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Bulls look to break out at Legacy Classic

By Herbert L. White
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Johnson C. Smith is headed in the wrong direction going into Sunday's Legacy Basketball Classic.



Joyner

The Golden Bulls (7-9, 2-3) have lost five in row going into CIAA West games against Livingstone Thursday at Brayboy Gym, followed by Winston-Salem State in the Legacy Classic Sunday at 5:30 p.m. at the Charlotte Coliseum. N.C. Central plays Livingstone in the first part of the doubleheader at 3:30 p.m.

Tickets range from \$15 to \$35 and can be purchased at the Coliseum box office or by calling Ticketmaster at (704) 522-6500.

"We've got to try to win some games," Smith coach Steve Joyner said. "We've been in some Please see LEGACY/3C



PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

Winthrop forward Marcus Cooke's goal is to make the NCAA tournament.

Cooke spices up Winthrop's title hopes

By Karl Petraroja
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Marcus Cooke is playing every game like it's the last.

The Winthrop forward and Concord native would love nothing more than play in the NCAA tournament in March. After posting a 20-10 record last year and winning the Big South Conference regular season title, the Eagles were ousted in the tournament semi-finals on a last-second buzzer beat by UNC-Asheville. The loss still haunts Cooke, a senior.



Cooke

"Oh yeah, oh it hurt getting beat at the buzzer. It really did hurt," he said.

"The crazy thing about the Big South is you can win the regular season and lose in the tournament and have no chance of going to the NAAs, so first we've got to

win the conference regular season, then going into the tournament we have to have the mindset to win all the games and win the whole tournament so we can get there and I can have a feel before I end my career."

It's been a good career already for Cooke. He earned N.C. high school all-star honors at Please see COOKE/2C

49ers face 5-game exam

By James Hamlin
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

The Charlotte 49ers are off to their best start under head coach Bobby Lutz at 10-3, and it the program's best start in nearly 10 years.



Lutz

The reason? Balance. For years the 49ers have relied on the three point shot to fuel their offense and they continue to bomb from outside, hitting 106 treys in only 13 games.

But now there's balance on offense thanks to the strong front-court of Curtis Withers, Martin Iti and Calvin Clemmons. The 49ers are now the

Please see 49ERS/3C

TOUGH AS NAILS



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Among the players John Fox inherited from a 1-15 2001 Panthers team was receiver Steve Smith, who emerged as one of the NFL's best receivers in his third season.

Panthers' attitude, determination byproduct of coach's approach

By Jenna Fryer
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

John Fox took over a team in trouble. The Carolina Panthers were coming off a 1-15 season and ranked at the bottom of the NFL in almost every statistic.

Fox arrived talking tough, vowing to implement a physical defense and a run-first offense that would turn the team around.

The plan worked much faster than anyone anticipated.

In two seasons, Fox's demand for excellence jolted the floundering franchise, lifting the Panthers into Sunday's NFC championship game at

Philadelphia - one victory from their first Super Bowl.

"The game gets bigger on the outside, but we just try to stay the same on the inside," Fox said. "Our preparation, our focus - not be distracted. I think all those are the important factors."

And it's not as though the hard-nosed Fox is working with a fresh batch of players: About half his roster was part of the group that lost its last 15 games in 2001.

While the Panthers might have known little about Fox before hiring him, plenty around the league figured he would be a natural success as a

head coach after five seasons as the New York Giants' defensive coordinator.

"I didn't know when he would get it turned around, but I did know that he would do it," said Giants quarterback Kerry Collins, who led Carolina to its only other NFC title game appearance. "I knew it would just be a matter of time once Foxy got the job."

Please see FIERY/2C



Fox

McNabb meets high expectations

By Jim Litke
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

It all came down to fourth-and-26, a more hopeless place than Donovan McNabb had found himself in a while. And even though people will say one play doesn't make or break a career, he knew better.

Sunday marked the third straight year McNabb and the Eagles found themselves one win away from the NFC championship, only this time he wasn't looking at a roadblock so much as a dead end. Fail to get through this one, McNabb understood, and all the good

work that had gone before it would be undone.

McNabb started this season, his fifth, about as poorly as a Pro Bowl quarterback could. In the first two games, losses at home to the Buccaneers and Patriots, the Eagles scored 10 points total and McNabb had no touchdowns and three interceptions. Not long after, Rush Limbaugh, hired to create some buzz for ESPN's Sunday pregame show, succeeded beyond even his wildest dreams.

He claimed pride of place on the anti-McNabb bandwagon,

saying the quarterback was "regressing."

"And I'm sorry to say this, I don't think he's been that good from the get-go," Limbaugh added. Then he started piling on.

In a rush to juice his own career, Limbaugh didn't mind trashing McNabb's, suggesting that he'd been propped by a media corps "very desirous that a black quarterback do well." While that little diatribe did nothing to improve race relations, it did shine a spotlight on McNabb when he

Please see McNABB/2C

C. JEMAL HORTON



Winning vibe grabs hold

Close your eyes. Can you feel it?

It's normally tranquil Uptown Charlotte bouncing like Times Square on New Year's Eve.

It's a city - no, a community - loudly patting its football team on the back for providing a new and beautiful face for the rest of the country to behold.

Can you see it?

It's the quaking kind of celebration we thought we might never witness in this city. It is, of all things, one hellacious party honoring the Carolina Panthers for making it to Super Bowl XXXVII.

And this celebration is going to happen.

Keep your eyes closed for a moment, because after the Panthers play at Philadelphia this weekend, there is going to be a street gala that we can only imagine in Charlotte. There will be dancing and singing and, I'm afraid to say, some streaking. And there also will be a tear or two.

If you thought 1997, the first time the Panthers made it to the NFC Championship game, was something, wait until this weekend, when they win the right to go to their first Super Bowl in only their eighth-season of existence.

Oh, it will be something.

Even before this weekend, the Panthers already had helped Charlotte shed one negative national image - that this is a place where sports figures come and fall into infamy. Instead of thoughts of murder trials and intrinsic losing and other ills that plagued the team in recent years, people now think of success and hard work when Charlotte is mentioned.

All because of the football team.

And this weekend, the party the Panthers are going to trigger with their Super Bowl-earning victory will help Charlotte get rid of another unflattering image - that this is a city full of Polo-shirt-wearing, minivan-driving conservatives who don't know how to get down.

Just wait. Charlotteans will prove things to be drastically different this weekend. If the people here are anything like this football team and its coach - and they are - then everyone should be pumped up about this weekend.

Why should we doubt that the Panthers will win now?

They will go up to Philadelphia and beat the Eagles in the NFC Championship game. They will come back to the Queen City as kings, representing Charlotte in the granddaddy of all sporting events.

And this city will party.

The thing is, the Panthers have what is a proven formula for success: They play out-of-this-world defense, they make very few mistakes on offense because they run the ball most of the time, and they excel in special-teams play almost to a flawless point.

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