



MENTALhealthcheck

The transition back to in-person learning

Read more on p. 3

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

NEWS

PAGE 3 Mental health resources on campus

PAGE 4 Facebook Campus is coming to UNC Charlotte

ARTS & CULTURE

PAGE 5 Film Review: 355

PAGE 6 How my Kindle changed my reading habits

OPINION

PAGE 7 CATS got your tongue?

PAGE 8 Letter to the Editor: Supporting Niner Times
Editors

SPORTS

PAGE 10 Niners in the pros

PAGE 11 Khalifa's journey

PAGE 12 The 49ers get back on track

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MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES ON CAMPUS

The University sends message about resources as students transition back into in-person classes amidst COVID-19

by Kathryn Caudill
Staff Writer

Photo of Center for Counseling and Psychological Services
by Christopher Grissett

On Jan. 20, 2022, Student Affairs sent a message to students containing information about mental health services such as Counseling and Psychological Services, the Office of Disability Services, and more. The email is signed by the Associate Vice Chancellor for Health and Wellbeing, Dr. Mari Ross and the Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, Dr. Christine Reed Davis.

“Your mental and emotional wellbeing is always important to us,” said the Jan. 20 special message.

Student Affairs announced the addition of Refresh Weekend to the academic calendar. Refresh Weekend replaces the former Spring Weekend to bring awareness to mental health and managing stresses. No classes will be held this weekend of April 15-16. There will also be several programs and events focusing on mental health leading up to Refresh Weekend throughout campus.

In the past, UNC Charlotte has given Health and Wellness days where no classes would be held, and no assignments were given.

“The mental and physical wellbeing of Niner Nation is of critical importance, and we care deeply about you,” said the email.

The message also reminds students of the Student Health Center’s mental health resources, such as checks, medication management, psychiatric assessment and nutrition counseling. The Center for Wellness Promotion (CWP) is also available for support concerning intimate partner violence, alcohol, drug recovery and general wellness education.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) is also a resource

for counseling and group therapy.

CAPS services are available to any currently enrolled UNC Charlotte student and are free.

There is no set number of times a student can meet with a counselor at CAPS; however, four to six sessions is the typical treatment model. Group therapy is unlimited, and each person is given one brief counseling session per academic year.

CAPS further offers a free online screening tool to help determine the need for therapy from a counselor. Appointments are also available online for a virtual consultation with a counselor from CAPS.

Other specific programs highlighted by CAPS include Mental Health First Aid and QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer). Mental Health First Aid is an eight-hour training that teaches risk factors and warning signs of mental illnesses and teaches about different types of care ranging from professional to peer and self-care.

To be certified, students must also complete two hours of pre-work and attend the full six hours of instructor-led training.

Upcoming dates are Feb. 7 and 9 from 5:30-3:30 p.m. and will take place virtually.

The QPR program is a 90-minute training on recognizing warning signs of suicide, responding to such signs and who to contact. The next date for this session is Feb. 16 from 4- 5:30 p.m. and will be held virtually.

Registration for both programs is online and now available through the CAPS website.

“These training opportunities are

just one way to work to reduce mental health stigma and take an active role in building an ethic of wellbeing and foster a community of care at UNC Charlotte,” states the CAPS website.

Other relevant campus events include the virtual From Burnout to Balance workshop on Jan. 26 at 4 p.m. hosted by CAPS, the virtual Finding Motivation Workshop at 11:15 a.m. and the virtual Stress Survival 101 course on Feb. 3 at 1:30 p.m.

There are also online CAPS workshops published known as the Coping with Anxiety and Living Mindfully (CALM) workshop. These workshops have multiple sessions and topics pre-recorded and available for viewing for free online, with topics ranging from breathing exercises to grounding and self-care.

