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## SPORTS

Section

## Bear essentials

## QB play key for underdog Carolina

It all depends on Jake. If the Carolina Panthers have any chance of beating Chicago this weekend in their second-round NFC playoff game at Soldier Field, Jake Christopher Delhomme, must be the difference. Not Julius Peppers - or anybody else on that highly touted defensive line.

Not head coach John Fox. Not even the only All-Pro player on the Panthers' roster, wide receiver Steve Smith. It's all about Jake this Sunday. He can't play as poorly as he did on Nov. 20, when the Panthers went to Chicago and got handled, 13-3.

He has to be better this time. As he goes, so will the Panthers.

Is that entirely fair, since football is supposed to be a team game and all?

Of course, it's fair. Remember that Super Bowl run the Panthers put together two years ago? Guess who got all the credit when he replaced an aging Rodney Peete in the season-opener and went on to lead Carolina within minutes of a world championship?

Yep, it was Jake - the Louisiana boy most of us in the media portrayed as the poor soul who simply couldn't get any love when he played for the New Orleans Saints and had to come all the way to Charlotte to get his just due.

Unless you're Trent Dilfer, when a team excels, the quarterback usually gets all the credit. I mean, there's a reason that, despite all those strong players who helped make that Super Bowl trip possible, it was Jake who landed the now-famous Bojangle's commercial deal.

So now, as the Panthers' most important game in two years is upon them, we shouldn't be afraid to put every ounce of the pressure to win this game on Jake. If he doesn't play well, the Panthers don't win Sunday.

It really is that simple. You might remember that November game against Chicago: The Panthers' defense was pretty stellar.

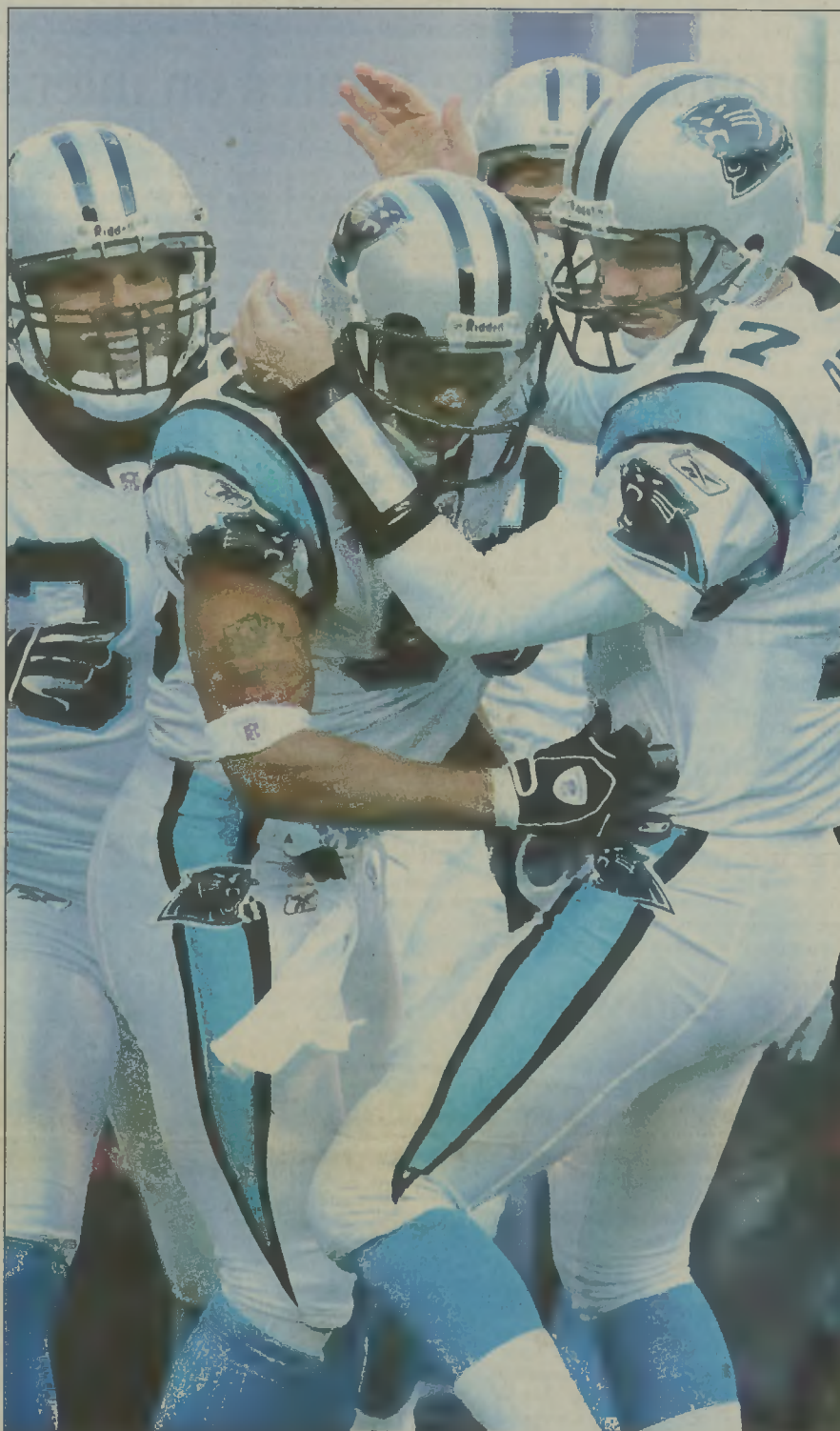
And they still lost. Smith set a franchise record for single-game receiving that day.

