

B A L T I M O R E
RAVENS

Feature Clips



Week 6
Rams vs. Ravens



Table of Contents

• Teddye Buchanan.....	1-6
• Kyle Hamilton	7-8
• Derrick Henry	9-16
• Jake Hummel	17
• Lamar Jackson	18-26
• Travis Jones.....	27-29
• Tyler Loop	30-35
• Reuben Lowery III.....	36-37
• Rookie Free Agents.....	38-39
• Roquan Smith	40
• Ronnie Stanley.....	41-44
• Malaki Starks.....	45-50
• LaJohntay Wester	51-52
• Nate Wiggins.....	53-54

Teddy Buchanan Joins Rare Company As Day 3 Pick To Instant Starter

[BALTIMORERAVENS.COM](https://www.baltimoreravens.com) | SEPTEMBER 18, 2025 | CLIFF BROWN

Two years ago, Teddy Buchanan didn't picture himself starting as a rookie for the Ravens.

A two-star prospect coming out of high school, he was playing at Cal-Davis, a school that has produced just one NFL draft pick since 2003. Even last year, after transferring to Cal, Buchanan couldn't take an NFL future for granted.

Now he's playing next to Roquan Smith, chasing Lamar Jackson at practice, and stalking Josh Allen on "Sunday Night Football."

Buchanan knows he's risen far and fast, and he's enjoying the ride.

"Before every game I just take a moment to appreciate it, take it all in," Buchanan said after making his first NFL start in the Ravens' 41-17 victory over the Cleveland Browns. "Now that I'm here, it's all about performing and helping the team win."

Buchanan became the first Day 3 pick to start on the Ravens' defense within his first two games since 2006, when fifth-round selection Dawan Landry started at safety.

Landry made five interceptions as a rookie and remembers what it felt like joining a stacked defense that included Ed Reed, Ray Lewis, Terrell Suggs, Haloti Ngata, Trevor Pryce, Bart Scott, Chris McAlister, Adalius Thomas, and Samari Rolle.

"I was starstruck until we put on the pads," Landry said in a telephone interview. "I still remember my first padded practice. [Defensive Coordinator] Rex Ryan put his arm around me and said, 'You're practicing with the starters. Do your thing.' I held my own, and that's when I said, 'OK, I think I belong here.'"

"Those are the moments you remember. It's probably the same for Teddy. Ed Reed, all the vets, took me under their wing, treated me like a little brother. I wasn't picking up the defense that fast until they showed up, but once I could see what they did, I followed their lead. The only advice I'd give Teddy is to savor the moment, take constructive criticism, and don't make the same mistake twice. I'm sure playing with guys like 'Ro', Kyle Hamilton, and [Nnamdi] Madubuike is only helping him grow."

More starts could follow for Buchanan, who made six tackles against the Browns and played 82% of the defensive snaps, up from 34% in Week 1. It's a continuation of his rapid rise, and none of it seems too big for him.

Buchanan's draft stock went way up after he had 114 tackles and five sacks at Cal last season and made the All-ACC First Team. That put him on the Ravens' radar, and now he's a key member of their 2025 draft class. Buchanan and Trenton Simpson are sharing snaps at inside linebacker, but Buchanan's play against the Browns stood out.

"He's just playing really solid football," Head Coach John Harbaugh said. "He is in the right place doing the right things, [with] specific things that we were doing. Again, there are things he can work on and get better at, but [he] played a really good game for us."

Being in linebacker meetings with Smith has accelerated Buchanan's growth. Smith won AFC Defensive Player of the Week honors for his performance against Cleveland, and his impact goes beyond the field. He's a leader who loves dropping knowledge to younger teammates. Buchanan loves absorbing it and clearly knows how to apply it.

"'Ro' is special," Buchanan said. "It's like having a coach out there on the field, especially for a young guy like me."

"He's the quarterback of our defense, and standing right next to him, I get to hear everything he's saying, and obviously, I'm taking in whatever he says, and it's helped me a ton."

Buchanan is a late bloomer who played quarterback in high school before switching to linebacker and wasn't heavily recruited. He has grown into a 6-foot-2, 240-pound physical specimen whose physique makes Smith jokingly envious.

"Those boys (Buchanan and Simpson) are yoked up," Smith said during training camp. "I was like, 'I never looked like that.' Whatever plan they're on, I probably need to look into it."

Smith also complimented Buchanan's smarts this offseason, saying he's "well advanced for a rookie."

Playing for UC-Davis, Cal, and the Ravens in a three-year span has forced Buchanan to learn different defensive concepts. It's been challenging, but he's a fast learner who has mastered the art of processing without overthinking. He reads, reacts, and makes plays.

"Teddy, he's going to be one of the best linebackers in the game," rookie first-round pick Malaki Starks said. "I truly believe that. Just the way he goes about his business. He cares so much about the game of football. But he also has the ability to back it up."

Buchanan also understands that nothing is guaranteed. To keep playing, Buchanan needs to keep playing well. But that's the world Buchanan is used to living in.

Buchanan had long hair in college, but he cut it off at the start of his NFL career because he felt he had to earn that look. As a Day 3 pick, he knew he needed to compete from Day 1 of rookie minicamp. He's done that while drawing inspiration from the Ravens' legacy that's been built on defense. And his hair is growing back fast.

"It's a blessing, for sure, just to have that responsibility," Buchanan said. "It means a lot to me, and I take that very seriously. I know the type of pedigree that the Ravens defense – especially Ravens linebackers – have. For me, that's easy motivation to just do my best on the field."

Landry is rooting for Buchanan — a Day 3 pick from the past pulling for a Day 3 pick in the present.

"We all learn about the standard for Ravens defensive players as soon as we're drafted," Landry said. "We hear the stories as rookies, we see the pictures on the wall. Glad to see that Teddye is holding it up."

Avocado By Avocado And Rep By Rep: How Teddye Buchanan Went From 2-Star Recruit To NFL Linebacker

BALTIMORE BANNER | SEPTEMBER 9, 2025 | GIANA HAN

UC Davis cornerback Jacob Horne will never forget the moment he first saw linebacker Teddye Buchanan.

Because Buchanan was sitting in the freshman dining commons nonchalantly devouring an avocado.

"I remember he was eating avocados, whole, before it was cool," said Horne, who became one of his best friends. "I was like what is this guy doing? ... He had the pit of the avocado in his mouth. He was going crazy on it."

Over the next four years, that was a common sight: Buchanan eating one, maybe two avocados a day; Buchanan microwaving a sweet potato on a plate and eating it whole; Buchanan filling the pantry with non-processed foods only; Buchanan taking over the kitchen with their teammate Noa Masui and creating meals to fuel their football performances.

This may sound like the typical devotion you'd expect from a star athlete, but players at UC Davis tend to have more modest aspirations. Buchanan was steadfast in his devotion, though, and it propelled him all the way to the NFL. He made his debut for the Ravens on Sunday night in a searing 41-40 loss to the Bills, but his play was a bright spot. The fourth-round pick had the second-most snaps at middle linebacker (Roquan Smith played all of them) and made three solo tackles.

He never truly imagined he'd get this far, but his habits stem from a talk he was given as a young child about being the best version of himself.

Since the day his dad, Arron "Teddye" Smith, told 5-year-old Buchanan he'd have to do 50 pushups a day to be strong enough to be a football player, Buchanan has embraced the idea that his body is like an "F1 sports car" that needs the right maintenance for the best performance, as Masui described it.

By 12, Buchanan had taken the lesson from his father, as well as his mother Kim Buchanan, who's a big believer in fitness and nutrition, and made it his own. Little did Smith know how that would backfire on him.

"He's hella irritating," Smith said recently with a laugh. "Because if he sees you eating something, 'Oh, you shouldn't eat that, Dad. That's not good for you, Dad.' ... Like even when he came home the last time, I was like, 'Man, let me get a Haagen Dazs ice cream cone.' 'Dad, you don't need that. That is too many calories. Put that down.'"

As 2-star recruit with few offers, Buchanan's methodical, holistic approach to his body and his career has helped him overcome the odds. At each level, he's continued to get bigger, faster and stronger — to the point that even Pro Bowl Ravens linebacker Roquan Smith looked on with envy.

"Those boys [Buchanan and Trenton Simpson] are yoked up," Roquan Smith said. "I was like, 'I never looked like that.' Whatever plan they're on, I probably need to look into it."

Now, Buchanan's journey to become the best version of himself may lead to an important role with the Ravens.

First impressions

Everyone else showed up in basic black tees and shorts. But not Buchanan.

When the high schooler came to UC Davis' camp, he was rocking an MTV shirt.

Looking back, former UC Davis linebackers coach Isaiah Jackson wonders if someone told him to wear something that stuck out. Purposeful or not ("I don't know what I was doing, honestly," Buchanan said), it worked.

Buchanan stood out first and foremost for his football skill. But his unique attire made it a whole lot easier for Jackson to point him out among the "million kids" to head coach Dan Hawkins, who laughed at the memory. Hawkins told Jackson he could offer Buchanan if he felt good about him, to which Jackson responded "I feel great."

The offer seemed like a long shot. Despite being a two-star recruit (which bewilders his father to this day), Buchanan seemed way too good for a small program like Davis. But other schools didn't seem to see the same thing in Buchanan, who opted to join the Aggies.

When summer workouts rolled around, there Buchanan was in the dining commons and the gym. Despite COVID-19 limiting what they could do, Buchanan immediately left an impression on his new teammates.

Outside linebacker Luka Sarac thought Buchanan looked as big as the seniors — and sure enough, he was moved up out of the freshman weight-lifting group immediately.

Horne said Buchanan was the fastest on the team, making him wonder how out of shape he, as a cornerback, must be.

"I remember just being like, why did this guy slide to Davis?" said offensive lineman Miles Meynell, expressing a common sentiment. "He's good at school, nice dude, easy going, really good at football. I was like, 'What did they not see that let them do this? Who recruited bad and missed this guy?'"

