

Williams, Merriman top rookies

The Associated Press

NEW YORK

Lofty goals and plenty of self-confidence barely prepared Cornell Williams for all the success he's had in his first NFL season.

The powerful running back nicknamed "Cadillac" not only burst onto the scene in record-breaking fashion, but he helped transform the Tampa Bay Buccaneers from also-ran to NFC South champions.

In doing so, he also ran away with The Associated Press Offensive Rookie of the Year award.

San Diego Chargers linebacker Shawne Merriman was named Defensive Rookie of the Year.

Williams had planned on making an impact during his rookie season.

"I'm one of those people who believes in goals, so I set them high," Williams said. "I wanted to come in and run for well over

1,000 yards, win Rookie of the Year, go to the playoffs and win the Super Bowl."

He's three-quarters of the way through that list. The resurgent Bucs (11-5) begin pursuit of the remaining objective when they host the Washington Redskins on Saturday in the NFC wild-card round.

Williams, who ran for 1,178 yards and six touchdowns, drew 47 votes Wednesday from a nationwide panel of 50 sports writers and broadcasters who cover the NFL.

His running mate at Auburn, Ronnie Brown of the Dolphins, received one vote, as did tight end Heath Miller of Pittsburgh and offensive lineman Logan Mankins of New England.

"It's an award he's obviously earned. It's a reflection of him and his family, the kind of worker he is. But it also reflects our team," coach Jon Gruden said. "He's got a lot more awards coming if he keeps doing what he's doing. I promise you that."

Williams moved into the starting lineup immediately and became the first player in league history to begin his career with three consec-

utive 100-yard games, including a season-high 158 against Green Bay.

Merriman's relentless style of play made an immediate mark in the NFL.

Known as "Lights Out" for his hard hits and aggressive demeanor, Merriman received 28½ votes. He easily beat Seattle linebacker Lofa Tatupu, who got 16½.

All the players receiving votes played linebacker in some form this season. Behind Merriman and Tatupu were Odell Thurman of Cincinnati with four votes and DaMarcus Ware of Dallas with one.

While all of them were stand-outs, Merriman showed the most explosiveness and made more spotlight-grabbing plays.

After being picked 12th in the draft out of Maryland, Merriman had a shaky start when his agent held him out of offseason workouts until he signed. He missed only a week of training camp, though.

"I think anybody who goes as high as I did in the draft should be planning to be a game-changer, point blank," he said.

Merriman finished with a team-high 10 sacks among his 54 tackles.

In other NFL action

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y.

After disappointing year, Bills shake up front office

Tom Donahoe was fired as Buffalo Bills president and general manager Wednesday in a shakeup that could mark Hall of Fame coach Marv Levy's return to the franchise in a management role.

Offensive coordinator Tom Clements was also fired, his agent, Gary O'Hagan, told The Associated Press.

Donahoe's dismissal was announced by Bills owner Ralph Wilson a few days after he promised changes for an underachieving team that finished 5-11 and missed the playoffs for a sixth straight season.

Donahoe, the only executive to hold the president's title in the franchise's 46-year history, was dismissed after five seasons. Despite increasing the team's ticket base, Donahoe's team couldn't win.

The Bills were 31-49 during Donahoe's tenure. The 31 wins tied Cleveland for the third fewest in the NFL during that span.

Levy, who led the team to four straight AFC titles in the early 1990s, could play a role in the restructured front office, Wilson said.

"We're going to make that decision in the next few days," the owner said.



San Diego Chargers linebacker Shawne Merriman reacts to a play during a Dec. 18 game against the Colts at the RCA Dome in Indianapolis. AP PHOTO



WILLIAMS

Indoor soccer gives adult crowd chance to socialize, exercise

By JOHN GROTH
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Gary Gokey is spry for his age. At 51, he still has enough energy and dexterity to play goalkeeper on an indoor soccer team. He doesn't let back problems get in the way.

But he's just on the field to get some exercise.

"It's about being with friends and getting a good night's exercise of going out and playing," said Gokey, a Greenwood resident. "I like the fact I'm getting exercise and doing a sport I like."

Indoor soccer isn't just for young players or high school athletes who are trying to stay sharp for varsity soccer play. The high-energy sport also is a popular recreational activity for adults.

Indy Indoor Sports Park in Indianapolis offers 60 adult leagues, including the one founded by Gokey six years ago.

An avid soccer player, Gokey has played indoor soccer for 10 years. In 2000, he formed a non-competitive, over-30 coed league called the Geezer League. The average age of players is 38 to 40.

The league, with games on Tuesday nights, doesn't track standings or have a tournament. But it has grown in popularity. It started with four teams and now has 11.

