

## Since it's July, time to ask a few Panthers questions

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The basic building blocks are in place: Steve Smith is the best receiver in the game and the defense is good when engaged. The problem is whether last year's stumbles were an aberration or a sign of long-term slippage.

Is a new offense finally going to get into the zone?

New offensive coordinator Jeff Davison has installed a zone-blocking scheme with the intent of maximizing the talents of DeAngelo Williams and DeShaun Foster. They are slashers and burners, not power backs in the Stephen Davis mold.

If Davison's plan works, there actually might be a long-distance threat or two aside from Smith.

Quarterback derby: Head coach John Fox insists there's no open competition between Jake Delhomme and David Carr for the top spot. Right.

Remember 2002 when Rodney Peete was the entrenched starter and Delhomme was brought in as insurance? It took one half of the season opener to make a switch, and the Panthers went to the Super Bowl. Carr is at least Delhomme's equal and history does have a habit of repeating itself.

Safety first: Strong safety Mike Minter says this is his final season, and he'll likely spend it playing instead of mentoring. Nate Salley is relatively untested at free safety, but showed well in coaching sessions.

How much better is Peppers?

He's actually primed to be better in his sixth professional season. The only thing that may dampen his effectiveness is an uncertain situation at the opposite defensive end. If Rucker's fully recovered, Carolina's set. Otherwise, Peppers will see plenty of double-teaming.

Which rookie will have the most impact? Judging from spring ball, it'll be second-round pick Dwayne Jarrett of USC, a younger version of Johnson who will compete for a starting receiver job opposite Smith. But don't discount first-rounder Jon Beason, who is one Dan Morgan bell-ringer away from moving up to starting middle linebacker.

## Try picking All-Star reserves

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commendable total especially considering how little he gets to hit.

Yup, Bonds should bat in the middle of the National League order. Maybe right after Cincinnati's Ken Griffey Jr., another aging star enjoying an excellent year.

Playing in his glistering home ballpark on the San Francisco waterfront, Bonds would own the spotlight July 10. Should make for an intriguing night.

Other choices are much tougher. The American League is loaded with outstanding center fielders: Ichiro Suzuki, Torii Hunter, Grady Sizemore.

The NL is stacked at shortstop. Jose Reyes, Edgar Renteria or Hanley Ramirez? Don't forget J.J. Hardy and Jimmy Rollins.

"I've been playing around with it, but why waste your time before you know who the fans selected?" NL manager Tony La Russa of the St. Louis Cardinals said.

Due to subpar seasons, a few perennial All-Stars might be missing, including Mariano Rivera and Andrew Jones. In their place should be rising young stars such as Prince Fielder and Curtis Granderson.

But space is limited.

There are 32 spots on each roster, and 12 go to pitchers. Every team must be represented, which means finding an All-Star on the Texas Rangers and Kansas City Royals is required.

The league that wins will get home-field advantage in the World Series again.

"I've got a big job to do, and I don't have a lot of time. I'm looking forward to the game and the festivities, but I'm not looking forward to the next couple days. It's going to be hectic," AL manager Jim Leyland of the Detroit Tigers said this week.

"I don't think it is going to be that difficult, but someone is going to get screwed. You can write that down right now. Someone that deserves to be there is going to get left off, but that's not because of Jim Leyland and Tony La Russa, that's because of the system. I've got seven or eight picks, and once I make sure that every team has someone, I might be down to one or two."

Without regard to fan balloting, here are our picks for the 78th All-Star game at AT&T Park.

Starting with the AL:

First base - Red Sox slugger David Ortiz gets the start here because there's no designated hitter in the NL park. Boston's regular first baseman, Kevin Youkilis, makes it as a backup. Reigning MVP Justin Morneau is in, as long as he's recovered from a bruised lung. And the huge surprise is Tampa Bay's Carlos Pena, sent to minor league camp late in spring training. Take a look at his numbers since he's been playing every day - they're unbelievable. An injury keeps Texas' Mark Teixeira off the team.

