For the first time in nearly ten years, the Carolina Panthers will have a new head coach and coaching staff. With the exception of secondary coach Ron Meeks and defensive quality control coach Sam Mills III, all of the coaches are making their Panthers debuts. While they come from many different directions, there are common threads on both offense and defense. The offense will feature a run/pass balance similar to that employed by the San Diego Chargers, where offensive coordinator Rob Chudzinski served as tight ends coach before coming to Carolina.

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CAROLINA PANTHERS COACHES

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Ron Rivera knows a lot about patience, but when it comes to his coaching philosophy, ‘aggressive’ is the word that jumps out. Rivera learned patience through the head coaching interview process with eight different auditions before he landed one of the League’s 32 coveted positions with the Panthers. “Sometimes I wondered about the process, but most of the chances came when I was with teams that were still in the playoffs,” says Rivera. “This opportunity felt right from the beginning and I could not be happier than to be with the Carolina Panthers.”

With his patience now rewarded with a head coaching position, Rivera will keep his foot on the gas. The first priority was putting together a coaching staff and reviews of his Carolina assistants have been favorable.

Next is the draft and Rivera, along with General Manager Marty Hurney, the scouts, and his assistants were on the road throughout the spring. Although the timing is uncertain with the CBA, Rivera looks forward to implementing his coaching philosophy with the team.

“We will be aggressive on both sides of the ball,” he says. “I believe in attacking and that will be our philosophy.”

As defensive coordinator of both the Chargers and Bears, that philosophy served Rivera well. Last year, San Diego was number one in the League in yards allowed and recorded 47 sacks despite not having a player named to the Pro Bowl. The Chargers were also at the top of the League on offense and Rivera saw in the Chargers two components that he wanted to bring to Carolina. The first is already here in offensive coordinator Rob Chudzinski, who served on the staff in San Diego. “I think Norv Turner is one of the best offensive minds in the NFL, and Rob has studied under him and will bring the same creativity,” says Rivera. “Then we have to have a high level of play at the quarterback position because that is essential in the League, and particularly, in our division.”

Despite their success on both sides of the ball, the Chargers missed the playoffs, marking only the 7th time in 23 seasons as a player and coach Rivera has failed to reach the postseason. As a player, he reached the pinnacle of pro football as a member of the ‘85 Bears Super Bowl championship team and came close as a coach with the Bears’ ‘06 NFC title team which lost to Indianapolis in the Super Bowl. Now he wants that second ring to come as a Carolina Panther.

QUICK HITS

Carolina Panthers Head Coach / College: California / Experience: 15 yrs

Ron Rivera

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QUICK HITS

What was your first coaching job?

My son’s Peewee football team in Liberty, IL in 1995

Which coach has had the most influence in your life as a person and a coach?

My first & most influential coach was my Father

Favorite Vacation Spot

Hawaii

Who was your favorite athlete growing up?

Bob Mathias, 2 time Olympic decathlete gold medal winner. I got to meet him and he became my friend.

If Hollywood made a movie about your life, who would you want to play you?

Freddie Prinze, Jr.

What would you be doing if you weren’t coaching?

Military or Public Service

What defines a great player in this league?

A player who puts the team’s success before his own success.

What is your pet peeve?

When I am at the airport waiting for my luggage, it bugs me when people crowd the carousel waiting for their luggage. Everybody should back up until theirs comes out.

iPhone or Blackberry?

iPhone
CAROLINA PANTHERS COACHES AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE NEW FACES OF THE COACHING STAFF

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CAROLINA PANTHERS COACHES

HEAD COACH / COLLEGE: CALIFORNIA / EXPERIENCE: 15 YRS

RON RIVERA

QUICK HITS

What/where was your first coaching job?
My son’s Peewee football team in Liberty, IL in 1995

Which coach has had the most influence in your life as a person and a coach?
My first and most influential coach was my Father

Favorite Vacation Spot
Hawaii

Who was your favorite athlete growing up?
Bob Mathias, 2 time Olympic decathlete gold medal winner. I got to meet him and he became my friend.

If Hollywood made a movie about your life, who would you want to play you?
Freddie Prinze, Jr.

What would you be doing if you weren’t coaching?
Military or Public Service

How would the players describe you?
Always in control of my emotions

What defines a great player in this league?
A player who puts the team’s success before his own success.

What is your pet peeve?
When I am at the airport waiting for my luggage, it bugs me when people crowd the carousel waiting for their luggage. Everybody should back up until theirs comes out.

iPhone or Blackberry?
iPhone
Sean McDermott is excited about the opportunity, in Carolina, NC. "It’s just the place," said McDermott. "I think the perception of the Panthers right now is we are not very good because we won two games last season – and I think that’s wrong. In reality I think we are a pretty good football team that has a lot of work that needs to be done." 

"I’m very excited. Anytime you come into a situation like this it is all about proving people wrong," said McDermott. "I think the opportunity that Marty Hurney has placed on the defensive side of the ball. He knows there is a lot of work to do and he is very excited." 

