

1B

SPORTS



Player of the year?

Tiger Woods will be named golfer of the year, but Hale Irwin is posting better numbers on the Senior Tour. Page 3B.

First start gives Biakabutuka confidence

By Herbert L. White  
THE CHARLOTTE POST

The doubts hovered over Tshimanga Biakabutuka like an ominous cloud.

For more than a year, the Carolina Panthers running back has struggled to recover from a knee injury that temporarily derailed his career. But a more confident Biakabutuka will line up Sunday against the Oakland Raiders after rushing for more than 100 yards and scoring his first touchdown last week in a 21-12 win over Atlanta. It has taken a while, but the cloud is starting to lift.

"That felt good," he said. "I scored my first NFL touchdown and it's like I broke the ice now, that mental limit that tells me I can't score. Now I know I can score. I've got to keep working hard and it's going to happen again."

Biakabutuka ran for 104 yards and a couple of scores on 23 carries in his first start since tearing the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee last year against Jacksonville. Against Atlanta, he made defenders miss in the Ericsson Stadium muck by cutting against the grain as well running by them, showing the moves

that made him the Panthers' top draft choice last year.

"The knee is improving," he said. "I never had a doubt as far as the knee's strength, but there was the everyday pain and the mental aspect of the knee as far as my confidence and cutting back hard in a given situation. I was able to do that."

Promoting Biakabutuka to the starting lineup rejuvenated Carolina's running game, which had slipped toward the bottom of the league. Anthony Johnson, who started the first seven games, had fallen off in production because of a toe injury and erratic

blocking. Biakabutuka's scores from 26 and 12 yards were the Panthers second and third rushing touchdowns this season. Rookie Fred Lane, who was inactive for three weeks before the Atlanta game, has the other.

"I feels good to break the ice," Biakabutuka said.

At 4-4, Carolina needs more productive games from Biakabutuka, whose previous rushing high was 78 yards. Drafted as the Panthers' franchise back last season, he knows it'll take more than one outstanding game to become a factor on offense.

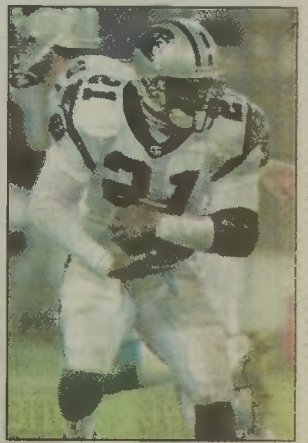
"I'm not going to relax at this

point," he said. "I'm going to work harder to keep improving because after a good game, you're expected to have more good games. A good game doesn't make a good running back, and I know that."

Biakabutuka said he isn't sure he's fully recovered, but can't wait to find out how he measures up in a must-win game against Oakland. After last week's success, he's ready to live up to his potential.

"I feel I've got to get back to the level I want to be," he said. "I'm not there yet, but I've got the ability."

The next test is Sunday.



PHOTO/WADE NASH  
Tshimanga Biakabutuka rushed for 104 yards Sunday against Atlanta.

Hornets buzzing for '97

By Karl Petraroja  
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

When the Charlotte Hornets unveiled their "Hardball" motto last season, people snickered.

But after a franchise-record 54 wins, the Hornets had the last laugh. This year the theme is "Hardball II" and the expectations are even higher, maybe for as many as 60 wins.

With newly-acquired guards David Wesley and Bobby Phillips, plus reserve power-forward J.R. Reid, Charlotte is more talented, but will that translate to the win column?

"I can't say what we'll do in terms of number of wins but what I think we'll be trying to do, is just get better as the season goes," head coach Dave Cowens said.

"Last year that hardball theme kicked in around late December. This year it needs to kick in on Halloween, it almost has to because you have to get off to a good start. That's really a key."

The Hornets tip off their 10th season Friday against New York Knicks, who made the Hornets disappear from the playoffs last April in three quick games. It made for a very long off-season for power forward Anthony Mason. The regular season was great but the playoff whitewash left Mason feeling empty. Off-season foot surgery has Mason almost 100 percent again and ready for the Hornets to establish a physical presence.

"This year we're definitely going to come out and form a physical presence," he said. "That's what basketball is - no matter how the league is trying to satisfy the rules and you can't touch and all this."

