

Delhomme leading Panthers deep into playoffs

The Carolina quarterback is not always the most calm and collected on the field, but he gets the job done

By Dan O'Neill
St. Louis Post-Dispatch (KRT)

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — At crunch time, when the field is long, the clock is short and the odds are foreboding, "collected" and "composed" are the traits one looks for in a quarterback. He is the one excitable teammates can turn to for equanimity.

At least, that's what common sense says. But there is nothing common about Carolina Panthers quarterback

Jake Delhomme, and precious little makes sense. Delhomme comes to the huddle the way a kid comes down the stairs on Christmas morning. When the going gets tough, he gets wired.

"It's like he's a little league or high school kid out there," said Panthers center Jeff Mitchell. "I mean, look at him. He's about a buck-fifty (150 pounds) and you look him in the face and you'd swear he's about 12 years old. I mean, it's like we have to calm him down."

Yet, Delhomme is to late-game heroics what David Letterman is to late-show antics. The Panthers have won seven times on their final possession this season and six when trailing

at halftime. The previously undistinguished Delhomme has completed 22 of 29 passes during drives in which Carolina has scored the decisive points inside the final two minutes of regulation or overtime.

From an emotional standpoint, he might be Jake the Quake more than Jake the Snake, but Delhomme gets it done.

"He's so fired up and crazy, there's no mistaking when he's in there," Mitchell added. "What it is, is positive energy. It's enthusiasm. It's unbridled, which is good. He's been working so hard for this, for so long."

Some teammates have taken to comparing their bayou-born quarterback, who celebrates his 29th birthday Satur-

day, to another Louisiana native with an anxious nature — "The Waterboy."

"He's like Bobby Boucher out there, you know," receiver Muhsin Muhammad said. "He's just going to be a fire-plug. He's going to show a lot of enthusiasm, a lot of excitement. He wears his emotion on his sleeve. When he comes off the sideline, you can tell when he had a bad play and you can tell when he's had a good play—he's going to be tackling you in the end zone."

Fans in St. Louis, familiar with the groceries-to-greatness story of Rams quarterback Kurt Warner, can relate to Delhomme. Coincidentally, the two were teammates in NFL Europe in 1998, living together at the Galaxy

Hotel in Amsterdam, struggling to make their football ends meet. Delhomme was Warner's backup, pushing 24 years of age at the time, and wondering if he was traveling down a dead end path.

"I'll be honest with you," Delhomme said, "there was a time when I was saying to myself, 'OK now, let's be real. If you're not going to start here, how are you going to make it in the NFL?' Of course, little did I know I was backing up a two-time MVP, but it was one of those things where you really start to question yourself, you really do."

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Horoscope by Linda C. Black

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (Jan. 9). Working with others is sometimes difficult, but it's worth the effort. You'll get a lot more done this year if you bring in some outside help. To get the advantage, check the day's rating: 10 is the easiest day, 0 the most challenging.
ARIES (March 21-April 19) _ Today is an 8 _ You still have to take appearances into consideration. Before you run off to play, make sure others know you're reliable. But be sure to play.
TAURUS (April 20-May 20) _ Today is a 7 _ You're bound to encounter resistance to your suggestions and ideas, so why not keep your opinions to yourself for a little while? See which way the wind blows.
GEMINI (May 21-June 21) _ Today is a 7 _ As predicted, you'll have to learn about a new subject. It might be something that will bring in more money, or simply a new game to play. Or both.
CANCER (June 22-July 22) _ Today is a 6 _ Gather up your determination and plunge into a difficult job. If you make sure co-workers communicate with each other, the profit will be yours.
LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) _ Today is an 8 _ Although you're strong, don't get cocky. Don't cause feelings to be hurt. Explain your plan for streamlining procedures. Try to be eloquent.
VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) _ Today is a 6 _ Let your subconscious work on

a problem you're facing at home. You've got to make a change, but you're not certain which way to go. Sleep on it.
LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) _ Today is an 8 _ Now that you have others on your side, you can make sure your point gets across. The boss will be more receptive now.
SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) _ Today is a 7 _ This is a good time to ask for a raise, a promotion or both. If you're in a dead-end job, send out some resumés.
SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) _ Today is a 9 _ Make sales contacts, plan a vacation or just go for a long walk. You need to expand your area of influence, meet new people and clear your mind. While you're at it, launch a new endeavor.
CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) _ Today is a 6 _ Set your emotions aside for a moment while you work out the details. This part can be kept in private. There's no need for the others to know.
AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) _ Today is an 8 _ By now, you should be getting pretty good at handing out assignments. It's good for you to develop this skill. Now, go on and give it away.
PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) _ Today is a 6 _ Your friend the entrepreneur can offer you advice, but you're basically on your own. Decide how much time you can devote to a new project before you commit.

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