As they got to know him, they learned he had been a quarterback before injuring his thumb junior year and switching positions. His father was still determined to see his son get a chance at QB — until Buchanan went out on the field as a linebacker for the first time and "blew up."

"One of my best friends that I coached with ... his name is Bill, he said, 'Well, no more quarterback,'" Smith recalled. "And I said, 'Man, shut up.'"

The position switch meant Buchanan went unnoticed by many recruiters. Buchanan's eventual position coach at Cal, Peter Sirmon, also recalled Buchanan being on the small side. And Jackson said St. Ignatius High School was not as well-recruited as other schools in the area. And of course, there was that two-star rating.

And so UC Davis benefited.

Buchanan was one of two freshmen to travel with the team. By his sophomore year, he might have been the best player on the entire roster, Meynell argued.

But it wasn't enough for Buchanan to simply be the most talented. He also had to be the hardest working — and not only on the field or in the weight room.

Jackson, the linebackers coach, was an artist and encouraged Buchanan's interest outside football. Others might argue with the concept, but at Davis, they believe well-rounded people make better football players, Hawkins said.

Jackson gave Buchanan a book called "Why We Sleep," which had Buchanan drinking cherry juice before bed and thinking about the optimal hours and environment for sleep.

"You want to have a cool room, okay?" Buchanan said. "Like, as cold as you can get it ... just kind of mimic a cave. And then you want to get the overhead lights off closer to bed. ... If I do need light, I try and make it low and red, because it kind of mimics a fire."

Buchanan was already a healthy eater. He's loved avocados for as long as he can remember, citing a children's book called "Avocado Baby" that led the little boy to being big and strong. He did clarify that he normally eats his avocados with eggs, but did not deny the story from the dining commons Horne recalls so fondly. As he moved out of the dorms and into an apartment, his nutrition took the next step.

"When I first started realizing I had to cook for myself, I had a decision to make," Buchanan said. "And I realized that I have the agency to kind of eat healthy and make my own choices and from there, I realized the power that you can have when you cook for yourself and do those type of things."

Buchanan's teammates-turned-roommates, neighbors and best friends were entertained by Buchanan's explorations — but also eager to join in.

Masui joined Buchanan in the kitchen, and the others were eager to sample their meals. The best meal they made was a chicken alfredo dish. Horne joined in with Buchanan's barefoot grounding walks, which Buchanan would sometimes take around campus with his cat.

Buchanan would basically get back from workouts and do another workout, Meynell said. Horne called him a "chronic stretcher."

"Like, we would be having a conversation, and he would be in downward dog," Horne said.

His teammates found Buchanan quirky but didn't question his methods because they made him a machine on the field.

As the only offensive player in the group, Meynell was the only one to compete against Buchanan in practice. Or, more accurately, be destroyed by Buchanan in practice. Meynell said he can't remember a single time he bested Buchanan in "any significant way." The others had the benefit of Buchanan directing them on the field and cleaning up their mistakes.

By his sophomore year, his friend group thought he could make it to the NFL. To Buchanan, it didn't seem that obvious. While it was a dream, it was not necessarily the goal. It felt like a "far reach."

"It's all about improving from where you're at," Buchanan said. "Not trying to, you know, make leaps and bounds in one day. It's just consistent steps, compound interest, things like that. That kind of worked for me my whole life."

By junior year, with NIL payments picking up and Buchanan finishing the year as a Big Sky All-Conference second-team defensive player, Buchanan's friends started to anticipate a transfer, a sentiment shared by the coaching staff.

"Towards the end of his junior year for us, we knew we had done all we could do," Jackson said.

Not going far

When Cal came out to see Buchanan as a high schooler but did not extend the offer, Smith promised them: "We'll be back."

Sure enough, when Buchanan entered the transfer portal, Cal was among his many suitors. All those who had ignored the two-star recruit now wanted the top linebacker in the portal.

Cal had been Buchanan's dream. It was also close to home. And, just as importantly, it was driving distance from Davis.

Buchanan selected Cal ahead of the spring 2024 semester, but he hadn't finished his graphic design degree at UC Davis yet. And he had promised his parents he'd graduate with his bachelor's from UC Davis. But he also wanted to get up to speed with Cal's systems.

So began Buchanan's early morning treks.

Three days a week, Buchanan's alarm would go off at 5 a.m. He'd make the two-hour drive to Cal ("I gained a lot of respect for commuters"), watch their practice or sit in their meeting, then drive back and complete another workout at UC Davis alongside his now-former teammates. All while finishing up his degree.

"That was one of the hardest things I've done," Buchanan said.

"Just a lot of moments by myself that no one necessarily saw, but that kind of gave me confidence going into that season that I had done a lot of work that other people probably didn't."

Sirmon saw him at every practice and meeting — "He didn't miss one" — but when Buchanan arrived in the fall, he still put Buchanan in with the second team. He figured even rookies in the NFL get more time on the field with their new program than Buchanan did, so he'd start him off slow.

By the end of the first day, Buchanan had already moved up with the ones. In addition to being talented and athletic enough, Buchanan already knew the system well enough to run it despite only having observed and not practiced.

When the season rolled around, the UC Davis crew got a first-hand look at how much Buchanan had grown: they were the first opponent on the schedule.

They didn't recognize him at first. His already imposing figure was even bigger.

"He also dyed his hair blonde — which is interesting," Sarac said.

"That was a shock for sure," Horne added.

Although the team went on and on about how badly they wanted to beat Buchanan, they were honestly just happy to get the chance to see him play at his new school in person.

"I'm glad we won because I couldn't imagine facing my friends after that," Buchanan said.

After they said their goodbyes following Week 1, Buchanan's friends continued to follow along closely. If they didn't have a game, his old teammates would make their way down to sit in Cal's stands, Smith recalled. And they were constantly checking the highlights.

As the season went on, they realized that Buchanan was even better than they realized. He and fellow linebacker Cade Uluave were on pace to be the leading linebacker pair in the nation. When they went up against SEC opponent Auburn, Buchanan's performance won ACC player of the week.

Biased as they are, Buchanan's teammates were convinced he could have made the NFL if he had stayed at UC Davis, maybe as an undrafted free agent or late-round pick. But after he finished the year with 114 tackles, the question was no longer if he'd make the NFL but how high he'd be drafted. For Buchanan, the "far reach" started to feel a bit closer.

"The more games I played, the more I started hearing things from whoever saying I would get a shot, and scouts talking to me a little bit here and there at practice and just starting to realize that this is becoming closer to reality," Buchanan said. "But I wouldn't have imagined I would have been a fourth-round pick."

Getting the call

When Buchanan arrived in Baltimore, he couldn't believe how green it was.

He'd pictured a city, but the Ravens practice in Owings Mills; Buchanan sends friends pictures of trees, the creek and even deer.

He has also complained bitterly about the heat to his father, who is from Virginia and had warned him: "'Dad,' he says, 'It's so damn hot.' He's like, 'The humidity!' He said, 'You were right.'"

It's the first time Buchanan has lived so far from home — and it was a very unexpected move.

Buchanan's Senior Bowl and NFL Combine performances gained him attention from teams. But the Ravens didn't seem to be one of them.

The family heard from the San Francisco 49ers, the Minnesota Vikings and the LA Chargers. On the day of the draft, the Oakland Raiders told him they were picking him. So when the phone buzzed and Baltimore was on the line, everyone thought they must have misheard "Ravens" for "Raiders."

Unfortunately for former Chargers fan Masui, "the wrong Harbaugh called."

The confusion was quickly erased with excitement. When football fans think of Baltimore, they think of defense, linebackers and special teams — a good fit for Buchanan.

Suddenly, they were all Ravens fans — and convinced Baltimore had gotten a steal.

Buchanan quickly moved across the country to begin proving himself to his new team.

Kim, Smith and Buchanan's friends got underwhelming reports from Buchanan about his own performance. No one else was remotely concerned.

"He's needed a couple of pep talks," Kim said. "He tends to be a perfectionist. So I'm like, 'Listen, you're a rookie. They're developing you. It's OK.'"

Sure enough, by training camp, Buchanan was taking reps next to Roquan Smith, a player he had previously highlighted in presentations for Jackson's positional meetings. When Roquan Smith wasn't on the field, Buchanan wore the green dot (meaning he shared play calls with the rest of the defense.)

"He's done a heck of a job," said Zach Orr, a former Ravens linebacker who now serves as defensive coordinator. "He's been physical when the pads came on."

Orr praised Buchanan's ability to adapt to different positions and looks, too. Still, Smith said, Buchanan remained unimpressed with himself.

"I watched [the stadium practice] on YouTube, and I was like, 'Man, you had a great practice,'" Smith said. "He was like, 'Dad, that was horrible.'"

"But then the next day he called me ... and was like 'Dad, I did well.'"

Roquan Smith said it's evident that Buchanan's a bit of a perfectionist — mistakes clearly "irk" him.

Buchanan said he's still figuring out what it means to be a pro and settling into his routine.

That's a common refrain from rookies, who often need to learn the work it takes off the field to keep up with the NFL schedule. However, for Buchanan, the opposite might be true.

"I think there are some things he can still [learn] — like taking a day off," Roquan Smith said. "Where you don't want to beat up your body too much because obviously playing the game of football is going to beat up your body."

So far, that holistic approach has carried him from his days as a two-star recruit all the way to the NFL, where he has impressed the player he once studied.

"I think he's prepared the right way, asks the right questions, and sees the game not like a first-year player," Roquan Smith said. "So I would definitely say, even compared to my first year, I think mentally, he's ahead of where I was."

Ravens And Kyle Hamilton Were A Perfect Match. They'll Be Together A Lot Longer, Too

THE ATHLETIC | AUGUST 28, 2025 | JEFF ZREBIEC

As Baltimore Ravens coach John Harbaugh sat across from Kyle Hamilton three years ago, he wanted to know one thing.

"What are you doing here?" Harbaugh asked Hamilton.

