

McCaffrey turning heads at training camp

Stewart lauds rookie's versatility

BY STEVE REED
ASSOCIATED PRESS

SPARTANBURG, S.C. — Christian McCaffrey remembers running around his backyard as a young boy playing tackle football, dodging his brothers while pretending to be Barry Sanders.

All of those moves have paid off for the Panthers rookie running back.

McCaffrey created quite a buzz during his first week of

training camp with veteran players and coaches raving about his athleticism and ability to make people miss. There hasn't been this much anticipation from fans over a Panthers rookie since 2011 when quarterback Cam Newton was drafted No. 1 overall.

Panthers veteran running back Jonathan Stewart, who rarely heaps praise on anyone — said

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Panthers hold Newton out of practice with shoulder soreness

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SPARTANBURG, S.C. — Panthers quarterback Cam Newton was held out of passing drills with soreness in his surgically repaired throwing shoulder.

Coach Ron Rivera said Newton told the training staff prior to Tuesday's

practice that he was still sore from last week's workouts. Newton was suited up, but only worked on handoffs.

Rivera said, "We figured why push it? Why have him throw with a sore arm — and make it even sorer?"

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LOGAN ULRICH/Dispatch photo

Linemen at Southern Vance work on hitting the sled on the first day of practice Monday. Getting players big enough to play offensive and defensive line to join the team has been a challenge for all of the local football coaches.

Local football coaches deal with low turnout

Concussions, CTE could play factor

BY LOGAN ULRICH
SPORTS EDITOR

It's the first day of football practice. Music pulses from the stereo on a rickety table next to Southern Vance's practice field. Some players sing along, others dance, others just watch their more flamboyant teammates while they slip on their cleats.

The drumbeats and bass tones infuse much needed

energy into the atmosphere. The team has been working for much of the summer, but today, it's official.

As the players finish their stretches, head coach Darry Ragland pulls up in his car and surveys his team. Ragland was brought back to Southern Vance to help restore the Raiders to their once mighty ways in football, when they were a consistent winner and made an

appearance in the 2006 state championship game.

Back then when Ragland was offensive coordinator, the first day of practice would bring more than 70 kids out to the field eager to suit up in Southern Vance colors. But on Monday, only 23 players showed up.

"It's a bit of a disappointment," Ragland said. "Hard not to take it as a smack in the face."

Ragland isn't the only one struggling to muster consistent interest, though. All across the area, coaches and teams are battling to recruit enough players to fuel healthy football programs.

At Northern Vance, new head coach Antwain Cook counted 35 players on his first day of practice, around 23 of which will for sure be varsity players — down from 45 a couple years ago.

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Rookies occupy 5 spots on U.S. Presidents Cup team

BY DOUG FERGUSON
ASSOCIATED PRESS

AKRON, Ohio — With just over a month remaining to qualifying for the Presidents Cup, this is shaping up as a new American team.

Charley Hoffman's playoff loss in the Canadian Open moved him to No. 10 in the standings, which is based on FedEx Cup points. That gives the U.S. team five players from the top 10 who have

never competed in a Presidents Cup or a Ryder Cup. The others are Justin Thomas (No. 3), Daniel Berger (No. 4), Kevin Kisner (No. 7) and Kevin Chappell (No. 9). U.S. Open champion Brooks Koepka is No. 5 and has never played the Presidents Cup, though he played the Ryder Cup last fall.

U.S. captain Steve Stricker could see this coming.

He was an assistant to

Davis Love III at Hazeltine last year. Thomas and Berger were invited to play the Minnesota course ahead of the final picks, though neither of them was chosen. The last pick went to Ryan Moore, another Cup rookie.

"You could see the change there, even though some of them didn't play," Stricker said. "You can see the movement is definitely going to younger, powerful players."

Right behind them is a blend of experience (Patrick Reed, Jason Dufner, Brandt Snedeker) and new (Brian Harman, Gary Woodland). The top 10 players qualify after the Dell Technologies Championship on Sept. 4.

That could have a bearing on how Stricker uses his captain's picks.

SEE **TEAM/PAGE B2**

Italy trip will give Keatts early look at Wolfpack

Team departs Wednesday for 3-game tour

BY AARON BEARD
ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH — North Carolina State's delayed trip to Italy will offer coach Kevin Keatts the first chance to see how much his new team has learned.

