

# Jets' CB Strickland picks his spots to hit

September 22, 2009 by RODERICK BOONE / [roderick.boone@newsday.com](mailto:roderick.boone@newsday.com)



Donald Strickland was down on himself and needed to reassess things. His career path had become cluttered with dead ends, mostly because he simply wasn't able to stay on the field consistently.

Strickland wasn't far removed from being one of the Colts' starting cornerbacks in the 2004 AFC Championship Game, no small feat since he was a rookie and wasn't even active for the season's first five games. The 2003 third-round pick started the first four games of his second season and had just begun making a name for himself when he injured his shoulder and needed season-ending surgery.

Strickland's mental psyche was about to get tested. The Colts were growing frustrated with the 5-10, 185-pounder's inability to stay healthy and they cut ties with him early on in the 2005 season.

"I had a couple of injuries and then I started noticing the business side, got cut, which was very hard for me," Strickland, 28, said. "It was the first time in my career that I wasn't able to perform up to their standards and I had to re-evaluate myself."

Strickland played sparingly with the Eagles in 2005 and was waived after the 2006 season opener. Opportunity finally returned to his front door two months after his Eagles release, when the 49ers gave him a shot at fulfilling a lifelong dream of playing for his hometown team. He started the final three games of 2006 and has remained healthy for the most part over the next two seasons, emerging as a solid nickel corner while playing in 27 of the 49ers' 32 games.

"I grew up a block away from the stadium," Strickland said, "so it sort of reignited that flame inside of me, and I just started to let loose and just play the way I was always capable of playing."

With [Tarell Brown](#) and [Shawntae Spencer](#) doing their thing in [San Francisco](#), though, Strickland was expendable this past offseason. [Rex Ryan](#) actually was looking at bringing in [Corey Ivy](#), whom he had coached for three seasons in [Baltimore](#).

However, general manager Mike Tannenbaum and assistant general manager [Scott Cohen](#)

convinced the Jets' first-year coach to take a look at Strickland. After seeing his bone-jarring highlight reel, Ryan was sold and the Jets signed him to a three-year deal.

"We could tell he was tough," Ryan said. "When I saw him knock [Brandon Jacobs](#) back in the open field one-on-one, I said, 'He's plenty tough enough.' You just don't see that and he certainly hasn't disappointed. He's got good coverage skills, man coverage skills and he's a good blitzzer. He was an ideal guy for us."

So far, Strickland's signing looks like pure genius. He has nine tackles and one forced fumble, which came on that game-changing, crushing hit on Texans running back [Steve Slaton](#). He nearly decimated Patriots wideout Julian Edelman on a screen pass Sunday, reading the play brilliantly and plowing him back for a 4-yard loss.

"I've never seen nothing like that," cornerback [Darrelle Revis](#) said, "a DB tackling a screen and just blow it up for a loss."

That's just the nature of Strickland's style of play. He's fearless when it comes to making the teeth-rattling hits. That's part of the reason he's been on injured reserve three times and battled so many nagging injuries - the latest a right ankle that bears watching this week.

"I came in the league trying to hit everything moving and the law of physics just really don't add up," Strickland said. "So as you grow and learn more and become more aware, you start picking your battles and getting the player down rather than taking the big shot. And I think that's contributed to me being able to stay on the field a lot more."

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## OrlandoSentinel.com

### Dave Sims, Anita Marks, Kordell Stewart, Doug Flutie make up UFL TV crew for VERSUS Network

By Chris Hays

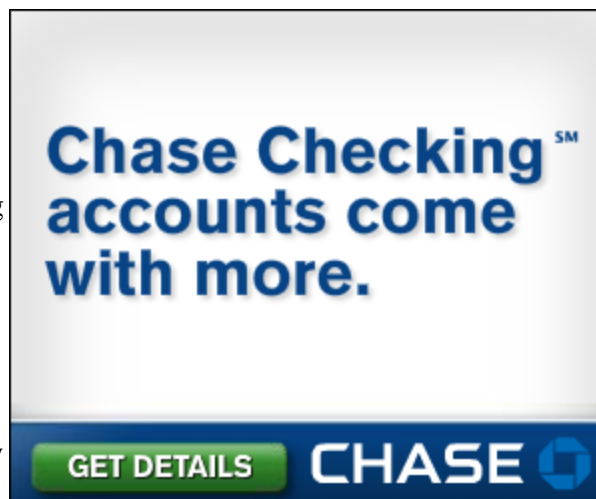
Sentinel Staff Writer

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You can't doubt the energy that former NFL players Doug Flutie and Kordell Stewart will bring to the broadcast booth for the new United Football League.

