

# Davis savors home season with Panthers

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top backs in the league. Media-shy and leery of accepting the star role, being home this season is one of the few topics Davis truly opens up about.

"Being able to go home some nights and sleep in my own bed, seeing my kids, my mother, seeing my grandmother before she died, that was important to me," he said. "A lot of guys don't get the opportunity and I am blessed to have that opportunity. I am also blessed to see my family during a season

that has been so rewarding. "I am having fun and they are having fun."

But the season has been as frustrating as it has been rewarding. A lingering ankle sprain sent him to the sidelines for 2 1/2-games this year. A bruised forearm knocked him out of another game.

The biggest setback came in the divisional playoffs against St. Louis, when Davis pulled his left quadriceps on a 64-yard run in the second quarter. He left the game and watched as DeShaun Foster, his under-

study, helped the Panthers earn the double overtime victory.

It made the week before the NFC championship game one of the most agonizing seven days of Davis' life. He couldn't practice most of the week and his playing status wasn't going to be decided until right before kickoff.

Desperate to be part of the game, Davis said there was no way he wasn't facing Philadelphia. But it was a coaching decision, not his, and he had to convince the Panthers he could play.

"I did everything I could possibly do to get myself well enough to play that game," he said. "When I was running for the coaches, I was kind of worried. But I did a pretty good job and proved to them that I could run and fill-in in the game. My wife even told me last week before the game that I looked kind of worried."

With a two weeks off before the Super Bowl, Davis is taking the time to heal. He didn't practice at all this week and won't hit the field until Carolina's first practice in Houston on Monday.

But the signs of frustration and worry that he couldn't mask a week ago are gone. Davis is positive he'll be ready to face the Patriots.

"I feel great, I feel a lot better than I did last week," he

said.

Will he be 100 percent by gametime? For once, the stone-faced Davis showed real emotion.

"No doubt," he snapped. "No doubt!"

## Poole dropped out to be with family

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especially because I was from Georgia," Poole said. "Carolina was only a skip, jump and a hop away. It was a 35-minute flight for me, so I could go home at any time. My days in Carolina were great."

They didn't last long. The Panthers traded him to Indianapolis in July 1998 for a second-round draft pick.

He played three seasons with the Colts, losing his job at the end of 2000. Indianapolis released him after the season to create salary cap room - he was due a \$2 million bonus and a \$2.5 million salary if he stayed for one more year.

"It's a business and you

have to roll with the punches," he said. "You go and do whatever you have to do to survive."

Denver offered him a chance to continue his career at a vastly reduced rate - a \$477,000 base salary. He accepted, only to face one of his most difficult decisions a few months later.

His wife, Jennifer, had their second child, and he was needed at home. He realized he couldn't play football with a divided heart, and decided to sit out one season - a risky career move. A move that could have meant he'd never play again.

"That thought never crossed my mind," he said. "Because I have my priori-

ties set in life, I think I'll always have a chance."

Denver gave him a second chance, but he started only four games in 2002. Finally, New England gave him a chance to come full circle.

Poole started all 16 games for the Patriots, one of only four defensive players to stay in the lineup all season. His first interception came off Collins, his first-round draft mate in Carolina, and he finished tied for the team lead with six overall.

He recovered a fumble in the AFC championship victory over Indianapolis, when the Patriots held Peyton Manning to his lowest passer rating of the season.

"Tyrone is an awesome

player," quarterback Tom Brady said. "He has been playing at a Pro Bowl level this year. There is a lot of depth to this team. I don't think that we have any bones about going out and finding guys that can help us win."

Poole is most pleased that he has helped a team reach the Super Bowl while staying true to his priorities, even when they turned him into a one-year dropout.

"It's always good to have the opportunity to show people that you don't have to do certain things to be successful," Poole said. "A lot of people have a different definition of success. To actually get to this game means success in the NFL."

## Anger is an inspiration to wideout

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There are a lot of hard-luck stories on the Panthers roster. But there's not one Panther, besides Smith, who would get this line of questioning from the media:

"How did you avoid getting involved in that criminal life, considering where you're from?"

Uh ... (laughter) ... it's hard. You either fall into it, or you don't.

"Did sports help you stay

out of gangs?"

Uh ... sometimes.

"Did it actually keep you out of them?"

Sometimes.

Were you involved in them?"

Sometimes.

"Can you talk about that?"

No.

And so Smith is angry. Heck, his senior year of high school, his house was robbed - by his neighbors.

"I don't want to put my

kids in that situation," Smith said. "I don't want them to go through it, and I refuse to go through it (again) myself. I'll do whatever it takes on the football field - or after I'm done with football - to not put my family in that situation."

