

C

SPORTS

Section

A fabulous finale

JOHNSON C. SMITH AT N.C. CENTRAL | SATURDAY, 1 P.M., O'KELLY-RIDDICK STADIUM, DURHAM

Records and rankings on line for Bulls and rival Eagles

By Herbert L. White
herb.white@thecharlottepost.com

It's been a long time since Johnson C. Smith played meaningful football in November.

The Golden Bulls play at N.C. Central with regional rankings, school records and a Pioneer Bowl berth at stake. The Eagles (9-0, 6-0 CIAA, No. 4 in Division II) have wrapped up the West Division championship, but a Smith (7-2, 4-2 CIAA, No. 10 in Southeast region) win would be the Bulls' first eight-victory season since the 1975 team went 8-2.

"We feel like we can win out," JCSU coach Daryl McNeill said. "You play to win and every time you line up, you have to We're going to give Central everything they ask for in a Smith football team."

Smith pulled closer to the Pioneer Bowl bid by beating Division I-AA Savannah State 27-6 last week for homecoming. As one of five CIAA teams eligible for the postseason game, the Bulls need a win at Central, ranked fourth in the nation in Division II, to solidify their case.

"We're looking forward to that Central game. That's our next homecoming," said linebacker Omar Bizzell, a senior from Raleigh. "We Please see STATEMENT/2C



Dix



McNeill



Johnson C. Smith cornerback De'Audra Dix (4) has returned four kicks for touchdowns this season, including a 74-yarder last week against Savannah State.



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Carolina cornerback Ken Lucas upends Dallas receiver Terrell Owens Sunday.

So many questions, so few answers

Panthers are nowhere near a smooth-running team yet

By Cheris F. Hodges
cherishodges@thecharlottepost.com

For the Carolina Panthers, the bye week couldn't have come at a better time.

Coming off a 35-14 loss to the Dallas Cowboys, the Panthers have to figure out why they can't score in the second half. It happened in their loss to Cincinnati and the defense allowed 25 unanswered points in the fourth quarter against Dallas.

"We have to get better," said free safety Mike Minter. "The coaches will go into the bye week and look at what they have to do to make changes and we'll just go with that."

"One minute we look like a playoff Super Bowl contender and the next minute we look like we don't have a clue," said cornerback Ken Lucas. "We have to try and figure things out. It's not too late, but time is running out for us."

Lucas said the Dallas loss was a total embarrassment because the Panthers didn't finish the game. "We have not been finishing games and that's something that we have to learn to do as the season goes forward," he said.

In Carolina's four losses, the Panthers failed to score in the fourth quarter.

"We have to do the little things correctly and not making mistakes," Lucas said. "Turnovers is the biggest key in whether you win or lose and we've got to try to cause turnovers and not give the ball away."

Please see PANTHERS/2C

Win helps JCSU keep pace in Pioneer Bowl chase

By Herbert L. White
herb.white@thecharlottepost.com

Johnson C. Smith is one of five teams still in contention for the CIAA's Pioneer Bowl slot.

The CIAA representative

must have at least a .500 record. The contenders are:

- N.C. Central (10-0, 6-0) rolled Livingstone 37-15 to wrap up the West and a likely Division II playoff bid. The Eagles are fourth in the

nation, third in the Southeast. Only North Alabama, the No. 2 team in the Southeast, is in front of NCCU in the national poll.

Next up: Johnson C. Smith for the Eagles' homecoming.

- Johnson C. Smith (7-2, 4-2): The Golden Bulls pasted Savannah State 27-6 to clinch second in the West. The Bulls haven't won this many games since 1996 and are a strong

See ELIZABETH/3C

With Wallace, Bulls' expectations rise

By Andrew Seligman

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
CHICAGO - The afro is gone, and Ben Wallace is wearing the Chicago Bulls' red and white instead of the Detroit Pistons' red and blue.

"I look real good in it," the former Virginia Union standout said.

The Bulls agree. The new hairdo and uniform aside, the four-time Defensive Player of the Year is on a team that is expected

to contend for the Eastern Conference championship. Nothing new there. But for the Bulls, it's a change.

After two straight first-round playoff exits, they want more.

The Bulls finished with 41

victories last season after winning 12 of their final 14 games to make the playoffs and gave eventual champion Miami a scare last season, before losing in six games. Then, they made

Please see BIG BEN/2C



Wallace

Life in the pits a dream come true for crew woman



PHOTO/DARRICK IGNASIAK

Melanie Thomas ditched her regular routine for a career as a tire-changer for Mike Skinner's NASCAR team.

By Darrick Ignasiak
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

MARTINSVILLE, Va. - Melanie Thomas' early resume gave no hint of what was to come.

She held several typical jobs - she had worked in a library, was employed in the day care field and was hired by a bank.

But Thomas is anything but typical. So she packed everything into her car and made the 14-hour journey from Lake Geneva, Wis. to Hickory to follow her dream: to work as pit-crew member for a NASCAR driver. It was a dream she had clung to since she attended her first race at the age of 13. Now, 13 years later, she is making it come true.

Thomas recently was a member of NASCAR driver Morgan Shepherd's pit crew. Two days after her brief

stint with Shepard, she joined CJM Motorsports headed by driver Mike Skinner - to be the right-rear tire changer. In all, she has worked on four teams.

"To have a girl that wants to be a tire changer and works at it shows real commitment on her part," said Robbie Loomis, a former crew chief for Jeff Gordon and executive vice president of operations for Petty Enterprises.

A committed Thomas was the first woman to ever to "go over the wall" (working on a car during a racing pit stop) in a Nextel Cup event. She was also the first female to do pit work in a Nextel Cup points event. Thomas' growing list of "firsts" has largely gone unnoticed by the news media, which is fine with Thomas.

"I'd rather be off the radar to give me a chance to get my feet wet,"

See HER DREAM/2C

CHARLOTTE GOLF

Brown earns Revolution fall championship

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Victor Brown won the Revolution Fall Club championship at Revolution Park Golf Course Oct. 28.

Brown, who finished with a 69, won a tiebreaker with James Boulter Harold Varner and Brandon Fisher each finished at 71.

- Donald Littlejohn, Rick Best, Joe Johnson and James Johnson won the Jack Brayboy homecoming tournament at The Tradition Oct. 27.

The foursome won a tiebreaker with Lasonio Thompson, Julian Collins, Sheldon Davis and David Sellers.

The tournament was part of Johnson C. Smith's homecoming activities.

- Willie Fields won the Masters City Golf Association Classic Sept. 16 in Augusta, Ga. Fields carded a two-round total of 149, 11 shots ahead of Chris Coles. Melvin Jackson was third at 161.

- Par-Busters Golf Group will host its Member-Guest and Friends tournament Nov. 19 at Birkdale Golf Club in Huntersville.

Entry fee is \$70 per player, and includes green fees, carts, range balls and prizes. Deadline for payment is Nov. 12 and can be mailed to John Love Sr., 929 Plumstead Road, Charlotte, NC 28216 or Andre Springs, 165000

See PAR BUSTERS/3C