Dominique Davis and the ECU offense take the line against Marshall. The Pirates will need to score often against Navy. After dropping a hard-fought game against Central Florida last Saturday, ECU looks to rebound, stepping out of Conference play to welcome Navy to Greenville for military appreciation weekend.

The Pirates had a chance against UCF to take control of the East division of Conference USA, but struggles on defense left the ECU hoping that UCF will drop two of their final four conference games.

"I'm really big on controlling things I can control. We can control how we practice and prepare," Head Coach Ruffin McNeill said during his weekly press conference. "If we take care of our business, then we can control our destiny. Now we have to wait for somebody else."

The Pirates continued to have a status quo offensive game against the Knights. The offense totaled 421 yards, while quarterback Dominique Davis completed 39 of 54 passes for 310 yards with three touchdowns and one interception. The performance brings his season numbers to 235 of 362 for 2,333 yards with 21 touchdown passes and 11 interceptions. Against the Knights, Davis had his most efficient game of the season and kept ECU in the game when things started to go south early on.

"I thought our offense did a great job. I thought they were patient, made some things happen and took advantage of their possessions," McNeill said. "I thought Dominique Davis did a great job of leading us."

The Pirates' running game seems to be the most bipolar unit on this football team. One week, ECU will gash teams with big, hard-hitting runs, while the very next week the blocking scheme will not be executed, or the ball carrier will do more dancing than cutting.

Starting running back Jonathan Williams was put in the back seat against the Knights while the running reigns were handed off to Giavanni Ruffin, a player who just last year had to prove his worth to the coaching staff to be let on the field. If Ruffin keeps up the hard running that he has shown in the last three weeks, it may not be long before he is the starting running back for the Pirates. However, Williams still leads the ECU rushing attack, having carried the ball 96 times for 483 yards with six touchdowns, while Ruffin has carried 53 times for 251 yards with just one touchdown.

On the defensive side of the ball, the Pirates returned to the kind of play that plagued ECU in the first five weeks of the season. The Pirates allowed the Knights to convert nine of 11 third-down chances, failed to keep UCF out of the end zone and allowed UCF to rush the ball for 265 yards.

The Pirate defense had become a unit that kept its offense in games and allowed ECU to overcome slow offensive starts against Southern Miss and Marshall, but against UCF, the Pirates' defense allowed 14 points in the first seven minutes of action. Before you knew it, UCF was up by 20 points and walking away with the game.
With the match up against an odd style of offense that most on this Pirate defense have never seen before, ECU's defense will need to step up and return to the form of the last three weeks.

The Navy Midshipman come into Greenville boasting a 5-3 record on the season and are coming off a thrilling game against Duke last weekend where, after trailing 31-7 entering the fourth quarter, Navy fought back but fell short, losing 34-31. The big thing with Navy is their use of the triple option offensive scheme. For those unfamiliar with this type of offensive system, it's not that difficult to comprehend.

The triple option is an offense that, in its essence, is based on the good decision-making abilities of the quarterback. The quarterback will typically line up under center with a fullback lined up straight behind him and two running backs lined up split behind the fullback. At the snap, the quarterback has a split second to make the decision to where he is going to go with the ball. At the start, he will go to his first option, which is the fullback. If the unblocked defensive lineman takes out the fullback, the quarterback will pull the ball from the fullback and either take it himself or pitch it to the running back.

Leading the Navy offense is quarterback Ricky Dobbs, who has run the ball more than he has thrown it, which, in a normal offense, would be unheard of. He has completed 54 of 107 passes for 955 yards, seven touchdowns and four interceptions, while running 174 times for 552 yards and nine touchdowns.

"Dobbs is their leader up front. He is the leading rusher with 552 yards. That's normally the case in great offenses like this," McNeill said. "The quarterback is usually the main guy. He has scored nine touchdowns, but has also thrown the ball extremely well, too. He'll be a guy we have to make sure we keep an eye on. We have to make sure whoever we assign to him does his job."

Following Dobbs is fullback Alexander Teich, who has carried the ball 88 times for 482 yards with two touchdowns. "He's the typical wishbone fullback; he understands his role, position and job. He does a great job," McNeill said. "He'll be one that we really have to contain with our tackles and linebackers. I'm really concerned with him. We have to make sure we have him. They do a great job incorporating him into the offense."

On defense, the Navy defensive unit isn't really on the field that much due to the time of possession their offense holds with their running style offense, but even so, McNeill is cautious of the Midshipmen defense.