The team departs Wednesday for a three-game, 11-day tour that was originally scheduled for last August before being postponed due to a terrorism travel alert from the U.S. State Department.

In the 12 months since, Keatts has taken over the program for fired coach Mark Gottfried and there's a half-dozen new faces on the Wolfpack's roster. And the former UNC Wilmington coach sounds ready to experiment.

"I couldn't tell you what type of lineups we're going to play, I couldn't tell you how many guys are going to play," Keatts said Tuesday. "I wouldn't worry about that, I wouldn't panic about it. This trip is for our season. ... It's so I can see as a coach and get back and kind of figure out where we need to go and what combinations play well together."

Sophomore Omer Yurtseven is playing for the Turkish National Team this summer and won't be with the team. The rest of the roster will be available with six new faces, including graduate transfers Al Freeman (Baylor) and Sam Hunt (North Carolina A&T) along with freshman Lavar Braxton Jr.

N.C. State will also have freshman guard Braxton Beverly, who signed last week after getting his release from Ohio State. But the school's compliance staff is working to determine whether Beverly will be cleared to play this fall.

Keatts also added transfers Devon Daniels (Utah) and C.J. Bryce (UNC Wilmington), who must sit out this season due to NCAA transfer rules but can play in Italy.

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Darvish, Gray are big trade deadline moves

BY BEN WALKER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Yu Darvish and Sonny Gray headed a parade of prized arms on the move Monday, leaving little doubt on trade deadline day: Top teams made a big pitch for the playoffs.

All-Star Brandon Kintzler, Addison Reed and Justin Wilson were among the many relievers swapped before the cutoff. There were 14 deals involving major leaguers — all six division leaders got someone new.

"We're trying to go from good to great," New York Yankees general manager Brian Cashman said.

The Yankees bolstered their rotation by getting Gray from Oakland for three minor leaguers. That swap came a day after the AL East leaders acquired starter Jaime Garcia from Minnesota.

The Los Angeles Dodgers, owners of the best record in the majors and the top pay-

roll, gave up three minor leaguers for Darvish. The Texas ace will join three-time Cy Young Award winner Clayton Kershaw, currently on the disabled list, as the Dodgers try to reach the World Series for the first time since their 1988 title.

"We're not going to be lining up our playoff rotation quite yet," general manager Farhan Zaidi said.

Los Angeles also added relievers Tony Watson from Pittsburgh and Tony Cingrani from Cincinnati.

A few stars mentioned in trade speculation stayed put — Orioles closer Zach Britton, Detroit starter Justin Verlander and San Diego reliever Brad Hand, among them.

"We just didn't line up at

this time," Padres GM A.J. Preller said, adding there was "no rush" to make a move right now.

Teams had until 4 p.m. EDT to make trades without waivers. For the rest of the season, players can be dealt only if every other club passes on a chance to claim them.

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A year after the champion Chicago Cubs and Cleveland used deep bullpens to reach the World Series, several teams boosted their relief corps. As did the Cubs and Indians.

Chicago got Wilson, a valuable lefty, along with backup catcher Alex Avila from Detroit. Avila was traded away by his dad, Tigers general manager Al Avila.

"Obviously you think, well, he's your son so you probably

feel even worse. Not really. Nobody likes to go through trades," the Detroit GM said.

"Actually, the person that's going to be really worse off, it's not so much my wife, it's my mom — Alex's grandmother. She's the one that might be the most angry," he said.

Joe Smith, who relieved for Cleveland from 2009-13, was sent from Toronto to the Indians.

"A lot of fans of Smitty in this organization, so getting him back will be a lot of fun," Cleveland manager Terry Francona said.

NL East-leading Washington got Kintzler from Minnesota — the Nationals recently acquired relievers Ryan Madison and Sean Doolittle from Oakland.

The Houston Astros, already running away with the AL West, plucked lefty Francisco Liriano from Toronto. He'll help patch a rotation that's deal with

injuries to Dallas Keuchel, Lance McCullers and Collin McHugh this year.

The contending Boston Red Sox added Reed, who had been serving as the New York Mets' closer. Reed is 1-2 with a 2.57 ERA and 19 saves in 21 chances, and he joins a bullpen that includes dominant closer Craig Kimbrel.

Like a lot of other executives, Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski was on the prowl for pitching.

"We liked a lot of the guys. We were inquiring about a lot of the guys," he said at Fenway Park, adding, "My list is long."

How long?