As a former All-Atlantic 10 Conference choice, which tied for first in the NFL with Green Bay defense in 2009 and 2010, over those two seasons, Philadelphia forced 72 turnovers, which led for first in the NFL with Green Bay over that period. In his first season overseeing the Eagles defense in 2009, McDermott overcame a rash of injuries to had a unit that ranked third in the NFL with 38 takeaways, the most by the club since 2002, and 44 sacks. Also, Philadelphia stood second in the league in third down defense, limiting opponents to a 33.0 percent conversion rate, and fifth in yards per play allowed with an average of 5.0 yards per play.

“McDermott, who previously headed up an attacking Philadelphia Eagles defense, comes to Carolina following 12 seasons with the Eagles, the last two as defensive coordinator, where he contributed to six division titles. McDermott’s defense finished 12th in the league in total defense in 2009 and 2010. Over those two seasons, Philadelphia forced 72 turnovers, which led for first in the NFL with Green Bay over that period.

He also was well known for his aggressive defense. He is known for implementing a scheme that is designed to stop the run and pressure the quarterback. His philosophy is based on more than just blitzing like crazy. “It’s more than blitzing. You can be an aggressive defense without just blitzing. It all comes back to core fundamentals, getting off blocks, tackling and catching the football when you get the opportunity. We need to improve in a lot of those areas.”

McDermott, who previously headed up an attacking Philadelphia Eagles defense, comes to Carolina following 12 seasons with the Eagles, the last two as defensive coordinator, where he contributed to six division titles. His defense finished 12th in the league in total defense in 2009 and 2010. Over those two seasons, Philadelphia forced 72 turnovers, which led for first in the NFL with Green Bay over that period.

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“In that year, the unit that he had was not a unit that was expected to do much. They played hard and performed with the whole team stepping up to the plate. The defense was one of the biggest storylines throughout the year and had a lot of people talking about them in the locker room. The defense was one of the biggest storylines throughout the year and had a lot of people talking about them in the locker room. The defense was one of the biggest storylines throughout the year and had a lot of people talking about them in the locker room.

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“I am excited about this challenge,” McDermott said. “One thing I can say about the team last season that impressed me the most was that they never quit. With the challenges and adversity that they faced, I think a lot of people expected them to quit but they fought till the end. The effort of this group, combined with the scheme we are going to implement, should make for an exciting year.”

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QUICK HITS

What was your first coaching job? 
Graduate Assistant at William & Mary
Which coach has had the most influence in your life as a person and a coach? 
My Father – Rich McDermott
Favorite Vacation Spot? 
Ocean City, New Jersey
Who was your favorite athlete growing up? 
Dan Gable (Olympic Wrestler)
Favorite Vacation Spot? 
Ocean City, New Jersey
Best Role Model? 
Fred Beier, High School Coach
Which coach has had the most influence in your life? 
Graduate Assistant – University of Miami
What/where was your first coaching job? 
Graduate Assistant at William & Mary

SEAN MCDERMOTT
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR / COLLEGE: WILLIAM & MARY / EXPERIENCE: 13

As a former All-Atlantic 10 Conference choice at safety for William & Mary, Panthers new defensive coordinator Sean McDermott knows a thing or two about applying pressure on an offense, but his philosophy is based on more than just blitzing like crazy. “It’s more than blitzing. You can be an aggressive defense without just blitzing. It all comes back to core fundamentals, getting off blocks, tackling and catching the football when you get the opportunity. We need to improve in a lot of those areas.”

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In his first season overseeing the Eagles defense in 2009, McDermott overcame a rash of injuries to lead a unit that ranked third in the NFL with 38 takeaways, the most by the club since 2002, and 41 sacks. Also, Philadelphia stood second in the league in third down defense, limiting opponents to a 33.0 percent conversion rate, and fifth in yards per play allowed with an average of 5.0 yards per play.

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ROB CHUDZINSKI
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR / COLLEGE: MIAMI (FLA) / EXPERIENCE: 8

Rob comes to Carolina after being a part of an offense that moved the ball better than any in the NFL last year when San Diego was number one in yards gained and second in scoring with an average of 27.5 points per game. It is an approach that he hopes will have similar results in Carolina.

“we will be a pro style offense that utilizes multiple personnel groups, formations, and movements,” says Chudzinski. “Our system is predicated on balance, specifically in the ability to run and pass the football. We will have an aggressive, attacking style that characterizes our offensive approach and philosophy.”

Working with the tight ends and serving as assistant head coach, ‘Chud’ played an instrumental role in the Chargers success. The offensive approach starts with good quarterback play and Rob is familiar with that from Philip Rivers.

Finding that success at quarterback includes finding that success at quarterback includes a varied passing game that has already been strengthened by the addition of tight end and Jeremy Shockey. The two will be reunited after working together when Chudzinski coached at the University of Miami and Shockey played for the Hurricanes.

Rob is also familiar with that from Philip Rivers. Joining the Chargers in 2009, he was part of a prolific San Diego offense while Ron Rivera was heading up the defense.

When Rivera headed east to coach the Panthers in February, Chudzinski was his first hire, as they try to duplicate the success they enjoyed in San Diego.