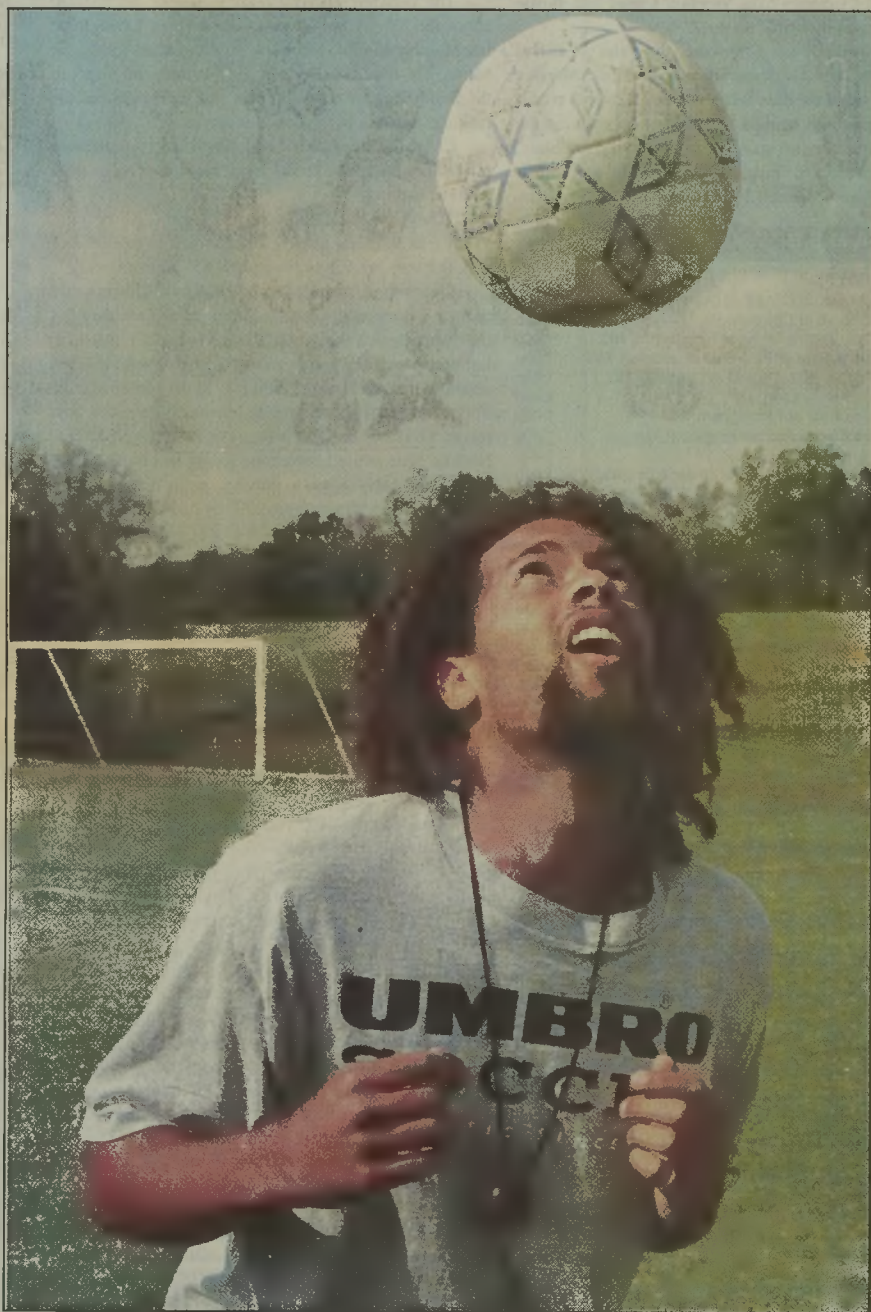
With Wesley and Phillips in the starting lineup, the Hornets have the toughest perimeter defense they've ever had but blending two new starters in with Mason, Glen Rice and Vlade Divac, could slow the Hornets down early as they build chemistry. Mason doesn't agree.

"It's not really hard to adjust

See HORNETS on page 4B



PHOTO/WADE NASH  
Anthony Mason is expected to give Charlotte muscle and leadership this season.



PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

UNC Charlotte midfielder Matthys Barker has been a leader for the 49ers despite shin splints in both legs.

