

Gift of grab serves Belton

J.C. Smith receiver on verge of rewriting school record book

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make it up."

Said Belton: "I pride myself on just getting better every day. I try to take that out on the team on the practice field to get my teammates better." Belton was at his best last week in a come from behind 10-7 win against Fayetteville State. He caught three Carlton Richardson passes for 58 yards in the decisive fourth-quarter drive, including a 30-yarder on fourth-and-14. That connection has helped the Bulls become adept at rallying, with half of their wins coming in the final two minutes of regulation or overtime.

"When me and Marquis get together, it's like we have a little connection," Richardson said. "He makes plays for us and I just give it to him. I should be seeing

NFL scouts in the stands. He may be little and all, but the small things he perfects, and that makes him a great receiver."

Belton, a North Mecklenburg High graduate, drew interest from several Division I-A schools, including East Carolina, but wound up at Smith when his test scores didn't meet NCAA standards. At JCSU, he was the lone constant on teams that went 1-29 over his first three seasons, earning all-CLAA in 2004. As the focal point in a revitalized offense, Belton has put together his most productive season, and so have the Bulls.

"I knew sooner or later we were going to hit a spurt," he said. "I didn't know when, but we finally got it this year and I'm glad it was my senior year."



Johnson C. Smith receiver Marquis Belton is the one Golden Bull opposing defenses must account for and teammates rally around.

PHOTO: CURTIS WILSON

Change in Pioneer Bowl selection process keeps Golden Bulls in mix

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bid will hinge on several factors, including fan support and the ability to generate interest and ticket sales for the Dec. 2 game at Memorial Stadium.

Three East Division teams are eligible: Elizabeth City (7-1, 5-0), Virginia Union (6-2, 4-1), and Bowie State (4-4, 2-3).

"There's going to be a lot of factors," McLeod said. "Any team on that list is still eligible."

Organizers of the game between the CLAA and SIAC

want to boost attendance at 24,000-seat Memorial Stadium, which was less than half full last year. The game was moved from Mobile, Ala., when Hurricane Katrina caused severe damage to the Gulf Coast region. Charlotte will host the game through 2008.

JCSU would be a strong contender because of its local ties. Elizabeth City, which leads the East, could be left home if the Vikings don't advance to the playoffs. Charlotte is a seven-hour drive, but McLeod believes Vikings fans will travel to back their team.

"For any bowl game, whether it's the Peach or the Orange Bowl, tickets are

going to be a concern," McLeod said. "But the Vikings have a large following and their contingent has been very supportive this year."

The best scenario for the CLAA would be to get a couple of teams into the playoffs, which McLeod said will boost Pioneer Bowl interest because of the league's strength. N.C. Central and Elizabeth City are third and sixth, respectively, in this week's Southeast Region poll. Smith is 12th.

"Whoever gets to the (CLAA) championship game has to earn their way into it," McLeod said. "With the bowl scenario, you have to earn your way too."

For Davidson's Hubbards, football strengthens ties

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"Jon's a bruiser...a hard runner, tough to tackle. Then you have Ryan, he'll make you miss in a phone booth," Merritt said. "He's fast. Different types of players, but fun to watch."

On the field, the brothers are a major part of the offense. "It's great to be in a position where your team needs you to play well, and that goes for both of us," said Jonathon.

"It's nice to be on the field and help him make a play, or him help me make a play," said Ryan.

While off the field, they are the best of friends. "We realized we were best friends in high school," Ryan said. "We were so close...and had the same interests, and found ourselves in the same places very often. We're so much alike, and it's just been fun to be around [Jonathon]."

Today the brothers not only play together, they live together, are members of Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity and hang out with the same people. And though they don't always see eye to eye, the extended time together hasn't made them crazy.

"It's been a blessing just to be around him so much," said Ryan.

"He's gotten on my nerves since he was born," joked Jonathon, as he went into a story about how his mother tricked him. "My brother's birthday is Christmas Eve."

Seems Iris Hubbard told her oldest son that her newest child was Jonathon's present for Christmas. "I had to be nice to him, cause he was mine," laughed Jonathon. "Around 6 [years old] I figured out what she had done to me."

Despite realizing the "trick," Jonathon, a theater major, still looks out for his younger brother, which sometimes makes life on the field hard.

"Every time he catches the ball, I run over

there," said Jonathon. "He's my teammate, but he's my brother first. My heart skips a beat every time he catches one."

"Those boys aren't small out there," continued Jonathon, who out weighs his younger brother by at least 50 pounds. "He takes a couple of hard ones every once and a while and I definitely have to run over there and make sure everything is everything."

On the flip side, Ryan, who is about three inches taller than Jonathon, shows his sense of humor, while discussing his "concern."

"My heart skips a beat when he touches the ball...he's a little guy, being so short and everything," jokes Ryan. "I go over and make sure he's OK."

Charlotte Christian's former team MVP and all-conference defensive back obviously enjoy the situation they are in, but it won't last forever. With Jonathon being a senior, this is his last season playing football on the same field, the same team, with his brother.

"It's definitely going to be bittersweet to leave," said Jonathon, last week's Hammer of the Week. "Playing football at the college level for 4 years...it wears on your body a little bit, so it will be nice to get a rest."

"But, I've been playing since I was six, so it is definitely going to be hard to watch it slip away. I gotta make the best of the last couple of opportunities," Jonathon said.

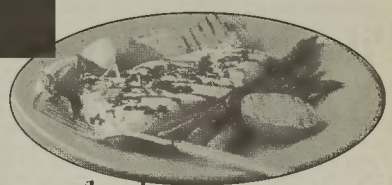
Ryan shared that one of his fondest college memories came during his freshman year, when his brother scored a touchdown, and he was the first person in the end zone to celebrate with him. The picture from that moment sits in their parents' home. The sociology and pre-med major has gone through the experience of not having Jonathon on the field, when his older brother graduated from high school.

"It's a two-fold thing where [the team] misses him on the field and I miss him at home," said Ryan. "It will be mostly bitter for me."

"But it will be good to be here on my own, and see what life is like. I'll definitely miss him on the field...and I'll have to find a new roommate," added Ryan.

Cabarrus, which took a similar thumping from Vance, will try to spoil West Charlotte's playoff drive. The Lions aren't particularly deep, but are opportunistic and play like underdogs. That's refreshing.

slip-up. RECOVERY UNIT West Charlotte took a thumping from North Mecklenburg last week in a MECA-6 4A battle, but the Lions don't have much time to feel sorry for themselves. Central



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Drive to improve playoff seeding

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Myers Park. The loser slides further down the seeding ladder in the Southwestern 4A. With Independence, Butler and East Meck at the top, neither the Mustangs or Panthers can afford another