

Tech RB Williams out for season

LUBBOCK, (AP) — Ricky Williams, the key to the Texas Tech offense, aggravated a knee sprain during practice and is out for the rest of the season.



WILLIAMS

Tech doctors said yesterday that surgery would be scheduled later this week. Team personnel would not say whether the sprain of his left knee will end his career. "It's gut wrenching, no doubt," coach Spike Dykes said. "The worst thing about athletics is injuries, because these kids put their whole life into it, and it can be taken away in an instant. It breaks my heart to see something like that happen to good people."

North Texas, in disarray. It also dims Williams' chances of breaking the NCAA Division I-A rushing record set by Texas' Ricky Williams last year.

Williams had played every game at Tech (1-2) the past two seasons, rushing for 1,582 yards and 13 touchdowns last year. The school had set up a Website to chart his progress this season called "Heisman Chase."

"We couldn't have more hope or optimism about a player and his potential," Dykes said.

Williams had missed the team's last two games after injuring the knee in the opener against Arizona State, and Dykes had listed the running back as a "maybe" for Saturday's game against No. 5 Texas A&M. During practice Tuesday, Williams aggravated the injury while running in a no-contact exercise.

"He just faltered and went down," said tight end Kyle Allamon, who saw a tape of the practice. "There wasn't any hit or contact — He just put too much pressure on

the knee."

"We are just going to have to play harder," offensive lineman Curtis Lowery said. "We can't get too upset about losing one person. He isn't the whole team, he's just a good part of it. If we just go out there and give up, then we might as well not go out there at all."

The decision to put Williams back on the field seems to have been prompted by Williams' own competitive spirit.

James Easterling, one of Williams' backups, said that Williams was itching to get on the field for the last several days.

"Ricky Williams is not a quitter," Easterling said. "He wanted to get back out there as soon as possible and the coaches liked that. But sometimes you just have to sit out until you're completely 100 percent well. With a knee injury, you can't try to come back too soon."

Players did not want to criticize coaches or players for putting the running back on the field during practice. "Ricky knows Ricky," Allamon

said. "He knows his limits and knows what he can do. It was mainly his decision, and you can't really second guess yourself."

Now Tech will have to replace a crucial part of its offense, which was built almost entirely around Williams.

"It's probably going to be like we've done it in the past," running back coach Jack Tayrien said. "We'll play it by committee and go with the hot hand."

The committee will consist of Shaud Williams, a freshman who has posted 210 yards since Williams' injury, and Easterling, who has 198 yards rushing. Also helping will be Ricky Hunter, who has 71 yards rushing this season.

Tech's prospects for this weekend don't look good.

A&M has the nation's top-ranked defense and allowed just 68 yards and one touchdown against Louisiana Tech, Tulsa and Southern Mississippi. Tech must also contend with No. 15 Texas and No. 23 Oklahoma this season.

Prime Time' returns to lineup for Cowboys

IRVING, (AP) — He makes quarterbacks ignore half the field, forces punters to think twice about giving him something to return and leads the postgame prayer.

Deion Sanders will be doing it all again starting Sunday when Dallas plays Arizona.

But it remains to be seen whether Sanders can live up to his All-Pro best five months after toe surgery and nine months since his last meaningful game. Sanders hopes Cardinals quarterback Jake Plummer is willing to find out the hard way.

"I'm laying before the Lord saying, 'Lord, please let Jake throw this ball to me,' because I've got a new holy ghost dance I'm going to give you guys out there on that field," Sanders said. Sanders sprained his left big toe early in a Nov. 15 game in Arizona. He missed five games, then returned for a Jan. 2 playoff game also against the Cardinals.

Sanders played in the Pro Bowl, then hoped the pain would go away in the offseason. It didn't, so he underwent surgery in April. He began practicing earlier this month and finally feels ready to go.

There's always a highlight waiting to happen when Sanders is on the field. He's one of the handful of guys around the league you can't

take your eyes off because he's capable of doing something exciting on any play.

And Sanders loves to entertain, whether it's taunting opponents by holding out the ball, high-stepping down the sidelines or doing one of his victory dances.

As much as Sanders' antics annoy oppo-

"I've got a new holy ghost dance I'm going to give you guys out there on the field."

— DEION SANDERS
DALLAS CORNERBACK



nents, his ability can hurt even more.

He had five interceptions last year, his most in four years. That's even more impressive considering he only played nine full games and teams usually tried to avoid throwing to his side.

"Do you think they just woke up in the morning and said, 'well, we ain't going to throw

at Deion?' No, no. It got that way for a reason," he said.

Sanders also led the NFL last season with an average of 15.6 yards per punt return. Sanders took six kicks at least 30 yards, reaching the end zone twice.

"Even if I'm not tested on defense, they have to punt," Sanders said. Safety George Teague said he expects teams to make Sanders prove he's 100 percent healthy.

"Everybody is going to want to know how well his toe is," Teague said. "I think the first time he goes out there and snags one of those outs or double moves or whatever they try to give him, then they'll all be back to the reality that it's the same old Deion."

Although the Cowboys are 2-0 without Sanders, their secondary has allowed an NFL-worst 304 yards passing per game. Kevin Mathis and Charlie Williams have given up 11 plays of 20 yards or more, including touchdowns of 41, 45 and 50 yards.

Dallas did not change its scheme to compensate for Sanders' absence, which may have been part of the problem. But the flip side is the Cowboys do not have to switch back now that Sanders is in.

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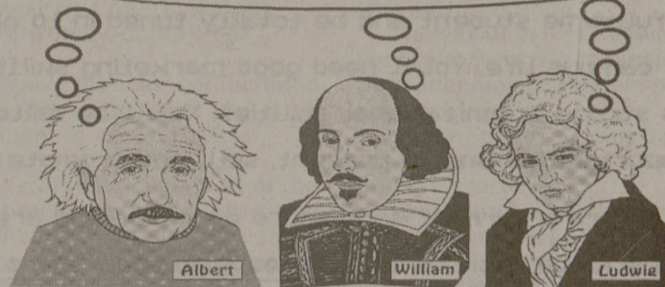
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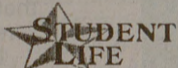
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