



JC Smith running back Fabian Duncan, one of the nation's top rushers, isn't close to satisfied

THE VOICE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY SINCE 1906

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CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG SCHOOLS

Acting Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Superintendent Melissa Balknight aims to calm community concerns regarding district leadership.

School district leaders pivot amid investigations, upheaval

Acting superintendent, new chair pledge focus on education, building trust

By Herbert L. White
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Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is picking up the pieces after a week of chaos that included firing its superintendent and a board leadership shakeup.

The school board on Tuesday approved the charter for a search committee - the first step toward hiring a replacement for Superintendent Crystal Hill. The committee's responsibilities include developing the search timeline and the process for gathering input from local stakeholders.



Rankin



Sneed

"Our community's voice will help shape the future of our district," said board chair Dee Rankin, who succeeded Stephanie Sneed, who resigned the leadership position when Hill was fired. "We want students, families, staff and community members to help us identify a leader who reflects our shared values and our aspirations for every child."

Acting Superintendent Melissa Balknight last week urged calm, adding the district is committed to serving its constituents - 139,000 students and their families.

"Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools remains focused on our most important responsibility: serving our students and families and supporting our educators and employees each day," she said in a statement. "We recognize that recent events and the public conversations surrounding the district are important to our families, employees and community. CMS is fortunate to have a strong team of experienced leaders and dedicated staff who continue to move our work forward every day."

"Across our schools and district, our focus remains on teaching and learning, student safety, and providing the services and support our students and families need."

Please see **CMS** | 2A

Help for neighbors impacted by I-77 toll

Deal includes 'cap and stitch' for divided corridor communities

By Herbert L. White

herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Neighborhood investments and anti-displacement initiatives highlight the community benefits commitments for development of the I-77 South toll lane project.

But the deal struck between the city of Charlotte and North Carolina Department of Transportation that commits the state to specific projects at a cost of at least \$300 million. The agreement signed by Charlotte Regional Transportation Organization and NCDOT became official after Charlotte Council voted 7-4 to cooperate on a \$3.2 billion public-private partnership to build toll lanes from Center City to the South Carolina border.

After voting in May to rescind its support, council flipped on recision with Malcom Graham and Joi Mayo jumping from opponents to supporters in last week's vote. Some council members suggested the panel was boxed in by a "poison pill" provision enacted in the state budget that threatened municipalities opposing road programs with sanctions that include repaying the state for initial work and loss of state and federal funding. The state reported a tab of more than \$69 million for preliminary work on the toll project.

"The project offers an opportunity to meaningfully invest in the community, not just address congestion," Transportation Secretary Daniel Johnson wrote to city leaders on July 28. "It presents the opportunity to contract with local and small businesses, with priority access to business along the corridor. This project has the potential to deliver several hundred million dollars to small businesses and support approximately 5,700 jobs

Please see **CHARLOTTE** | 2A

Livingstone adds Dyson as scholar-in-residence

By Garette Hunter

TRICE EDNEY NEWS WIRE

SALISBURY — Livingstone College has added one of the nation's most recognizable public intellectuals to its campus community.

Author, scholar, activist and cultural critic Michael Eric Dyson has joined the faculty as a visiting scholar in residence, launching a four-part residency designed to place some of the most consequential conversations shaping Black America at the center of the collegiate experience.

Through a series of lectures, student engagement opportunities and academic experiences, Dyson will bring together urban education, faith, hip-hop, politics, culture and democracy where students are challenged to examine not only the world around them, but their responsibility to shape it.

Dyson's residency started on Sept. 18.

"I am honored to spend quality time with some of the smartest students at one of our nation's

Please see **MICHAEL** | 3A

North Carolina teachers feel the weight of policy moves, survey finds

By Trimmel Gomes

NORTH CAROLINA NEWS SERVICE

Around the United States and in North Carolina, teachers said they are stressed, working second jobs and thinking about quitting, according to a new survey from the American Federation of Teachers.

The union polled more than 2,000 members and found nearly two-thirds rate their weekly stress at seven or higher on a 10-point scale. Around 31% said they are likely to leave teaching in the next year.

Melissa Cropper, vice president of the American Federation of Teachers, said while the Trump administration insists it is important to focus on ideological issues in the classroom and restoring parental authority, the findings reflect the realities educators are experiencing.

"The survey is showing that the Trump policies are having a negative impact on teachers. Sixty-one percent described the administration's impact as very negative, 16% said it's somewhat negative, and this is an uptick even from last year," Cropper said.

Teachers cited several concerns: weakening school funding, Immigration and Customs Enforcement activity traumatizing families and the cost-of-living squeeze. One English teacher reported having only textbooks, with no fiction or nonfiction publications because of book bans.

In North Carolina, Republicans filed a bill to ban books on gender identity and sexuality from elementary school libraries. Democrats filed one to protect students from immigration enforcement. Both are

Please see **SURVEY** | 2A



HIDDEN VALLEY COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

The Hidden Valley Community Association will sue to block construction of a triplex by enforcing deed restrictions limiting residential housing to single-family units.

Hidden Valley residents rally to block triplex residence under construction

By Herbert L. White

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A coalition of Hidden Valley residents and activists are taking on triplex construction.

The Hidden Valley Community Association and Historic Black Neighborhood Coalition will hold a press conference Oct. 3 at Parkwood Institutional CME Church on Tom Hunter Road to announce legal action for enforcement of deed restrictions and stop a triplex development underway in the neighborhood. The residents contend the lawsuit is to preserve the character, history, and quality of life of the north Charlotte neighborhood.

"This is bigger than one building or one property," Hidden Valley Community Association president Marjorie Parker said in a statement.

Please see **HIDDEN** | 2A

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Please
Recycle



CMS leaders pivot amid investigations, upheaval

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ilies deserve.”
Along with the leadership shakeup, CMS is the focus of investigations by State Auditor Dave Boliek and the State Bureau of Investigation into the district’s finances. Boliek said it’s his office’s responsibility to ensure the proper use and allocation of state funds and transparency in reporting.



Boliek

“You have a state auditor that cares about how the taxpayer dollars are spent in Mecklenburg County, and you have a state auditor’s office that is staffed with professionals whose job it is to bring accountability and transparency to situations that involve taxpayer dollars,” Boliek said.
In a statement, the school board acknowledged the state probe and its cooperation. A week before she was fired, Hill released a 200-page memo to the board that conveyed her concerns over finances and transparency.



Hill

The board, which fired Hill for convenience by a 5-4 vote, approved an investigation into oversight and administrative concerns in June and placed her on paid leave. The panel voted in August to end Hill’s leave after a seven-week probe after determining the district “review identified issues that will require ongoing attention as it relates to leadership and operational practices,” according to a statement by the board. “We will address these issues directly with Dr. Hill.”