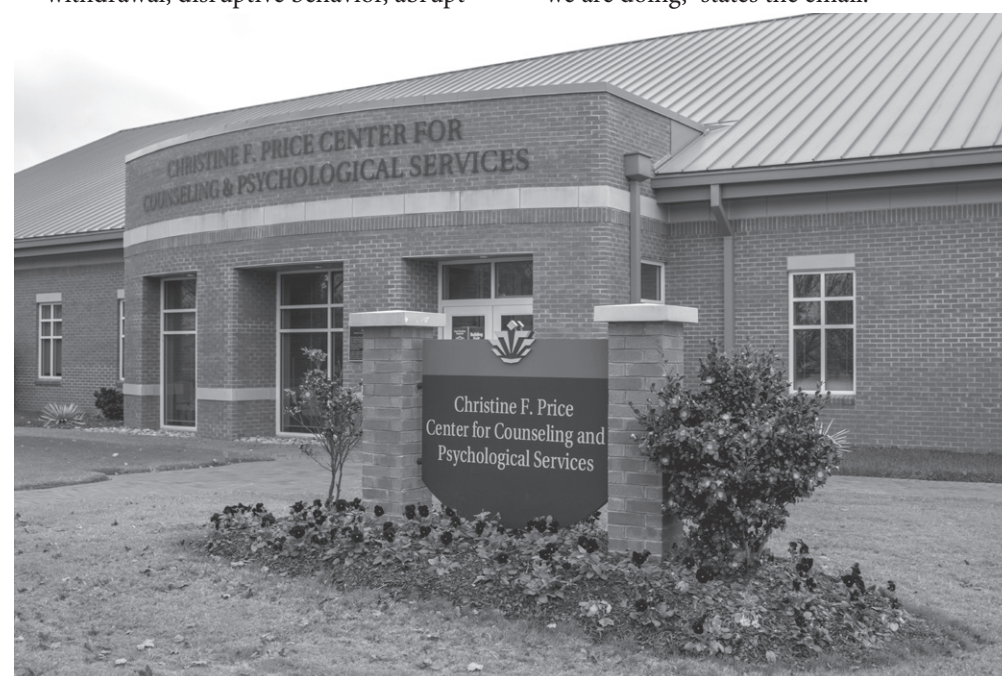
CAPS reports signs and symptoms of stress such as erratic behavior, withdrawal, disruptive behavior, abrupt

change in personal hygiene, and more.

If there are urgent concerns for the safety of another student or the community, CAPS suggests calling 911 or UNC Charlotte Police and Public Safety at 704-687-2200. CAPS can also provide support on approaching another student to seek help if experiencing psychological concerns. To reach the on-call counselor at CAPS, call 704-687-0311. There is also an anonymous online care and concern referral available to fill out via the CAPS website.

Other available resources include the University Recreation Center (UREC), the Office of Disability Services, and Active Minds, a campus chapter of a national organization dedicated to mental health advocacy.

“One of our biggest strengths lies in each other. Let’s check on one another. Let’s ask each other how we are doing,” states the email.





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Facebook Campus is coming to UNC Charlotte

Facebook has gone back to its roots to create a platform for college students to connect

by Lorenza Medley
Staff Writer

Photo courtesy of
Facebook Campus

“Campus offers an all-in-one, college community forum that centralizes updates on things like student clubs, and enables students to create and discover informal social events and interest-based groups,” Facebook Product Manager, Charmaine Hung said.

Facebook started as a means for college students to interact with each other. In September 2020, Facebook retraced its company steps by releasing Facebook Campus. According to Hung, “we’re returning to our roots with Facebook Campus to help students make and maintain these relationships.”

So far, students have been using Facebook Groups and Events to stay connected with other students. This was not always ideal since people from other institutions or those no longer attending could see and interact with their posts. Users now will only have access to others from their institution.

The platform started with only 30 colleges and has since grown to 200 institutions. The platform is still considered a beta program and will be planning to add more institutions from the U.S. and other countries. Each phase and new addition to the platform launches two times a year.

The platform includes a campus-

only news feed and a campus directory. “The campus-only news feed includes student groups, plan virtual concerts or ask for advice with college-only Groups and Events,” Hung said. The platform is similar to the early days of Facebook, where students could find classmates by class, major, year and more.

Students only need to sign up with their student email and password to access the platform. “Students can find Campus in the Facebook app, create their Campus profile, and start connecting with their fellow classmates in Groups, Events and Chats,” Hung said.

An article by Hung described the key features of Campus as a campus-only news feed, a campus directory and a new way to chat. “Students can create chat rooms for their dorm, clubs or any other groups they’re part of within Campus,” Hung said.

Yao Vang, a fourth-year, is double majoring in Management Information Systems and Operations and Supply Chain Management. Vang is active on Facebook and knows of the new Campus platform. “I’ve seen other people use it and that I should connect to it,” Vang said.

Currently, he uses the group messaging app, GroupMe, to communicate with

his classmates and form study groups. “There’s usually a GroupMe for every Zoom class, so, usually, I would try to find people on there,” Vang said.

Vang said if he were earlier in his college career, he would use the platform. “I would use it to connect with other students and create more study groups,” Vang said.

An article by Dianne Hajdasz, privacy and data policy manager at Facebook, addresses any privacy concerns students may have regarding Facebook Campus. “Campus does not have public groups or public Events like Facebook does where content is visible to users on and off Facebook,” Hajdasz said.

