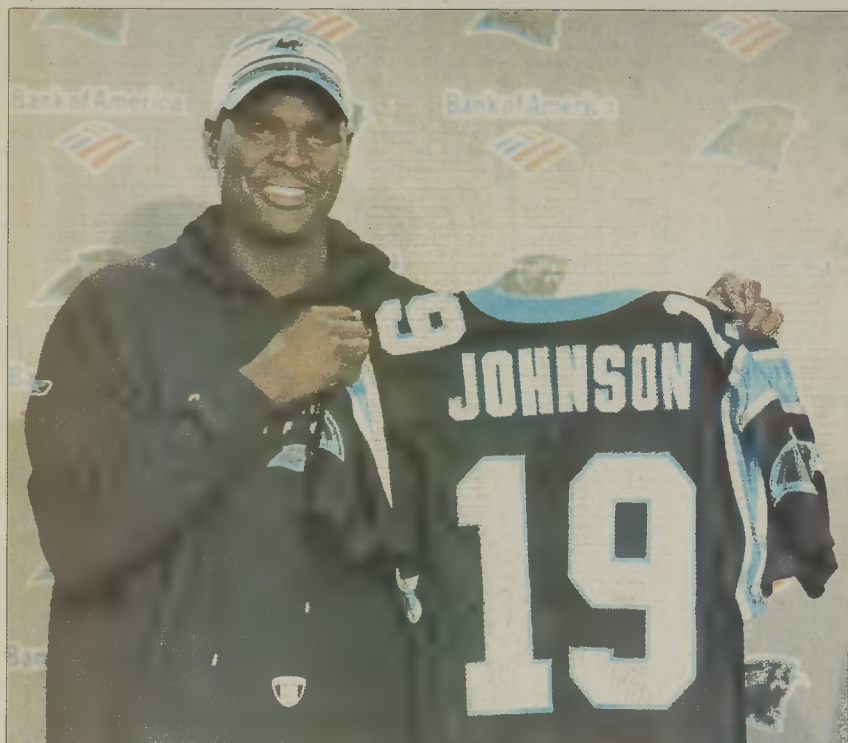


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SPORTS

Section

SECOND BANANA'S OK



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

Carolina Panthers receiver Keyshawn Johnson credits fellow receiver Steve Smith with convincing him to sign with the Panthers. Johnson gives Carolina a physical receiver who isn't afraid of blocking - something the Panthers lacked last season when Muhsin Muhammad left for Chicago via free agency.

Key ingredient

Fellow wideout convinced Johnson to sign with Panthers

By Paul Nowell
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Carolina receiver Steve Smith might have been the biggest influence in persuading Keyshawn Johnson to the sign with the Panthers. "He threatened me a couple of times to make this

decision," Johnson quipped Friday after signing a four-year contract to play for the Panthers. Johnson, who negotiated the contract himself while his agent serves a one-year suspension, got a \$19 million deal that includes a \$5 million signing bonus.

"Was I unreasonable?" he asked general manager Marty Hurney. "Apparently not!" Hurney fired back. Johnson becomes the complement to Smith that the Panthers lacked last season during their run to the NFC championship game. Smith

was their only big playmaker, and teams could clamp down on him to stop Carolina's offense. Johnson called Smith "the most dominant force in the NFL at wide receiver" and said he was looking forward to lining up next to him
Please see SMITH/2C



FILE PHOTO/CURTIS WILSON

Heavyweight Calvin Brock of Charlotte is ranked No. 3 in the world by the International Boxing Federation.

Brock's goal: Unify heavyweight division

Charlotte contender aims for title bout by end of the year

By Herbert L. White
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Calvin Brock sees himself as more than a rising star in boxing's heavyweight division. He's going to be 'The Man'. Brock, 28-0 with 22 knockouts, is ranked in the top six in three of the major sanctioning bodies, topping out at third in the International Boxing Federation. He's looking for a title opportunity after his June 24 bout against Timor Ibrigamov at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. "Right now, there is no man," Brock said. "The man is going to be who the public perceives as being the man, and I'm working right now to be perceived as the man with or without a title. I'm the one who's going to clean it up." Brock, a Charlotte native and West Charlotte High graduate, is creating some buzz in boxing circles with an unbeaten record. At 31, he's breaking into the national limelight after a streak of impressive outings. Five years after earning a spot in the Olympics, his professional path of steady improvement is bearing fruit: He'll open training camp for Ibrigamov May 7. "I'm OK with it because it's best to move along slowly and win and grasp the public's attention with me as the See BROCK/2C

