

Hugh Charles hopes to be flipping out against Lions at BC Place

Edmonton's 5-foot-8 mighty mite proud of his signature touchdown move

BY MIKE BEAMISH, THE VANCOUVER SUN JULY 19, 2013

With **Dennis Johnston**
from Advantage Home Ice
& DJ's Hockey Schools



Edmonton Eskimos' tailback Hugh Charles introduced his trademark post-touchdown celebration during his playing days with the Roughriders and is more than thrilled to continue it with the West Division squad.

Photograph by: Greg Southam, Postmedia Files

Hugh Charles said he is too young to remember Ozzie Smith, the Baseball Hall of Fame shortstop from the big-hair days of the '70s and '80s. But he knows of Eskimos kick return legend Henry (Gizmo) Williams from watching YouTube, and he is a contemporary of Carl Edwards, the "rock star" NASCAR driver.

All four are brothers of the backflip, their signature move after a spectacular putout, touchdown or race to take the checkered flag.

"I'm still not a showboat," insisted Charles, the running back of the Edmonton Eskimos. "It's really a fun thing. And our offence has come to expect it."

Indeed, when Charles is back-flipping it means the Eskimos are celebrating a touchdown from their 5-foot-8 mighty mite.

On Saturday night, the Eks hope to see Circus Boy flipping out at BC Place Stadium, because Charles was something of a caged animal a week ago at Commonwealth Stadium in Edmonton. He has held to just 36 yards on 10 carries by the joy-killing Lions' defence on a sloppy surface pelted by torrential rains. Together, the forces of nature and of man held the Eskimos to only 145 net yards in a 17-3 B.C. victory, the fewest net yards allowed by the Lions in 13 years.

"I think, once the rains started last week, each team's offensive playbook narrowed down quite a bit. And I think the defences knew that," Eskimos quarterback Mike Reilly said.

"It was not a passing game, and the defences started to load up the box, to stop (B.C. tailback) Andrew Harris and also to stop Hugh. We didn't dispense the ball like we wanted to. Hopefully we can do a better job of that."

Charles ran for a 70-yard touchdown the week before against the Tiger-Cats under similar conditions in a game played at Alumni Stadium in Guelph, Ont. What impressed Reilly was not only the burst and staying power of Charles as he went the distance, but the exclamation point at the end of the run.

"It was pretty impressive athletically that he can run 70 yards with guys chasing after him and still have the energy to do a backflip," Reilly said. "I don't think I could manage a somersault. Hugh progresses to two after the second one (TD). I'd like to see him do three or four. That would really be impressive. And it would mean our offence is rolling and he's getting into the end zone a lot. I'm not sure we'll ever get to four for him, but I'd love to see it."

Charles grew up in Keller, Texas, and started doing backflips as an eight-year-old to pass the time during daycare. He loves gymnastics as much as football — the former is his favourite event to watch during the Summer Olympics. But his dynamic athleticism was bottled up for many years as his football career progressed through high school football and later at the University of Colorado. Rules didn't permit a backflip following a touchdown, with officials regarding the move as excessive celebration and a form of taunting which earned a penalty.

"In college and high school, I'd just have to hand the ball back to the referee," Charles explained. "I always told myself I would celebrate that way if I got to the pros. You want to make a name for yourself. When I came to the CFL, and I saw all the things they were doing up here — Winnipeg used to do the bicycle, the Tiger-Cats once jumped into a motorboat — I decided I needed a signature move, too."

Coach Kavis Reed has a measured response to his backflipping running back. He accepts the spirit of it, but doesn't encourage it. All he asks is that Charles take into consideration where his landing point will be. Reed's greatest fear is Charles landing on the football, twisting an ankle, or worse.

"You never want to see a player get hurt when he's in celebratory mood," Reed said. "Hugh is

capable of doing what 99 per cent of the people in this world can't do. And one of the most storied athletes in the CFL did it — and that was Gizmo Williams. As long as he's not showing up the opposition, or taunting, I have no problem with it, as long as he's doing it in an expedient way — and in a safe way.”

Charles has his limits, however, and won't risk flipping out when the frost is on the pumpkin.

“I've never done it in snow,” he said. “It probably would be iffy on that surface. I'd have to get creative, maybe just do a little front roll or something.”

But on a summer Saturday night, under unthreatening skies, there is no such caveat.

Charles suggests conditions are right to put his signature backflip back in business.

mbeamish@vancouversun.com

TWITTER:

[Twitter.com/sixbeamers](https://twitter.com/sixbeamers)

© Copyright (c) The Vancouver Sun