Harbaugh wasn't being disrespectful, and he surely knew that Hamilton was on his pre-draft visit tour that included a stop at the Ravens' Owings Mills facility. Harbaugh, though, figured it would be the one — and likely only — time Hamilton was in the building.

The Ravens do their due diligence on every draft prospect, but they thought there was no way they'd get even close to an opportunity to select Notre Dame's standout safety. They believed Hamilton was one of the best players in the 2022 draft, a legitimate and unique top-five talent who could help transform a defense with his eclectic skill set.

Those types of players aren't typically options for teams picking 14th in the draft. Except Hamilton was, and Baltimore still can't believe its good fortune.

Hamilton is a star, just as the Ravens believed he would be. And making sure he remains a Raven for the foreseeable future was one of the easiest calls general manager Eric DeCosta and company have had to make in a while, even though it came at an eye-popping cost.

With a four-year, \$100.4 million extension, which includes a whopping \$82 million in guaranteed money, the Ravens made Hamilton the highest-paid safety in NFL history, which feels both fitting and appropriate because Hamilton has spent the previous two years making a compelling case that he is the league's best at the position.

The Ravens don't think it's particularly close.

"I think the deal really does speak to how we feel about Kyle," DeCosta said after announcing the deal. "We've had a few players over the years become the highest paid at their position, and I think when you are the highest paid, that's an important distinction. I think Kyle has proven that he's going to carry that very well, and we expect him to continue to be an impact player on our defense for years to come."

The 24-year-old Hamilton, already a two-time All-Pro, does a little of everything — and does it all at a high level. He covers. He's shown an ability to take away top tight ends and match up with speedy receivers in the slot. His transition into a deep safety role last year helped change Baltimore's defensive fortunes.

He hits. Hamilton has made 188 tackles over the past two seasons, and quite a few of them have left opposing ball carriers on the ground for just a little longer. Throw a screen pass to Hamilton's side of the field at your own risk.

He blitzes. He has seven career sacks and 15 quarterback hits, and he's working on adding moves to his pass-rushing arsenal, because why not?

He takes the ball away. Hamilton has five interceptions, three forced fumbles and a fumble recovery over the past two years.

"One of the things that you love about Kyle is he's kind of a unicorn," DeCosta said. "He can do many different things. He does them all very well."

And this also shouldn't be overlooked when you analyze a deal of this magnitude. He leads on and off the field and is quite comfortable being front and center. He's become one of the most vocal Ravens in the locker room, and one of the team's most willing and cooperative players with the media and in the community.

Hamilton gets it, and he understands the responsibility that he now carries.

"It's a crazy amount of money, and I am blessed to be in the position I'm in," Hamilton said before Wednesday's practice. "But my mom always told me, 'Money just makes you more of who you already are.' So, I think it's a blessing, and I'm excited to help my family, help others with it as well. But I don't think it really changes my outlook or my perception of who I am as a person. I pride myself on that. No matter what you're talking about, whether it's money or experiences or accolades, I try to just stay the same Kyle."

Make no mistake, the Ravens are Lamar Jackson's team, and they'll continue to be. As Hamilton noted on Wednesday, Baltimore will always have a chance to lift the Lombardi Trophy while Jackson is healthy and under center. The two-time league MVP is the face of the franchise, the sporting face of the city.

With a bloated salary-cap number over the next two years, Jackson could become one of the next Ravens to get a contract extension when he's ready to return to the negotiating table. DeCosta and Harbaugh made clear that they aren't done trying to sign key players to lucrative long-term extensions, and Jackson obviously would be the priority.

But this was Hamilton's day, a culmination of contract talks that started in June and truly got serious over the past three weeks. Hamilton, who was kept well apprised of the negotiations, insists that he wasn't sweating it even if he wanted the deal done before the start of the regular season to avoid any potential distractions.

The Ravens have known since Hamilton's breakout in 2023 that they one day were going to have to make him the NFL's highest-paid safety. There was an acceptance of that because, from owner Steve Bisciotti all the way down through the organization, they believed he deserved it.

With all due respect to Roquan Smith, a terrific leader and force multiplier in his own right, and to other accomplished veterans such as Marlon Humphrey and Nnamdi Madubuike, Hamilton is the face of this defense going forward. The contract he signed Wednesday morning, which could keep him in Baltimore through at least 2030, ensures that.

He's a homegrown Raven who is seven months shy of his 25th birthday. He is charismatic, good-looking, personable, extremely smart and comfortable in just about every setting. He just happens to be extremely good at football, but he's one of those rare athletes and personalities who you can picture doing whatever he wants to and finding a way to be great at it.

He checks just about every box, on and off the field, for an organization that knows a thing or two about producing defensive stars and transformational leaders.

"Phenomenal player, phenomenal person, a great leader," DeCosta said.

As if on cue, Hamilton spent a chunk of his post-contract extension news conference talking about the brotherhood he shares with teammates, the impact Jackson had on his decision to want to stay a Raven, the philanthropic plans he has now that his future in Baltimore is secure and his one big goal as a player.

"Super Bowl, really," he said. "I think you check a lot of boxes off, hopefully, throughout your football career. Not to toot my own horn, but I feel like I've checked a good bit ever since high school, and a Super Bowl still has yet to be checked. So, that's the next one that I want to check off. All the personal accolades and stuff, that's cool. But I feel like, as a team, as an organization — I've talked to Mr. Bisciotti — and it's just a Super Bowl, and we're not trying to wait anymore."

"We want to get greedy with that. We want to do that now, as soon as possible, and stack them."

Hamilton also couldn't help but look back to his draft day about 40 months ago. Harbaugh didn't expect that Hamilton would be there at No. 14, and Hamilton didn't either. Yet, as the picks came off the board and Hamilton and his friends and family sat uncomfortably in the green room, he remained calm.

"I think back to draft night, and some people have said some things about where I was drafted, this and that, and where I could be drafted," Hamilton recalled. "At the time, I think I was the least mad out of anybody. I knew that I came to the right place."

And now, he'll be staying a while.

The Evolution Of Derrick Henry's Stiff-Arm

ESPN | SEPTEMBER 22, 2025 | JAMISON HENSLEY

Baltimore Ravens running back Derrick Henry was in his second year of Pop Warner football when he discovered the move that would strike fear into defenders over the next two decades.

At seven years old, Henry was a tall and lanky running back who saw a defender closing in for the tackle. Then, he just did it.

Henry extended his arm and shoved his opponent to the ground.

"It was just something that came natural to me," Henry said. "So, I just kept putting my arm out there, and I would go for 50 yards."

Henry's signature stiff-arm has helped him become one of the NFL's all-time great running backs and leave smudges on the reputations of the best defensive players in the league. When Henry outmuscles Pro Bowl linebackers and defensive backs, it can cause years of embarrassment, leaving more mental scars than physical ones.

If Henry gets one-on-one with a would-be tackler when the Ravens play the Detroit Lions on Monday night (8:15 p.m. ET, ESPN), he will likely unleash his stiff-arm, which might lead to another long run as well as a meme on social media.

Ravens cornerback Chidobe Awuzie remembers the time four seasons ago when he played against Henry in a Bengals-Titans playoff game and just escaped a stiff-arm.

"My life definitely flashed before me," Awuzie said. "You don't want to end up on Twitter for the wrong reasons."

Some running backs break free by juking out defenders. Others rely on spin moves. Henry has perfected this old-school tactic of using his free hand to toss would-be tacklers out of his way.

Henry has recorded 64 career stiff-arms on rushing attempts since 2017, when ESPN Research started tracking them. It's 36 more than any other player.

His ability to shed tackles has paved the way for an NFL-best 5,704 yards after contact and has prompted a teammate to question whether Henry should be allowed to continue using his stiff-arm.

"It's more of a punch," Ravens cornerback Marlon Humphrey said last season. "But if he's on my team, it's good. If it's against me, I want it to be illegal."

Henry's first stiff-arm of the year came in the season opener, when he used his left arm to deliver a quick jab to Cole Bishop that left the Buffalo Bills safety sprawling on the ground. Henry went untouched the rest of the way for a 30-yard touchdown.

But it's been a challenging season so far for Henry. He made a costly fumble in the fourth quarter of a 41-40 loss in Buffalo and was held to 23 yards rushing in Sunday's 41-17 win over the Browns, statistically his worst game in two seasons as a Raven.

Baltimore believes that when Henry gets back on track, it will create the usual predicament for defenses.

"Once you see Derrick in person, you can understand if he put those paws on you, there's going to be trouble," Ravens running backs coach Willie Taggart said. "When he showed it on film once, everybody else knows that can happen when they come up in there. So, I think sometimes there's some business decisions whether to tackle him or not."

RAVENS OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR Todd Monken first met Henry in 2009, when Monken was the wide receivers coach for the Jacksonville Jaguars and Henry was a freshman at nearby Yulee High School.

Someone told Monken that Henry was a running back.

"I'm like, 'What?,' " Monken recalled this summer. "The guy is like 14 years old. He looks like he's 28. [It was] a lot like when I first saw Adrian Peterson, when you see somebody that's just different."

Players and coaches say the reason Henry is so effective with his stiff-arms -- and why others are simply not built to do so -- is his combination of size and long arms.

Henry is listed at 252 pounds. The only other NFL running back who is currently listed at 250 pounds is C.J. Ham, who is a fullback for the Minnesota Vikings.

Henry's wingspan was measured at 80.75 inches at the NFL combine in 2016. It's the third-longest wingspan by a running back measured at the combine since 2003, when this data was first recorded.

"He's got really good timing on it, too," Ravens tight end Charlie Kolar said. "He does a really good job of redirecting a defender's momentum."

Kolar then paused and said, "And he's just really strong. Sometimes it's not that complicated."

Henry has the power to brush tacklers away. He also has the speed to run away from them to reach the end zone.

According to NFL Next Gen Stats, Henry has reached 20 miles per hour or faster 32 times since 2018, which is third only to wide receiver Tyreek Hill (75) and Saquon Barkley (36).