Vang is not concerned about any privacy issues on the platform. “If you already have it installed, they already have access to your information,” Vang said. “I don’t think it really makes a difference.”

Campus is optional for students to join and most information that is input is optional. “Every Campus profile contains your cover photo and profile photo from your Facebook profile, as well as your graduation year,” Hajdasz said.

The new platform by Facebook could allow students to form study groups for classes and connect with and form bonds with students across campus.

MOVIE REVIEW



A cast that deserves so much better than what they're given

by Gabe Lapalombella
Staff Writer

Photo courtesy of
Universal Pictures

Female-lead action films have become a rare commodity amongst the crowded Hollywood studio landscape. No matter the cast assembled in front of the camera, audiences seemingly don't go to see these female-driven films. It's frustrating when some of these casts include many of today's best actors. Even with an all-star cast, "The 355" unfortunately does nothing to distinguish itself as an important piece of spy cinema. We follow a CIA Agent named Mace (Jessica Chastain) who's forced to assemble a team of agents—including Lupita Nyong'o, Penelope Cruz and Diane Kruger—to keep a dangerous technological weapon out of the wrong hands.

It's certainly exciting to see this cast assembled, but unfortunately, they don't have anything that exciting to do. The screenplay's co-writers Theresa Rebeck and Simon Kinberg, as well as Kinberg's direction, are largely to blame. The screenplay doesn't offer any ounce of excitement or real drama but simply goes through the motions. It wastes a talented cast that does nothing more than pronounce complicated spy jargon. This film also includes a romance between Chastain and Sebastian Stan, which fails due to their lack of chemistry.

The same could be said for all these women and their relationships with other characters that never feel genuine. Like many spy films, it takes time to get to the action because of first needing to build the team. In the right hands, those more dialogue-centric sequences could give us time to really get to know these characters. But Rebeck and Kinberg struggle to give any of these characters depth and muddle what few details they have. Nyong'o and Cruz's loved ones should serve as stakes and even teach us about the characters. But it's these moments that characters have to explain why certain things are so important to them, which contradicts the golden rule: "show, don't tell."

This incredibly stilted dialogue could be forgiven if the action was at all interesting or exciting. Unfortunately, the editing makes these sequences unwatchable and far from engaging. The camera violently shakes with almost every punch and kick, making it hard to tell what is going on. It's an incredibly frustrating detail that ruins any tension the film forces these women into. When we're unable to see what's happening at a given time, why should we care? This made any excitement vanish and left me checking my watch. Issues

like these make the few moments that work that much more frustrating.

The film is most engaging when Kinberg lets the camera stand still, and the actresses can just sit and talk. Hearing this ensemble of actresses swap war stories is quite fun to watch. They each lean into the more ludicrous dialogue and have a chance to chew the scenery. It's a great moment that can't redeem the film due to how long it takes to get there. Having a screenplay that barely stays still long enough to know these characters makes these quiet moments feel all the more out of place.

The ambitions of a female-led action-packed franchise are incredibly admirable. However, the hard truth is

that even with a talented cast, those behind the camera just aren't the right fit. Given his work on the equally frustrating "X-Men: Dark Phoenix," it's clear Kinberg doesn't have any distinctive style behind the camera. "The 355" feels like nothing more than what a studio thinks audiences want to see when we deserve much more than a standard spy thriller. If you're a fan of this cast, you might get some mild thrills watching them interact. However, those thrills are few and far between and are not enough for you to head to a theater.

RATING: 3.5/10

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HOW GETTING A KINDLE HELPED MY READING HABITS

What I'm doing to maintain a new reading routine

by Olivia Lawless
Staff Writer

Photo courtesy of
Isabella Perryman

This past December, I finally caved to my friend's relentless demands to buy a Kindle. I originally wondered why I should spend money for an e-reader when I had been downloading electronic library books onto my phone for free—something that worked for me even though I often had to squint at the small blue light text.

Then, this friend showed me a \$40 deal on an older generation Kindle, and I figured I should try to save what little eye strength I have left. Since the Kindle had backlight and adjustable text, it wouldn't give me headaches from extended reading. I gave in.

The change in my reading was almost instant: as soon as the Kindle arrived in late December, my reading average jumped up from one book per month to about one per week.

The biggest factor in this change was the convenience—the Kindle let me carry around a ton of books in one slim device. It's not much bigger than a typical iPhone and fits in any purse or even pants with bigger pockets. Now I never have to worry about book storage, which is valuable as an out-of-state student who frequently travels and lives in a small apartment. The second benefit is that e-readers can connect to library apps, allowing someone to download any available library book. Wifi is required to download, but once it's on your Kindle, you've got it for the loan period. The combined portability and instant access make it so convenient to read that it's addicting. With almost endless free time over winter break, I quickly got hooked.

