

Johnson feels best basketball lies ahead

Continued from page 1B

physically strong, he needs to be in the best of shape because we think he can score. As you look at the next level, it's a one-on-one game. Here, he's getting double-teamed and triple-teamed and he still gives us 19 points a game."

Johnson, who starred at North Mecklenburg High before transferring to Fork Union Academy in Virginia, had several college scholarship offers but decided UNCC was the best place for him. Playing ball at home was a factor, especially for a program trying to establish major inroads in the shadows of the ACC.

"I chose to come back home because I wanted to be close to my family," he said. "If I can't do it in Charlotte, I can't do it anywhere, so I felt that coming home and trying to turn this program around, that's what I wanted to do."

"It's been all good for me, playing in front of the home crowd. I can look up at my people every home game and know they're there and that adds to me playing well."

Watkins, who recruited Johnson to UNCC, has been a steadying influence as well. Coach and player have a close relationship to the point where Johnson hangs out at Watkins' home to spend time with his family. They talk often about basketball, but conversations

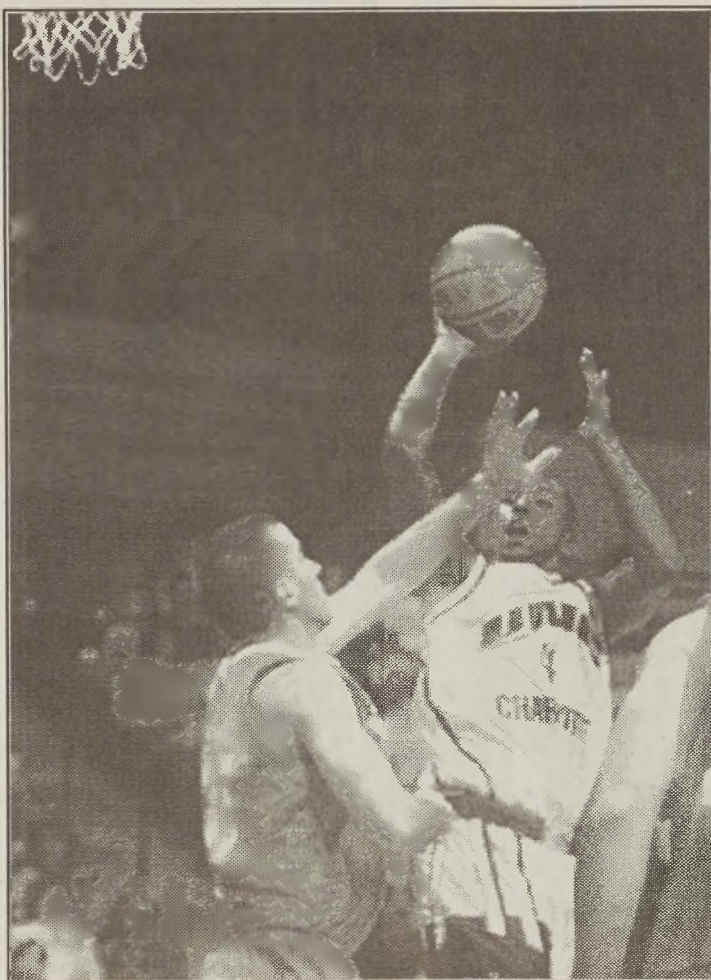
don't always end there.

"I think DeMarco's a special kid," Watkins said. "He comes to you for advice. He knows he can count on me having played college basketball, so I can share some things with him and that's what I want to do. He doesn't mind asking questions, and I sure don't mind giving advice. We talk about more than basketball. We talk about the skills of life."

"Me and coach talk on a regular basis," Johnson said. "He tells me so many things. We've been close since I've come to school here. He's told me a lot of things and he's stuck behind me."

UNCC, which plays Memphis Thursday, has retooled under Watkins, who's in his first season as head coach. With 7-2 center Alexander Kuehl patrolling the paint and perimeter shooters like Roderick Howard, former Independence High standout Andre Davis and Sean Colson in the backcourt, the 49ers have weapons to contend in the CUSA. Johnson, though, is the main man, UNCC's consistent force.

"There's definitely more players that can take the load off me," he said. "They still expect me to be the go-to guy, and I'm just trying to live up to the billing everybody's giving me and try to go out and play tough every night."



PHOTO/WADE NASH

DeMarco Johnson leads UNCC in scoring and rebounds

Road beckons Smith

By Herbet L. White
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Johnson C. Smith basketball coach Steve Joyner doesn't mind having his Golden Bulls travel.