The board declined to reveal the charges against Hill or what led to the investigation.

“Last week, we welcomed State Auditor Dave Boliek and members of his team to Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools,” the board said in a prepared statement. “We appreciated their visit, their engagement with district leadership and staff, and the information shared during (last week’s) media briefing. As one CMS team, the Board of Education, district leadership, educators, school leaders, and staff are fully committed to cooperating with the Office of the State Auditor and the State Bureau of Investigation.

“We will provide the information, documentation, and access needed to support a thorough and complete review and will continue to engage openly and professionally throughout the process.”

Balknight acknowledged the sudden changes in leadership has reverberated across the district but offered assurance CMS will focus on education goals and priorities as well as building confidence and clarity.

“We also understand that public trust is built through accountability, honesty and transparency,” she said. Most importantly, our commitment to the students we serve has not changed. Our schools are open and serving students, our work continues, and our employees remain dedicated to ensuring that every student has the opportunity to learn, grow and experience endless possibilities.

“Together, we will continue to support one another, serve our students and families, and move forward with purpose and care.”



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Nearly a third of teachers around the U.S. said they are likely to quit within the next year, according to a new American Federation of Teachers survey.

Survey: NC teachers feel weight of policy moves

Continued from page 1A

stuck in committee and not expected to advance anytime soon.

Cropper added the stress on teachers is not just about their own well-being. It affects students.

“It denies students the opportunity to actually get a full education because oftentimes, teachers are self-censoring, are holding back on

conversations, keeping certain things off their agenda because they don’t want to deal with potential controversy,” Cropper said.

In North Carolina, the survey findings mirror concerns raised by local educators. The North Carolina Association of Educators has highlighted teachers face low pay, chronic understaffing and a lack of resources.

Hidden Valley residents rally to block new triplex construction

Continued from page 1A

“Hidden Valley residents have invested in this community for generations. We are not opposed to thoughtful growth and redevelopment, but we believe that growth should respect the commitments homeowners relied upon, the character of the neighborhood and the people who have made Hidden Valley home.”

This is bigger than one building or one property. Hidden Valley residents have invested in this community for generations. We are not opposed to thoughtful growth and redevelopment, but we believe that growth should respect the commitments homeowners relied upon, the character of the neighborhood and the people who have made Hidden Valley home.

Hidden Valley Community Association president **MARJORIE PARKER**

Hidden Valley, developed in 1959 by George Goodyear, was originally a predominantly white middle-class neighborhood. With the advent of fair housing laws in the 1960s, more Black residents moved in and white homeowners left. Today it is mostly Black and Latino but is in transition as developers transform the area due to its proximity to the city’s light rail platform.

Before the public investment in transit, the community struggled with a long-standing reputation as a hot spot for crime and hobbled by decades of disinterest and neglect by city leaders.

The neighborhood, with approximately 4,500 homes situated about 5 miles from Center City, is one of Charlotte’s largest single-family developments. It’s bordered by West Sugar Creek Road and North Tryon Street.

The neighborhood association is suing to stop the development of duplexes and triplexes in traditionally single-family neighborhoods after application of the city’s Unified Development Ordinance. Hidden Valley residents assert that existing deed restrictions in some areas limit construction to single-family development and should be enforced.

“Preserving Black history also means preserving the communities where that history was made and where families continue to build their lives,” said Bobby Drakeford, a member of the Historic Black Neighborhood Coalition’s steering committee. “We are standing with Hidden Valley because residents should not have to fight alone to protect the homes, history, and neighborhood character their community has built over decades.”



LUCAS THOMAE | CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS

WakeMed’s Cary hospital, seen here on June 17, 2026.

Wrinkles remain in Atrium’s controversial WakeMed takeover

By Lucas Thomae

CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS

Wake County leaders gave the go-ahead Monday for a controversial combination between Raleigh-based WakeMed and Atrium Health, the state’s largest hospital system, which is based in Charlotte.

In spite of significant public opposition to the deal, which critics fear will increase prices for patients and decrease quality of care, county commissioners voted 5-2 to relinquish control over WakeMed and give it to Atrium. In return, Atrium pledged \$2 billion of its own money in investments to WakeMed’s facilities and \$150 million for a new county-run public health initiative.

“On any given day, emergency rooms are full and there’s a shortage of hospital beds,” Don Mial, chair of the county board of commissioners, said before casting his vote in favor of the deal.

“Now is the time for us to plan for this growth,” he added.

However, the deal isn’t finalized yet. It still needs to clear regulatory hurdles with the state attorney general’s office and the Federal Trade Commission before WakeMed can officially become a part of Atrium.

The two systems celebrated the vote in a joint statement that also acknowledged the public skepticism surrounding the combination.

“We recognize that trust is earned, and our focus now is to follow through on what we’ve outlined, continuing to listen to the community and demonstrating, through our actions, the value this combination will create for the people of Wake County and beyond,” the statement read.

Stein intervenes, seeking price caps from Atrium

WakeMed began as a county hospital before becoming a private nonprofit entity in 1997. Because of that history, Wake County still holds significant influence over the hospital system’s operations.

County commissioners appoint the 14-member board of directors and must approve any changes to WakeMed’s articles of incorporation and the transfer agreement between the county and hospital system.

WakeMed’s board of directors, by some members’ own admission, conducted secret meetings with Atrium for more than a year before looping in the county commissioners, who were needed to move the deal forward.

Public outcry ensued after the proposed

deal was announced, and the county commissioners delayed a vote on it in May, forcing the two hospital systems to go back to the drawing board and host community listening sessions over the summer.

Last week, Wake County put the vote back on the agenda for its regular meeting on Monday, Sept. 21.

However, negotiations over the terms of the deal continued into the weekend as Gov. Josh Stein lobbied Atrium to not increase prices at WakeMed following its takeover.

In the hospital business, prices are determined largely by negotiations between health systems and insurance companies. The common thinking is that through a partnership with Atrium, WakeMed would have more leverage to negotiate higher reimbursement rates from insurers.

Higher reimbursement rates typically mean increased monthly premiums or out-of-pocket costs for patients.

Atrium agreed in a letter sent to Stein on Sept. 19 to cap reimbursement rate increases at WakeMed to “1.5 times the annual Medicare reimbursement increases,” but only for five years following the completion of the deal. Atrium also requested that the governor push for comparable price caps at the other regional hospital systems, namely UNC Health and Duke Health.

Stein said he would not stand in the way of the WakeMed-Atrium combination after Atrium agreed to the price caps. But the promise to limit price increases for five years wasn’t satisfactory for some critics of the deal.

“Capping prices the way that they did is very weak,” Nathan Foster, a health policy analyst for the NC Justice Center, told Carolina Public Press.

