

# Football dreams bloom in European spring



PHOTO:WAYNE PAULO.COM

Rhein Fire receiver and former Hampton star Zuriel Smith has three touchdowns in four NFL Europe games.

## Throwing helps Wyatt's recovery

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"While I was over there I had a couple of cousins that were in units around me, and they were killed on a mission, so I had gone into a depression during my rehab," he said. "We were raised together and I wasn't able to go to the funeral so I had to deal with it on my own. It was real hard for me to rebound from that and continue my rehabbing. Everything took a back-seat. (the Army) said I had a disattachment to reality."

The Army determined Wyatt was not able to complete rehab assignment in a wartime environment, so he was sent home. Wyatt finished rehab at Fort Knox in Kentucky, and his parents urged him to return to Charlotte.

"My parents felt that it was best that I stay at the same school," he said. "I had gained weight to be able to carry the weapons over there. So because I love sports, I love my teammates, Abe (Morlu) ... used to e-mail me when I was over in Iraq to encourage me. Terry Watson and I came in as freshmen ... they were always saying 'We need you to contribute.'"

Morlu saw the opportunity to use Wyatt's increased strength in field events, specifically the hammer throw.

"Coming in he was pretty strong and we had just lost our best thrower the year before ... so I thought it would behoove him to come out and give the hammer throw a try," Morlu said. "We talked on a regular basis, and his mind set was beyond his age, so it made it really easy for him to take advice. I guess the military really helped him in that aspect."

Working with strength coaches and head coach Robert Olesen, Wyatt, 22, was able to improve his technique despite the injury to his non-throwing shoulder. He has a personal best hammer toss of 49.26 meters, second all time at Charlotte. Wyatt also has the third best shot put (13.29 meters), and at the Duke Invitational last week, he turned in a hammer throw of 41 meters.

"Brandon has done an excellent job," Olesen said. "It has taken awhile, but he's really focused on developing that technique as a hammer thrower. The quickness that he had as a sprinter early on helps him with the quick footwork in the ring when he goes to throw. With us pursuing a victory in our conference, he could play a major role for us in the hammer throw."

Wyatt, who plans to enroll in graduate school at Howard, credits his support system of parents, family, and friends that always kept encouraging him to compete again.

"I had a great deal of help from coaches, my parents, family and a lot of teammates," he said. "They helped me readjust back to as normal as possible. The biggest thing about coming back and competing is just readjustment, getting used to the competition and getting used to the environment. I wanted to be able to still contribute to the team. My shoulder bothers me from time to time, but if I'm working out too hard coach Olesen will say 'calm down.' He looks out for me."

## WNBA Sting re-signs center, extends guard

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great confidence that she will continue to make valuable contributions to our team."

An Eastern Conference All-Star in 2002, the 6-4 Sutton-Brown is Charlotte's all-time leader with 327 offensive rebounds and with 233 blocks. She became the 10th woman in WNBA history to reach the 200-block plateau.

Mazzante, a two-year veteran, was selected 18th overall by Charlotte in the 2004 WNBA Draft. She has averaged 2.3 points in 61 career games.

"It was important for us to know that Kelly will continue to be part of the Sting," Lacey said. "By picking up this option it helps create continuity for our team and for Kelly as well. Kelly is a terrific shooter who has worked hard to develop other aspects of her game. We expect her to continue to grow and flourish as a player in Charlotte."



FILE PHOTO

Center Tammy Sutton-Brown the Charlotte Sting's all-time leader in offensive rebounds and blocked shots, re-signed Monday.

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"It's getting better," he said. "It was tough being away from my family. It's tough being away from your support system, but it's getting better."

The six-team NFL Europe is the NFL's minor league. Its asset is playing time, something every hopeful is looking for to boost his chances of making an NFL roster. Every NFL team allocates players to Europe — Mitchell was sent by Chicago; Smith by New England. NFL Europe alumni include Carolina Panthers quarterback

Jake Delhomme (1999) and backup running back Jamal Robertson (2005). Nineteen black-college players are in the league this year.

Mitchell is learning to play a new position. He broke into the NFL as a tackle with Cleveland in 2002, then went to Chicago, where he started 14 games in 2004 before breaking his leg. When the Bears revamped

their line, Mitchell was moved inside.

"When I started with the Bears, I was a left tackle," Mitchell said. "They put me at guard and they sent me here to learn the techniques and lose a little weight."

