time.

Shannon Tyndall testified that she was bartending at The Other Place when she saw Richardson get into an altercation.

Richardson protested when bouncers began to escort the men from the club, Tyndall said. “He threw his hands up and said, ‘Don't touch me. You better not touch me,’” she said.

Tyndall said she identified Richardson as the man who got tossed when Greenville police Det. Connie Elks later showed her a copy of the 1996 Rose High School yearbook, which had two photos of him. She said she hadn't seen him since school, but recognized him that night by his features.

Another woman, Lisa Wrzesinszki, testified that she saw Richardson at Unk's and The Other Place.
Wrzesinzki had gotten off her job at another restaurant, went to meet friends at Unk's and saw Richardson there with his friends, she said.

Coincidently, Andrew Kirby was at Unk's as well, she said. Kirby, a restaurant manager, was killed later in front of The Other Place along with East Carolina University student Landon Blackley.

Wrzesinzki told Assistant District Attorney Kimberly Robb she didn't like Richardson. “I thought he was a very rude person,” she said.

Arrington told jurors that after he and Andre Richardson walked to the spot on Reade Street where he and James Richardson had parked, the white BMW that Richardson had borrowed from his friend, James Peterson, in Charlotte days before was gone.

He said he caught a ride to another friend's house with Andre and met up with James Richardson and a woman who was with Richardson all night. At the house, he saw the BMW with two men inside but could not identify them.

Arrington said they all drove to Raleigh that night and stayed at a hotel. The next day, he left Richardson and got a ride back to Greenville. Only then, he said, did he learn that two men had been shot to death outside The Other Place.

Peterson, a childhood friend living in Charlotte, was called first by the prosecution Monday. Opening statements came on Friday followed by three witnesses, including a man who testified he and Richardson were involved in the altercation at The Other Place about 2 a.m.

Richardson was in Charlotte several days earlier when he asked to borrow Peterson's car to attend a basketball tournament in Raleigh, Peterson said Monday morning.

He loaned the 1993 BMW 525 to Richardson on June 24 or June 25, 2009, he said. He had only one key, and gave it to Richardson. No other keys existed, and he didn't give permission to anyone else to drive car, he said.

Richardson called Peterson on June 28 to ask if he could keep the car another day. Peterson told him he could. He never heard from or spoke with Richardson again after that, he said. He called him several times but only could leave voice messages, he said. Peterson never has owned a gun and never had one in the car, he said. He was shown photos of the car with a bullet casing in the rear window and a bullet on seat.

“Never saw them before,” he said.

He was contacted and interviewed by Elks after the incident. Peterson said he saw Richardson with a gun a year or so before he loaned his car to him. He was told the gun was legally registered, he said. He never saw it fired, he said.

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ECU coach Ruffin McNeill watches his team during the first day of spring football practice Monday afternoon. (Rhett Butler/The Daily Reflector)

McNeill begins second act
By Nathan Summers
The Daily Reflector
Tuesday, March 22, 2011

One year ago, practically everything was new with the East Carolina football team, from coaching staff to quarterback.

When the Pirates opened their second spring practice under head coach Ruffin McNeill late Monday afternoon, perhaps the only new thing was McNeill's lease on life.

In the wake of his offseason bariatric surgery and a little over a month in advance of hip replacement surgery, a much trimmer McNeill was reunited with his players, and the coach was quick to point out that he won't be the only one feeling different for long.

“They'll feel it today, I would imagine,” McNeill said Monday of how his players will feel the effects of McNeill's ever-improving health. “I'm able to move around a lot better, I'm a lot stronger and my mind's a lot clearer.”

That means McNeill will be able to cover the Pirates' practice facility more quickly and interact with his players more easily.

In six weeks, the coach's personal renovation project will enter its final phase when McNeill undergoes hip surgery that should complete the task of giving the coach much greater mobility.

As proof of the change, McNeill had a bottle next to him at Monday's spring practice press conference, part of what he called a very limited diet at this point. It's admittedly been a tough change, but McNeill said he won't turn back now.
“I have some Crystal Light over here, but really, it's a steak-and-egg sandwich in my mind,” McNeill said. “But it's Crystal Light. I'm so stubborn and hard-headed that I'll stay by it. It's not going to be a flash in the pan for me. I'm very serious about the move and the change and I'll stay with it.”

The Pirates completed the first of 15 total spring workouts Monday, and the first of three limited-contact sessions in which players wear helmets but no pads. The second no-contact session is slated for Wednesday, while Friday's and Saturday's are set to be full-pad workouts.

In addition to his health gains, McNeill said he is excited there is better organization in his second full year with the team.

“Last year at this time, we were trying to figure out who was where and who was what, staff-wise and player-wise, but it is a more comfortable feeling here now, being in our second year with this program and being around the young men for a second year,” McNeill said.

Pro day
McNeill did not go into any detail regarding his thoughts about the National Football League's lockout, but his feelings about it were made very clear when he was asked about Wednesday's annual pro timing day at ECU, a chance for last year's seniors to work out for NFL scouts in advance of the draft.

“Don't get me started on that lockout mess,” McNeill said.

