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- **Tupe Peko:** strained knee
- **Steve Cheek:** Waived
- **Rod Gardner:** Traded to Carolina for sixth-rounder

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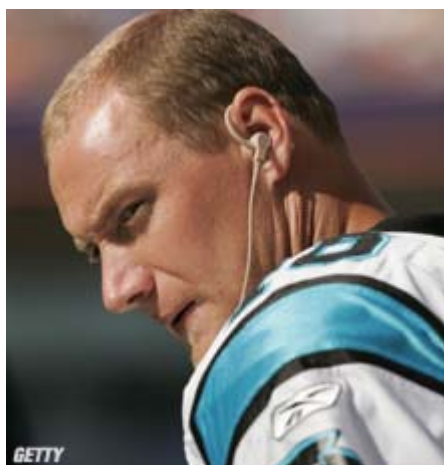
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Looking ahead to the 2006 Panthers



Weinke

By [Mark Stugelmeyer](#)

PantherInsider.com

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Is the 2006 season going to bring about dramatic change to roster of the Carolina Panthers? If so, is that change going to be so dramatic that the Panthers will fail to be contenders again for the next few years? Such names as Dan Morgan, Will Witherspoon, Deshaun Foster, Stephen Davis, Ricky Manning Jr., are in doubt to be on the 2006 roster. Examining the future of these and other high profile players could give us a sneak peek into the Panthers' future success.

QB

[Chris Weinke](#), in his final year of his rookie contract, is expected to flee into free agency next year in hopes of landing a starting role. His impact will be minimal and may in fact allow the Panthers to groom a younger QB to replace [Jake Delhomme](#) in the coming years.

RB

Rumor has it that Foster is not seeking to sign a long term contract with the Panthers, but instead is wanting to find a starting role elsewhere. In the Panthers defense, they seem reluctant in wanting to re-sign Foster. His impact is a currently unknown since they have yet to see him in action for any length of time due to two season ending injuries. However, that fact alone is enough to suggest he will not be missed much in the 2006 season.

[Stephen Davis](#) could have seen the end of his career in the start of the 2004 season. His agent is doing his best to paint a pretty picture that Davis is progressing well, however, the Panthers won't know anything until a few weeks into training camp or possibly well into the season. His loss was felt last year, but it will be softened this season and next by the drafting of RB [Eric Shelton](#).

FB, WR, TE, OL

All these positions are in pretty fair shape for the 2006 season. That being said, [Ricky Proehl](#) is in his last year of his career. Matter-of-fact,

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had John Fox not requested Ricky to return for one more season he would have retired. His leadership, sure hands, and precise routes, all will be missed on and off the field. His loss will result in a huge impact as far as leadership is concerned. It is believed that the Panthers are working to restructure newly acquired [Rod Gardner](#)'s contract, which will add stability to the WR corps for a few years.

CB

The only major loss that will take place here will be [Ricky Manning](#). An intense and emotional player, Ricky doesn't have the height or run stopping ability the Panthers need in their division. His loss will impact the Panthers special teams and nickel packages, but won't affect the secondary traumatically.

[Mike Minter](#) is aging and is entering the twilight of his career. One can expect that his loss will be felt past the 2006 season and the Panthers will have time to shore that position up.

LB

This position will have the biggest impact on the team. It is unsure that the Panthers will be able to meet [Dan Morgan](#)'s contractual expectations. The Panthers front office are wanting to re-sign Morgan between to a contract believed to be worth 3-4 Million a year, but he is expected to want 5-6 million a year. His absence will be felt considerably. Morgan is a bruising sideline to sideline player who, when on the field, changes the course of any game.

[Will Witherspoon](#), signed his 1-year tenure offer, but it remains to be seen if the Panthers will be able to sign him to a long-term contract. His versatility, intelligence, and speed make for a powerful contribution to the Panthers defense. The losses of Witherspoon and Dan Morgan would dramatically effect the Panthers 2006 season if both signed elsewhere.

DL

The only loss here along the defensive line would likely be Brentsen Buckner. His leadership and experience are the contributions the Panthers would miss, and those now can be found along the rest of the line.

Special Teams

[John Kasay](#) is getting older and his length is getting shorter. While he is the last of the original Panthers, father time will take him away eventually and this could be his last effective season. His skill and poise is unchallenged on the field. His loss will be felt and replacing him will be a challenge.

[Karl Hankton](#) is undoubtedly the captain of special teams. His ability to punish the punt returner is an intimidating force that few can match on the team. However, he is replaceable and his time could be a soon as this season. [Aaron Boone](#) could emerge as his replacement. Not only can Boone play special teams, he can do something Hankton can't; catch the ball. Karl Hankton's loss will be softened if Boone can become a gunner on special teams.

Overall Loss impact

The Panthers have a lot to loose, and could be in bad shape if they don't take steps to ensure that the players lost are replaced with productive talent. Marty Hurney has his work cut out for him, but as Panther Fans know, he has worked miracles before and there is no reason to doubt him now.

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