

## Colorado Classics: John Wooten, former CU Buffs football great

By Irv Moss *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

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It didn't take much imagination to think of John Wooten as a Paul Bunyan-type man. Stories coming out of Boulder about Wooten's exploits on the football field for the University of Colorado told of a giant doing miraculous things. Wooten played guard on the offensive line and tackle on the defensive line in the days when college players went both ways.

The late Colorado sports information director Fred Casotti said Wooten was a quick, agile lineman who provided bone-crunching blocks for one of the nation's top offenses. Wooten played defense in a similar physical style, causing the opposition to run plays to the other side of the field.

Wooten was 6-foot-2, 230 pounds in his playing days in the 1950s, barely linebacker size in today's football.

"That was big back in those days," Wooten said in a telephone interview from his home in Dallas. "They wouldn't even look at me in pro football today. But I made it work. I wanted to get something done."

After starring at CU, Wooten went on to play in the NFL for the Cleveland Browns as a 260-pound lineman.

Last week, Wooten returned to Folsom Field. At halftime of the Colorado-Arizona State game, he was honored by his alma mater for being inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame. As he stood on the field where he once paved the way for the backs in coach Dal Ward's single-wing offense, Wooten reflected on the course of his life that brought him to CU and to a life he once thought was an impossible dream. He thought of his mother, Henrietta, his single parent rock of the family who insisted he go to college and, she hoped, to her choice, the school in Boulder.

There were many crossroads along the way that could have taken Wooten on another path. Wooten's roots were anchored at a time when black athletes had to struggle just to be accepted in collegiate athletics.

Wooten didn't play football until his sophomore year at Carlsbad (N.M.) High School, and only then when a coach and two school administrators stepped up and did what they thought was right.

"They asked the students if they wanted to let us come to their school," Wooten said. "They voted 'yes.' We didn't have enough students to play football at the segregated school where I would have gone. I might not have ever played the game."

Hugh Davidson, a member of the CU staff, saw him play and started the recruiting process. But there was another crossroads to negotiate.

"Because I came from a low economic level, I had questions," Wooten said. "Should I go to college or get a job and help support my mother and the family? My mom said I could help more by getting a college education. I thought that's just what I was going to do."

Wooten boarded a Greyhound bus and came north to Boulder.

This was the mid-1950s, and Wooten and teammate Frank Clarke were the first black players to don CU football uniforms. There were some issues.

On a football trip to play at Utah, Wooten and Clarke were refused admittance to the team hotel. Ward and athletic director Harry Carlson intervened, and Wooten and Clarke stayed with their teammates.

The same scenario occurred in 1956 when CU traveled to Miami to play Clemson in the Orange Bowl. Ward and Carlson again insisted the CU team came first.

"Those experiences changed my life," Wooten said. "It's what I believe in today. You stand up for what is right."

Wooten is a giant off the field. He participated in the commencement ceremony at CU so his mother could see him graduate. He later bought her a home from his earnings with the Browns.

After his playing days, Wooten was a member of the Dallas Cowboys organization for 16 years. He has given time to organizations that help others such as Big Brothers in Cleveland the Fritz Pollard Alliance.

Wooten now stands with the greats of CU football as the sixth Buffalo to be selected for the College Football Hall of Fame. Present coach Jon Embree didn't need any introduction. The parking spaces in the parking lot are marked with the names of the former great players. Embree parks in Wooten's space.

"It's difficult for me to realize that I'm being honored for something that began 57 years ago," Wooten said. "It is an honor. They say better late than never. I don't think about it that way. It never came to mind."

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About John Wooten

Born: Dec. 5, 1936, in Riverview, Texas

High school: Carlsbad (N.M.)

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## **Jimmy Smith is prepared to step in wherever the Ravens need him on defense**

By Aaron Wilson, The Baltimore Sun

8:04 PM EDT, October 17, 2012

Anquan Boldin bellowed advice from the sideline to Ravens cornerback Jimmy Smith, delivering a sage last-second tip that Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo would be throwing the football in his direction.

Smith nodded affirmatively before matching wide receiver Miles Austin stride for stride, turning his head and batting down a deep sideline pass during the third quarter of the Ravens' 31-29 victory last Sunday.

Now that starting cornerback Lardarius Webb has been placed on injured reserve with a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee, the Ravens will need Smith to duplicate the speed and technique he has displayed at times this season.

Smith will be under heavy scrutiny on Sunday against the Houston Texans when he becomes a regular starter for the first time.

"Jimmy will be ready," strong safety Bernard Pollard said. "We can't sit here and decipher who's going to do what and when they're going to do it. Jimmy knows his time is now. So, he's got to play. You got to be a grown man in this league."

Drafted in the first round last year with the 27th overall pick, Smith represents the NFL prototype for a shutdown cornerback. Big, strong and fast at 6-foot-2, 205 pounds, Smith's accomplishments have yet to mirror his potential.

The Ravens have seen glimpses of his potential throughout the season while he operated as the nickel back.

In 18 career games and three starts, Smith has recorded 34 tackles, two interceptions and 11 pass deflections.

"Jimmy Smith's got great physical tools," NFL Films analyst Greg Cosell said. "Ultimately to me, he's a press corner. Sometimes, you can't play press every snap in the NFL. He hasn't been terrible, but he's not quite been the player I thought he had a chance to be coming out of the draft. I would say his ability at this point is better than his production."



While Smith has 4.42 speed in the 40-yard dash, a 36-inch vertical leap and bench pressed 225 pounds 24 times at the NFL scouting combine two years ago, the California native hasn't provided consistency and is prone to penalties.

