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Former ECU walk-on Hardy now captains Pirates' ship

By Chris Kudialis - Correspondent

GREENVILLE–Justin Hardy’s pregame routine since high school has been the same.

“My mother and I always pray together,” he said.

Perhaps their prayers have paid off. Standing just under six feet tall and weighing all of 185 pounds, Hardy’s figure doesn’t exactly model that of a marquee Div. I receiver. But after a breakout season in 2011, Hardy, whose only other offer to play college football was from Fayetteville State, finds himself the clear top threat in one of Conference USA’s most explosive offenses.

Hardy racked up 658 yards and six touchdowns on 64 receptions. His 5.82 receptions per game average was in the top 50 among all FBS receivers.
The Vanceboro native has overcome adversity along the way. After graduating from West Craven High School in 2010, Hardy wasn’t even offered a scholarship to play at ECU. He enrolled anyway -- as a preferred walk-on.

“He was a preferred walk-on in every sense of the word,” coach Ruffin McNeill said. “We would have offered him a scholarship if we could have, but there wasn’t one available.”

The next summer, Hardy got his scholarship, but still had to earn his way into the starting lineup. After catching 11 passes in ECU’s season opener against South Carolina and adding 10 more three games later against North Carolina, Hardy had established himself as one of the offenses go-to receivers.

“I knew I had to come out and make a case for myself in the game,” he said. “And I was able to do it.”

Now, he’s making a case as ECU’s next big thing.

Hardy understands that expectations are higher in 2012. His offensive coordinator, Lincoln Riley, already said he expects Hardy to be among the best players ever to have played at ECU.

At a program that has seen NFL players like Chris Johnson and David Garrard pass through, Riley’s words carry strong weight and expectations.

“It means a lot, and I want to make him correct,” Hardy said.

Riley knows a thing or two about promising receivers. A former Texas Tech assistant, Riley helped coach Michael Crabtree to two Biletnikoff Awards. Crabtree, now with the San Francisco 49ers, played under Riley in some of Texas’s Tech’s most potent offenses. Riley compared Hardy’s skill set to that of Crabtree’s and another former Texas Tech receiver – Wes Welker, a Pro Bowler with the New England Patriots.

“Justin catches the ball like Crabtree in the sense that it’s effortless,” Riley said. “He’s not the fastest receiver on the field, but he plays at a high speed like Welker. There’s just never any hesitation or confusion in the way he plays.”

Riley hints that Hardy’s breakout season in 2011 was just the beginning.

“He certainly set the bar high, and he’s a lot better than any point than last year,” Riley said. “He’s got a drive that some of the great ones have. Our expectations are a lot higher and I think his are too.”
Hardy refuses to get caught up in the hype.

“I need to improve on my technique and it has to be more precise,” he said. “It’ll all come out during game situations.”

Following a 5-7 season, Hardy’s goals are clear for the 2012 Pirates.

“Winning season, getting back to a bowl game, that’s good,” he said. “Winning a Conference USA championship, that’s even better.”
ECU head coach Ruffin McNeill voices his displeasure about a no-call during a game at Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium in Greenville, N.C. Saturday October 1, 2011.

**Tudor: ECU faces another tricky football schedule**

By Caulton Tudor - staff columnist - ctudor@newsobserver.com

The early stages of this East Carolina football season will be a near clone of the past several years.

Starting with Saturday’s opener against Appalachian State, Pirates players and fans again will be heavily invested in a tough September non-Conference USA schedule.

There’ll be a trip to South Carolina on Sept. 8 and one to North Carolina on Sept. 22. An upset win in either of those games would almost equate to a successful overall season for some fans.

But in what will be a status check for third-year coach Ruffin McNeill, the most important game of the season could be a Sept. 15 trip to Southern Miss – a game that likely will fall well below the regional media radar.
Although coach Larry Fedora has moved on to UNC, Southern Miss is the defending Conference USA champion and an East Division rival that has ruled (26-10) a long series against the Pirates.

After two seasons at his alma mater, McNeill’s teams have a modest 9-7 league record. A season-ending overtime loss at Marshall in 2011 resulted in a 5-7 overall record that did a lot more to dent momentum than did frustrating early-season losses to South Carolina and Virginia Tech.

