

Fiery Fox turns Panthers into winners

Continued from page 1C

At his very first Panthers minicamp, Fox stood up and challenged his team's toughness.

"He basically came in and said, 'I don't know how tough you guys are,'" safety Mike Minter said. "He didn't pull any punches on that, and it's hard when a man has his toughness questioned. But he laid it all out there and told us whoever survived training camp would be around to turn this team into a winner."

It was quite a change. Fox's predecessor, George Seifert, was laid-back and had few close relationships with players. Fox is a screamer and a sideline pacer who wants to get to know each and every member of the

team.

Under Seifert, the Panthers rarely worked out in full pads. Fox prefers contact drills.

"The biggest surprise was his bluntness. A lot of coaches sugarcoat stuff, but Foxy just said it like it was without pulling any punches," defensive tackle Brentson Buckner said. "If you weren't doing a good job, he told you and told you how you had to do it the next time - or else."

The changes paid off immediately: The Panthers opened the 2002 season 3-0. There were still some tweaks to be made, though, and Carolina slipped into an eight-game losing streak.

But the Panthers of old would have packed it in from there. With Fox's leadership,

they rallied to a 7-9 finish.

Fox and general manager Marty Hurney went to work in the offseason, bringing in a powerful running back to carry the offensive load (Stephen Davis) and gambling on a no-name quarterback to add a little fire (Jake Delhomme). Both players worked out wonderfully for the Panthers, as have all of Fox's draft picks.

Although selecting defensive end Julius Peppers with the No. 2 overall pick in the 2002 draft seemed like a no-brainer, the pick was questioned by those who thought Peppers didn't fit Carolina's immediate needs. And taking offensive lineman Jordan Gross in the first round in 2003 didn't exactly make a huge splash, but Fox went

with his instinct. Peppers and Gross have been anchors for the lines.

As is his style, Fox plays down the significance of his personnel decisions.

"We're trying to locate the best human talent available, just like the other 31 teams in the National Football League," he said. "It's kind of our lifeblood, it's a lot of hard work, and we've been fortunate."

Fox's bland persona off the field is a far cry from his excitable identity on it. He spends game days yelling at his players after mistakes or running in celebration after a big play.

Then, once the game is over, he quiets down.

Clearly, his approach works.

McNabb meets expectations in Philly

Continued from page 1C

hardly needed it. His thumb hurt so bad, he had trouble gripping the ball. Expectations in Philly were already at fever pitch.

"I was trying to be too perfect, to be so precise that it was taking me away from my game," McNabb recalled Sunday night. "I needed to just go out there and play reckless football."

Great quarterbacks don't always put up great numbers. They just win. McNabb does that with his arm, but even more with his legs, heart and head. He shrugged off questions about an apology. "What's 'I'm sorry' going to do?" McNabb said at a news conference a few days after Limbaugh's remarks, then responded the way he knew best.

He worked harder, studied film longer, and the Eagles won 10 of their next 11 games. Before Sunday's kickoff, with the Packers and Brett Favre in town for the playoffs, McNabb stayed on the high road. "The only satisfaction that I have," McNabb said, "is winning."

For most of the game against Green Bay, it looked beyond his reach. From the

sideline, he watched Favre, a quarterback who already had everything he wanted - a Super Bowl ring and a Hall of Fame career - about to steal the rest. Climbing back from a 14-0 deficit, the Eagles trailed 17-14 with 1:12 left in regulation, and one final shot to get it back.

The Packers had sacks on five of the previous eight downs, but when McNabb broke the huddle this time, that wasn't the kind of pressure he was worried about. Realizing the Packers were playing prevent defense, he watched Freddie Mitchell make his way down the center of the field, then purposefully threw the pass just short of where Green Bay defenders Bhawoh Jue and Darren Sharper were about to converge on Mitchell.

"I just tried to get into a position where Freddie could compete for it," McNabb said.

But Mitchell knew better. "If he would have put it up ahead of me," the receiver said, "I would have got crushed."

Instead, Mitchell wound up with a 28-yard completion, his first catch of the day. Philadelphia eventually tied

it with a field goal, then won in overtime after Favre's uncharacteristically panicked throw led to an interception and a McNabb-orchestrated drive that kicker David Akers ended with a 31-yard field goal.

