

Williams fitting in

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experience with the Panthers. Playing behind starter DeShaun Foster, Williams has been practicing with the third, fourth and even fifth teams as he adjusts to the speed of the NFL.

"The holes open and close up fast and everybody is fast," Williams said. "I knew in the Senior Bowl and in college everyone could run, but these are the best players in the world, on one field."

Fox isn't concerned with Williams' learning curve because the plan has always been to bring him along slowly.

"There are a lot of skills to the position it's not just running the ball," Fox said. "You have to understand protections, you have to block when called upon. There is a lot of coaching going on."

Still, Williams has shown flashes of why the Panthers expect him to eventually compete for the top running back job. He was given a five-year contract — it could earn him up to \$9 million — and the time to grow into the position.

"Even though it's only been a few days, you can see he knows how to run the football," quarterback Jake Delhomme said. "He sets up blocks and he goes downhill."

As part of the rookie hazing process, Williams twice had to carry Foster's helmet and shoulder pads inside after practice. Still, he's soaking in Foster's insight.

"DeShaun has helped me read defenses and read certain lanes and how to pick up if defenses are blitzing or bluffing," he said. "In minicamp, guys were flying around, but we didn't have

pads and there wasn't much banging. I know I'll get used to it in a couple of days, I don't have a choice."

Since Williams will be battling for playing time, he wants to get on the field any way he can and has been bugging special teams coach Danny Crossman to let him return kickoffs.

"Every time I pass the special teams coach I say, 'When are we doing kickoff returns, coach?' I bet he's probably tired of hearing that," Williams said.

Having failed to master his ill-placed dorm TV, Williams is looking for other ways to fill the time between practices.

"I gave up. I got an iPod and a radio," Williams said. "I don't even bother trying to watch that TV. You need a pair of binoculars to see it."

MEAC out for redemption

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wild card. The Rattlers were just over .500 at 6-5, but went 5-3 in league play under first-year coach Rubin Carter. With a year's seasoning and the opportunity to recruit, FAMU may be ready to reclaim its spot as one of the conference's best programs.

Bethune-Cookman may have as much talent as anyone in the MEAC, but haven't been able to harness enough to make a run at the title. The Wildcats, like the rest of the league, have to figure out the Hampton-S.C. State axis to really go anywhere.

After several years of futility, Norfolk State can finally see some light, at least to the mid-

dle of the pack. The Spartans improved to 4-7 last year and are primed to do better with tight end Jonathan Allen and cornerback Daniel Hammett leading the offense and defense, respectively.

Even bottom-feeders have to chase something. N.C. A&T, once a marquee program, is regrouping under first-year coach Lee Fobbs. The former Grambling State star and Texas A&M running backs coach has overhauled everything with the departure of 21 seniors, so the Aggies aren't expected to be world-beaters. Morgan State slipped badly last year, and needs to rebound, as does Howard. Their incentive is avoiding the basement.

Dix's challenge: Score on defense

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interceptions."

Dix's growth as a defender also benefits the offense, Richardson said. His work against receivers forces them to run precise routes and quarterbacks to get the ball to them quickly because of Dix's recovery speed.

"He's made me better just

by the way he plays," Richardson said. "He's just a good coverage corner. You can just sit him out on an island all by himself."

Dix isn't taking anything for granted. With the defense switching to a 3-4 scheme, responsibilities and roles are changing. There's also more depth, which

forces everyone to compete.

"I work hard every day because I know the people behind me are just as talented as I am, so that motivates me to work hard and we push each other to work hard," he said. "If I go down, I know the person behind me can get the job done, too."

Case of mistaken identity costly to former basketball star's reputation

By Eddie Pells
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Eddie Johnson is still getting over what he calls the worst day of his life.

He scratched his way out of the Cabrini-Green housing project in Chicago, fashioned a long and successful NBA career, turned that into an opportunity on TV and built a reputation as an all-around good guy who loves to work with kids.

His worst scrape with the law involved a couple of traffic tickets. Now he's dealing with a case of mistaken identity that shocked him and his friends and, he fears, may have permanently sullied his reputation.

"Devastating. Hard to explain," Johnson said Thursday.

Eddie Johnson was mistaken in some media reports for another Eddie Johnson — a retired 10-year NBA player from Florida who was arrested last week and charged with sexually assaulting an 8-year-old girl.

The Eddie Johnson who had nothing to do with that hideous accusation is a former Illinois star who went on to a 17-year career with the Kings, Suns, Rockets and other teams. But when some media reports about the alleged crime included his bio information and file photo linked on the Internet, his phone started ringing.

"The thing that disappointed me the most is some people were overzealous enough to

think it was me and attack me with a ferocity I can't comprehend," Johnson said in a telephone interview from his home in Phoenix. "That's the part that didn't allow me to sleep last night. That's the part that forced me to reach out to as many people as I could and say 'Shame on you, that's not me.'"

Edward Arnet Johnson is 6-foot-8, does color commentary on Suns telecasts during the season, gives motivational speeches and runs basketball clinics for youngsters. He has a DVD that teaches kids how to shoot the jumper. He retired from the NBA in 1999 and is 47.

"He called me really upset about it," said Charles Barkley, a former teammate of Johnson's, who wanted to help him set the record straight. "It's a tough situation. He was on vacation in Hawaii. He gets back and the first thing he knows, he's dealing with this. And he's such a good dude. It's an unfortunate situation."

Edward "Fast Eddie" Johnson, Jr. — the one being held in a Florida jail on sexual battery and burglary charges — is a 6-foot-2, two-time NBA All-Star who played most of his career in Atlanta. An Auburn alum, he retired in 1987 and is 51.

"I feel bad for Eddie Johnson of Phoenix and I feel really badly for Eddie Johnson of Auburn, because he never got his life together," Barkley said.

Krzyewski dislikes 'Dream Team'

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HONG KONG - U.S. national basketball team coach Mike Krzyewski doesn't like his squad being labeled a "dream team."

The term "dream team" surfaced when a first-ever U.S. basketball squad with NBA players, including standouts like Michael Jordan and Earvin "Magic" Johnson, dominated the competition at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona.

Krzyewski's team, which will be playing in the world championships in Japan that start Saturday, has been dubbed "Dream Team VII" — the seventh incarnation of an U.S. basketball team with an NBA lineup.

Asked how the current squad stacks up against the original "dream team," Krzyewski said, "We don't call this a 'dream team.' We call this a national team."

Krzyewski and star player LeBron James were attending a promotional event in Hong

Kong after playing warmup games against China and Brazil in the neighboring Chinese city of Guangzhou.

"The first 'dream team' was a collection of all-stars from different ages. This is really a national team that has young guys," Krzyewski said, adding that there are role players who aren't necessarily big stars on the roster.

"It's a different concept from a 'dream team.' It's a developing team," he said.

Other than James, the U.S. lineup also includes Carmelo Anthony, Dwight Howard, Dwayne Wade, Gilbert Arenas, Brad Miller and Elton Brand.

U.S. domination in international basketball has waned since its convincing gold medal performance in Barcelona. Most recently, the Americans only collected bronze at the 2004 Athens Olympics.

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