

This is a printer-friendly version of an article from www.news-record.com
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Article published Nov 28, 2005

Panthers get enough offense

By Dan Friedell

Special to the News & Record

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. -- Early in Sunday's 13-9 win over the Buffalo Bills, Carolina tight end Michael Gaines called attention to himself in the worst way.

He was flagged for false starts twice during Carolina's second drive of the game, a 16-play, 11-minute marathon that resulted in a 25-yard John Kasay field goal.

But by the end of the game, he was known as the guy who caught a 3-yard touchdown pass late in the fourth quarter that propelled the Panthers (8-3) to a win and gave them a one-game cushion over Atlanta heading into next Sunday's NFC South contest at Bank of America Stadium.

Down 9-6 and facing third-and-goal with just over two minutes to play, Gaines lined up at the 3 and noticed that backup safety Coy Wire (Lawyer Milloy had just left the game with a foot injury) was playing him to the outside. A few seconds later, after a fake handoff froze the defense, Jake Delhomme found Gaines open 6 yards deep in the end zone.

"I knew I had him dead," a smiling Gaines said. "I gave him a head nod, and then I came back in and I was wide open. It was just a nod play ... a get open play."

Delhomme said he was happy to see Gaines get open, because he didn't want to settle for a field goal and a 9-9 tie.

"At that point, we wanted to get it into the end zone," said Delhomme, who found seven different receivers on a 20-for-27, 191-yard passing day. "You didn't want to give (Buffalo) a chance to kick a field goal at the end."

Gaines credited wide receiver Ricky Proehl of Greensboro, a 16-year veteran, with helping him refine his routes. And, having missed almost as much football over the last five years as he has played because of academic problems in high school and college, the raw 25-year-old has needed every bit of that advice.

"He's just a guy who's still learning to play," said tight end Kris Mangum, whose 16-yard catch late in the first quarter erased one of Gaines' false-start penalties. "Two years ago, he wasn't even playing

football. He's getting better and better."

Working underneath the Bills' cover two defense, the Panthers' tight ends combined to catch five passes from Delhomme. It's the kind of production in the middle of the field Carolina has been looking for to offset the double coverage wide receiver Steve Smith routinely faces.

Delhomme's willingness to look for his secondary options -- the tight ends; DeShaun Foster (four catches) and Brad Hoover (three catches) out of the backfield; and wide receiver Keary Colbert (four catches) -- opened things up for Smith in the second half.

"They rolled to Smitty a good bit, and we just had to be patient," Delhomme said.

Smith, the NFL's leading receiver, responded with catches on two straight plays late in the third quarter.

The drive, which resulted in a John Kasay field goal that tied the game at 6, began with Smith's 19-yard punt return that gave the Panthers the ball on their own 42.

"(Smith) still stepped up and made some huge plays for us both in the return game as well as on offense," Panthers head coach John Fox said.

Buffalo rookie Roscoe Parrish returned the ensuing kickoff to the 37-yard line, initiating a drive that would be the Bills' best chance for a touchdown in the second half.

Willis McGahee, who had been ineffective for most of the game, gained 20 of his 53 yards on five carries and Lee Evans made two athletic catches to give Buffalo a first down inside the Carolina 20. Two plays later, on third-and-8, quarterback JP Losman couldn't connect with Evans, who was tightly covered by safety Marlon McCree in the back of the end zone.

McCree, who said he treated the game as a must-win after Atlanta's Thanksgiving-day victory over Detroit, was ready for the play.

"We had seen that play all week on film, and in practice we prepared for it," McCree said. "It was just like we practiced. I just got back there and did my job."

After scoring the lone touchdown of the game to take the 13-9 lead, the Panthers' defense withstood Losman's frenzied nine-play, two-minute drill. Cornerback Chris Gamble dove in front of Parrish and intercepted a pass on the Panthers' 34 with 47 seconds left to end the threat.

Although Fox wasn't happy that his offense held the ball for more than 35 minutes and only scored 13 points, he saw the value of the victory.

"Anytime you can find a way to win on the road in this league, it's important," Fox said. "Luckily we were able to find a way to bounce back from last week."

Carolina 0 3 3 7 -- 13

Buffalo 0 6 0 3 -- 9

C--FG Kasay 25

B--FG Lindell 31

B--FG Lindell 45

C--FG Kasay 25

B--FG Lindell 33

C--Gaines 3 pass from Delhomme (Kasay kick)

Attendance--71,440

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING--Carolina: Foster 22-74, S.Davis 7-25, Goings 2-9, Colbert 1-6, Delhomme 1-(-1).
Buffalo: McGahee 21-53, Losman 3-0.

PASSING--Carolina: Delhomme 20-27-0-191. Buffalo: Losman 16-29-1-197.

RECEIVING--Carolina: Colbert 4-32, Foster 4-24, S.Smith 3-55, Hoover 3-20, Gaines 3-18,
Mangum 2-18, Proehl 1-24. Buffalo: Moulds 7-84, Evans 5-45, Parrish 2-30, Reed 1-29, Neufeld 1-9.

MISSED FIELD GOAL--Carolina: Kasay 45 (WR).

Copyright © 2005
The News & Record
and Landmark Communications, Inc.