

Smith, Williams to give Ravens help against big, strong receivers

By Aaron Wilson, Times Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, August 16, 2011 11:00 pm

OWINGS MILLS - The trenches aren't the only part of the football field where wills are imposed, where brawn and power still matter.

NFL teams seeking an edge against tall, athletic receivers are deploying large cornerbacks in press coverage to shut down pass patterns at the line of scrimmage before they can even start.

By jamming receivers in the chest, big, strong cornerbacks can disrupt timing and prevent quarterbacks from having a downfield target to choose from. The NFL still allows bump-and-run coverage techniques as long as contact ceases after 5 yards.

And the Baltimore Ravens have been experimenting with a tandem of tall, long-armed cornerbacks in Jimmy Smith and Cary Williams.

Smith and Williams have been working in with the defensive starters in practice, providing a different look for a secondary populated by mostly smaller corners.

Smith is a 6-foot-2, 210-pound physical prototype drafted in the first round. And Williams is a rangy 6-1, 190-pound reserve cornerback and special teams contributor.

"They played really well," said defensive coordinator Chuck Pagano. "When they prance out there, it's very comforting. You've got two 6-1, 6-2 guys out there with long arms and guys that can run. It makes it very difficult.

"When you play tight coverage, it forces the quarterback to put it in tight windows and makes it really hard for the receivers to get off the line."

Smith remains a strong candidate to start, but needs to stack together several practices and preseason games after being hampered at the start of training camp with a nagging groin injury.

To overtake Chris Carr and Lardarius Webb while veteran Domonique Foxworth continues to recover from a torn anterior cruciate ligament, Smith will need to utilize his best assets: superior size and speed.

At the NFL scouting combine, the All-American from Colorado ran the 40-yard dash in 4.42 seconds and bench pressed 225 pounds 24 times and registered a 36-inch vertical leap.

Plus, Smith has long arms and big hands.

"It definitely helps out if they're literally like half a foot away from me," Smith said. "My arms can go past them, so I get my hands on them every time. I've just got to get my feet moving now."

Even for a swaggering high pick like Smith who's accustomed to success, the NFL is an adjustment.

Grappling with 6-1, 223-pound receiver Anquan Boldin is different from the receivers Smith encountered in the Big 12.

"These receivers run right into you and throw you off of them," Smith said. "I like it, I like the physicality of it."

It's difficult to judge how well Smith is faring considering he has missed a lot of practice time and made only a cameo appearance during the Ravens' 13-6 preseason loss to the Philadelphia Eagles.

Smith is slated to play significantly more Friday night against the Kansas City Chiefs at M&T Bank Stadium.

"Jimmy is a really, really bright guy. He really has a lot going on and he's savvy," Pagano said. "Nothing really bothers Jimmy. He's a cool cucumber. He's just learning everything. He's not where he should be because of the setback, but now that we've got him out here we're kind of force-feeding him in there. It'll be interesting. We're going to up his reps this game. I can't wait to see him play."

Williams will likely continue to operate in nickel and dime packages as well as having a big special-teams role. He has intercepted several passes since camp began. And he's not far behind Smith athletically with 4.43 speed in the 40-yard dash and a 9-11 broad jump.

"He's done nothing but great things out here and he's earned the opportunity to work with the ones," Pagano said. "Now, what he's got to do is he's got to be consistent. We've got great competition in the back end, so these guys are pushing each other."

A year ago, Williams began the season with a two-game suspension for a violation of the NFL personal conduct policy. This year, he's in contention to play in the first game as part of the secondary rotation.

"Being in the system definitely helps," Williams said. "It's hard work, going through the hours and doing all the intangible things. Last year, nothing was set in stone."

"I want to come out and compete to the best of my ability and stack practice after practice. It's the same old thing for me. I'm a firm believer in hard work. I'm willing to accept whatever role Coach Pagano wants to put me in."