I ordered the Kindle on Black Friday and was a bit skeptical. I still

had the rest of the fall semester to worry about and wasn't looking for any particular books. Then, I started listening to a large sci-fi audiobook over winter break and dying to get a copy of it to read faster. The chaos of the pandemic, dangerous winter weather and damage from the last hurricane made it difficult to get a physical book, so I started looking forward to it.

The day it came in, I was gleefully showing it off to my friends like a kid who had just gotten the newest video game for Christmas. With gracious assistance from my persistent friend, I used an app called Libby to connect to the library and send books directly to the device. By the end of the next day, I had already finished the first book of my sci-fi series. Even if you

can't get a library book right away, most Kindle versions are about \$10 or \$12 and can be bought and sent to the e-reader instantly. In some ways, it's even more dangerous than looking at pretty hardcovers in a bookstore—all I needed was one or two clicks to grab any book that looked interesting.

I had a lot of free time over winter break, so I would spend mornings and evenings curled into one spot on the couch reading for hours. That pace has generally slowed since classes started, but I'm happy about the fact that I'm reading more than I have for years. I reach for my Kindle instead of my phone and finally getting through my "to-read" list (what a concept—actually reading books instead of just buying more of them).

I know I'm going on about the Kindle,

but it was really only part of why I started reading more. It made accessing and carrying around books easier, but that's about it. I've always loved reading, but like many people, I had felt like I hadn't been able to focus for long enough to read the things I wanted to read.

After these past few weeks, I've just gotten used to the work of reading again. What I mean by that is that reading can be enjoyable, emotional and informative, but it's not one of those activities where you get to absorb stuff that lights up your dopamine receptors. Sometimes it's just boring, and you have to work to get to the good parts. It can be kind of like going to the gym. You don't want to go all the time, but you almost always feel better after going, having enjoyed yourself and knowing it was good for you.

As my schedule has begun to fill up again, I'm working on habits that will hopefully help me keep up this pace in the future. Sometimes I put nonfiction under my "work" time during the day, while I put fiction under my leisure time and do more reading instead of aimlessly scrolling on my phone. I try to get in at least fifteen or twenty minutes, even when I don't feel like it, because it usually ends up refreshing my mind or teaching me something new.

Most importantly, I read about stories and ideas that interest me. While it's important to read different types of writing and not just your favorite genres, if you're trying to establish a reading habit with books that bore you, you probably won't get very far. Once you start to read more consistently, try branching out to other genres and that may open your mind.



CATS

GOT YOUR TONGUE?

City buses need massive improvements

by Issac Naylor
Asst. Opinion Editor

Tardy buses and spotty service are the hallmarks of Charlotte's transportation network. Ask anyone who has stood next to those mysterious roadside bus signs, and they will tell you that waiting is unavoidable.

The Charlotte Area Transportation System (CATS) is responsible for citywide transportation. Serving 3,628 stations scattered across the Charlotte metropolitan area, this 69-route bus and rail network boasts an average of 320,000 weekly riders and 16,640,000 annually.

Historically, mass transit in Charlotte was privatized until 1976 and local to the uptown area until the founding of CATS in 2000. However, the modern bus network has become how the city shuttles its poor, black and brown residents to work, which might explain Charlotte's reluctance to

address the punctuality problem.

According to the Charlotte Metropolitan Commission, the share of minority riders was 41.5% in 2017, down from 48.1% in 2014. From personal experience, wait times for buses range from five to 35 minutes, with an average of around seven to ten minutes. The longest I have waited for a bus was two hours. CATS claims that their buses run on-time 85% of the time, defining on-time performance as arriving "no more than five minutes past its scheduled time."

Another inescapable eyesore on the transit system is cleanliness, or the lack thereof. Even before the pandemic necessitated Plexiglass as germ barriers, many buses have had food and trash littered wherever, with seats coated in thick layers of dirt.

However, COVID-19 changed every-

thing for CATS. The pandemic has hit public transport hard nationwide, causing a dip in ridership for the foreseeable future. In 2020, Axios reported that the pandemic dealt an \$8 million loss to Charlotte's mass transit system. Low ridership could mean higher fares and reduced quality for the remaining riders.

According to data from CATS, ridership in April 2019 was 1,801,004. WCNC reports that the system has begun to see a rebound from rock bottom in April 2020 at 593,940, with ridership in April 2021 at 721,541.