"You can see guys with that size, but they're not as fast," Ravens center Tyler Linderbaum said. "But you see guys with that speed, and they're not as big as him. He's kind of got a little bit of everything. He is a special player, and there's a reason why he is going to go down in history as one of the best backs to ever do it."

Ravens running back Justice Hill believes it's more than physical traits that allows Henry to excel at stiff-arms. When Hill asked Henry how he executes it, Henry replied, "Bro, I just give my all in it and put it all in there."

HENRY'S MOST FAMOUS stiff-arm came on Oct. 13, 2020, and it technically didn't count.

Henry, who was with the Tennessee Titans at the time, got to the left edge where he smacked Josh Norman in his right shoulder and sent the All-Pro cornerback flying through the air and a few feet in front of him. The play was negated by offsetting penalties, but it's long remembered by football fans. One YouTube video of the stiff-arm has 3.8 million views.

In an appearance on "The Dan Patrick Show" three months after the play, Norman said, "For me, I don't look at it from the standpoint of what people say after the fact. We can laugh. It's a joke. I mean, we like to see the oohs and the aahs and the gliss and the glams of the sport. But when you're out there, the only thing you're thinking about is getting the opponent and the ball."

A month after that throw-down of Norman, Henry delivered another impressive stiff-arm. He was looking to turn the corner against the Indianapolis Colts and got his hand under the facemask of Grover Stewart. Henry pushed the 314-pound defensive tackle to the ground.

Teammates have messed with Stewart over the years about Henry's stiff-arm. Stewart has tried to explain how he was tearing off a block and was caught off-balance by Henry.

"My dad even said to me, 'Hey, somebody said he stiff-armed you,'" Stewart said last month. "I said, 'Hey, wait a minute. Go look at the film, man.'"

Minkah Fitzpatrick, a five-time Pro Bowl safety, shares a similar experience that he would like to forget. In last season's wild-card win over the Steelers, Henry took a direct snap and then put his right hand to the side of Fitzpatrick's helmet, which sent him falling backward.

"It's not fun being on the receiving end of that," Fitzpatrick said last month. "I was more mad at myself. I knew it was coming, but I hesitated and didn't believe what I saw on film. He's a guy that likes getting one-on-one with defensive backs and embarrassing them."

Teammates can sometimes get caught in the middle of a stiff-arm. Last December, Linderbaum was looking to block an Eagles defensive back about 10 yards downfield when he felt Henry's hand on his back. Linderbaum was then launched forward and off his feet.

"I've felt the brunt of it," Linderbaum said. "That's him telling me to move faster, so I got to get going."

RAVENS COACH JOHN Harbaugh was asked how he would combat one of Henry's stiff-arms.

"As an old defensive back, I just envision myself trying to knock that thing down and hanging on for dear life," Harbaugh said.

There have been other running backs known for their stiff-arms, from Earl Campbell to Marshawn Lynch. Henry has turned it into a science.

Henry has mastered different stiff-arms for different situations. He was surprised that others have noticed this.

"It just depends on the run and the angle," Henry said. "If I got time and I can set it up, then I'm going to really throw it with power. If I'm trying to break a quick tackle and get up field, then it's more of a short arm. If I got space on a guy, I just try to give him a little stiff-arm to break the tackle and keep going down the field."

Since Henry joined the Ravens in 2024, some of his teammates have used his renowned stiff-arm. Last October, quarterback Lamar Jackson stiff-armed Bengals defensive end Sam Hubbard to buy time to throw a touchdown pass to Isaiah Likely. Then, in the wild-card win over the Steelers, Likely used the stiff-arm to slam cornerback Cameron Sutton to the ground.

Henry said he hasn't given out any advice for stiff-arms, adding, "I'm not the stiff-arm coordinator."

Henry, though, is the resident stiff-arm expert. From Pop Warner to the NFL, Henry has built a reputation of clearing his own way into the end zone and into league lore.

So, what is Henry's favorite stiff-arm?

"I always say I don't have a favorite one yet," Henry said before cracking a smile. "I'm still playing. It might be more down the line."

How High Can Derrick Henry Climb On Rushing List In 2025?

ESPN | AUGUST 30, 2025 | JAMISON HENSLEY

When Derrick Henry was growing up, the running back he loved the most wasn't the one you'd expect for the burly Baltimore Ravens star.

Henry long admired LaDainian Tomlinson, a five-time Pro Bowler for the San Diego Chargers from 2001 to '09. He had Tomlinson's jersey as well as his bobblehead. He thought Tomlinson's dark visor gave him the coolest helmet ever.

"He's the one who really inspired me," Henry said during training camp. "As I got older, I was like, 'Man, I'm not LT's size' so I have to be a different type of back."

Even though his stature (6-foot-3 and about 250 pounds) is much different than that of Tomlinson -- who typically played around 215 to 220 pounds at 5-10 -- Henry could soon be joining his childhood idol in an exclusive club. Henry needs 1,317 yards rushing to become one of the NFL's top 10 leading career rushers.

This historic run would lift Henry from his current spot at No. 19 and propel him past seven Hall of Fame running backs: Thurman Thomas (No. 16), Franco Harris (No. 15), Marcus Allen (No. 14), Edgerrin James (No. 13), Marshall Faulk (No. 12), Jim Brown (No. 11) and Tony Dorsett (No. 10).

"It'd definitely be a surreal moment for my name to be mentioned with those legends," Henry said. "I pray it happens, but I'm living in the moment every day."

Henry's 11,423 rushing yards are the most among running backs currently in the NFL, and it's not even close. Houston Texans running back Joe Mixon trails Henry by nearly 4,000 yards.

When you ask coaches about what makes Henry great, they talk about his work ethic. After he makes a mistake in practice, he's still fuming a few plays later. On the rare day when he misses an offseason practice, he's texting his coach about what he missed.

When you ask teammates about what separates Henry from others, they talk about his intensity. He brings a relentless mindset, whether he's carrying weight chains up a hill in the offseason or stiff-arming a tackler during a game.

"The way his mentality is in a game, it is actually cool to observe because you kind of see the difference between a normal guy in the league and somebody that's going to be a Hall of Famer one day," Ravens backup running back Justice Hill said. "But I'm always joking around with him. I tell him to smile and loosen up a little bit."

Teaming up with quarterback Lamar Jackson in his first season with the Ravens, Henry averaged 113 yards rushing per game, which was the second highest of his nine-year career. On that pace, he would crack the league's top 10 rushers by Baltimore's Thanksgiving game against the Cincinnati Bengals. In order to move past Eric Dickerson at No. 9, Henry would need to produce 1,837 yards, which would be the 21st-best season of all time.

As Henry climbs the NFL rushing list, the debate surrounding his place among the best running backs in league history will heat up. For Ravens coach John Harbaugh, Jim Brown is at the top. Harbaugh also mentioned Barry Sanders, Walter Payton and Dickerson.

"I think Derrick Henry is in that category," Harbaugh said. "I know he still feels like he has a ton to prove, and I want him to prove a ton."

A reason to celebrate

It may be hard to believe, but it was about this time a year ago when Henry was being asked if his best days were behind him after the Tennessee Titans let him walk in free agency. He signed a two-year, \$16 million deal to come to Baltimore.

"Let my play speak for my age," said Henry, who had recently turned 30.

Last season, Henry totaled 1,921 yards rushing (11th most in a single season) and set a career high by averaging 5.9 yards per carry. And, instead of reaching the end of his career, he reached the end zone -- a lot. His 16 touchdown runs were a Ravens record and were tied for the league lead.

Along with moving up the NFL's rushing list, Henry is ascending up the league's all-time rushing touchdown list even faster. His 106 career rushing touchdowns are tied with Brown for the sixth-most in NFL history.

For the most part, these touchdowns have ended with little celebration. Henry hands the ball to the referee and goes to the sideline.

Last season, teammates could be heard telling a miked-up Henry that he should be dancing. But Henry hasn't busted out his end zone moves since the early part of his Titans career.

"I'm old now," Henry told them. "I'm over it now."

Some of Henry's best work has come in the red zone. He has scored 86 touchdowns inside the 20-yard line, which are the third-most since 2000.

"First off, he's big; he's explosive; he's highly competitive," Ravens offensive coordinator Todd Monken said of Henry's red-zone effectiveness. "For his size, he plays with great vision and pad level, so that's exactly what you want down there -- because you're not going to be able to block everybody. You're going to have to break arm tackles. You're going to have to get some yards on your own, which he is certainly capable of."

Of the five players ahead of Henry on the rushing touchdown list, four are in the Hall of Fame: Payton, Marcus Allen, Tomlinson and Emmitt Smith. Only Adrian Peterson, who is No. 4 on the list, isn't in the Hall of Fame, and he's not eligible until 2027.

If Henry scores double-digit rushing touchdowns like he's done in each of the seven seasons since becoming a full-time starter, he would eclipse Payton for No. 5 (110 TDs) on the list and be in pursuit of Peterson's 120.

"I think his track record speaks for itself -- what he's done in Tennessee, what he's done here and what he's going to continue to do here," said wide receiver DeAndre Hopkins, who was Henry's teammate in Tennessee and now in Baltimore. "I think Derrick is obviously on track, but [he] and I, I think we're definitely present in what we're doing and not looking forward -- and that's trying to win games for the Ravens right now."

"I think everyone knows, potentially, where he could be, and I feel like he does as well."

All-time leading rusher?

Like many running backs who grew up in Florida, Henry has put Emmitt Smith on a pedestal. Henry called Smith the Michael Jordan at that position.

So, what are the chances of the running back nicknamed King Henry taking the all-time rushing crown from Smith?

"I'm not thinking that far," Henry said recently at training camp. "That's a long ways away."

At 31, Henry is 6,933 rushing yards away from Smith, who amassed an NFL record 18,355 rushing yards over 15 seasons. Given that Henry has averaged 1,269 yards rushing per year, he would need nearly six seasons to overtake Smith.