"I wanted a bracket for an age group to have a fun, noncompetitive league," said Gokey, who plays on The Tie Dyes. "For the majority of players, it was an avenue for exercise and fun. Everybody got on board with the concept."

"As soon as the scoreboard goes off, you can go to the local pub and have (a drink) together."

Gokey grew up in upstate New York and played outdoor soccer in high school and college. And he's always had a passion for playing defense.

• Kicks

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

"I've noticed my foot skills are a little bit better. Once you're outside, the grass slows the ball down a little bit. Once you get outside, you're going to be one step ahead and quicker than everybody else."

"Each time I play outdoors now, (foot skills are) a little bit better."

Indoor soccer gave Emily Fox, a Franklin senior, an opportunity to play during the winter. The extra work obviously paid off.

Fox joined an indoor league at Indy Indoor at the urging of Grizzly Cubs coaches. She finished her high school career in the fall as Franklin's all-time leading goal scorer.

Prior to her final varsity season, Fox played for the Dynamo 88 club team. Last month, she was a guest player on the Cincinnati United Premier team at the Disney Soccer Showcase in Florida.

Fox, 17, likes the indoor version because it's faster than outdoor soccer.

"It's a shorter field, and you get to use the walls when you play. I like that," Fox said. "It makes passing easier because you can hit (the ball) off the wall to other players. It helps you with your foot skills."

Local high school soccer coaches urge players to compete

"I like the fact I'm getting exercise and doing a sport I like."

Gary Gokey
51-year-old Greenwood resident on playing soccer indoors

He switched to goalkeeper seven years ago after starting out as a fullback. He had some back problems and wanted a more limited role.

Although the transition was a small adjustment, he said he benefits from the smaller goals of the indoor game.

"I like defense," Gokey said. "I've always been that way. Having the ability to stop somebody from scoring makes you feel good. Goalie is a tough position for somebody to play. You're always getting shot at."

"You can't take it personally if you get scored on. That's just the nature of the game."

But Gokey doesn't have too much trouble making saves, even if the balls are deflected off the wall.

"The corners are curved," he said. "There's not a lot of possibility of getting an angled shot off a rounded corner."

"You're more likely to get a deflection goal than one coming off the wall."

As goalkeeper, Gokey does a fraction of the running of the other position players. But he said he still gets enough exercise. He occasionally substitutes for other teams if they're short a player and he's free later that night.

He admits he doesn't practice and mainly gets his exercise during games.

"Some players on some teams are more religious about physical activity," Gokey said. "But most of us show up Tuesdays for our games."

indoors during the winter.

Franklin boys varsity coach Erik Kimbler understands soccer is only a secondary sport for some Cubs players. Some focus on basketball or baseball as their primary sport. But he said if they're not playing a winter sport, they should be playing indoor soccer.

"From a coaching standpoint, I want them to play because it keeps a ball on their foot," Kimbler said. "That's always a good thing. It can help with individual skills and is a lot of fun. Soccer should be fun. It's a game."

"Add those three things together, and I highly encourage indoor soccer for all of my guys."

Center Grove boys soccer coach Phil Orlando encourages the Trojans to play indoors, too, so long as they can play at least twice a week.

Anything less provides no real benefit, Orlando said.

"If you're doing it once a week, you're not getting much out of it," Orlando said. "The game is 40 minutes long. You're on the field for 20 minutes and running up and down the field for 18 minutes."

"You only touch the ball for two minutes."

If nothing else, Orlando recommends that players participate for conditioning purposes. Training indoors helps develop speed and keeps players in shape.

"Indoor soccer is mainly about fun," Orlando said. "I would rather have them train and do footwork. But it's not as much fun as playing with the guys."

• Colts

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

Much of that hot start had to do with the growth of the defense, which came through continuity.

"That's really why we were able to play so well is because we didn't have injuries at the beginning of the year," linebacker Gary Brackett said. "It almost became a routine with those same guys in there, and now we're getting that back."

Brackett said getting back June, Reagor and Mathis, along with Sanders and eventually tackle Corey Simon, should re-solidify a defense that looked much shakier in its final three games than the first 13.

"Communication is so key on defense, and that changes when different guys are in," he said. "If one guy's not on the same page, it's a touchdown, where the offense might be able to get away with one guy not making his play."

"You kind of get comfortable with everybody and know what each other is thinking or doing at all times on the field."

Dungy said consistency in the secondary was a big key to Indianapolis' overall defensive improvement.

Cornerback Nick Harper was inactive one game, and Sanders missed the final two games with an injury. Otherwise, the only time the starting four missed a game was when safety Mike Doss sat out the season opener due to league suspension.

