

Panthers roll into Superbowl riding franchise best 15 wins

BY ANDY HOANG

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Ron Rivera, the leading candidate for NFL Coach of the Year, is leading his 15 regular season win Panthers team into the Superbowl against the Denver Broncos, after achieving the Panthers' third consecutive NFC South Division Crown.

The Panthers' previous mark of twelve wins was the franchise record. This year, the development of key players on defense coupled with the elevation of MVP-candidate Cam Newton's play has made the 2015-2016 season one for the history books, but the season isn't done quite yet.

The Panthers' path to the Superbowl went through Charlotte, where the Panthers were undefeated this year.

In the playoffs, they first defeated the Seattle Seahawks, who represented the NFC in the Superbowl the last two years. They defeated the Seahawks by a touchdown, 31-24.

They then dominated the NFC West Champions, the Arizona Cardinals, in the NFC championship game, 49-15.

The Panthers have gotten little respect from members of the media and other teams. Even during the 14-0 start to the season, many people claimed the Panthers "hadn't played anybody challenging."

It's not the Panthers fault — they play the games on the schedule. Phrases such as "worst undefeated team" and



photo courtesy of skysports.com

Members of the Panthers football team celebrates after consecutive wins

"worst 8-0 team," were used by ESPN sports commentator David Newton and statistics website FiveThirtyEight, but isn't 14-0 better than 13-1 on any given day?

The National Football League is a money-making league. Don't be fooled by its "non-profit" tag — it's just a way to avoid taxes. The league is fixated on making money as evident in its lucrative TV contracts.

The NFL would rather have a large-market team like the

Dallas Cowboys, New York Giants or Jets, Chicago Bears, etc. to be the best teams in the league because those teams bring more viewers.

In their defense, the NFL is smart to prioritize the monetary benefits of the "big-market" teams but not at the expense of demeaning the accomplishments of another team. The Carolina Panthers had a record-breaking year for the franchise — but also for the league.

Even with all the outside

noise, Ron Rivera has kept the Panthers focused. Critics rejoiced when the Atlanta Falcons beat the Panthers in week 16 but Ron Rivera and the Panthers went out the next week to crush the Tampa Bay Buccaneers 38-10 en route to clinching the league's best record and home-field advantage throughout the NFC playoffs.

The Panthers have a strong locker room and a strong fan base. The "next-man up" mentality shows the

integrity and character of the team, especially considering the injuries the Panthers are enduring to their top running-back and top wide-receiver. Did fans abandon ship when the Panthers lost to the Falcons?

No. Instead, another sellout crowd packed Bank of America stadium in the final game. 16-0 would have been great but there is no point in waddling over "what could have been."

The grand prize is still ahead — a Superbowl ring.

Star Wars: The Force Awakens enters cinematic history

BY MAX NOBEL

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Is *The Force Awakens* culturally significant? Short answer: No, it isn't. Long answer: It still isn't, but the movies that follow could be.

According to the Australian International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Burra Charter of 1999, "Cultural Significance" is defined as "the aesthetic, historic, scientific, social, or spiritual value for past, present, or future generations."

But to fully comprehend the cultural significance of *Star Wars*, we need to travel back a long time ago to a galaxy far, far away.

The year was 1977. Jimmy Carter was President, the first Apple computer was sold, and George Lucas had made a low budget, pulp space opera heavily borrowed from *Metropolis* (1927), *The Hidden Fortress* (1958), and *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), and save for maybe Steven Spielberg, no one believed

in the film, least of all Lucas himself.

That film was called *Star Wars*, later given the subtitle "A New Hope" in a 1981 re-release, and it would go on to gross over \$775 million, becoming the second highest grossing film of all time after adjusting for inflation, being surpassed only by *Gone with the Wind* (1939).

It was nominated for ten Academy Awards, winning seven, and forever changed the face of modern cinema. *Star Wars* singlehandedly brought an end to the golden age of 70s film whilst ushering in that of the blockbuster.

A majority of its successes came from its time of release. Watergate and the Vietnam War had left the nation without a moral compass.

People needed a return to the classic tales of simpler times, tales of good in its continuing conflict against evil. *Star Wars*, with its progressive retelling of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero's Journey*, presented a welcome

return for modern myth.

The bad guys wore black, the good guys wore white, and a young man uncertain of his future discovered his destiny.

While its prequels and sequels are forever embedded in our pop culture canon, their cultural significance is derived entirely from that of their predecessor.

That is not to say that they haven't been high influential in their own right. It suggests instead that their influence never rose enough above that of technical, corporate, or popular culture to be deemed culturally significant.

For a film to be culturally significant, it must make a marked impact on how films are made and what stories they choose to tell. It has to, in some way, upend or change the status quo, progressing - or regressing - the entire industry as a result.

Few films manage to earn this lofty certification, and failure to do so is in no way to *The Force Awakens'* detriment.

The Force Awakens was never a film designed to push boundaries. It was a meticulously-calculated artistic endeavor designed to win back fans who felt betrayed by the prequels by convincing them that the new *Star Wars* films were wholeheartedly rooted in the original trilogy these fans hold so dear.

Impressively, this was done while simultaneously attracting new fans and winning over casual moviegoers for the *Star Wars* films in the coming years, ensuring that Disney's \$4 billion purchase of the franchise in 2012 was money well spent.

Despite this, its influence most likely won't be seen

outside of popular and corporate culture, with little to follow but a series of ill-advised rebootquels and next year's Halloween costumes.

In essence, there is nothing

wrong with *The Force Awakens* not changing the very face of the film industry as some expected it should.

Its biggest cultural achievement will be that it was the first *Star Wars* film for an entire generation of new fans to see in theatres.

The Force Awakens successfully re-confirmed *Star Wars'* status as a commercial and cultural superpower, leaving the door open for its upcoming spinoffs and sequels to possibly earn a coveted place in our cultural pantheon.

If you are an eager *Star Wars* fan, be on the look out for new *Star Wars* films arriving in 2017, 2018, and later. May the force be with you.

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WARS