

Rivera, Tolbert, Panthers enjoy thorough beat down of Chargers in San Diego

Written by Levi Johnson, Sports Editor

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As a former assistant coach and player; respectively for San Diego, Ron Rivera and Mike Tolbert wanted very much to return from a recent trip to the westcoast with an upbeat feeling.

And on the heels of beating down San Diego 31-7 Sunday (Dec. 16), at Qualcomm Stadium, Rivera, Tolbert and the rest of the Carolina team left no doubt about a conquest of the host Chargers that improved the visiting Panthers record to 5-9.

Under the guidance of embattled leader Norv Turner, the Chargers mark slipped to 5-9.

In his second season with Charlotte, N.C.-based Carolina, fullback Tolbert, a fifth year pro, who played his college ball at Coastal Carolina, rushed in three times for scores as the Panthers dominated a Charger team that for all practical purposes never arrived for duty on its home turf.

While totalling 40 yards on nine carries, Tolbert and his offensive mates enjoyed an outing that they triumphed in from start to finish. Versus San Diego, Tolbert and friends, with quarterback Cam Newton enjoying one of his better games as field general, netted 372 yards against a San Diego defense that brought little resistance against them. Newton, without throwing an interception, finished the day with passing numbers at 19-33-0, for 231 yards.

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Mostly forcing their will against a Chargers offensive contingent that had trouble moving the ball all game long, the Panther defenders allowed the home "O" players to total 164 yards, with only 70 coming via rushers in 16 cracks into the line of scrimmage.

With the exception of a nine yard TD catch by standout San Diego receiver Antonio Gates, which happened in early fourth quarter play, the Chargers truly disappointed themselves and their fans, who had little to cheer about during the AFC-NFC matchup.

Jumping out to a 21-0 lead after the first 15 minutes of action, the Panthers never looked back en route to thoroughly achieving victory before 53,832 spectators.

After trouncing the Chargers, the Panthers have now won three of their last four games, which also includes triumphs over Atlanta and Philadelphia. The loss was 27-21 at Kansas City almost three weeks ago.

While getting their big win on the westcoast, the Panthers had a record-setting 29 first downs.

Mathematically out of contention for a playoffs berth, the Panthers have two games remaining in the season.

These include an encounter with the Oakland Raiders this Sunday (Dec. 23), at Bank of America Stadium and a close out affair opposite New Orleans in Louisiana next Sun. (12/30).