

Art imitates football for Panthers LB

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 in this league, you spend a lot of time in coverage. He's looked fine in the first (week-end) of practices and we think he's a guy who has a bright future for us."

Where Anderson will fit this season is a work in

progress. The Panthers, who lost Witherspoon to free agency and Brandon Short in a salary-cap move, will start two new outside linebackers. Nail Diggs was signed away from Green Bay and Thomas Davis is moving full time to linebacker after splitting

time last year at safety. Anderson will figure into the mix in addition to playing special teams.

"I'm just trying to figure out how everything is going to shake out," he said. "Of course, one of my goals is to come in and start playing,

whether that's special teams or defense, we'll find that out later in the season."

Davis already likes Anderson's work habits, which he said will accelerate his acclimation.

"He's a pretty good cat," said Thomas Davis, who is expected to start at outside linebacker. "He seems to be pretty smart and he goes home every night and he's studying and coming back and answering questions, so that's always good."

Davis said he's leaning on

the veterans in order to soak up as much as possible during coaching sessions, which continue next month in Charlotte. The learning process will continue throughout training camp.

"I liken it to going from JV to varsity," Fox said. "The NFL is bigger, stronger and faster and the game's played fast because you've got veterans who've been doing this for a while. The biggest acclimation is mostly mental where they're learning a new terminology, kind of like

learning a new language and they've got to put in extra time so they can get caught up fast. The guys who do that will have the most success being young players.

Anderson hopes to be one of them.

"There's a lot of opportunity for new guys to come in and play right off the bat" at linebacker, he said. "We've got a lot of leadership with Dan Morgan and Thomas Davis, but you've got some spots for some new guys."

Including an artist.

Currie spices up preseason

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 6-28 record last year, Charlotte will need her to acclimate as soon as possible due to the brevity of a WNBA season.

"I think I need to pick it up as quickly as I can," Currie said. There isn't a lot of preparation time before the season starts and I think I can do that. Muggsy works with me a lot in practice and this system isn't too difficult that I shouldn't be able to. All of us new people are learning the system and adjusting to it pretty well."

Currie has the added bene-

fit of playing in a starting lineup that includes four starters from last year. With Bogues limiting veterans' minutes in preseason, the floor time has helped Currie make the pro transition smoother.

"It's good to be out there with them," she said. "I get to practice with them a lot, they help me a lot. They know the game, they know this system a little bit, so they do whatever they can to help me adjust and fit best into the system."

Currie, who led Duke to a couple of Final Four appear-

ances, isn't shy about her expectations for Charlotte. With fellow rookies Tye'sha Fluker and LaToya Bond expected to make major contributions as well, the goal is to help take the Sting out of the basement and back to respectability.

"I think we've come a long way since the beginning of camp and I think we continue to get better every day in practice," she said. "We won't accept losing. We forgot about last year. This is a new year, and we're looking to do a lot better."

Robinson's impact still felt

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 Americans," said Lofton. "It's important just understanding what he went through, understanding how the game was, the trials and tribulations he went through. I'm just honored to be a part of the game right now and it's all because of him."

Newcombe was a former teammate of Jackie's and was the second African-American to join that Brooklyn team.

The Jackie Robinson Foundation was established in 1973 by Rachel Robinson and some close friends. San Francisco Giants slugger Barry Bonds was on hand and shared a few words with some of the scholars. He even gave a photo op to them. "This is your Kodak moment," said Bonds to one of the scholars. "So take it."

Robinson family. We see them once a year and work on leadership development," she added.

Some scholars from the JRF include Jonas Cleveland of Carnegie Mellon University, Landon Dickey a freshman at Harvard was at Fenway in Boston and Tracy Hadnott, a senior at Stanford was at the As in Oakland.

JRF scholars have a 97 percent graduation rate.

Raymond Pounds is a JRF scholarship recipient. The Cleveland High School (Los Angeles) graduate threw out the first pitch at Dodger Stadium to Lofton.

"It (the scholarship) means a lot. I am grateful for it and it's an honor just representing his name," said Pounds. "It is putting me through college." Pounds is a political science major at UCLA.

Robinson was very proud of our young people. He thought they were very important to society. "Jackie always said, "Get the kids to listen, not hear, listen, then they'll learn," said Newcombe.



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Lakers left to ponder what went wrong in playoff loss

After going up 3-1 on Suns, L.A. implodes at worst time

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 "I don't know what to say," coach Phil Jackson said after his team was routed 121-90 Saturday.

"To be honest, I think some of us came out a little overwhelmed," Luke Walton said. "We're a better team than we showed and should have moved on."



Bryant
 But the Lakers didn't. Instead, they lost a playoff series after holding a 3-1 lead for the first time, and the Suns became just the eighth NBA team to rally from such a deficit.

Jackson, the \$10 million coach brought back this season to try and restore the Lakers to their previous greatness, made strides with a young team.

from there. And hopefully, we can find some pieces that will make us a little bit better next year."

The Lakers played their best ball of the season in the first four games against the Suns, giving superstar Kobe Bryant more help than he could have expected in taking a 3-1 lead.

Game 5 in Phoenix was a wipeout. Then, playing at home, the Lakers had a great shot to win Game 6. But Shawn Marion rebounded a missed shot by teammate Steve Nash and got the ball to Tim Thomas for a game-tying 3-pointer, forcing overtime. The Suns went on to win 126-118.

Then came the disastrous Game 7 in Phoenix.

"It's all growth for us, it's all evolution," said Bryant, who scored 23 points in the first half of Game 7 but just one after that. "I think at the start of the season, nobody expected us to be here. I think the growth that we have, the talent that we have, the upside, is good."

"Kwame Brown obviously has a lot of talent and a lot of potential. He's going to work hard this summer, he'll be better next year. Lamar Odom has stepped up and really turned himself into being one of the best players in this game. We have some good pieces in there."

Brown and Odom made great strides in the last two months, but both looked out of it in the last game, combining to shoot 7-of-24.

Odom said he planned to "watch this game over and over this summer."

"Know what it feels like to lose a game like this on somebody's home court the way we

lost it," he said. "Take that hurt with you in the summer."

Smush Parker emerged from journeyman status to do a decent job opposite Bryant in the backcourt. But for the most part, he played poorly in the last four games, failing to contain Nash and shooting 7-of-37.

"We didn't want to be going this early, but it's a step further than they were last year and next year we're going to be a step further than we are this year," Parker said. "It was a successful season. No one thought we would be in this position. Unfortunately, it had to end this way."

And unfortunately, the way the season ended will be the way it's remembered by many inside and outside the organization. Bryant's 35.4-point scoring average - best in the NBA in 19 years - and staggering 81-point performance are simply footnotes now.

So deficient on the inside a year ago, the Lakers have a trio of 7-footers in Brown, Chris Mihm and young Andrew Bynum.

Brown blossomed while playing center after Mihm severely sprained his right ankle March 12. As it turned out, the absence of Mihm against the Suns perhaps made a difference. There's no telling when the 18-year-old Bynum will be ready to help on a consistent basis.

Less than a week ago, local fans were eagerly awaiting what appeared to be a likely first playoff meeting between the Lakers and Clippers.

The Clippers did their part. The Lakers didn't.

"I'm not disappointed," Clippers star Elton Brand said about not playing the Lakers.

Then, with a smile, he added: "They're disappointed."

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