

Bobcats look to move ahead

Continued from page 1C

"I feel a little more comfortable with Raymond making predictions this year, than I did last year because I think him gaining that experience, along with other guys, we have a team more capable of making the playoffs and playing in the playoffs," said May. "If we do the things that are necessary, but only time will tell."

Wanting to win and making the playoffs are completely different. With a young team — only five players who have been in the league five years or longer — the playoffs may seem like a lofty goal, but forward Othella Harrington said it's a realistic expectation.

"They've got a great roster from top to bottom. Right now the key is gelling and creating familiarity," said Harrington. "They weren't winning games last year, but they were playing hard and making it competitive when they were minus a number of people. When you play hard, you put yourself into position to win games. I'm looking forward to a great season with these guys."

The Bobcats made a number of key acquisitions in the off-season, including signing free agent Harrington, drafting Morrison and UCLA center Ryan Hollins, and re-signing Melvin Ely. "I think we have a lot of key pieces. I think the coaches did a great job of filling in the roles, just in case injuries do happen this season. This team has a lot of depth and if injuries do happen, we have the players to stay on the pace we were at," said small forward Gerald Wallace.

After sitting on the bench as spectators, and watching their teammates struggle, May and Okafor are itching for the season to begin.

"I've been anxious to get back into the groove of things," said Okafor, who missed 56 games due to a right ankle injury. "I just want to get out there, doing basketball stuff, getting that rhythm and routine. The balance has been restored. People were playing out of position, and we were kind of under staffed in certain positions, it was just a little kooky, but this year, it's a lot better than what it was."

Felton and Brevin Knight carried the brunt of the Charlotte offense after May and Okafor went out with injuries. "It was tough. It's tough to play with nine guys or ten guys and that's what we were playing with," said Knight. "But I think we adjusted as well as we could have to the situation."

"I think even if we don't make the playoffs, success for us will be having a shot at the playoffs," added Wallace. "Having our destiny in our own hands, where it's not determined early in the season, but it comes down to the wire and it's up to us...that would be a successful season."

Most of the players feel the key to success is health. "If everyone stays healthy, we have the pieces," said May, who played in 23 games before sustaining a season ending right knee injury in December. "My goal is to come out and help this team...not in a suit on the bench, but in my jersey on the court."

The Bobcats' first intrasquad scrimmage is in Wilmington on Sunday. The first preseason game is Tuesday against Indiana at 7 p.m. at Bobcats Arena.

Wideouts lead Panthers offensive revival

Continued from page 1C

al but it kind of threw me off a little bit." For the second straight week, Smith's presence made a difference to Carolina's offense. He caught three Jake Delhomme passes for 35 yards on a 91-yard drive that put the Panthers ahead 14-10 on Drew Carter's 4-yard catch. Although the Panthers weren't especially brilliant in the passing game (Delhomme passed for 169 yards), Smith and fellow wideout Keyshawn Johnson (six catches for 63 yards) did more

than enough to provide balance for the run. DeShaun Foster led Carolina with 105 yards on 16 carries, including a game-clinching 43-yard scoring run with 1 minute, 45 seconds left. As a team, the Panthers ran for 167 yards on 29 carries.

"When the receivers are doing what they're supposed to be doing on the edges, the running game gets going and the

running backs can do some things to open up the wide receivers," Johnson said.

Johnson's blocking freed Foster on his touchdown run, confirming why the Panthers pursued him as a free agent. Johnson sealed the corner, Foster broke a pair of tackles and raced to the goal line for what became the winning score.

"Key made a good block to the side and then it was off to the races," Foster said. "He was like a safety out there."

After starting 0-2, Carolina is back in the NFC South

hunt. Although the Panthers have issues, namely a revolving-door offensive line and injuries that forced juggling among the linebackers, they're in better shape with Smith on the field.

"All the games we play at home we need to win them and continuously be consistent on the road like we have been prior," he said. "I think we'll come out fine. We do have a lot of room to improve. Myself, I think I need three or four better routes and give Jake a better option. We all have room for improvement."



Johnson

J.C. Smith linebackers lead Division II in tackles

Continued from page 1C

ers and outside linebackers to excel as pass rushers. The scheme plays to his strengths.

"I loved it because that's what I played in junior college," Wilson said. "When (defensive coordinator Eric) Puryear told me we were switching, I was right at home."

The linebackers' success is the byproduct of Smith's down linemen disrupting

opposing linemen. With end D.J. Haynesworth and 6-0, 350-pound nose tackle William Burgess occupying blockers, Williams and Wilson are free to clean up the leftovers.

"At the beginning, I was skeptical because there was no one over the guards," Williams said. "The way we design our defense, William Burgess is taking on two or three blocks and it allows us to get to the ball."

"It's a lot of teamwork," said Wilson. "The outside guys are forcing them to us and the guys up front are hitting their marks. In this scheme we run, with the double teams up front, that leaves me and Fred free."

Smith, which plays at Livingstone Saturday, is in the middle of the pack among CIAA defenses in most categories. A telling exception is red zone defense, where the Bulls allow a league-low 55

percent success rate. Moving the ball is one thing, scoring is another.

"I look at it as in the middle of the field, they can run away from us," Williams said. "But inside the 20, they don't have as much room."

That's the goal on every down: Get in position to make plays.

"Our defense is just so quick, it's like we're (right) there," Wilson said. "We just meet at the ball."

N.C. Central moves on after Warren quits team

By Bonitta Best
THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

DURHAM—Adrian Warren is gone.

Again.

The N.C. Central quarterback did not travel with the Eagles to Baton Rouge, La. when the Eagles played Southern two weeks ago and coach Rod Broadway had not heard from him. Warren's absence likely confirms the senior is finished with football. He quit the team before fall drills, only to return.

Broadway said true freshman Chris Webb will be the

backup to Stafford Brown, and, if push comes to shove, wide receiver Charles "Stix" Futrell could be used.

"Stix is always an option, and I would never rule him out," Broadway said.

Warren was the designated starter heading into preseason training but quit the team a week before practice began, leaving Brown and Webb to battle for the position. He returned to the team a week before the season began, but Brown was given the starting nod against Albany State, and has kept it

ever since.

"Stafford continues to make good decisions, and he continues to get better," Broadway said.

Bowie State is team No. 2 of a four-game road trip for the Eagles. The Bulldogs, who obviously looked past Livingstone College last weekend, will be without starting QB Lamar Manigo and running back Isaac Redmon.

If the Eagles win this weekend, they will be halfway to an undefeated season. Of the five remaining games, only

Langston and Johnson C. Smith are at least 500. Of course, records mean nothing when it comes to rivalries and revenge.

"I want the players to feel confident that they can win every game, but anybody can beat anybody at any time," Broadway said.

Notes: Athletics Director Bill Hayes said Southern will reimburse the players for their stolen personal items during last weekend's game. Hayes also said no championship rings were taken, as previously reported.









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