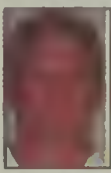


Panthers have one shot at playoff party

Continued from page 1C started. That's the mindset we have to be in position to control our destiny as far as getting into the playoffs," said Fox.



Fox

"Those guys are going to be ready and going to be on that turf. They are going to be looking at what they did first time against us. These guys are definitely focused so we are going to have to go down there and take a win," said safety Mike Minter.

Last week against Dallas, Carolina gave up 214 yards rushing. Cowboys running back Julius Jones, who came

into the game averaging just 3.7 yards per carry, rushed for 194 yards on 34 attempts. Fox attributed the rush defense breakdowns due to more mental than physical breakdowns. The Panthers slipped from fourth to fifth in rush defense in the league.

"That is where the game is really won at. You start with the run and end with the run. You stop a team and make them one dimensional and then the ball moves into your favor. We have to tighten up all around. This team is going to run the ball. So it's not going to be a secret," said defensive end Mike Rucker.

That's the truth. Atlanta does likes to run the ball with Warrick Dunn who averages 5.1 yards per carry with 273 carries for 1,387 yards. Oh,

let's not forget about Vick who is the team's second leading rusher with 101 carries for 597 yards and six touchdowns.

"It's going to be a big and emotional game. It's going to be a dogfight down there. No one is going to come rescue us. We got to do this. We just have to get better and blow up," said Rucker.

The Panthers' window of opportunity to make the playoffs is still open. However, with one game left in the season, it's now open for *deja vu* to. That's why you play the game.

"The key is getting into the tournament... And we still have that opportunity," said Fox.



Riley mulls a weighty idea

Continued from page 1C

"You can't stop him," Hawks center John Edwards said last week after O'Neal scored 28 points in only 24 minutes against Atlanta.

Riley divulged his plan Sunday, after the Heat beat Kobe Bryant and the Los Angeles Lakers 97-92 - a game where O'Neal struggled a bit offensively, shooting 8-of-18 against the likes of Chris Mihm and Kwame Brown and finishing with 18 points.

His comment wasn't designed to express displeasure with O'Neal. Instead, it was borne out of the long-standing frustration Miami has with the way teams defend their behemoth center, perhaps the most physically imposing man to play the game.

The worst-kept secret in the NBA might be this: O'Neal cannot get away with the same tactics teams use against him, even though the rule book states that "contact initiated by the defensive player guarding a player with the ball is not legal. This contact includes, but is not limited to, forearm, hands, or body check."

"I'm sure that everybody will say that I'm just up here trying to complain, but I don't see how he could ever get to the basket," Riley said. "I don't care if he's 340 pounds. They get locked into such a defensive position that they just hold him... Impeding his progress. But he's got to find a way to get around that."

Miami (17-12) got past its showdown with the Lakers, but will soon begin prepping for another major test. After closing a four-game homestand against Milwaukee on Tuesday, the

Heat will visit Detroit - the team that beat Miami in the Eastern Conference finals last season today.

"We still have to learn how to keep leads," O'Neal said. "But it's coming together."

For his part, O'Neal shrugs off the talk about how teams tend to bend the rules when guarding him. And he wouldn't give Mihm and Brown any credit for their defense Sunday, even though he missed six straight shots in one stretch - mostly around the rim.

"It wasn't them. It was me," O'Neal said. "It's never them. It's always me."

Unless Riley is serious and finds some of the biggest sumotori out there, O'Neal probably won't be facing anyone bigger or stronger than him anytime soon. At a recent major tournament in Japan, the average weight of a sumo was 341 pounds - about what O'Neal checks in at.

And whether he signs a couple wrestlers or not, Riley is starting to sound a bit anxious over finding new ways to squeeze more production from O'Neal, who's averaging 18.4 points and 9.6 rebounds, both off his 22.9-point, 10.4-rebound pace of his MVP-runner-up season a year ago.

O'Neal doesn't sound worried quite yet, though.

"Remember, I've only been back a couple weeks," he said, referring to the 18 games he missed with a sprained ankle this season. "I'm still getting there. Not there yet. I'll get there."

Deep talent pool in prep shootout

Continued from page 1C boys' game tipping off at 9:15 p.m.