Following the game at Marshall, which kept his team out of bowl participation, McNeill called the loss “a huge disappointment that we’ll have to use as motivation.”

But that’s long been easier said than done at ECU.

Given the immense regional popularity of college sports, it’s understandable that Pirate players and fans put more stock on games against in-state foes, Virginia Tech, the Gamecocks and even an emerging rivalry against Navy than the far-flung Conference USA teams.

That is why McNeill and his staff have to be concerned about the possibility of a mental letdown in the conference opener at the defending league champ. That trip to Southern Miss is sandwiched between the two games many of the players most want to win.

It’s a strange scheduling dynamic but one the school has little choice except to pursue. The non-conference regional games long ago spiked the interest in the program beyond all expectations and still serve as an important fund-raising tool.

But winning consistently in the league has to become as much of a priority as the games against State, UNC and South Carolina.

Hopefully the day will come when ECU is in a more visible, more user friendly conference. But until that day arrives, inattention to the C-USA could become the Pirates’ heaviest burden and McNeill’s biggest problem.

Tudor: 919-829-8946
Three Pirates suspended for opener
Thursday, August 30, 2012

Three East Carolina receivers — senior Dayon Arrington, sophomore Danny Webster and redshirt freshman Antonio Cannon — will miss Saturday’s season-opener against Appalachian State as a result of a one-game suspension for a violation of team policy, according to an announcement from head coach Ruffin McNeill on Wednesday afternoon.

The third-year ECU head coach did not address specifics of the suspension, but added “there are rules and policies in place for a reason and we expect those to be followed, unconditionally.”

Webster, who had a strong rookie campaign in 2011 with 43 receptions for 418 yards while starting six of 11 games, was not listed on the team’s two-deep depth chart released Monday, but it wasn’t clear if that was because of lingering effects from offseason knee surgery or because of an automobile accident last weekend. He was not on the injury report.

Webster was charged with reckless driving early Saturday morning after he fell asleep at the wheel and overturned his truck around 12:45 a.m.

Arrington has played in 23 career games with 13 receptions for 124 yards as one of ECU’s outside pass catchers, while Cannon was preparing to make his collegiate debut after competing on the scout squad a year ago.

Arrington also served a role on the Pirates’ special teams units as a punt and kickoff returner before suffering a right knee injury against UCF on Nov. 19 that sidelined him all spring.

College Football
The East Carolina football coaching staff isn’t afraid to give a debut to a true freshman if it believes that rookie can legitimately add something to the winning formula.

It worked with players like slot receiver Danny Webster last season, and after an explosive August camp, freshman outside receiver Jabril Solomon will get the honor in this weekend’s season opener against Appalachian State.

“I’m just a little nervous, but you’ve got to get over that and play man ball,” said the 6-foot-2, 180-pound freshman from Hemingway, S.C., who had compiled an extensive highlight reel by the time he graduated high school just a couple of months ago. “It feels good. It all goes to hard work.”

That hard work combined with Solomon’s physical gifts made him an immediate favorite with coaches and teammates alike, and his big catches in scrimmages made him stand out even more.

Understandably, he’ll have to make big plays in real games if he wants to get a share of snaps playing behind standout junior Reese Wiggins and the X position.
“The crowd is going to be big and the game’s going to be moving faster, and I’ve got to get over it and play ball,” Solomon said. “I’ll hopefully get over it when I step on the field and start warming up.”

Like many before him, Solomon’s prep highlights are an illustration of domination, a man running over and around seemingly much smaller kids. While his college debut will speak volumes about how ready he truly is to recreate that domination on a much different level, Solomon has already shown the wherewithal to be prepared.

“In college, you’ve got to run routes crisper and faster, and I’ve worked hard on that,” he said.

Sound advice
Thanks to the one-game suspension of projected starter Webster on Wednesday, the H slot position is in disarray.

Good thing for the Pirates’ depth, as senior Derrick Harris moves into the starting role after making three starts and 10 game appearances last season.

