

# NINERTIMES

Student-driven news since 1947  
Sept. 11, 2024



## Skate quad

Skateboarders form a tight-knit  
community at the Star Quad

MORE ON PAGE 8



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The Niner Times is UNC Charlotte's student-run news publication founded in 1947 and has received both state and national recognition.

We cover campus happenings, news and events in the city of Charlotte and North Carolina and topics that are important to students.

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2023 Charlotte International Arts Festival | Richard Nuzzo/Niner Times File

## Events to watch for on and off campus

**Cookies and Coloring Sheets,**  
Sept. 11, Scott Hall, 7-9 p.m.

**Fall Career & Internship Fair**  
Sept. 13, Student Activity Center, 10 a.m.

**Charlotte International Arts Festival, Sept. 13-29**

**49ers vs. Gardner-Webb,**  
Sept. 14, Jerry Richardson Stadium, 6 p.m.

**Panthers Home Opener,**  
Sept. 15, Bank of America Stadium, 1 p.m.

**Charlotte Film Festival, Sept. 24-29, The Independent Picture House**

## From the Charlotte police logs (Aug. 30 - Sept. 6)

Sofia DiStefano | News Editor

The following are some incidents in the UNC Charlotte campus police logs from Aug. 30 to Sept. 6, 2024.

**Aug. 30** - An officer responded to the Student Union on a report of a stolen bicycle. Camera footage was reviewed with unsuccessful results.

**Sept. 3** - Officers responded to hit-and-run accident on Craver Road near McMillan Greenhouse. Officers located the vehicle and identified the driver. The driver was issued two state citations.

**Sept. 5** - An officer responded to the Union Deck in regard to an animal control incident. A raccoon was observed in the stairwell and removed without incident.

**Sept. 5** - Dispatch received a call in reference to a suspicious person attempting to break into her vehicle. Upon further investigation, officers confirmed no foul play was afoot.

## NOTES FROM THE NEWSROOM:

# UNC Charlotte's parking situation is 'driving' me crazy

Brendan Mullen | Writing Managing Editor



Despite the seemingly endless increase in new admissions every year, UNC Charlotte has continually failed to adjust its parking situation accordingly.

It is no secret that most of Charlotte's students live off school grounds. Even if most of those students live within a short vicinity of campus, there is still an ever-increasing need for parking, especially considering the recent housing changes that limit on-

campus housing for returning students. So why am I constantly scraping the bottom of the barrel for a place to put my car?

The longer this semester drags on, the more I feel like I paid \$500 for a filled parking space. On top of the impossible task of finding a parking space, I am often left with a lengthy walk to get to my class. At the very least, I should not have to check three different parking lots for one parking space. Driving in

Charlotte is enough of a headache; parking at my destination does not need to cause a bigger one.

With the price I am paying, I would expect premium parking on campus. Yet the value of my purchase has yet to prove itself outside of the bare minimum. Too often have I been driving in circles in a jam-packed Student Union Deck, wondering: How many more students must Charlotte admit before something changes?





# Erik Byker and Susan Michael named winners of the 2024 Teaching Excellence Awards

Wes Packham | Staff Writer

UNC Charlotte held the 2024 Teaching Excellence Awards on Sept. 6, announcing Erik Byker and Susan Michael as winners of the Bank of America Award for Teaching Excellence and the Charlotte Award for Teaching Excellence in the Popp Martin Student Union.

Erik Byker, a reading and elementary education professor, was awarded the Bank of America Award for Teaching Excellence out of fellow nominees Dr. Jeanette Bennett and Dr. Mark West.

"I feel ecstatic. I'm still a little in shock, and it's an amazing honor because of how much UNC Charlotte means to me," said Byker. "Professionally, it's quite an honor because of the finalists I was with; Dr. Bennett and Dr. West are both amazing professors here."

Susan Michael, a senior lecturer in chemistry, was awarded the UNC Charlotte Award for Teaching Excellence along with fellow nominees Kevin Edwards-Knight and John Taylor.

"I was totally shocked to be nominated and even more shocked to actually win. It's a very nice validation of a lot of years of hard work," said Michael. "Teaching is hard work, and it's best to understand that there are going to be good days and bad days."

To be eligible for the Bank of America Award for Teaching Excellence, staff members must be

full-time or tenured and have at least seven years of service to UNC Charlotte.

The UNC Charlotte Award for Teaching Excellence honors full or part-time non-tenure track faculty members with at least five years of teaching service at UNC Charlotte.

Byker has been teaching for over 25 years, 10 of which were spent at Charlotte. During those years, he has gained much experience, honed his teaching technique and fostered a healthy classroom environment.

"My teaching philosophy is based on the Hawaiian phrase 'E komo mai,' meaning 'the door is open, the house is yours.' For me, it means the classroom is our space together, and the learning is co-constructed," said Byker.

Michael has taught in the chemistry department at UNC Charlotte for 26 years and has 38 years of teaching experience. Although she originally intended to attend medical school, she applied her talents to becoming an educator.

"I was pretty sure that I was going to go to medical school as a chemistry major," said Michael. "But after counseling at a camp for a summer and just finding out that I liked working with young people and helping them investigate new things, I decided to go into teaching."

His fellow faculty members and students recognize Byker for encouraging and providing op-

portunities for students to display their scholarship. He aims to make a positive difference in the world and chooses elementary education as the best avenue to achieve that.

"Teaching is where I can make the most difference in the world, and reading in elementary education is the foundation for all of that," said Byker. "That's where those foundational skills, basic skills and social learning always happen."

Michael hopes to leave a lasting positive impression in chemistry and everyday life.

"I try to make sure that my students can apply what they've learned to everyday life. Chemistry influences us daily, and if you can see how chemistry applies to your life, you can probably learn it a lot better than just memorizing a bunch of abstract concepts," said Michael. "I would like students to have confidence in themselves and what they can do."

The Bank of America Award for Teaching Excellence was first presented in 1968 to recognize outstanding faculty members at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The award was established in response to a suggestion by the staff of the student literary magazine.

"Bank of America is proud to collaborate with UNC Charlotte through our support for the University's programs and initiatives. Our partnership benefits the University and our company, as

we reap the rewards of hiring such great talent," said Steffany Hajek, Bank of America CFO. "Today's finalists are committed to changing the lives of their students. They engage in research that advances knowledge and prepares their students to become active-minded citizens of the world."

