

With Adam Thielen out, here’s who the Carolina Panthers will turn to at receiver

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Jonathan Mingo hasn’t been on social media since his college days in an effort to find clarity under the brightest spotlight — to find tranquility despite all the football noise.

So when you tell him that the fantasy football world has taken notice of his potential for a breakout performance in Week 4, his response is what you’d expect:

“Nah,” he said with a smile Thursday.

“I don’t do that type of stuff,” added Mingo, who is projected to score 10 fantasy points this week. “I just try to do my job every day.”

The Panthers will need him to do his job at 1 p.m. Sunday when they host the Cincinnati Bengals in Bank of America Stadium — perhaps even more so than in previous weeks.

The second-year wide receiver might hear his name called Sunday a bit more than usual. A lot of that has to do with the hamstring injury suffered by Adam Thielen, the team’s No. 2 wide receiver who will now miss at least the next four games on injured reserve.

But a lot of that, too, has to do with how Mingo played Sunday. In the Panthers’ 36-22 win over the Raiders — one in which Andy Dalton put on a vintage, 300-plus yard, three-TD performance — Mingo lived up to his role.



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Carolina Panthers wide receiver Jonathan Mingo secures the ball on a pass reception during practice on Tuesday, August 6, 2024.

He notched 49 snaps (66% of all offensive plays), which is a season high. He also caught three of his four targets for 18 yards and took an end-around rush that looked promising before the Raiders defense made a nice play to hold it to 2 yards. (That’s the second time in three games they’ve called an end-around rush for Mingo.)

His biggest play of the day came when he caught a pass in the flat behind the line of scrimmage and then took it for 15 yards with his team backed up deep in its own territory.

How that play came together even more so speaks to Mingo’s expected elevated role in the offense.

“We had something else called (out of the huddle),” Mingo told The Charlotte Observer of that

15-yard catch. “Andy checked to a Cover 0 answer. So it was a good check by him, saw he was getting (blitzed). Had a good block on the outside and tried to take advantage of running the ball in space. It’s something that I’ve been trying to prove to people that I can do.”

SO ... WHO WILL REPLACE ADAM THIELEN IN THE OFFENSE?

It’s true that replacing Thielen won’t be easy. The 34-year-old is the second-leading receiver on the team and notched three catches for 40 yards and a touchdown in one half Sunday before going down with an injury that’ll have him sidelined for a while.

Ask offensive coordinator Brad Idzik, though, and the plan to make up for Thielen’s

absence is pretty simple. It’s designed that way.

“They both did a phenomenal job stepping in,” Idzik said of Mingo and rookie Xavier Legette. “And again, it’s just a testament to them owning the full game plan. The thing that we value in this offense is guys not just memorizing one spot, whether it’s a heavy tackle coming in and playing tight end for us in the run game or the pass game, or it’s a receiver who’s typically the Z having to come in and spell us at F or X.”

Ideally the plan for the Panthers is to look for Diontae Johnson, who hauled in a career-high 122 yards Sunday, on every passing play. After that, there’s Mingo and Legette; the duo will almost certainly round out most three-receiver sets. Legette, like Mingo, also saw some more attention in Thielen’s absence. The first-round pick played 44 snaps — 49% — and caught two of three targets for 42 yards, which included a 35-yard catch that was mostly thanks to his speed after the catch.

And then behind them is Jalen Coker, a once-coveted undrafted free agent and practice squad promotion this week who flashed in the preseason enough to make the team’s initial 53-man roster.

Coker said Thielen — one of the most successful undrafted free agents in league history himself — has been a great leader to

all the rookies, and that has only helped prepare Coker for Sunday.

“He’s always going to take you under his wing and try to guide you through this process, which is awesome,” Coker told The Charlotte Observer on Wednesday. “Especially because we do have similar backgrounds. So it’s really kind of an amazing opportunity for me and experience for me, where I get to learn from probably one of the best guys to ever do it.”

SHAQ THOMPSON WANTED TO PLAY IN THE PRESEASON

The question of whether the Panthers should have played their starters in the preseason was a storyline for a bulk of training camp. Head coach Dave Canales ultimately chose to not play most of his starters outside of one series in the final preseason game — an approach other teams across the NFL took.

After the Panthers’ slow start, that decision lingered under scrutiny. And on Thursday, veteran linebacker Shaq Thompson shared that he wished his defense had played in the preseason.

“That’s just my opinion, I’m not the head coach or the GM who calls that shot. But I like playing in the preseason,” Thompson said. “Getting all the jitters and all that stuff out. ... But you know what? It is what it is. We got a win last week, and we’re 0-0

this week, and we’re trying to get a win this week.”

He added: “Helps with everything. Communication, tackling, going out with your guys, playing football. It helps with everything.”

QUICK HITS

● **With rain from Hurricane Helene whisking into Charlotte** — and with the Panthers currently without an indoor facility in their practice space — the team practiced in soggy conditions Thursday. That is still optimal, according to Thompson, who said he prefers to play on grass over turf no matter the weather conditions. (Thompson has shared this view before.)

● **There’s really only one big change on Thursday’s injury report.** And that involves arguably the Panthers’ most explosive player. Diontae Johnson didn’t practice Thursday because of a groin injury; he told reporters that the decision was primarily because of the field conditions and that he’ll be good to play Sunday. Those who showed up as “Did Not Participate” on Thursday’s injury report: Lonnie Johnson (hip), Damien Lewis (elbow), Shy Tuttle (foot), Taylor Moton (rest) and Johnson (groin). Those who showed up as limited: A’Shawn Robinson (knee) and Nick Scott (quadriceps).

● **Something fun for Panthers fans to look forward to:** At halftime of Sunday’s game against the Bengals, Julius Peppers will receive his Pro Football Hall of Fame Ring of Excellence, according to a release from the Hall. The legendary defensive end was inducted into the Hall this summer.

Mike Kaye contributed to this report.

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