

Panthers aim to atone for November flop

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and move on," said receiver Steve Smith, who, with a team-record 14 catches for 169 yards, was the only Panther to have a good game against the Bears the first time.

"That's what you get paid for - to make plays; not to gripe and complain about



Smith

what you get. You just have to make do with what you have."

What the Panthers didn't have in the first meeting was a running game. The

Bears, who had the No. 2-ranked defense in the NFL this season, held the Panthers to a paltry 55 rushing yards.

The good thing for the Panthers this weekend is that they are coming off one of their best overall rushing performances of the season. Against the Giants, Carolina

had 223 yards on the ground, led by DeShaun Foster's 151 yards on 27 carries. Goings provided a spark off the bench, gaining 63 yards on 12 carries. Foster and Goings currently rank Nos. 1 and 2 among rushers after the first weekend of playoff games.

"The offensive line was really pumped up to get the run-

ning game going," right tackle Jordan Gross said. "We know that will be important against Chicago. We have to establish the running game in the playoffs, if you want to be successful."

The Panthers know that won't be easy, considering the Bears boast two players on this year's NFL All-Pro team -

linebackers Brian Urlacher and Lance Briggs. Urlacher also was named the league's defensive player of the year.

Will another strong and consistent running game help the Panthers against Chicago this week?

"Absolutely," Panthers head coach John Fox said. "Well, we hope."

No offense, but Carolina defense figures on intense game

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"Fun 'N Gun" offense at Florida.

Now, instead of facing a familiar quarterback, the Carolina defense is at somewhat of a disadvantage as it prepares for Grossman.

Facing ex-Carolina teammate Muhsin Muhammad for the second time this season might be the least of the Panthers' worries.

"It's two different (quarterback) styles," Carolina safety Mike Minter said, "and that makes it tough. With Orton, they ran the ball more. But with Grossman, he's a gunslinger. He'll take more

chances. He'll put it up.

"We've played quarterbacks and teams like that before, but the playoffs are a whole different thing. We'll really have to be ready."

One positive omen is that the Panthers are coming off their best defensive performance of the season. They shut down 1,800-yard rusher Tiki Barber, frustrated second-year quarterback Eli Manning, and shut out the New York Giants 23-0 last Sunday in the first round of the playoffs. That game marked the first time in two decades that the Giants had been held scoreless in the

postseason, and the Panthers hope to build on that momentum.

"These are the challenges you live for," Panthers cornerback Ken Lucas said of facing a passing quarterback like Grossman in the playoffs. "We know we've got the ability. We showed that (last Sunday). Now, it's just a matter of putting together another strong performance."

If they wish for additional inspiration, the Panthers need not look any further than the other sideline, toward their defensive counterpart.

Led by this year's defensive

player of the year, linebacker Brian Urlacher, Chicago had the No. 2-ranked defense in the NFL.



Buckner

However, earlier this year, Carolina defensive tackle Brentson Buckner said the Bears' defense was the best he's

ever seen.

Given a chance to back down from his statement once he found out the Panthers would be facing the Bears again, Buckner

refused.

"I stick by my word," Buckner said in the locker room at Giants Stadium. "I've seen a lot of football, and I haven't seen a defense in the NFL that's more impressive than that defense."

"That puts pressure on us to match their intensity as a

defense. You can't allow their offense to put a whole lot of points up, because it's going to be hard for your offense to move. So whatever kind of intensity they come out with, we've got to be the same way. We've got to take what we had (last Sunday) and raise it a notch or two."

Golden Bulls vault into Division II elite

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rebounds and four assists in the rematch.

"They got us in Cali and I had a bad game and I know to be considered one of the best players in the (conference), you have to play against the best teams," Fulton said. "Tonight I wanted to prove that I'm one of the best teams in the CIAA."

"John has settled down a

little bit. He was trying to carry the whole team on his shoulders and that didn't work for him the first semester. He's begun to settle down a little bit and started to let things come to him in a natural fashion."

Smith excelled at the basics, connecting on 56.4 percent of its shots, including a torrid 60.7 percent in the second half, and turning the

ball over just 12 times against 22 assists.