"They do a good job defensively. They're very sound. They are third in the nation in fewest penalties per game at 3.6; that's amazing. They are also in the top 50 in red zone defense," McNeill said. "They remind me of Central Florida as far as being disciplined and those kinds of things. They don't beat themselves. You have to go out and beat them."

The Pirates and the Midshipmen will kick off from Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium at 3:30 p.m. on Saturday.
Engraved with words of tribute, in colors of purple and gold, the coin to be tossed this Saturday at the beginning of ECU's football game against Navy holds more significance than any sporting event could ever encompass on its own.

This Saturday, the Pirates of ECU will honor the memory of Sgt. David Smith, who lost his life Jan. 26, 2010, at the age of 25, fighting for our country as a United States Marine. Smith's family will toss the coin at the beginning of the football game in remembrance of him and the many other military men and women who have lost their lives fighting for our nation. The coin to be tossed was made specifically for Sgt. David Smith. It bears the words that exemplify the values Smith lived by each day: leadership, integrity and service.

Sports have always had a way of bringing people together for a common cause. It is through sports that many cities, towns, states and countries learn to put aside their differences and unite as one for the common love of the game. This Saturday's football game will serve as a way to recognize an ECU Pirate who serves as an example of excellence in every sense of the word.

One of Smith's professors, Leslie Pagliari expressed her description of him.

"He was just a breathe of fresh air. He was one of those students that when he walked into the room, the entire place just lit up," Pagliari said. "He was a leader in all of his classes, he was always the one people went to. David was very honest. He was a man of high integrity and one that we will truly miss."

Smith served in Iraq from 2006 to 2007. When he returned from his first deployment, he continued at ECU to work on getting his bachelors of science in industrial distribution and logistics.

Pagliari shed some light on Smith as a student and as a Pirate.

"He was great at the program. He just got it. He was always the one to say, 'I'll take the lead. I'll help you guys.' " She continued, "He loved being a Marine and a Pirate and I think it will be very fitting that his parents will be able to toss the coin at the ballgame. In most of his pictures, you'll see he's wearing purple."

When Smith came to tell Pagliari that he was being deployed again, this time to Afghanistan, she explained that this departure seemed a little harder to deal with. He had about a year and a half left to graduate, but Pagliari remembers him telling her that when he got back, he'd graduate, and everything would be OK.

"I think we were all a little more nervous about that second deployment," Pagliari said as she reflected on the day she found out Smith was leaving to continue serving the country.

ECU and the college of technology plans to continue the tradition of honoring Smith by setting up a leadership award that will be presented to students who embody the three words that Smith lived by: leadership, integrity and service. They are working
to raise funds to add a monetary scholarship for the students who receive the David J. Smith leadership award as well. That way, more and more people will continue to be helped by Smith's hard work and dedication from year to year.

When the time comes for the coin toss at the ECU-Navy game this Saturday, be mindful of the importance it holds. Pagliari imparted her views on the significance of the coin toss.

"I'd like for people to really think about what our countrymen do for us day to day, and the sacrifices that they and their families make, and to realize that David did this for honor," Pagliari said. "When people are walking on the streets every day, they should remember that and thank him."

There is no way to explain why so many amazing people are taken from us, no way to truly distance ourselves from the pain the loss of a loved one can cause. All we can do is remember the things we learned from them, the examples they set, the impact they made and to honor their memory to the best of our abilities.

"David would tell everybody to never give up," said Pagliari as she steadied her shaking voice. "That honor and integrity are two of the things you need to live for, and he did. He would tell students to never give up on your dreams and to live life to the fullest."

May the memory of Sgt. David Smith live on through every Pirate and may the impact of the tribute at this week's football game hold more meaning than that of a simple sport. This is not a mere toss of a coin, it is a time for thousands of Pirates to come together and recognize the life and leadership of a fellow Pirate, who risked his life so that others can live theirs.
GREENVILLE - After escaping through a large portion of the season relatively healthy, the injury list is starting to add up for East Carolina.

On Wednesday, coach Ruffin McNeill announced that sophomore defensive tackle Michael Brooks will be out of the rest of the season due to an injury to his right knee, the same one that sidelined Brooks during the spring.

“Michael is out. He is out for the season,” McNeill said. “(Sophomore DE) Marke Powell is out, he won’t play this week and hopefully in two weeks we will get him back. Rahkeem Morgan won’t be back (for Saturday’s game against Navy), but Travis Simmons and Ty Holmes will be back.”

The loss of Brooks for the season and Powell for Saturday leaves the Pirates thin along the defensive line, but McNeill said as of now there will be no removal of redshirts.

