

Seattle final road obstacle to Super Bowl

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chore."

Besides overcoming a team that proved to be the best in the NFC this season, in order to advance to Detroit, the Panthers also will have to accomplish something that has never been done before -

win its fifth consecutive road playoff game, dating back to that magical 2003 season.

After last Sunday's 29-21 NFC Divisional Playoff victory at Chicago last week, the Panthers tied the Dallas Cowboys (1975-1981) with their fourth consecutive road

playoff win.

Hence, in addition to facing a powerful offensive team that boasts the league's Most Valuable Player (Shaun Alexander), the Panthers also must out-duel history.

The Panthers can take solace in knowing they are

being led by a man who knows how to get things done on the road. In six playoff games under Fox, Carolina is 5-1, with four of those victories coming on the opponents' stadium.

"I think it's just a mind-set," Fox said of winning on the

road. "I think we have a close team, a very together team, and they know that that's all they have when they go on the road."

Besides facing an anticipated crowd of more than 67,000 at Qwest Field, the Panthers also have a huge task because they are entering the game without running back DeShaun Foster, who broke his ankle in Chicago. Nick Goings, who usually gets most of his action on special teams, will replace Foster in the starting lineup.

Things could be worse. Goings filled in last season when Foster and Stephen Davis went down and rushed for 821 yards and six touch-

downs, while tying the team's single-season record with four consecutive 100-yard games.

"There's no doubt (Goings' track record puts the team at ease)," Fox said. "He has the confidence of his coaches and his team. I think that's the key. We had a couple of guys in front of him. Those couple of guys got hurt a year ago, and those couple of guys have gotten hurt this year. We've been down this road before."

And on the road before.



Goings

J.C. Smith on roll despite obstacles

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loss to Virginia Union with a pair of wins, helped turn the season around by bringing the team closer.

"Everybody's starting to buy into what coach Joyner is preaching to us," said guard Prince Parker, who scored 14 points

and hauled down 10 rebounds against Bowie. "We've got to trust each other, play as a team. All for one, one for all."

Smith, ranked No. 15 in the nation, were picked to win the Western Division in a preseason poll of CIAA coaches, but there have been challenges. During the holiday break, three players left the team, which redistributed playing time. Now the

Bulls go at least nine deep, which keeps everyone happy.

"I think right now, we're overachieving," Joyner said. "We're only a 10-man squad, we're small compared to some teams we're playing against. I think in many ways we're overachieving and overcoming, so that's what it's all about."

What the Bulls haven't lost is its starting lineup. Forward John Fulton is still

Smith's top player, center Charles Clark is the league's best inside scorer and the three-guard tandem of Parker, Jerome Givens and Maurice Hooper all can push the ball and play defense.

"We feel like we can play with anybody in the country, home or away," Parker said. "We just strap it on and go to work and work on executing."

West Charlotte a force in prep wrestling

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teered his services for three years before taking over full-time in 2003.

"We've done it through a lot of hard work, and our guys have done a great job recruiting (fellow West Charlotte students) We don't have middle-school wrestling programs in the inner city, so that hurts. And since (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools) cancelled the late buses (last fall in a fuel-saving measure), the majority of the inner-city kids were left without rides. So we take them home, and they use their own money to catch the bus. Those things have been a big obstacle to us, but we weren't going to let that hold us back."

The schedule gets a little tricky for Howard, who works full-time in Concord at Philip Morris. Assistant coach Ivan Neely, a former wrestler at Appalachian State, works at Bank of America as a business tech analyst and hustles

to practices and games with the perseverance of a marathoner.

The two coaches' dedication to the program has been infectious.

"We're going to work harder, we're going to practice harder than anyone else," said Brian Richardson, a senior with a 26-6 record at 189 pounds. "Before, we had to make ourselves known. Now, people know who we are, and we want to keep it that way. Our motto is: 'You train, you win, enough said.'"

Richardson's twin brother, Brandon, has a 27-4 record at 215 pounds. The twins are team captains, along with fellow seniors Daron Boyd (24-8 at 152 pounds) and Mordecai Scott (23-4 at 171 pounds).

"The big thing is us being a majority African-American team," said Scott, whose brother, Isaiah, also is among the team leaders. "Wrestling's not really big in our community. But what we're doing now shows we

can actually do this. People know now that when you wrestle West Charlotte, you're going to get a fight."

That competition goes beyond the mat.

According to Lee, the team has an overall GPA of 3.1. Mordecai Scott has a 5.0 grade-point average on a weighted scale, followed by

brother Isaiah at 4.25. Brian Richardson has a 3.8, while Brandon Richardson and teammate Kris Brevard have averages of 3.75.

"It's a great rags-to-riches story," Howard said. "Not that we're rich now, but we've come a long way with this program."

"A very long way."



PHOTO: CURTIS WILSON

West Charlotte High senior Brian Richardson, who wrestles at 189 pounds, has a 26-6 record. His twin brother, Brandon, is 27-4 at 215 pounds.

NATIONAL SIGNING DAY FEB. 1

For Golden Bulls, football signees more likely to trickle in

By Herbert L. White
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Successful recruiting in Division II football isn't measured in February.

It's more like May and July.

At Johnson C. Smith, the Golden Bulls will have a few signees - mostly transfers from Division I-AA schools - on Feb. 1, when high school athletes can sign national letters of intent, head coach Daryl McNeill said.

"It's a big deal because people want to know that you're out there doing something," he said. "Of course, we want to put some names out there, but what you won't ever see is a big conglomerate of 15 to 20 to 30 names of people that we have signed."

The process has already started. McNeill declined to identify transfers who are already in class, but said they'll upgrade the talent pool. Coming off a second straight 0-10 season, the Bulls have needs everywhere, starting with the defense. Starting linebackers Chris Nelson and Jarrell Goodwin are graduating or undecided about playing a fifth season of eligibility. Safety is another need area, with George Pope graduating. Of course, in Division II, offensive and defensive line is always a priority.

"We've addressed linebacker, cornerback and running back (with athletes) that have done well at the I-AA schools they've transferred from," McNeill said. "The thing is we've got to concentrate on ... linemen, those linebackers."

That'll take time and luck. Division I-A programs usually get the cream of the high school crop, but others fall to the lower divisions because of academics or changes in recruiting requirements. That's when patience - and relationships with other coaches - becomes important.

"It's frustrating at times, but the thing you have to do is establish relationships with Division I-A and Division I-AA programs where you have a feel for who they're going after, who's having grade problems, those types of things," McNeill said.

On offense, McNeill wants to add depth at tailback, where Andre Williams was named to the CIAA all-freshman team and receiver, as well as the line. Another priority is finding another receiver to pair with top wideout Marquis Belton (North Mecklenburg High).

"We have to get better in the tailback position," McNeill said. "We have to have a guy who can take it to the house. We feel like we have to take some pressure off Marquis with another big-time receiver, someone that can really (eliminate) the double-coverage for him."

Even if it takes waiting until July



McNeill

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