Byker also highlighted the broader impact of the collaborative opportunities UNC Charlotte provides.

"One of the best parts of being here at UNC Charlotte is having the privilege to serve and connect with so many programs across campus," said Byker. "I love being part of the undergraduate research conference, where I see the incredible work our students produce, with guidance from dedicated faculty."

Byker aims to leave an impact outside helping students understand the course material. He emphasizes the importance of personal growth and nurturing potential in his students.

"One of the most important things I hope they take away is the power and the impact they can have, not only as community members but also as global scholars who can make a difference around the world," said Byker. "Always be willing to be teachable, stay teachable. Always be ready to invest in the hearts and minds of children or learners because you never know when you find a diamond in the rough."



# Grace Cooper balances leadership and advocacy as Truman Scholarship Finalist

Hector Gaspar | Contributor

As one of the two Truman Scholarship finalists from UNC system schools, Grace Cooper took charge of the opportunities Charlotte provided her throughout her four years.

From the Student Government Association (SGA) to Greek life and the Honors College, Cooper has built her resume and worked on things she is passionate about.

Alongside Sonia Birla, Cooper spoke about how the two finalists shined a spotlight on the University student body.

"I think Sonia and I, by being Truman finalists, are able to show what UNC Charlotte students do and how driven we are, and how motivated we are as a student body," said Cooper.

Cooper is involved in numerous organizations at Charlotte. She is a member of the SGA, the Honors College and the Kappa Rho Chapter of the Alpha Chi Omega Sorority.

Cooper said that she did not know if she could

use it as a big period of growth," said Cooper. "I knew I wanted to grow as a person within college. I want to use the opportunities I could to get to know myself better and pursue anything I was interested in. I think UNC Charlotte has a lot of opportunities for students."

Cooper has found ways to manage her commitments while also making time for her mental health, as she is a proud activist and assists with many events for suicide prevention.

"You have to know how to prioritize and choose what you want to do each day and also include mental health. You have to take self-care time, but once you're able to really learn how to manage time effectively and efficiently, you can do it," said Cooper.

Alongside all her other commitments, Cooper started her campaign path during her first year at Charlotte. She became class president during her first year and has continued throughout all four years. She still holds the role of class president as a fourth-year student.

Cooper expressed that she wants to represent the student body accurately as class president.

"You have to represent the people accurately and effectively as well. Honestly, it has opened up so many doors and opportunities. Being able to be sophomore, junior and now senior class president has been an honor to serve all four of those roles," said Cooper.

Cooper said she plans on going to law school with an open mind and hopes to find her calling there.

"I'm not going to close the door to that. It's really fascinating. I want to go to law school with an open mind and see where I find my calling," said Cooper.

Looking forward at her career path, Cooper hopes to make an impact in the legal field and explore ways to integrate mental health.

"Making mental health more known within the legal field, and sort of integrating those two fields a lot more than it is, because I feel like mental health is not talked about enough, especially within the legal capacity," said Cooper.

Cooper says that mental health resources should be available to everyone.

"I think it's just what we need to do as a society, and we need to sort of reduce the rates of suicide. It's so prevalent, and that's what I hope to accomplish, is just making an impact within the legal system and integrating the legal and mental health systems together," said Cooper.

Cooper credited Charlotte's Honors College with providing her with a foundation and resources that helped her become a Truman Scholarship finalist.

"I could feel the support from the Honors College all the way in Washington, and it was really



Grace Cooper, Truman Scholarship finalist | Courtesy of Grace Cooper

“I have a philosophy from my dad of being a student for life. That’s what he would always say to me, and I don’t think just because I’m graduating, I’m going to stop learning.”

- Grace Cooper, fourth-year

manage everything when she first joined Greek life. However, she quickly found a supportive system, and they were excited about her scholarship opportunity.

"They have been nothing but extremely supportive within it. All of the girls were so excited for me to do my Truman interview and extremely supportive. It's like having a huge family here in Charlotte," said Cooper.

Cooper said she wanted to take on as much as possible in college to take advantage of the opportunities.

"When I came to college, I just knew college would be an enlightening opportunity, and I wanted to take in as much as I could and use all the opportunities that were available to me and

nice to have that support," said Cooper. "I think that had I not had that support, that experience within the Truman application, getting a finalist going to do my interview in Washington, D.C. would not have been the same."

While Grace is a fourth-year, she recognizes that her academic journey is not over. Growing up, her dad would tell her that she was a student for life.

"It's my senior year, so sadly, it's coming to an end, but being a student isn't," said Cooper. "I have a philosophy from my dad of being a stu-

dent for life. That's what he would always say to me, and I don't think just because I'm graduating, I'm going to stop learning. Learning is going to go on for the rest of my life."

Cooper said that most of the work falls under applications that many find annoying or scary; however, it is inevitably the most rewarding.

"Putting yourself out there, sending in those applications, clicking 'submit.' Like, it's so nerve-wracking, but honestly, go out there, put yourself out there and give it a chance," said Cooper.



# Sonia Birla's pursuit of excellence leads to Truman Scholarship finals

Sofia DiStefano | News Editor

Between balancing three majors and conducting research in Philadelphia, Sonia Birla embodies what it means to be a 49er and Truman Scholarship finalist.

In March 2024, Birla was named a Truman Scholarship finalist alongside Grace Cooper, another fourth-year student from Charlotte.

The two were selected from 191 finalists out of 709 applications nationwide, and Charlotte was the only UNC System school with finalists for the 2024 award year.

The fourth-year is majoring in three fields of study: geography, finance and international studies. However, during her experience with Charlotte City Center Partners on urban work, she changed from studying supply chain management to geography.

Throughout her time with Charlotte City Center Partners, she was able to continue her community work and focus on urban work.

"I loved it. The work we were doing was interacting with the community, figuring out what all of the different types of stakeholders in the community needed and how we could better connect them to resources and better connect them to each other. Generally, it improves people's experiences of Uptown and South End. I was supposed to be there for eight weeks, but I ended up staying for eight months," said Birla.

Alongside working with Charlotte City Center Partners, Birla traveled to Philadelphia and spent a summer conducting urban food research.

