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Rams' Justin Bannan embraces new role

By Mike Sando
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Defensive tackles not named [Pat Williams](#) or [Sam Adams](#) had a tough time cracking the [Buffalo Bills'](#) starting lineup for a few years.

[Justin Bannan](#), now entering his first season with the [St. Louis Rams](#), would know. He was with the Bills back then. Bannan was also with Baltimore when [Kelly Gregg](#) and [Haloti Ngata](#) were anchoring the Ravens' defensive middle. Good luck cracking the lineup there, either.

Bannan started eight of the 54 games he played for Buffalo from 2002-2005. He started 19 of the 58 games he played for Baltimore from 2006-2009 and all 16 games in his lone season with Denver.

Like newly-signed Rams safety [Quintin Mikell](#), Bannan has been around a long time and played extensively, but he was a backup long enough to avoid wear and tear early in his career. Unlike Mikell, who played in a similar defensive scheme with Philadelphia, Bannan is getting reacquainted with a 4-3 alignment. His job in a 3-4 required staying low, sinking his hips just right and anchoring against multiple offensive linemen. It's a skill learned over time and not a glamorous one, either.

"It's good getting back into the 4-3 mode and doing a little bit more attacking," Bannan said during training camp. "It feels good to just come off the ball and play football. Last year I was in a 3-4, I was real far off the ball. It's a good change up to just come back here and turn it loose."

The Rams' situation is a good one for any defensive tackle. The other starters on the line combined for 25 sacks last season. Right end [James Hall](#) (10.5 sacks), left end [Chris Long](#) (8.5) and tackle [Fred Robbins](#) (six) command attention from opposing offensive linemen. Defensive linemen care a great deal about the players around them on the line. Playing alongside talented teammates leads to more favorable matchups.

"It's a huge deal," Bannan said. "Fred is a great player and very underrated. He had a phenomenal season last year. Big, strong, physical guy who is very athletic. I think the whole D-line is great. From Chris Long to Fred to James Hall, who I think is one of the most underrated defensive ends in the NFL. You want to surround yourself with people like that."
