

Morgan OK to play in 2007

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 Panthers' final team meeting. "I felt great. I felt I was going to do real well and I went up there and did real well on all my testing. It ended up good. They cleared me and it felt like a weight was lifted off my shoulders."

Morgan, the Panthers' first-round pick in 2001, suffered his first concussion as a pro in 2003. He missed four more games in 2004 with another concussion. He then suffered one in the preseason and another in the loss to Atlanta in Week 1 this year.

Studies have shown players with multiple concussions are more likely to suffer more concussions with less contact, so there were questions that Morgan may not be able to return again — joining players such as Troy Aikman and Steve Young who had their careers cut short by multiple concussions.

But Morgan claims he's not hesitant about returning.

"Not at all. I feel fine and from the outside people are

always going to draw their own conclusions about how I feel and what happened," Morgan said. "But I feel great. I've had a lot of time to heal up. I feel ready to play and I'm excited to come back next season."

The Panthers could desperately use a healthy Morgan. Carolina ended a disappointing 8-8 season Sunday that was filled with numerous injuries to key players. Chris Draft eventually replaced Morgan, but the entire linebackers unit struggled.

"It's been real difficult, especially when you want to be out there helping your team," Morgan said. "Seeing them struggle was hard, too. There's always next year and I'm going to come back next year better than ever."

The Panthers signed him to a five-year, \$28 million contract before the 2005 season, a move criticized by many because of Morgan's history of injuries. He's missed 40 games in his six-year career.

The Panthers also had so

much money tied to Morgan they let fellow linebacker Will Witherspoon leave via free agency to St. Louis last offseason.

But getting Morgan cleared was a bit of good news for Carolina as players packed up their belongings and headed home after a brief team meeting.

"It was the first thing I asked him and he said, 'Yes I'm cleared,'" safety Mike Minter said. "That's the greatest thing, seeing him healthy and being able to come back and play."

As Morgan left the stadium with a trash bag full of gear, he sounded confident he'd prove wrong critics who question whether he'll be able to stay on the field next season.

"They feel I'm healed up and I'm ready to go," Morgan said. "Obviously if they felt I would go out there and hurt myself they wouldn't have cleared me. I feel great. It's nothing that I'm worried about and I'm excited to get out there next year."



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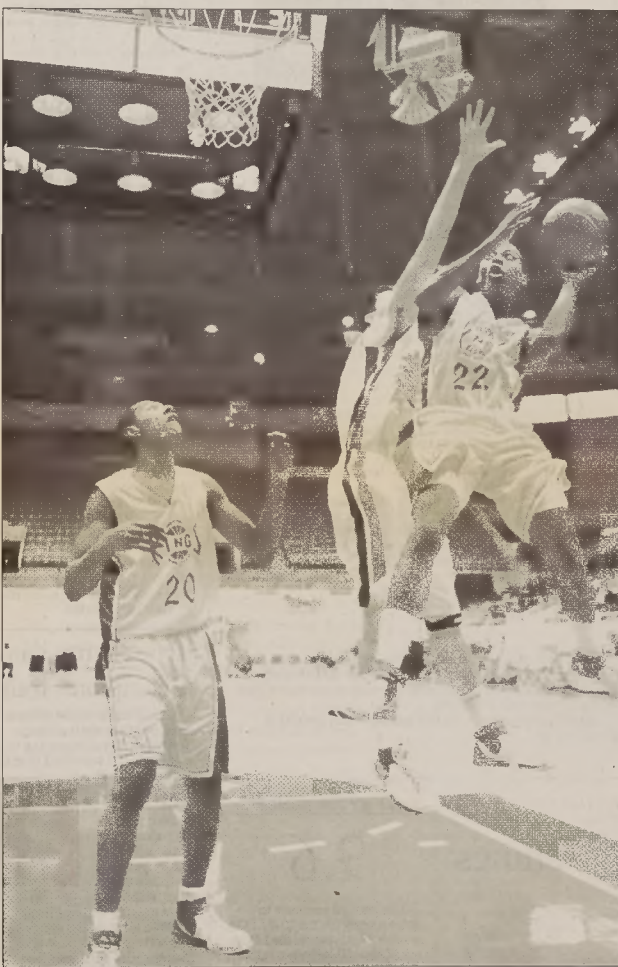


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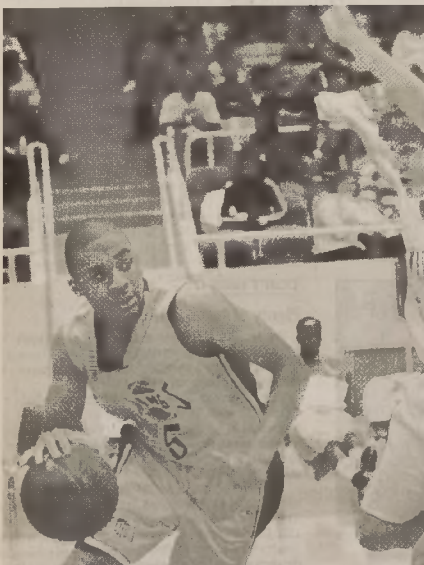


PHOTO: CURTIS WILSON

Charlotte Christian outlasted Victory Christian 69-63 in overtime of the local boys' championship game at the Bojangles Shootout last week at Cricket Arena. Victory Christian's Sidney McClettle (22 top) goes up for a shot. Left: Charlotte Christian's Carson Sullivan, who hit all five shots for 10 points in the game, defends against Victory Christian's Alvin Riley.

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