"Great players," Packers coach Mike Sherman said, "make great plays."

McNabb had plenty of those in his past, but without this one, none of those would have mattered. The playoffs are different, because each round raises the stakes. Rams quarterback Marc Bulger was 18-4 as a starter in regular-season games when his coach, Mike Martz, turned cautious in the final minutes of regulation in Saturday's playoff game against the Panthers and opted to kick the tying field goal instead of going for the win.

Eagles coach Andy Reid didn't have an option at fourth-and-26, but he knew what the stakes were. McNabb is the team's highest-paid, highest-profile star. If the Eagles lost confidence in him, there was no Kurt Warner waiting in the wings, no way to start over again next season.

Winning vibe turns entire city into Panther nation

Continued from page 1C

If this sounds familiar, well, it should. The Tampa Bay Buccaneers, who won last year's Super Bowl, played the very same way. The year before that, the New England Patriots employed that style to win it all. And the year before that, the Baltimore Ravens muscled their way - mentally and physically - to the Super Bowl crown.

Every once in a while, a finesse team, like St. Louis, sneaks in and wins it all. But the winning blueprint for years and years has been tough, nasty football.

These are your Carolina Panthers. Sure, they could really use star running

back Stephen Davis this weekend. Who couldn't use a player of Davis' capabilities? But should Davis not be able to play because of the quadriceps injury he suffered in last week's victory over St. Louis, the Panthers will be just fine with DeShaun Foster filling in.

That's the thing about these Panthers: All season long, they kept finding ways to get the job done when so many people - including this columnist - thought they didn't have enough to go to the Super Bowl.

Well, they do.

So go ahead, open your eyes. Open them wide and take everything in while you're uptown this weekend.

I hear victory champagne doesn't burn all that much.

E-mail Post sports columnist C. Jemal Horton at sejemalwrite@aol.com.



Foster

Mother Jones to run at Milrose

Marion Jones will return to the track next month at the Millrose Games, her first event since taking a year off to have a baby.

Jones, who won five medals in the 2000 Olympics, is set to run the 60

meters at the indoor event held in Madison Square Garden on Feb. 6.

This will be her first meet since 2002, when she won the U.S. title in the 100 and 200, and the 100 in the World Cup to complete the

first undefeated season of her career. She had a baby boy last June with boyfriend and fellow sprinter Tim Montgomery, who is not scheduled to compete at the Millrose Games.

Associated Press

The Charlotte Post
704-376-0496

FORD'S USED TIRES

New Tires

Mon. - Fri. 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. • Sat. 8 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

• Brake Job
Front \$35.00
Back \$45.00



• Oil Change - \$21.88

3401 Tuckaseegee Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28208
(704)393-1109

Ford's Busy Bee Mini Mart
505 Beatties Ford Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28216
(704)333-8448

1222 Central Ave.
Charlotte, NC 28204
(704)377-0870

IN CELEBRATION OF THE 2004
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
HOLIDAY WEEKEND

THE 5TH ANNUAL
LEGACY BASKETBALL CLASSIC

North Carolina
Central University
vs.
Livingstone College
&
Johnson C. Smith
University
vs.
Winston-Salem State
University

SUNDAY, JANUARY 18, 2004
CHARLOTTE COLISEUM
CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

TIP OFF AT 3:30 PM

Tickets available at the
Charlotte Coliseum and
Cricket Arena box offices,
all Ticketmaster outlets,
by phone at 704-522-6500
and on-line at www.ticketmaster.com
Student tickets on Sale in January



www.legacybasketballclassic.com

You know us
for our bravery,
our technology
and our passion.

You know us
for our skills,
our dedication
and our pride.

And now, as we defend
freedom around the
world, you will know
us as every day

HEROES.

AIR FORCE
RESERVE
ABOVE & BEYOND

800-257-1212 • www.afreserve.com



SATURDAY, JANUARY 24
12:00 - 4:00 p.m. • Charlotte Coliseum

- Your chance to shake hands and get autographs from the NEW Carolina Cobras players and coaching staff
- Have your picture taken with the Snake Charmers dance team and King Cobra
- Go behind the scenes with a locker room tour
- Select your seat for the 2004 AFL season
- Fun and games for kids and adults

1-877-4-COBRAS • WWW.COBRASFOOTBALL.COM

CAROLINA
COBRAS

