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Former Carolina Panthers wide receiver Muhsin Muhammad is shown in this file photo from 2010. **JEFF SINER** JEFF SINER - jsiner@charlotteobs

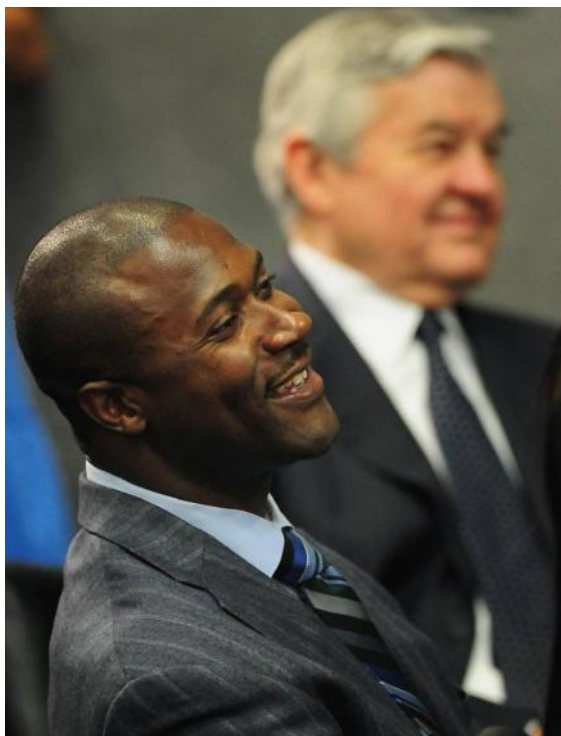
BUSINESS

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Charlotte private equity firm founded by ex-Panther invests in burger chain

BY DEON ROBERTS

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Charlotte-based private equity firm Axum Capital Partners announced Monday it has acquired a controlling interest in Nashville, Tenn.-based burger chain Back Yard Burgers.

Axum, founded by former Carolina Panthers receiver Muhsin Muhammad with three partners, said it plans to accelerate growth of the 30-year-old fast-causal burger chain. Back Yard Burgers has about 32 franchised and 23 company-owned restaurants in 11 states, including North Carolina, according to a press release.

Muhammad, a former Pro Bowl receiver known as “Moose,” began building Axum in 2008 with Denis Ackah-Yensu, formerly of McColl Partners, a Charlotte investment bank that provided merger advice to midsized companies.

Muhammad was still playing football at the time and would head to business meetings after practice, he has said.

Monday's acquisition adds another restaurant investment to Axum's portfolio, which includes Wild Wing Cafe, a restaurant chain and sports bar in which Axum acquired controlling interest in 2012.

Last year, Wild Wing announced it was relocating its corporate headquarters from Charleston to Charlotte, a move that brought the restaurant chain closer to Axum.

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