

SPORTS

Black College Sports/4C

Embracing time and distance

JCSU grad one of top over-50 runners in U.S.

By James Hamlin
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

After 37 years, Jerry Clark is still running. The 51-year-old Charlotte native has been one of the best distance runners in the state since he first laced on track shoes at Erwin Junior High.

"The first time I ran the mile on the track I ran a 5:23 (mile)," he says. Before that Clark was struggling to find a race that fit him, but after putting up that fast time and winning his first 1-mile race he knew he would become a distance runner.



PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

Jerry Clark, an assistant principal at Long Creek Elementary School, holds three N.C. records for runners over age 50.

Clark's success didn't come exclusively in his later years. He ran cross-country at Second Ward and the newly-desegregated Harding High in 1969-70. Back then Clark was one of the few black distance runners in Mecklenburg County, but he more than held his own.

"Most of the distance runners were white and I sort of jumped right in the midst of it," said Clark, an assistant principal at Long Creek Elementary.

It didn't take him long to convince his coaches of his talent. "By the time I (made it to) the 11th grade, I was able to compete against a lot of the top runners in the city from Myers Park High School and Independence High School," he said.

Clark went on to dominate in college running. He went to Winston-Salem State for a semester where he won the CIAA championship in the 3200 his freshman year. After that he transferred Johnson C. Smith and won three more conference championships and picked up an NAIA District 26 title to boot.

Clark has his eyes set on beating two runners ranked ahead of him nationally. Clark will compete against them in a race this month at Virginia Beach, Va. After that his next goal is to break all of Charlie Rose's records.

"He has all the records from (age) 55 on up," Clark said. "So my challenge over the next five to 10 years is to break all of his records."

N.C. Central bids Spence adieu after 49-64 tenure



FILE PHOTO

Despite an appearance in the CIAA final, Phil Spence's contract with N.C. Central won't be renewed.

FROM STAFF REPORTS

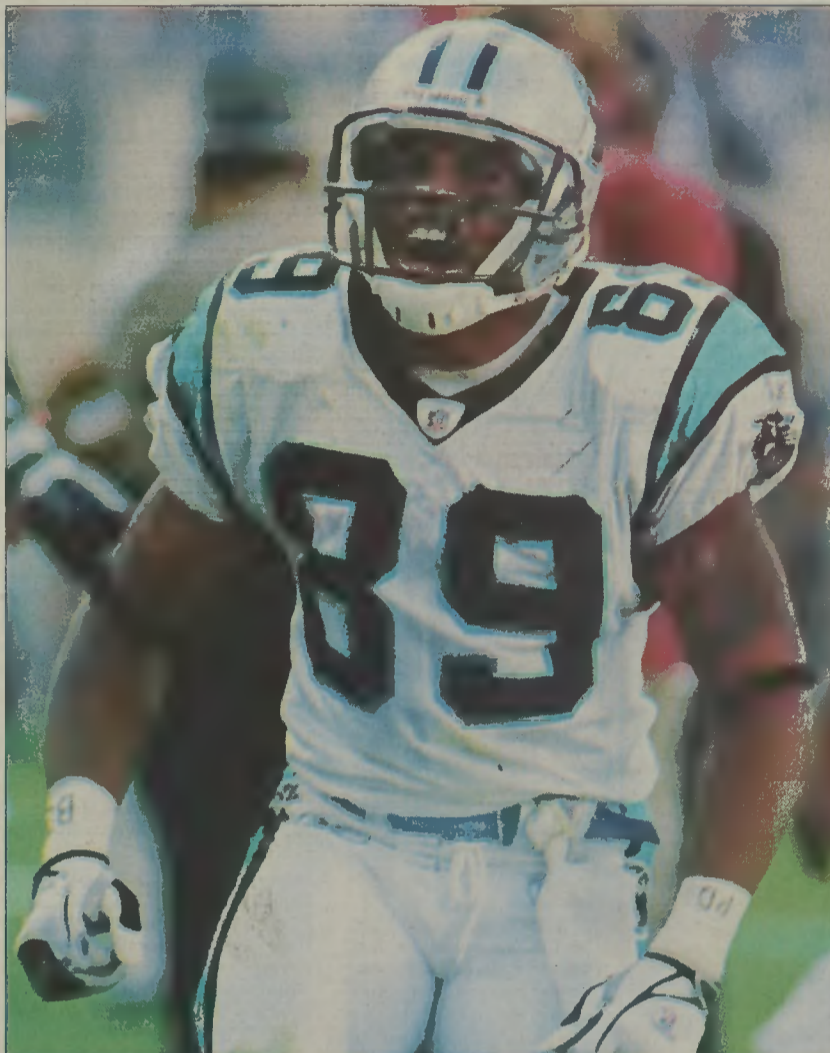
N.C. Central announced Monday that the contract of Head Men's Basketball coach Phil Spence will not be renewed.