And they still lost. The one Panther who was visibly horrible that day? It was Jake. He wound up throwing for 235 yards, but he had zero touchdowns and two interceptions. He reverted back to those occasional ugly moments of his, when he is off-balance and out of the pocket and on the run and his intended receiver is in triple coverage - yet he still throws the ball up there, hoping something good will happen.

That's why the Panthers lost to Chicago back then.

Look, I know those are the chances you take with Jake. Most of the time, those sloppy throws of his are going to hit their target, and they're going to be clutch. At times, it is a magnificent thing to watch because, hey, playmakers aren't always aesthetically appealing when they're doing their thing (see: Favre, Brett).

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ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO/JULIE JACOBSON

Carolina receiver Steve Smith (center) is congratulated by quarterback Jake Delhomme (17) and running back Nick Goings after Smith caught Delhomme's 22-yard touchdown pass in the Panthers' 23-0 win over the New York Giants last Sunday in East Rutherford, N.J. Carolina plays Chicago Sunday in the divisional playoff round at Soldier Field.

## Chicago has Panthers' attention for playoff rematch

By C. Jamal Horton  
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Sure, they were celebrating. Make no mistake about that.

It had been about 15 minutes since the Carolina Panthers had beaten the New York Giants 23-0 in their first-round playoff game and stormed into the Giants Stadium locker room smiling widely, exchanging high-fives as if they were going out of style.

But there was no overabundance of Panthers patting themselves on the back, either.

Every Panther seemed to understand what it meant that, despite how impressive they

looked in that annihilation of New York, the Chicago Bears await Sunday (4:30 p.m.).

"We have a lot of pride in ourselves," Carolina running back

Nick Goings said, taking a look around the room. "We work hard, and we believe we can achieve our goal if we just take it one game at a time. But (this) week with

Chicago is going to be a battle." No Panther has forgotten how the Bears shut down the

Carolina running game - and dominated in most other facets - during a 13-3 loss on Nov. 20.

In addition, this game, too, will be at Chicago's storied Soldier Field. In the first meeting, the game-time temperature was 45 degrees. This week, the forecast calls for weather in the mid-30s.

And, well, the stakes, obviously, will be higher this time around.

"There's not a trick about it - you don't have the luxury of being at your own house and being in your own bed, so you have to deal with the elements

See PANTHERS/2C

## No offense? Defense counting on it



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Panthers cornerback Ken Lucas returns an interception against New York.

By C. Jamal Horton  
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

The last time the Carolina Panthers faced the Chicago Bears, Rex Grossman didn't even play.

With Grossman away nursing what was considered to be a season-ending knee injury, conservative rookie Kyle Orton was the Bears' starting quarterback. Even though the Bears won 13-3, the Panthers limited Orton to a pedestrian 136 passing yards and felt they knew the answer to stopping the neophyte.

Seven weeks later, guess who will be the Bears' starting quarterback when the Panthers return to Chicago on Sunday for an NFC divisional playoff game: Grossman, the third-year "gunslinger" who excelled while executing Steve Spurrier's

See NO OFFENSE/2C



PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

Johnson C. Smith guard Jerome Givens drives past Virginia Union's Darius Hargrove in the Golden Bulls' 87-77 win last Saturday. JCSU is No. 18 in this week's NABC poll.

## J.C. Smith vaults into D-II rankings

Golden Bulls (10-3)  
No. 18 in NABC poll

By Herbert L. White  
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Johnson C. Smith has risen to Division II basketball's elite.

The Golden Bulls are No. 18 in this week's NABC poll, the best showing by Smith since the 2001-01 season. The Bulls (10-3, 3-0 CIAA) knocked off top-ranked Virginia Union 87-77 at Brayboy Gym Saturday, and St. Paul's 95-91 Tuesday in Lawrenceville, Va. Smith never trailed Va. Union in the rematch of their Dec. 28 game in Los Angeles, which the Panthers won. Union dropped to No. 8 in the poll, giving the CIAA two teams in the rankings. Barton and Mount Olive give North Carolina three teams in the polls, the most of any state.

"I thought we saw some good things in Los Angeles that we brought home to Charlotte," Smith coach Steve Joyner said. "We thought we were gelling as a team and you certainly need a team effort to beat Virginia Union, and that's what you saw."

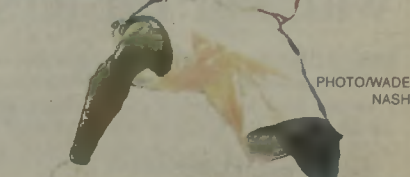
The Bulls are playing better as a team since Los Angeles. Charles Clark has scored 62 points in the last two games, including a career-best 36 against St. Paul's and forward John Fulton has shaken off an early slump to regain his role of offensive leader. After a sub-par effort against Union in the first game, Fulton bounced back with 20 points, 10

See GOLDEN/2C

## Bobcat finds a groove

Bobcats guard/forward Gerald Wallace has been on a tear going into Friday's NBA game against Milwaukee.

Avg. last 4 gms		Season
Points	15.3	14.2
Rebounds	8.5	6.5
Blocks	3.3	2.08



PHOTO/WADE NASH