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Williams shines as DB for Pokes

IRVING (AP) — On a team that's had little success, Robert Williams may be the Dallas Cowboys' success story of the year.

The second-year free agent has become the starter at right cornerback and his play against the Phoenix Cardinals on Sunday drew high praise from Dallas Coach Tom Landry.

"I'm just so pleased with Williams," Landry said. "He is one of our bright spots. He has great speed and is able to finish a play. We've got something special for the future in Robert Williams."

Williams limited the Cardinals' explosive wide receiver, Roy Green, to only one catch in the 16-10 loss. Green had averaged at least one touchdown pass a game against Dallas in previous meetings.

On two occasions, Williams made spectacular leaps to bat away long passes intended for Green.

"That kid is a good defensive back," Green said. "He's got a lot of promise."

Landry said, "When you go up against a Roy Green you find out pretty quick whether you can play. Williams can play. I guess he should be green at the position but he just keeps making good plays."

Williams' performance and an injury

to Mike Downs have encouraged Landry to temporarily move Ron Francis to safety.

Francis, a No. 1 draft pick in 1987 as a cornerback, worked at free safety this week in practice.

Francis suffered a dislocated shoulder in summer camp and lost his job to Williams.

Ironically, both played on the same team at Baylor.

Williams was a running back and at one time was a backup cornerback to Francis.

Downs has been bothered with a pulled groin muscle.

"One reason we will move Francis to free safety is to see how he will do," Landry said. "He could play some there against the Giants."

Williams said he's just glad to be a part of the team.

"When I was a running back at Baylor I never thought I'd be starting at cornerback in the NFL," he said. "Of course, Ron and I are good friends. Maybe some day we'll be playing in the secondary at the same time."

Williams got invaluable experience as a starter during the NFL strike replacement games in 1987.

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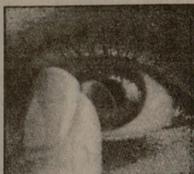
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Simonini

(Continued from page 11)

fourth down and two from the A&M two yard line, Wesson handed off to Morris, who headed for the end zone.

Only he never got there, as the Maroon-shirted marauders met him at the point of attack, led, of course, by their spiritual leader.

"I shot the gap, split the halfback and fullback, and I felt Morris around the ankles," Simonini said after the game. "Three dudes, I don't know who they were, but they were hitting Morris from behind me, and all of a sudden we were going backward."

An unusual aspect of the game was the fact that though Shipman was injured in the game, the sporadic Aggie offense continued to purr along behind the leadership of senior Mike Jay.

Jay directed two second-half touchdowns and played admirably until suffering a back injury in the second quarter against Texas two games later.

Following the game, Bellard told the assembled media that watching fumbles be returned for touchdowns was getting to be common place.

"Until last year I had never seen that in all my years of coaching," Bellard said. "Last year it happened five times,

"My highest and lowest point at A&M came one week apart. Beating Texas was something we hadn't done previously. . . . But then we went to Arkansas and lost. I think if we had scored first, we would have blown them out, but we didn't."

Ed Simonini

three against us and two for us. This year's been all in our favor, and we hope it stays that way."

Indeed, the previous week, Hayes had provided the winning touchdown after intercepting a pitchout and going 77 yards for the score (and most of the way with the ball held high above his head in his right hand in the rain).

A&M continued its winning ways, defeating Rice 33-14 and Texas 20-10 before falling to Arkansas 31-6 in a game that cost them the undisputed Southwest Conference championship and a berth in the Cotton Bowl.

"My highest and lowest point at A&M came one week apart," Simonini said. "Beating Texas was something we hadn't done previously. Earl Campbell didn't have a very good day (15 carries, 40 yards), and we held their offense pretty well."

"But then we went to Arkansas and lost. I think if we had scored first, we would have blown them out, but we didn't. They hit a long pass right before the half for a touchdown."

On their way to the dressing room, the Aggies were verbally accosted by the overly-exuberant Arkansas crowd. Two Porker fans leaned over the rail to get closer to Simonini, who didn't back down.

Legend has it that the youngster went to the dressing room and threatened to whip any player that didn't play his best in the second half.

"I don't know about that," he replied. "A lot of things get said in the heat of a game. All I remember is that I wasn't in a very good mood."

Bereft of their long-awaited Cotton Bowl berth, the Aggies sadly marched to Memphis, Tennessee, where USC ended Bellard's initial-recruiting-crop's careers with a 20-0 defeat.

Nonetheless, Simonini retains many fond - and proud - memories from his A&M career, not the least of which is that the Ags' record improved each season he was there.

"We started off in last place (3-8 in 1972) but progressed steadily to 10-2 and tied for the SWC title with Texas and Arkansas," he noted. "When Pat or Jackie (Williams, the free safety) and I talk about it, we remember that we came here

when A&M had been down a long time, but we left with 10 wins and a part of a championship."

In his 45-game career, the last 41 of which were starting assignments, Simonini garnered an incredible 425 tackles (123 in 1973 and 115 in 1975). All this when offenses tried to avoid him for the last three years of his career.

He was named SWC Freshman of the Year in 1972, SWC Defensive Player of the Year in 1973 AND 1975, second-team All-America in 1973-74 and first team All-America in 1975.

Additional honors included being a Lombardi Trophy finalist in 1975, team co-captain in 1973 and 1975 and a member of the 1975 SWC Academic Honor Team.

But the one thing that separates Simonini from the other 184 Aggies who have been named to the All-SWC first team is that he earned the honor FOUR times.

Only four other players have even been so honored three times, and the last one was Joel Hunt (1925-26-27).

None of the honors surprised Bellard, who in 1981 noted, "Ed never had a bad practice or game in four years at A&M. He was an outstanding, intense player for us. His main attribute was that he's a fighting son-of-a-gun who never gave up regardless of the score."

Melvin Robertson, who was A&M's defensive coordinator from 1972-78, echoed Bellard's sentiments, adding, "Ed was the catalyst of our defensive football team. He was the best kind of a leader because he led us ON the field. He's just a natural football player and had natural instinct."

Of the six freshman that were included in the varsity squad that played Wichita State in 1972, the first game of Bellard's tenure, only Simonini played on the defensive side of the ball.

His first start was in the Aggies' opening SWC game against Texas Tech at Kyle Field, something that he easily recalled 16 years later.

"I had no idea what to expect when I got to A&M," he said. "Since I was from Nevada, I didn't know any of the other players, plus you always doubt your ability."

"Suddenly I was a starter in a close

"Ed never had a bad practice or game in four years at A&M. He was an outstanding, intense player for us. His main attribute was that he's a fighting son-of-a-gun who never gave up regardless of the score."

Emory Bellard
 former A&M coach

SWC game and experienced the normal excitement that any freshman has when put in such a position. Things kind of exploded out there."

Tech won 17-14, scoring the winning touchdown on a drive prolonged by an accidental face mask penalty on Simonini.

"Their quarterback (Joe Barnes) put a move on me and instead of grabbing his shoulder pads, I got part of his face mask," he said. "If the rules then were as they are now, it would have only been a five-yard penalty. But they got a first down and went on to win the game."

Simonini thrilled Aggie fans everywhere, whether they attended the games or listened or watched them on television, because he had the rare combination of good talent, great desire and an indomitable will to succeed regardless of the situation or opponent.

He entered the Aggie Hall of Honor in 1982 and has been joined by teammates Thomas, TenNapel and Bubba Bean.

But those of us who were fortunate to watch him play in person will always remember what a fiery leader he was for Texas A&M.

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