Even the NFL's impending strike, however, could not dull what the coach feels about last year's seniors, led by NFL draft hopefuls like wide receiver Dwayne Harris and offensive lineman Willie Smith.

“They'll forever be in my heart for what they did and the sacrifices they made for our staff during a transition period,” McNeill said of the 2010 senior class. “They helped us lay the blueprint that I'm very proud of, and the team concept. I'll miss them, but I'm also texting them and wishing them well in their endeavors on Wednesday during pro camp.”

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Pirates address issues
BY BRIAN HAINES - Correspondent
GREENVILLE—After he fielded one of the worst defenses in college football last season, there was no doubt what East Carolina coach Ruffin McNeill had placed on the top of his to-do list as the Pirates launched spring practice Monday.

Accompanied by Pirates defensive coordinator Brian Mitchell, the second-year head coach announced plans to abandon his 4-3 defensive alignment and switch to a 3-4 formation for this fall.

ECU capped a 6-7 season last year with a 51-20 loss to Maryland in the Military Bowl, a defeat that highlighted many of the defensive woes that hamstrung a high-scoring ECU team that ranked eighth nationally in passing offense, 25th in total offense.

The Pirates were 5-2 through their first seven games last season, but they stumbled to a 1-5 record down the stretch in large part because of a young, injury-plagued defensive line that failed to stop the run or pressure opposing quarterbacks.

ECU finished the season ranked last out of 120 Bowl Subdivision teams in total defense (478.8 ypg) and 117th in rush defense (226.7 ypg). Its pass defense was only marginally better (107th, 252.1 ypg).

"We will go to a 3-4 package, and the reason behind that is personnel issues," McNeill said Monday. "We have a lot of guys on campus, like a [sophomore DL/LB] Justin Dixon and [junior DL/LB] Marke Powell just to name a few, that can step up and be guys that can stand up on two legs and maybe run around a little better."

Playing at defensive end, Dixon recorded three sacks last season in the team's first four games before a knee injury sidelined him for the rest of the season. Despite missing nine games, Dixon tied freshman defensive end Matt Milner for the team lead with those three sacks.
McNeill, who was a defensive coordinator at Texas Tech before coming to ECU, said that he and Mitchell decided to make the switch and called it a move his staff is comfortable with.

"We came about [the decision] together," McNeill said. "Everyone on our staff has 3-4 experience. I have 3-4 experience, Brian [Mitchell] has 3-4 experience, [outside linebackers coach] Duane Price has 3-4 experience, and [defensive line coach] Mark Yellock played in a 3-4 while he was here, and [associate head coach/inside linebackers coach] John Wiley has experience in it."

The Pirates' defense expects back seven starters from last season.

A year ago, the big story was who would play starting quarterback, but after a record-setting performance by junior transfer Dominique Davis, that is one question McNeill does not have to worry about this spring.

Under the direction of first-year offensive coordinator Lincoln Riley, Davis rewrote the ECU record book, connecting on 393 of his 609 pass attempts for 3,967 yards and 37 touchdown passes, all school records.

Davis flourished in Riley's pass-happy spread offense, and East Carolina scored 36.7 points per game, the 16th highest total nationally.

The Pirates' biggest concerns on offense revolve around an offensive line that must replace three starters and a running back corps that must find a way to overcome the losses of starting running back Jonathan Williams and his primary backup, Giavani Ruffin.

"The most vital position is offensive line, and we have to establish our starters there," McNeill said. "There are some guys that have stepped up in the offseason, but that was the offseason.

"I'm ready to see how they perform with full pads."

While ECU lost its all-time leading receiver Dwayne Harris to graduation, it will bring back 6-foot-3, 212-pound senior deep threat Lance Lewis (89 receptions, 1,116 receiving yards, 14 touchdowns in 2010), along with senior speedster Michael Bowman (47- 434-3).
"The wide receiver position has the most personnel; now we have to see who will be those guys in the top eight or top 10 that we travel with each game and use in this offense," McNeill said.

"You don't replace a Dwayne Harris, you just maybe have some guys that can accumulate his importance to the team yardage-wise and performance-wise."

**ECU Purple-Gold Spring Game**

When: 2:30 p.m. April 16  
Where: Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium, Greenville  
Tickets: $5
Juror: DNA proved guilt convincingly
By Joe DePriest, Franco Ordoñez and Gary L. Wright
GASTONIA—The jury never questioned whether Mark Carver was guilty in the 2008 killing of UNC Charlotte student Irina Yarmolenko, one juror told the Observer on Monday.

The jury convicted Carver of first-degree murder after deliberating about six hours, a discussion that mostly centered on whether the killing was premeditated.

"I didn't see anything thin about the evidence at all," said juror Warren Newsom. "The evidence weighed against Mr. Carver. I feel very comfortable about the verdict. It's the only one I could come to."

Carver, 42, sat quietly as the clerk read the verdict, drawing gasps then sobs from his family and friends in the courtroom. Carver declined to speak on his own behalf before Superior Court Judge Timothy Kincaid sentenced him to life in prison without parole.