"That was Kordell's first question when I called him and said, 'We need you for the UFL,' " Chief Operating Officer Frank Vuono said. "And he said, 'You mean to play?' I told him, 'That's up to you. I don't know what kinda shape you're in there Stewie, but hey ...' "

Vuono and the UFL announced Tuesday its broadcasting team for the debut season and there probably was no better fit for the job than the man they chose as TV color analyst for the VERSUS Network.



Flutie is the quintessential poster boy for the "Little Engine That Could," and who better to analyze the players of the fledgling UFL than a man who has been there. Flutie has run the gambit of professional football levels, starting off in the USFL then jumping the border to the Canadian Football league between stints in the NFL.

He played for five NFL teams: Los Angeles Rams, Chicago Bears, Buffalo Bills, San Diego Chargers, and two stints with the New England Patriots.

"It's exciting for me," Flutie said. "I love it ..... I was a very low-round (12th) draft choice. I was second-guessed my whole career.

"I went to Canada to prove that I can play and then came back. This is going to be an opportunity for a lot of those fringe guys who maybe aren't getting an opportunity to prove they can play. .... and there is no loss of talent out there."

Flutie will be part of a team of four, which will be led by play-by-play voice Dave Sims, who is currently the TV play-by-play voice for the Seattle Mariners and the radio play-by-play announcer for Westwood One's NFL Sunday Night Football.

Two sideline reporters make up the rest of the crew with former Colorado Buffaloes and Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Stewart taking one sideline, and Anita Marks, a former quarterback with the Miami Fury and the Florida Stingrays in a women's professional league in South Florida, taking the other.

Marks' popularity and football skills got her enough notice that *Playboy* magazine invited her to do a photo shoot, which published in the 2002 September edition. She currently does a radio show in Baltimore for ESPN Radio AM-1300 and she likes to stir things up.

Vuono said the league was looking for a female reporter to pair up with Stewart, but at the same time wanted one with credibility, so he called a long-time friend and respected professional Lesley Visser of CBS Sports.

"I told her we need somebody who really knows football because they're going to have access and have to talk about and know what's going on on the sidelines," Vuono said. "And she said, 'I've got the perfect person for you.' "

"These guys here will tell you quickly, she's (Marks) challenging them already."

From the sidelines, Stewart and Marks will be providing more than the usual sideline fodder, with more access to the player areas and even access to the locker rooms for a four-minute period at the beginning of halftime.

"We have a little more range. For example, Jermaine Wiggins (Tuskers TE) can score a touchdown and as he comes to the sidelines we can actually talk to him about the play," said Stewart, who also works with ESPN's College Football Overdrive. "It will be fun and we can be creative, but with still understanding the guidelines of when to approach and when not to approach ..... not interfering."

Stewart knows plenty of players from his Steelers days who could have benefitted from a league like the UFL to get a chance to come back from an injury or a missed opportunity.

"There were many guys and I could go down the list for a very long time," Stewart said. "The thing I love most about it is that it's kinda for the underdog kinda guy. The ones who've never been appreciated and you get this opportunity over a short period of time to prove your worth and what you *can* do, not so much what you can't do. That's why this league is here, because of what you *can* do."

The UFL would have made things a little easier for Flutie. He's probably still using up frequent flyer mileage from his days playing in the various leagues. He played in nine cities over a 21-year span that started in 1985. He's been to the NFL Pro Bowl, been the NFL's Comeback Player of the Year and the Canadian Football League's player of the year. And, oh yeah, there's that Heisman. But he always had to prove himself.

"Because I was already under contract with the New Jersey Generals of the USFL, that's part of the reason why I was drafted in the 12th round," Flutie said. "Today, that's five rounds past the draft. So, I would have fallen in that pool (of free agents). A lot of these kids fall under the same category."

Vuono knew he had the right guy for the job in Flutie.

"Absolutely. This is not just guns for hire," Vuono said. "These are people who have a story that relates to the kind of story that we're telling for our league."

"We also didn't want a bunch of prima donnas. We think we got the right people."

Sims certainly didn't have any problem bringing former players like Flutie and Stewart on board.

"It's exciting. Any time you get a start-up with people of this kind of experience, and then the opportunity that it's provided for everybody, it can't help but be exciting," said Mills, who was in Tampa this week as the Seattle Mariners made a swing through Florida.

"The energy level of the people trying to prove things on the field is going to be off the charts. I think it's going to be a very high level of football."

