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# SPORTS

Business 8C

Section

## Panthers' Smith returns to form

To put it bluntly, it was one stinking NFL preseason game.

In this city, however?



C. JEMAL HORTON

From talk-radio shows to watering holes to barber shops, folks have been rejoicing about how good the Carolina Panthers looked in last Saturday's 28-10 victory over Washington at Bank of America Stadium.

Such an over-the-top reaction to a preseason victory is to be attributed, in large part, to the fact that the Panthers went a pitiful 7-9 last season, one year after making it all the way to the Jackson Bowl... I mean, Super Bowl.

Nonetheless, there indeed is a legitimate reason for giddiness around here after that preseason victory. And its name is Steve Smith.

The team's sole playmaker, it appears, is back. For real.

Finally, the football portion of this city can exhale.

I mean, come on. We figured quarterback Jake Delhomme would be good. And we knew the Panthers defense, with guys such as Julius Peppers and Mike Rucker and (a healthy) Dan Morgan on the field, would be fine.

But Smith? There still were so many questions about whether he would be fully recovered from a broken left leg that kept him on injured reserve pretty much all of last season. But Smith answered them.

It's not that he caught long, dreamy touchdown passes last Saturday. In fact, he actually dropped a pass that he had a good chance of running into the end zone.

No, it was just in the way Smith looked like his flashy, cocky, I'm-better-than-you self. He caught an early quick pass from Delhomme and exhibited his familiar burst of speed, delivering his trademark stiff arm to the defender as he scooted out of bounds.

And, then, it happened. As Smith turned head toward the huddle, he took the football and gave it a signature spin on the ground.

THAT swagger, that ability to make a short gain resemble a work of art, was what this team had been missing last year. "I think Steve Smith has proven what kind of player he is when he's healthy," Panthers coach John Fox said after the exhibition. "I think it was pretty evident he was healthy (last Saturday)."

Smith, who finished with two catches for 18 yards and one punt return for a scintillating 11 yards, agreed with that sentiment. "It felt good to be out there producing, especially with my teammates," Smith said. "It's exciting to be out there, but we're missing a special guy — Stephen Davis. Once he gets back out there, we'll be complete."

Davis, a star running back who still is missing time with a knee injury, certainly will help the Panthers when he returns. However, there is a huge difference between

See SMITH/3C

## Got Smart: Special teams aces boosts Panthers



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Rod Smart's (32) return from knee surgery provides an immediate upgrade for the Carolina Panthers' special teams.

By C. Jemal Horton THE CHARLOTTE POST

All the pomp and circumstance going on inside Bank of America Stadium Saturday night hadn't even gotten a chance to settle down.

Nonetheless, Rod Smart had a point to make.

And, well, it took the Carolina Panthers' star special-teams player and reserve running back roughly six seconds to do it.

BOOM! Washington's Antonio Brown was heading up the field with the opening kickoff

of Saturday's exhibition game, when the 5-foot-11, 201-pound Smart smashed into him with the violence of a play-fight between Whitney Houston and Bobby Brown.

The hit sent Brown to the ground immediately and served as a clear indication that Smart, who spent most of last season on injured reserve with a knee injury, was back to his familiar form.

"That's the way you do it! Right off the bat!" Smart said with a broad grin after the Panthers' 28-10 victory. "You

have to let people know that you're going to be your old self. I established myself early tonight. That was cool."

Smart paused and smiled again.

"After last year, you just don't know how good it feels to be back on the field."

If Smart's opening sequence was a foreshadowing of how good he will be this season, then it also means the Panthers' special teams are going to be among the league's best once again.

Losing Smart in the third game last season was a See SMART/2C



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Johnson C. Smith head coach Daryl McNeill will decide on a starting quarterback among three candidates: Senior Edvard Jean (from left) and freshmen Rodriguez Patterson and Carlton Richardson.

## Quarterback derby

J.C. Smith's offensive options hinge on inexperienced trio

By Herbert L. White herb.w@thecharlottepost.com

Experience is a rare commodity among Johnson C. Smith quarterbacks.

Of the three candidates participating in preseason drills — senior Edvard Jean and freshmen Rodriguez Patterson and Carlton Richardson — only Jean has taken a snap in college. But coach Daryl McNeill believes a serviceable starter can be developed quickly if someone emerges as the frontrunner.

"The thing we want to do is keep pushing those kids and make them think they are going to start," he said. "One will, but we feel like all three (non-starters) of them will be ready to start."

