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NEWS

Boone on another mission

August 15, 2005

By Brett Borden
Panthers.com

Aaron Boone looks at the Panthers depth chart at wide receiver and realizes the task ahead of him. In search of an NFL roster spot, he has to beat out some very talented football players. But don't bet against him. He's already been on a mission once in his life.

"There is a lot of talent here," said Boone, who at the age of 19 served a two-year mission in Peru. "My mindset is just like every other place I've been. I've started at the bottom and worked my way up. That's what I like about Coach (John) Fox and the whole organization. They are always preaching that it's not where you start but where you finish. I just have to survive. I've always been written off wherever I've been. I'm going to get my break sooner or later."

It may have come sooner, if not for the mission. A two-year starter at quarterback at Millard Fillmore HS in Fillmore, UT, Boone earned all-state honors in football, basketball and baseball. He got scholarship offers from decent schools, but instead of learning where to be on third down, he was helping rebuild homes in the third world.

"You don't get paid for it," he said. "It steers you in the direction of doing something unselfish and something different. I saved up for it. I'm fluent in Spanish now, which comes in handy here."

Boone's multilingual skills are needed when fellow wide receiver Hugo Lira doesn't quite understand what wide receivers coach Richard Williamson is trying to say in his heavy Southern drawl.

"I translate a new saying for him every day, because Coach will say something and Hugo will have no idea what's going on," said Boone. "Some of them are hard, because some football sayings don't really translate all that well."

One thing that Boone has never lost in translation is work ethic. The experience in Peru saw to that. He lost 30 pounds while there, then returned to play football at Snow Junior College in Utah, where he switched to wide receiver. He went on to star at Kentucky, where he led the Wildcats with 41 catches for 706 yards and an SEC-leading 10 touchdowns as a senior. The ups and downs continued after graduation, however.

Boone pulled a quad muscle right before the NFL Combine and didn't get drafted. He went to Dallas as an undrafted rookie free agent, but separated his shoulder in the third week of the preseason with the Cowboys. Chicago signed Boone the next season and allocated him to NFL Europe. He tore an abdominal muscle and



Aaron Boone celebrates a touchdown reception versus Washington last Saturday. (AP Photo)

bruised a kidney his last week of camp with the Bears.

Carolina signed Boone in March and immediately sent him back to Europe, where he was assigned to the Berlin Thunder. Boone earned all-NFL Europe honors after leading the league with 43 receptions for 582 yards and five touchdowns. So here Boone is, in his fifth professional training camp in just over two years, trying to beat the odds and make the roster.

"It's a slower game now," said Boone. "When you first start out, things are going like 100 miles per hour out there and you're trying to process it all."

Boone's first preseason reception in the NFL was a 26-yard touchdown catch from Stefan LeFors in Carolina's 28-10 victory over Washington on Saturday at Bank of America Stadium. He described the play, and the feeling of scoring in the NFL.

"I'm probably the second or third read on that play," said Boone. "I beat (my man) initially right over the middle and was looking for a quick ball. (Washington) ran a Cover 2 with both safeties up and I was trying to split them. I looked back for the ball and didn't see it. But there's something about left-handed quarterbacks that I've had luck with. I played with Jared Lorenzen at Kentucky and Dave Ragone in Berlin, and now Stefan. He rolled out left, and I have always been able to make plays when the route breaks off and everything is chaos. I saw he was scrambling over my shoulder and I just took off running. I thought I was going to have to go out of the end zone to catch it, but he had enough arm strength to get it to me on time.

"Once you catch it and see the signal from the referee, it's pure excitement. It's fun. That's what you play for is to score touchdowns. I celebrated like it was my first one ever."

He celebrated like a man on a mission, again.



Boone served on a two-year mission to Peru after high school.