Birla said that she had been looking forward to the opportunity to travel out of Charlotte and wanted to expand her research.

"I want to see what other cities were like, and it was a really cool opportunity, it was something I haven't learned a lot about before. I was just interested in seeing how food impacts where people live, how they interact with space and how that plays out into long-term well-being," said Birla. "I was doing research on different organizations that work in the food justice sector in Philadelphia and trying to figure out the best practices for those different organizations."

She also highlighted how she has connected her majors to improve her understanding of urban development, as it is her main focus.

"I started to realize that finance actually has a lot of application to urban development, being able to talk about investments and financial analysis, and returns on investment and having that language while working in urban development has been very cool," said Birla.

Birla said the Honors College advisors and professors also played a significant role in her journey, including the scholarship application process, traveling and becoming a finalist.

According to Birla, numerous opportunities

opened up for her through the Honors College at Charlotte.

Alongside her work in the Honors College and urban development, Birla has been heavily

**"It was almost just like there were more people in my corner. The staff in the Honors College are all amazing, and they're very one-on-one. Everybody knows my name, and they know my major."**

**- Sonia Birla, fourth-year**

involved on campus and helped found the South Asian Student Organization.

During her first year on campus, Birla noticed the broader South Asian cultural presence on Charlotte's campus wasn't connected, which is why Birla and others found it important to bring the organization to life.

"We wanted something that would unite all of South Asia because we have a lot of similar cultural heritage, and we share a lot of values, even though they might look a little bit different, so we started SASA," said Birla.

During her first year with the organization, she started out as vice president and then became president. Birla also shared how the organization aims to promote community bonding.

"I love our team, and I think we were very intentional at the beginning of picking people who were supportive and were really excited to do cool things. We wanted to do good for the rest of the community and see how far we can push the boundaries of what a student organization can do," said Birla.

Although Birla and Cooper did not win, Birla noted that being a finalist was a big step for UNC Charlotte as a whole.

"I feel like people don't necessarily think of Charlotte in the same way that they think of those schools. Charlotte's on the up and up. The fact that we were able to produce the only two Truman finalists in the UNC system last year is crazy," said Birla.



Sonia Birla, Truman Scholarship Finalist | Courtesy of Sonia Birla





# UNC Charlotte breaks previous record for enrolled students in fall 2024

Richard Nuzzo/Niner Times File

Sunnaya Hadavi | Layout Editor

UNC Charlotte set a new enrollment record in fall 2024, with 31,091 students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs. This new record exceeds the previous record of 30,488 set in fall 2021.

“It’s great to see more and more students and their parents seeing the benefits of the strong academics and student success programs available only at Charlotte,” said Chancellor Sharon L. Gaber in a University press release. “These record-breaking numbers reflect the outstanding work of our faculty and staff and our commitment to the success of all students through rising retention and graduation rates.”

Enrollment numbers at UNC Charlotte have been increasing steadily since the fall of 2012. The only exceptions are in 2022 and 2023, when enrollment numbers did not exceed the record from 2021.

The University reports that student enrollment was 26,232 in 2012. This means that fall enrollment numbers have increased by around 19% (4,859 students) in the last 12 years.

In addition to increasing enrollment, UNC Charlotte has consistently seen an increase in minority-identifying students in its student body. As of fall 2024, around 42% of the student body identifies as Black, Hispanic, Asian American,

Native American or Pacific Islander.

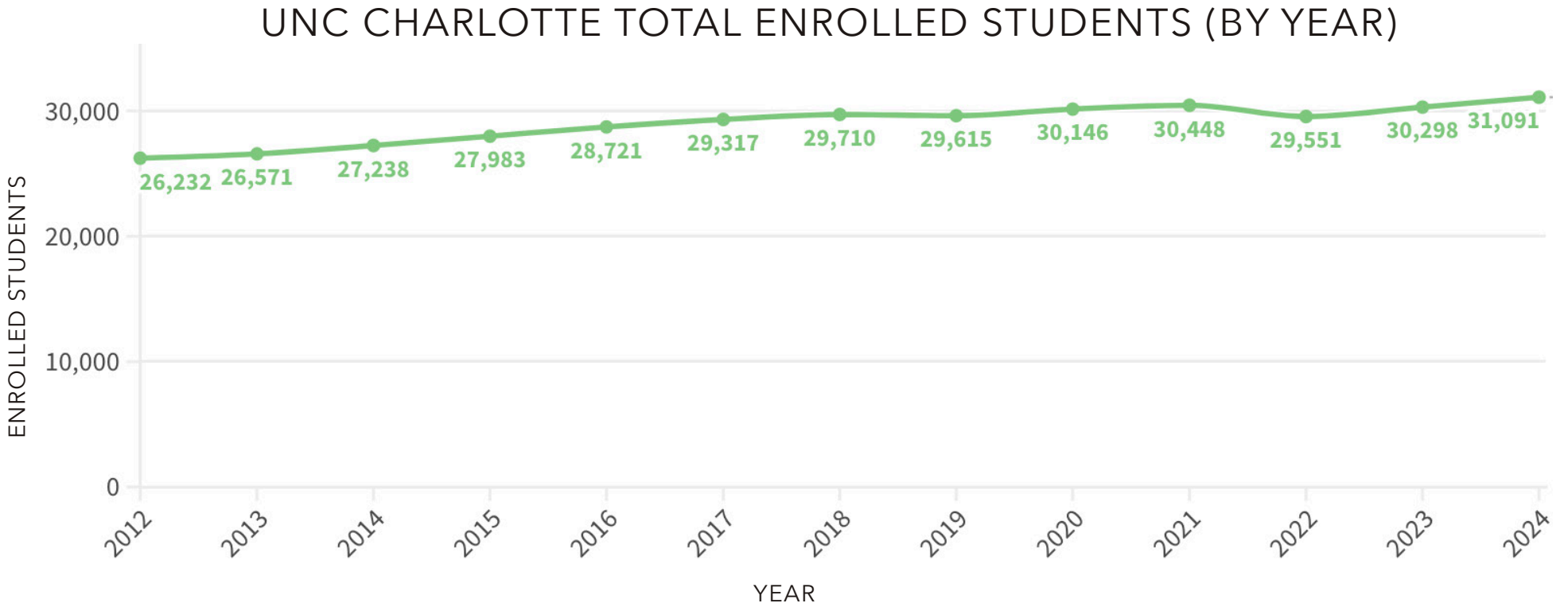
The University is now recognized as an Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution by Excelencia in Higher Education, as 15.6% of its undergraduate students identify as Hispanic.