Foster spoke out against the Atrium-WakeMed combination at a rally in downtown Raleigh on Monday and was one of the many people signed up to make a public comment at the county commissioners meeting later that day.

Even with Atrium’s concession to cap price increases, Foster expressed dismay that the system agreed to do so only for five years. He also criticized the commissioners for approving the deal before the language regarding the price caps had actually been finalized — a detail confirmed by interim county attorney Roger Askew.

“The devil is in the details,” Foster said, “so if they don’t write that in a strong

Please see **WRINKLES** | 3A

Charlotte-specific benefits deal in the I-77 South tollway contract

Continued from page 1A

each year of construction, according to a study conducted by NC State University.”

Included in the memorandum of understanding between the city and NCDOT includes a commitment to “Local hiring, workforce development, and apprenticeship programs, including targeting opportunities for City residents and disadvantaged and small business enterprises.”



Johnson

That pledge was struck at the same time the state budget wiped out the Historically Underutilized Business Office, in which the Republican-authored law followed Trump administration rollbacks of initiatives designed to close disparities in business opportunities in communities of color. Who’ll be responsible for keeping track of the pledge? Johnson told city leaders NCDOT will prioritize “corridor hiring and workforce development opportunities into project delivery where appropriate. He also said the agency will require “the selected developer in the project contract to meaningfully engage with small businesses, particularly along the corridor.”

NCDOT will pay at least \$100 million in supplemental transportation funding for Mecklenburg County exclusively in addition to the baseline investment reserved for “neighborhoods affected by the construction, operation, and historical impacts of highway infrastructure

within the I-77 South corridor.” Among the projects described in the contract are:

- \$150 million for “cap and stitch” programs, landscaped decks (caps) and widened bridges (stitches) over highways that reconnect divided neighborhoods.
- Minimum of \$50 million or 33% of the community benefits for a regional recreation center in the Steele Creek and Nations Ford Road neighborhoods.
- \$35 million in program investments in housing stability, small business and economic mobility.
- \$20 million for neighborhood facilities that address food insecurity on the West Trade Street/Beatties Ford Road and West Boulevard corridors.
- \$15 million for environmental improvements.
- \$10 million for food insecurity and wellness programs along the Statesville Avenue corridor.
- \$20 million for quality-of-life improvements, including a civic center in the construction corridor’s impact zone.

The toll project is moving forward, but Johnson admits NCDOT will need to be more open as it moves from planning to construction. Engagement and recognizing community priorities are part of the pledge.

“I recognize we must continue our work to earn the community’s trust,” he said. “I am committed to working with local leaders to set up a transparent process that builds lasting public confidence and serves as a model for future projects.”



Cultural critic and author Michael Eric Dyson is a visiting scholar-in-residence at Livingstone College, where he'll give a series of lectures and student engagement.

Michael Eric Dyson’s new move: scholar-in-residence

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most distinguished HBCUs as we explore important issues and ideas that will shape the future of our nation,” Dyson said.

His inaugural lecture, “Represent: The Unfinished Fight” explores Black excellence, the enduring importance of HBCUs and the transformative power of an educated mind.

The moment will carry added significance as Livingstone welcomes one of the largest and most academically competitive incoming classes in its history. The convocation included Livingstone’s first-Year pinning ceremony, which formally welcomes nearly 500 first-year and new students to the campus of approximately 1,300.

The academic profile of Livingstone’s student body reflects the college’s growing momentum. More than 40% of students have a grade point average of 3.0 or higher, and approximately 450 students earned recognition as Presidential Scholars with a 3.7 grade point average.

“Having Dr. Michael Eric Dyson as a visiting scholar in residence speaks directly

to my vision for Livingstone College as a relevant, regarded and respected HBCU, where we are developing and deploying change agents who are thoroughly immersed in civic engagement, cultural content and environmental justice,” Livingstone President Anthony Davis said.

Dyson has built a career translating complex questions of race, politics, faith and identity for broad audiences. His acclaimed body of work includes “Jay-Z: Made in America,” featuring a foreword by Pharrell Williams, and “Represent: The Unfinished Fight for the Vote.”

Dyson’s residency will continue with sessions examining faith and leadership, hip-hop and cultural identity, and race and democracy, positioning Livingstone as a gathering place for rigorous scholarship and conversation about the forces shaping life in America.

The residency will be housed within Livingstone’s Political Science Division and will also establish the Dyson Fellows, a selected cohort of 10-20 students who will engage directly with themes from the residency through research, scholarship and capstone projects.

Challenge to NC absentee ballot rules

By Sarah Michele
CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS

A group of nonprofit organizations and two voters sued the North Carolina State Board of Elections and two county election boards over new absentee ballot rules, according to a complaint.

It’s the first lawsuit of North Carolina’s 2026 election season.

It comes after the State Board directed county election boards to spoil absentee ballots when voters do not seal the inner, container-return envelope, regardless of whether the ballot is inside a sealed outer return envelope.

The North Carolina Alliance for Retired Americans, North Carolina Asian Americans Together, Down Home North Carolina and two voters argue that rule illegally discards votes for “immaterial errors” that have little to do with voters’ eligibility or election integrity.

In their complaint, plaintiffs argue that the policy will disenfranchise thousands of absentee voters who may not have enough time to fill out replacement ballots by the time county boards identify the issue, or the ability to vote in person.

State Board of Elections spokesperson Jason Tyson said the board does not comment on ongoing litigation, as a matter of policy. He did note that the board hired private counsel, under Executive Director Sam Hayes’ direction, instead of using Attorney General Jeff Jackson’s office.

How NC got here

Absentee envelope drama dates back to 2024, when the Republican National Committee, North Carolina Republican Party and a voter sued the then-Democratic-majority State Board over its absentee ballot counting policy.

After the voter ID law went into effect, absentee voting got slightly more

complicated. Instead of submitting one envelope with their ballot, absentee voters got two envelopes. The first was the container-return envelope, where voters were supposed to place their filled-out absentee ballots.

The container-return envelope has a sleeve attached to it where voters are supposed to put the photocopy of their voter IDs. The second envelope was the outer return envelope, encapsulating the container-return envelope and photo ID photocopy.

Then, the board issued guidance that directed county election boards to count absentee ballots even if the inner, container-return envelope was not sealed, or appeared to have been opened and resealed, as long as the outer return envelope was sealed.

The 2024 lawsuit asked the State Board to change its guidance to not accept these ballots.

In the middle of litigation, the State Board shifted from a Democratic to Republican majority. In December 2025, the Republican-majority board agreed to a settlement that required it to reconsider the envelope sealing rules.

When it reconsidered, the board agreed to change its policy. However, the State Board decided to do so through the rule-making process, which is more time-consuming and intense than issuing guidance to county election boards.

While the Rules Review Commission accepted the absentee ballot rules, there was enough public objection to require legislative approval to implement them. That potentially would happen in 2027.