Yarmolenko, a 20-year-old sophomore, was found strangled near her car on an overgrown embankment along the Catawba River. Wrapped around her neck were a bungee cord, a ribbon and a drawstring from her sweatshirt. She had reportedly gone to the river to shoot photos of kayakers that day in May 2008, when Carver said he was fishing in the area.

The six-day trial revealed that Carver's DNA had been found on Yarmolenko's car but not on her body or on the bindings used to kill her. In the two days of testimony, prosecutors brought no witnesses to the killing and little discussion of any motive until suggesting during closing arguments that Yarmolenko may have photographed something Carver didn't want on film.

"This was one of the toughest cases I've ever worked," prosecutor Bill Stetzer told the Observer. "The DNA evidence conclusively placed him at the scene not far from the victim's body. But his DNA was not found on the murder weapons. That's what made it challenging."

"But we present the evidence we have," Stetzer said, "not the evidence we wish we had."
Carver's attorney Brent Ratchford countered: "The jury is wrong - flat-out wrong. They put an innocent man in jail today."

After the verdict was read, Yarmolenko's brother, Pavel, thanked the jury and investigators for their work. He told the court his family is still struggling with what happened to his sister, but felt justice had been done.

"As for Mark Carver, I don't know what to say..." Yarmolenko told the court. "It's hard for us to go on like this, all thanks to you and your cousin."

Carver and his cousin, Neal Cassada of Mount Holly, were charged seven months after the killing. But Cassada, 54, died last year of natural causes on the eve of his trial.
Carver's supporters questioned the verdict.

His father, Kyle, said the family didn't understand "how they got a conviction off a little bitty DNA... They've got the wrong person."

Family friend Leslie Sellars called the verdict "a travesty," saying there were too many holes in the case.

"These people didn't do it," she said. "The murderer is still on the loose."
But juror Newsom said he was convinced that Carver and his cousin had worked together to kill Yarmolenko and cover up her death.

He said he was swayed by Carver's signed statement that he and his cousin never saw Yarmolenko or her car, and yet their DNA proved they had touched her blue Saturn, found crashed near the river.

Newsom also recounted how Carver described Yarmolenko's height to investigators by raising his hand to his nose - suggesting that Carver had seen her up close. Carver's attorneys argued during trial that he had learned her height from TV news accounts.

Newsom concluded that Yarmolenko's wounds showed "there had to be one person holding her down and the other putting the cords around her neck."

"Two people were there, and two people lied about what happened," he said. "To me, there's no way it wasn't them who killed her."

Carver and Cassada's skin cells were found on both sides of Yarmolenko's car, which prosecutor Stetzer told the jury showed they had tried to push the car into the river. When the car got stuck on a stump, he said, the two men put her body in
the water - likely washing away any DNA they left behind. Stetzer said the men then fished her out because the body didn't sink.

Gaston District Attorney Locke Bell said Monday that Carver had been involved in another violent incident. He was arrested in 2007 for shooting his son, according to Bell and court records. Bell's office dismissed the charge, he said, because the son wouldn't cooperate.

"If you will shoot your son, it doesn't take much to set you off," Bell said.

Carver's father called the shooting an accident and said his grandson, who is about 20, is OK.

Juror Newsom said the jury's discussion went beyond the DNA evidence.

"You take everything into consideration and look at the picture it paints. The motive is purely a matter of speculation. I don't know what they had in mind. I think it was a crime of opportunity."
Incentives Offered to Raise College Graduation Rates
By TAMAR LEWIN
In what amounts to a “Race to the Top” for higher education, the Obama administration is offering competitive grants and a new “tool kit” to help states increase their college completion rates.

During a news briefing Monday, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said the program, to be formally announced Tuesday by Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., would include only incentives — no “sticks” — for reforms aimed at helping the administration meet its goal of adding eight million college graduates by 2020.

According to Mr. Duncan, the campaign will include a new $20 million Comprehensive Grant Program for states that carry out plans intended to increase their graduation rates.

In addition, as part of its 2012 budget, the administration has proposed the $123 million “First in the World” initiative for programs that hold down tuition, increase completion rates and move students through college faster.

Last, the $50 million College Completion Incentive Grants would reward states and schools for reforms that produce more college graduates.

“We all know that the best jobs and fastest-growing firms will gravitate to countries, communities and states with a highly qualified work force,” Mr. Duncan said.

The administration will calculate each state’s expected share of the eight-million-graduate increase, taking into account their current college graduation rates.

Currently, only 28 percent of young adults in Arkansas, Nevada and New Mexico have college degrees, compared with more than half in the District of Columbia, Massachusetts and North Dakota.
The administration is also releasing what it calls a tool kit of strategies to help governors meet those goals, like stabilizing tuition increases, singling out adults with some college experience but no degree and making it easier for students to transfer college credits.

Although three-quarters of today’s young adults pursue some form of postsecondary education, fewer than half earn a certificate or degree within six years of enrolling.

The administration goal is for every American to get at least a year of post-high-school education, and for the United States’ college graduation percentage to rank first in the world by 2020.

The United States lags behind several nations, with 42 percent of adults ages 25 to 34 earning college degrees.