The tournament also has star power with several high-profile college prospects. Division I signees Charlie Dewhurst of Charlotte Latin (Charlotte) and Stephen Curry of Charlotte Christian (Davidson) will play as will Jerry Hollis and DiJuan Harris of Victory Christian. Christian beat Norcross (Ga.) in last week's Chick-Fil-A Classic in Columbia, S.C., last week Norcross (13-1) is in the Bojangles' field as well.

Top players from around the country like Wayne Ellington and Gerald Henderson (Duke) of The Episcopal Academy (Pa.) and Laurinburg Institute's Chris Douse and Antoine Watson are also among the top collegiate recruits.

Providence Day's girls, which upset No. 19 nationally Winter Haven (Fla.) in the Crescent Bank Holiday Invitational in Myrtle Beach last week, will be among the favorites in their bracket, but South Meck and Harding will contend as well. The girls' draw also has Duke signee Joy Cheek and teammates

Betsy Horowitz and Erica Williamson of South Mecklenburg.

On the Web www.dccharity.org

Why read The Post?

It's essential

"I couldn't imagine being a resident of Charlotte and not subscribing to The Charlotte Post. It covers a wide range of news and serves a vital function for the African American community and for the entire Charlotte community. The Post does a great job in covering the local issues; not just news, but sports and leisure as well."

Chris Weiller, executive vice president for marketing and communications, Charlotte Bobcats

Call (704) 376-0496 to link with news that's important to Charlotte

The Charlotte Post

Information that is always on line, 24 hours a day

www.thecharlottepost.com

The Charlotte Post



OBSSESSED

WITH HOLIDAY SAVINGS

05 CTSs
from \$27,988

04 CTSs
from \$25,988

03 CTSs
from \$21,988

OVER 5 MILLION IN FRESH TRADES AVAILABLE.

PALMER PRE-OWNED

EAST INDEPENDENCE PINEVILLE

1998 Dodge Intrepid	Spotless White	\$3,950	1994 BMW 740i	Extra Clean	\$7,983
1994 Cadillac SLS	Clean	\$4,950	2000 Cadillac Eldorado	Must See, One Owner	\$9,991
1995 Jeep Grand Cherokee	4X4, Really Clean	\$4,988	2002 Cadillac Deville	Fully Loaded	\$13,994
1991 BMW 525	Black & Spotless	\$5,988	2003 Ford Expedition XLT	Fully Loaded, 3rd Row Seat	\$16,991
2001 Chevy Blazer	Sharp	\$7,950	2004 Volkswagen Jetta GLS	Auto, Sunroof, 9K Miles	\$17,991
1998 Cadillac Eldorado	Clean Forest Green	\$10,950	2003 Jaguar X-type	Moonroof, Extra Clean	\$21,991
1999 GMC Sierra Classic	Red & Ready	\$11,950	2003 Cadillac CTS	Sunroof, Navigator	\$23,991
1999 Cadillac Escalade	Bordeaux	\$13,950	2004 Ford Expedition	Eddie Bauer, Fully Loaded, Red	\$23,993
2004 Subaru Forester	One Owner, 4X4	\$15,988	2002 Lexus ES 300	Black, Sunroof, 39K Miles	\$23,993
2002 Lexus ES 300	Pristine	\$17,988	2002 Lexus RX 300	Black, Extra Clean	\$26,982
2003 Cadillac Deville	All Black, Exquisite	\$21,950	2004 Cadillac CTS	Certified 100K Coverage	\$27,991
2003 Cadillac CTS	5 To Choose From	Starting At \$21,950	2005 Chrysler 300C	Hemi	\$29,992
2004 Cadillac SRX	AWD, DVD	\$27,950	2002 Cadillac Escalade	White Diamond, AWD, Low Miles	\$31,991
			2004 Cadillac Escalade ESV	DVD, Navigation, Extra Clean	\$36,991

PALMER BUDGET VEHICLES OVER 25 TO CHOOSE FROM UNDER \$10,000

ARNOLD PALMER

INDEPENDENCE BLVD.
800-241-9653
WWW.CAROLINACADILLAC.COM

Cadillac
OBSESSED WITH EXCELLENCE

SOUTH BLVD.
800-853-0119
WWW.APCADILLAC.COM

BREAK THROUGH

SATURDAY SERVICE & COLLISION CENTER SINCE 1991. CONVENIENT: 8 AM - 5 PM!

TWO LOCATIONS TO SERVE YOU BETTER!

All prices less incentives plus tax, \$66 tag fee and \$499 documentation fee. Photos for illustrative purposes only. On approved credit.