And while redshirt top reserve Cedric Thompson has yet to make his splash with the Pirates, it could be coming for the former walk-on from Kings Mountain who embraced his year of offseason training.

“I know Danny’s going to be out so I’ve got to step in and execute,” said Thompson, who walked on last year. “I knew I had to put in a lot of extra time with me being a redshirt and being able to work out six days a week, and (strength coach Jeff Connors) pretty much developed me, skill-wise, to be more versatile on the field. I feel like I can be able to make plays and have the offense count on me.”

In terms of playbook preparation, Thompson called on the perfect tutor. He asked sophomore Justin Hardy, who led the Pirates in receiving last season with 64 catches for 658 yards and six touchdowns, for assistance.

“I got with Justin Hardy and he sat down with me in the film room and he pretty much got me ready to play, so I won’t be lost whenever I step in,” Thompson said.

Contact Nathan Summers at nsummers@reflector.com or 252-329-9595.
UNC system panel holds closed-door discussion of academic fraud

By Jane Stancill - jstancill@newsobserver.com

CHAPEL HILL A UNC Board of Governors panel met for more than five hours behind closed doors Wednesday in its review of the academic fraud case that has dogged UNC-Chapel Hill.

The panel gathered briefly with reporters present, but then went into closed session, citing state law that protects confidential personnel matters, information about the performance of public employees and attorney-client privilege.

Laura Fjeld, vice president and general counsel of the UNC system’s General Administration, was present at the meeting. The review group also cited federal law protecting the privacy of student educational records.

The panel will reconvene Thursday in what is expected to be mostly open deliberation.

Wednesday’s closed door meeting no doubt included discussion of two former employees thought to be at the center of the scandal in UNC-CH’s African and Afro-American studies department — Julius Nyang’oro, a former chairman and professor who was forced to retire in July, and Deborah Crowder, a former department manager who retired in 2009.

In July, the five-member panel began its review of UNC-CH’s investigation of academic fraud in the department. The campus probe found dozens of courses, heavily enrolled with athletes, in which there was little or no faculty instruction. Those included independent study courses and no-show classes.

But more information has emerged since the panel convened, including the public disclosure this month of an academic transcript that bore the name of Julius Peppers, a former UNC football and basketball star. The transcript showed a trail of low grades in most subjects but high marks in African studies.

The UNC Board of Governors panel is one of several looking into that department as well as the broader question of whether the university has struck the proper balance between athletics and academics. The State Bureau of Investigation is probing the possibility of criminal fraud.
Earlier this month, UNC-CH Chancellor Holden Thorp announced that former North Carolina Gov. Jim Martin and a national consulting firm would conduct an audit to look for any additional academic irregularities. After the audit, Thorp said, Hunter Rawlings, president of the Association of American Universities, will come to campus to help assess the relationship between athletics and academics.

Stancill: 919-829-4559
EXPRESSING HERSELF Amanda Zuckerman, a student at Washington University, started Dormify.com because she was sick of "childish" dorm décor.

Leaving Home, but None of Its Comforts

By STEVEN KURUTZ

I DON’T remember everything I took with me when I went to college, but do I know it all fit easily into the back seat of our family car. The twin-size sheets were new; nearly everything else (pillow, stereo, ugly green rug) had been scavenged from home or a thrift store.

As for electronics, that summer my well-meaning parents went to a garage sale and were talked into buying an Apple Macintosh with a drive that accepted only large floppy disks. My suspicion that it was embarrassingly out of date, even by 1994 standards, was confirmed by my roommate’s look of disbelief when I tried to boot up.

Altogether, furnishing my dorm room cost maybe $50.

These memories came back as I stood inside a Target store in South Philadelphia one night last week at midnight, watching 1,200 students from
Temple University swarming the aisles like amped-up contestants on a shopping-spree game show.

Target had bused the students from campus and rearranged the store for the after-hours event. A D.J. played dance music in what was normally the baby department; mini-fridges and cases of Red Bull were stacked along a central corridor. Students’ carts were filling with hanging mirrors, garbage cans in bright colors, shower caddies and bed-in-a-bag sheet sets.