But, with a two-time NFL Most Valuable Player in Jackson lining up beside him in the backfield, Henry had a resurgent year last season because he wasn't the sole focus of defenses for the first time in his career. This could mean an accelerated path for Henry to catch Smith, who has been the NFL's all-time rusher for 23 years.

"He played a very long time. He was very effective," Henry said of Smith. "He's a Hall of Fame player and a legend at the position."

Henry then added, "So, I don't know. But, Lord willing, hopefully. So, we'll see."

Henry has shown no signs of slowing down. Last season, he rushed for the most yards by a player 30 or older, beating Tiki Barber's previous mark from 19 years ago.

When asked how long Henry can play, Ravens fullback Patrick Ricard leaned into the microphone and immediately replied: "Forever."

"I mean the way he takes care of his body, the way he loves the game and how hard he plays, I think he can play however long he wants to play," Ricard said of Henry, who estimated that he spends nearly \$250,000 a year on body maintenance. "I think it's really up to him."

In training camp, the players were talking about center Tyler Linderbaum's haircut. Henry commented that Linderbaum's style is going to be popular for 30 years.

Linderbaum joked, "And you'll probably still be playing here."

So, what does Henry say to everyone who asks him how long he plans to play?

"I tell them: 'When I feel like it's time, I'll hang it up,'" Henry said. "But right now, I don't see that anytime soon."

Can't Stop Him: At 31, Derrick Henry Shows No Sign Of Slowing Down

PRESSBOX | AUGUST 13, 2025 | BO SMOLKA

Derrick Henry took the handoff from Lamar Jackson at the Ravens' 9-yard line and blasted through a hole on the right side of the line. He got to the second level before Buffalo Bills linebackers knew what had hit them, and by the time Henry reached the 40-yard line, he had left the Bills' secondary in the dust as well.

Henry raced down the sideline with three Bills defensive backs in futile pursuit. They never caught him, and Henry's 87-yard touchdown run became the longest in Ravens history.

It isn't supposed to work this way; 30-year-old running backs aren't supposed to be as productive as they've ever been, and 250-pound, 30-year-old running backs definitely aren't supposed to leave a trio of smaller, younger defensive backs in the dust.

But Henry, now 31, is like few who have ever come before him, a dazzling combination of size and speed with, as his high school coach, Bobby Ramsay, put it, "a DNA-touched-by-God element to him."

"He's an alien," NFL Network analyst Brian Baldinger said. "He's been doing this his whole life. He was always the biggest, fastest kid on the field, and at 30-plus, whatever he is, he's still the biggest, fastest guy on the field."

Henry also has relied on a ferocious commitment to his training to retain peak physical performance after turning 30, long perceived as a fault line for NFL running backs.

In his first season in Baltimore, Henry and Jackson in the backfield together became must-see TV for fans — and a maddening combination for opposing defensive coordinators.

Now fresh off a contract extension that has him linked with the Ravens through 2027, Henry is focused on the one thing that thus far has eluded both him and Jackson: the Super Bowl.

"You're Not A Running Back"

Henry and Jackson have something else in common: Both appear to have been highly motivated by others telling them what they couldn't be. Throughout the draft process, Jackson had famously heard that his NFL future would be at a position other than quarterback. Jackson scoffed at that idea, and his two MVP awards show the folly of that evaluation.

Henry, meanwhile, had heard during his college recruiting process that at his size, his future would be at a position other than running back.

It didn't matter that Henry's statistics at Yulee High School in North Florida were the stuff of video games: 510 yards against Jacksonville's Jackson High — currently coached by Ramsay — and 482 yards and six touchdowns in a playoff game. In that game, he broke the all-time high school rushing record and finished his career with 12,124 yards. Eight times in 13 games as a senior, Henry ran for more than 300 yards.

Still, ESPN did not include him in its running back rankings for the 2013 recruiting class. He was labeled the No. 1-ranked "athlete." The top-ranked running back, incidentally, was Kelvin Taylor, the son of NFL back Fred Taylor. Kelvin Taylor went to Florida and bounced around a handful of NFL teams but never played a down in an NFL game.

"One thing I've learned, and I learned it a lot through him, is that in the evaluation of players, there's a lot of groupthink, a lot of stereotyping, a lot of lazy evaluations," Ramsay said. "You sort of look at a kid and go, 'OK, he's this height, he's this weight, the analytics say he's this position.'"

"I would always get a chuckle when people would say he was too big," Ramsey continued. "We're not talking about economy class seats on an airplane. What do you mean he's too big? I always use the Magic Johnson analogy. Was he too big to be a point guard?"

Ramsay recalled Henry listening to coaches who would tell him that he projected to some other position at the college level.

"He was always respectful," Ramsay recalled. "'Yes sir, thank you for your time.' Then that coach would leave, and Derrick would say, 'Well, cross that school off the list.'"

"If it seems like he has a chip on his shoulder, I think it really goes back to that," Ramsay said. "As he's racking up these yards and putting out all this film, more and more people are saying, 'You're not a running back.' And after a while, he really started to take it personally."

Henry remembers being steadfast about being a running back.

"I was stuck on playing running back," he said. "That's what I was focused on. I know the norm wasn't my size of running backs ... but I was determined."

Nick Saban and Alabama recruited Henry as a running back, and Henry knew that Mark Ingram had won the Heisman Trophy as an Alabama running back (in 2009). Henry ultimately committed to Alabama over Georgia and Tennessee.

As a freshman, Henry backed up T.J. Yeldon, and it was a major adjustment getting just 3.5 carries per game. By 2015, though, Henry was rampaging over college defenses much as he had at Yulee. Henry ran 395 times for 2,219 yards and 28 touchdowns — all totals that led the nation — and beat out Stanford running back Christian McCaffrey and Clemson quarterback Deshaun Watson for the Heisman Trophy.

Henry and Ingram, in fact, are the only running backs to win the Heisman since 2006.

Longtime Ravens Target

Former Ravens general manager Ozzie Newsome has an affinity for Crimson Tide players, and current general manager Eric DeCosta has long coveted Henry. Yet the Ravens had a chance to draft Henry in 2016 — several of them, in fact — and opted against it.

With their first pick in that draft, the Ravens selected tackle Ronnie Stanley at No. 6 overall. They also had the No. 36 pick, and with Henry on the board, the Ravens traded back to No. 38. Henry was still on the board when they traded back again, to No. 42, stockpiling an additional pick. With Henry still on the board at No. 42, the Ravens drafted Boise State linebacker Kamalei Correa. Henry went to the Tennessee Titans three picks later.

Then the Ravens watched from afar as Henry ran through and past defenses — including their own. Henry led the NFL in yards, carries and rushing touchdowns in both 2019 and 2020. In 2020, Henry ran for a career-high 2,027 yards, the fifth-highest total in NFL history.

DeCosta tried and failed to swing a deal for Henry before the trade deadline in 2023. When Henry became a free agent in 2024, the Ravens pounced, signing him to a two-year, \$16 million deal. At the time, Henry called it a "no-brainer" to join an offense led by Jackson and an organization positioned for a Super Bowl run.

Henry was coming off a season in which he averaged 4.17 yards a carry, the lowest of his career. He turned 30 at the end of that season, and questions about wear, tear and age predictably surfaced.

Asked at his introductory Ravens news conference what he would say to people who questioned his future production at his age, Henry said, "Tell them to keep watching."

Instead of slowing down, Henry appeared rejuvenated last year.

With defenses also focused on the singular threat of Jackson, Henry piled up 1,921 rushing yards, the second-highest total of his career and the most in a season by a back age 30 or older. (Only one other 30-year-old back, Tiki Barber in 2005, has ever rushed for 1,700 yards in a season.) Henry also ran for 16 touchdowns, a Ravens single-season record, and averaged 5.9 yards per carry, easily the highest of his career.

Henry was rewarded with a two-year, \$30 million extension, the largest deal ever for a running back over the age of 30.

No Days Off

Fresh off his extension, Henry attacked his offseason workouts with his usual ferocity.

"No days off" is a slogan coaches like to put on a T-shirt or bulletin board, but Henry lives it. He is in the gym every day, twice a day. Videos of his grueling workouts in Dallas, lifting weights or running hills with a chain dragging behind him, light up the internet each summer.

Henry's workouts have been legendary for a long time. Ramsay recalled challenging his Yulee players to push a pickup truck on the concrete track near the field. Most pushed it 50 yards or so. Henry pushed it an entire lap.

It's estimated that Henry spends nearly \$250,000 a year on his body, a regimen that includes a personal trainer, a massage therapist and a personal chef who oversees a strict, regimented diet — no fried food, no artificial sweeteners, no gluten, and during the season, no meals before 4 or 5 in the afternoon.

In a league full of off-the-chart physical specimens, "King Henry" still stands out.

"For you to be great, you've got to focus on being consistent," he said. "You've got to outwork everybody, and that's the approach I try to take every single day I wake up. Even the days you don't want to, you've got to find a way."

Asked if his training habits have changed over time, he said, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it. So I keep doing my same thing."

Teammates and coaches say what stands out most about Henry is that ferocious work ethic.

"My dad talks about 'attacking the day with an enthusiasm unknown to mankind,' and I see that in [Henry] every day," head coach John Harbaugh said. "It's what he does and the way he works at it and how hard he works to get better, how intentional he is about being the best player he can be."

Hungry And Motivated

Every carry involves the possibility of punishment inflicted on the body, but Henry doesn't get hit when he outruns everyone, and he can give as good as he gets when he squares his shoulders and plows up field. His physicality also includes one of the angriest stiff-arms in the game.

Ravens fans watched with glee as Henry stiff-armed Pittsburgh Steelers safety Minkah Fitzpatrick to the ground last year, but the Ravens have been on the receiving end as well: Henry twice shoved safety Earl Thomas aside like an inconvenience on a long run during the 2019 playoffs.

"He obviously has tremendous upper-body strength and long arms," Ramsay said, "and he realized pretty quickly, 'Hey, this is something I can use and be pretty effective.'"

