

New season already presents fresh issues

Continued from page 1C made last Sunday - beyond the penalties and turnovers.

There was the last play of the first half, when 16-year veteran wide receiver Ricky Proehl wasn't mentally tough enough to not step out of bounds before he caught what would have been a touchdown pass to tie the score at 14 at half-time.

And there were more than a few times when quarterback Jake Delhomme - who was the cover boy for that Sports Illustrated issue - just couldn't throw the ball low enough for his receiver to catch it.



Peppers

Besides rectifying those kinds of errors, the Panthers have to be mentally tough enough to get past the loss of Jenkins, who's generally considered the best defensive tackle in the game. But remember: The Panthers also are supposed to have one of the best defenses in the league, if not the best defense. So, somehow, the other studs on the defensive line, especially ends Peppers and Mike Rucker, have to find a way to make up for the loss of Jenkins.

A major problem in last week's loss was the defense, which too often allowed the Saints to sustain long scoring drives - and even a critical short drive that led to John Carney's game-winning field goal with three seconds left.

The good thing is all these problems can be fixed rather quickly. The good thing is, coming off season-ending injuries last year, Smith and Davis looked strong. The good thing is we've all seen the Panthers play much better - and smarter - than they did last week.

There won't be any greater test of how much the Panthers have learned from the ugliness of last Sunday than this weekend's game with the Patriots.

Who would have guessed it a few weeks ago when Sports Illustrated threw the Panthers on the cover?

Already, in Week 2, the Panthers have a "statement game."

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GET A GRIP



PHOTO/WADE NASH

West Charlotte High receiver William Rann leaps to pull in a pass in the Lions' win over Harding earlier this month, are scheduled to play Wilmington Hoggard Friday at West Charlotte. That's provided Hurricane Ophelia doesn't prevent Hoggard from making the trip to Charlotte to face the Lions (2-2).

Rookie learns from mistakes

Continued from page 1C said Davis.

"Whenever we watch film together, myself, Mike (Minter) and the coaches we rally around him. He's a rookie, but he has a lot of talent. We try to help him out. He learns real fast. So he has ate up that learning curve as a

rookie coming from college to the NFL. He's already two or three steps ahead of the average rookie. He does not need too much teaching. He's going to be a great safety," said McCree.

Davis stated that he is comfortable at his position and the tempo of the game is

exactly what he expected. With confidence of his skills at strong safety, he wants to be nothing more than a contributing factor for the team.

"I want to contribute to the team where ever I can. What I want to do is to contribute and not hurt this team," said Davis.

Hornets owner not ready to abandon New Orleans

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downtown Rivercenter and the LSU Assembly Center in Baton Rouge might be unavailable because of their current use as evacuation shelters and medical facilities.

"The thing everybody's got to remember is our goal is simple. We want to play in New Orleans. That's our home. But we can't. We

can't come back even if the facility was clean because there's nobody else there. The city will come back. We don't know how long it will take, therefore we've got to find a temporary home," Shinn said.

Shinn said he hopes to have a decision on where the Hornets will play home games during the upcoming week.

PLAYOFF STRETCH

Guillen questions Nationals teammates' commitment

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - Without naming names, without going into specifics, Washington Nationals outfielder Jose Guillen said after Sunday's 9-7 loss to Atlanta that he has doubts as to how much some teammates care about winning.

"Lots of times, you really need guys for motivation, guys trying to help your teammates. Lots of times, you see a lot of guys, they don't really care," Guillen said. "But what can you do? It's a long season. Probably, a lot of guys here are tired, probably want to go home."

At first, Guillen said he would keep his thoughts to himself about why the Nationals were 23-40 since beginning the season 50-31.

"I really want to speak my mind out, but it's been a great year, and I have a great relationship with these guys, and I'm going to eat it and swallow it, because hopefully, good things are going to happen," Guillen said.

A few moments later, though, he said: "It's not even close to the team we had in the first half."

Asked what has changed, Guillen responded: "What do you think? Everything."

• AILING PATTERSON: Right-hander John Patterson was sweating whether he would make his scheduled start Tuesday at the New York Mets because of a sinus infection.

"I'm weak, I've lost weight, and I haven't played catch," said Patterson, adding that he's dropped about eight pounds.

"I don't want to hurt myself or jeopardize the team," he

said. He left his last start, Thursday against Florida, after giving up seven runs in 4 2/3 innings, then skipped his normal off-day bullpen session Saturday.

"Rumor is he feels like he won't be able to go until Friday," manager Frank Robinson said. "I'm not worried about it. I'll deal with it when it comes."

The Nationals already are without two starters because of arm problems, Ryan Drese and Tony Armas Jr.

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Express	\$1.55	\$1.65	Gold Rush	FREE	FREE
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