Gina D’Annunzio, director of student activities at Temple, said she had resisted Target’s previous overtures to host an after-hours event. But this year the timing had worked out, and Ms. D’Annunzio remembered that as a little girl she had dreamed of getting “locked in a mall” — a common fantasy, judging by the scene at Target.

Jordyn Richman, an 18-year-old freshman, had come for a mattress pad, a body pillow, a night light and push pins. Before arriving at Temple, Ms. Richman had already spent $300 on dorm décor at Target and Ikea stores near her home in Boca Raton, Fla. The additional items she was buying would “round out” her room, she said.

In recent years, the Target run — or a shopping trip to a similar big-box store — has become a new college tradition, right up there with spring break and sleeping through class. This time of year it’s common to see students and parents roaming the aisles, checking off items from an ever-growing list of essentials. The goal, it seems, is to turn the dorm room into a plush home away from home.

Derek Jackson, director of housing and dining services at Kansas State, is among those who have observed a growing influx of comforts like coffee makers and the rise of color-coordinated rooms.

“We get requests saying, ‘Can you give us dimensions for the windows, because we want to hang curtains?’ ” he said. “Back in the old days, students were just trying to make their rooms purposeful.”

And of the 72-inch TVs he has lately been seeing students lug into residence halls, Mr. Jackson said, “If they can fit it into their room: that’s the mind-set.”

Norb Dunkel, associate vice president for student affairs at the University of Florida, who is busy overseeing the current crop of arrivals, has also noticed the maximalist shift. He cited the overloaded family car as a ubiquitous image during move-in week.
“When they back their vehicle up, if it goes beep-beep-beep, they’re bringing too much stuff,” Mr. Dunkel said. “And you can hear the beep-beep-beeps now.”

Both men say big-box retailers have played a big role in fueling students’ desire to make their dorm rooms more than just drab boxes along a double-loaded corridor. Retailers are now marketing so heavily to students during the back-to-college season, Mr. Dunkel said, that they would probably like to “put a flier in every student’s room.”

Kathy Grannis, a spokeswoman for the National Retail Federation, an industry group, said hard goods for back-to-college, which includes school supplies, laptop computers and dorm décor, are a $50 billion annual business. Which is why retailers as diverse as Apple, Kate Spade, Krups, Roux Maison detergents and Sure Fit slipcovers are all promoting deals.

Despite the recession, Ms. Grannis expects to see growth in this sector, because in an annual survey conducted by her organization, she said, this year more people responded that their children will live in dorms on campus, rather than commuting from home to save money as they have in previous years.

Surely there are students whose families can’t afford to spend hundreds of dollars outfitting a dorm room. But “the kid with two suitcases flies under the radar,” said Patrick Love, associate vice president for student affairs at Rutgers, which also holds an after-hours sale with Target. “What draws your eye are the students bringing the flat-screen TVs.”

Not surprisingly, Target is a leader in the market. Its after-hours sales for Temple and Rutgers students are just 2 of 69 similar events the retailer is holding in partnership with colleges across the country, an effort that began 11 years ago with the University of Minnesota. This year, Target also introduced uStyler, an online program that allows students to see how its products look in a virtual dorm room. After talking with students about their cooking habits, the retailer created a line of back-to-college dinner and drinkware in colorful patterns, made of microwaveable polypropylene.

“The students also told us they eat on the go,” said Michelle Mesenburg, the company’s vice president for style marketing. “So we added a little rim to prevent food from spilling.”

Ms. Mesenburg said the company begins debriefing sessions to plan its annual back-to-school strategy as early as September of the previous year.
Bed Bath & Beyond also markets heavily to college students, offering programs like a college registry and Shop Here, Pick Up There, which allows students to buy items locally or online and retrieve them at a store near their college. The retailer’s Campus & Beyond Checklist, a sacred text among students and parents, numbers over 90 items: from basics like hangers and laundry hampers to things of more questionable necessity (particularly during a recession), like a tool kit, blackout panels and iPod speakers.

“The business just continues to grow,” Ms. Grannis said. “There’s so many different ways to get in on this.”