After a week of competition, it's hard to handicap the derby. Jean (1-of-12, 9 yards, 2 interceptions in 2004) is the only holdover from spring drills, but Richardson (Columbia, S.C.) can have an immediate impact. A backup for most of his high school career, Richardson

had a throw for over 2,000 yards as a senior and has the size at 6-foot-2 and arm strength to provide an upgrade over last year.

"It's definitely open," he said. "Edvard hasn't taken many snaps as a college quarterback going into his senior year. Carlton Richardson hadn't taken a lot of snaps going into his high school (senior) year. We're in a situation where these guys are going to really, really compete for that position."

The starter will have one of the CIAA's better receivers in Marquis Belton to See J.C. SMITH/2C

## Aggie-Eagle labors on with new date

By Bonitta Best THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

RALEIGH — The CIAA is gone, and the MEAC has yet to make its debut and economic impact.

That leaves the Aggie Eagle Classic as the biggest black college sports event in the Triangle. The football

game Division I-AA N.C. A&T State against Division II N.C. Central is Sept. 5.

Unlike the CIAA tournament, Aggie-Eagle fans just want to kick some serious behind on the field — whether it's the game or the halftime battle of the bands. It's about bragging rights among players, friends, relatives, neigh-

bors, dogs, cats, you name it.

"I'm still very excited," said A&T alum Lonnie "Tre" Spinks, 33, who has attended every Aggies-Eagles game since childhood. "They are serious about their bands and we're serious about ours, they send messages back and we send messages back; it's not just the football, it's

the whole hype."

Despite dwindling attendance, the game has been good to Raleigh. In 2002, the last economic impact report on the classic by the Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau, the event brought an estimated \$3.2 million to the local economy and 43,000 fans.

## HELLO, DARLING

Since replacing Staley, Sting point guard has blossomed

By Aaron Summer THE CHARLOTTE POST

Three minutes, one field goal attempt, no points.

For Helen Darling, her July 29 box score was all too familiar. Since her February trade to the Charlotte Sting, playing time had been scarce, opportunities to shine few and far between.

The lack of time was through no fault of Darling's, nor was it an indication of her skills. The point guard just had the misfortune of backing up a women's basketball legend, Olympian and Sting cap-

tain Dawn Staley.

But just three days after that paltry performance against Seattle, everything changed. In an attempt to give their aging star a shot at a championship, the Sting traded Staley to the Houston Comets. The move left Darling as the only point guard on Charlotte's roster. In the following game at Washington, Darling logged 39 minutes, surpassing her total from the prior six games combined.

Darling took full advantage of the opportunity to start, generously

See DARLING/3C



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Helen Darling's minutes and production are up since replacing Dawn Staley at point guard.

## HBCU sports finally noticed

Black college sports is hot. Really hot. Really, R-E-A-L-L-Y hot!

Why is it so hot? Because white folks, i.e. advertisers have discovered it. We all know nothing is legit until white people "get it" — right?

Black Entertainment

Television, ESPN, CSTV, NBC and the Black Family Channel all want a piece of the HBCU action. On second thought, cancel out the BFC, formerly



BONITTA BEST

MBC Network but still owned by Shaw alumnus Willie Gary. We probably won't be seeing too many more games on that channel since rumor has it paychecks roll out slower than molasses over there.

Talk about BET all you want — and you should — but the network has broadcast black college games long before anybody else. NBC televises the Bayou Classic featuring Southern versus Grambling. It took the CIAA 60 years for ESPN to notice the conference. Now it and CSTV are battling it out for the black sports market.

So what took so long?

"The change occurred a couple of years ago," said Eric Moore, publisher of HBCUsports.com. "The success of black college teams began to get noticed on a much larger scale."

So true. Despite the turmoil swirling over at Florida A&M, it was only six years ago that the Rattlers were two games away from the NCAA Division I-AA championship.

ESPN came sniffing for the CIAA after the tourney was profiled in USA Today a couple of years ago.

See, when black people see a crowd of black fans, we think "Dang, somebody must be having a good time. Where's the party?"

White people look at a crowd of black fans and think "CHA-CHING!" Then they start plotting.

Sadly, though, when it comes to whites relating to blacks, even in 2005, you'd be amazed at how many don't know Martin Luther King Jr. from Martin Luther the protestant.

The same with advertisers. Somebody has to teach them.

"Local advertisers who may have had a successful experience with a black college event have gotten perhaps promoted up to a regional or national level, See BLACK/2C