According to the University, UNC Charlotte’s student population this semester comes from 98 of 100 North Carolina counties, 49 states and 99 countries.

In 2023, UNC Charlotte had the No. 3 highest enrollment of all 17 institutions in the UNC System. NC State University had the highest fall 2023 enrollment, with 37,323 students, followed by UNC-Chapel Hill, with 32,234.

The increase in enrollment at UNC Charlotte contrasts predictions made by think tanks and university officials across the nation about a decrease in enrollment.

These predictions were made due to the slow rollout of financial aid after changes to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Others looked at the high number of higher education institutions shutting down due to low enrollment and funding. Not far from Charlotte, UNC Greensboro announced the closure of 20 programs earlier this year to ensure “academic and financial footing for the next generation.”







Courtesy of UNC Charlotte

# Charlotte's research hub CIPHER advances research work on campus

Ronnie Taylor | Staff Writer

The Center for Computational Intelligence to Predict Health and Environmental Risks (CIPHER) is leading research efforts as UNC Charlotte intensifies its bid to achieve R1 status, a designation reserved for top-tier research universities.

CIPHER aims to elevate the University's reputation by strengthening its research output and fostering interdisciplinary collaborations—all essential to reaching R1 status.

CIPHER is a campus research hub devoted to environmental and health issues. The center brings together professors and student researchers from various fields to work on solutions to pressing problems, including infectious diseases, environmental degradation and food safety.

By integrating empirical and computational technologies, CIPHER's research centers on emerging viruses, antibiotic resistance and ecosystem health.

"We have researchers from public health, computing and informatics, the sciences, mostly biology, and we have all kinds of interest ranging from bacteria and viruses to ticks and how environmental changes increase our risk for disease," said Dr. Daniel Janies, Carol Grotnes Belk Distinguished Professor and co-director of CIPHER. "But, we all share the modalities of DNA sequencing and computation."

According to Janies, CIPHER's unique technological capabilities distinguish it from other research centers. The center has advanced facilities, including high-performance computing clusters and state-of-the-art data visualization tools. Integrating emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and sophisticated data analytics is central to CIPHER's research initiatives.

"We have an amazing array of equipment. We have basically every equipment to handle DNA or RNA and analyze it better. Then the stuff to

interpret it and the AI is allowing us to do more experiments and look at possibilities more quickly," said Janies.

The CIPHER team is engaged in several significant research projects addressing real-world challenges. These include projects with limb regeneration, SARS-CoV-2, and diseases from vectors such as birds, bats and mosquitoes.

"Two or three years ago, I had a student who studied all the mosquitoes in Mecklenburg County. He found that 90% of mosquitoes are an invasive variety," said Janies. "So now, when you get bit by a mosquito, you're getting bit by tropical mosquitoes, and those tropical mosquitoes carry diseases we've never experienced before."

The advanced technology and collaborative spirit at CIPHER are integral to driving the high-impact research necessary for R1 recognition.

Achieving R1 status will attract more prestigious research grants, further strengthening CIPHER's capabilities.

A key benefit of achieving this status is the potential to secure significant funding and attract top-tier researchers and faculty.

"We have decided to take on complicated problems," said Janies. "We're writing papers, and people will have a first impression, so we want that first impression to be very good. R1 status will show others that you don't need to be at a place with Ivy on the walls to do great work."

As UNC Charlotte strengthens its position as a leading research institution, CIPHER sets out to play an even more critical role. The center's ongoing evolution and strategic enhancements will continue to drive its impact and support the University's quest for R1 status.

"CIPHER is doing something new, unique and important. It's something Charlotte has afforded us to do. We can take some chances along the way. We are making leaps and bounds, and it's very exciting," said Janies.



# Skate

## UNC CHARLOTTE'S SKATEBOARDERS FORM A TIGHT-KNIT COMMUNITY AT THE STAR QUAD

Sunnya Hadavi & Guadalupe Aguilar Sosa | Layout Editor & Arts & Culture Editor  
Photos by Sunnya Hadavi/Niner Times

# quad

UNC Charlotte's Star Quad is known for many things. On campus tours, it is the area where you can hear your echo. For historically Black sororities and fraternities, it is a classic spot for strolling and performances. However, it is most known as a popular spot for skaters.

Atop some of the steepest stairs on campus, the Star Quad sits between the J. Murrey Atkins Library, Cone University Center and the Student Activity Center. Even if students

avoid the area, the sound of skateboards and cheers is unavoidable.

From doing tricks and skills to chatting, these student skateboarders are there for hours every day, no matter the temperatures or tumbles. While some find it annoying, they have created their own community on campus.

"People shouldn't feel intimidated by us. I think we are kind of rowdy and annoying sometimes. But if a passerby just started a conversation, or even if we were in their way, all you have to do is talk to us. And honestly, 99.9% of the people here will be so nice and so welcoming," said Adam Leidhold, a fourth-year mechanical engineering student and skater.

Leidhold began skating on campus as a first-year after seeing others at the Star Quad. He now skates there three or four times a week.

"Once I came to college, [I saw] this community of people who are out here consistently. It made me want to get better. [It] made me want to come out here and skate," said Leidhold. "I think the past three or four years that I've been here have been the most I've ever skated in my life. And it's because of the community."

Originally from Massachusetts, Leidhold travels home for breaks but only finds himself motivated to skate when back on campus.

"Even though I have time to skate [back home], I don't end up skating. But when I'm here and don't have time to skate, I [still] end up skating," said Leidhold. "Which is funny, but it's just the community that pushes you to get better."

For these students, skateboarding is not simply a quick way to get to class but also a way to pass the time and take a break.

"I often go between the library and skateboarding. I'll be studying for maybe an hour, and then I'll come to skate. It's just a nice way to stay active and socialize with people," said Manny Merino, a fourth-year student. "Then, when I'm done, I just go back to studying. I do that all day, rotating."

