

SPORTS



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Charlotte teams help UNC Asheville recover post-Helene

BY LANGSTON WERTZ JR.
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Janet Cone has been athletic director at UNC Asheville for 21 years. She intentionally built a house in an area where, even when the snow and bad weather would come — and it always comes in the mountain winters — Cone knew she could still get to work.



Janet Cone

That was until Hurricane Helene blew through Asheville last week, delivering a double-fisted blow of wind and rain like the area had not seen since “The Great Flood” of 1916.

Businesses closed. Nearly 100 lives were lost. The power went

out. The water stopped working. “In the 20-something years I’ve been here,” Cone said, “I don’t think I’ve ever not been able to get work until that Friday. My neighborhood wasn’t bad. There were trees blown all over, but when you came out to the county road and you look to the right, it was like, ‘Well I can’t go that way.’ There just trees and power lines down. Then I looked to the left and it

was the same thing. “All I could do was go back home.”

Like many people in the area, Cone didn’t really know how bad things were.

She couldn’t turn on the TV, although she did find an old transistor radio that could pick up one station. By Sunday, she could finally get a cellphone signal, and one of the first messages she read was from Char-

lotte 49ers AD Mike Hill.

How can I help you?

“At first, I told Mike, ‘Let me get back to you,’” Cone said. “My first thing was to make sure our students were safe. We were making sure we could get student-athletes off campus.”

THE AFTERMATH ON CAMPUS

When Cone finally got to UNC Asheville, she was able to see the damage, which included a building that houses athletic offices, golf and tennis locker rooms being flooded with water that was, she said, between eight and 12 feet high.

And once she got a head

SEE ASHEVILLE, 5B

Nijman to start at right tackle for Panthers on Sunday

BY MIKE KAYE
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Yosh Nijman has some big shoes to fill. Luckily for him, the 6-foot-7, 314-pound offensive lineman has been in this position before, and he knows what to expect.

On Sunday against the Atlanta Falcons at Bank of America Stadium, Nijman, 28, will step into the Panthers’ starting lineup at right tackle, replacing Taylor Moton (triceps) who is sidelined after starting 104 consecutive games. It’ll be Nijman’s first start in Carolina, but he comes into the matchup with 72 games (22 starts, 1,622 career snaps) on his resume.

“It’s good to be back out there,” Nijman said Wednesday after practice. “Collectively as a team, we’re trying to find ways to win a game. As I’m coming in, there should be no drop off of play. The offensive line played pretty well over the past five weeks, and I’m just trying to come in and mimic the same thing.”

YOSH NIJMAN LOOKING TO LIVE UP TO TAYLOR MOTON'S STANDARD

Nijman signed a two-year, \$8 million deal with the Panthers in March to be the team’s swing tackle.

The plan was for him to provide proven insurance behind Moton and left tackle Ikem Ekwonu. The Panthers are cashing in on that policy a bit earlier than expected, but Nijman says he is prepared for the challenge that comes with replacing Moton.

“Taylor is our fearless leader on the offensive line,” Nijman said. “He’s been here for a long time. He’s a professional, inside and out. . . . But me coming in for him, there’s a lot of expectations on me to play well, which I feel like I will do. And we should be good moving forward.”

SEE PANTHERS, 3B

‘THIS WILL BE A SHOW’

How a redesigned Roval could impact NASCAR’s Charlotte playoff race



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President of Charlotte Motor Speedway Greg Walter drives along the race track Tuesday to give an inside look at the changes made for the upcoming Roval 400 to make it look like a “purpose built road.”

BY SHANE CONNUCK
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CONCORD

Any NASCAR race on a road course allows skills and strategies to shine.

The playoff race at Charlotte Motor Speedway will be run on a unique one — the “Roval,” which features 17 turns over 2.28 miles — for the seventh straight year. It’s a fall tradition that began with Ryan Blaney, now the reigning Cup Series champion, stealing the inaugural win in 2018 following a late wreck involving Jimmie Johnson.

This year’s main event, sched-

uled for 2 p.m. Sunday, could be the most competitive yet.

Coming out of the course’s fifth turn, located in front of the backstretch near the traditional Turn 2, race cars will continue on a new straightaway instead of making a quick right-hand turn. It almost runs parallel with the banked turns on the right side of the track, where cars will be racing in the opposite direction.

The new straightaway starts to bend — forming the sixth turn of the newly-designed Roval — as the course nears the traditional Turn 1. That leads to a new Turn 7, which will force drivers to slow down and nearly make a full U-turn as they drive

onto the oval.

“This will be a show,” said Greg Walter, the longtime executive promoted to CMS track president in May. “You want something that is different. We had this culture of being constructively discontent. ‘How do you go from good to great?’ ‘How do you go from great to remarkable?’ This is all about the fans. We’re not doing this because we want to spend money just to build a new course. This is about creating something that gives NASCAR fans something to enjoy.

“Drivers are gonna complain about it, because it’s new. The only person who likes change is a baby with a wet diaper. This is

creating something *new* that the audience and fans should enjoy.”

SHARPER TURNS COULD BRING INCREASED ACTION ON EVERY LAP

Speedway Motorsports announced these reconfigurations, which aim to create additional passing opportunities and make the race more competitive, during the Coca-Cola 600 weekend in May.

On top of its anticipated racing benefits, the hairpin that follows the redesigned Turn 6 will provide a unique visual for

SEE NASCAR, 2B



JIM DEDMON Jim Dedmon-Imagn Images

ACC commissioner Jim Phillips during ACC Media Days at The Hilton Charlotte Uptown on Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2024.

ACC basketball aims to fix image, change narrative

BY ANDREW CARTER
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Toward the end of each of the past three men’s college basketball seasons, the ACC has experienced something of a collective catharsis. It has become routine over the past few years, a budding tradition in a sport that has found itself fighting for sustained relevancy in a college athletics world more and more

driven by football.

By now, everyone knows the deal: ACC men’s basketball teams might spend parts of November and December finding themselves, at best, or languishing at worst. Throughout January and February, the conference — hurt by metrics that may or may not overvalue non-conference performance of the previous months — will take a beating nationally.

The perception of ACC

basketball will sink. The pundits will mock, or question the strength of the conference. Fans of rival conferences will have a lot of fun delighting in the ACC’s perceived plight. The experts, some of whom work for an alleged ACC business partner (ESPN, if that’s not obvious enough) will project a laughably low number of conference teams who might be in a posi-

SEE BASKETBALL, 4B