Smith stunned Union with a swarming defense that created 10 first-half turnovers and set the game's tone.

The three-guard lineup of Jerome Givens, Prince Parker and Maurice Hooper is also playing better. Joyner praised Givens' work against Union, (9 points, 6 assists) especially in running the

offense and finding open passing lanes.

"He's learning the difference between being a point guard and being a general," Joyner said. "(Against Union) I thought he was a general. He had good recognition of what they were trying to do defensively and kept us under control and he was certainly a key factor."

Cavs' Jones looking far and wide for shot

By Tom Withers

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CLEVELAND - Cavaliers guard Damon Jones has the distinction of being the first NBA player to sign an endorsement contract with Li-Ning, an athletic shoe and sports apparel company from China.

Right now, he seems to have misplaced his famed jump shot somewhere equally far, far away.

Jones, who signed a four-year, \$16 million free agent deal with Cleveland this summer to fix the team's woeful outside shooting, has fallen into a horrific slump at the worst possible time for the Cavs.

The club will be without guard Larry Hughes, its second-leading scorer and top defender, for two months following surgery on his finger. Since replacing Hughes as a starter three games ago, Jones is just 3-for-18 on 3-pointers - his specialty.

He scored 15 points - all on 3s - in a win over Chicago on Dec. 22, but has since shot 19 percent (7-for-36) and is only 6-for-31 on 3s.

"I'm human, period," Jones said. "I still feel the same way about my shot, still feel I'm the best shooter in the world. I'm not going to pass up a shot, because the day I pass up a shot, it would mean my confidence is gone. And we all know that'll never happen. I usually come out on the other side smelling like roses."

The bouquet inside Quicken Loans Arena wasn't so appealing on Saturday when Jones was booed at home by Cavaliers fans while missing his first five 3-

pointers during a win over Milwaukee.

When he finally made his first, Jones, who normally celebrates making a long-range basket with a three-fingered gesture with his hands, instead placed them over his ears to block out the cheering.

"If you are going to boo, then boo," Jones said following the game. "Don't be fair-weather. If you're going to be behind us when we win or lose, then you have to be behind us when a guy is going through a tough stretch. I'd rather not be applauded anymore."

On Monday, Jones toned down his remarks a little.

"What I should have said after the game was that I didn't mean everybody because everybody wasn't booing," Jones said. "It was just a few hundred, and if that's how it's going to be, then fine."

Despite Jones' streakiness, first-year Cavs coach Mike Brown has no plans to put Jones on the bench. And, he's not going to put any handcuffs on Jones, who made 43 percent of his 3s last season for Miami.

"I want him to continue taking them," Brown said. "Either he will shoot his way out, which I believe he will because he is a shooter, or he won't. Anytime he's open, he has to let it go."

Jones plans to keep letting 'em fly.

"I'm not going to change the kind of player I am," he said. "I'm a shooter, and I'm going to shoot, make or miss."

Jones' candor and bubbly personality are part of what led Li-Ning executives to

choose him as the company's spokesman and sign him to a multiyear deal. The company, founded by renowned gymnast Li Ning, signed a marketing agreement with the NBA last year, hoping to tap into pro basketball's unmatched popularity in China.

With 2,500 stores in every province of China, Li-Ning has a chance to challenge Nike and Adidas at home. But there are no immediate plans for domestic sales of Jones' shoes, which are being pushed with an ad campaign

slogan of "Anything Is Possible" in the United States.

Jones, who plans to visit China this summer, was asked if his shoe might out-sell teammate LeBron James' popular Nikes overseas.

"Right now, it's Yao, LeBron and then myself. But I'm going to shoot high," Jones said with a grin before slowly saying, "Anything is possible" in Chinese, a phrase he practiced for six days. "I might be No. 1 by the end of the year."

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Varner starts year off with Par Busters win

Harold Varner III won the Par Busters Golf Group New Year's Shootout at Renaissance Park Golf Course.

Varner fired a round of 67, six shots ahead of Donald Littlejohn and Kevin Logan. Robert "Greasy" Brown finished at 75.

Herbert L. White