In the meantime, the State Board also opted to issue updated guidance to county election boards. Under this guidance, each absentee voter must place the ballot inside a sealed inner container-return en-

velope, regardless of whether the outer return envelope is sealed. If a voter doesn’t do that, it will be considered an irregularity.

County election boards would notify impacted voters within one business day of uncovering the issue, through mail, telephone and email, if they have that contact information. Their ballot would be spoiled and, if there is enough time, reissued through the mail.

If there is not enough time, county election officials will tell these voters how they can vote in person, if the election is not already over.

The absentee ballot lawsuit

Now, a federal district court will decide whether that guidance survives the 2026 election.

Plaintiffs argued that the guidance, which passed along party lines, went against documented public opposition. They also argue that the guidance will require counties to discard ballots “for innocuous, technical errors unrelated to individuals’ eligibility to vote.”

Wrinkles in Atrium’s takeover of WakeMed

Continued from page 1A

“so if they don’t write that in a strong way, it could be even weaker than that.”

“I’m glad that prices are being discussed because that’s so core to what this deal is, but I don’t think the price cap really addresses the problem to the extent that I would like to see,” he added.

Atrium concedes more money, board control

In a presentation to the county commissioners, Askew outlined several changes that had been made to the deal during negotiations between Atrium, WakeMed and the county.

Perhaps the most notable of these was the assurance that all \$2 billion earmarked for upgrades to WakeMed facilities would come directly from Atrium. Previously, Atrium said most of that investment would come from WakeMed’s own revenues and would merely help fill the gaps for expenses that WakeMed couldn’t afford.

About a quarter of that money will go toward “routine expenditures” like HVAC system replacements, Askew said.

Another chunk will help fund several WakeMed projects that already have received approval from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. Those include an expansion at WakeMed’s North Hospital in Raleigh, a freestanding emergency department in Rolesville and new acute care and mental health hospitals in Garner.

Atrium also pledged \$150 million for what it’s calling a Whole Health Program, which is to be administered by Wake County over the next decade.

While the exact details of that initiative aren’t yet known, Wake County spokesperson Kate Maroney said the program will be primarily targeted at social drivers of health such as foster care placement shortages, homelessness, food security, in-home aides for seniors and general behavioral health.

Funding decisions will come directly from county commissioners and neither Atrium or WakeMed will have a say in how that money is spent.

Negotiations also led to slight changes in governance under the proposed combination. If the deal were to go through, Atrium would become the “sole member” of the nonprofit corporation that is WakeMed.

Under that structure, Atrium would directly appoint six members to the WakeMed board of directors. Wake County commissioners would retain appointment powers for the remaining eight board members, but they would have to choose from a trio of candidates handpicked by Atrium.

Previously, there was no residency requirement for the eight “community directors” appointed by the county commissioners, but Askew said the deal had been revised to require that those directors live in Wake County.

Another new aspect of the board structure is that the eight community directors may meet separate from the Atrium appointees to ensure that Atrium is holding up its end of the partnership agreement. If they find that Atrium isn’t meeting those terms, it would automatically trigger legally binding arbitration, Askew said.

Atrium also agreed to raise the minimally required charity care at WakeMed from 4.8% to 8%. WakeMed facilities already average well above that number at around 12%, Askew said.

Finally, Atrium promised not to pursue what Askew called “extraordinary collection actions” against patients with medical debt. Prohibited prac-

tices include selling debt to collection agencies, commencing legal action against debt holders and garnishing wages.

Bed shortage a factor for commissioners

As Commissioner Vickie Adamson put it, the revised deal is “a lot less bad than it was to start with.”

Adamson still voted against the deal, calling it a “sad day” for Wake County. She was joined by Commissioner Tara Waters, but the two were outvoted by the other five commissioners, who framed the combination as necessary for ensuring the continued growth of WakeMed.

Before casting her “yes” vote, Commissioner Shinica Thomas spoke about experiencing the need for new hospital beds firsthand.

“I’ve been to the emergency room at WakeMed twice in the last year, taken there by ambulance,” Thomas said.

“I spent the better part of my most recent two-day stay in a bed next to the registration desk at the North campus, because we need more beds. We need more rooms.”

CPP’s recent investigative series Battling for Beds found that North Carolina has lagged behind in expanding hospital capacity to meet the demands of quickly growing urban centers like Wake County.

The delay in getting new beds operating is tied to the state’s certificate-of-need law, which requires hospital systems to apply for a limited number of new hospital beds. In hotly contested regions like Raleigh, where UNC, Duke and WakeMed all have hospitals, approved projects can be stuck in legal limbo for years because of lengthy certificate appeals processes.

A partnership with Atrium may not get those appeals resolved any faster, but it could better position WakeMed to compete for new beds and medical equipment as the Research Triangle continues to grow.

“We are also concerned by the increase in our population, of 66 people moving into our county every day, or 24,000 people per year,” Mial said.

After approval, regulatory review awaits

Next, the WakeMed-Atrium deal will receive scrutiny from both the state attorney general and the Federal Trade Commission.

Attorney General Jeff Jackson’s powers in this context are limited to certifying that the proposed combination adheres to the law. In a statement, Stein urged the General Assembly to grant the office more authority to “review hospital transactions and protect North Carolinians from the increased prices and decreased quality they often bring.”

The FTC, meanwhile, has broader authority to potentially block the deal if it finds that it is anti-competitive or harmful for patients. It did just that with a proposed hospital acquisition in Ohio earlier this year.

In that case, however, the proposed acquisition would have decreased the number of hospital systems in the affected county. Because Atrium currently doesn’t have a presence in the Research Triangle, it isn’t likely that an FTC review would find the deal anti-competitive in that regard.

Still, the federal agency said in a press release that it is dedicated to reviewing and stopping “bad hospital deals.”

“Financial distress is not a blank check for mergers that would substantially reduce competition between hospitals and risk leaving patients with higher costs and lower quality care,” FTC chairman Andrew Ferguson wrote.

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The Voice of the Black Community

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Taxpayers and voters owe it to themselves to control the chaos

Running neck and neck with the N.C. Department of Transportation for the most egregious example of government waste is the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Board of Education.

NCDOT spent close to \$70 million designing a partial plan — it's only 10-15% complete — for adding toll lanes projected to negatively impact the environment, generally, and harm Black neighborhoods in Charlotte specifically.

The school board's waste is not as expensive.

It is more egregious. When school board members voted 5-4 Tuesday to cut ties with Crystal Hill as the district's superintendent, they basically added well over a half-million dollars more to a mounting bill that would make even fiscally liberal folks blush: A \$379,000 investigation cleared Hill's name that some board members tried to cloud. Some on the board remained determined to fire her just because they felt like it.