Dombrowski reached into the left pocket of his suit jacket and pulled out an 8x11-inch piece of paper. He then counted — by ones — "20 right-handed relievers that were on our list at one time or another, and a lot of lefties, too."

TURNOUT

FROM PAGE B1

Warren County head coach Terrance McCormick had 45 players at his first practice, including 31 on varsity, but said he and his staff have still struggled to drum up interest from high schoolers in football.

While the problem is widespread, it doesn't have one simple answer. McCormick can draw from an entire county to field his team, but because the population is so spread out, it can be a challenge for players to get to and from practice each day.

"Kids don't have a ride during the day or a ride to get home at night," he said. "It's just hard for them, then once they get out of that mind frame of playing any kind of sport, they just shy away from it."

The increasing awareness of concussions and brain damage from playing football also has depressed interest in the sport. A recent study published by the New York Times showed how 110 out of 111 brains belonging to former football players showed signs of chronic traumatic encephalopathy — a brain disease caused by repeated head trauma. Other studies have shown signs of CTE in players as young as the high school level.

"A lot of kids and a lot of parents are scared of concussions, and that's been the main focus

with football, they say it's such a violent sport," McCormick said. "That was never an issue when I was playing because they didn't think about it."

The sudden reluctance to play has hit the offensive and defensive lines hard. Back when Cook played in high school, it was taken for granted that if someone was big enough, they played football. While there's still no shortage of high schoolers big enough to play offensive and defensive line, actually getting them out onto the field is no guarantee.

"Last couple years all around, big boys are not coming out like they once were," Cook said. "They walk the halls, but actually coming to play is totally different. When you get linemen, it's like gold."

There are other factors in the Vance County area that Cook and Ragland are up against as well. Many potential players have to work other jobs to help provide for their families, leaving no time or resources for sports. Cook still remembers one guy a year ago who had the size, skills and grades to be an excellent player. He lived with his brother, though, who told him he had to work to help pay for his keep.

"You feel for a kid, because at the end of the day I think sports is good for anybody, no matter if it's football, basketball or whatever," Cook said.

Once the school year begins, the coaches do typically receive

more interest from students in playing. But by then, it's too late. They're already into the third week of the season, and catching a player up with the state-required ten days of practice would take up even more time. That was part of the reason Northern Vance didn't even field a junior varsity squad last season.

"If you want to play, just come out and try," Cook said. "It's not for everybody, but at the same time, you don't know unless you come out. Please, please, please, come out early."

Participation is crucial for a healthy high school football program. More players increase the coaching staff's chances of finding good players and helps with depth during the physical grind of not only the season, but each individual game.

That participation enabled Southern Vance's success in the early 2000s, but a winless season in 2016 has sucked the life out of interest in the program. Ragland has done everything imaginable to recruit players, including Instagram, turning his players into ambassadors to their classmates and phone blasts from Southern Vance's principal, but he's still fighting an uphill battle.

"We may just be a small team from here on out, I really don't know," Ragland said.

Even wins might not bring Southern Vance or the sport of football back to what it was.

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TEAM

FROM PAGE B1

"It concerns me a little bit that we have a lot of rookies," he said. "But it also excites me what I'm seeing from them. They're very courageous, they're feisty, they're making clutch putts when they have to. It just shows a lot of guts. These guys are playing well and showing a little attitude when they're doing it, which is nice to see, especially in match play."

Phil Mickelson has dropped to No. 17. His best finish this year was reaching the quarterfinals of the Dell Technologies Match Play. Mickelson has never missed a Presidents Cup or a Ryder Cup since 1994, and he had to rely on a captain's pick for only the second time in his career in 2015. He went 3-0-1 for the week.

NO SURE THING

PGA Tour players are often mistaken when they talk about one of the perks from reaching the Tour Championship — getting into the four major

championships the following year.

That's not always the case.

Roberto Castro, who made it to the Tour Championship on the strength of his third-place finish at the BMW Championship, did not qualify for the PGA Championship. This is the second straight year that has happened — Steven Bowditch failed to qualify for the PGA Championship last year.

Castro has missed the cut in 14 of his last 18 events. He has fallen to No. 99 in the PGA Points list, which effectively is a money list from the 2016 Canadian Open through the 2017 Canadian Open. The top 70 earn spots in the PGA Championship.

It's rare that a player doesn't make it because accruing the money to get to the Tour Championship (plus earnings at East Lake) is enough to be in reasonable shape on the PGA Points list the following year.