Despite my short campus checklist, I wasn’t averse to decorating my dorm room. My mother is an antiques dealer, and I remember the kitschy red-tin Chesterfield cigarettes sign I found among her stuff and hung on the wall in my dorm. The ugly green rug really tied the room together.

Still, it wouldn’t have occurred to me to buy curtains or an air-conditioner or a coffee maker. I wasn’t planning to spend much time in my room, and I was living on a student’s budget, as they say.

Or used to say. Watching the shopping frenzy at Target in Philadelphia, I wondered if the phrase still applied. When I asked one girl pushing a loaded cart if her parents had set a spending limit for her, she looked at me blankly. What has changed since I graduated not all that long ago?

Chris Seman, president of Caring Transitions, a Cincinnati-based company that handles logistics when people make a big life change, said the closer ties between children and parents have redefined the move to college. Students are “so connected to their family and home they don’t see moving to college as a new stage,” he said. “They want to bring home with them.”

At the same time, he added, helicopter parenting doesn’t stop when the child goes off to school: “Now parents think their kids have to have everything they had at home or it’s going to be too traumatic for them.”

Jess Smith, an 18-year-old freshman at Temple who came to the Target event to buy a mirror, said her parents “took over decorating” the lounge-style room she is sharing with two roommates. “They were a huge help,” Ms. Smith said. “My dad came today and installed a shower caddy.”

Mr. Seman, who attended Eastern Michigan University in the mid-1980s, said he recalls taking little more than clothes and a Led Zeppelin poster. But
when he sent his oldest son off to college two years ago, he admitted to
overdoing it at Target, where he spent $350.

“I probably ended up returning $100 worth of stuff,” Mr. Seman said. “He
had roommates. It was duplicates of everything. How many spatulas do you
need?”

If the volume of moving boxes has increased, however, so has students’
desire to live in a well-designed space. Reality shows focused on design and
Web sites like Pinterest have made students savvier about decorating.

Roommates connect on Facebook months before college begins, Mr.
Jackson said, to plan their décor: “They pick out carpet and start
accessorizing. The bedspreads match. It’s a more coordinated effort.”

At the University of Florida, there is even an annual competition for the best
decorated room. The winner two years ago, Kent Stephan, used shells and
weathered furniture to create a nautical effect.

“I’ve stayed at a lot of hotels, and my inspiration came from having that
chic, luxury feel,” said Mr. Stephan, who graduated last year and is
considering starting a design business geared to students. “I wanted to break
from that dorm-room look.”

Indeed, for a number of students, the bed-in-a-bag just doesn’t cut it.

Last year, Sarah Calle, a 21-year-old junior at Laguna College of Art and
Design in Laguna Beach, Calif., started Dormdesign.tumblr.com, a blog that
showcases tricked-out dorm rooms. “I wanted to see people who took it
beyond the basics,” Ms. Calle said. “Some inspirational design.”

Amanda Zuckerman went one step further. Before she went off to
Washington University in St. Louis as a freshman three years ago, she went
shopping for dorm furnishings and found the offerings at big-box stores
“very childish,” she said. “No one had Twin XL bedding that was very
stylish,” she said, referring to the irregular bed size native to residence halls.

So Ms. Zuckerman and her mother, Karen, an advertising executive in
Washington, started Dormify.com, an e-commerce site that sells stylish (and
generally more expensive) bedding sets, wall decals and sorority-themed
items like posters and Greek prints.

“If you care about what you’re wearing, you’ll care about what your room is
like,” Ms. Zuckerman said. “It’s a form of self-expression.”
Her freshman dorm room had a cream-and-green color scheme with “pops of orange,” she said, and a chandelier wall decal. It was known among her friends as the “hotel suite.”

As I was leaving the Target event, I ran into a 19-year-old Temple student with frosted hair named Alec Santiago Hooper. His cart was loaded with a Mr. Coffee machine, a 10-speed blender, pillows and burgundy curtains, among other items.

Like many students I spoke to, he had already done most of his shopping, buying bedding at Ikea and a used dresser on Craigslist, and was picking up extras for his off-campus apartment.

“I didn’t know my room was so plain,” he said. “So I got the curtains.”

