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# SPORTS

Business 8C

Section

## OK to call out middling Panthers

It's going on two decades since Charlotte became a major-league sports city.

Oh, don't get me wrong, Charlotte's always had a big-league mind-set. And we've had our share of national sports celebrities live and work here. I mean, is there a more accomplished sports figure than "Nature Boy" Ric Flair? What about all those millionaire race-car drivers?

Charlotte was big time in the Carolinas a long time ago.

Unfortunately, though, people living in, say, the Midwest, still mistook us for Charleston, S.C., and Charlottesville, Va.

This country didn't start showing us any major-league love until 1988, when the Charlotte Hornets joined

the NBA. And things heightened in 1995, when the Carolina Panthers entered the NFL. After all, those were supposed to be REAL mainstream sports celebrities.

Perhaps that's why the professional athletes around here have been treated so ... well ... kindly. Too many people here still feel fortunate to have mainstream sports celebrities walking around town.

Typically, folks in this region - including the media - don't hassle pro sports stars too much for giving below-average performances on the field of play. Sports stars here only truly get taken to task when they mess up OFF the field of play (see: Carruth, Rae).

It's time for fans here to make a change.

It's time to stop babying your sports stars and demand more of them when they mess up.

I'm not saying to treat your athletes like pariahs. But you do deserve to look at them with a more critical eye when they continually perform below their capabilities - and it seems the Panthers fall into that category far too frequently lately.

Charlotte, you've had a Super Bowl appearance. You've won NBA playoff series. You've hosted the NBA All-Star Game.

You've earned the right to be ornery.

I know: It's not as if you've always been cherubs or something. It wasn't all that long ago that you stopped going to NBA games and helped boot one big-league sports franchise the heck outta dodge - even though it was this city's first big-league sports fran-

Please see IT'S/3C

## Pioneer Bowl moving to Charlotte

By Herbert L. White  
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Kerry

Charlotte will host a Division II postseason football game in December.

The Pioneer Bowl will be played Dec. 3 at Memorial Stadium after officials from the SIAC and CIAA decided to move the game from Mobile, Ala., due to damage caused by Hurricane Katrina. The game will be televised live on ESPN Classic.

"Regrettably, we have had to move the Pioneer Bowl from Mobile," CIAA Commissioner Leon Kerry said. "However, we are excited about the prospects of the Pioneer

Bowl in Charlotte. Other locations were considered, however, with the 2006 CIAA tournament coming to Charlotte, we already know the Queen City is one of America's great sports cities."

The Pioneer Bowl was played in Mobile for the first time last year to positive fan feedback, but concerns over travel to storm-damaged Alabama forced organizers to look at other options. The game will move back to Mobile in 2006.

"This isn't something we planned," said Jeffrey McLeod, the CIAA's football championship coordinator. "Mobile wasn't hit as hard

(as other areas near the Gulf Coast), but it has some issues and we had to make that decision in the interest of the people who'd have to travel there."

The Pioneer Bowl is the only NCAA-certified bowl game involving historically black college conferences. The first Pioneer Bowl game was played in 1997 in Atlanta when Kentucky State beat Livingstone 30-28. Last year in Mobile, Shaw beat Tuskegee 30-28, ending the CIAA's three-game losing streak to the SIAC.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to show- See CHARLOTTE/2C



DAVIDSON COLLEGE

Davidson receiver Ryan Hubbard has gone over the 100-yard mark in three games this season. He had a career-high 172 yards and three scores against Austin Peay Saturday.

## Catching on

### Davidson's Hubbard emerges as big play threat

By Herbert L. White  
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DAVIDSON - When Ryan Hubbard has the football, good things happen for Davidson's Wildcats.

Hubbard, a sophomore receiver, has three 100-yard receiving games this season, including a career-best 172 yards and three touchdowns on five catches in a 44-6 rout of Austin Peay Saturday. The former Charlotte

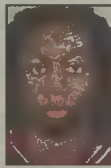
Christian standout had touchdowns of 55, 79 and 27 yards to earn Pioneer Football League receiver of the week honors.

"I just catch the ball when they throw it to me," said Hubbard, who has 18 catches for 449 yards (122.1 per game) and five scores.

"All the wideouts are doing well. They're the people who pull the safety across the field so I can get open. It's all our yards."

Hubbard and senior Jake Rice give Davidson (3-3, 1-0) the PFL's top receiving tandem, with both averaging more than 20 yards per catch. Rice was a proven commodity, but Hubbard is far ahead of last season, where he totaled 180 yards

See DAVIDSON'S/2C



Hubbard

## CB Lucas lives up to shutdown reputation

By Jenna Fryer  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

If the Carolina Panthers had any chance at beating Arizona, someone had to find a way to stop receiver Larry Fitzgerald.

Ken Lucas volunteered. Carolina's cornerback went to the coaching staff before halftime and asked to replace Chris Gamble as Fitzgerald's defender. Fitzgerald torched Carolina's secondary in the first half - he had six catches for 106 yards and a touchdown - and it was clear Gamble couldn't get the job done.

The Panthers made the switch, pulling Gamble and moving Lucas in a pivotal mid-game adjustment that rallied them to a 24-20 victory over the Cardinals. Lucas held Fitzgerald to three catches for 30 yards in the second half.

The free agent addition also created a pair of interceptions and recovered a fumble to set up a score.

"He's been everything we expected," coach John Fox said Monday.

Carolina's first mistake of the game was allowing Gamble to cover Fitzgerald. Gamble injured his ankle during a light Wednesday practice and sat out the rest of the week. Although he said he could play

See LUCAS/2C



Lucas



PHOTO/CURTIS WILSON

Carolina Panthers cornerback Ken Lucas (23) has played up to his billing as a shutdown defender.

## For Bulls' McNeill, third time around hasn't been charming

Johnson C. Smith football coach Daryl McNeill (right) and quarterback Carlton Richardson are struggling through a 0-7 season. The Golden Bulls have lost a school-record 20 games in a row going into Saturday's game at Fayetteville State.



PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

It's hard to compete with your reputation. Johnson C. Smith football coach Daryl McNeill is battling his during the Golden Bulls' 0-7 train wreck of a season.

Smith, loser of 20 straight games and counting, isn't very good. And McNeill, who was brought to campus for the second time to clean up the mess, knows it. What's refreshing is that he'll tell you it'll require players better than the ones he inherited from former coach Tim Harkness.

After loss No. 19 to Livingstone, McNeill said "some of those kids they recruited are not the caliber of athletic kid that I want. Great people, but not the caliber of athlete we need to win football games in the CIAA."



HERBERT L. WHITE

Preach, brother: McNeill, who was 10-10 in his previous two-year stint at Smith, knows his way around a rebuilding project. He went 3-7 his first season, followed by a 7-3 campaign that included reputation-cementing wins over I-AA S.C. State and Winston-Salem State that old-timers still won't forget. The second time around has been more difficult, to put it mildly.

Yes, Smith's defense plays with fire and vigor. But the Bulls are stuck with the CIAA's most impotent offense. It's like owning a hoopty: You know it's going to break down, yet you pray it won't put you down too often. The Bulls are an offensive version of a Yugo.

No one has been able to blow the Bulls out, an accomplishment last year's 0-10 crew didn't get

Please see McNEILL/2C