“Not at this time,” McNeill said. “I talked with (defensive coordinator) Brian Mitchell about that today, but with only four games left if I can keep it on them I will. It’s too late in the season, but if I had to I would.”

McNeill said if need be he would consider playing linebacker Wes Pittman as a stand-up end and would also think about playing senior defensive tackle Josh Smith at defensive end.
ECU'S HARRIS CONTINUES TO AMAZE

Wideout in midst of stellar season

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Brain Haines

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It’s so easy to take brilliance for granted. It’s seems like forever that East Carolina wide receiver Dwayne Harris has been catching passes and making plays as a Pirate, but when he takes the field for the team’s 3:30 p.m. kickoff against Navy this Saturday it will be the second-to-last home game of his college career, so catch him while you still have a chance.

The senior wideout stands as the school’s all-time leader in receptions (230) and receiving yards (2,628) and simply rewrites the record book every time the ball hits his vacuum-like hands.

Harris has caught a Conference USA-leading 63 passes this season, six of which ended in touchdowns, while racking up 750 receiving yards.

The electric receiver seems to get better with each game too. This Saturday, in ECU’s loss to Central Florida he set a career mark for receiving yards in game when he caught nine passes for 146 yards and a touchdown.

Harris is recording 7.9 receptions per game, which the sixth best total in all of the FBS, and at that rate he would break his own Pirates’ record of 83 catches in a year (which he shares with Aundrae Allison) at home in the regular season finale against SMU.

The reigning first-team all-conference receiver and special teams player of the year is four TD receptions away from tying East Carolina single season record and is six away from being tops on the all-time list.

East Carolina’s first-year offensive coordinator Lincoln Riley has been around some top-notch receivers during his time at Texas Tech, most notably Michael Crabtree and Wes Welker, and said that Harris ranks up there with the elite.

“He’s up there with those two. I don’t know if he is in front of them or behind them, but when you get guys that are that good it’s just .... You’re are either at that level or you’re not and he is,” Riley said. “There is nobody better than him in the country. I know there’s not. I have seen everybody ... He may not get the recognition that the others do but there is nobody better in the country (at wide receiver) I promise you that.”

The 6-0, 205-pound juke machine from Stone Mountain, Ga., will wrap up his career as arguably the best wideout to don a purple and gold uniform, which is an amazing feat for someone who was recruited to throw touchdowns, not catch them.

“I never thought I would be having receiving records I always thought it was going to be quarterback records,” Harris said. “It’s just great (to hold those records), it’s a great job by the guys who have played with me. I give a lot of praise to those guys because without them I couldn’t have did it.”

Harris was recruited to play quarterback by running backs’ coach and former Pirate Junior Smith, who served during the Skip Holtz regime. However, a logjam at the position forced Harris to consider playing wide receiver. He considered it and now it’s considered one of the best decisions he has ever made.

“It was funny how I ended up being a receiver. I came in as a quarterback and I went through my freshman season as a quarterback and then the spring after my freshman year they were thinking about playing me at receiver because we had a lot of quarterbacks: (James) Pinkney, Rob Kass, Brett Clay and so on," Harris said. “So they were like ‘We are going to move you
to receiver and try you out there. If it doesn’t work out after this season you can move back and compete for a starting position next year.’ I enjoyed my time at receiver ... It was a great decision.”

Harris, who has completed three of his eight career attempts for two touchdowns and 154 yards, admits he still thinks about slingling the pigskin.

“You always have those times where you want to throw the ball once and a while,” Harris said. “I do miss it, but I don’t miss it. Playing receiver gives me the best chance to go to the next level. I never thought I would be one of the top receivers in the country.”

Harris also recalled another tough decision that he was forced to make early in his career that turned out for the best.

“I had Kentucky, Boston College, North Carolina, Southern Miss and a lot of other schools recruiting me,” Harris said. “At the end it was between East Carolina and Southern Miss.”

Harris said he was torn between the two schools but the dedication shown by Holtz and his staff gave the Pirates the edge.

“Throughout the whole recruiting process they stuck with me. I was a late qualifier because of my grades but they stuck with me throughout the whole thing. Southern Miss slowly dropped out. On signing day Coach Smith called me and asked what I wanted to do, so that’s who I went with.”

In his time at East Carolina Harris has made several highlight reel catches and big plays, but he said there are a few moments that stand above from the rest.

“The conference championship last year, winning MVP (during the Pirates 38-32 win over No. 18 Houston in Greenville), beating North Carolina at home,” Harris said. “There was the big win over Virginia Tech in Charlotte. There was just so many, but I have enjoyed every moment of being a Pirate.”