



Carolina Panther photo
Panther defensive back Mike Minter ranks as Carolina's all-time leader in a variety of categories. He has compiled 572 tackles, 13 forced fumbles and 271 interception return yards and is tied for first all-time with two interception returns for touchdowns.



Shaw Bears photo
Shaw running back Dion McIver was named Outstanding Offensive Player of the Game after scoring 123 yards.

Panther defensive back Mike Minter still optimistic

Media around the nation are talking about the character of the Carolina Panthers and the strong push the team is making toward the playoffs.

Most people seem to be impressed with the way the team has conducted itself through such a trying season. I mean, there have been injuries to a number of key players. The team also suffered a very long losing streak, and expectations were a little higher than normal heading into this season.

So I wanted to see how Carolina's star defensive back, Mike Minter, was taking everything that has happened with the team to this point. I also wanted to get his thoughts on why the team still seems confident in making the playoffs and having a good season.

He says it has a lot to do with the way the team finished last season. He and I talked about a number of other things too. I realized that I now have a favorite Carolina Panther. I

already admired a lot about Minter, but I like him even more after our interview.

Mike: What's up, buddy?
Anthony: Nothin' much, man. What's up with you?
Mike: I can't call it.

Mike: I'll tell you what, man, that was tough, especially coming off the Super Bowl and all the expectations coming into the season. It was tough, especially losing guys throughout the losing streak. That was also tough to deal with. The biggest thing is

Again, we understand what it takes to win in this league. I think it was more of a chemistry thing. We had a bunch of people coming in for the injured people, so I knew it was a chemistry thing. Most of the guys understood that. It would've been different if we were losing and didn't think we were good enough.

Anthony: Right.
Mike: We understand that this was something we could fix. That's why we've had confidence in our football team the whole time.

Anthony: How were you able to deal with the injuries?

Mike: It was tough. We lost some big-time guys: Steve Smith, Steven Davis, DeShaun Foster and Chris Jenkins. Those are some hard injuries to overcome. For us to overcome all that we've gone through and be in the position that we're in today is a testimony to the coaches for keeping us focused on the job at hand.

Anthony: How much did playing in the Super Bowl a year ago do for the team's confidence?

Mike: Yeah, I think it did.



Anthony: Well, tell me what has been good with you lately.
Mike: Man, we're winning. That's what's good right now. (Giggles.)

Anthony: (Smiles.) I hear that. Kind of tell me how bad it was for you-all to go through that lil' losing streak at the beginning of the year.

that we have guys that understand that it's a long season. And we realize that we can forget about the six-game losing streak if we get on a roll.

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

The Shaw Bears took the Pioneer Bowl championship in its first year in Mobile, Ala.

After missing a PAT (point after touchdown) that could have tied the game, Chester Charles kicked a 30-yard field goal midway through the fourth quarter to give Shaw a 30-28 win over Tuskegee in Pioneer Bowl VII in Mobile's Ladd-Peebles Stadium last Saturday.

Charles' game-winning kick, his only attempt of the game, capped a nine-point fourth quarter in the Bears' come-from-behind victory.

Shaw scored first, late in the first quarter on a Terrence Ford 7-yard run. Tuskegee responded with an eight-play, 42-yard drive that ended on a 2-yard run by Lawrence Ervin to tie the score at 7-7. Shaw went ahead 14-7 on a 16-yard pass from Jermonty Kimbrough to Mark Bransom.

The Bears' defense scored a touchdown when A.J. McDonald and Torrance Nunnally combined for a 65-yard fumble return for a touchdown. Shaw linebacker Christopher Peavy forced a fumble by Tuskegee running back Lamont Finnie at the Shaw 35-yard line. McDonald picked up the fumble and ran 25 yards to the Tuskegee 40, then he pitched to Nunnally, who ran the remaining 40 yards for the score.

Tuskegee then scored 21 straight points, beginning with a Travis Gumbs 30-yard field goal

with 10 seconds remaining in the first half. Shaw led 21-10 at the half, but Tuskegee stormed back in the third quarter.

The Golden Tigers began the second half with a 52-yard kickoff return by Harry Williams, leading to Ervin's second 2-yard touchdown run to cut Shaw's lead to 21-17. Tuskegee scored 10 more points on a Gumbs 21-yard field goal and a Ramone Nickerson recovery of a blocked punt in the end zone. After a successful 2-point conversion, the Golden Tigers took their first lead of the game at 28-21.

Shaw's defense stiffened in the fourth quarter, shutting out the Golden Tigers and limiting Tuskegee to a punt, missed field goal and interception in its three possessions. While the defense was stopping Tuskegee's offense, the Bear offense scored 9 unanswered points on a 36-yard pass from Kimbrough to Damon Harrison and Charles' game-winning field goal.

Shaw running back Dion McIver was named Outstanding Offensive Player of the Game, rushing for 123 yards on 21 carries. Tuskegee defensive back Ramone Nickerson got Outstanding Defensive Player of the Game as a result of his 14 tackles (five solo) and blocked punt recovery for a touchdown. Quarterback Jermonty Kimbrough was named Shaw MVP, completing four passes for 108 yards and two touchdowns. He also rushed 10 times for 57 yards.

See One-on-One on B5

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