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Panthers flop again

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Special to the News & Record

PHILADELPHIA — Jake Delhomme was looking for a chance to redeem himself Monday night. And he got it.

Delhomme got the chance to win the game for the Panthers in the final minute, but his fade pass to Keyshawn Johnson in the right corner of the end zone was picked off by Lito Sheppard with 25 seconds left. And as Sheppard crashed to the ground, Carolina's chance to win crashed, too, as the Eagles snatched a 27-24 victory at Lincoln Financial Field.

The loss was the Panthers' second straight, dropping them to 6-6.

Before the final interception, Delhomme had thrown an ill-advised pass with 7:30 left, leading to the Eagles' game-winning field goal. Nick Goings went one way and Delhomme's pass went the other, and Eagles safety Brian Dawkins picked it off. Dawkins' 38-yard return led to David Akers' 25-yard field goal, which gave Philadelphia a 27-24 lead with 3:13 left.

When the Panthers began their final possession from their 24 with 3:06 to go, Delhomme was ready to make amends.

"I just felt that we were going to get it done," Delhomme said after the second game in a row in which his final pass was intercepted.

The Panthers quickly moved down the field, thanks to a 25-yard pass to Keyshawn Johnson that gave them the ball at the Philadelphia 33 with 2 minutes left. Three plays later, the Panthers had a first down at the Philadelphia 7.

As he set up for what turned out to be his final play of the game, Delhomme was confident.

"If I had the matchup, I'd take it again," he said.

Coach John Fox agreed.

"We feel it's a high-percentage pass," he said.

Johnson, the target of the pass, supported his quarterback.

"The pass was there," he said. "Ain't nothing wrong with Jake."

Johnson thought he had been pushed, which enabled Shepard to get in position for the interception.

"A call wasn't made," Delhomme said. "I like my chances there, and I thought we had it when I let it go."

While neither quarterback's effort was pretty, Philadelphia's Jeff Garcia, subbing for injured Donovan McNabb, made enough plays to keep the Eagles (6-6) in the game.

Garcia finished 21-for-39 for 312 yards and three touchdowns. He threw no interceptions.

Delhomme completed 22 of 37 for 269 yards and three touchdowns, but threw two costly interceptions.

It was often difficult to tell which quarterback was starting his second game of the season (Garcia) and which one had been behind center all year, but Delhomme converted just enough plays to put his team into the end zone twice in the first half.

The Panthers' first touchdown came on a 9-yard pass to Steve Smith in the first quarter.

Delhomme didn't look great on the Panthers' TD drive late in the first half, but he completed two key passes, including a 38-yarder to Smith, and took the Panthers to the Eagles' 17 yard with 12 seconds to go. The next pass resulted in an interference call in the corner of the end zone on a ball intended for Smith, and the following throw fluttered in the hands of Johnson for a 14-7 lead with 7 seconds remaining

The Panthers opened the second half with an uninspired 3-and-out that mimicked most of their first-half possessions. The Eagles answered with a 10-play, 74-yard touchdown drive that tied the game 14-14.

Carolina broke the tie when Delhomme hit DeAngelo Williams for a 35-yard touchdown pass with 5:17 left in the third quarter.

Garcia found Reggie Brown on a 40-yard bomb down the right sideline to tie the game, 24-24, putting Delhomme on center stage.

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