As a matter of fact, he's looking forward to it.

Smith (4-6) is young, but shows signs of growing up after consecutive upsets of Virginia Union and Elizabeth City State in CIAA play. After beating perennial power Union 74-71 in Richmond, Va., Joyner isn't leery about traveling. If anything, it should make Smith better.

"I think it's good," he said. "By the time we get here after playing a number of games on the road, we will have matured as a basketball team and we'll use our home court advantage as an advantage."

After struggling to a 2-6 mark to start the season, Smith pulled off its second CIAA upset in as many games Monday, beating Elizabeth City State 90-80 at Brayboy Gym. Four Bulls scored in double figures, led by CIAA player of the week Marcus Wright's 24 points. Alex Thompson pitched in with 21 points and Christopher Reese added 19 as Smith improved its conference mark to 2-2. Walt Wright paced Elizabeth City with 16 points.

The Bulls, who knocked off Virginia Union for the first time under Joyner, played confidently against the Vikings. Despite a poor start that threatened to worsen, Smith's improvement can be traced to better chemistry between coaches and players.

"It's a new attitude," Joyner said. "I think we're finally jelling together. We had a lot of new people who didn't jell on the court or with the coaches. We

have a new attitude, a new approach about what we're trying to do, and believing in each other and ourselves."

Once the Bulls grasped Joyner's philosophy, they started playing better.

"We just said we're going to band together and whatever happens, happens," Thompson said. "We're going to go out and play defense and play as a team."



Joyner

Smith has found success using a three-guard offense with Wright and Reese as the shooters. When they're hitting from the perimeter, defenses have to account for them. That leaves Thompson, one of the CIAA's top scorers with a 19 points per game average, with more room to operate in the paint.

"Our philosophy (is) to work inside out," Thompson said. "Once the inside game opened up, the outside game will be there."

Now that Reese, Wright and Thompson have established themselves as scoring threats, Smith's offense has been less predictable in recent games. Their improvement has coincided with the Bulls, Joyner said.

"Without a doubt those three guys from the offensive standpoint have been our big hitters," Joyner said. "As long as they continue, the way way our talent pool is now, we're most effective when we put both of them on the court and go to a three-guard offense."

L.A. Dodgers for sale

By Denise Levin
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES - The team picture of the 1965 World Series champion Los Angeles Dodgers smiles down on the sawdust-covered floor of the famous Philippe's Restaurant, standing in the shadows of Chavez Ravine.

People have flocked to this restaurant for decades to feast on the world famous french dip sandwiches - as long as they've fought traffic up the ravine to enjoy a day of baseball and Dodger Dogs.

As news spread throughout the restaurant Monday of the impending sale of the Dodgers by Peter O'Malley, eyes grew wide with disbelief.

"I can't believe it," Janet Klein said as her hand flew to her chest and her chin dropped. A native New Yorker, Klein admitted she never transferred her loyalty from the Brooklyn Dodgers to the Los Angeles team when they moved west in 1957.

However, noting that former manager Tom Lasorda "was the team," players and fans adapted when he resigned his post last July, Klein said.

"They'll adapt to whoever owns them too," she added.

Many fans predicted team ownership will go the way of most other major sports teams - to a big corporation.

"It would be hard to replace a personality like the O'Malleys," retired school teacher James

See DODGERS Page 4B

PAYLESS
CAR RENTAL

Holiday Auto Rentals, Inc.
a/b/a Payless Car Rental



3 locations:

1931 Roosevelt Hwy.
College Park, Ga
30337
(404) 768-2120



4204 Rental Car Rd.
Charlotte, N.C.
28214
(704) 359-4640

1100 Jetport Rd.
Myrtle Beach, S.C.
29577
(803) 448-3737

Bring this ad in for 10% discount on any rental. Expires 12/31/96

Congratulations, Panthers. You're Making Your Mark.

On To The NFC Championship Game!



After a record seven wins their first season, the Panthers are giving us a second season that won't be forgotten. Seven players were selected to the Pro Bowl. And Dom Capers was honored as coach of the year.

The Panthers also dethroned perennial NFC West champion San Francisco to capture the division. Now they've beaten last year's Super Bowl champion Dallas to advance to the NFC Conference Championship.

Panthers, your success and teamwork inspire the entire community. Good luck. Win the NFC Championship, then bring the Super Bowl trophy home to the Carolinas!

NationsBank

Official Bank of the Carolina Panthers.

NationsBank, N.A. ©1997 NationsBank Corporation.