

File photo
Panther running back Stephen Davis is being patient about getting back on the practice field.



Patience is the key for Panthers' Stephen Davis

BY BRETT BORDEN
SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Hurry up and wait. Anyone who has been stuck in traffic can relate to the emotion that Panthers running back Stephen Davis is dealing with right now.

With healthy wheels, Davis would be off and running with the rest of his teammates as they get acclimated to the heat and the hitting in Spartanburg. But as his right knee continues the slow but steady climb back from microfracture surgery, Davis must watch from the sideline.

"I've been patient thus far," said Davis, who rushed for 1,444 yards and eight touchdowns in leading the Panthers to Super Bowl XXXVIII two seasons ago but only 92 yards in two games last season before being placed on injured reserve. "I want to do whatever is best for me and the team. I want to be out there at 100 percent."

"If we had a Super Bowl game or important playoff game, I could go out there and play, but we don't want to do anything stupid and go out there and have something happen and say, 'What if we had waited?' The best thing to do right now is just wait and get better. Hopefully in the near future I'll be out there."

It can be done. For inspiration, Davis only needs to look out on the field and watch teammate DeShaun Foster. Following microfracture knee surgery that ended his rookie season in 2003, Foster heard the same whispers Davis has heard the last 10 months, that his career might be over. But with patience and persistence, Foster came back successfully, rushing for 421 yards in 2003 and then adding 196 more yards and two touchdowns in the postseason.

"Every time I go out there and see him on the field, I know what he went through," said Davis. "My thing is to just be patient and get myself ready. My motivation to come back is that a lot of people say I can't come back. I know what kind of team we could have had last season if a lot of guys didn't get hurt, and that's a motivation."

"Motivation is just wanting to be out there and be competitive and be one of those guys out there playing his heart out, bleeding, sweating and everything else on the field."

Davis, now 31, passed the "30 barrier" since his wonderful 2003 season. It's an imagi-

nary barrier to be sure, but one that critics like to use for injured players on the plus side of that age.

"Age doesn't matter," said Davis. "Yes, I'm older than I was last year. I'm older than I was three years ago, but that

doesn't matter. The determination I have to play this game is no different than it was five or six years ago. Don't talk to me about age when you should be asking me if I still desire to play this game. That's what you need to ask me."

Hampton

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"The outpouring of support by the Aggie family was just tremendous," Small said. "The sense of unity everyone had at that time puts this thought in my head. We're going to take that same passion, that same sense of unity, that same desire, and we're going to translate it onto the field. My mother would want it that way, and I've never let Momma down."

Two Aggies are expected to be the best at their respective positions. Senior Rickie Lewis, a 2004 first-team All-MEAC defensive end, was selected preseason first-team All-MEAC along with senior middle linebacker Chamar Milton. Senior left guard Chris Gates was selected to the second team.

The Aggies are coming off of an injury-plagued 3-8 season. However, N.C. A&T is healthy, and returns eight starters on defense and seven starters on offense.

"We're not going to make excuses about last year," Lewis said during a media session with just players last Friday. "We lost a lot of close games we should have won despite the injuries. We are encouraged about this year because we've had 100 percent participation in the weight room during the off-season. Guys are determined not to have a repeat of last year."

The Aggies will start their season in Raleigh for the 12th straight season when they face N.C. Central in the annual Aggie-Eagle Classic at Carter-Finley Stadium on Monday, Sept. 5, at 1:30 p.m. Tickets can be purchased through the Aggies ticket office by calling (336) 334-7749. The Aggies' first home game is Sept. 10 at 1:30 p.m. against Nor-



File photo
Hampton's Alonzo Coleman was one of two Pirates to receive top preseason honors.

folk State.

Hampton University's Alonzo Coleman and Justin Durant earned the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference's top football preseason awards, as announced by the league. Coleman was selected the preseason Offensive Player of the Year and Durant was chosen the Defensive Player of the Year by the MEAC head football coaches and sports information directors.

Coleman (5-11, 190, Jr., RB, South Boston, Va.) led the Pirates in total rushing yards with 1,133. He led the MEAC in carries last year (225) and finished second in yards and touchdowns (13). Coleman, the MEAC Rookie of the Year in 2003, has been a first-team All-MEAC performer the last two seasons.

Durant (6-2, 235, Jr., LB, Florence, S.C.) earned Defensive Player of the Year honors in 2004 after posting 14.5 tackles for loss (second in MEAC), 99 total tackles (fifth), and three interceptions. Hampton led all teams with

nine players on the preseason All-MEAC first team. The Pirates also had three second-team players for a total of 12. Morgan State was second with four first-team All-MEAC players. Bethune-Cookman, despite not having any players on the first team, tied S.C. State with eight All-MEAC players. S.C. State placed three players on the first team.

The MEAC Press Luncheon concluded with the unveiling of MEACKIE, the leagues' first-ever mascot. The mascot is colored in MEAC purple with an MEAC gold jersey. The jersey features the logos of each of the 11 MEAC institutions. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the new mascot is his head, which is shaped into the MEAC logo. MEACKIE can reach a height of 5 feet 7 inches.

"We are excited about having our own mascot," Commissioner Dennis Thomas said. "We will use MEACKIE in our local communities, at special events and all promotional activities."

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