Merino began skating for the first time the summer before starting at Charlotte. In the last four years, he has progressed in his skating and created lasting friendships.

"At first, they're all strangers, but it really only takes maybe two days to get to know everyone," said Merino. "Then you have a whole entire friend group that's willing to do anything, hang out, help you study, make connections."

It is the connections made through the Star Quad that help these students throughout the semester.

Jonathon Burns, a third-year, deals with stress from classes through skating. It is why he and the other skaters often stay at the Star Quad for hours.

"For me, it's a safe place. It's where I go to get negative thoughts out or just clear some stress and not think about anything else," said Burns. "Here, I can do it judgment-free and with my friends."

On a regular basis, there are at least five skaters at the Star Quad. These include experienced skateboarders, those with little to no experience and even students who rollerblade.

There are also a variety of personalities and backgrounds.

"It's a mix of all introverted skaters, extroverted skaters. It's a big community, for sure. So you get different people [from] different backgrounds in the city," said Dillon Syhavong, a fourth-year student.

The friendship between the Star Quad skaters runs deep. For most of the skaters, these are the people they spend most of their time in college with and keep in touch after graduation. Alumni frequently visit the skate spot as well to catch up.

"I'm going to skate wherever I am. And I definitely plan on, when I graduate, coming back here and skating," said Merino. "A bunch of my friends already graduated, and they come back here and skate, not just on the campus, but in the city of Charlotte as well. [They] take a little day trip just to visit all their old friends and whatnot."

For the skaters, the Star Quad is where they know they can see most of their friends and catch up during the semester.

"I know I can see every single one of my friends in this community," said Bryson Williams, a third-year student. "That's how I've met almost everyone I [know] in college. It has been from this place right here."

Most skaters joined the



RAFFAEL ZIEMSKI,  
FOURTH-YEAR





MANNY MERINO,  
FOURTH-YEAR

group because of their interest in skateboarding and tricks. Some only recently started their skating journey, while others have

picked up the board from a young age. Raffael Ziemski, a fourth-year exchange student from Germany, is at Charlotte for a research program. He began skating at 16. The community encouraged him to skate more, and the others are now his good friends and roommates.

“Ever since I got here, I’ve been skating pretty heavily, like every day,” said Ziemski. “It’s fun and challenging, and I love the trends and the overall vibe [of the community].”

To showcase their love for skating, the skaters made their own page on Instagram. They post clips from any skater on campus and accept non-campus clips from Charlotte students.

The close friendships motivate these skaters to try new tricks and push themselves past their limits.

“When I first met Bryson, he was just skating off [to] the side. He didn’t have anything skill-wise, but his fear of commitment was not there. He would throw himself down anything and try a trick that anyone years ahead of him was trying,” said Burns. “It made him get really good fast. Seeing people like that, they can just do it. It pushes me to do it too.”

While the group is tightly knit, they are always open to new skaters and extend an open invitation to anyone who wants to improve their skills or make some friends.

“Don’t be intimidated. If you skate, just come out. We are more than happy to skate with anybody, no matter if you’re a beginner or not because we were all beginners once,” said Merino.





# Norms Vintage Market transforms UNC Charlotte into a one stop thrift shop

Sunnya Hadavi | Layout Editor

Photos by Sunnya Hadavi/Niner Times

Vintage fashion and college life collided last Thursday when Norms Vintage Market popped up on UNC Charlotte's campus.

On Sept. 5, over 30 vendors and small businesses set up shop at the Mebane/CHHS Plaza across from Popp Martin Student Union. From sports clothing to handmade rugs, the Plaza had something for everyone.

With music playing in the Plaza and a food truck right by, the market was also a gathering

place for students to showcase their best outfits and discuss their interests.

Norms Vintage Market has organized these markets once a semester since popping up on UNC Charlotte's campus in the fall of 2023. The market is a registered student organization on campus, created by students Jasmin Walia (@geniethrifts) and Trey Orantes (@justbuyitvintage).

The first market, held in November 2023, had 20 vendors present. However, this semester's

market stood out with a record number of vendors and customers.

"Normally, on Charlotte's campus, I feel there's nothing ever going on. And right now, it feels like everybody's together as one," said vendor Joseph Leviev. "Everybody likes clothes in some aspect. And when it comes to vintage stuff, there's always something for everyone."

Leviev, a fourth-year computer science student, has been a vendor at Norms Vintage Market three times. He runs Days of Old CLT (@daysofold.clt), selling vintage clothing full-time while finishing his degree.

Most vendors at the market are local to Charlotte, and many are current students or alumni of the University.

"The Charlotte community is always awesome. I think North Carolina is one of the bigger thrift states for all the events they have across [the state in] Raleigh, Greenville and Charlotte," said Sesin Kahsay, vendor and Charlotte alumnus. "With this one being on campus, I think in the short time they've been doing this, it's always a good turnout."

Kahsay sells vintage clothing through his shop Senzu Vintage (@senzuvintage), named after Dragon

Ball Z, one of his favorite anime. He originally sold shoes but turned his love for streetwear and thrifting into a full-time business.

"I think retail shopping is on the decline.

I feel like people always want to get second-hand [clothes], and now it's got the exposure too," said Kahsay. "So it's cool to engage with all the students and the faculty. I had a bunch of faculty last time I was here that bought stuff."

Walking through the market can be

overstimulating, with so many racks of clothing and people browsing the selection of items.

"I think that today is probably one of the most organized markets that I've been to in a very long time, which is really important for vendors, customers and students," said Emma Pimentel, owner of Lucky You Vintage Threads (@luckyyouvintagethreads). "We're taking up this whole courtyard, but we're not in the way of anything."

This was Pimentel's first time as a vendor at Norms Vintage Market on campus. She runs Lucky You Vintage Threads full-time and attends markets around Charlotte every weekend.

"Seeing people find clothes that fit them in their style and being able to express themselves through their clothing is really inspiring," said Pimentel. "I personally never thought I would find my style. Then I started doing this and was like, 'Okay, wait, I really like this piece.' You throw it together, and it gives you so much confidence when you feel like you're wearing something that's made for you."

Having built confidence in her style from her business, Pimentel wants others to do the same with the clothing they buy at these markets.