Cornerback Jason David hasn't missed a game all year, and rookie nickel back Marlin



Indianapolis Colts defensive end Raheem Brock celebrates after an Arizona Cardinals touchdown was overturned on a booth challenge during the Colts' 17-13 win Sunday in Indianapolis. AP PHOTO

Jackson's only inactive game was the first of the year.

"Just having that same group in there was something we haven't had since I've been here week in and week out," Dungy said.

Likewise, up front, Brock has had to play alongside a crew of free agents and rookies much of the final two weeks of the season with Reagor, Mathis and Simon all battling injuries, and he said he relishes the chance to get those teammates back in the lineup.

"It's nice having the rotation back in there like we usually do," Brock said. "We need to get some work in and some conditioning with some of the guys who have been out two or three weeks."

Dungy said that he thought the defense, even with the missing starters, hit as well in Sunday's victory against Arizona as any game this year.

"We're playing well enough to win," he said. "(Wednesday) in practice, the defense was sharper than the offense."

Vikings interested in Caldwell

Jim Caldwell could be the first in a handful of Indianapolis Colts assistants whose names emerge for potential promotions around the NFL as teams that didn't make the playoffs begin to reshuffle their staffs.

Caldwell was mentioned in a St. Paul Pioneer Press report Wednesday as a potential candidate for the Minnesota Vikings head coaching opening.

Caldwell, 50, is the Colts' assistant head coach and quarterbacks coach and led the team during head coach Dungy's week-long absence last week while handling the apparent suicide of his 18-year-old son, James.

The Pioneer Press listed Caldwell among seven potential candidates for the job. Philadelphia offensive coordinator Brad Childress and Vikings defensive coordinator Ted Cottrell already have had interviews for the job.

But The Minneapolis Star Tribune didn't list Caldwell's name among six potential candidates it singled out in its Wednesday story.

Caldwell could not be reached for comment Wednesday, and Dungy would not say whether the Vikings had interest in his top aide.

"We'll let other teams that want to interview our guys comment on that," Dungy said after Wednesday's practice. "That's how we're going to handle it."

However, Caldwell and defensive coordinator Ron Meeks were mentioned specifically by Dungy as coaches deserving looks for promotions from other teams.

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Batter Dipped Alaskan Pollock	Stuffed Pork Loin with Sage Dressing	Turkey Pot Pie	JB's Fried Chicken	Beef or Turkey Manhattan	Turkey Au Jus	Fried Shrimp
JB's Fried Chicken	FF Shrimp	Meat Loaf w/Tomato Sauce	Carved Roast Beef	Turkey Pot Pie	Turkey Pot Pie	Baked Cod
Chicken and Noodles	Turkey Au Jus	Carved Turkey Breast	Carved Turkey Breast	Turkey Tetrazzini	Turkey Pot Pie	Fried Haddock Almondine
Carved Roast Beef	Turkey Pot Pie	FF Shrimp	FF Shrimp	8oz. Ribeye Steaks and Sautéed Mushrooms	Meat Loaf w/Tomato Sauce	Beef Au Jus
Carved Turkey Breast	Meat Loaf w/Tomato Sauce	Rib-eye Steak	Meat Loaf w/Tomato Sauce	JB's Fried Chicken	Carved Turkey Breast	JB's Fried Chicken
FF Shrimp	Carved Turkey Breast	Beef or Turkey Manhattan	Rib-eye Steak	Carved Roast Beef	FF Shrimp	Meat Loaf w/Tomato Sauce
Beef or Turkey Manhattan	Rib-eye Steak	Italian Lasagna	Beef or Turkey Manhattan	Turkey Pot Pie	Beef Stroganoff over Buttered Egg Noodles	Carved Turkey Breast
Beef/Chicken Thigh Combo	Beef or Turkey Manhattan	Fried Biscuit Breaed Perch	Beef/Chicken Thigh Combo	Meat Loaf w/Tomato Sauce	Beef or Turkey Manhattan	FF Shrimp
Meat Loaf w/Tomato Sauce	Beef/Chicken Thigh Combo	Reuben Sandwiches	Chopped Steak with Cheese, Bacon and Onions	Country Fried Steak	Beef or Turkey Manhattan	Rib-eye Steak
Turkey Au Jus	JB's Fried Chicken	Carved Roast Beef	Carved Turkey Breast	Carved Turkey Breast	Baked Tilapia	Carved Roast Beef
		Turkey Au Jus	Veal Parmesan	Rib-eye Steak	Beef/Chicken Thigh Combo	Turkey Pot Pie
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