Second base - With a recent surge, Baltimore's Brian Roberts earns the start at a relatively light position. Behind him is Toronto's lone representative, Aaron Hill, who is quietly having a solid season. Passing on Detroit's Placido Polanco was difficult. He was leading the fan vote, though.

Shortstop - Carlos Guillen of the Tigers beats out Yankees captain Derek Jeter for the starting role. A couple of tough omissions here, including Orlando Cabrera of the Los Angeles Angels.

Third base - Alex Rodriguez is in the middle of a monster season that could earn him even more money - even if New York misses the playoffs. Boston's Mike Lowell is the backup.

Catcher - Jorge Posada has been strong and steady throughout the Yankees' woeful

first half. He edges Cleveland switch-hitter Victor Martinez.

Outfield - Detroit's Magglio Ordonez starts in left, Minnesota's Hunter in center and Vladimir Guerrero of the Angels in right. The reserves are Suzuki from Seattle, Sizemore from Cleveland, Detroit's Granderson and Boston's Manny Ramirez. Tigers DH Gary Sheffield also gets a spot. It was hard to leave out Alex Rios of the Blue Jays.

Starting pitchers - Dan Haren is the only representative from Oakland, but he earns the start in his first All-Star appearance thanks to a 9-2 record and league-leading 1.91 ERA. Joining him on the staff are first-timer Josh Beckett of Boston, Detroit's Justin Verlander, Cleveland's C.C. Sabathia, Minnesota ace Johan Santana, Los Angeles' Kelvin Escobar and Kansas City's Gil Meche.

Relievers - Angels closer Francisco Rodriguez anchors the bullpen, along with Seattle's J.J. Putz, Boston's Jonathan Papelbon, Chicago's Bobby Jenks and Rangers setup man Akinori Otsuka. Unfortunately, there's just no room for two deserving setup men: rookie left-hander Hideki Okajima of the Red Sox and Los Angeles stalwart Scot Shields.

And in the NL:

First base - Fielder is the first-half MVP. The son of "Big Daddy" Cecil Fielder, the Milwaukee slugger has a great chance to lead his team to its first playoff berth in 25 years. Reserve roles go to reigning MVP Ryan Howard of the Phillies, St. Louis' Albert Pujols and Washington's Dmitri Young - a nice comeback story. Chicago's Derrek Lee, Colorado's Todd Helton and San Diego's Adrian Gonzalez get squeezed out at a power-packed position.

Second base - Philadelphia's Chase Utley has separated himself from everyone else at this position and could have a lock on many All-Star trips to come. He's the clear choice to start, with Florida's Dan Uggla behind him.

Shortstop - Renteria is quietly having a superb season for Atlanta, and he outpaces a competitive field. Hardy makes it from Milwaukee, and New York's Reyes earns a spot as well. Shaky defense costs Hanley Ramirez, while Rollins just musses.

Third base - Miguel Cabrera of the Marlins easily wins the start, and New York's David Wright takes second string.

Catcher - Russell Martin is the heart and soul of the Dodgers and a terrific young player. Take your pick on a backup - San Francisco's Bengie Molina?

Outfield - Bonds starts in left, his first All-Star appearance since 2004, with Griffey at his old spot in center and Colorado's Matt Holliday in right. On the bench: Chicago's Alfonso Soriano, Houston's Carlos Lee, Cincinnati's Adam Dunn and Phillies center fielder Aaron Rowand. Brad Hawpe of the Rockies is a harsh cut.

Starting pitchers - A toss-up for starting honors between Los Angeles' Brad Penny and San Diego's Jake Peavy. Make it Penny (10-1, 2.04 ERA) for the second consecutive year. The rest of the staff includes Chris Young of the Padres, Atlanta's John Smoltz, Arizona sinkerballer Brandon Webb, Brewers ace Ben Sheets, Pittsburgh's Ian Snell and the Mets' John Maine. Philadelphia left-hander Cole Hamels was oh-so-close.