It's known as getting terminated for convenience (no reason), as opposed to ending a work relationship for cause (a contractually stipulated reason). The convenience piece comes at a price, about \$340,000 in severance for Hill. That was her annual salary. The next superintendent will want at least that much. The search firm to find that savior won't do it as an in-kind donation. So that's more money. All of it exceeds \$1 million right there.

Oh, and during the investigation, word from school board members was for Hill to not bother coming to work. They put her on paid administrative leave. Not exactly vacation for Hill, but it was summertime, and she was getting paid with North Carolinians' tax dollars to not work on account of a petty party thrown by board members, whose guidance has both the N.C. State Bureau of Investigation and the N.C. Office of the State Auditor doing homework on the school system.

Egregious. District 1 board member Charlitta Hatch got mad after Hill went on the radio to tell her side of the story. Hatch framed Hill's autonomy as insubordination. No doubt about it, school board members were Hill's bosses. Hatch made it clear she didn't care for the sideshow Hill created by using the media as a personal megaphone — the circus the school board created notwithstanding.

"What you are seeing in Washington is not acceptable here in Charlotte, and so we are making a decision to say that we need bold leadership changes, a reset across the board. And that is what leadership looks like," Hatch said.

At-large board member Monty Witherspoon pointed the finger at his peers.

"Quite frankly, this board has spiraled into complete chaos. This board is dysfunctional. This board is broken," Witherspoon said. "I hope that residents of this county hold this board accountable at every stop and turn. I hope that the press continues to ask questions."

Hatch's mind appears to be on the school system's 140,000 students.

"The children are watching. My child is watching," Hatch said.

Taxpayers and voters are watching, too. School board members work for them, to extend Hatch's insubordination metaphor.

"We know that when folks get into their positions, there does need to be some sort of accountability," North Carolina Black Alliance democracy and economy program manager Mikayla Massey said. "These are terms. We're not talking about a monarchy here. We're talking about people taking a turn and seeing what they can do for their community. If you in community are like, 'You know what? I actually don't like that,' there's gonna be another option in a couple more years."

Witherspoon and fellow at-large board members Liz Monterrey Duvall and Lenora Shipp have terms expiring in 2027. Terms come due in 2029 for Hatch, Stephanie Sneed (District 4), Dee Rankin (District 3), Shamaie Haynes (District 2), Cynthia Stone (District 5) and Anna London (District 6).

"That's important — to just really honor the democracy, that opportunity that we have," Massey said.

That is, the opportunity we have to fire school board members for cause. Of course, the state auditor could end up applying the heat first. That's if the SBI doesn't beat him to the punch.

John McCann is senior digital communications associate for Advance Carolina.

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Who controls college athletics?

There has been rapid growth in college sports.

Increased scholarships, television deals and new conference alignments have all been a part of it. Now let's add the possibility of players signing professional football contracts and then returning to play in college.

I'm watching now only as a fan. Years ago, I was a college student-athlete and enjoyed my time playing the sport that I loved. I didn't know much about conference rules and regulations.

What I did know was that I had four years of scholarship eligibility and had to get good grades to keep it. And of course, winning was a part of it. Thankfully and humbly, things

worked out well for me. My college experience was fulfilling and fun.

Is it different being a student-athlete today? Is there more pressure to perform? Yes, there is. I have often said that you may be the best in your house, the best on your block and the best in your community. However, is that enough to receive a college scholarship?

According to the NCAA, there are approximately 180,000 students on some type of athletic scholarship. If you are in that number, you are fortunate so don't take it for granted. If you are trying to get in that number, keep working hard and you'll get there.

Today, college student-athletes leave college early to pursue professional sports careers. Here is where it gets confusing, at least for me and for many others from the old school. I am perplexed and con-

founded that a college student-athlete can sign a professional sports contract and then return to play in college. Recently, a confirmed report says, "A Louisiana state judge granted a temporary restraining order allowing a group that includes 16 college football players, some of whom participated in NFL training camps to return to college sports and enter the transfer portal for the 2026 season".

Paul Finebaum of ESPN said, "College football has officially plunged into an abyss." If you are a college football purist, you'll say this is unbelievable. Madness is happening right in front of us.

However not everyone is on this play football at all costs love train. Just a few weeks ago, the SEC presidents and chancellors released the following statement: "College athletes not former profes-

sional athletes have been at the heart of the Southeastern Conference. Individuals who choose to leave college athletics, sign professional contracts, and compete professionally should not then be permitted to return to college competition."

The Big Ten and Big 12 conferences issued similar statements. Other conferences have weighed in with their displeasure about athletes who have signed professional contracts returning to playing college ball. All of them realize that something is wrong with this picture.

Will this get worse before it gets better? Having the courts seemingly in charge of college athletics isn't right. Student athletes who leave college for the pros continue to run the risk of not making it. They are receiving bad advice and poor counseling from their advisors.

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TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Johnson C. Smith running back Fabian Duncan is fourth in Division II rushing with 610 yards and five touchdowns on 96 carries for the Golden Bulls, including 159 yards on 30 tries in a 20-14 win against Fayetteville State at McGirt Field on Sept. 19, 2026. The Golden Bulls (3-1, 2-0 CIAA) going into their Oct. 3 game at Bluefield State.

‘I love being the underdog’

JC Smith running back Fabian Duncan is one of Division II’s top rushers, but he’s far from satisfied

By Herbert L. White
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Fabian Duncan’s goals were deferred but undeniable.

Duncan, a junior running back at Johnson C. Smith, spent one semester on campus when COVID-19 struck. He left school, went to work and got on with the transition to adulthood. The separation from campus life and football grew wider. If only another chance presented itself.

“COVID ended up happening, and then I was out of school for three and a half years, and really had like an everyday life in Charlotte,” said Duncan, a

North Mecklenburg High graduate. “I had an apartment, family, dog. I was definitely living, but my dream, my passion, is football and it also gave me another reason to come back and get a degree.”

Montez McRae, who recruited Duncan to JCSU, threw out a lifeline when he joined the staff at Allen, which is also a Division II Black college. Duncan converted opportunity into the 2025 SIAC player of the year award with a conference-best 1,301 rushing



Duncan

yards and 15 touchdowns.

When Duncan made the decision to transfer after helping the Yellow Jackets to a 6-5 season, Seattle Seahawks running back Emmanuel Wilson, a longtime friend, North Meck teammate and 1,000-yard rusher in his lone season at Smith, encouraged him to go home. There was also the incentive of joining an ascendent program that won last year’s CIAA title and advanced to the NCAA playoffs for the first in school history.



Flowers

“I’m all about Charlotte, and I definitely knew what I can bring to an organization such as Smith, but also I can do it back in my hometown,” he said. “That decision wasn’t too tough. I end up coming back home, and it just happened that the program is developing to what it’s turned into.”