But hits are hits, and they pile up for a player who has been a workhorse since high school.

Back then, Ramsay was publicly ripped for overworking Henry, who averaged 35 carries a game as a senior and topped 40 carries in six games that season. That included a whopping 57 carries for 485 yards and six touchdowns in a playoff win.

Ramsay dismisses the criticism and says whenever Henry was on the field, he wanted the ball.

"He never got a carry that he didn't want," Ramsay said.

Henry's workload eased his first two years at Alabama, but he led the country with 395 carries in 2015. Did all those miles on the tires give the Ravens and other teams pause? Is that why this surefire Hall of Famer dropped to the 45th pick in the draft?

In the NFL, he led the league in carries four times in a span of five years with Tennessee — he missed half the season the other year. Last season, Henry carried 325 times, the second-highest total in the league and the second-highest total in Ravens history. (Jamal Lewis holds the record with 387 in 2003.)

Henry begins this season ranked 32nd in career carries with 2,355. Emmitt Smith holds the record with 4,409, including 1,166 after age 30.

Will all that wear and tear finally take a toll? Will this be the year Henry reaches the so-called age-30 cliff?

"Well, I'm 31 now, so the 'age 30' thing should be gone now," Henry said. "I don't worry about it too much."

Frank Gore is the standard-bearer for older backs. He tallied 6,033 yards after age 30, including a 1,000-yard season with Indianapolis at age 33. Gore didn't miss a game between ages 30 and 34 and played until he was 37.

John Riggins had 1,000-yard seasons at age 34 and age 35, but he sat out his age 31-season in a contract dispute, and by age 33 he had 2,038 career carries — 317 fewer than Henry has entering this season.

Curtis Martin led the league in rushing at age 31 with 1,697 yards, but he played just one more season, when his yardage dropped by more than half, to 735.

Henry doesn't seem particularly concerned with the long view, or what his career might look like at 34 or 35. He knows how last season ended, with a divisional round loss at Buffalo, and he seems determined to change that.

"Last year, it was a lot of fun," Henry said. "We accomplished winning the division, got into the playoffs, but ultimately, we came up short. So it's a lot of fuel that should go into this season. Guys should be motivated, they are motivated, and hungry to get ready for the next one."

Ravens LB Jake Hummel: 'I Take A Lot Of Pride In Special Teams'

PRESSBOX | SEPTEMBER 26, 2025 | NINA WILSON

Linebacker and special teamer Jake Hummel changed the trajectory of the Ravens' game against the Browns on Sept. 14 by blocking a punt ... with his newborn son Hudson on hand for the first time.

Hudson is too young to remember or even watch the game, but Hummel and his family decided to take many pictures and remember the moment, even saving the ball from the blocked punt.

"It was just a really cool day," Hummel said on Glenn Clark Radio Sept. 16. "Good way to start the year."

With the Ravens ahead, 3-0, early in the second quarter, Hummel blocked a punt by Corey Bojorquez to give Baltimore's offense a short field. Two plays later, the Ravens scored a touchdown to go up 10-0 en route to a 41-17 win.

"I'm happy to help the team win any way I can," Hummel said. "That's the kind of mentality I had, especially starting last year, just going into each game, preparing, finding a way that I could impact that game."

This is the 26-year-old's first season with the Ravens. Hummel played for the Rams for three seasons until he signed a one-year contract with the Ravens in the offseason. He played in every game for the Los Angeles Rams in 2024 and made eight special teams tackles.

"My ability to block that punt draws more attention to me and opens up some lanes for some of the other guys later on this year to have a chance," Hummel said.

Hummel said he saw a chance for a blocked punt after a missed opportunity early in the game. After talking to special teams coordinator Chris Horton, they decided to make an adjustment.

"It's what got me into the NFL in the first place," Hummel said of special teams. "When I was brought into the Rams as an undrafted rookie, that's why they brought me in. So I take a lot of pride in special teams."

The 6-foot-1, 235-pound linebacker has been a productive special teamer since his time at Iowa State. Hummel knew the fastest way to get on the field as a freshman was to prove to his coaches that he could play special teams.

"We had a good special teams coordinator, Joe Houston, who let you know, he kind of emphasized that to us freshmen. I was one of the guys who listened," Hummel said about starting out in college. "He pleaded my case to the head coaching staff to get me on the field early, even if it meant limited reps on special teams."

Hummel recognized that special teams would get his foot in the door to prove his worth as a football player. He earns new teams' trust by his plays on special teams. He often gives advice to undrafted players who have never played any special teams to help them learn faster.

"A lot of times those guys will come to me asking for tips and just different ways I can help them to quickly get better at teams," Hummel said, "because they understand that that's how they also can get on the field and how they can earn their spot on a team even as an undrafted guy."

Lamar Jackson Focusing On Making This The Year

ESPN | SEPTEMBER 2, 2025 | JAMISON HENSLEY

It was midway through Baltimore Ravens training camp when quarterback Lamar Jackson rolled to his right and saw wide receiver Keith Kirkwood open along the sideline for a surefire big play. But Jackson's pass sailed wildly over Kirkwood.

Without hesitation, Jackson, a two-time NFL Most Valuable Player, dropped face-first to the ground and did 10 pushups. Coaches and teammates say this is a glimpse of how Jackson is constantly chasing perfection and how this underscores his bold statement on the first day of training camp.

When asked if there was another level to his game, Jackson replied, "Yes. I'm only 28. I'm really just getting started."

As the Ravens prepare to open the season Sunday night at the Buffalo Bills (8:20 p.m. ET, NBC), Jackson is at a point in his career where he's entering his prime while dealing with the same questions. He believes there is more to his game, but he's facing increasing pressure to follow a spectacular regular season with an equally remarkable postseason.

"We've had two back-to-back years of some really, really tough losses that ended the season in a way that we don't want to end the season," Ravens quarterbacks coach Tee Martin said. "If you know Lamar, like I know him competitively, he's probably thought about that every day [and] every minute during the offseason. So, that comes with a sense of urgency and a sense of purpose."

Jackson's latest playoff disappointment -- a 27-25 divisional round loss in Buffalo -- came after he produced one of the best seasons by a quarterback in NFL history. He became the first player to throw more than 40 touchdown passes and fewer than five interceptions in the same season.

Jackson proved again that he's the league's most explosive playmaker in the league, leading the NFL in yards per pass attempt (8.8) and yards per carry (6.6).

After watching Jackson deliver this impressive season, Ravens tight end Mark Andrews said jokingly that it might be 10 years until everyone sees Jackson at his peak.

"Every year, he finds a new way to get better and better," Andrews said. "It's almost like the game has just continually slowed down for him. And he's already such a fast, dynamic player and his playmaking, the way he reads the game, he's just getting more and more comfortable. I love the way that he's just going about his business and continues to move that bar higher and higher, which is already incredible."

When looking at the careers of the previous three multiple NFL MVP winners who are either retired or nearing the end of their careers, Jackson could be -- as he said -- just getting started.

All six of the seasons Peyton Manning totaled a passer rating over 100 came when he was 28 or older. All eight of Tom Brady's seasons with over 4,500 passing yards came when he was 30 or older. Aaron Rodgers' seven highest touchdown pass seasons came when he was 28 or older.

Jackson could be approaching that same cusp after reaching new heights as a passer last season. He produced a career-best 4,172 passing yards, which were 494 more than any of his previous six seasons. He also set personal marks for most touchdown passes (41) and fewest interceptions (four) in a season.

"I think Lamar kind of makes his own trajectory," left tackle Ronnie Stanley said. "He's going to do things week-in and week-out that we haven't seen before, so it's always surprising the new things he can do and accomplish. After playing with him for eight years, I'm not surprised by him always pushing the limits and breaking new boundaries."

WHEN ANALYZING HOW Jackson can further ratchet up his game, the knee-jerk reaction is to focus on his passing. For those close to Jackson, it's more about what is happening after he throws the ball.

On the practice field, Jackson talks to his wide receivers about what went right and wrong on the previous plays. He has even pulled wide receivers coach Greg Lewis and offensive line coach George Warhop to talk off to the side.

"He's more vocal than he ever has been about what he wants from us, even to the staff and the offensive linemen," wide receiver Rashod Bateman said. "He's definitely pushing the agenda of just staying hungry and being competitive."

Jackson has never been outspoken. He has never been the type of player to deliver a great motivational speech. His style has always been leading by example.

But coaches have pushed him to talk to teammates more one-on-one.

"Mentally, he's in a different place," Martin said. "It's his third year in the system. He's playing with a lot of the same players. Having the [good] communication of the guys who he has to communicate with the most, Bateman, Zay [Flowers], all the guys, Mark. It's time to take not only himself to the next level, but the whole unit."

During training camp, Jackson hasn't hidden his frustration when the offense struggles. After repeated false starts by the offensive line, Jackson spiked the ball in anger. Then, after a fumbled exchange with a running back, Jackson punted the ball high in the air.

Jackson's next step has been relaying to his teammates what he expects from them. He's in, perhaps, the best comfort zone of his career regarding his supporting cast. Jackson lost one starter from the NFL's No. 1 offense of 2024, and he's entering his third season in offensive coordinator Todd Monken's system.

Monken believes Jackson has improved his command at the line of scrimmage, consistently getting the players on the same page.

"Once he takes over that control, that's a good thing for the Ravens," Monken said. "The more he does that, the more he embraces that -- which he does a lot of it -- that's really good because the elite players like him want that. They want the ability to do that and then you live with the end result. And usually with him, it's pretty special."

DURING A TWO-MINUTE drill this summer, Jackson dropped back to pass and didn't see anyone open. He tucked the ball under his arm and took off.

While Ravens defenders can't tackle quarterbacks in training camp, no one was even close to Jackson, who punctuated his 75-yard touchdown run with a front flip into the end zone.

"I feel [how] I did my rookie year, speed-wise [and] mobility-wise," Jackson said.

The long-standing narrative with Jackson is that he will eventually have to change his style of play when he loses his speed. But, after 1,014 career rushing attempts, he doesn't appear to be slowing down.

