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Boone, Hankton and Stubblefield fighting for Spot

By [Brad Thomas](#) PantherInsider.com
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The Carolina Panthers will have a fierce battle on their hands this summer, only it won't be for a starting position. It won't be a high-profile competition, taking place during the second halves of preseason games and on special teams. A former Panthers team captain, a NFL Europe Standout, and the All-Time NCAA Receptions Leader will be fighting for a roster spot this summer during Training Camp.



WR Aaron Boone

Despite the very different resumes, [Karl Hankton](#), [Aaron Boone](#) and [Taylor Stubblefield](#) each have a chance to show themselves and the world that they belong in the NFL.

Karl Hankton was the Special Teams Captain for the Panthers the last 3 seasons. He is the Panthers All-Time record holder for special teams tackles with 66; however he never has been much of a receiver. In the last 5 seasons, Hankton has caught a total of 17 passes for 236 yards, and no touchdowns. Make no mistake about it, Hankton is a special teamer and is a WR in name only. At 35 years old, his age might actually be an asset in this situation. Perhaps he can prove to Coach John Fox and new Special Teams Coordinator Danny Crossman that his veteran leadership is worth more than his potential as a receiver.

Every team wants the All-Time NCAA Receptions Leader as a member of their receiving corps, right? Tell that to Taylor Stubblefield, who sat through 7 rounds of the NFL draft only to be disappointed that his name wasn't called. "I sat there, especially as the second day (of the draft) started, watching the fourth and fifth and sixth round, and I was very frustrated," Stubblefield said. "I was surprised, but what can I do about it now?" he said. "I can't sit back and think about four weeks ago when my feelings were hurt. I have to come in here every day and do the things I've been doing and get better every day."

He's not big, he's not fast, but he can catch when it counts. "I am labeled as a possession receiver," Stubblefield said. "Any team that can want to keep the chains moving needs a possession receiver." However, Stubblefield's not playing Special Teams makes him expendable. Most

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5th string receivers need to earn their keep on Special Teams, as well as catch a pass when the situation presents itself. Being strictly a receiver might not be enough to entice the Panthers' staff into keeping him.

Perhaps an amalgam of the two aforementioned players would be a valuable weapon for the Panthers? Look no further than Aaron Boone, the 2005 NFL Europe leader in receptions AND Special Teams tackles. Boone was a sure-handed target for NFL Europe Offensive MVP [Dave Ragone](#), amassing 582 yards on 43 receptions and five touchdowns for the Berlin Thunder this past season.

The extra playing time in Europe allowed Boone to mature, much like it did for Panthers QB [Jake Delhomme](#). "I feel like I'm so much better now than I was coming out of college," says Boone. "I really feel a comfort and confidence level that I'll try to carry back to Carolina."

However, it might be his Special Teams prowess that makes him more valuable, at least initially, to the Panthers.

"I know I'm not going to come in and start," Boone told the Louisville Courier-Journal. "To someday start is a dream, but the thing I'm most proud of from Europe is leading the league in special-teams tackles. Most receivers are return guys, and I'm not, so playing special teams is something not many receivers do. That might give me a shot."

Boone stands to be the most attractive alternative for the roster spot at this point. "Aaron did very well in NFL Europe and we're looking forward to getting him in here and seeing what he can do," Panthers head coach John Fox said.





The competition starts July 30th. Keep your eyes on Boone, and rest assured you won't be the only one.

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