Said JCSU coach Maurice Flowers, who coached Wilson for three seasons at Fort Valley State: “Emmanuel called me and said, ‘Coach, Fabian’s in the portal, and I told him I think it’d be a good idea for him to play with you.’ ... I tell you, for a recruit to be this sought

Please see **FABIAN** | 6A

Takeaways going into 49ers’ conference schedule



MATT LACZKO | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Charlotte 49ers running back Khamani Alexander has shouldered more of the rushing load with Chance Williams’ dismissal from the program.

By Cameron Williams
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Another week, another Charlotte 49ers loss.

Charlotte (0-4) lost 34-7 at home against Louisiana in a game where the only points scored by the 49ers were a defensive scoop and score.

Charlotte has scored just two offensive touchdowns in the last three games, and turnovers and gifting short field have led to points being scored against them.

Here are three takeaways from the 49ers non-conference slate:

1. Quarterback play must be better. Does it start with a change behind center? Maybe.

Starter Cole Gonzales has not been good since the season opener. There is no other way to say it.

Against Ole Miss, he threw for 128 yards, no touchdowns and an interception. Against Appalachian State it was 211 yards and two interceptions. Against Louisiana it was 68 yards and an interception. Gonzales

Please see **49ERS** | 6A

Several football things on my mind

The CIAA restarted its football coaches press conference after a long hiatus.

The good news is it gives media a chance to hear all the coaches in one sitting.

The bad news is the media can’t talk to the coaches. The host asks all the questions. Make it make sense.

They aren’t there to ask any hardcore questions like “Coach, your defense is weaker than two-day-old dishwater. What are you doing about it?” OK, maybe not those EXACT words, but you get the drift. Coaches shouldn’t be smiling when they’re winless or have a losing streak dating back to 2024 or have blown multiple fourth-quarter leads.

This ain’t “Family Feud.” They should look like Prairie View A&M coach Tremaine Jackson, who resembles a junk yard dog whether he wins or loses.

Everybody is about public relations. Putting on a good show, not making anybody feel bad. Let’s play nice. This is football, people! Listen, I’ve been down on the field standing behind a team’s bench. If a coach can hear some of the stuff coming from those crazy fans and not pull a gun, he’s man enough to tackle a few tough media questions.

Who’s top dog?

We are heading into the fifth week of the football season, and the jury is still out on the contenders and pretenders.

SWAC teams have played 13 Division II teams so far. The MEAC six.

FCS vs. Division II is akin to FBS vs. FCS in my book. Just like an FBS team is in a no-win

Please see **THERE’S** | 6A

Special teams hold extra value for the Panthers

By Jeff Hawkins
for the Charlotte Post

As a senior for Azusa Pacific in 2003, David Canales’ special teams duty produced one of his favorite football moments.

Lining up next to his brother Cobra, a sophomore who transferred to the NAIA program from the University of Pennsylvania, the future Carolina Panthers

coach couldn’t recall the result of the kickoff, but the memory remains.

“Just like we were at the park (as) kids running down trying to blow stuff up,” Canales said with a grin. “Being able to be on kick-



Canales

off cover was crazy. That was probably the highlight of my sports career.”

The family bond could be seen as a significant statement, considering Canales was an assistant quarterbacks/offensive quality control coach during the Seattle Seahawks’ Super Bowl championship run in 2014.

Continuing to value his on-

field experiences while rising through the NFL coaching ranks, Canales remains partial to the unique contributions special teams provide.

Following the Week 1 defensive debacle against Chicago, Canales highlighted the effort of reserve tight end Feleipe Franks during the 59-37 loss to the

Please see **SPECIAL** | 6A

Myers Park breaks into Magnificent Seven; Palisades to No. 3

By Herbert L. White
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The only certainty in the Magnificent Seven is a pair of unbeaten clubs Hough and Chambers leading the pack.

Hough is first for the seventh week, followed by Chambers and 4-1 Palisades but there’s more movement behind the top three with Mallard Creek up a spot, followed by Myers Park bumping back into the mix at No. 5.

The Magnificent Seven with overall and conference record and previous week’s ranking.

1. **Hough** (6-0, 1-0 Greater Charlotte 7A/8A, previous week No. 1). It’s metronomic how the

Huskies maintain their dominant rhythm atop the rankings. Some team will have to play perfect for 48 minutes and still get lucky to ruin Hough’s unbeaten season.

The Huskies are off this week, followed by Garinger.

2. **Chambers** (6-0, 1-0 Meck Power Six 7A/8A, previous week No. 2). The Cougars delivered a 28-0 thumping of Butler to keep its unbeaten record intact. They have a week off to prepare for Independence on Oct. 9.

3. **Palisades** (4-1, 0-0 Southwestern 7A/8A, previous week No. 3). The Pumas are in a good position heading into their first conference game against Ardrey

Kell at home. A win would go long way toward sending a message to the rest of the conference.

4. **Mallard Creek** (4-2, 1-0 Meck Power Six 7A/8A, previous week No. 5). When the Mavericks are on, they’re pretty darn good. Ask West Charlotte, the victim of a 43-6 romp last week. North Mecklenburg has the next shot at an upset.

5. **Myers Park** (3-2, 0-0 Greater Charlotte 7A/8A, previous week unranked). It’s easy to be forgotten in the conference Hough is expected to dominate, but the Mustangs have won three straight, including a 28-25 deci-

sion against Mallard Creek and last week’s 48-25 walloping of Hopewell.

Next up is a road trip to Garinger.

6. **Ardrey Kell** (3-2, 0-0 Southwestern 7A/8A, previous week No. 7). The Knights needed an off week to get a handle on their inconsistency ahead of Friday’s showdown at Palisades.

7. **Hopewell** (4-2, 0-1 Greater Charlotte 7A/8A, previous week No. 4). That 23-point shellacking by Myers Park has got to hurt.

Lick those wounds because resurgent Myers Park is making stuff happen ahead of their Oct. 9 meeting.

Fabian Duncan’s juiced to play hungry at JCSU

Continued from page 5A

after, it was probably my least amount of recruiting.”

Duncan fits in with the Golden Bulls, who are 3-1, 2-0 in the CIAA going into Saturday’s game at Bluefield State. Through four games, he’s racked up 610 yards and five touchdowns on 96 carries, fifth best in Division II and on pace to break Ernest “Warhorse” Williams’ single season school record of 1,176 yards set in 1976.

“Definitely some meat on the bone,” said Duncan, who averages 158.5 yards per game. “I’m not where I want to be. I don’t even know what it’s going to look like when I get to that peak, but I know I haven’t reached it yet. I’m not really surprised in the humble sense though, because I knew what I was capable of doing. I just needed the stage to do it, and I have the pieces around me, like my o-line. I love my o-line. ... Take them boys up to get food, break-fast, all types of stuff.”

