

Panthers addressing defense in free agency

By Herbert L. White
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The Carolina Panthers didn't waste time replenishing their defense.

The Panthers signed unrestricted free agent defensive tackles Maake Kemoatu from Baltimore and Damione Lewis from St. Louis to beef up the line thinned by the release of Bronston Buckner. Then they signed strong safety Shaun Williams from the New York Giants to add depth after losing starter Marlon McCree to San Diego.

Kemoatu and Lewis are likely starters next season, especially if Kris Jenkins' recovery from knee surgery takes longer than expected. The Panthers still are expected to address filling spots at linebacker. Brandon Short was cut to save money against the salary cap, and unrestricted free agent Will Witherspoon left for St. Louis.

Kemoatu (6-2, 301 pounds) has played in 61 games with 21 starts and became a full-time starter last season. The 27-year-old started all 16 games and produced 40 tackles and a sack.

"Maake was one of the players we said was a priority for us in free agency and gives us a force inside," Panthers General Manager Marty Hurney said in a statement. "From what we gather, he was a highly sought-after player and we feel very fortunate to have

signed him."

Undrafted out of Utah in 2002 by the Ravens, Kemoatu was a college teammate of current Panthers Jordan Gross and Steve Smith. A Tonga native, his name is pronounced ma-AH-kay key-moy-AH-too.

In five years with St. Louis, Lewis (6-2, 301 pounds) totaled 204 tackles and 10.5 sacks. He recorded 40 tackles and one sack in 16 games with seven starts in 2005. His best season in 2004 with career highs in tackles (61) and sacks (5) while starting a career-best 10 games.

"We are thrilled to add Damione to our defensive line," Hurney said. "He is a very talented player who we liked coming out of Miami five years ago, and we think he is an excellent fit for us on the field and in the locker room."

Williams (6-2, 218 pounds) started 58 straight games from 2000-2003 and finished second on the team with a career-best 108 tackles in 2002. During the Giants' Super Bowl season in 2000, Williams started all 19 games and was named to Sports Illustrated's All-Pro team after registering 85 tackles and three interceptions.

Williams, 29, played in eight games last season before being placed on injured reserve (hamstring). He finished the season with 16 tackles and two interceptions.

Former Tigers star hopes to bridge racial and social gaps

By Harry Atkins
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LAKELAND, Fla. — Willie Horton grew up in a loving family in Detroit, watched over by a wise father. Maybe that's why he had to travel to the Deep South to learn the hard facts of racial prejudice.

Horton, the hometown hero who signed with the Tigers right out of Northwestern High School in 1961, recalls his first trip to Florida for spring training. Lakeland, like the rest of the South, was a different place in those days.

"The town was segregated. Horton said the club's Tigertown training complex was too.

"I could not stay at Tigertown," Horton recalled before a recent workout of Detroit's pitchers and catchers. "I had to stay across town, about eight miles away."

"That situation was made more complicated by the fact that taxis in Lakeland wouldn't carry him to the ballpark.

"At first, I thought the cabbies were playing a joke on me," Horton said. "It was my first experience with that kind of thing. I finally took my duffel bag and walked."

A few years ago, he relayed this story to the late civil rights icon Rosa Parks.

"She understood," Horton said.

Horton, of course, went on to become one of Detroit's most celebrated baseball players. He played 14 of his 18 seasons in the major leagues for the Tigers. He'll always be remembered for his throw from left field to nail St. Louis' Lou Brock at the plate in Game 5 of the 1968 World Series, a pivotal 5-3 win over the Cardinals.

Less well remembered is the fact that he left Tiger Stadium in full uniform one awful day in 1967 in a desperate attempt to quell rioting in northwest Detroit.

"I'm like a bridge, I guess," Horton said. "I'm always trying to bring peace to society."

He's been at it for a long time. And he shows no sign of letting up.

Last year, Horton and his wife, Gloria, "adopted" two families that fled Hurricane Katrina. One of the families probably will return, he said, but the other family wants to remain in the Detroit area. Close to Horton.

Now, the Hortons already had seven children, 19 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Why would they take on strangers?

"Well, you know, we're all

one family anyway," Horton said.

Yet it doesn't stop there.

Horton's autobiography, "The People's Champion," written with Kevin Allen and a forward by Al Kaline, is in its second printing. Horton said the book soon will be used in Detroit public schools. He said he hopes other schools might also elect to use it as a tool to help some students read.

Horton, who, along with Kaline, is a special assistant to Tigers president Christopher Ilitch, has recently begun to reap a few honors for his good works.

- In 2000, his jersey No. 23 was retired and a Comerica Park statue of his likeness was unveiled.

- In 2003, he was named by Corp Magazine as one of Michigan's most influential African-American business leaders.

- In 2004, his birthday, Oct. 18, was permanently designated as "Willie Horton Day" in the state of Michigan on an order signed by Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

- And last year, new baseball and softball fields at his alma mater, Northwestern High, were named in Horton's honor.

Horton also has a project, inspired by the guidance from his own mother and father, aimed at getting parents to spend more time with their children. And he's not asking for much. In fact, he's only asking for five minutes a day.

"I call it my Five-minute Program," he said. "Spend five minutes with your kids. You'd be surprised how many people don't even do that."

"I'm concerned. I'm concerned about what's out there for my grandkids."

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