"We appreciate the service and dedication that Phil has given to the men's basketball program at NCCU during the past four seasons," said NCCU Athletics Director William Hayes. "At this time, however, we feel we need to head in a new direction."

During Spence's four-seasons, the Eagles posted an overall record of 49-64 (.434). This year's team finished 16-13 after advancing to the CIAA championship game.

The process to find Spence's replacement will begin immediately, starting with the formation of a search committee.

THEY'LL BE BACK



FILE PHOTO

Steve Smith development from special teams standout to top-line receiver was rewarded by Carolina Monday when the team signed him to a five-year contract extension.

Panthers shore nucleus by re-signing Smith, Wallace

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Steve Smith agreed to a five-year contract extension with the Carolina Panthers on Monday after leading the NFC champions in receiving last season.

Contract details were not disclosed, but Smith's agent Derrick Fox said the deal includes a team option for a sixth season.

The Panthers also re-signed backup defensive end Al Wallace to a five-year contract.

The Panthers had made re-signing Smith a top priority after a 32-29 loss to the New England Patriots in the Super Bowl. He could have become a restricted free agent.

Smith wasn't always a priority.

He made the Pro Bowl as a return man as a rookie, but wouldn't settle for being pigeonholed in that role simply because at 5-foot-9 and 185 pounds he was considered too small to play receiver.

After lobbying for a shot at as a starter, he got it in 2002. But he had his problems off the field.

He beat up teammate Anthony Bright in a film session that season, leading to a one-game team suspension and a public outcry he should be released. Instead, Smith volunteered for anger management classes and



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Smith (left) and defensive end Al Wallace both said remaining with the Panthers was their preference.

spent time as a youth soccer coach, helping improve his image in the community.

Last season, he proved his value on the field.

Smith led the Panthers last season with 88 catches and 1,110 yards receiving, then had 19 receptions for 424 yards and three touchdowns in the playoffs. That included a game-winning 69-yard grab to defeat the St. Louis Rams.

Please see **PANTHERS/2C**

Home still not so sweet for Cobras: Carolina 0-10 all-time at Coliseum

Carolina Cobras defenders Otis Moore (left) and Sir Mawn Wilson bring down Orlando receiver James Bowden (N.C. A&T) during the Predators' 59-43 win last week at the Charlotte Coliseum. The Cobras fell to 0-10 all-time in Charlotte. The next home game is March 14 against Dallas.



PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

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HORTON

10 things I love about sports

All right, there were a few of you who were put off by last week's column on the 10 things I hate about the sports world right now.

In an attempt to make up for it, here are 10 things I LOVE about the sports world:

(10) I love that the Panthers didn't let receiver Steve Smith hit the free-agent market. He's their best player, and his re-signing shows the team is serious about trying to make another Super Bowl run in their near future. The team has other needs, but re-inking Smith was the biggest.

(9) I love that the zone defense died and went away from the NBA. For a while, there seemed to be a push to inundate the league with set-shooters - can you say Bryce Drew? - who offered nothing in the way of the style of play that made the NBA popular.

Look, you wanna see zones and set shots you can get at the local Y? Watch the college kids. You wanna see the best athletes in the world go head-to-head and make fans scream in wonderment? Keep the NBA the way it is.

(8) I love that the three players who transferred from Baylor after last year's ugly scandal, including the murder of a teammate, have prospered.

Lawrence Roberts (Mississippi State), John Lucas III (Oklahoma State) and Kenny Taylor (Texas) are playing vital roles for their new teams. They have a combined record of 67-10. At Baylor, they never had a winning season.

(7) I love that they finally built a statue of Magic Johnson in Los Angeles. The man gave the Lakers - and the NBA - a new face when he entered the league in 1979. He's given his heart and soul to the franchise. If Michael Jordan had a statue, Magic definitely needed a statue.

(6) I love that baseball is getting tougher on steroid users. Baseball would be nothing without its statistics. And if the statistics have been attained because of steroids, the game becomes a farce.

Now, if baseball could just do something about that stupid designated hitter ...

(5) I love George Steinbrenner. And I hate the Yankees. Thing is, Steinbrenner represents everything a sports owner should be. The recent acquisition of Alex Rodriguez is the latest example.

Steinbrenner spends the money to make his team better, which ultimately makes fans happy. Steinbrenner plays within the rules. He puts the best product on the field. Now, tell me: How happy would Charlotte Hornets fans have been if former owner George Shinn shared that philosophy?

(4) I love that it's getting closer to time for the Charlotte Bobcats to start assembling their team. No, the expansion draft isn't

Please see **TEN/2C**