In the Ravens' 31-2 win at Houston on Christmas Day last season, Jackson reached a career-best top speed of 21.25 miles per hour on a 48-yard touchdown run. He later joked that he was jogging.

Qadry Ismail, the No. 1 wide receiver for the Ravens' 2000 Super Bowl team who now specializes in sports performance training, said Jackson can maintain that speed as long as he doesn't bulk up like he did in 2022 and continues to avoid the big hits.

"I can see it where another eight, nine years, and you'd be like, 'Wow, how does he do that?'" Ismail said. "Well, I think it's because of how he can go about his offseason training."

Jackson has transitioned from a run-first quarterback to a pass-first one over the years. He went from averaging over 10 rushing attempts per game in each of his first four seasons to totaling the 12th-most passing attempts in the NFL (931) over the past two seasons.

But Jackson remains one of the most dangerous mobile quarterbacks in the league. After surpassing Michael Vick last season for most all-time rushing yards by a quarterback, Jackson finished with 915 yards on the ground in 2024.

Can he go against the grain again? The most rushing yards by a quarterback 28 or older is 754 by Cam Newton in 2017.

"All I can tell you is he is flying," Martin said. "He's running really well. [With] his escapability in the pocket, they can't tackle him, but they're still having a hard time touching him, too. But I like where he is at. To go the long haul, we know is all the way to February [with] the mental condition, the physical conditioning that it takes to get to the Super Bowl. I think that that's what's on his mind, and he's looking really good."

ON THE FIRST day of training camp, Jackson had a private meeting with the team where, as Martin recalled, he "spoke from the heart."

Jackson emphasized that it's time to put in the work if the Ravens want to reach their ultimate goal, leading running back Derrick Henry to say, "He's just tired of coming up short."

Jackson isn't the only NFL MVP to feel this angst at the start of a career. Rodgers didn't win his first Super Bowl until his sixth season. Manning didn't hoist the Vince Lombardi Trophy until his ninth.

And Bills quarterback Josh Allen, who faces Jackson on Sunday night, has not reached a Super Bowl in seven seasons -- exactly like Jackson.

Since becoming the Ravens' starting quarterback midway through the 2018 season, Jackson has been dazzling in the regular season and mistake-prone in the playoffs.

"If Lamar's having a great season, it's like, we've seen that before," said Vinny Cerrato, a former NFL general manager who is an analyst for a Baltimore radio station. "The thing with Lamar is in the playoffs thus far, he has not played a full four quarters yet."

Jackson has accomplished nearly everything on a quarterback checklist from September to December. In addition to the MVP awards, Jackson has been named to four Pro Bowls and has earned first-team All-Pro honors three times. He's led Baltimore to four AFC North titles and captured the No. 1 seed twice.

The biggest area of improvement for Jackson lies in the postseason. Of the 10 quarterbacks who've won multiple NFL MVP awards, Jackson is the only one with a losing record in the postseason (3-5) and the only one without a Super Bowl title.

Jackson told reporters at the start of training camp that he doesn't want to think too far ahead to the Super Bowl "because every time we had those discussions, we get to the playoffs, but we don't punch in. We don't finish."

Jackson can't shoulder all the blame because his supporting cast has dropped the ball in critical situations. Flowers fumbled near the goal line in the fourth quarter of the 2023 AFC Championship Game, and Andrews dropped a potential game-tying 2-point conversion in the final minutes of last season's AFC divisional playoff game.

Still, all eyes are on Jackson, whose 11 turnovers in eight playoff games are the NFL's most since he entered the league in 2018. This is after Jackson has protected the ball quite well in the regular season with 57 turnovers in 103 games.

"Things are meant to happen," Jackson said. "It's not my time because if it was my time, we would've had seven Super Bowls in a row already."

All the buzz around Baltimore this summer is how this year's team might be the most complete during Jackson's time as the starter. The Ravens are co-Super Bowl favorites with the Eagles, according to ESPN BET.

"I think the conversation for Lamar is going to change when, not if -- but when -- he wins his championship," Ismail said. "Yeah, you got to go through it and you got to get to the dance. That's just the bottom line."

Ravens QB Lamar Jackson Didn't Speak Up. He's 'Not Having That This Year.'

BALTIMORE SUN | AUGUST 31, 2025 | BRIAN WACKER

It was late on a Friday night in May and the crowd inside The Horse You Came In On Saloon in trendy Fells Point was starting to stir. Finally, just after 10 p.m., the main attraction, Ravens star Lamar Jackson, made his way through a side entrance of the building that first opened for business in 1775 and settled into a cordoned off section of the bar.

The quarterback and two-time NFL Most Valuable Player was there to promote a new horse racing team, the Maryland Colts, that he'd bought an ownership stake in, and he was joined by his small but tight circle of confidants.

But there was also a surprise and notable figure among the group: Jackson's mom, Felicia Jones, who, in a rare appearance at a public event in the city, took up residence on a corner stool and cast a watchful eye from underneath a bucket hat as the waiting audience began to swell around her famous son.

Though she often stays at Jackson's Owings Mills house during the season, Jones rarely attends games. Yet her pull remains significant if not paramount in her eldest son's life. That was of course true in Jackson's formative days, when she pushed him through pulverizing backyard football drills in South Florida, and remains so even now.

Jackson, 28, is preparing to enter his eighth NFL season. He's continuing his ascent not only toward the mountaintop of the biggest and most popular sport in the country, but his pursuit of an elusive Super Bowl title that on draft night eight years ago he promised to one day deliver to Charm City.

So, when Baltimore suffered another disillusioning, turnover-filled playoff loss, this time in the divisional round to the Buffalo Bills in January, Jones had some motherly words of wisdom. "She's been a voice to me all my life," Jackson told The Baltimore Sun, a slight crack in his voice. "Anytime she says something to me, she's adamant about it, and she was on me about it."

Jones told him, in short, that he needed to go back to how he was during his youth football days.

"That's when I was vocal," Jackson continued. "When things weren't happening, I'd tell people get the [expletive] off the field."

"Now I'm kinda doing the same, and my guys are looking at me like, 'He's talking to me a certain way.' Like, not no disrespect. We're competitive out here. When I see you lacking that, get off the field and put somebody else in. They don't shy away. They like to compete as well. But if I feel like you're jogging out here and we going full speed, get off the [expletive] field. They come back to me and talk to me and I let them know we're not having that this year."

"We're trying to get somewhere. I let things like that happen in the past, but I'm not having that no more."

The past is, of course, what haunts Jackson's present and perhaps future, his postseason performances a giant spaghetti stain on Sunday best attire.

In the regular season, he has set several NFL records, including last season becoming the first player to throw for at least 4,000 yards and run for at least 900 in the same season and the first to throw at least 40 touchdown passes with fewer than five interceptions. He also holds the career record for most rushing yards by a quarterback and in 2023 became the youngest quarterback to twice be named MVP of the league.

In the playoffs, however, Baltimore is just 3-5 with Jackson at the helm, has reached the AFC championship game only once (losing to the eventual Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs in 2024) and has yet to figure out how translate regular-season mastery into postseason majesty.

Jackson has often been at the nexus of those woebegone performances, completing 60.6% of his passes while averaging 219 passing yards, 70 rushing yards and throwing 10 touchdown passes with 11 turnovers (seven interceptions, four fumbles) in that span. As a result, he's the only two-time MVP that has failed to reach a Super Bowl.

Two of those turnovers came in that loss to the Bills, with Jackson throwing an interception on a pass intended for Rashod Bateman in the first quarter, then fumbling in the second as he tried to turn nothing into something with defenders closing in and the slippery ball sliding from his grasp like an ice cube on a snowy evening in Orchard Park, New York.

"I feel like I did a great job controlling my hype at the end of the season," Jackson told The Sun. "The costly turnovers, I can't even tell you how they happened. Seeing the coverage, OK man coverage, me and him wasn't on the same page. Then the fumble, I'm squeezing the ball to put it in, it fell out. That was some movie-type situation. That's not supposed to happen."

Indeed.

In fairness to Jackson, he hasn't been the only Ravens player during his tenure with some dubious moments when the stakes were at their highest. In the AFC championship game against the Chiefs, Zay Flowers, then a rookie, had the ball poked away by cornerback L'Jarius Sneed as he dove for the end zone early in the fourth quarter after the receiver had been flagged for taunting following a long catch earlier on the drive. Then there was tight end Mark Andrews' crushing drop of a would-be game-tying 2-point conversion with 1:33 remaining against the Bills last season.

Still, the blame, much like the praise, goes to Jackson, much the way it did so long for Peyton Manning.

Like Jackson, he was twice named NFL MVP in his first seven years. Like Jackson, the Indianapolis Colts were just 3-5 in the playoffs with Manning in that span. Like Jackson, he put up similar postseason numbers, completing 60.4% of his passes for 2,172 yards with 14 touchdowns and eight interceptions. Like Jackson, whose path has been blocked in part by three-time Super Bowl champion quarterback and Chiefs star Patrick Mahomes, Manning's path to the final game of the season was often impeded by the New England Patriots' Tom Brady.

Which is perhaps why, among other reasons, optimism remains.

Manning reached, and won, his first Super Bowl in his ninth season, 2006, and appeared in two more with the Denver Broncos, winning his second title in 2015.

"Lamar is young," Ravens coach John Harbaugh said. "So, his window to improve is pretty big."

"First of all, he works really hard. Secondly, he really wants to get better, and he's already great. He's not one of these guys that says, 'I'm there, I've arrived.' He never looks at it that way. He always looks at what [he can] do to get better. If there's something that happens on the field, even when it's not 'his fault,' it's his fault in his mind. 'What can I do to make it right?' And I know he has done a good job of communicating that with the team as well with that kind of mindset. So, he's grown in every way."

But Jackson also knows the opportunities can be fleeting.

