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SPORTS

Section

NFL jobs for whites only?

What will you do now, NFL owners?

Now that there are, as my grandmother would say, "fifty-leven" head-coaching jobs available at the moment, what exactly do you plan to do?

Will you do what most of you have done since Fritz Pollard stopped coaching in the 1920s, and ignore the



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many qualified African-American candidates out there?

Or will you, having seen what black men such as Tony Dungy and Marvin

Lewis can do, give another black man the opportunity to prove he can successfully lead a team?

Granted, the sports media aren't always on top of things, but if the latest reports are anywhere close to accurate, then all the current vacancies likely will go to white men.

And that would be a crying shame.

Let's see, as of mid-week, there were head-coaching vacancies in Detroit, St. Louis, Kansas City, Green Bay, New Orleans, Houston, Oakland and Minnesota. That's "eight and a possible," if you count the fact that Dallas Cowboys coach Bill Parcells didn't seem certain he would return next season.

That's a lot of openings by NFL standards, which has had an average of 5.9 head-coaching jobs open up per year, since the merger with the AFL in 1970. Nonetheless, only eight black head coaches have been hired during that 35-year span.

So, yeah, I'm skeptical this year about what NFL owners will do, even with so many vacancies out there.

Turn on ESPN. Read or listen to analyses from the top so-called NFL experts across the country. They're barking unofficial lists of people who "deserve" head-coaching jobs in the NFL, and it's hard to find an African-American on any of them.

And virtually all of the so-called experts are waxing poetic about how Washington defensive coordinator Gregg Williams, who is white, just HAS to get a head-coaching job this season. This sentiment is prevalent among people who cover the NFL, despite the fact that, when Williams was head coach of the Buffalo Bills, he posted a three-year record of 17-31.

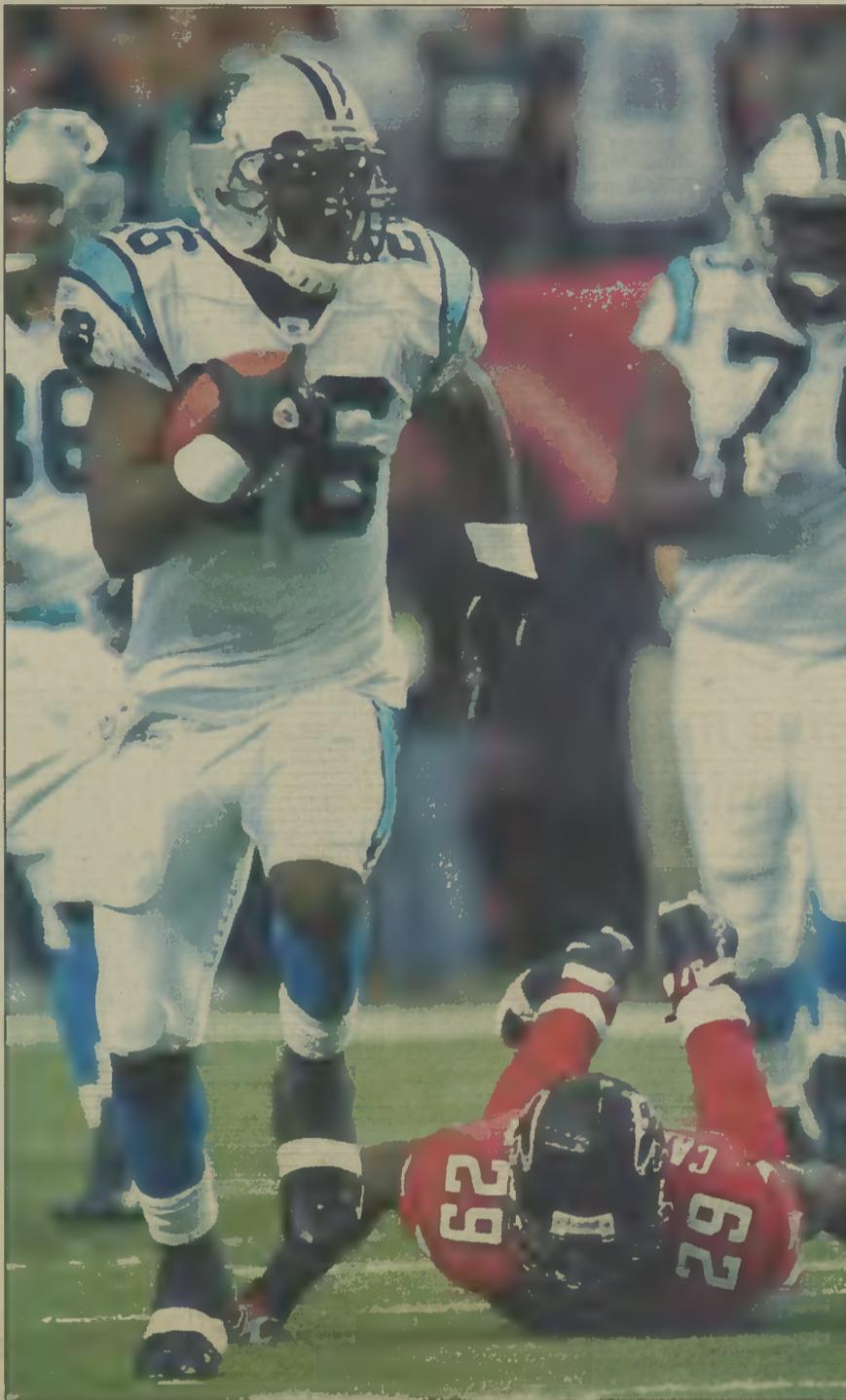
But, really, my beef isn't with white coaches such as Williams.