His purchases also included a ClosetMaid combination bench-and-storage unit, which he planned to customize by swapping out the plain beige drawers and substituting some wicker baskets he found a few aisles over. This would enhance what he described as the “international” look of his room (he travels a lot, he explained).

Mr. Hooper held up the baskets, pleased with his find, then his eyes narrowed on a small discrepancy: one basket was slightly darker than the other.

“I’m about to go get a new one,” he said, excusing himself. “These baskets are not the same.”
Colleges differ on best way of roommate selection
By Mary Beth Marklein, USA TODAY
Updated august 30, 2012

Having scoped each other out on Facebook over the summer, Karl Sadkowski and Reggie Sackey-Addo had some idea what to expect when they met face-to-face Aug. 25.

Sadkowski, 18, of Cedar Falls, Iowa, was impressed with Sackey-Addo's "great taste in music" and hopes he's not a light sleeper. Sackey-Addo, 17, of Ghana, is eager to learn about U.S. culture but also wonders about "any possible weird idiosyncrasies."

No less invested in their relationship is Andrea Conner, who led the process by which the two freshmen at Iowa's Grinnell College have become roommates. As director of residence life there, she oversees a staff of six who spent more than a week sifting through 450 housing applications to hand-match first-year roommates.

As ever-more sophisticated software takes on a growing role in college roommate selection, Grinnell remains one of the holdouts, arguing that humans can do a better job playing matchmaker than computers.

The goal is not necessarily to "create a bunch of best friends," Conner says, but "if you're happy in your room, you have more time to focus on your academics."

Roommate selection has always been fraught with angst. No tragedy brought that point home more poignantly than the case of Rutgers University freshman Tyler Clementi, who committed suicide in 2010 after his roommate set up a webcam to spy on him.

A study published last year involving more than 1,200 students and conducted by psychology professors at several universities, including Michigan State and Rice, found roommate conflict one of the top five reasons freshmen withdraw from school.

Colleges pay far more attention today to the desires and interests of today's freshman roommates than they did a generation ago. Many schools offer options such as substance-free housing for recovering addicts, gay-friendly
dorms and themed housing according to academic majors or interests such as entrepreneurship or the arts.

If Facebook has removed some of the mystery for students, it has added complications for campus housing officials. They recently have seen an uptick in demands for reassignments, usually from parents who didn't like what they found on their child's roommate's profile.

"Parents have complicated student assignments tremendously," says John Messina, chief housing officer at the University of Akron.

This spring, Adelphi University in Garden City, N.Y., set up a speed-dating-style event where accepted students could interview potential roommates. In New York, Rochester Institute of Technology's 2,500 freshmen this fall could use a software program similar to online dating sites such as Match.com.

Carla DiLella, the school's director of housing operations, hopes the change will lead to more satisfied students and fewer room changes. So far, it has been well-received.

"I was really excited to have potentially found someone who wasn't crazy and was really nice to talk with and was funny," says freshman Brooke Milan of Westfield, Ind., who found Kaitlin Hipkin of Cranford, N.J., through the service. All but one of her friends from high school were assigned "randomly generated roommates," she says, and one of them is "already not positive that (he'll) get along well" with his.

The self-selection approach runs counter to a goal by many colleges, including Grinnell, to nudge students outside their comfort zone. For that reason, New York's Hamilton College and Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C., refuse to put friends together. A longstanding tradition at Stanford in Palo Alto, Calif., goes a step further: Students not only can't choose their roommate, their roommate's identity isn't divulged until move-in day.

"Students at this age are often going to look for somebody they're going to feel comfortable with because they're just like them," says Pamela Stawasz, assistant housing director at Amherst College in Massachusetts, which this year hand-matched about 475 freshmen. "We're going to look to really mix it up."

That's Grinnell's idea, too.
Sadkowski and Sackey-Addo both wanted to live in co-ed housing. Conner says their views on personal space lined up, too. Perhaps most important, Sadkowski checked a box on the application saying he would be interested in having a roommate from another country.

It's too early to know whether they will become life-long friends, but Sadkowski says the matchup so far feels "pretty solid."