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SPORTS

Business 8C

Section

Bobcats sticking with the vision

Long before July 2004, when multi-platinum rapper Nelly became part-owner of the expansion Charlotte Bobcats, a few other NBA teams already had approached him about purchasing a stake in their organizations.



C. JEMAL HORTON

Nelly, however, was waiting on "the right opportunity."

Enter Bobcats owner Bob Johnson, the Black Entertainment Television

founder who had become the first African-American majority owner of a professional sports franchise.

After researching the days when the former Charlotte Hornets regularly led the league in attendance, and having some in-depth conversations with Johnson, Nelly, whose real name is Cornell Haynes Jr., knew that NBA basketball in the Queen City would be an excellent choice for his new business venture.

"Charlotte's a beautiful city with a strong basketball history - that was one of the reasons I agreed to do what I did," Nelly said as he whisked through the bowels of Charlotte Bobcats Arena late last Saturday night with his girlfriend, star R&B singer Ashanti, after the Bobcats' thrilling overtime victory over Boston.

"There were a few teams that wanted me to partake in what they had going on," Nelly said. "But this just felt right. I believed great things could happen here, and I wanted to be a part of it. Charlotte has shown me such much support over my career, so I thought it would be hot."

Sorry, I couldn't resist the temptation to reference one of Nelly's biggest hits and say the Bobcats have a chance to be "Hot in Herre."

But, well, they do. Early in just their second season on the court, the Bobcats appear to be right on course - just as Nelly saw them evolving and, perhaps more important, just as the team's general manager and head coach envisioned.

"The vision was that we were going to build it the right way," Bernie Bickerstaff said. "We haven't changed."

The fact the Bobcats already are showing signs of success is remarkable, considering what this organization faced when Johnson purchased it in 2002, shortly after the Hornets left for New Orleans: Fans were apathetic, Johnson was asking for a new \$265 million arena and several losing seasons were on the horizon.

But the Bobcats already are giving an indication this whole thing is going to work - perhaps well.

Heading into the final two games of a four-game homestand - Wednesday against San Antonio and Friday against Dallas - the Bobcats boasted a record of 2-2.

Even more, the team has injected much-needed excitement into the Queen City, whose sports heart has been exclusively owned by the NFL's Carolina Panthers in recent years. Last Saturday's game featured a big-event atmosphere, with other celebrities besides Nelly and Ashanti in attendance: golfer Fred Couples, actor Will Ferrell and North Carolina coach Roy Williams.

And the fact the Bobcats Please see **FRANCHISE/3C**



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Charlotte Bobcats forward Gerald Wallace is fouled by Andrei Kirilenko in Monday's overtime loss in Charlotte. Wallace suffered a concussion and was expected to miss Wednesday's game.

One first at a time

New building, season agrees with Bobcats

By Aaron Summer THE CHARLOTTE POST

No game is more important than any other. Each win means as much as the one preceding and the next.

Charlotte Bobcats head coach Bernie Bickerstaff has preached such a

mantra to his team from day one, providing the cornerstone for their blue-collar work ethic and attitude.

But Bickerstaff would be hard pressed to discount the importance of a particular win, a 107-105 overtime thriller on Saturday

over the legendary Boston Celtics in the first game ever played at Charlotte Bobcats Arena.

In one momentous night, the Bobcats accomplished something that they never attained in their rookie season - a win-
See **BOBCATS/2C**



Bickerstaff

Golden Bulls hurt early, often

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

Johnson C. Smith basketball is hurting for healthy bodies.

The Golden Bulls have been slowed by injuries during preseason, with shooting guard Prince Parker (toe, hand) Edmund Rainey (knee) and John Fulton (knee) on the shelf to varying degrees. Parker didn't play in last week's 101-59 loss at Clemson while Fulton managed just 13 minutes and Rainey 19. Rainey has been ruled out indefinitely while Fulton is day to day.

"It's not the hand we were looking for, but it's the hand we were dealt," Golden Bulls coach Steve Joyner said.



Joyner

The injuries have forced changes in the lineup with walk-on Travoris Howerton, and seldom-used Darren Ramsey logging more playing time. Howerton scored four points in 27 minutes against Clemson. Ramsey was 0-for-5 in 20 minutes against the Tigers, who limited Smith to 41.2 percent shooting and forced 32 turnovers. Backup guard Jerome Givens led the Bulls with 16 points on 6-of-8 shooting, followed by forward Charles Clark's 12 points on 4-of-6 shooting.

"The thing you can't plan for is injuries," Joyner said. "We're hoping that the plus side will be more experience for the guys who now
See **INJURIES/3C**

BEARCATS RULE THE ROCK



PHOTO/HAROLD TYSON

Rock Hill Bearcats hoist the Rock Hill City Championship trophy and celebrate the Bearcats victory over the Northwestern Trojans. The Bearcats won the final City Championship between the two schools by a score of 21-6. The Bearcats lead the series, 2219 wins. A third high school opens in Rock Hill next year.



LIVINGSTONE COLLEGE

Livingstone cross-country athlete Darius Shade won the Southeast Region championship.

Champ runner has it made in Shade

SPECIAL TO THE POST

Livingstone's Darius Shade won the team at the NCAA Division II Southeast Region cross-country championship at Wingate.

Shade, the 2005 CIAA champion, finished the 10K race with a personal best 32 minutes, 14 seconds. Last season, Shade finished as CIAA and region runner-up. He will advance to the NCAA nationals in Pomona, Calif., on Nov. 19.
See **LIVINGSTONE/2C**

Shaw women prepared to maintain hoop dominance

By Bonitta Best THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

Raleigh has been good to Shaw. The Lady Bears have won all three of their championships here.

The basketball tournament moves to its new location in Charlotte next year at the Charlotte Bobcats Arena. Will that spell a new women's champion? Not if coach Jacques Curtis & Co. have anything to say about

it. Shaw (32-2 overall, 16-0 CIAA)

Coach Jacques Curtis had the audience in stitches after his proclamation at the basketball coaches luncheon that he just hoped his team could stay in the middle of the pack.

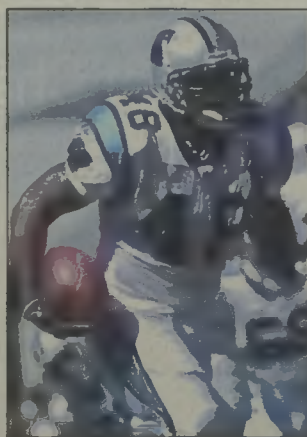
After talking to him this week, he's sticking to his story.

"We're used to dominating, not
See **SHAW/2C**



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Shaw's Bears are looking for a fourth straight CIAA women's basketball championship.



PHOTO/CURTIS WILSON

Running back Stephen Davis averages 3.1 yards a carry, but has 11 touchdowns.

Panthers determined to run away from slide

By David Dawson FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

The Carolina Panthers are dominating on defense, Steve Smith is the league's best receiver and Jake Delhomme is managing the offense.

The running game, however, is ailing.

As they start the second half of their season, the Panthers are looking to improve their running game against the New York Jets on Sunday.

Carolina's ground attack has plummeted in the last few weeks, slipping from ninth in

the NFL at the start of the season to 25th within the last two games, averaging 90.6 rushing yards per game.

The nosedive started in a Week 3 loss to Miami, in which the Panthers only rushed for 62 yards. By the fifth game against Arizona, Carolina dropped four places. In the Detroit and Minnesota victories, the Panthers ran for a combined total of 165 yards to land in 25th place.

With running backs Stephen Davis and DeShaun

See **PANTHERS/3C**