

C. JEMAL HORTON

National anthem should be open to interpretation

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www.BlackAthlete.net, asked this question of Kelly: "What in the name of Francis Scott Key were you thinking and who in the hell told you to try to hip-hop something that every American reveres?" Moore also said: "If R. Kelly was truly an American, he would have sung the song the way it was meant to be sung."

I contend that what R. Kelly did was the bomb!

Uh, that is, if people such as O'Kelly and Moore give me their consent to use the term "the bomb" when referring to The Star-Spangled Banner.

I guess the biggest reason what Kelly did doesn't bother me is because I'm not one of these folks who gets misty when the anthem is played before a sporting event. For one thing, I don't think the song should be played at sporting events anyway, unless it's AFTER an Olympic event in which an American took the gold

medal.

For another thing, I'll admit it: I'm not the most patriotic person in the world. Sure, I'm glad I live in this country, and I certainly believe in its stated ideals. Still, the flagrant and accepted injustices allowed to take place here each day - I still wonder how much Cleveland County's little Asha Degree would have benefited from the same kind of coverage the missing girl in Aruba receives on TV each night - keep me from fully claiming a song such as "The Star-Spangled Banner" as my own.

But, see, that's where people such as Hendrix and Gaye and, yes, R. Kelly come in.

There are a lot of people who feel the way I do about the anthem: indifferent, not really paying attention when they stand for the song. That is, until an R. Kelly comes along and does it with a passion and uniqueness rarely seen. I call it The Kirk Franklin Effect.

Back in the 1990s, when Franklin started adding funky baselines and dancing to his new style of gospel music, many people, especially black folks, were beside themselves. "That's not the way God's music is supposed to be played," some said. "It sounds too much like R&B music," others said. This much, however, was certain: There was a generation of young people out there that hardly ever thought about God and church, but suddenly many were thinking about them because of Franklin's new approach to gospel music. R. Kelly, like Hendrix at Woodstock, has the potential to similarly impact people who typically care less about the national anthem.

And if it takes "stepping" and a smooth melody to get more people thinking positively about this country, then I say let's all go get dance lessons.

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Final games test of Panthers' will

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Tampa Bay) game and it's not won after this game. We have to play three more games, we have to be ready to play."

Starting with the Saints, who won the opener on Jon Carney's 47-yard game-winning field goal with three seconds left. Since then, the Saints have gone downhill. With a 3-10 record and elimination from the playoffs, the Panthers know that they are still dangerous and that it will not be an easy game.

"It's never easy in this league and especially not in this division. It's hard every week. I know we can play much better," said Peppers.

Since the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, the Saints have moved around quite a bit. They have practiced near San Jose, Calif.; at the Alamodome; and at two high school fields in San Antonio. They've also had "home" games at the Alamodome, Tiger Stadium in Baton Rouge, La., and Giants Stadium in New Jersey.

When the Saints moved their locker room, training equipment and front offices to the Alamodome in September, team officials knew they would have to move everything out when the NCAA set up the volleyball tournament, which is now taking place.

Minter does not see the Saints' displacement as an advantage for the Panthers. "No, not at all. Those guys beat us the first game, so there are no advantages going down there."

We've got to go in and be focused and take care of our business. We definitely are not thinking that there are advantages," said Minter.

Receiver Ricky Proehl is confident the Saints are not feeling sorry for themselves due to their situation. "New Orleans has struggled with the situation that they have, but they are a good football team," he said. "They have a lot of talent on that team. We can't take them lightly."

Missing from the first game is running back Duce McAlister who suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee on Oct. 9 against Green Bay. His replacement Antowain Smith, is no stranger to the Carolina defense. In New England, Smith collected a pair of Super Bowl rings. In Super Bowl XXXVIII against Carolina, he posted a game-high 83 yards on 26 carries, including a 2-yard score. Smith had 11 carries for 60 yards and a touchdown in the Monday Night Football 36-17 loss against Atlanta.

The Panthers control their playoff destiny, so there's no need to panic. According to Proehl, they are focused on beating the Saints and finishing the regular season strong.

"We've had a hard time with New Orleans. They're a good football team and they have given us problems," he said. "We have to prepare this week as hard as we have all year. We have to focus on New Orleans. We're 9-4, we're not 4-9. We're tied for the division; we have an opportunity to do something special. We have three games to go. If we finish strong, we'll be 12-4."

Shell makes D-II Hall of Fame

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II Hall. Harry Carson, a former Shell teammate and a star linebacker with the New York Giants, was inducted in 2000. Hatcher joins fellow Valdosta State graduate Jessie Tuggle, who was enshrined in 2002.

At S.C. State, Shell became the dominant player at his position in the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference, earning All-MEAC and Associated Press and Pittsburgh Courier All-America honors as a senior. He signed a free agent contract with the Steelers in 1974 and went on to an 11-year NFL career, which included four Super Bowl titles.

Shell earlier was voted to the Division II Quarter

Century Team, the Sheridan Broadcasting Black College 100-Year Anniversary Team, the Steelers' all-time team and the NFL silver anniversary team, and has been enshrined in the South Carolina Athletic Hall of Fame, the Mid-Eastern Athletic Hall of Fame, the S.C. State Athletic Hall of Fame and the National Football Foundation College Hall of Fame.

EYES ON SHOOTOUT PRIZE



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Victory Christian point guard Kendria Holmes looks for an opening to the basket in the Kings' 60-51 loss to Oak Hill in the Gold & Blue Holiday Invitational at Victory Christian last week. Holmes has signed to play at Providence next year. The Kings will also be in the field at the Bojangles' Invitational at Charlotte Latin Dec. 29-31.

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