Smith leads the defense with five penalties this season. He committed three penalties against Dallas, including encroachment, pass interference and defensive holding in the second half after replacing Webb.

Opposing quarterbacks have found success throwing in Smith's direction 24 times, completing 15 of them. That includes a 49-yard pass to Philadelphia Eagles wide receiver DeSean Jackson in the second game.

In college, Smith drew comparisons to Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Nnamdi Asomugha and allowed only 11 completions in man coverage during his junior and senior seasons combined with only one for a first down.

"I've been working hard," Smith said. "I took this offseason to really hone in on my skills and technique. I feel like just being a confident player, I'm ready.

"I think I've grown, but everybody knows I've got a lot of growing still to do as a young player. But I think I've taken some steps in the right direction."

That includes how Smith has conducted himself off the field, avoiding trouble after character questions surrounded him prior to the draft two years ago.

Smith lives a quiet existence in the Baltimore suburbs near team headquarters, playing video games and hanging out with his teammates and friends.

Red flags were raised about Smith heading into the draft. This included failed drug tests, a pair of alcohol-related violations and an arrest for third-degree assault. Those issues, which occurred early in his career at Colorado and didn't interrupt an All-Big 12 conference career, haven't followed him to Baltimore.

"As a person, I've been growing since college," said Smith, who finished his career with 183 career tackles, 18 pass deflections and three interceptions. "It's always a work in progress, but have you heard my name be called one time? I've been doing OK at that."

Against the Cowboys, Smith tied a career-high with seven tackles. That included one for a 7-yard loss where he decked wide receiver Dez Bryant.

Bryant did most of his damage against Cary Williams, catching 13 passes for 95 yards and two touchdowns.

And Smith anticipates the Texans, whose top wide receivers are Andre Johnson and Kevin Walter, targeting him early and often to test his mettle.

"Absolutely, I'm a second-year corner," Smith said. "They're definitely going to attack me, but I've got to strap it on and be ready. We definitely have our hands full with these receivers."

As a rookie, Smith had 18 tackles, two interceptions and eight pass deflections. And he had an acrobatic

interception of New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady in the AFC championship game.

Now, the Ravens need Smith to play at an even higher level.

"I expect him to play really well," Ravens coach John Harbaugh said. "I have tremendous confidence in Jimmy Smith, we all do. Jimmy's got tremendous confidence. He's here for a reason. He's talented, he works hard. He'll play well."

Smith spent this offseason dropping weight, getting noticeably leaner from his rookie season.

His goal was to upgrade his speed, lateral mobility, backpedal and change of direction skills after missing four games as a rookie with a high-ankle sprain suffered in his first NFL game.

"From one year to the next, it makes a whole lot of difference from the rookie year to the second year," fullback Vonta Leach said. "Jimmy's played a lot more football now. He's growing up and he's going to step up into that starter's role. He's applied himself."

Now, Smith wants to justify the investment the Ravens have made in him. Smith is signed to a four-year, \$7.46 million rookie contract that includes a \$3.92 million signing bonus.

"Once you get drafted, you want to prove what you've got," Smith said. "You want to prove to everybody that you belong. It [stinks] that my opportunity came at a time when another player was hurt, but, at the same time, you've got to step up and show what you've got."

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## NFL RapidReports

### Ravens' Jimmy Smith prepared for starting role

By Jason Butt | CBSSports.com

October 17, 2012 5:24 pm ET

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Baltimore cornerback Jimmy Smith is aware the Texans will come after him when he starts Sunday. (US Presswire)

Jimmy Smith isn't naïve.

He's well aware he'll be tested when he enters the starting lineup of Baltimore's base defense Sunday against Houston.

Smith was drafted in the first round in 2011 and is expected to become a long-term starter down the road. He's seen considerable time in nickel situations this year, though Sunday's game will be the first time he sees action for a full 60 minutes.

"I'm a second-year corner; they're definitely going to attack me," Smith said. "But I've got to strap it on and be ready."

Smith will play on the left side at cornerback and should figure to see some matchups against Texans' receiver Andre Johnson. Smith's a bigger cornerback at 6-2, 205 pounds, but has been beat on back shoulder fades and has shown a tendency to lose track of the ball in the air.

Smith has seen an average of 46.5 snaps per game thus far, which has helped to prepare him to jump in as a starter. He's also given up 15 catches out of 24 passing attempts thrown his way with a long of 49 yards, according to ProFootballFocus.com.

"I expect him to play really well," coach John Harbaugh said. "I have tremendous confidence in Jimmy Smith. We all do. Jimmy's got tremendous confidence. He's here for a reason. He's talented, he works hard. He'll play well."

Smith is stepping in the starting lineup for cornerback Lardarius Webb, who tore his left ACL against Dallas this past Sunday. Webb had emerged as a leader on the field and his presence will be missed in the secondary.

Though Webb was an important part of the secondary, opposing teams weren't throwing his way. With Webb, Baltimore gave up more than 300 passing yards against Philadelphia, New England and Cleveland.

Without Webb, there's a chance upcoming opponents could elect to air the ball out against this Baltimore secondary. And even though Houston's been dominant running the ball this season, it wouldn't be a surprise to see the Texans passing more than they have been. Smith and the secondary will have to be prepared for just about anything this week.

"I've been working hard," Smith said. "I took this offseason to really hone in on my skills and technique, and I feel like just being a confident player that I'm ready."

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Tags: Andre Johnson, Jimmy Smith, Lardarius Webb, Baltimore Ravens, Houston Texans, NFL

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