



Charlotte native aims to unify heavyweight titles

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stand still for Wladimir." To that end, the 6-3 Brock, 31, wants to move and avoid taking punishment. He's never been knocked down and figures he has the speed to keep Klitschko guessing.

"When I get in there, my job is to fight my pace, which is staying pretty busy," Brock said. "I'm going to hit Wladimir and not take too many shots myself."

Brock will try to become the second American to win a world title in a week. Shannon Briggs stopped Sergei Liakhovich last Saturday to win the WBO championship, breaking a logjam of Eastern European titleholders. Brock insists he'd make the kind of champion — an eloquent pugilist — that American fight fans can embrace.

"It's very important to the heavyweight division in the U.S., but it's not that important in Great Britain and Germany," said the West

Charlotte High School and UNC Charlotte graduate. "I'm the only hope to make it happen."

Five straight wins over the last year raised Brock's profile and moved him to the top of the worldwide rankings. Among the victims were Jameel McCline, who once fought for the world title and top-10 contender Timur Ibragimov, a heavy hitter like Klitschko. He beat both easily.

"I guess I've been coming out from under the radar," Brock said. "I was under the radar until I beat Jameel McCline. I'm the most deserving of the title shot."

And now it's here, after four years of climbing up the ranks. The only thing to do now is get in the ring and take care of business.

"All the preparation is in," Brock said. "All we have to do is hang loose. We had a great camp — no injuries, no hands hurt, no bruised ribs. Everything went perfect."

Bulls left to ponder Pioneer

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ing mistakes, unraveled in the finale. Seven turnovers doomed the Bulls, and Central made them pay early and often. Quarterback Carlton Richardson, who threw a pair of first-half interceptions and lost a fumble that Central turned into 17 points, took responsibility for putting Smith in a hole.

"Turnovers can definitely kill you," he said. "I should've played a little better. The offense is riding on my shoulders and I let them down, but the game is over and we've just got to move on."

Despite the finale's bitter taste, there are lessons to be learned, Wilson insists. Perhaps there'll be a chance for atonement in the Pioneer Bowl. But next year's team will be prepared to build on this year's success.

"It's going to help us if anything because the guys next year know how (it feels) to

actually lose like this," he said. "I think it's going to be a motivational tool for the younger guys if we don't get the Pioneer Bowl bid to just start working out and get everything going from there."

"We can grow from this being in this atmosphere, this hostile crowd and Central coming in, we can definitely learn from this game," Richardson said. "Not getting ahead of ourselves on what we need to do, but focus on what's at hand."

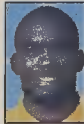
Perhaps, on Nov. 17, that'll include preparation for a bowl game. Elizabeth City will have a major say in whether Smith gets the Pioneer bid, but at least the Bulls are in position to sweat details.

"It's going to be a hectic week for us," Richardson said. "We're hoping we can get some more CIAA teams into the playoffs and we're hoping the CIAA will bless us

with the Pioneer Bowl."

• In addition to Wilson, cornerback De'Audra Dix earned all-conference honors as a defensive back and kick returner. Dix is the second player (Craig Brown, 2002) to be named all-conference on offense and defense.

Defensive lineman D.J. Haynesworth was named second-team all-CIAA and fellow defensive lineman Lorenzo Hall was named all-rookie.



Dix



Haynesworth



Hall

Who's up, down for invitation

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Virginia Union. A win over NCCU, or perhaps a close loss, would propel ECSU into the playoffs. A blowout loss could damage playoff and Pioneer chances.

• **Johnson C. Smith** (7-3, 4-3). Seven turnovers and hot Eagles took some shine off a turnaround season, but

Golden Bulls aren't out of the running.

Local fan base alone makes JCSU a sexy choice, although Elizabeth City State folks may howl about their superior season. Speaking of howling, how can Smith linebacker Ed Wilson, the leading tackler in Division II, not be named league defensive

player of the year? ECSU linebacker Kevin Jones got that honor.

• **Virginia Union** (7-3, 5-2) Panthers would appear to be out of the running after losing to both JCSU and ECSU. Regardless, Union football can look forward to brighter days after spending the last two seasons in the dark.

First week is for playoff favorites

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years ago, Mecklenburg didn't have 14 high schools — period. That's counting the private schools, too.

THE FAVORITES: Of those in the hunt for championships, can anyone really, truly figure **Independence** will lose? The Patriots have the nation's longest active winning streak at 103 games and experience on the big stage, something **Weddington** will find out the hard way Friday.

Another time-tested program is **Charlotte Catholic**, winner of two straight titles and purveyors of the Wing-T offense. The Cougars are riding high with seven straight victories and are rounding into 3AA championship form when it matters most.

UPSET SPECIALS: Gimme **Vance** (8-3) against West Forsyth (8-3). The Cougars are going on the road, but they've been tough all season. Besides, as the No. 9 seed in the West,

can beating No. 8 be that difficult? For kicks, let's go with **Pernell Swell** from Lumberton against **West Charlotte** in the 4A ranks.

The seventh-ranked **Lions** (7-4) are banged up and don't have a lot of depth, which makes them ripe for the picking. If home field stands for anything, **West Charlotte** should take advantage, especially if the Lions find some offensive consistency.

WHO CAN STOP INDY?: Everybody in Mecklenburg County has given their best shot, to no avail. **Butler** gave the Patriots a run, leading 21-0 at halftime, but lost 30-24 in double overtime. **Myers Park** was competitive, and so were **Providence** (7-4) and **Vance**, but **Independence** is just so darn tough in the playoffs. It's like another gear magically kicks in.

Don't forget **Richmond County**, which opens at home against **Hopewell**. The Raiders are always woofing about taking down **Independence**. Maybe they'll get a shot.

Baker wants to get back in dugout

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major league All-Star team, said a baseball source who spoke on condition of anonymity. Hillman, who also interviewed with Texas and Oakland for their managerial vacancies, is scheduled to return to Japan on Friday. He'll manage a Japanese team in a forthcoming Asian series.

Baker has been spending time back in the Bay Area getting work done around his house that he didn't

have time for during his tenure in Chicago. While he would be thrilled if things work out in San Diego, he plans to take whatever happens in stride.

"I know what I'd like to do," he said. "I've had more options on the TV and radio side than the baseball side. No matter what, it's all good."

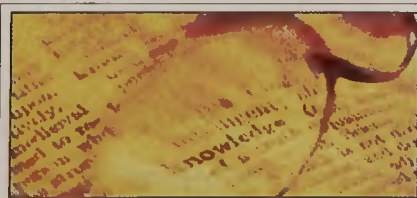
Of his work for ESPN during the World Series, Baker said: "It was fun. I had a great time and they taught me a lot. I was a rookie and didn't know what to do."

AP sports writer **Bernie Wilson** in San Diego contributed to this report.



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