

Ravens CB Jimmy Smith bounces back from struggles against Falcons

By Matt Zenitz Times Staff Writer | Posted: Sunday, August 25, 2013 12:00 am

OWINGS MILLS — Ravens coach John Harbaugh playfully teased the media at one point after Thursday's game against the Carolina Panthers: "I'm waiting for the Jimmy Smith question. Got one for me?"

Smith and his play had been a popular topic among the media and fans leading up to Thursday, but not for positive reasons.

Smith, Baltimore's top pick in 2011, has been consistently praised by coaches since the spring for his play, for being in great shape and for having a noticeably improved work ethic. But Smith's struggles against the Atlanta Falcons last week brought about skepticism for many outside the organization because of the issues Smith has had through his first two seasons in the NFL.

But coaches defended and repeatedly voiced confidence in Smith throughout the week, and Smith bounced back from the lackluster showing against the Falcons with a performance against the Panthers that appeared to have Harbaugh pleased, enough so that Harbaugh made a point to bring Smith up during his post-game media session.

"Jimmy Smith played very well," Harbaugh said with a smile after his playful request for a question on Smith's play. "He was physical at the line. They've got excellent receivers over there, and I think he did a nice job."

Last week, Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan completed three passes to wide receiver Julio Jones in Smith's direction during a first quarter scoring drive — one for 32 yards, one for 15 yards and the final one for an 8-yard touchdown on third-and-goal.

Ryan also completed a 17-yard pass to little-known wide receiver Kevin Cone with Smith in coverage on the first play of Atlanta's next possession.

But against the Panthers Thursday, Smith was matched up largely against former Pro Bowler Steve Smith, and he didn't allow a completion during the five series he was in the game for.

Brandon LaFell dropped a pass late in the first half that would have gone for a gain of at least 15 yards. But the end result was an incompleteness. And including that incompleteness, Carolina quarterback Cam Newton was 0-for-2 on passes thrown in Smith's direction.

"I felt like I didn't play the kind of game that I like to play against Atlanta, so I came out of that feeling like I could play better," Smith said. "But this week, I went out and did exactly what I wanted to do, and I feel pretty good about it. I got up there and I pressed a lot, pretty much the entire game. That's what I

like to do best, so I got to go out there and be me.”

Smith has always had prototypical size for the cornerback position.

He’s always had prototypical speed and athleticism.

But his play against the Panthers Thursday was another sign that Smith is in fact an improved all-around player now going into his third season with Baltimore.

“I’m more comfortable this year,” Smith said. “I’ve learned the game a lot more, just the ins and outs of the game, and my technique has gotten a lot better over the last couple years. Overall, I feel pretty good.”