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Ravens' Jimmy Smith making plays, rookie mistakes

By Matt Vensel

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In Sunday night's 24-10 win over the Cleveland Browns, Ravens cornerback Jimmy Smith once again flashed the natural ability that tantalized the team before April's NFL draft. But the first-round pick also made a rookie mistake, getting crossed up in coverage as Browns quarterback Colt McCoy tossed a garbage-time touchdown.

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But Smith's huge second-quarter interception that set up Billy Cundiff's field goal before halftime had much more weight on the outcome of the game -- which was his first career NFL start -- than the late-game mix-up.

"He did good," Ravens linebacker Terrell Suggs said Sunday. "Young pup, but he's got some growing to do."

Smith, who missed four games earlier in 2011 with an ankle injury, has six tackles and a pair of picks in eight games. He has taken over for the injured Chris Carr in the nickel package, covering receivers on the outside.

Ravens coach John Harbaugh on Monday [was asked a few questions about his young playmakers](#) -- including linebackers Dannell Ellerbe and Jameel McClain, defensive end Pernell McPhee and Smith -- stepping up with Ray Lewis sidelined. Harbaugh praised Smith, but also pointed out that his starting cornerbacks are young, too.

"[Smith is] starting to get some interceptions, obviously. He's tackling really well," Harbaugh said. "But, we've got a lot of young players. Cary Williams is a young player, not a rookie. Lardarius Webb is a young player. If you're going to be successful, for sure, in football, the way it's set up and even more so now with the new salary cap structure, you've got to have contributions from young players and really from rookies, also."

Williams said Sunday that Smith's emergence in the secondary has made [an "overlooked" group](#) even better.

"It's a good opportunity for the young guy to go out there and showcase his talent," the 26-year-old said. "Our back end is very talented and we often get overlooked, but we have guys who are capable of making plays."

With two interceptions in three games, Smith is starting to make more plays, though occasional mistakes are to be expected. He said that when McCoy found Browns tight end Evan Moore for a touchdown in the closing minutes of Sunday's victory, there was confusion over which coverage he was supposed to playing.

There may be more growing pains as Smith continues to learn on the fly for a title contender, but Smith, who does not lack for confidence in the least bit, says he is "definitely ready" if his responsibilities should increase.

"They're using me a lot more and I'm definitely happy with what I'm doing right now," Smith said Sunday.

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