Duncan, who combines power and physicality in a 5-10, 210-pound package, has the ingredients to play professionally, Golden Bulls coach Maurice Flowers said.

“He’s got an Emmanuel Wilson type work ethic,” Flowers said. “I’ve coached a few young men on the Division II level that play on Sundays, and what they all have in common is their work ethic was different, and Fabian fits right in. The way he meets, the way that he lifts in the weight room, the way that he does drills, the work that he does before practice, the work that he does after practice, and then the way that he practices. When you watch this guy practice, you’re not surprised that he gets the results that he does on game day. Every day is the game to Fabian.”

Duncan gets most of the carries, but he isn’t the only option. Senior Kamarro Edmonds, who missed most of 2025 with an ankle injury, has rushed for 272 yards and a pair of touchdowns on 50 carries. Together, they set the pace for the CIAA’s third-ranked offense at 384.8 yards per game.

“That’s my dude,” Duncan said. “It’s not a RB1, RB2. It’s 1A, 1B, and we call ourselves a pack a punch deal where somebody going to do something. It’s hard to sit there and stop us over and

over and over again. You’re not going to be able to do it. It’s not going to happen. We won’t let it happen.”

Duncan’s contributions go beyond taking handoffs. Flowers praises his blocking and pass-catching skills, which make him a big play threat whenever he touches the ball.

“His running style is that of a every down back, and that’s really how I approach him,” Flowers said. He is an every-down back by our definition. He’s going to fall forward – he doesn’t have many negative gains. The second thing is he can pass protect. That’s one of the best things about his game. Fabian has a great understanding of pass protections and contributing with the offensive line. The third thing he can catch out of the backfield, so we’re finding out just what type of back he is.”

Duncan is a bruiser – willing to confront defenders at the point of attack or in space. He takes pride in forcing tacklers to make what Flowers calls “business decisions.”

“I’m going to give it to you before you give it to me,” Duncan said. “I love contact, but it’s a certain mentality you’ve got to have. One of my favorite running backs growing up was Marshawn Lynch, and I’m trying to quote him: when you run through (an opponent’s) face over and over and over again, a lot of people can’t take that. I’ve started to see that in a sense where if I give it to you first quarter, second quarter, third quarter, you’re going to start trying to dive for my legs. Now you’re thinking twice before you’ve got to hit me, and by the time you do that, it’s too late.”

After last year’s record-setting campaign, the Golden Bulls are thinking bigger in 2026. That means returning to the playoffs and advancing. Duncan believes they can do it, and he’s up for the challenge of carving an impression along the way.

“I love being the underdog,” he said. “I love the juice it gives me, the way I’m able to stay hungry. I think even coming back here to coach Flowers where he keeps me hungry, I think that’s why I love it here. That’s why it’s such a good culture fit for me – he doesn’t allow me to get complacent. ... Be who you say you are.”



Edmonds

There’s football on my mind

Continued from page 5A

situation – lose and you’re toast for the season or win by a slim margin, and you get dropped in the polls – the same goes for FCS teams. They’re supposed to beat DII opponents, although somebody forgot to tell Mississippi Valley State.

SWAC Commissioner Charles McClelland announced earlier this year that the conference was eliminating games against non-NCAA Division I and DII opponents beginning next year.

Prairie View A&M needs little convincing. The Panthers have played one heck of a nonconference schedule (nationally ranked Tarleton State, Baylor and Stephen F. Austin), while

their conference colleagues ease on down the road against Virginia-Lynchburg, Lincoln (Pa.), Lane College, etc.

Even South Carolina State, the consensus No. 1 HBCU FCS team, has played two DII teams: Savannah State and Virginia State, 87-0 and 66-0 wins, respectively. The Bulldogs needed that quality win at Furman.

Of course, no coach wants his team beat up, and I’ve been told that early wins boost players’ confidence. The feeling will be short-lived for some, however, when conference season rolls in and the real competition begins. Then we’ll see who’s still standing come December. I know who my Monopoly money is on.

No place like home

The MEAC has associate members from other conferences in women’s bowling and women’s flag football.

It’s time for Hampton and North Carolina A&T to return to the fold in football only. The Pirates are 3-27 against CAA teams since joining the conference in 2022. (Three conference wins were vacated in 2023 due to NCAA violations. The Aggies are 3-23 since joining in 2023.)

Remind them again, Dorothy: “There’s no place like home.”

Bonitta Best is sports editor at The Triangle Tribune in Durham.

49ers searching for answers

Continued from page 5A

lez has three touchdowns to six interceptions.

Charlotte coach Tim Albin didn’t answer the question directly when asked about his confidence in Gonzales moving forward.

“It is not all Cole’s [fault],” Albin said. “It’s just not. I know Cole and he is a competitor. He wants the ball in his hands every play. So, as a staff, we are going to have to talk through that. The thing with Cole is we just can’t turn the ball over. He missed high on the one today, and so that’s where it’s at but he’s going to come to work and help this team win football games.”

Albin rolled out Conner Harrell in the fourth quarter and while he wasn’t stellar, he went 8-for-13 and 43 yards when the Ragin’ Cajuns were bringing a blitz practically every snap.

So, there is a legitimate quarterback question in University City, but Albin seems set on Gonzales for now.

2. Where did the run game go?

In the first two weeks,

Charlotte had 216 yards and 143 yards rushing respectively. In the next two weeks, the 49ers have combined for 62 yards.

After the loss to Ole Miss, running back Chance Williams was dismissed from the program and the 49ers have struggled on the ground since.

“I don’t think so,” Albin said. “I think that the room is very capable. Kamani Alexander is playing at a very high level ... I like where he is at. So, I say no, because, again, the room is capable. We have guys in there that can get some things done, but we’ve got to help them.”

Alexander had five carries for 8 yards against Louisiana.

Henry Rutledge has seen more touches since Williams’ dismissal but against Louisiana he rushed three times early for 14 yards but no carries afterward. Albin said he was unsure as to why and he didn’t think it was injury related.

“I don’t know if it was an injury, I don’t think so,” he said. “But, at this time, I

don’t have that information.”

3. Play calling has been disappointing.

To be cordial, the offense is perplexing.

On numerous third-and-distance plays, pass routes were underneath or short of the line to gain. Even when passes connect, the separation isn’t there to gain the yardage needed.

On fourth and inches against Louisiana, Charlotte ran and was stopped short. The play was blown dead due to a play clock error, but they lined up again and ran the same exact play.

Offensive coordinator Todd Fitch must figure something out as the 49ers start American Conference play. Albin, though, took the blame.

“The calls like last week we threw it out of our own end zone, [Fitch] didn’t call, I called that,” he said. “He didn’t call the reverse, I called it. And so tonight was a tough environment because we were behind the chains. ... We have to find out what our identity is and take care of the football.”