"Wear whatever the fuck you want. It doesn't matter. People don't care as much as a lot of people think they do," said Pimentel. "I used to feel like everyone judged my outfit or something about me. Now that I do this, I don't care."

While Norms Vintage Market focuses on local Charlotte businesses, it also features vendors from other parts of the state, such as Thrift Smith Vintage (@thrift.smith.vintage) from Boone.

"I grew up during the recession, and all the stuff I got was thrifted before it was considered cool to thrift. It was when people would make fun of me for thrifting," said Bethany Smith, owner of the Thrift Smith Vintage shop. "I just kept doing it through college, and then I ended up getting my degree and then changing my mind and selling clothes instead."

For Smith, buying second-hand clothing from small businesses is not just about the price but also sustainability.

"Shopping sustainably is definitely something that everyone needs to start doing because there's so many clothes that have already been made, and there's so many clothes that go into landfills," said Smith. "So you're saving the planet when you buy second-hand vintage and thrifted clothes."

In addition to clothing, vendors at the market sold accessories such as purses, shoes and even press-on nails.

Sophia Park, a third-year student, sold press-on nails at the market for the second time as a vendor. She prides herself on her prices and







making college students feel confident.

“My entire college experience is with nails. It’s talking to a bunch of girls my age, and it’s really nice to have these girls feel really confident and feel beautiful,” said Park. “Especially with the pricing, it matters because we’re all college students, and the way I charge my own nails and sets is more accommodating to the young adult age range here.”

Park’s business, Nails by Sophia Park (@nailsbyssophiaparkk), is just a year old. Since regularly attending markets like Norms Vintage Market, she has seen a lot of growth.

“When I first started, I would probably have 20 to 30 sets of nails, which is not a lot. But now, I would have around 80 to 100 sets of nails on display for people to choose from,” said Park. “It’s definitely been improving, especially the way I would decorate my table, too. I used to have one table, and now I have two, and it’s all full.”

By providing a platform for local businesses, Norms Vintage Market helps Charlotte students get more recognition and experience at markets. For second-year Josh Brodie, showcasing his handmade rugs and business, Brodini Rugz (@brodiniugz), is a blessing.

“It’s been straight supportive out here. I’ve seen a wave of support today that I had never seen from Charlotte before,” said Brodie. “Everybody coming up to me, even if they’re not buying a rug, [is] giving me positive compliments. And people need to hear that sometimes. You don’t know what is going on behind the scenes of somebody, so you just don’t know the boost that it could really bring to that person.”

Like Brodie and the other vendors, Karen Araya said she appreciates the support from the community and those

shopping from them. Araya runs Timeless Treasures (@timelesstreasuresclt), a luxury and permanent jewelry business. She is also a 2024 UNC Charlotte alum.

“It’s super important to be buying from small businesses because, for a lot of us, this is our lives,” said Araya. “We really rely on people coming to us, and we love the community as well. So, I love interacting with people and showing them what we have.”





# Column: Crawling out of the friend zone

Emsley Jackson | Asst. Opinion Editor

With a new relationship, the friend zone is a dangerous place to be when aiming for something more in a connection. While building trust and familiarity with the person, you may also cement your place on the no-try list. Keeping your head about you on the battlefield can ensure that you and your potential relationships make it out alive.

### Make your intentions clear

The friend zone is rough; you never know when a landmine will be set off. The side hug, group hangouts and lethal ‘your friend is cute’ conversations can sneak in and blow everything up in a matter of seconds. This is why it is essential to be honest from the beginning, as daunting as that idea is.

If you are interested in being more than a friend, let the other person know through words or actions. This could be asking to hang out one-on-one or

initiating a conversation about your interests in a way most comfortable for you both. Compliment them more, suggest date-like hangouts, associate your presence with good times and show up as your best self when you do see them. Just hanging around and being the bro creates an image that might be how they forever see you. Once soldiers enter ‘bro’ territory, many never return.

### Do not play games

Some advice out there about getting out of the friend zone will tell you to try and get them jealous with messy tactics when, honestly, guerilla warfare is not how you want to con your way into a relationship. Science of People noted in an article, “Don’t pull stunts. (...) Some people overplay themselves to the point of being clownish. Stop trying to impress, don’t showboat, let them come to you.” Flashing other prospects in someone’s face might make them even less likely to pursue. Depending on the person, the idea of being one of many or your inconsistency could be a complete turnoff. Being your

authentic self is the most sincere way to approach people and less cringe-worthy for your future self’s sake.

### Understand your boundaries

If you are one of the brave souls who is content with lingering in the friend zone, waiting for the right moment to make a move, more power to you. As seen on TV with famous friends-to-lover couples like “Schitt’s Creek’s” David and Patrick, “Brooklyn Nine-Nine’s” Jake and Amy and of course “The Office’s” Jim and Pam, timing is everything. Sometimes obstacles arise, and there is nothing to do but lie in wait.

Understanding when the wait is too much is crucial. In “The Office,” Jim lets Pam know how he feels about her while she is engaged to someone else. She could not commit to being in a relationship with him, so Jim took the necessary steps to remove himself from the equation. Knowing what you will and will not put up with can help cut down on hurt, or at least save you from a messy situation.

### Stay open-minded

There will always be ‘plenty of fish in the sea.’ It is lame but true. Do not put all your eggs in one basket, talk to other people and try out other opportunities. Whether or not you have faith in the universe or an overarching plan, the right things will fall into place eventually. You should not have to fight for the right person to be interested in you. Worst comes to worst, if they ultimately do not feel the same way; it just lets you know what was not meant to be.

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# Column: Stop whining about Taylor Swift

Taylor Swift cheers on the Chiefs alongside family of their quarterback. [Courtesy of Larry Koester/larrywkoester via Flickr]

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief

For a majority male fanbase, ‘man up’ is not something NFL fans should have to hear, but in reaction to the mass of complaints around Taylor Swift’s NFL involvement, it seems appropriate.

While keeping her carbon emissions in mind, I am far from a ‘Swiftie,’ but the constant vocal gripes and groans from NFL fans whenever she appears during a game are ridiculous.

Not to foster negative masculine stereotypes, but for a group that prides itself in its masculinity, NFL fans have done a lot of crying in regards to Swift.