Relievers - Brewers closer Francisco Cordero leads the majors in saves. He teams up in the bullpen with Trevor Hoffman of the Padres, Takashi Saito of the Dodgers, and Mets lefty Billy Wagner. It was difficult to deny Arizona's Jose Valverde.

AP Sports writer Bill Konigsberg in New York and AP freelance writer Dave Hogg in Detroit contributed to this report.

## Sifford earns lifetime honor

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golf...it's a beautiful thing."

Proceeds went to the American Cancer Society and the Bill Dickey Scholarship Fund. Among the luminaries who attended were actors Bill Bellamy and Rosie Perez; rapper Luther Campbell and basketball hall of famer Clyde Drexler.

Chris Hamilton won the Elite Golf Association tournament June 23-24 in

Greenville, S.C.

Hamilton shot a two-day total of 147 at Carolina Springs Golf Club and Verdare Greens Golf Club. Andy Wood was second at 151 and Mike Wallace was third at 153.

Brandt Williams won the Upstate Birdies Golf Association charity tournament June 16 at Southern Oaks Golf Club in Easley, S.C.

Williams' round of 76 was one shot better than John Neely's 77 and Doug Earl's 78.

## Bobcats add firepower in guard

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nificant that would make our basketball team that much better, then we would do that."

The 6-foot-6 Richardson, who grew up a Jordan fan and wears his No. 23, provides the Bobcats with something they've never had: a late-game threat.

The 26-year-old swingman averaged more than 19 points a game in his six-year career, including 23.2 points a game in 2005-06. Richardson is a good 3-point shooter, but he also is an exciting slasher who has won the league's dunk contest twice.

"The last couple of years, this team has put itself in winning situations in the fourth quarter," said Bobcats general manager Rod Higgins, who spent three seasons with Richardson in Golden State. "When we thought about

making this move, we wanted to try to get a veteran guy who could step up and make big plays for us."

Richardson was a Golden State fan favorite, remembered for buying a full-page ad in Bay Area newspapers last year apologizing for the Warriors missing the playoffs.

Richardson then averaged 19 points a game in this year's playoffs - when the Warriors stunned top-seed Dallas in the first round.

But Richardson has never been an All-Star and averaged only 16 points a game last season while missing 31 games with injuries. He's been criticized for his ball handling and defense, and is only a 69 percent free throw shooter.

Still, if Charlotte re-signs Wallace - who became an unrestricted free agent Sunday - Richardson and Wallace would bring some

exciting possibilities.

"I said it from day one, I fully expect him to be here," Jordan said of Wallace. "Hopefully we can come to some type of understanding."

If Wallace returns, the Bobcats would seem ready to compete for a playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

Richardson and Wallace would join point guard Raymond Felton and power forward Emeke Okafor. The Bobcats are hoping Adam Morrison improves from his rookie season, Sean May comes back from a knee injury, and first-round pick Jared Dudley can contribute right away.

"We have a young nucleus," Jordan said. "We felt that if we could add a guy with Jason Richardson's talent, it would give us a well-rounded and balanced basketball team."

## Onetime CIAA lightning rod slows down a little bit

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could attend. Then last month, he gave \$10,000 to the Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club and longtime friend, executive director Charles Lyons. He promised Lyons another \$10,000 in a few months.

Hopkins said he is satisfied with where his life is now.

"I'm my own boss, I don't have to answer to anyone," he said. "It's all about helping the kids, and now I can help as many as I want."

After leaving Shaw, Hopkins said if he wasn't back in coaching within three years, he was through. Few believed him; OK just me, but he meant it.

Now, he's totally out of the sports world. He's even hung up his Nikes for whom he was a high school and college scout for many years.

"I don't miss any of it," he said. "At Shaw, there was too much red tape and too many egos. Everybody had an agenda. Now, there's only one agenda and it's mine."