Though, the return for riders cannot be said for drivers. A CATS supervisor told me that the network is experiencing a labor shortage as there aren't enough drivers to fill every shift, which has caused frequent adjustments and mediocre service.

At the #29 stop at East Deck, for example, bus drivers have passed me at the sign or have skipped the stop entirely. One time, I was on that same route going the opposite direction on University City Boulevard when the driver stopped the bus to buy Lipton tea at Circle K.

This is an institutional problem. I'm tired of phoning in my complaints and getting the same response. After three to five business days, a CATS supervisor calls me back to say the same meaningless phrase: "We have identified the operator and have assigned a supervisor to address the issue. We apologize that this inconvenience occurred."

The Lynx Blue Line light rail is one of the redeeming parts of the CATS network. Although they can be as dirty and trash-covered as the buses, the trains are rarely late. Additionally, the trackside stations are well-lit and surveilled, providing an atmosphere of safety.

However, that does not mean the Blue Line is flawless. Trains occasionally break down on the tracks and have to be repaired on-site, which can cause long delays for riders in both directions.

The CityLynx Gold Line streetcar that opened uptown in 2015 has not become a promising addition to the city's transportation fleet. According to Fox 46, low ridership brought on by the pandemic has forced CATS to run fare-free service for the streetcar as it has since Aug. 30, 2021.

However, even before the pandemic, the CityLynx Gold Line moved a mere 1,748 daily riders based on data from CATS. This streetcar has undoubtedly turned into a garnish on the urban landscape for rich people rather than practical transport for inner-city residents, making it another specter of gentrification.

For those who drive a car to work or school every day, the problem of inadequate transit may seem unfamiliar or even irrelevant. However, clean and reliable buses affect traffic patterns too. The more people that take the bus, the lighter traffic congestion becomes.

Functioning public transportation is at the heart of any modern city. However, Charlotte's tax dollars should not fund a substandard service if significant improvements continue to go unfulfilled.

After calling their customer service line many times, the CATS representative knows me by name. For anyone who needs to contact CATS for service information and estimated wait times, the number is 704 336-7433, or reach them via email at telltransit@charlottenc.gov.



CATS bus on the UNC Charlotte campus
Photo courtesy of the Niner Times & logo courtesy of charlottenc.gov

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: SUPPORTING NINER TIMES EDITORS

by UNC Charlotte's chapter of American
Association of University Professors

The following is a letter to the editor in response to "Why protect a predator?" published in print in the Nov. 30 issue of the Niner Times.

The letter to the editor was submitted by UNC Charlotte's chapter of the American Association of University Professors regarding the harassment scandal and employment status of lecturer Robert McEachnie.

We stand in solidarity with the editorial staff of the Niner Times, which published a set of eloquent, courageous editorials in its Dec. 1 issue, under the headline "Why Protect a Predator?" This was in reference to the untenured History lecturer who was recently sued—along with the university—for violating Title IX protections against sexual discrimination as well as intentional infliction of emotional distress. After the lawsuit was reported last March additional revelations emerged, revealing a pattern of predatory and unethical conduct that was known to the university administration.

Among the many strong observations and insights in the Dec. 1 editorials, it was also alarming to read that one of the Niner Times journalists, who had authored a Sept. 13 article calling for the firing of the lecturer, has been harassed by university administrators. It seems this student has faced more severe criticism by the university than the lecturer credibly accused of sexual misconduct.

We also wish to affirm our support for the students and former students who have raised complaints against this particular lecturer and for all students who have suffered sexual harassment,

misconduct and/or assault.

We brought attention to this issue and demanded changes in UNCC policy in an April 2021 statement and memo to the UNCC administration, but like the Niner Times we received no response. As we wrote at the time:

"The rights and safety of students can and must be balanced with the rights of professors and other campus workers. The rights and safety of students must not be ignored, nor treated as an inconvenience."

"In the last several weeks, UNC Charlotte has shared very little information regarding these allegations, while simultaneously devoting resources to fight the lawsuit. While news media reports grow, faculty members, student leaders, and the general student population have heard next to nothing from the university, echoing an archaic culture of silence around campus sexual assault."

"This silence speaks volumes to

survivors of sexual discrimination and assault and sends a message that those experiencing unwanted sexual attention will not be taken seriously or supported."