But all this complaining comes in the face of positive progress in the NFL’s brand reach.

Swift’s presence in the NFL has provided a massive boost to its viewership, especially among the female demographic. The NFL failed to reach this demographic until last year when Swift began attending Kansas City Chiefs games to support her boyfriend and Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce.

Last season, the NFL reached its highest regular-season female viewership ever, with a staggering 53% spike among teenage girls. Additionally, viewership among women aged 18-24 jumped 24% and 34% among women aged 35 and up.

Football is for everyone, right? With all these new fans coming together to enjoy something NFL fans live by, why is there so much resistance?

Every time Swift is posted on social media, the comments are flooded with majority male users expressing their grievances. Data showing Swift’s positive impact on the NFL has been widely published, but it seems that these fans do not care.

With the wave of complaints, you would assume NFL broadcasts had switched to a split-screen, with half of it showing Swift and the other half showing the game.

But no, during the Super Bowl between Swift’s Chiefs and the San Francisco 49ers, Swift was on the screen for 54 seconds total during the game.

This was 0.36% of the total game broadcast.

In prior playoff matchups leading up to the Super Bowl, Swift graced the screen for 44 seconds and a minute and 17 seconds in the game before.

The game where Swift was shown for a minute and 17 seconds was, at the time, the most streamed event in U.S. history. The Peacock stream saw an average of 23 million viewers, reaching a high of 27.6 million at one point.

These fussing fans surely watch these games and are aware of her minimal screen time, which has a major impact. So, what is the reason for the constant moaning cries on social media about the NFL always showing her?

Even if her constant presence on the NFL and other sports pages on social media can sometimes be redundant, is it that hard to scroll? Fans act like their eyes are being pried open and presented with a screen of Taylor Swift brainwashing.

The NFL is as good as ever, with both of last

season’s conference championships and the Super Bowl resulting in closely contested, one-score games. The addition of Swift only means new, excited fans to enjoy our beloved NFL and more money for the NFL to improve its product.

This is a good thing whether you are a fan of Swift or not; just sit back and enjoy the football.

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# The team behind the team: Charlotte football's equipment staff

Kelli Blackburn | Asst. Sports Editor

When it comes to a football game day in Charlotte, most people spend their time getting ready for the game—preparing to tune in on TV, going out with friends or tailgating. Thoughts typically focus on the game itself, with little consideration of the factors that ensure players are prepared. The Charlotte football equipment team has played a major role in keeping the team ready for each matchup, season after season.

The 49ers offer students the chance to join athletic teams' staff every year, whether in video production, social media or equipment management. Charlotte football has a handful of students joining their equipment squad for summer practices and fall camp, where they must make quick adjustments as needed. These students sacrifice their free time, giving up hobbies and socializing to contribute to the 49er's success, ensuring their necessities are smoothly in check. In

return, they receive a bit of scholarship money.

## A day in the life

Typically, equipment managers log more hours of work than most would expect. They are required to attend all team practices, which means waking up around 6 a.m. to be at the Judy W. Rose Football Center by 7 a.m. A two-hour window is given for the staff to prepare the practice fields—setting up speakers for music, sleds, pads, footballs and more.

Once practice wraps up around noon, the equipment team cleans up the field and heads to class. Laundry is also a big part of the job, ensuring the team's practice gear and gameday gear stay clean and ready for use. Each equipment member takes turns handling laundry duties. On game day, the staff splits into two groups: one arrives six to seven hours before kickoff, and the

other comes just before the team reports. The goal remains the same—to meet the player's and coaches' needs.

Equipment managers are also responsible for the decals and uniform combinations that fans eagerly anticipate on game day. On Aug. 15, the staff got to unveil the new 'Gold Rush' uniforms Charlotte wore in their matchup against James Madison University on Aug. 31.

## Handling the pressure

Fourth-year student and equipment manager Drew Davis knows better than anyone that to handle the stress of the job, you have to focus on the positives.

"For me, I like to remind myself that equipment is a unique opportunity for me to be involved with the game I love, work with great people and travel to states and cities I've never been to," said Davis.

To make their experience more enjoyable, fourth-year students Ethan Michalski and John Wheeler have a pre-game ritual before every Charlotte matchup. Starting in 2023, after the team returns to the locker room following pre-game warmups, the two quickly chug 8.4 oz Red Bulls to get themselves fired up for the game.

Another equipment staff manager, second-year student Lucas Johnson, manages stress through faith.

"I try to at least read my Bible every day, just to make sure that I center [my life] around what's really important to me and that kind of blossoms into my life, so the hard work and everything doesn't really seem as bad when I understand what's really going on with my relationship with God," said Johnson.

By maintaining a positive outlook, the equipment staff makes their workload more manageable and meaningful.



Charlotte football equipment managers, (left to right) Drew Davis, Ethan Michalski, John Wheeler and Joe Elberti pose for a photo ahead of the matchup against James Madison University on Aug. 31. | Courtesy of Drew Davis



**“For me, I like to remind myself that equipment is a unique opportunity for me to be involved with the game I love, work with great people and travel to states and cities I’ve never been to.”**

**- Drew Davis, fourth-year**

### Making memories

The Charlotte football equipment team comes together quickly to get as many hands involved as possible. This fast bonding creates opportunities for staff members to connect with each other, the football team and the coaching staff.

“We’ve only known each other for about a month and a half, but I feel like we’ve known each other forever,” said Johnson.

Davis makes it a point to connect with everyone personally through his work. Though professionalism is important, he values building strong relationships, given the amount of time they spend together. One of his favorite parts of the job is warming up with the quarterbacks during practice. There are five quarterbacks, so he usu-

ally gets to throw with one of them. Davis enjoys simple conversations about football, life and personal experiences during these moments.

The camaraderie extends off the field as well. Second-year student Zack Linton, known as ‘Weatherman,’ recalls one of his favorite memories: The starting cornerback was driving around campus and spotted him walking out in the rain, so he decided to stop and give him a ride back to his dorm. As the saying goes, football truly is family.

“It’s really awesome to meet all these different people and [see] all the different things that they’ve been through, even with football and just other things in life,” said Johnson. “With the players, it’s really eye-opening to see that they’re,

again, just people too.”

