Bonds, Giants still together

Continued from page 1C

never have had any legitimate bidding competition at all with other teams, despite Bonds' side saying every organization had interest.

With the posturing and games played by both parties throughout the negotiation process, Bonds wound up getting almost exactly the kind of pay day he had hoped for: $16 million for one year and the opportunity to make $20 million with bonuses, right in line with his 2006 salary of $18 million.

No way Oakland or San Diego or anyone else was going to offer that much.

"I'm seeing guys sign for stupid amounts of money and they're not even premier players," San Francisco shortstop Omar Vizquel said. "They're average. You see a guy like Barry Bonds who's been in the record books forever and is an MVP, he's going to get paid."

They reached agreement last week, with final language of the contract still being worked out and the 42-year-old Bonds needing to take the obligatory physical. He is coming off surgery on his left elbow and had three operations on his right knee in 2005 that limited him to 14 games.

Bonds will earn double the money of any of his teammates next year. So much for the seven-time NL MVP being a bargain in this year's fertile free agent market. His defense is no longer at the Gold Glove level, but Bonds was running better late last season and still exhibits some of the best hand-eye coordination at the plate ever seen in his sport.

"I think with him searching for the record to become the home run king, the Giants were going to be able to accommodate Barry and his contract," Vizquel added. "He brings a lot of enthusiasm and excitement to the ballpark. With the All-Star game being in San Francisco, they really wanted to put up a good show for the fans and see him hit the record at home and retire as a Giant."

That's what Bonds has long wanted.

He made one main request to his representative, Jeff Borris, and that was to sign with a playoff-caliber team. Yet even with Bonds, the Giants will have a tough time contending in a division with the greatly improved Los Angeles Dodgers, two-time defending NL West champion San Diego Padres and up-and-coming Arizona Diamondbacks.

Want security? Become a coach

Continued from page 1C

hard for me TO say something about it too," he said. "I don't see any sense in continually changing coaches and not change the system. The problem is still going to be there."

Point well taken. UNC AD Dick Baddour hired former men's basketball coach Matt Doherty (forced to resign), and former fired football coaches Carl Torbush and Bunting yet was recently given a contract extension.

Even smaller HBCUs have their own system of keeping fired coaches on the payroll. Call it "reassignment."

Coaches are reassigned to administrative duties, thus giving back some labor to the university. Wouldn't we all like to have such options.

"When you get into the coaching profession and you're in it long enough, one of three things is going to happen: you're going to retire, you're going to get fired or you're going to die," Hardy said.

Make that four - the checks will still keep coming.

BONITTA BEST is sports editor at The Triangle Tribune in Durham.

McNeill, JCSU agree to extension

Continued from page 1C

Yancy said.

"I'm very confident" in McNeill's abilities, she said. "It's not like I was looking at some stranger in the office."

McNeill went 0-10 in 2005 before turning the program around, finishing second in the West Division behind N.C. Central.

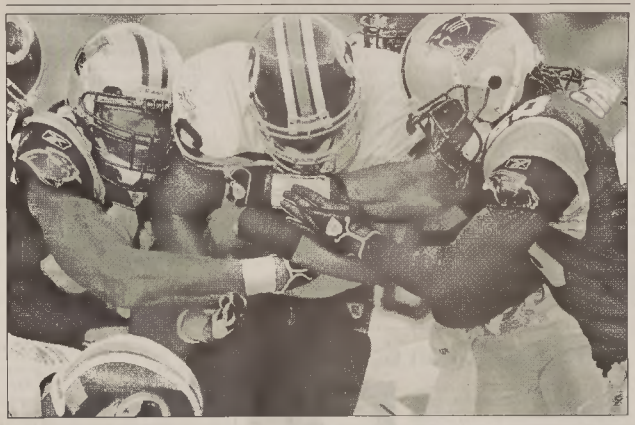
"Usually, with the type of season we had, you could look at it as" a vote of confidence by school officials, McNeill said.

Locking McNeill in long-term effectively prevents other schools from approaching him during the offseason. Several historically black colleges are in the market for new coaches, including Division II Benedict and CIAA rival Livingstone, which fired Garinger High graduate Robert Massey last week. Division I Howard is also looking for a new coach after firing Ray Petty. McNeill said he hasn't been contacted about any of those jobs.

"You always entertain what people offer when they inquire about your availability," he said. "But we're excited about what we have right here."

"I have sense enough to know any time we win, other schools try to recruit our coaches," Yancy said.

With N.C. Central moving to Division I and JCSU keeping McNeill and returning 16 starters, the Bulls will be among the early favorites for the West title in 2007.



PHOTO/WADE NASH

With end Julius Peppers (left) and cornerback Chris Gamble (right) Carolina's defense was expected to be the cornerstone of a Super Bowl run this season. That unit has struggled.

Panthers' slide a team affair

Continued from page 1C

group, it has been mostly bad.

The Panthers just haven't been very good, either. The offensive line doesn't dominate, so the running game is stuck in neutral. Without a running game, Jake Delhomme is just a chicken-pitchin' quarterback who can't win games on his own. Steve Smith is all-world when he has the ball, but defensive coordinators have gotten hip. Where once he ran free, Smith now has two or three escorts guarding him. Keyshawn Johnson is OK, but merely complementary as a receiver. Get the picture?

The defense hasn't been much better, undone by an inability to close out fourth-quarter leads. In recent weeks, the pass rush has been pedestrian and the beat-up secondary has been beaten like a washed up boxer. Even head coach John Fox has outsmarted himself, as in the Chris Gamble punt return/pass disaster against Minnesota or the blocked kick/timeout against Dallas.

It's pretty ugly, all right.

But there's always hope among the ruins, if you can sift through the debris. DeAngelo Williams can be special as a running back if he's situated properly. Thomas Davis is going to be pretty good with more time at linebacker. And as one of the teams that won't get to the playoffs, Carolina's bound to get a high draft pick in April.

Now, what do they use it on? I say start at quarterback, where the Panthers could use some competition, if not an upgrade. And middle linebacker. And offensive line. And secondary.

And lower expectations.

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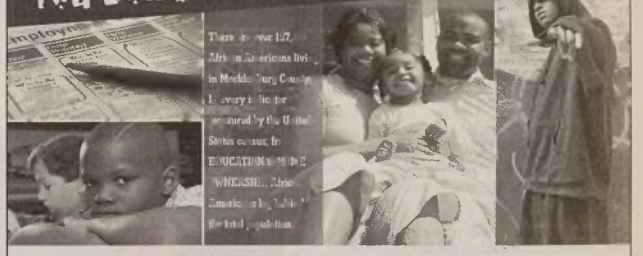

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