

One ticket sale

postponed Sunday's single-game tickets for the d a possible conflict with ne involving the Hornets. ; not been announced.

Sports

THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 1998 * Section B

A punishing mountain ride

Mountain bikers take a grueling, bloody ride through the mountains — and naturally come out smiling about it.

Outdoors/Pages 6-7B



Write Trick picks lucky post No. 7 in Kentucky Derby draw PAGE 2B

Rangers win team-record 18th in April BASEBALL/PAGE 4B

Ericsson lands Heels, Pack

Football rivalry shifts to Charlotte for 2 years

By RON GREEN Jr.
Staff Writer

Major college football, one of the missing pieces in Charlotte's sports scene, will make a colorful return this fall when North Carolina and N.C. State move their rivalry to Ericsson Stadium for two years.

A news conference has been tentatively scheduled for next week to announce the agreement for the 1998 and 1999 games to be played in Charlotte.

"Major sports cities have strong

professional teams and college games. We have the pros here. This brings in the colleges," said Ken Haines, vice president of Raycom Sports, who has been instrumental in putting the package together, along with the Charlotte Regional Sports Commission and both schools.

Some details have not been finalized but officials involved in the negotiations expect an announcement, perhaps as early as Monday.

"It should happen next week," said Chip Mark, executive director of the Charlotte Regional Sports Commission.

"I'm pumped. I've wanted a college football game from the get-go."

The teams will play Saturday,

Nov. 28 at Ericsson Stadium to conclude their regular-season schedules. This year's game on Thanksgiving weekend will count as N.C. State's home game.

The teams will also play here in 1999. No date has been finalized for that game, though it's expected to be played earlier in the season, likely on a Thursday night as part of the ACC's national television package with ESPN, and it will count as a North Carolina home game.

There are no plans for the N.C. State-North Carolina series to become an annual event in Charlotte. Officials from both schools said it was important that the game be

Please see FOOTBALL / page 2B

Heels, Pack move rivalry for 2 years

FOOTBALL

Continued from page 1B

played on campus most of the time, though they felt comfortable moving it for two years.

"The easy thing to do was never even think about taking it to Charlotte," said N.C. State athletics director Les Robinson. "But I didn't take this job to take the easy way. I think it's good for our football program, good for our athletic department and good for our university. I think the pluses far outweigh the minuses."

Under the two-year agreement, both schools will receive an equal split of tickets in 73,328-seat Ericsson Stadium. Tickets will also be made available to the public. Though ticket prices have not been set, they are expected to be in the \$25-35 range.

Several factors have worked into the decision to move the series to Charlotte.

North Carolina officials are concerned about hosting a Thursday night home game because of parking problems on

campus. The overlap of daily student and teacher traffic on a campus with a tight parking situation was one reason officials were open to the idea of playing in Charlotte.

Both schools have received criticism from their fans about moving their home game in the long-standing rivalry. Much of the concern has been voiced by fans in the eastern part of the state who would face a longer trip to Charlotte.

Moyer Smith, executive director of North Carolina's Educational Foundation, has been attending regional foundation meetings in recent days and has heard mixed feelings about the two-year move.

"I think people are OK with it but, naturally, the people in Hickory are a lot happier about it than the people in Kinston or in Lumberton," Smith said. "Everybody pretty well understands it."

Robinson got so many questions about the game he sent Wolfpack supporters a two-page letter detailing the factors in the move. He stressed that it's a two-year deal and pointed out that N.C. State has more than 18,000 alumni living within a one-hour drive of Charlotte.

He also pointed out that by playing two games in Ericsson Stadium, more than 23,000 additional tickets will be available to N.C. State fans who would typically have access to 45,000 tickets in Carter-Finley Stadium, and 5,000 tickets for a game at Kenan Stadium.

From the Charlotte perspective, it's the kind of college football presence that has been missing through the years.

"For Charlotte to be a major sports city, college football has to be a part of it," Haines said. "This enables the city to have it."

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