Hey, I'm sure Williams is an honest, hard-working man who gives everything he has to the coaching profession. Heck, maybe he *does* deserve another shot at a head-coaching job.

What does bother me, though, is short-sighted owners who continually ignore equally qualified black coaches year after year.

Earlier in this column, I sang the praises of Indianapolis' Dungy and Cincinnati's Lewis, who are two frontrunners for coach of the year, along with Chicago Bears head coach Lovie Smith, who also is black. While their accomplishments this season are noteworthy — they are a combined 36-12 heading into this weekend's

See BLACK/3C



Carolina Panthers running back DeShaun Foster breaks away from Atlanta's Keion Carpenter for a 70-yard touchdown against the Falcons Sunday.

Running with the big cats

Foster has playoff stage, Panthers' hopes to himself

By Jenna Fryer THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DeShaun Foster helped Carolina get into the playoffs with his best running performance of the season. If the Panthers plan to make it past the first round, they'll need a lot more of that out of him.

Foster ran for 165 yards and a franchise-best 70-yard touchdown to lead the Panthers to a 44-11 victory against Atlanta that locked up an NFC wildcard bid. Carolina (11-5) plays the New York Giants (11-5) on Sunday in the first round of the playoffs.

Foster's totals jump-started a

running game that has sputtered most of this season, but broke open against the Falcons for a team-record 229 yards.

"We're peaking at the right time," Foster said. "That's what we're trying to do. Hopefully, everything is going to work out for us."

Carolina will depend on Foster to make sure it does.

Panthers coach John Fox is a firm believer that the offense must revolve around the run-

ning game, but the team struggled when former Pro Bowler Stephen Davis failed to fully recover from major knee surgery last year and managed just 549 yards rushing in 13 games before the Panthers placed him on the injured reserve list Dec. 17.

Foster had watched and waited behind Davis, failing to get enough consistent carries to find a rhythm.

That changed against Atlanta in early December, when Fox gave Foster the bulk of the carries. He converted his chance into 131 yards rushing — the

See PANTHERS/2C



Foster

Carolina in New York frame of mind

By Cheris F. Hodges THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Carolina Panthers finally won a game they absolutely had to have.

By beating Atlanta 44-11, the Panthers snagged a wild card spot and erased the bitterness of missing the playoffs last year in a last minute loss to the New Orleans Saints.

"We're fortunate that the game played out the way it did," head coach John Fox said.

Now Carolina is looking toward New York where they will face the



Carolina Panthers receiver Steve Smith reaches for the goal line against Atlanta in the season finale.

See PLAYOFFS/2C

Round 2 for CIAA division favorites

J.C. Smith, Va. Union clash at Brayboy Sat.

By Herbert L. White herb.white@thecharlottepost.com

Ten days and 3,000 later, Johnson C. Smith will try to get even with Virginia Union.

The Bulls, who lost to top-ranked Virginia Union 66-51 in the Black College Classic Dec. 28 in Los Angeles, will take another crack at the Panthers Saturday at Brayboy Gym. Although Union (7-1) is the No. 1 team in Division II, Smith coach Steve Joyner is approaching the game with an even-handed attitude.



Joyner

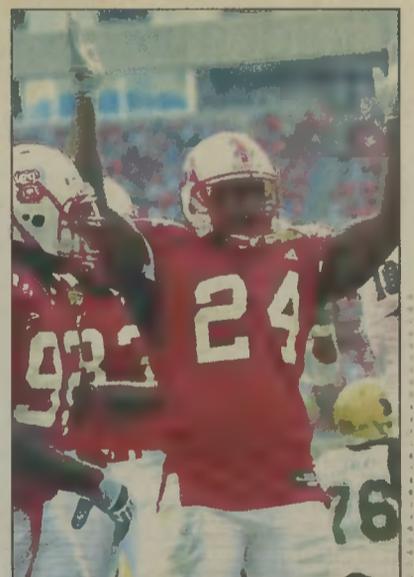
"I don't want to turn our bunch into an emotional team," he said. "We're concentrating on winning the (CIAA) Western Division. (VUU is) certainly going to be one of the best teams (in the East), so for us to beat them would certainly go a long way for us winning the Western Division."

Smith and Union were tied at 26 at half-time in the first meeting, but a 10-2 Panthers run — all scored by guard Darius Hargrove — over the final four minutes helped VUU pull away.

"It got away from us the last five minutes of the game when Hargrove scored 10 points," Joyner said. "We've got to hold him

See GOLDEN/2C

PACK 'EM ON



PHOTO/CURTIS WILSON

N.C. State running back Andre Brown celebrates a touchdown in the Wolfpack's 14-0 win over South Florida in the Meineke Car Care Bowl Saturday at Bank of America Stadium.

Five-game stretch could define Wizards' NBA season

By Joseph White THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Early in the season, the feeling among the Washington Wizards was the team would eventually get its act together, that the team would return to last year's playoff form once the new players had adjusted to their surroundings and got a handle on coach Eddie Jordan's system.

Well, it's January already. It's not now-or-never time, but it's getting close. If the Wizards (12-17) are going to make a move, now would be a good time to do it. Their next five games are against teams with los-

See FIVE-GAME/3C

