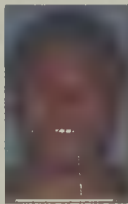


Panthers offense confident going into St. Louis

Continued from page 1C

cized the Panthers' receivers after the regular season game. Smith took that personally.

"You just got to make plays," said Smith, who had five catches for



Smith

135 yards and a score. "The receivers had to prove a point. Last time they said we just threw the ball up and hoped for pass interference, but this time we threw the ball up and we caught it."

"We just felt that we could do some good things," Delhomme said. "We needed to come out and prove it ...and I think we did."

Carolina, which became

only the second team to go without a penalty or turnover in a postseason game (Pittsburgh, 1976), wasn't perfect on offense. Four of John Kasay's five field goals came after drives bogged down inside the Dallas 20, but the Panthers' overall dominance was so overwhelming, it didn't make much difference.

"We had some places

where we made mistakes, but you're going to have those," Davis said. "The main thing is you get yourself better during the week and get better for the next game, and we did that. Hopefully we'll do that this week and every week as long as we're in the playoffs, get better every week."

That's been Carolina's plan all along, Davis' running sets

up the pass, and Delhomme is getting the ball to open receivers. The formula is simple, and it gets another test at St. Louis, where ball-control will be key to the Panthers' success.

"We're not the most flashy team," Delhomme said. "We are going to run it and take our chances. That is fine with us. If we can keep chugging along doing the right things, that is fine with us. It

was a big step for us and we have to go to St. Louis to face a very good football team who is going to be rested."

After dispatching Dallas, Carolina's looking forward to the challenge.

"We played a great game" against the Cowboys, Smith said. "We raised our intensity up. (Sunday) we go to St. Louis, and we've got to raise it up three or four more bars."

Olympic QB looks forward to college

Continued from page 1C

the Charlotte area like Providence running back Andrew Pearman and West Charlotte defensive back Rod Council both who were on teams with winning records that went far in the stat play-offs.

Miller was on this year's Shrine Bowl team though, as

he got a chance to practice and play with the best senior football players in the state. It was also where Miller got his first taste of his future popularity when he visited the Shriner's hospital.

"It's something that will always live with me. Seeing those kids ask for autographs and smiling was real

touching," he admits. And while North Carolina won its second straight Shrine Bowl, Miller's talents were used sparingly.

North Carolina passed only seven times and Miller didn't throw any of them. His stats in probably the biggest win of his senior year consisted of

two rushes for 4 yards.

Miller has committed to East Carolina where he hopes his fortunes will turn around. The Pirates could use his talents coming off a 1-11 season where Desmond Robinson, their starting quarterback, threw for only three touchdowns and 11 interceptions.

Combine first step in locating pit crew talent

Continued from page 1C

on NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series teams competing nationally during the 2004 season. Drivers will compete for as many five spots on NASCAR Dodge Weekly Series teams in the

southeast. An official announcement concerning final competitors, teams and sponsors will be made later in the month.

More than 100 resumes were gathered from qualified minority drivers and crew

members via the media, track owners, industry experts and referrals from technical schools and academic institutions. Combine participants were chosen based on their accomplishments, talent and reputa-

tions as potential successful motorsport professionals.

Participants not chosen to compete in the combine, or selected for a team, will be asked to apply for the 2005 program.

Former Sun rising after trade to Knicks

By Chris Sheridan
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Stephon Marbury has returned to his hometown to play for the team he grew up watching.

In a blockbuster eight-player trade between New York and the Phoenix Suns, Marbury, Penny Hardaway and Cezary Trybanski were dealt Monday to the Knicks for Antonio McDyess, Howard Easley, Charlie Ward, Maciej Lampe, and two first-round draft picks.

"Our goal is to win an NBA championship, and our goal is to put together a team that can do that," Knicks president Isiah Thomas said after making his first major move in his new job.

The trade is the fourth of Marbury's career. The Brooklyn native was drafted by Milwaukee and immediately dealt to Minnesota, where he subsequently forced a trade to New Jersey. The Nets sent him to Phoenix for Jason Kidd.

"I think we got the best deal," Knicks center Dikembe Mutombo said. "He's among the best point guards in the league, he's an All-Star player."

The trade represents a major shakeup for both teams and an additional long-term financial commitment for a Knicks team that already has the league's highest payroll.

In exchange for giving up its best player, Phoenix will be under the salary cap next summer and will have at least \$8 million to offer to a free agent class that includes Kobe Bryant.

Suns owner Jerry Colangelo said the Suns will save \$20 million to \$25 million in salary and luxury tax costs through the 2004-05 season while Phoenix rebuilds.

"This is a big picture kind of move, and a bold move," Colangelo said. "We didn't have flexibility under the cap, and we were hamstrung by some contracts. This allows us to be a player in free agency if we choose to. This is not a talent-for-talent deal."

The contracts of McDyess and Ward expire at the end of this season, and Ward has a buyout clause that can be exercised before Jan. 10. Easley is under contract for three more seasons. Vujanic, the starting point guard on the Yugoslav team that won the 2002 World Championship, is playing in Europe.

Marbury, one of the league's best point guards, was averaging a team-high 20.8 points for the Suns, who are in last place in the Pacific Division.

"It's definitely a home run hit by Isiah in terms of getting this deal done," Knicks coach Don Chaney said.

Hardaway, a former All-Star, has been a reserve in Phoenix and will have the same role in New York. He will earn \$14 million next season and \$16 million in 2005-06.

"If you're going to win a championship, you need talent, you need players," Thomas said. "You're not going to beat the best teams with just one or two players."

McDyess, who played for the Suns in 1997-98, returned to action last month after missing more than a year because of knee surgery. McDyess took over a spot in the Knicks' starting lineup from Kurt Thomas, then lost it - thereby becoming expendable.

"We've got a scoring point guard coming in, and a two-guard who's been getting it done for a number of years. So it's going to be a different

look for us out there, but it definitely should be an improvement," Kurt Thomas said.

The Knicks will give Phoenix their first-round pick in the 2004 draft and an additional first-round pick.

Easley, who recently lost his starting job to Frank Williams, did not play in the Knicks' 95-85 loss to New Jersey on Sunday night.

Ward, who has been with the Knicks for 10 seasons, is expected to be waived by the Suns later this week.

Isiah Thomas has already turned over about half the Knicks' roster in the two weeks since he replaced team president Scott Layden.

"I knew right after we got a new sheriff in town that we were in for a shakeup. One of the reasons he was brought here was to shake up the team and get us to the playoffs," Mutombo said.

Marbury was reunited with Keith Van Horn, his teammate in New Jersey.

Last summer, Marbury said the Nets didn't win when he was there because he was surrounded by untalented players, lumping Van Horn in with Gheorghe Muresan and Jim McIlvaine.

"Personally we never had any problems. On the court we didn't win, and I think that was the biggest problem that Stephon and I had," Van Horn said.

The Knicks are fifth in a weak Atlantic Division. But with a starting lineup of Marbury, Allan Houston, Van Horn, Thomas and Mutombo, they should have enough talent to snap their two-year streak of missing the playoffs.

"On paper, talent-wise, this puts us right up there at the top," Van Horn said. "But that's just paper."

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