"We also affirm that UNCC should support its students, and in this case should listen to the two women who have brought allegations, rather than investing the university's moral and financial capital in fighting this lawsuit. Unless the footnote on page 2 of UNCC's "Motion to Dismiss" (acknowledging the veracity of the

charges in the lawsuit) was a typo, there is nothing to defend. UNCC should settle with the plaintiff and publicly apologize, change its policy, and properly investigate this matter, which appears to have been covered up." (By "cover up" we simply employ a term that is being used by many students and faculty who have learned of the lawsuit. The university's silence has encouraged this assumption.)

"We cannot help but wonder: What message does the 'Motion to Dismiss' send to students? The message would seem to be: 'If I bring a complaint about a serious violation to the university, UNCC will not listen to me, but will vigorously defend itself and any perpetrator within its ranks.'"

We endorse and amplify the Dec. 1 statement and demands of the Niner Times editorial staff:

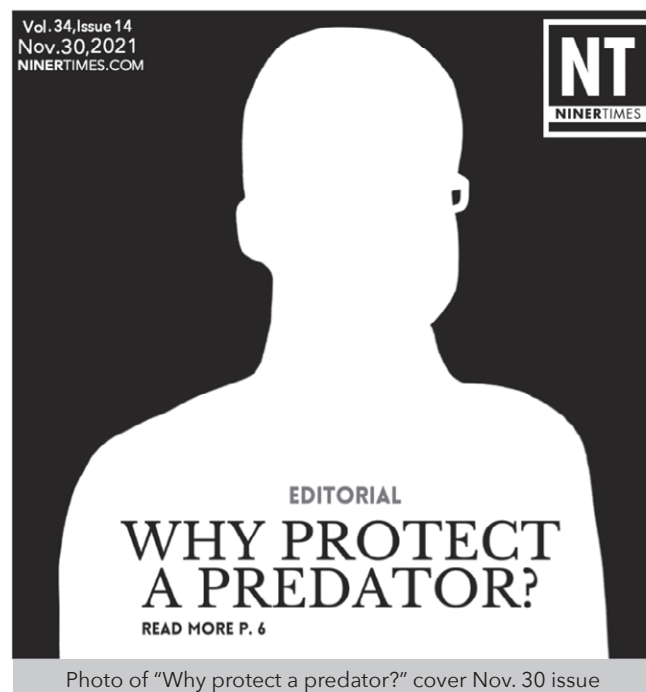
"The Niner Times Editorial Board wants to raise awareness regarding the University's failure to remove a sexual predator. Although

McEachnie's classes are asynchronous, it is unethical to allow him to remain in contact with students."

"We demand that University leadership uses their moral judgment to terminate McEachnie's employment. Until the University takes this step, we also urge students to take precautions by reporting cases of sexual misconduct and publicly acknowledge McEachnie's involvement on campus. The Niner Times stands with the survivors of Robert McEachnie."

We are also concerned for the welfare and safety of faculty and staff who may, without knowing it, have co-workers who have been credibly accused of sexual misconduct."

Finally, the AAUP proposes that UNC Charlotte invite an independent investigation of sexual harassment and assault on our campus. We strongly suspect that if the administration would support and cover-up for an untenured lecturer, they have done it for others.



NINERS IN THE PROS

See how several former 49ers are faring in the NFL playoffs



Logo courtesy of NFL.com

by Bradley Cole
Sports Editor

As a young program, Charlotte football doesn't have many players currently playing in the NFL.

However, the few in the league made a splash in the NFL's regular season and the playoffs. Three players that starred for the 49ers made appearances in this season's playoffs.

Here's a roundup of Charlotte 49er football alumni and how they have performed throughout the 2021 season and postseason.

Larry Ogunjobi, Cincinnati Bengals:

After spending four years with the Cleveland Browns, which drafted him in 2017, the defensive tackle and former 49er played a big part in the Cincinnati Bengals' successful regular season. The Bengals are currently set to play in the AFC Championship game after beating the Las Vegas Raiders and Tennessee Titans in their first two playoff games.

Ogunjobi racked up 43 total tackles and had seven sacks—a career-high performance. Ogunjobi highlighted his season with a fumble recovery against Las Vegas, which helped the Bengals' offense score to extend their lead. However, in the same game, Ogunjobi suffered a season-ending injury but has remained around the team to show support.

The future is bright for Ogunjobi with his new team. Ogunjobi wrote the following on Twitter days after the injury: "Heart heavy, but my mind clear. The world favors those who bet on themselves. It also favors those who get knocked down 7 times but

get up 8. Am I pissed? Yes. Am I frustrated? Absolutely. But will I quit? Never."