Don't be fooled. Hopkins has a big enough ego of his own. But the CIAA hasn't been the

same since he left.

Oh well, there's always Jacques Curtis on the women's side.

Revamped voting process

The football and volleyball seasons are just around the corner. And soon both will be releasing their preseason all-conference teams. Hopefully, the CIAA office took good notes at the spring meeting.

Volleyball officials asked that only returning players be selected to the preseason team. And for good reason. Last year, NCCU's Kai Wright made the team despite not being in the league the year before.

The sports information directors have requested that they be allowed to vote on all preseason and postseason teams so the selections will be "devoid of politics," Elizabeth City State SID April Emory said.

Not to mention the embarrassment it causes - like naming a punter defensive player of the year. It's going to be a long time before the coaches live that one down.

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

AFFECTS ESTIMATED ONE-TENTH OF AFRICAN AMERICANS

## Sickle cell poses risks to athletes

By Alan Scher Zagler

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLUMBIA, Mo. - The growing number of exercise-induced deaths among athletes with sickle cell trait can be curtailed with proper treatment and greater awareness among team doctors and athletic trainers, a national medical group said in a report released last week.

The National Athletic Trainers' Association report, released at the group's annual meeting in Anaheim, Calif., only suggests, not recommends, that schools screen players for the inherited blood disorder.

The symptoms of explosive muscle breakdown tied to sickle cell trait are "underrecognized and often misunderstood" by team medical workers who mistake the injury for heat exhaustion, muscle cramps or heart problems, the report found.

"Sickling collapse is a medical emergency," the report states.

Nine athletes have died under such circumstances in the past seven years, ranging in age from 12 to 19. The NATA study also notes the deaths of 13 college football players at schools that did not test for sickle cell trait or had "a lapse in precautions."

Three of those deaths occurred over the past three summers. The group includes former Missouri

reserve linebacker Aaron O'Neal, who collapsed on the field near the end of a preseason workout in July 2005.

"I have no doubt that I'm very typical of a lot of sports medicine professionals," said Scott Anderson, head athletic trainer at the University of Oklahoma and a co-chairman of the NATA task force that produced the report.

"There's knowledge of sickle cell trait, but a great lack of understanding of the associated risks," he said.

In Missouri, a county medical examiner listed O'Neal's official cause of death as viral meningitis. That determination was challenged by several people, including outside experts and the chairman of the university's pathology department.

Individuals with sickle cell trait have one normal gene for hemoglobin, the protein in red blood cells, and one abnormal gene. Unlike normal, rounded red blood cells, the sickle-shaped cells carry less oxygen and can clog blood vessels that flow to the heart and other muscles.

The trait is distinct from sickle cell disease, a condition that affects far fewer people and in which two abnormal genes are present.

Sixty-four percent of the colleges that responded to a 2006 survey said they give blood tests to athletes to determine the presence of

sickle cell trait.

NCAA guidelines treat the hereditary condition found in an estimated 8 to 10 percent of the U.S. black population as a "benign condition" and ask members only to consider voluntary testing.

The risks to athletes are heightened during common preseason performance tests such as mile runs or repetitive sprints, the study found. Heat, dehydration and high altitude can exacerbate the risks.

The NATA recommends an adjusted training regimen for athletes with sickle cell trait, including longer rest periods and a more gradual build up to intense repetitions. Such athletes should be excluded from performance tests that could escalate the risk of sickling collapse, the report urges.

For Baltimore Ravens wide receiver DeVard Darling, the issue is a personal one. His twin brother DeVaughn, an 18-year-old linebacker, collapsed and died during a 2001 offseason workout at Florida State. Medical examiners said the disorder may have contributed to the death.

Darling worries that the win-at-all-costs mind-set in major college and pro football won't necessarily make room for such precautions.

"How does getting a water break make you weak?" he said.

You already know the score. Now it's time to get the story.

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