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SPORTS

Section

Panthers have new issues to start year

There's no need to blame Sports Illustrated or New Orleans voodoo dolls for all the bad that's happened to the Carolina Panthers in recent days.

This football team simply has issues.

Already.

From Kris Jenkins' season-ending knee injury, to the way Carolina was playing defense BEFORE Jenkins went down, to the embarrassing performance every

Panther except Stephen Davis and Steve Smith put forth in that 23-20 loss to the Saints last Sunday.



C. JEMAL HORTON

If only Sports Illustrated knew what it was getting

itself into when it put the Panthers on the cover and anointed them the next Super Bowl champion,

I know, I know. It's only been one weekend of regular-season football, and the Panthers still are good enough to win the NFC South and make a deep run into the postseason.

I honestly believe those things.

But there is much work to be done. Just because the Panthers are that good and the season is still young, there's no reason to just yawn in contentment after the way this team played last Sunday. Especially since the reigning Super Bowl New England Patriots are coming to Bank of America Stadium this week.

Is it time to panic? Of course, not. Since we're only 1/16th of the way through the season, the Panthers definitely still are in the playoff hunt. It's merely time for this city and this team to take a deep breath and say: *You know what? We're good enough to have a magnificent season and make it to the Super Bowl ... and we now realize we're vulnerable enough to finish in the lower tier of the conference, if we're not careful.*

Here's the understatement of the year: Against the Patriots, the Panthers simply cannot do what they did against the Saints.

Eleven penalties for 84 yards? Four turnovers? Playing inconsistently enough to lose to a team that barely knew where it was going to be sleeping later on in the week because of Hurricane Katrina?

It's the things seasons from hell are made of.

And in come the Patriots, who are not that far away from replacing the Dallas Cowboys as "America's Team." But the Patriots are that respected, that beloved because they hardly ever have days like the Panthers had last Sunday. Not that the Patriots are incapable of having a below-average game. They just rarely ever have a poor game mentally. And that's where the Panthers have to improve.

"(The Patriots and the Saints) are two different teams," Panthers defensive end Julius Pepper said. "The Patriots are going to be disciplined. They're going to be a good football team. We're going to have to work even harder to clean up the stupid mistakes that we made."

And, well, there's a Manute-Bol-long list of stupid mistakes the Panthers

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PHOTO/CURTIS WILSON

Johnson C. Smith freshman quarterback Carlton Richardson saw extended playing time for the first time last week against Benedict. He completed 5-of-18 passes for 60 yards.

No offense, but time to move on

Task of sparking Bulls falls to freshman QB

By Herbert L. White
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Carlton Richardson has earned a trial by fire. The Johnson C. Smith freshman played the majority of downs at quarterback in the Golden Bulls' 26-11 loss to Benedict last week in Columbia, S.C. He'll likely do more of the same Saturday against Virginia Union at Belk Complex as the Bulls try to develop offensive consistency.

Game time is 6 p.m. at Irwin Belk Complex. "I'm looking at it as an opportunity," Richardson said. "Coming into a college league, a lot of people didn't think I was going to be able to (play immediately), so I was just coming in, here trying to prove myself and make our team

better...so we can win as many games as possible."

Smith (0-3) probably doesn't have much choice. The Bulls were short on experience with senior Edvard Jean the only quarterback to throw a collegiate pass when the season started. Head coach Daryl McNeill indicated last week his willingness to get Richardson and fellow freshman Rodriquez Patterson more playing time.

The Bulls had their best offensive game of the season with 203 yards, yet came up empty twice inside Benedict's 10.

"That was tough," said Richardson, a Columbia native who completed 5-of-18 passes

See FRESHMAN/2C

Coast couldn't be clearer for Bonds

By Jim Litke
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The coast couldn't be much clearer. The nation's attention is still riveted on New Orleans, the NFL just kicked off in earnest, BALCO is an all-but-forgotten acronym, and Rafael Palmeiro's recent turn as the villain in baseball's long-running steroids drama has

quenched some of the audience's thirst for revenge.

What better time for Barry Bonds to make his comeback?

Only a cynic would suggest the timing of the San Francisco slugger's return Monday, after three knee surgeries since Jan. 31 and an extended stay on

See THE COAST/2C



Bonds



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Carolina Panthers strong safety Thomas Davis struggled in pass coverage in the season opener against New Orleans.

Welcome to the big league, kid

Panthers safety T. Davis learns hard lessons early

By David D. Dawson
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Thomas Davis, the Carolina Panthers' rookie strong safety is obviously going to make some mistakes this year. It's also obvious that the former Georgia Bulldog is going to make some great plays this year too.

Davis, who is the only rookie starting for the Panthers, struggled against New Orleans Saints' tight end Ernie Conwell, who caught a career-best six passes for 71 yards in the season opener. Not surprisingly, he has learned from his mistakes and moving forward.



Davis

"We have a lot to play for this season. That was just a minor bump in the road. I just say to myself that I have to be better prepared next week. It's nothing that I can dwell on. If you're going to improve, you're going to have to come out and play harder next week," said Davis.

When in doubt, Davis turns to veterans Mike Minter and Marlon McCree for support.

"The whole secondary has helped me out since I'm a rookie. Whenever I have a question, those are the guys I can go talk to. They have just been there for me, so I am going to just keep using my resources,"

See ROOKIE/3C

Hornets owner not ready to abandon New Orleans

By Eddie Pells
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW ORLEANS - New Orleans Hornets owner George Shinn says he is far from ready to abandon the hurricane-ravaged city despite the obvious difficulty in playing home games near the Gulf Coast.

"Our objective is not to abandon ship here or to get out of dodge," Shinn told The Times-Picayune from his summer home in Telford, Tenn. "Our plan is to hope and pray New Orleans rebuilds. And I think it will with everyone's support and the federal money that's coming in there. I think it will be stronger."

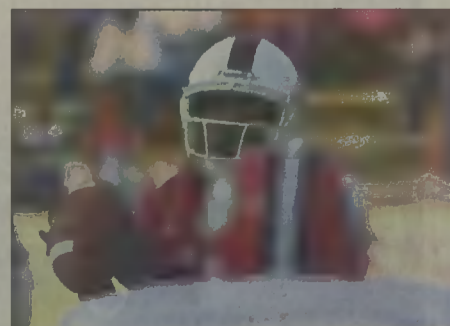
Louisville, Oklahoma City, Kansas City, Nashville and San Diego have extended offers to the Hornets to play their home games in those cities this year.

Shinn said hopes are dimming that Baton Rouge could be used as a possible home venue this season. The Hornets cannot play in the New Orleans Arena because of facility damage and hurricane-related infrastructure problems in the city.

Hornets' representatives informed Shinn that the

See HORNETS/3C

EYE ON OPPORTUNITY



PHOTO/HAROLD TYSON

South Carolina State quarterback Cleveland McCoy sets up to deliver a touchdown pass in the Bulldogs' 52-12 victory over the Winston-Salem State University Rams on September 10.