Alex Highsmith, Pittsburgh Steelers:

The third-round pick in 2020 made a splash in his rookie season with the Steelers last year. And with the departure of former Steeler linebacker Bud Dupree, Highsmith upped his production in every way. After starting just five games in 2020, the linebacker started 16 in 2021. He tallied 65 total tackles throughout the season, with 37 solo tackles and 28 assisted. Highsmith also had six sacks, which was up from two in 2020.

"In regards to the loss of Bud and the expectations and the depth at that position, the lynchpin of that entire discussion is the natural maturation of Alex Highsmith from

year to year two," Steelers head coach Mike Tomlin said to reporters in April of 2021.

In his only second postseason game of his career, Highsmith had three tackles and one sack against the Kansas City Chiefs, where the Steelers lost 42-21 in the AFC wildcard round.

The 49er alum has the potential to be an all-pro linebacker in the coming years for a team that is known to develop and help improve players year after year.

Nate Davis, Tennessee Titans:

The offensive lineman selected in the third round of the NFL draft in 2019 has protected one of the league's best running backs in Derrick Henry. Despite missing almost half the season, Henry tallied up

nearly 1,000 yards of rushing. D'Onta Foreman, who stepped in place of Henry as the starter, racked up 566 yards as well. The rushing attack was a key reason the Titans secured the number-one seed in the AFC.

Davis looks to be an essential piece for the Titans offensive line for years to come after starting his career off in a promising way.

How are other players faring?

A few others from the 49ers are lurking around the NFL on practice squads and 52-man rosters.

Cameron Clark, drafted by the New York Jets, has battled his fair share of inquiries since joining the team but is still a part of the Jets' roster.

Ben DeLuca, who went undrafted in the 2021 NFL Draft, was signed by the Los Angeles Chargers as an undrafted free agent. DeLuca spent time on the team's practice squad and made his NFL debut against the Giants on Dec. 12. The gritty defensive back is a player to watch in the coming years.

Lastly, running back Benny LeMay is another player that has had some playing time on and off. LeMay fought for a roster spot during training camp before the season kicked off with the Indianapolis Colts. LeMay showed flashes of improvement throughout the preseason but was cut from the Colts before the season started.

LeMay was signed to the Cleveland Browns' practice squad towards the end of the season after spending time with the team last year.



Charlotte alum Larry Ogunjobi made an impact for the Cincinnati Bengals in their first playoff win of the 2021 postseason
Photo courtesy of the Athletic

Khalifa's Journey

Center Aly Khalifa has played all over the globe and now he is taking strides at Charlotte

by Sam Perry
Staff Writer

Charlotte's Aly Khalifa shoots over a defender
Photo courtesy of Charlotte Athletics

Charlotte's Aly Khalifa has been a stand-out player at the center position for the team this season. His journey to Charlotte has been the culmination of his dream to play at the next level. Khalifa has finally found his place in 49er green.

"It means the world to me, like a dream come true. It feels like home here already. It's only been a year and a half; I love it," said Khalifa.

The Alexandria, Egypt native, trained at the NBA Global Academy in Australia before joining the Charlotte 49ers basketball program in 2020. At Charlotte, Khalifa has found a home and has created a familial bond with his teammates.

"I feel like it's home here," said Khalifa. "Regin Larson, Jackson [Threadgill], Jared [Garcia] all helped me get through a lot, and Anzac Rissetto last year helped me too. The whole team helped a bit."

Representing the Egyptian National Team:

Khalifa played for the U17 Egyptian National Team, where he was a captain and competed in the 2018 FIBA U17 World Cup and averaged 12.7 points and eight rebounds. His best performance came against Canada, where he recorded 16 points and 13 rebounds. Khalifa reflected on the pride he felt when playing for his home country.

"It was great; it was a dream come true. I never expected to play for my country," said Khalifa. "I got selected to go to a camp

for the under 19s when I was little when I was 14 or 13, but I never expected to make the team. And to be one of the main guys to be a captain of the team was great; it was an amazing experience."

NBA Global Academy Standout:

His performance with the Egyptian National Team earned him an invitation to train at the NBA global academy in Australia. Khalifa grew his game with what he calls the "best youth program in the world."

At the NBA global academy in Australia, Khalifa got to play alongside elite talents such as Oklahoma City Thunder rookie standout Josh Giddey and Davidson's star Hyunjung Lee to develop his game. Earlier this season, Khalifa had his best game of the season against Lee and the Wildcats, recording 18 points, six rebounds and two assists.

The NBA Global Academy wasn't just vital to helping Khalifa on the court, but it also helped him tremendously off the court, helping him learn English. Khalifa accredits his success to his time at the academy.