Smith was out of football for two years before coming back with the Patriots. As New England retooling after winning three Super Bowls in four seasons, he's looking to pick up his dream where he left it. Smith has done pretty well: through four games, he has 12 catches for 139 yards and three touchdowns.

"Although I could've been doing 1,000 other things, I didn't want to pass up the opportunity," he said. "Basically I'm trying to sharpen my fundamentals and gain weight (he's 5-11, 168 pounds), but not a lot."

Smith's efforts have helped Rhein to a 4-0 start and the league's only undefeated team. He figures that will draw the attention of NFL coaches who monitor their players as well as free agents.

"They're coming here to get guys off winning teams," Smith said. "They're not going to be signing many players off 0-10 teams."

Mitchell's inspiration comes from a former A&T teammate. Running back Maurice Hicks, who played in NFL

Europe in 2003, graduated to the big league's San Francisco 49ers.

"Maurice is the guy I talk to regularly," he said. "He

came over here and did his thing. I can't let A&T down, so I've got to do my thing, too."

With such a deep contingent of black college players in Europe, the trash-talking is constant, if good-natured. "That's one part of home that managed to get across the Atlantic."

"It's kind of neat to see those guys that you played with," Smith said. "I talk the trash — Hampton is the best school."

And thousands of miles away from home, Mitchell is grateful for his European apprenticeship, which reminds him of college in at least one aspect.

"How often do you get to leave the country and improve yourself?" he asked. "It's like an internship, and just like an internship, they don't pay."

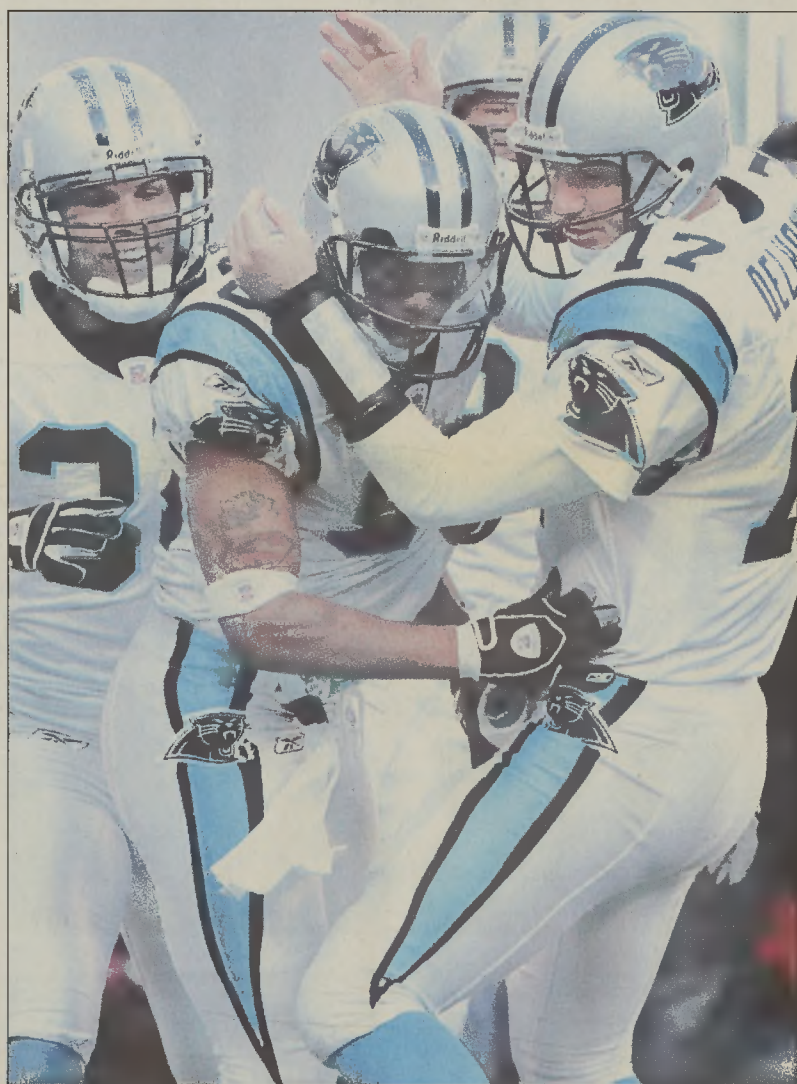


Mitchell



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