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Carolina Panthers coach Dave Canales emphasizes special teams as an important phase of football, where a play can turn field position or flip momentum.

Special teams a point of emphasis for the Panthers

Continued from page 5A

Bears on Sept. 13. With 2:35 remaining in the first half, Franks rambled downfield, covering what amounted to an in sequential kickoff. Except for Franks, a special teams ace, the effort meant something.

Kick returner Josh Blackwell logged 20 yards before enduring an abrupt end when Franks and teammate Jeremiah Moon aggressively upended him.

Canales appreciated their professional pride.

“Even late in the game, as things were getting out of hand, Franks runs down the field, avoids (a blocker) and (makes) just this beautiful, beautiful play,” Canales said. “That’s the type of style of football that I love.”

Canales appreciates special teams

A day after the Panthers rebounded with a resounding Week 2 win at Atlanta, Canales headlined the special teams.

“Complimentary football,” he said, per Panthers.com. “That’s what it’s all about.”

Despite quarterback Bryce Young generating a series of explosive plays and inside linebacker Devin Lloyd delivering a historical performance in the 34-3 win, Canales elected to pinpoint the often-overlooked special teamers.

In 14 kickoffs this season, the Panthers ranked second in return average (20.5 yards) with five touchbacks, according to NFL.com. The punting unit placed three of seven chances inside their opponents’ 20-yard line.

Special teams’ success starts with attitude, Claudin Cherelus declared.

“For sure,” Cherelus said. “It’s often overlooked, but I think special teams is really the staple piece for offense and defense. You gotta start the game with special teams play and come out of the half with the special teams play. Just the energy it brings.

“For example, you get a kick, you go on kickoff and you tackle it inside the 25 or

something like that. That’s a crazy momentum shift. You go on kick return, and you get a big return past the 40, offense has got good field position. People don’t realize how big it is.”

Canales credited the special teams for providing a significant “hidden yardage” advantage against the Falcons (0-2).

“I think it was 220 yards difference from the start of the drives,” he said.

Takes a special mindset

Despite the Week 1 blowout at Bank of America Stadium, Franks and Moon competed. Franks worked his way through a block, while Moon created an opportunity from the other side. They met at the ball carrier.

So, who got there first?

“I don’t know,” Moon said. “I feel like it was at the same time. That’s what I’m gonna say.”

Special teams are generally populated with specialists, backups and prospects. With new rules and constant changes, not everyone fully appreciates the mentality special teamers possess.

“I think it takes a special mindset to get down there and go make a tackle 50, 60 yards down the field,” Franks said. “But you got to embrace it. I enjoy it. I love it.”

One special teams void appears to be taken over by WR2 Jalen Coker. After Jimmy Horn Jr. was released after a Week 1 fumble, Coker returned two punts against Atlanta, including a 36-yarder. John Metchie III, who replaced Horn on the 53-man roster, averaged 26.5 yards off two kick returns.

The Panthers’ kickoff coverage unit yielded 79 yards on four attempts, while yielding just seven punt return yards.

“We’ve got a great group of special teams guys,” Moon said. “I think we compete with each other every day. Everybody’s trying to make the tackle. Everybody’s trying to make the play. We got a lot of guys that are hungry.”

No LaMelo, no problem going forward, the Hornets predict

By Cameron Williams
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The NBA season is nearing, and the Charlotte Hornets will lean on their new big three.

There was an offseason flurry of transactions, none larger than the trade of franchise centerpiece LaMelo Ball to the Minnesota Timberwolves. It came as a shock to Hornets fans after the team reaching the play-in and falling just a game short of the playoffs.

Vice President of Basketball Operations Jeff Peterson didn’t want to discuss Ball too much at Monday’s media day but did thank him for his contributions.

“What I’ll say about LaMelo is, he’s someone who I appreciate everything that he did in my time here,” Peterson said. “He was great to be around. He’s a fantastic talent. I wish him nothing but the best in Minnesota.”

With Ball gone, it adds more responsibility for guard Coby White, who resigned in the offseason. After a February trade with the Chicago Bulls, White averaged 15.6 points, 3.0 assists and 3.0 rebounds per game and hit one of the biggest shots of the season against Miami in the first round play-in game to send it to overtime.

“The biggest thing I want for Coby is for Coby to be Coby,” Hornets coach Charles Lee said. “He doesn’t need to play the point guard position like anyone else in the NBA or anyone that was in that seat previously. I think what he has done throughout his career has already been really effective, and we want to help him become an even more overall basketball player. I think that offen-

sively, he has always shown he can score. Now he has to find that balance of scoring and passing, playing off the ball at times, too. I think he has embraced every bit of the challenge that is going to come his way.”

Said White: “I feel extremely confident and I think I have to do it my way. I’m excited to see what that looks like for myself. I got to do it the Coby White way, but I have the utmost confidence in myself. I think work always going to show, and I work really hard in my craft, and I sacrifice a lot for the game that I love. I’m excited to see what this year holds, just a different opportunity.”

Guard/forward Brandon Miller underwent labrum surgery in May and has resumed full contact workouts.

“I’m back now,” he said. “I have been doing a lot better. I think the most important thing throughout this process was staying connected with my teammates. They did a great job of just keeping me focused on the controllables that I can control during my rehab, and just kind of having that mindset throughout the summer has gotten me back to where I’m at now.”

Miller played 65 games last season, the most since his rookie season (74) and

averaged 20.2 points per contest. He will have an elevated role but insists he is just looking to do whatever he can to win games.

“I’m willing to do whatever the winning play might be,” Miller said, “whether it’s me guarding the best player every night, or it’s me scoring the ball. I will do whatever my team needs to win basketball games.”

Forward Kon Knueppel looks to build on his rookie campaign where he finished second in rookie of the year voting behind Dallas Mavericks forward — and former Duke teammate — Cooper Flagg. Knueppel was recently reported to have sustained a hamstring injury in a game of pickup. “We’ve been doing live play days throughout the summer and off season, and just got a rebound, defensive rebound, and went coast to coast with it. I just felt my hamstring pull up on me. It kind of felt like a cramp. Then I was like, ‘I don’t think that’s a cramp.’ So just a little tug of the hamstring. But I’m progressing really well. It feels good. I’m not dealing with any pain.”

Knueppel, much like White and Miller, will have to raise his level of play with Ball gone. He looks forward to embracing the challenge.

“[There will be] a lot of ball handling, a lot of secondary playmaking coming off ball screens,” Knueppel said. “Those things can be really important for our team. We need guys that can create offense for others. I think we’ve got a lot of guys that can do that and pitch into that but that’s definitely an area of growth, as a focus, both for myself, but also from the team.”



Knueppel



Miller



White