"It was really good. I learned a lot. Without the NBA global academy, I wouldn't be here today. On and off the court, I learned a lot," said Khalifa.

Taking the step to Charlotte:

Khalifa played a significant role in leading his academy team to back-to-back titles in 2018 and 2019. He decided to take





Charlotte's Aly Khalifa posts up against a defender
Photo by Chris Crews

the next step by committing to Charlotte to play for the 49ers.

Khalifa redshirted his first season, but he took strides academically while adjusting to the college atmosphere. Charlotte's coaching staff was understanding of this and knew that a player of Khalifa's talent level was worth waiting through the red-shirt season.

"I got a couple of offers," said Khalifa. "I feel like Charlotte's Coach Sanchez and Coach Fearn, they convinced me to come here because they accepted that I needed a year to prepare, to be able to play."

The wait has paid off as Khalifa has been a significant contributor to the team's success. Khalifa is currently averaging seven points, 3.1 rebounds and assists.

Expectations for the remainder of the year:

There are a lot of external high expectations for Khalifa this season, but that isn't his primary focus, as he wants to focus on the team playing the best they can, and the accolades will come later.

"People want me to win freshman of the year, but I don't think about stuff like that," said Khalifa. "I just want to win. I want to make it far with the team. If we have success as a team, the personal stuff will come after."

Khalifa has many goals for the season going forward. He feels that adopting the team-first mentality that Sanchez preaches is vital for the squad.

"We have got to be good and keep marching forward as coach says," said Khalifa. "I think we are gonna make it. We get better every day. We are going to get some wins and hopefully win the conference championship and make the NCAA tournament this year."

The ceiling is high for Khalifa, and he is excited for the challenges to come. His journey has been unique, and he continues to grow on and off the court. Keep an eye on number 15 for the remainder of the year.



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THE 49ERS GET BACK ON TRACK

Charlotte gets back on track with a 67-64 win over Rice

by Gabie Stanfield
Staff Writer

On Saturday, Jan. 22, the Charlotte men's basketball team secured a 67-64 win over the Rice University Owls at Tudor Fieldhouse.

The matchup was the first road conference win for the 49ers. The 49ers move to a 10-7 overall record and 3-2 in conference play with the win. The Owls have an overall record of 11-7 and are 4-3 in conference play after the loss.

Charlotte's leading scorers were sophomore Jackson Threadgill and fifth-year Austin Butler; both scored 14 points, which were crucial down the stretch for the team.

Junior Jahmir Young and senior Clyde Trapp also aided in the win by hitting the double-figure mark in points, recording ten and 11 points, respectively. Young tallied up a game-high six rebounds and five assists. Trapp recorded three assists as well as two rebounds in the contest.

Butler, Young and Trapp have all scored in the double figures for the fifth time this season.

First Half:

The Niners and Owls went back and forth at the beginning of the game, with neither team leading by more than six points. Both teams had 11 field goals and five three-pointers in the first half. Rice capitalized on their free throws by sinking nine out of ten attempts.

The Owls pushed ahead at the halftime break, leading going into the second half 36-30.

Second Half:

The 49ers fought back to get on top by cutting Rice's lead in the second half with a couple of three-pointers, tying the game at 36-36. The game was relatively close during its duration and throughout the game's entirety; neither side led by more than four

points.

Butler started it off with a layup to take the lead by two. Then, Trapp put the finishing touches on the contest with two made free throws. Trapp and Butler pushed the 49ers ahead in the final minute to seal the deal.

Matchup History:

This win for the 49ers marked the first time this season the team won when trailing at the halftime break. The overall matchup record between the 49ers and Owls sits at 8-6, with the Owls leading. The last time these two faced one another was in February of 2020, and it took place at Tudor Fieldhouse, which ended in a 70-54 loss for the Niners.

Conference Outlook:

Even though the 49ers went 1-2 on their road trip, they sit in a good position as the season starts to heat up. The 49ers are currently third in the East Division behind Florida Atlantic and Middle Tennessee. The 49ers can boost their 3-2 C-USA record with two straight games against Old Dominion, who sit behind them in the division standings.

Charlotte has looked sharp at home this season with a 7-1 record when playing in Halton Arena. Charlotte's next three out of five games will be on their home court. A few wins during the next couple of weeks could put the 49ers in a prime position down the stretch of the season.

Next Up:

Charlotte will be back in action on Wednesday, Jan. 26, as they host ODU in Halton Arena, with tip-off set for 7 p.m. The game will be available for streaming on ESPN+.

Charlotte's Clyde Trapp goes up for the dunk
Photo by Chris Crews



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