

Panthers re-sign WR Smith, DE Wallace

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Rams in double overtime in the playoffs and a 39-yard touchdown catch against the Patriots in the Super Bowl.

"Steve came out and exploded in the second half of the season and became one of the top receivers in the

league," Panthers general manager Marty Hurney said.

He also returned punts and worked part-time on kickoff returns last year.

Smith said his next goal is to make sure he lives up to his new contract.

"I want to be considered a productive player and not just a one-hit wonder," he said. "I think I've had three pretty good seasons here and I want to add on six more."

Wallace, who had 38 tackles, five sacks, nine quarterback pressures and two

interceptions last season, was content to re-sign with Carolina instead of exploring the free agent market even though he will again backup Julius Peppers and Mike Rucker.

"At this stage in my career being somewhere where I'm

wanted and appreciated is a big deal for me," Wallace said. "I feel like I fit in here."

Hurney said the Panthers would look to extend quarterback Jake Delhomme's contract in the next couple of months after the free agent market calms down.

The team was also trying to re-sign guard Jeno James, tight end Kris Mangum, cornerback Reggie Howard, safety Deon Grant and linebacker Greg Favors before Wednesday, before they became unrestricted free agents.

Ten things I love about sports include Paul Silas' honesty

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until June, and it will be years before the Bobcats are competitive. But simply knowing that this will be the last winter in the Queen City without pro basketball is comforting.

(3) I love that St. Joseph's still is undefeated. For one, St. Joe's (26-0 at press time) is making college football's Bowl Championship Series, which only rewards "major" teams and keeps so-called mid-majors from competing for national titles, look even sillier. The moral

to the story: Small schools really can play with the big boys, if they get a chance to compete between the lines in a tournament - and away from the computers.

(2) I love that the CIAA Tournament still is one of the best things going. I went to the tournament this year figuring things had fallen off a little. It was just the opposite. The celebrities still walk among the fans as if they're old classmates. The basketball is still exciting. And the tournament still tries to

empower people. Awesome.

(1) I love that former Hornets coach Paul Silas had the strength to admit he's a recovering alcoholic.

Recently, reporters asked Silas if he had interest in signing ex-Celtic Vin Baker, who was waived because of well-documented drinking problems. Silas shocked people, saying he drank heavily as a player, from 1964-1980.

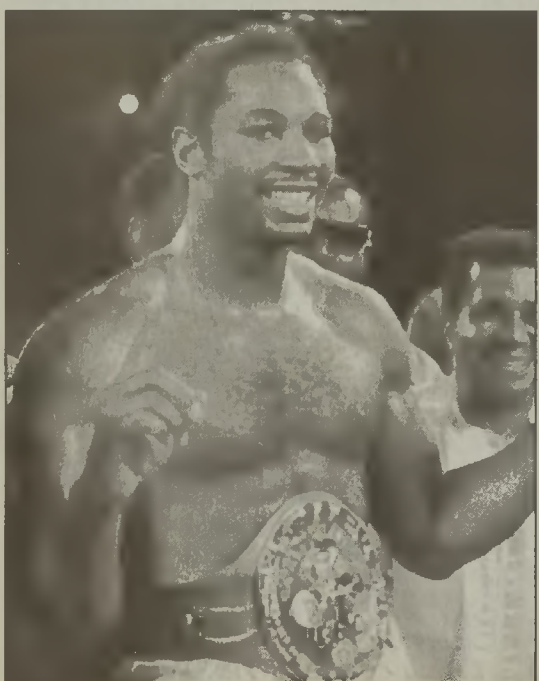
"After every game, there was beer in the

locker room," Silas told reporters. "... I'd have five or six beers before I left the locker room."

There was no reason to admit it, especially since Silas had moved on and privately built on his classy reputation in recent years. But this was the best way of letting Baker - and other alcoholics - know they aren't alone and that they can overcome.

That's impact.

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FILE PHOTO

With Lennox Lewis retired from boxing, the next heavyweight champion will likely come from a crowded field of hopefuls.

With Lewis out, it's heavyweight time

By Tim Dahlberg
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

With Lennox Lewis gone, it's suddenly a good time to be a heavyweight.

Promoter Don King's planned announcement Tuesday of two title fights means all three major titles will be in play in April, along with most of the top heavyweight contenders and pretenders.

The best of the fights may be the one saved for last, when Vitali Klitschko and Corrie Sanders meet April 24 for the WBC title that Lewis gave up when he retired last month rather than fight Klitschko in a rematch.

Klitschko's brother, Wladimir, will fight two weeks earlier, and IBF champion Chris Byrd and WBA champion John Ruiz

will defend their titles in between on a card at Madison Square Garden.

About the only heavyweights not fighting are oldsters George Foreman and Larry Holmes, though both say they want back in the ring, too.

The winner of the Klitschko-Sanders fight will likely be considered the true heavyweight champion, though those in the Ruiz and Byrd camps will argue that their fighters should be given proper due.

King isn't doing Ruiz and Byrd any favors by matching them in what could be two ugly fights on an April 17 card at Madison Square Garden.

Byrd will fight disgraced heavyweight Andrew Golota, now on the comeback trail, while Ruiz will defend his title against Fres Oquendo, who will be getting his sec-

ond straight title shot after losing to Byrd last September.

Ruiz became the WBA champion again only after Roy Jones Jr., who beat him last March, decided to move back down to light heavyweight.

With Lewis gone, most of the excitement in the heavyweight ranks surrounds Klitschko, who was beating Lewis last June on all three scorecards before he was stopped because of bad cuts after the sixth round.

The 6-foot-6 Ukrainian, who now lives in Los Angeles, will not only have another shot at the WBC title against Sanders, but also get a chance to pay Sanders back for knocking out his brother a year ago in a major upset to win the fringe WBO title.

The two will meet at the MGM Grand Hotel on April

24. Two weeks earlier, Wladimir Klitschko will fight Lamont Brewster for the WBO title at the Mandalay Bay hotel-casino in Las Vegas.

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