We all have our motivations in life. For some of us, it's to prove people wrong. For others, it's to out-succeed - by his siblings.

Smith will be angry and

scared by kickoff Sunday night.

And that's a good thing for Carolina Panthers fans.

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## Winning wasn't enough for Nets

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of the NBA long.

He thought of himself as a players' coach, and maybe he was a little too much of that. He took heat for the Nets' meltdown in the fourth quarter of Game 6 in San Antonio in last year's finals, when he left Kerry Kittles and Richard Jefferson on the bench too long in the Spurs' 19-point run.

Scott said his mistake came earlier in the game when he should have realized that Lucious Harris' slump wasn't going to end and he should have pulled him.

Winning helps cover up mistakes and differences in philosophies and personalities. Losing exposes them. Those differences, particularly about how to run the offense and defense, became magnified amid this season's lazy start. Something had to give.

Scott said one thing, his players heard another. Kidd popped off in the locker room a month ago in Memphis after a 110-63 humiliation, challenging his coach, his teammates and himself, and everyone came away with a different thought about what went on rather loudly behind the closed doors.

Kidd and Scott got along well enough away from the court, dining and playing golf together at times. But tempers can run high when losses pile up. In Memphis, Kidd and Kenyon Martin vented their frustration at Scott in a way that marked the beginning of the end for him.

"There's such a pressure to win," Nets president Rod Thorn said after announcing Scott's firing. "Messages aren't received the same way from year to year, from coaches to players. There are changes in personnel. There's a tremendous lot at stake in today's world. Last year there were, like, 11 coaching changes. Maybe there's not as much patience today as there was 10 years ago."

As a franchise, the Nets are in transition, unsure whether they're bound for Brooklyn under new ownership, or stuck in New Jersey in a place that feels like purgatory.

As a team, they are on the edge of turmoil. Thorn rejects the term "disarray," insisting, "We don't have any internal problems on our team."

Thorn is quick to point out the Nets still lead the Atlantic Division, two games ahead of Boston. As astute a basketball man as there is in the game, Thorn doesn't want to brag too much about that.

The division is the weakest in the league, and a 22-20 record is nothing to get heady about. Thorn's thoughts are on the playoffs, where stronger teams like Indiana and Detroit could crush the Nets.

Still, first-place coaches usually aren't fired in midseason. It takes a special sort of breakdown for that to happen. In the Nets' case it was a collapse in effort by the whole team, a loss of confidence in Scott, and the carping by Kidd that undercut the coach.

Thorn knew after last Friday's 85-64 drubbing in Miami, the Nets' fifth straight loss, that he had to make a move. They shot 29 percent, including Kidd's 4-for-19, and played with pathetic indifference.

"The Miami game was the nadir, so to speak, for us," Thorn said. "So for the last two, three days I was just contemplating if maybe a different voice, a little different approach, might not help this particular group."

That new voice will sound familiar to the Nets. It will come from Lawrence Frank, who moves over a seat from his spot as assistant coach. Thorn, speaking of Frank's "work ethic," compared him with Jeff Van Gundy, another former no-name assistant who found success at the helm of the New York Knicks and is now with the Houston Rockets.

Frank, at least, has the advantage that he's the guy Kidd wanted running the team. Thorn gave the star what he wanted. It's not the first time that's happened in the NBA and it surely won't be the last.

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### NOTICE OF A CITIZENS INFORMATIONAL WORKSHOP FOR PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS TO NC 24-27 (ALBEMARLE ROAD) FROM PIERSON DRIVE TO REDDMAN ROAD

WBS No. 34959.1.1 U-3603 Mecklenburg County

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) will hold the above Citizens' Informational Workshop on Tuesday, February 10, 2004 between the hours of 4p.m. and 7p.m. in the Large Conference Room of the Metrolina Regional Transportation Management Center, 2327 Tipton Drive, Charlotte.

The purpose of this workshop is for NCDOT representatives to provide information, answer questions, and accept written comments regarding this project. NCDOT proposes improvements to NC 24-27 (Albemarle Road). The project consists of constructing one additional travel lane in the eastbound direction of NC 24-27 (Albemarle Road) from Pierson Drive to Reddman Road.

Anyone desiring additional information may contact Bethany Hunt, 1548 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-1548, or by phone at 919-733-7844 ext. 229, fax at 919-733-9794, or E-mail at [bhunt@dot.state.nc.us](mailto:bhunt@dot.state.nc.us)

NCDOT will provide auxiliary aids and services for disabled persons who wish to participate in this workshop, to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. To request special assistance, please contact Ms. Hunt as early as possible so that arrangements can be made.



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