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Colts sign veteran defensive end Tyler Brayton



Written by

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ANDERSON, Ind. – The Indianapolis Colts continued to address their defensive line by signing veteran end Tyler Brayton.

Financial terms were not available, but Tom Mills, Brayton's agent, confirmed Brayton signed a one-year contract.

"I think they plan on using him in a variety of ways," Mills said. "This is a very good opportunity for him."

The 6-6, 280-pound Brayton was a 2003 first-round draft pick of the Oakland Raiders. He appeared in 15 games with Oakland last year, 14 as a starter. He has started 92 games in eight seasons.

Brayton, 31, is the latest free-agent acquisition for the Colts. Previously, they signed tackle Tommie Harris and end Jamaal Anderson. Harris and Anderson also are former first-round picks.

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Rookies Knight, Burks have no regrets leaving school early

With no summer league and likely no [NBA](#) training camp, [Detroit Pistons](#) rookie [Brandon Knight](#) did the next best thing: He went back to college.



By Duane Burleson, AP
Pistons rookie Brandon Knight threw out the first pitch before the Detroit Tigers game against the Arizona

Diamondbacks on June 24. [Enlarge](#)

By Duane Burleson, AP

Pistons rookie Brandon Knight threw out the first pitch before the Detroit Tigers game against the Arizona Diamondbacks on June 24.

At 19, Knight has plenty to study and learn about being a professional. The 6-3 guard, who spent one season at Kentucky, recently worked out with his old team during the NBA lockout, which began July 1.

"I definitely miss (college) already," says Knight, the eighth overall pick in the 2011 draft. "You build a close relationship with

your teammates, your coach, your assistant coaches and also with the fans. The entire place. You build a new family.

"But once you move on, you can't really look back and regret the decision you made. The best thing you can do is move forward."

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Many players who turned pro early amid labor uncertainty find themselves in Knight's position. Eighteen of the 30 first-round picks had at least one year of college eligibility left.

But with no NBA labor deal, there's no summer-league ball in [Las Vegas](#) and Orlando. Those leagues typically help rookies get in sync with their teams — even though top-level superstars rarely participate — and offer undrafted free agents hope to earn an invitation to an NBA training camp.

"You learn the plays, and you're getting early chemistry with the young players on the team," says [Greg Monroe](#), Knight's teammate in Detroit who competed in the summer

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league last year as a rookie. "It also gives you some confidence going into training camp knowing that you already have a little bit of experience."

After two seasons at Colorado, [Utah Jazz](#) rookie [Alec Burks](#) has been in Indianapolis for the past month doing two-a-day workouts with Jazz teammate [Gordon Hayward](#) and strength and conditioning coach Ed Schilling.

Burks, 20, was sent there by his agent, [Andy Miller](#), who also has [New York Knicks](#) veteran [Chauncey Billups](#) as a client. Billups, also a Colorado alum, already has worked with the 6-6 guard to improve his shooting range.

Burks has been playing in a pro-am but thinks not having a summer league is a setback.

"I think it's a big deal. You get to learn the system better," says Burks, the 12th overall pick. "Now you've got to learn on the fly, pay attention to everything. It is kind of hard not having it."

Regardless, Burks doesn't regret leaving school early.

"It didn't matter for me. I was a lottery pick. A lot of people can't say that," he says. "I made the best decision for my future. I knew that before I left school. If I didn't know that, I wasn't going to leave school."

Knight will soon head to [Los Angeles](#) to train with NBA MVP Derrick Rose of the Chicago Bulls and other clients of his agent, [Arn Tellem](#).

"I'm playing with grown men, guys that are much older than me," says Knight, who

thinks he needs to become a better ballhandler and run the pick-and-roll to perfection if he's going to live up to expectations. "I'm working on my body, being mentally prepared for a longer game."

At the same time, Knight is prepared for uncertainty and a long wait with the lockout.

"I thought this was my time," Knight says. "I thought I had the best opportunity this year. I'm pretty happy with my decision."

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