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Jimmy Smith not up to Ravens' standards

By Jamison Hensley

[Baltimore Ravens](#) cornerback [Jimmy Smith](#) told reporters last week he is going through a boxing regimen to get in the best shape of his NFL career. It's focusing on conditioning drills and the speed bag. So, no sparring is involved.

"I feel great, I feel like I did in college," said Smith, who has lost 10 pounds to get down to 200.

Smith's health is a big reason why he has been among the most disappointing first-round picks in Ravens history at this point. He's only made five starts in two seasons, which is far below Ravens' standards.

Before Smith, the fewest starts by a Ravens' first round pick in his first two seasons was 17 ([Terrell Suggs](#)). Of the Ravens' 16 first-round picks prior to Smith, half made 30 or more starts in their first two seasons.

Smith's career got off to a rough start when he suffered a high ankle sprain on the season-opening kickoff of his rookie season. He's battled back problems throughout his Ravens career and then underwent sports hernia surgery last November. For his career, he's had more missed games (nine) than starts.



Will 2013 be the season in which Ravens CB Jimmy Smith has more starts than games missed?

Smith, though, has come up with timely big plays, especially in the playoffs. As a rookie, he intercepted [Tom Brady](#) in the AFC Championship Game. Then, last season, his physical play against [Michael Crabtree](#) on fourth-and-goal helped Baltimore win the Super Bowl.

Still, Smith's lack of consistency has been a disappointment for Baltimore. After the Ravens selected him 27th overall in 2011, Smith couldn't beat out [Cary Williams](#) for the starting job. Last season, when [Lardarius Webb](#) got hurt, the Ravens turned to [Corey Graham](#), a Pro Bowl special teams player, over Smith.

Now, with Williams signing with the [Philadelphia Eagles](#) in free agency, Smith will compete against Graham for a starting job.

"Anybody can emerge and be a starter," Smith said. "I've been wanting to starter since Day 1, but God had a plan. I'm still just learning, trying to become a better player in the classroom and on the field, trying to diagnose plays and read things and be a student of the game."

Smith added, "You always want to go uphill. You never want to digress. I'm trying to pick up where I left off and

do even better. I feel like I've improved. Everything is a work in progress. I'm still trying to climb the mountain. I'm not where I want to be yet, but I'll be there."

Hugh Charles a bright light in Edmonton Eskimos' stormy season

BY CON GRIWKOWSKY ,EDMONTON SUN

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Hugh Charles, left, runs the ball around Marcus Howard, right, as Marcus Henry puts on the pressure during Edmonton Eskimos training camp at Commonwealth Stadium in Edmonton, Alta. on Sunday, Jun. 2, 2013. Amber Bracken/Edmonton Sun/QMI Agency

During the stormy season the Edmonton Eskimos offence endured in 2012, running back Hugh Charles shone brightly.

Calm, tenacious and above all, productive, it's a shame what Charles contributed in a trying situation ended up being overlooked in the all-star balloting.

There's no question Charles was enjoying a career year before resting a banged-up knee for the last two regular-season games.

Heck, his 887 yards rushing combined with 522 receiving yards put Charles in the CFL's NO. 4 slot with 1,409 offensive yards.

Entering his sixth pro season, Charles made the most of his chance to be a full-time starter.

He's no longer a placeholder for Jerome Messam's NFL aspirations or competing with Cory Boyd for playing time.

This year, Charles came into camp knowing he's the undisputed No. 1 running back.

"Through each adversity lies a greater victory," is how Charles put it. "I'm here today because of that adversity and what I've been through."

Being top dog has created a somewhat different perspective for Charles, who's ready to take on a leadership role and be a role model for his understudies.

"It makes me want to teach the young guys a work ethic and how to work," said Charles. "I'm out there practising from Day 1 just like when I was a rookie — running hard, finishing plays and showing them how to be athletes up here."

After so many years as a backup before he got his chance to start, he knows the transition to mentor is now complete.

"It's expected, having the role I did last year as a starter, although it was in and out," said Charles. "There's still more provin' to do. I proved myself last year because I was able to start, stay on the field and get things done. I'm hoping for another good year again, as long as I can stay healthy."

When a player can produce in one season more than he had in the previous four combined, there's a sense that the best is yet to come.

Charles held up his part of the deal and finished with just under 100 yards more offence than Fred Stamps, who was closing fast at the end of the year.

"I pride myself on making big plays and that's one of the reasons I'm here on this team is to make plays and help this team win," said Charles, whose biggest gain of the year was a career-high 76-yard TD catch. "With that comes challenges of being able to maintain and uphold the expectations people have for you."

Eskimos head coach Kavis Reed appreciated the steadiness Charles showed during the tumultuous 2012 season.

"Hugh Charles, in my opinion, was having an all-star campaign," said Reed. "He was good at protection, exceptional with the ball in his hands as a runner and a receiver. Now, he's a year comfortable as a full-time starter.

"He's a very conscientious individual. He doesn't say a lot. He does not go and try to assert his bravado externally. He just produces day in and day out."

EXTRA POINTS: Eskimos GM Ed Hervey made his rounds in the Commonwealth Stadium stands, shaking hands and talking with many of the fans who came to see first-day practice. Among those in attendance were former defensive lineman Jed Roberts and long-time kicker Sean Fleming.

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