

C

SPORTS

Section

Bill Lester has recorded his first top-five finish and broke the \$1 million earnings mark in NASCAR's Craftsman Truck Series.



NASCAR IMAGES

Keep on truckin': Lester makes strides

By Herbert L. White
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Bill Lester is having his best NASCAR season, but he's not satisfied.

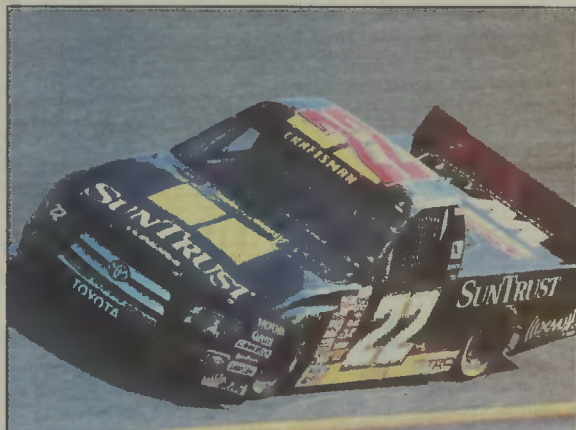
Lester, who drives in the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series, is the only African American in a top-level racing series. Although 2005 has been his best campaign, he doesn't have what he wants most - a win.

"I'm pretty hard on myself," he said. "I strive to get everything we

deserve. I guess I shouldn't look at things as half empty instead of half full."

Although the number of prominent black drivers in motorsports is miniscule, a few pioneers have blazed trails.

In stock car racing Wendell Scott was the first and only African American to win a race in NASCAR's top division, in 1963 in Jacksonville, Fla. Among open wheel series, Willy T. Ribbs was the first black to race at the See LESTER/2C



NASCAR PHOTO

Bill Lester is a rarity in big-league motorsports as a driver in one of NASCAR's top divisions. See LESTER/2C

Second banana in hoops country

Around these parts, the big question isn't "What should we expect when the Charlotte Bobcats open training camp in Wilmington next week?"

The real question on most Charlotteans' minds is this: "When the heck will Jake Delhomme stop making so many bad plays so the Carolina Panthers can get on track?"



C. JEMAL HORTON

Sorry, Bob, Bernie and the Bobcats - the Queen City has been morphed into a bona-fide football town. It's become the kind of town that helps places of worship clear out a little bit faster during autumn Sundays.

Football's a bigger deal here.

Kelly Tripucka and J.R. Reid must be spinning in their mansions.

So the real task the Bobcats face heading into their second season as an NBA franchise isn't making a playoff run or beating the Miami Heat when Shaq comes to town during the regular season - Jan. 27 and March 6, for the millions of you who care.

The biggest challenge the Bobcats face is turning Charlotte back into a basketball town.

It can be done. Especially with the Panthers' defense playing so pitifully nearly a quarter of the way into a season many felt would end with a Super Bowl appearance. The tools for the Bobcats to make Charlotte return to its basketball roots already have fallen into place.

For starters, there is the brand-new, fancy-schmancy Charlotte Bobcats Arena.

Uptown's newest structure is supposed to be one of the NBA's best. Consequently, there will be a large segment of people from all over the region who buy a ticket at least one time, just so they can see what the place looks like. While they're there, it's the Bobcats' job to make them want to come back to watch some hoops.

And I'm not necessarily talking about winning games.

Sure, at some point, perhaps five years down the line, people in this town will have reason to expect the Bobcats to win a certain number of games, if not compete for a spot in the Eastern Conference playoffs. But most everyone knows that time is not during the franchise's second season.

The things that will be expected are effort, a strong Please see BOBCATS/3C



PHOTO/CURTIS WILSON

Johnson C. Smith receiver Velton Bennett counts down the seconds during the Golden Bulls' 26-11 loss to Benedict earlier this month. Smith is 0-5 and last in the CIAA West.

Oh to the no

Winless Bulls, Bears play to escape basement

By Herbert L. White
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The good news about black college football's oldest rivalry is that somebody's going to get their first win of the season.

The bad news: The loser's chances of breaking through will be very slim for the rest of 2005.

Winless Johnson C. Smith and Livingstone, whose rivalry dates back to 1892, will play for the 71st time Saturday at Belk Complex at 6 p.m. The Golden Bulls lead the series 37-29-4, but Livingstone won last year in Salisbury 16-10. Smith's last win - against anyone - was a 21-19 homecoming victory over the Blue Bears in 2003, 18 games ago.

"The bottom line is just executing our plays and doing things we (have) to do," Bulls coach Daryl McNeill said. "We've just got to be able to grow up and do the right thing and mentally be able to take some things from the practice field to the game."

Neither team has done enough of that. Smith lost to St. Paul's (2-3, 1-1 CIAA) 27-7 last week at home to drop the Bulls to 0-9 all-time at Belk. The Bulls' defense forced turnovers that put the ball deep in St. Paul's territory, but the offense continues to struggle.

See JCSU/2C



McNeill

WR Smith steps up his game

By David D. Dawson
THE CHARLOTTE POST

The Carolina Panthers receiver has two games with over 100 receiving yards, with 138 yards against New Orleans and 170 yards and three touchdowns to set a career high against Miami. Smith has shown that he has matured as a player and is having fun on the field.

"I've always had fun. My direction of how I would channel that was my biggest problem. I understand that I can't get all rallied up. I just have to go out there and have fun and play," said Smith.

Smith moved into third place on the Panthers all-time receiving list with 181 receptions and 14 touchdown catches, surpassing wide receiver Mark Carrier, who recorded 176 receptions and 13 touchdown catches from 1995-1998. Smith needs 10 yards receiving to better Carrier's career mark of 2,547 yards receiving for third place.

Head coach John Fox sees Smith as one of the leaders on the team that leads by example.

"During my tenure, Steve has always been a big play guy. He's made some very big plays for us ... this season," Fox said. "I think guys look to that and they respect that about him. I think he does lead by example in that way. He shows up ready to play and give everything he has."

Statistically, Smith is also exemplifying that he is

See SMITH/2C



Smith



PHOTO/CURTIS WILSON

Carolina Panthers receiver Steve Smith has gone over 100 yards receiving twice in three games. He's within 10 yards of third place on Carolina's career receiving yards list.

76ers' Iverson still craves an NBA championship

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SHANGHAI, China - Even after the scoring titles, the Olympics, Most Valuable Player awards and rookie of the year honors, Allen Iverson still craves the "big one."

"I have the same goal every year. And that's just to win a championship," the Philadelphia 76ers point star told reporters during a visit

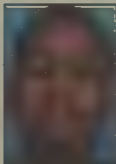
to Shanghai.

"I've accomplished a lot of individual goals in my career ... But I haven't accomplished the main goal, which is to win a championship and that's all I focus on every season," said Iverson, now set to enter his tenth season in the NBA.

Visiting China's largest city on a promo-

tional tour, Iverson was asked whether his chances of accomplishing that goal would be boosted by a partnership with Shanghai's hometown hero Yao Ming of the Houston Rockets. The answer: No question.

"I think if Yao Ming was on my team, we'd probably have a 100 percent chance of winning an NBA championship," Iverson said.



Iverson