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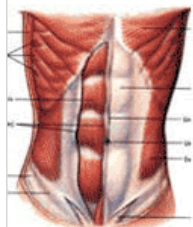
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Jimmy Smith still struggling to prove he was worth a first-round pick

Ravens cornerback struggled to cover Falcons receivers Thursday night

August 15, 2013 | Mike Preston

The Ravens are running out of excuses and cornerback Jimmy Smith is running out of time.

We just keep waiting and waiting and waiting ...

And so far, there has been very little production, at least for what you'd expect out of a first-round pick.

When the Ravens selected Smith with the No. 27 overall pick out of Colorado in 2011, there was speculation that he could be another shutdown cornerback like Chris McAlister because he had size, speed and range.

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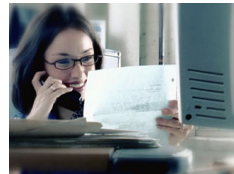
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Since then, he has only proven that he can be a nickel back in the [NFL](#).

With Lardarius Webb out of the lineup Thursday night because of knee injury, Smith got a chance to start for a second straight preseason game, and again he didn't show much.

At this point, the Ravens are hoping Webb continues to make a quick recovery.

The [Atlanta Falcons](#) and quarterback Matt Ryan zeroed in on Smith in the first half. He trailed receiver Julio Jones on an 8-yard touchdown pass over the middle with 2:58 left in the first quarter. Smith gave up a 17-yard pass down the left sideline to Kevin Cone almost 90 seconds later.

At least compared to his coverage against Jones, Smith had great position on Cone, but he never turned around to make a play on the ball. We've seen this before, like watching another rerun of "I Love Lucy."

Smith just doesn't make plays.

What are the problems?

He is too stiff at times and doesn't always get the proper bend in his knees. He doesn't anticipate well, and maybe that's because he looks unsure about the coverage he is supposed to be playing. He probably is suffering from a lack of confidence as well, because the [Tampa Bay Buccaneers](#) got him last week, and Atlanta picked on him Thursday night.

It is too early to suggest that Smith is a bust, because he deserves to play out this season, but there hasn't been a lot to build on.

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In the past, the Ravens have used injuries as an excuse for Smith's slow development. He missed four games in 2011 because of an ankle problem and five games last season with a [sports](#) hernia. They also privately talked about how Smith never had to play tight man to man coverage in college because opposing teams never threw to his side of the field.

So, what is it now?

Smith has had the entire training camp and two preseason [games](#) to show why he was a first round pick, and he still hasn't showed it.

In his defense, he wasn't the only defensive player to play poorly Thursday. The Falcons ran the ball well against the Ravens' front seven, which spent too much time fighting with linemen and didn't get off blocks.

The Falcons also found holes in the Ravens' pass defense, especially when they threw into the flats or mid-range passes over the middle. There were few positives, except for the pass rushing ability of outside linebacker Elvis Dumervil. If he didn't play, it could have been a really long night for the first-team defense.

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It could have been even longer for Smith.

When you are a first-round pick, you don't get the same amount of time to develop as a project like Jah Reid or Moe Lee, though Smith will get his share of time because his failure would be an embarrassment on the team's strong draft record.

But Webb continues to get stronger every week and it seems likely he will start the regular-season opener against the Denver Broncos on Sept. 5. On the other side will be Corey Graham, who has been the Ravens' most consistent cornerback in the preseason.

That leaves Smith either on the sideline or as the nickel back, which isn't bad for the Ravens, but not what they had in mind when they drafted him in the first round.

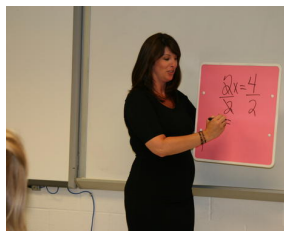
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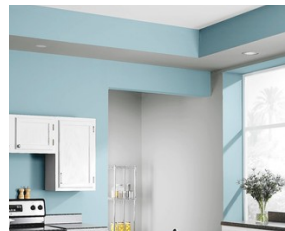
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