Fancy footwork

Barker spurs UNCC's late-season soccer rally

By Karl Petraroja  
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

As the sun begins to set on Matthys Barker's college soccer career, the UNC Charlotte midfielder hopes to get one more chance at a national championship.

That's if his aching legs allow him to play his best.

As a junior, he helped lead the 49ers to three NCAA tournament victories and their first-ever appearance in the Final Four. A loss to Florida International in the national semifinals ended UNCC's finest season. Barker, who is tied for fifth place in career scoring with 28 goals and 28 assists for 84 points, hopes to settle some unfinished business.

Barker's senior campaign has been far from easy. He's battled shin splints all season

and is far from 100 percent.

"It's painful but I'm playing through it," Barker said as he emerged from practice last week with an ice bag strapped to each leg. It's my last year. You've got to."

After a slow start, Barker has caught fire, making things painful for opposing teams with six goals in his last six games. He had seven goals and two assists through the first 16 games, but was far from satisfied.

"I'm scoring but my thing is assists and I need three more (to set the school career assists record with 31) and for some



Barker

reason, I'm not finding them," he said.

"I'm doing my part, trying my best. If it comes as goals, it's goals. I enjoy it anyway it comes."

UNCC head coach John Tart has enjoyed watching Barker play since Tart moved over from Furman three years ago. Last season's Conference USA coach of the year knows Barker's had to play most of the season hurt.

"We've just dealt with it and he's dealt with it in a very admirable way," Tart said. "But it's not allowed him to be 100 percent in any of these matches."

"Obviously Matthys means a lot to our team. He's been a tri-captain this year, it's his senior year and he's been the leading scorer the last couple of years

See BARKER on page 3B

Vikings coach on hot seat after book comments

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

One of the Minnesota Vikings' owners said four of the team's owners want to fire coach Dennis Green after he outlined a possible takeover attempt of the team in his new autobiography, according to a published report.

The owner, speaking on condition of anonymity, said he believes three other owners won't commit to disciplining Green because they fear he will sue and that three other owners want to keep him, the Saint Paul Pioneer Press reported Monday.

The owners have a meeting scheduled Nov. 4.

"I'm not sure anything will happen," another owner, Carol Sperry said Sunday night. "This whole thing is hard to understand."

Green said Sunday that the controversial last chapter was nothing more than a possible scenario to settle the Vikings' ownership situation. He blamed the media for misinterpreting his words.

"There is no threat to sue in that book ('No Room for Crybabies'). There was not any time I said I would buy the Minnesota Vikings or I would try to buy the Minnesota Vikings. I said a scenario, a possibility and maybe this could happen," Green said in an interview with the

See GREEN on page 3B

Shakeup likely for Golden Bulls (2-6) in McGirt Classic

By Herbert L. White  
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Next year has arrived early at Johnson C. Smith.

There will be major changes in the Golden Bulls lineup Saturday when Smith plays N.C. Central in the First Union Eddie McGirt Classic. After a 40-7 loss to Winston-Salem State, Smith's third in a row, coach Bill Davis will use the rest of the season to develop young players for next season.

"We're going to have to make some changes," he said. "I'm not going to get my brain beat out every weekend, you'd better believe that."

After steady improvement during a 2-2 stretch, the Bulls (2-6, 1-4 CIAA) have gone backward during the losing streak. The main culprit is a defense that has given up at least 38 points during that span. Opponents are finding it easier to pass or run against Smith, which ranks near the bottom of the CIAA in total

defense.

"I thought we were getting to be a pretty good football team, but somewhere we've hit a snag," Davis said. "We gotta go find

some football players because a lot of those youngsters won't be back."

Defensive culprits are plentiful. The Bulls allowed Winston-Salem to rack

up 276 yards of total offense the first half and 380 for the game. Freshman quarterback Tory Woodbury looked like a senior with 7-of-12 passing for 122 yards and two touchdowns. Nor could they couldn't stop running back Eric Hendly, who rumbled for 170 yards on 29 carries and two touchdowns.

See CHANGES on page 4B



PHOTO/HERBERT L. WHITE

Johnson C. Smith's defense, which had shown improvement in the middle of the season, has tailed off in consecutive losses to Livingstone, Fayetteville State and Winston-Salem State.