



PHYSICALITY KEY IN JIMMY SMITH'S DEVELOPMENT

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The former first-round pick has played tight coverage and shown growth in this third season.



Jimmy Smith 🏈 is hesitant to pat himself on the back three games into the season.

The former first-round pick has earned a starting job and is making steady progress in his third NFL season, but he insists he still has plenty of room to grow.

"I'm playing OK," Smith said. "I'm just playing my game. Each week I'm still trying to get better. That never stops."

A big part of Smith's development is his ability to play physical against wide receivers. The 6-foot-2, 200-pound defender is the biggest cornerback on the team, and the coaches have worked with him on using that size to his advantage.

"When you're a big corner, that's quite a tool you have when you can play physical and get your hands on guys," Defensive Coordinator Dean Pees said. "That's one of his physical talents is being physical because he is big, he's got long arms, and you've just got to keep working on that."

Smith has shown that physical play in each of the last two weeks.

He has matched up against big wide receivers and played tight coverage in games against the Browns and Texans. Smith has four passes defended in those games and is a big part of the reason the Ravens have not allowed a touchdown in the last eight quarters.

Last week against the Texans, Smith spent



much of the day matched up against All-Pro receiver Andre Johnson. Johnson finished the day with five catches for 36 yards, and just three of those catches came when Johnson lined up against Smith.

One of the noticeable improvements Smith has displayed early this season is that he's avoided getting burned deep. Earlier in Smith's career he struggled with getting beat over the top, especially on double moves. But against the Texans he did a good job of keeping everything in front of him.

Houston quarterback Matt Schaub completed seven passes in Smith's direction, and none of those passes went for big gains, as the longest pass Smith allowed on the day was a 17-yard completion.

"I'm just getting comfortable in the scheme and doing what I like to do, playing physical, trying to be consistent out there," Smith said.

Smith has also shown a better awareness for the football. He is playing the ball better, and turning his head to bat down balls in coverage.

"That's just natural instincts," Smith said. "You can be taught to do it. It's kind of a natural instinct, when you're in good position to turn around, find, lean and locate. Then you make a play on the ball. It's not an easy job to do, especially when quarterbacks are really good at putting it outside. You just try to focus with your technique and stay in good position."

Throughout his young career, Smith has shown flashes of developing into a lockdown cornerback. His play on the final defensive stand of the Super Bowl was critical in the Ravens hoisting the Lombardi Trophy, and the coaches have emphasized their confidence in him.

The key now, which Smith and Pees both stressed, is consistency.

"Each week I get more and more comfortable doing what the defense wants me to do and allows me to do," Smith said.

Packers rookie David Bakhtiari holding up under fire

By [Rob Reischel](#), for the Journal Sentinel
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Green Bay — Back in his college days at Colorado, David Bakhtiari's coaches had a saying called FIDO. And it had nothing to do with dogs.

"My coaches had the same saying," said Bakhtiari, the Green Bay Packers rookie left tackle. "It was 'FIDO,' which was '(Bleep) It, Drive On.' Just forget about it and make sure you move on. Don't let the previous play affect the next series."

That will be the challenge Bakhtiari and the Packers face following a stunning 34-30 loss to Cincinnati. Green Bay led, 30-14, late in the third quarter, only to see the Bengals finish the game with 20 consecutive points.

Bakhtiari has certainly showed through the first three games that he can be a quality player.

Bakhtiari, a fourth-round draft choice in April, became the starting left tackle when Bryan Bulaga suffered a torn ACL in early August. But Green Bay hasn't missed a beat with Bakhtiari, who won't turn 22 until next week.

Bakhtiari had the ultimate baptism by fire in Week 1, when San Francisco sent defensive end Justin Smith and outside linebacker Aldon Smith his way. Bakhtiari allowed 1½ sacks and five pressures but battled throughout and didn't force the Packers to adjust their offensive game plan.

Then in Week 2, Bakhtiari was terrific against Washington. Bakhtiari was fluid in space, strong against the run and did his part as the Packers accumulated 580 total yards.

"I like the way David Bakhtiari is playing," coach Mike McCarthy said last week. "I never really put him on a schedule. It's great he's been able to step in and take advantage of his opportunity. I think when his opportunity came it really helped him because he was able to get a full training camp to prepare. He's off to a good start."

Bakhtiari had his roughest outing of the season against the Bengals, allowing five pressures and a sack, while being flagged for holding.

On the Packers' final offensive play — a fourth and 5 from the Bengals 20-yard line — Bakhtiari whiffed trying to execute a cut block against 6-foot-7 defensive end Michael Johnson.

Johnson flew past Bakhtiari and batted down Aaron Rodgers' final pass, which was intended for an open James Jones in the left flat.

"I think I have room to improve," Bakhtiari said. "I think that (opponents) kind of just look at me as, 'We'll try to give him what we've got and see if he can stack up to the punches that we want to throw at him.'"

For the most part, Bakhtiari has stacked up just fine. And that has to surprise many NFL teams that passed on him in the draft.

Three of the top five selections were offensive tackles. Five tackles went in the first round and eight tackles went before Bakhtiari at pick No. 109.

But right now, Bakhtiari might be upstaging all of them.

In Pro Football Focus' most recent rookie of the year projections, it listed Bakhtiari at No. 8. He was the only offensive tackle on the list.

"I like to say bits and pieces, little slices here and there," Bakhtiari said. "I like to see what successful people do and take pieces. I'm not the same as you. Certain things that you do, I can't do.

"Certain things that I can do, you can't do. So, I can take things that work well with you and try to use it in my everyday philosophy."

Bakhtiari is the youngest of three boys and grew up in a football-crazed house.

His oldest brother, Eric, is a free agent linebacker who's played with Tennessee and San Francisco. Andrew, the middle child, was a defensive end at the University of San Diego.

Both treated David like a blocking sled during his younger days. But Bakhtiari grew from that, and now, gives more than he gets.

"We've got three siblings and my Dad's really competitive," Bakhtiari said. "We're just a very competitive, driven household. Sports has always been a big thing in our family."

It's shown early on.

At 6-foot-4, 300 pounds, Bakhtiari doesn't have ideal size to play left tackle. But he's extremely athletic, has shown he won't back down from anybody and should be a staple on Green Bay's line for years to come.

"You don't have to be the biggest, strongest guy out there," Bakhtiari said. "But if you play within the fundamentals and have good feet and low pad level, you can be successful."

Bakhtiari has largely done all of that. Now, he just needs to remember the FIDO mantra more than ever.

This story appeared in Packer Plus Magazine

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<http://www.jsonline.com/sports/packers/packers-rookie-david-bakhtiari-holding-up-under-fire-b99104201z1-225120892.html>

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