

C. JEMAL HORTON

Franchise has chance to score big with area fans

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actually won the game, marking the first time the team (then 2-1) ever was above .500, made the evening even more spectacular.

"We've got to become worthy (as a team)," Bickerstaff said. "We understand that. And we're willing to do it."

That's why they've got a fighting chance to excel at this.

Because they've got a coach/general manager willing to put the onus on himself, on his team.

Because, now that the C-SET venture is in the past, more people will get to see the quality product the Bobcats put on the floor.

And because that sweet

uptown arena, which features a scoreboard with four 16-foot-high by 28-foot-long LED screens, is going to be a magnet for fans, a facility that will become the talk of the state, if not the region.

The Bobcats can do this. Charlotte — and cities beyond — can help.

"The Carolinas, North and South, are a basketball (region)," Ely said. "I think they're just waiting for a team to come in and take their hearts. Anybody that loves blue-collar basketball, people that work hard, they're going to love us. And I think North Carolina and South Carolina are both going to do that. Hopefully, if we get a couple more wins,

we can get their hearts back."

It will take more than getting this city excited enough to show up for the first games in the new arena, though. While victories still will come sparingly, there has to be enough appeal to make fans show up on a cold Wednesday night when the Atlanta Hawks are in town.

"I think if we keep showing resilience (in Charlotte)," Nelly said, "it's unlimited to what the players can do and what fans will do in their support."

To paraphrase another Nelly hit, just maybe the Bobcats and their fans can do it "Errtime" ... for a long time.

E-mail C. Jemal Horton at see-jemalwrite@aol.com.

Panthers look to run farther

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Foster recovering from injuries, head coach John Fox feels that the running game is still a work in progress.

"By no means do I think we have arrived... There's still room for a lot of improvement and that's something that we're going to continue to work at," Fox said. "I think they are both very talented backs, I think they've proved that to everybody I know in this league. I think DeShaun has been steady throughout the season."

Davis, who has 11 touchdowns, is averaging 3.1 yards per carry, 1.1 yards off his career average. Fox complemented Davis' performance in last week's win against Tampa Bay, whose defense was ranked first in the league against the run. Davis rushed for 48 yards and two touchdowns on 12 carries.

"We did a real good job," Davis said. "The offensive line did a great job... Everybody just went out and played hard in all phases of the game."

Fox said the offensive line did a superb job against the Buccaneers, but feels they have

room for improvement.

"It's probably one of the hardest position groups to gel," he said. "And we had some new guys, new faces in new positions. It takes a little bit of time for them to develop and that's true in both the passing portion in their job description and the run portion... They've continued to improve and they need to continue to improve moving forward."

Foster, Davis' backup, has steadily contributed to the ground attack when called upon. He ran for 51 yards on 12 carries against Minnesota and 48 in the Monday night win over Green Bay.

The Panthers should control the running game against the Jets' 30th-ranked run defense. However, quarterback Jack Delhomme is not taking that for granted.

"We have the Jets, a team with a stout defense, offensively they have some issues with injuries at quarterback," Delhomme said. "Offensively, we're going to have to run the ball well next week and be effective throwing it."

Injuries hamper Bulls early

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have to play more."

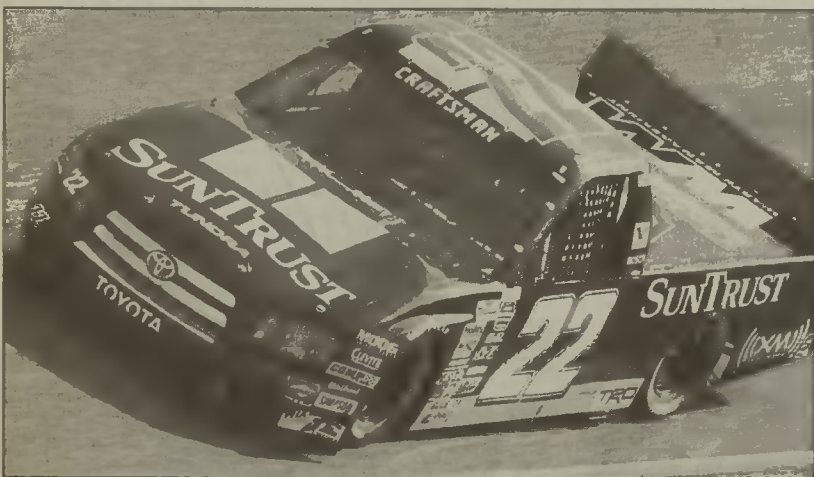
Parker, a former Butler High star who transferred from Division I Delaware State, is expected to give the Bulls consistent scoring and leadership to go with sopho-

more Maurice Hooper at point guard. He should be ready to play when Smith opens the regular season next week at the Tip-Off Classic at Brayboy Gym.

"Prince is a very strong-willed player," Joyner said.

"Players respond differently to injuries, and I think we'll see him soon."

"We're still a work in progress and we have a ways to go," Joyner said. "I think that resulted in us playing poorly at Clemson."



FILE PHOTO

Bill Lester, the only African American driver in NASCAR's top series, made his 100th career start last week at the EasyCare Vehicle Service Contracts 200.

Keep on Truckin': Lester reaches milestone with 100th career start

By Herbert L. White

herb.white@thecharlottepost.com

Bill Lester added another milestone to his NASCAR career.

The Craftsman Truck Series driver started his 100th race Saturday at the EasyCare Vehicle Service Contracts 200 at Atlanta Motor Speedway. Earlier this season, he was the first black driver in NASCAR history to break the \$1 million mark in career earnings.

"Things have definitely been going in the right direction," he said. "Working with crew chief Doug Wolcott and the guys on this 22 team has really been a pleasure. The chemistry has been really strong."

Lester has put together a career season in 2005, with three top-10 finishes, including a career-best fifth place finish at Kansas Speedway in July and has led four laps. He also earned consecutive poles at Kansas and Kentucky.

"Starting up front is a byproduct of what the guys at Bill Davis Racing have provided me," Lester said. "We still have some really

strong races remaining this year and I think we can finish the year on a strong note."

Lester is a racing late-bloomer. A graduate of the University of California-Berkeley, Lester earned a degree in electrical engineering and computer science before landing a job as a project manager at Hewlett-Packard. After racing part-time for several years, he went full time.

"It was not hard to leave high technology to go racing," he said. "Racing is what I wanted to do. High technology was a means to an end. It was a way for me to get a paycheck and go racing. The only difficulty was knowing that I was going from having a paycheck every week to not knowing if I was going to have one in racing."

Now Lester is getting paid as a major league racer. All that's missing is career win No. 1.

"I'm excited to be part of the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series," he said. "It is a series where there is a lot of exposure and good competition, but I have not gotten the win yet, so I am unfilled."

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