Bowditch also hit a spell of bad form after reaching the 2015 Tour Championship, missing 11 out of 17 cuts.

MCCAFFREY

FROM PAGE B1

McCaffrey is "pretty unstoppable" as a receiver coming out of the backfield.

"I can tell you now there's not going to be anybody in this league that can cover him one-on-one," Stewart said. "He's a special player."

But McCaffrey, who is no stranger to this setting — his father Ed played 12 seasons in the NFL mostly with the Denver Broncos and won three Super Bowls — seems at home on the football field and is taking the attention in stride.

"Anytime I'm on the football field, that's my comfort zone," McCaffrey said Tuesday. "That's my safe place."

He's looked plenty comfortable despite missing almost all of OTAs and minicamp due to an NFL Collective Bargaining Agreement rule preventing college players from par-

ticipating in those practices until their school has completed its final exams. Stanford finished later than most schools.

You'd never know he's trying to make up for lost time.

McCaffrey already has shown a good grasp of the playbook and displayed what Stewart called a "deadly" first step.

Panthers three-time All-Pro linebacker Luke Kuechly found out the hard way last week in practice.

While running a route over the middle McCaffrey put one foot in the ground, then shifted in the other direction in one fluid motion, creating immediate separation to break free for a reception. Kuechly fell for the move, stumbled briefly and then frantically raced to try to close the gap.

Cornerback James Bradberry said he let out an "ooh ahh" when he watched it on tape.

"He got me," Kuechly acknowledged with a wide smile.

He's gotten others, too.

The next day in practice McCaffrey headed outside in the flat on a route, then put his foot down and quickly broke up the field leaving outside linebacker Shaq Thompson grasping at air. He caught a pass 5 yards ahead of Thompson.

"He's shifty," Thompson said.

Added Kuechly: "He's got shake. ... He's very precise with his movements. He is in an out of breaks quick."

Panthers coach Ron Rivera said McCaffrey's first move is to set up a defender and then "where he goes from there, it's up to him."

It's a move that McCaffrey said came naturally to him while playing with his three brothers in a small backyard growing up in the Denver area. There was only a little patch of grass there, making things more difficult to get around his siblings before being tackled.

"I had to find different ways to make my older brother miss," McCaffrey said.

He said playing basketball also helped, too.

"A lot of that quickness and setting people up and being able to jab one way and go the other way and explode off that first step — that's where I did a lot of that stuff," McCaffrey said.

Several players have approached Rivera during training camp to tell him they're excited about what McCaffrey brings to the table.

"Guys come up and tell you, 'This guy can be special, coach,'" Rivera said. "We're seeing it, and hopefully you continue to see it."

Teammates say McCaffrey doesn't act like a rookie.

Stewart said McCaffrey prepares like an NFL veteran, and that includes a long stretching routine as well as a strict eating and workout regimen. He said the rookie's focus never seems to waver.

"His approach to the game, the mental part of the craft is a 10," Stewart said.

WOLFPACK

FROM PAGE B1

Hired in March, Keatts immediately emphasized conditioning for his up-tempo offense and a version of the fullcourt press from his time as an assistant under Rick Pitino at Louisville — an approach that helped him lead the Seahawks to the past two NCAA Tournaments.

He also pushed to bring a com-

petitive edge in every offseason workout, including so much running that fifth-year senior Lennard Freeman called Keatts his "first track-basketball coach."

"Just everything comes down to winning," junior Torin Dorn said. "With losing comes consequences. If we lose something in practice, we lose a drill, you're running. And if you look tired you're running. It's a mentality."

N.C. State is allowed to hold 10 team practices ahead of the trip,

the last set for Wednesday morning.

"It's weird because in eight practices you would think that obviously you get a lot of stuff in," Keatts said. "But when you go back, you get to thinking late at night — as I was at 4 in the morning — what else can I put in? Are we prepared to play?"

"And then you have to say, 'Just put a little bit of stuff in and be good at what you have in right now.' And that's what we're doing."

NEWTON

FROM PAGE B1

Newton missed the final portion of practice Sunday with some soreness in the shoulder. The Panthers had Monday off, so he'd been expected to return to work.

Rivera hasn't decided whether Newton will play in the Aug. 9 preseason opener against the Houston Texans.

Newton had surgery in March to repair a partially torn rotator cuff.