Golden Bulls face major basketball rebuilding



PHOTO/CURTIS WILSON

Guards Maurice Hooper (above) and Jerome Givens provide continuity in Johnson C. Smith's backcourt, but the Golden Bulls lose their top scorers in center Charles Clark and forward John Fulton.

3 of top 4 scorers are graduating

By Herbert L. White
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Johnson C. Smith's Golden Bulls have a lot of rebuilding to do. Smith won the CIAA West Division and advanced to the Division II tournament with a 23-8 record, but lose three starters, including all-conference center Charles Clark and forward John Fulton. Clark led the Bulls in scoring with 18.7 points per game and Fulton was the league's defensive player of the year in addition to averaging 13.6 points an outing. A third starter, guard Prince Parker, was a versatile asset on either end of the floor and reserve center Bobby Bienemee was a defensive presence. After playing most of the season with just 10 players, losing 40 percent of the roster is a major blow. But Smith will return its backcourt of guards Maurice Hooper and Jerome

Givens as next season's foundation. Givens was arguably the most improved player, finally showing the decision-making skills of a point guard head coach Steve Joyner envisioned. Givens averaged 8.6 points and 4.7 assists per game. Hooper followed up a CIAA freshman of the year season with a strong sophomore campaign in which he became more of a scorer (12.8 points per game) and better defender. He led the Bulls with 67 steals. But there'll be major issues to address in the frontcourt, where the Bulls don't have a returning go-to scorer. Center David Sanders showed some promise with 4.9 points per game while connecting on 60.2 percent of his shots. After playing in Clark's shadow for two seasons, the 6-8 Sanders will have a chance to shine with more playing time. A couple of reserves, Darren Ramsey and Terry Givens, will also have to improve in order to move up to more minutes.

Davis drives off with historic first victory

By Herbert L. White
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I didn't take Marc Davis long to find Victory Lane. In his debut race with the Drive for Diversity program and Joe Gibbs Racing, 15-year-old Davis won the Limited Late Model stock car race at Hickory Motor Speedway Saturday. In doing so, he became just the second African-American to win a stock car race at Hickory, joining former Gibbs Racing driver Chris Bristol, who won last April. After starting third, Davis took the lead during the final lap and piloted the No. 92 Levi Strauss Signature Chevrolet to victory, making him the first Drive for Diversity driver to win in 2006. "The diversity program is a real source of pride for all of us at Joe Gibbs Racing," said J.D. Gibbs, the team's president. "Thanks to (the late football hall of famer) Reggie White's vision, our diversity program was the first to be founded and the first to win races. It's a proving ground for young drivers like Marc Davis, and already he's carrying on the tradition set by our original drivers - Chris Bristol and Eric Almirola.

See DAVIS/2C



PHOTO/DRIVE FOR DIVERSITY

Marc Davis celebrates his first win last week at Hickory Motor Speedway. Davis, 15, is the second African American to ever win at the track.

BASEBALL 2006

Bonds ready for record pursuit; is Rocket?

By Mike Fitzpatrick
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

As Barry Bonds takes aim at The Babe and Hammerin' Hank, the Houston Astros can only hope for a call from Roger Clemens.

With opening day right

around the corner, nobody is sure what to expect from two of baseball's biggest - and oldest - stars. Bonds is swinging for the home run record on a cranky right knee, in the center of a steroids scandal. The Rocket hasn't said if he'll

return to the National League champs, or any other team. That makes it hard to predict what lies ahead this season, though Atlanta is always a safe bet. Led by ace pitcher John Smoltz (another aging stal-

wart) and enduring manager Bobby Cox, the Braves are seeking their 15th straight division title - and maybe even a playoff victory for a change. First, they'll have to hold off Carlos Delgado, Billy Wagner
Please see EMBATTLED/2C