The equipment staff also shares memorable experiences traveling together. Davis’ favorite game was at the University of Florida in 2023, whereas Michalski enjoyed attending Duke University in 2021 and the University of South Carolina in 2022. Johnson’s first and favorite game so far has been against James Madison University for week one of the 2024 season, when his whole family was ecstatic about him being on the ESPN broadcast. These are the types of ‘made-it’ moments that make the job feel surreal.

### The end goals

While a few students are pursuing business careers, they all hope their experience with Charlotte football will open doors within the sports industry. The hands-on experience, management and communication create a great résumé builder and skills that are invaluable for any career.

Johnson reflects that getting the chance to extend his experience in equipment brings him back to his childhood dreams—working for an NFL team would be a huge achievement for him. In addition to personal goals, the staff shares common ambitions: To support the team and contribute to something bigger than themselves.

“My goal is to be a part of the first team in school history to have a winning record or win a bowl game,” said Michalski. “This goal is out of my control, so in terms of things I can control, I would like to make the equipment room a place the players can trust and rely on and that the coaches know is going to be the best in the country.”

Next time someone looks at the field in Jerry Richardson Stadium before a game day, hopefully, they think about the preparation that comes into play for both the team and ‘the team behind the team’—the Charlotte football equipment staff. None of the operations would be possible without them.



(Left) Student equipment managers John Wheeler and Ethan Michalski participate in their pregame ritual at football game against UNC. (Right) Student equipment manager Drew Davis holds on to a bag during a rainy Charlotte football practice. | Courtesy of Drew Davis





# Ryan Osborn puts offenses in a headlock as Charlotte football's defensive coordinator

Davis Cuffe | Editor-in-Chief

Carrying what players have called 'WWE energy,' Charlotte football Defensive Coordinator Ryan Osborn brings energy and expertise from the top rope.

A former defensive assistant with the NFL's Baltimore Ravens, Osborn brings next-level experience and energy to the 49ers as their resident football zealot.

During the season, Osborn spends his Saturdays '10 toes down' with Charlotte football on the sideline, dialing up destructive concoctions of pass rushes and coverage schemes.

An expressive and vocal leader, Osborn is boisterous and intense in his coaching approach, constantly shouting at players and stomping up and down the sideline.

"When I'm here, I'm here," said Osborn. "Saturdays are a little bit different. I've got to go to a different place."

When Osborn puts on the title belt and makes his mental transformation on game day, he hopes players return the energy.

"If I don't bring my [expletive] every day, then I can't expect them to bring their [expletive] every day," said Osborn. "So that ultimately is the reason why, when I'm on the field, I have the highest sense of urgency and enthusiasm unknown to mankind."

This energy does not go to waste on the 49er defense. Since joining as defensive coordinator Charlotte in 2023 following his stint with the Ravens, where they were ranked No. 3 in points allowed per game, the unit has vastly improved. Charlotte dropped their points allowed per game by over 10 and was ranked No. 59 in the NCAA at the end of the 2023 season, a 70-place jump from their 2022 performance.

When Osborn talks, players listen. In an interview with the Charlotte Observer in 2023, Osborn identified himself as the leader of defense, and it seems to be the same in 2024. Osborn believes his command over the team stems from his own attitude.

"I have to bring my [expletive] every day," said Osborn. "They know I'm ready to handle any challenge presented. When they have the confidence of me, and I have the confidence of them, [expletive] really goes smooth."

The Charlotte pass-rushers are a position group whose play has been especially smooth since Osborn's arrival. From the 2023 to 2023 season, total sacks jumped from 17 to 20, holding six opponents to less than 140 passing yards due to the added pressure. As Osborn acts as the outside linebackers coach and works closely with the defensive line, he takes pride in their success.

This unit was especially effective in week one against James Madison University (JMU) against

the potent rushing attack. The 49ers held JMU's star senior running back Ayo Adeyi to 2.6 yards per rush after he averaged 7.4 in the year prior.

Osborn is no stranger to stopping the run. While with the Ravens in 2023, Baltimore ranked as the No. 3 best rushing defense, allowing just 92.1 yards per game while finishing No. 5 in sacks.

Before leading top units in the NFL, Osborn spent time in the college scene. In 2021, he was an analyst at the University of Michigan, helping the Wolverines to their first College Football Playoff appearance in program history. During his time with Michigan, they were the No. 8 scoring defense nationally and ranked No. 20 in yards allowed per game.

Before his time at Michigan, Osborn coached at the universities of Florida, Mississippi State, Tennessee-Martin and Amherst College, among others.

"I've tried to take everything from every place that I've been and try to create a product on the field here," said Osborn. "That's something that we can be proud of and take pride in, and I think we've done that up to this point."

Osborn's coaching journey started in 2008 at Bridgewater College as a student. While Osborn was not on the team as a player, he was about as involved as a student can be, acting as the director of football operations, video coordinator and defensive assistant.

Now heading into his 16th year coaching, Osborn's love for football still drives his energy.

"When I'm not doing anything else, I'm watching football," said Osborn. "I know it's like a cliché thing to say, like, 'You're just watching football,' but literally, that's all I do. I'm just constantly thinking about ball. It's been a hard road, but it's been a great road, and I look forward to the next 25 to 30 years."

With a new challenge every week for Osborn, 'locked in' may be an understatement for his day-to-day approach to gameday preparation.

Osborn said he spends upwards of 60 hours a week working on Charlotte's defensive game plan every week during the season. Between watching film, coaching practices, meeting with players and other duties, Osborn lives, breathes and eats football while in-season.

"We signed up for this. We got to put the best product on the field, and I am committed to doing that," said Osborn. "[I've] got a couch in my office. If I got to sleep on that, I will"

Osborn truly embodies the essence of what football looks like to most. He is burly and intense but overall attentive. Every detail matters to Osborn, and that is something he hopes to instill in his players.

"There's not a play that does not matter," said Osborn. "There's a sense of urgency, and it's extremely important, extremely, extremely important to to play as such. Every day matters."

While Osborn's high energy remains a constant, it is not for nothing; Osborn and the 49ers are building something special in Jerry Richardson.



Ryan Osborn at Charlotte Football's 2024 spring game. | Courtesy of Charlotte Athletics