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SPORTS

Section

Want job security? become a coach

"Mama, don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys."

Or firemen, policemen, teachers and especially not journalists.

No, if you want Little Junior to grow up and have job security for the rest of his life, start training him for a career in coaching. Get out that Etch-A-Sketch and start drawing up those Xs

and Os and diagrams right, 'cause the best gig out here - next to Bill Gates' of course - is a college head coach.

Sports is one of the few industries where a person can get fired for being incompetent and still collect a six-figure paycheck years down the road.

Take the recent Alabama/Mike Shula saga for instance. Shula, who didn't deserve the job in the first place - more on that later - had just inked a new six-year contract last May!

What did he do wrong? He couldn't beat arch rival Auburn.

What did he get for punishment? A pink slip and about four million George Washingtons.

And the list goes on: Iowa State and Michigan State fired coaches with long-term contracts. Right here in the Triangle, UNC's John Bunting and NC State's Chuck Amato have no jobs but plenty of unemployment security.

Why? Why sack a coach with years left on his contract? At least make him work for food.

"It may be because the program is not going in the direction where they [athletic directors/presidents] want it to go, and they feel it is in their best interest to make a coaching change, even if they have to pay the remainder of the contract," said Lonza Hardy, athletics director at Mississippi Valley State and a UNC graduate. "In the case with smaller institutions, especially HBCUs, you won't see many of them buying out contracts because it becomes a financial issue, even if they feel the program is not where they want it to be."

There are exceptions, however.

Bill Hayes was the football coach at N.C. A&T when he was fired with two years left on his contract. A few months later, North Carolina Central hired him as AD - two checks for the price of one job.

Understandably, Hayes is ambivalent about discussing the situation. On the one side, feelings are still pretty raw from his dismissal; on the other side, he's now, well, on that other side.

"It's hard for me NOT to say something about this; it's

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PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

Johnson C. Smith football coach Daryl McNeill took the Golden Bulls to a 7-4 record and a Pioneer Bowl appearance in 2006. University officials want to extend his contract, which has three more years.

McNeill, J.C. Smith to talk contract extension

By Herbert L. White
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Johnson C. Smith football coach Daryl McNeill is staying with the Golden Bulls for a while longer.

McNeill and JCSU President Dorothy Cowser Yancy each confirmed to The Post an extension to McNeill's original deal, which expires in 2009. Yancy said McNeill will also get a pay raise and an increase in scholarships that should exceed 20.

Said McNeill: "I want to stay, and we're already out recruiting for next year."

"We've come up with what we believe is a fair and equitable com-

ensation," Yancy said. "He's a wonderful coach and he's capable of getting more out of his players as students and athletes."

McNeill, 46, who led the Bulls to a 7-4 record and a berth in the Pioneer Bowl, is 17-24 in four seasons at Smith. He went 10-10 during his first stint, (1995-96) which included a 7-3 mark in his second season. Over the last 25 years, JCSU has been above .500 just four times - twice with McNeill as coach. That made it easier to offer an extension, Please see MCNEILL/3C



Yancy



BONITA BEST



PHOTO/CURTIS WILSON

Carolina Panthers receiver Drew Carter hangs his head as time runs out on the Panthers' 27-13 loss to the New York Giants last week. Carolina is 6-7 and all but out of the playoff chase.

Where did it go so wrong?

The truth not only hurts this time of year, it's cold, too.

The Carolina Panthers are going to be home for the playoffs, and they deserve it.

Remember when August's heat was at full blast and the entire football world was yapping about how good Carolina was? Super Bowl good, in fact. Winning the Super Bowl, for

Panthers' poor showing is a team effort

crying out loud.

Fast forward, if you will. December's chill is going full blast. Most folks in the football world won't even look for Charlotte unless they're trying to find Independence High. Yup, the Panthers have fallen that far off the map. Yet the signs of this season of high expectations and less than

stellar returns had warning signs all over it. Still, I figured this group was good for 10 wins, easy. At this rate, I'll be off by at least a couple.

First, there were those expectations. Every time the Panthers are projected to be special, like after an extended playoff run, something manages to go wrong. Were they full of themselves, somehow thinking there were advance reservations for South Florida already made? Nah. Way too much can happen, and for this

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HERBERT L. WHITE

Bonds, Giants were always the best fit for each other

By Janie McCauley
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN FRANCISCO - Barry Bonds' return to the San Francisco Giants feels a bit like a shotgun wedding.

As much as they might have wanted to part ways this winter, the Giants couldn't find another cleanup hitter as dangerous as Bonds. And the slugger struggled to find a better place to break Hank Aaron's home run

record than his longtime home.

Bay Area fans have stood by him through all of his off-field problems in a city where as a boy Bonds bounced around the Giants' clubhouse hanging on his godfather, Willie Mays, and late father, Bobby.

Bonds is despised and booed almost everywhere he goes aside from San Francisco's waterfront ball-

park, though swarms of people still roll in the gates to see No. 25 step into the batter's box.

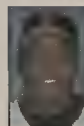
For a superstar player Giants owner Peter Magowan said would no longer be the focus of the franchise if he came back, Bonds is still going to be the centerpiece all right.

How could he not with the attention he brings, only 22 homers shy of passing

Aaron? No matter that Bonds generates more than his share of bad press, too, because of constant steroids questions and the chance he could be indicted by a federal grand jury on perjury charges.

Magowan probably wishes now he'd kept his mouth shut about Bonds. San Francisco, which hosts the 2007 All-Star game, might

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Bonds



PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

EXCHANGE RATE: Serena Williams returns a shot to sister Venus during the Williams Sisters Tour last week at Charlotte Bobcats Arena. Proceeds from the exhibition match go to construction of a Ronald McDonald House in Charlotte.