

Ravens: Jimmy Smith having 'outstanding' summer despite struggles against Falcons

By Matt Zenitz Times Staff Writer | Posted: Wednesday, August 21, 2013 12:00 am

OWINGS MILLS — Ravens cornerback Jimmy Smith struggled Thursday against the Atlanta Falcons.

But at least based on what Baltimore defensive coaches have said during the past few days, the subpar performance was an aberration for Smith during what's been an otherwise encouraging summer for the 2011 first-round pick.

"I think he's been outstanding," Ravens secondary coach Teryl Austin said. "He's worked hard. He's in great shape, the best shape he's been in since he's been here. He's really working at it. And he is, on a daily basis out here, every day, when we go through however many plays we go through, he stands out."

But he stood out in a bad way against the Falcons.

During a drive late in the first quarter, Atlanta quarterback Matt Ryan completed three passes to wide receiver Julio Jones, including one for an 8-yard touchdown on third-and goal. All three of the completions came in Smith's direction — one for 32 yards, one for 15 yards and the touchdown.

Ryan also completed a 17-yard pass on Smith on the first play of the Falcons' next possession to little-known wide receiver Kevin Cone, who got a step on Smith on a route up the sideline.

"I think [Jimmy] has looked really good [this summer]," Ravens defensive coordinator Dean Pees said. "I think he's done a great job, [but] I don't think he played particularly good the other night. ... He's got a technique he's got to use, and he didn't use it the other night. He's got a distinct advantage in a way that he can play, and he didn't necessarily play that way last week, and I think he will [this week]. ...

"At corner and defensive back, you're playing a lot of man coverage, [and] everybody plays it a little different. Asante Samuel, Champ Bailey — every guy is a little different — but they all find their way to do it and get it done and do it well. I think Jimmy is on his way to doing that."

This, of course, will be a telling season for Smith.

He's failed to live up to expectations through his first two seasons in the NFL, but he made two big plays to help Baltimore beat the San Francisco 49ers in the Super Bowl in February, and, at least prior to Thursday, he appeared to be playing well for the most part this summer.

Smith is competing with Corey Graham for the Ravens' second cornerback job. But regardless of who ends up winning the job, both players will be depended on to play significant roles with as much as Baltimore will have three or more cornerbacks on the field.

"This is where I think Jimmy is," Austin said. "I know it maybe wasn't a great game for him per se

when you look at it from the outside. But when I look at Jimmy, I look at his body of work coming off last year's playoffs, in the offseason and what he's done in practice, and, as any corner will tell you, there will be a game out there where you're not playing your best, and things don't go your way.

"But I have the utmost confidence in Jimmy that he's going to have a fine, fine season for us."