Flutie added: "I don't think it can be understated how hungry these kids are for this opportunity to prove themselves."

"Simeon's (Rice, of the New York Sentinels) quote was that he has unfinished business and I think that's the way with a lot of the guys in our league," Vuono said. "They have unfinished business."

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## If LB Sims is out, it's Dizon or Levy

*BY CARLOS MONARREZ*  
*FREE PRESS SPORTS WRITER*

Lions linebacker Ernie Sims suffered a shoulder injury Sunday against Minnesota that might sideline him. If so, second-year linebacker Jordon Dizon or rookie DeAndre Levy could step in for the hard-hitting bulwark on the outside.

Unofficially, Dizon is listed as Sims' backup, and Levy is listed as Larry Foote's backup at middle linebacker. Dizon and Levy received accolades from the coaching staff during the off-season.

If Sims can't play Sunday against Washington, much of the jockeying for the starting role between Dizon and Levy will be determined in practice this week.

Dizon said players always are ready to step in for a starter because of the regularity of injuries.

"In this league," he said, "the chances of you getting hurt are pretty much 100%, and there's people behind you that step up and have to step up and do the same job you did. In terms of Ernie, one of us is going to have to step up and assume the role he did, and we're going to have to play just like he did. It's big shoes to fill, but we're going to have to do it."

Foote, 29, is in his eighth season and sees the potential loss of Sims as an opportunity for Dizon and Levy to prove themselves.

"We've got young guys," Foote said. "We've got guys that have got to step up. I didn't come into this league as a starter. I was a backup and had to prove myself. You've got to have guys that make up a good team. When guys go down, guys have got to fill in and don't miss a beat."

*Free Press beat writer Carlos Monarrez will conduct our weekly Lions chat at 3 p.m. Friday at [freep.com/sports](http://freep.com/sports). Then come back Sunday as sports writer Shawn Windsor live-blogs the Lions-Redskins game.*

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## Vickers readies for Ravens

*Matt Florjancic, Contributor to ClevelandBrowns.com 09.23.2009*

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Since being selected in the sixth round of the 2006 NFL draft, Browns fullback Lawrence Vickers has blocked against some of the NFL's most physical, stingy run defenses. Sunday's game in Baltimore will not be any different.

The Ravens have not allowed a 100-yard rusher since they gave up 120 to Kansas City's Larry Johnson on December 10, 2006. The streak of holding opposing running backs to less than 100 yards now stands at 37 games.

The 100-yard rushing mark has been eclipsed 300 times since Johnson's exploits in 2006. Through two games this season, the Ravens are giving up a league-low 41 rush yards-per-game.

"They have multiple fronts," said Vickers. "They do a lot of things to switch them out from four down to three down. You have to be able to adjust because their defense does so many things. Some of the things they do, it goes against the grain. Sometimes, they're out of sync, but it's a good play and you don't even know it.

"They make you want to sit back on your heels and pass the ball," he added. "Their main concern is, 'You're not going to run the ball against us. You're going to pass. If you do pass it, we're going to pressure you. If you pick the pressure up, good things happen. If you don't, (we'll) continue to bring more and more pressure.'"

The Ravens' 3-4 defense is physical and will present a challenge. Ends Haloti Ngata and Trevor Pryce combined with nose tackle Kelly Gregg average 6-foot-3, 316.6 pounds. They use their size and speed to open gaps for the linebackers and secondary to blitz.

The Ravens have three Pro Bowlers, linebackers Ray Lewis and Terrell Suggs and free safety Ed Reed, back from last year.

Though they are experienced and continuously bring heavy pressure, there are signs that point to where and when a Ravens rush could be coming.

"Recognizing is knowing what front they're in, what's the front they like to blitz from and what personnel you're in also," Vickers said. "If it's third-and-deep, they might just play coverage because they can get pressure with their front guys.

"If it's a third-and-medium to short, they're going to bring pressure and make you get the ball away quick," he continued. "If you can pick the blitz up, it could be a good thing. If not, it's going to be a bad day for you."

The Browns offense has to communicate effectively on Sunday afternoon because Baltimore uses its home field advantage better than almost every team in the NFL.

Since the 2000 season, only the Patriots have a better home record. The Ravens are 53-20, while the Patriots are 54-19. In home games going back to the 2003 season, the Ravens are 13-5 against AFC North foes. They are 3-1 over their last four home games within the division.

The Browns are 3-7 against the Ravens in Baltimore. Their last win against the Ravens came in Baltimore on November 18, 2007. The 33-30 overtime victory was the Browns' first in Baltimore since 2002.

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