So he said he watched film of Baltimore's losses from last season. He connected with fellow South Florida native Flowers for a few offseason throwing sessions. And he has the best collection of talent that he's ever had, with three-time All-Pro receiver DeAndre Hopkins added to an offense that includes running back Derrick Henry for a second straight year along with the burgeoning Flowers and Bateman along with Andrews and the ascending (albeit injured for now) Isaiah Likely.

Jackson is also entering his third year in offensive coordinator Todd Monken's scheme, and with that comes a certain degree of comfort.

"It started [to jell] last year after the first year in the offseason with [Harbaugh] saying here's what we did, here's what I think is us," Monken told The Sun. "Where do we take this to 2.0 and where do we take for this Lamar?"

"The second year was a big part of that. We had some guys mature as players — Flowers, Bateman — and we got Derrick. So this year, how do we drill down on the things that bog us down? Early in the year it was penalties, games where we turn it over in bunches. We turn it over like that, I don't give a s—t who we play we're going to lose. Those little things fighting our operation — time at the line, getting in and out of plays, Lamar having more of the offense, an awareness of where we want to end up as an offense. Where can we get better at these few things that will help us in critical times?"

Mentally, Jackson is in a different place now, quarterbacks coach Tee Martin said.

"The next level is just taking the things that he already improved in and continuing to improve in those areas," Martin said. "But also consistently doing them every day, every rep."

A hyper-detailed daily grading system that is blasted across screens throughout the Ravens' training facility is just one reminder of the progress, for the quarterback and the rest of the team.

Jackson's voice is another.

"Lamar, he's more vocal than he ever has been about what he wants from us, even to the staff and the offensive linemen," Bateman said.

It's intentional.

"Certain guys, they need to hear from me more," Jackson told The Sun. "They don't know what I'm thinking. Some guys just look at me like, 'Lamar's going to make something happen.' I need you guys to play your part as well."

"We got a lot of young guys on our team, [but] even the vets sometimes like to hear from me on certain things to know what I'm thinking on certain things so we can have the same chemistry out on the field."

It's why Jackson, a buoyant presence in the locker room but often taciturn with most teammates away from the facility and especially in the offseason, has tried to be more communicative. He speaks up more in meetings. There are more text messages.

"I think he understands what we're trying to accomplish against what we're seeing every day, and I think every day he feels more comfortable voicing his pleasure [and] displeasure, in terms of what we do or how he wants to see," Monken said. "That's probably strong, but just being able to communicate, because everything goes through him."

"He's still coming. He's still a young player, really, at quarterback in my mind."

Jackson's mind, meanwhile, can't help but go back. First to hearing his mom's voice.

"She's gonna coach me like she's Harbaugh, like she Coach Tee or Coach Monk," he told The Sun. "She's always been my coach and I listen to her."

Then to his own, in the locker room at Highmark Stadium during halftime of that chilly night against the Bills just over seven months ago.

"I told my guys everybody just play your part I'm gonna put us back in the game," he told The Sun. "We can't have those type of mistakes in the playoffs."

Especially Jackson, now more than ever.

For Lamar Jackson, Improving On Historic Season Starts With Being More Vocal

THE ATHLETIC | AUGUST 29, 2025 | JEFF ZREBIEC

Lamar Jackson didn't throw the pass, but that didn't mean he was going to let an opportunity slip by to tell second-year wide receiver Devontez Walker exactly how he felt. Jackson wasn't about to wait, either.

As Walker slowly walked back to the huddle after a Cooper Rush pass hit off his shoulder and was intercepted by cornerback Marquise Robinson during a Baltimore Ravens training camp practice earlier this month, Jackson hustled upfield and met the receiver halfway.

An animated Jackson explained to Walker what he expected from him on the play. He wanted to see more effort, more aggressiveness. He wanted Walker to help out his quarterback, who had an accurate deep throw turn into an interception. The one-sided conversation included Jackson putting his arm around Walker and offering encouragement. It probably didn't go on for much longer than two minutes. That was more than enough time for Jackson to get his point across.

"I have to let my guys know that I'm caring for them, I'm not dogging them. I'm not angry at you or anything like that, but we're competing out here," Jackson said when later asked about the interaction. "I need you to be a competitor, because I'm extremely competitive. I don't like to lose, and you should feel the same way.

"If the ball is in the air and you're on the perimeter, catch the ball. I don't care if the ball is underthrown or if it's too far out — make a play. You're a receiver. Everything is not going to be perfect. It's our job to try and be perfect, but it's your job to make us right sometimes. That's what teammates are for."

How do you improve on one of the best statistical seasons an NFL quarterback has ever had? How do you raise the bar after a season in which you threw 41 touchdown passes and just four interceptions? What do you do for an encore when you put together the first 4,000-plus passing yards and 900-plus rushing yards season in NFL history?

For Jackson, you hold yourself even more accountable and challenge teammates to do the same.

As the Ravens prepare for the 2025 regular season and next Sunday's prime-time Week 1 opener against the Buffalo Bills, teammates and coaches say they've never seen Jackson this locked in and this willing to push players to raise their levels. They've never heard him this vocal or this demonstrative when he sees or hears something he doesn't like.

It was evident in about every practice, from the way he interacted with teammates to the manner in which he approached coaches to how he responded to mistakes.

"He realizes he's the leader of our team, and if it's not up to his standard, he's going to say something, where maybe he was more reserved in the past," said Ravens center Tyler Linderbaum. "Now, he's speaking up and trying to get stuff corrected. We all want that out of Lamar. We go as he goes. It's good to see that passion come out and that accountability."

Jackson and his quarterbacks coach, Tee Martin, have talked for the last couple of seasons about the importance of Jackson being vocal with teammates and speaking up when something's on his mind. Jackson has never been shy to express himself, but he's traditionally done it behind closed doors, away from cameras and in an understated way.

The Jackson that Martin has spent a ton of time with this summer is less reserved and more detail-oriented. He's been far more willing to make suggestions and call out mistakes.

"He's at a point where he's seen a lot, he's experienced a lot," Martin said. "We've had two back-to-back years of some really, really tough losses that ended the season in a way that we don't want to end the season. If you know Lamar like I know him, competitively, he's probably thought about that every day, every minute during the offseason. That comes with a sense of urgency and a sense of purpose."

It's fitting in many ways that the Ravens' 2025 season starts in the same place their 2024 campaign frustratingly ended, Highmark Stadium in Buffalo. Jackson was superb late in the 27-25 loss to the Bills in the AFC divisional round in January, nearly digging the Ravens out of an 11-point hole. However, it was his two first-half turnovers that helped create that deficit.

After the game, a distraught Jackson sat in front of his locker with his head in his hands. HBO cameras and microphones, following around the Ravens as part of its in-season "Hard Knocks" series, captured Jackson saying, "I'm mad, bro. I ain't gonna be all right." Earlier, Jackson said in a postgame news conference that he was "tired of this s—," alluding to the trend of mistake-filled Ravens playoff losses during his tenure.

The feeling of disappointment, of again falling short of playing for the NFL's biggest prize, lingered for months.

"Even in the offseason, I was thinking, 'Dang, we should have done this,'" Jackson said. "I wish things didn't happen like that, but that's part of life. Mistakes happen. I feel like it's a lesson. It taught us about different situations, like protect the ball. If we protect the ball, we win. The whole world knows that."

Jackson stayed away from the Ravens' Under Armour Performance Center all offseason, as he is apt to do. However, when he reported for training camp in mid-July, Jackson set the tone for the organization ahead of a season of great importance. In a team meeting, Jackson spoke passionately about the total buy-in and urgency that was required for Baltimore to finally accomplish its goal.

He was tired of falling short, and this year needed to be different. He wanted to make sure everyone else felt the same way.

"There was a private meeting where he spoke from his heart, and he's been leading that way every day," Martin said. "There hasn't been a day where his communication hasn't gone to the next level, his performance, his level of work, his level of everything. He has upped his game in a lot of areas, and I'm really proud of that maturation, honestly. He's growing at his own pace, and it's beautiful to see."

Wide receiver Rashod Bateman said Jackson is "more vocal than he ever has been about what he wants from us, even to the (coaching) staff and the offensive linemen. He's definitely pushing the agenda of just staying hungry and being competitive. He's a competitive guy, and he's leading us in the right direction with that."

Jackson, 28, concedes that being more vocal has become easier for him as he's gotten older. He acknowledges that when he was younger, he was conscious of his place in the locker room. He felt the older players had earned the right to have their voices heard.

Jackson's give-and-take with fiery and loquacious third-year Ravens offensive coordinator Todd Monken, who has given the quarterback even more responsibility and freedom at the line of scrimmage, has become more pronounced as they've gotten to know each other better.

Yet, for Jackson, that's not where it ends. At different points this summer, he's gone to Linderbaum or veteran offensive tackle Ronnie Stanley to send a message to the rest of the offensive line. Just last week, he made a beeline for wide receivers coach Greg Lewis in the middle of practice when he wasn't happy with a route from one of the wideouts.

"I'm not perfect. No one who plays in any football league is going to be perfect," Jackson said. "I'm trying to be perfect when I'm out there on that field. I'm trying to make everything easier on myself and my teammates. I feel like the other guys feel the same way."

In 2024, Jackson set career highs in passing yards (4,172), touchdown passes (41), yards per attempt (8.8) and passer rating (119.6). He tied for the league lead in quarterback rating (77.3) and total touchdowns (45) and finished sixth in passing yards and 20th in rushing yards (915). He was denied his third league MVP award, finishing second to the Bills' Josh Allen, but he convinced many pundits that he was the NFL's best player.

Yet, Jackson constantly talks about all of the areas of his game that he can improve. Former NFL quarterback and current ESPN analyst Dan Orlovsky chuckles when he's asked about the areas that Jackson needs to work on.

"I don't know if Lamar can get better. He was arguably the best player in football last year," Orlovsky said. "I think I'd just be making something up for you to say, 'Yeah, he can get better at this.' Every part of his game improved, improved, improved. I think intellectually, he's as impressive as he's been and as good as you can be when it comes to seeing things. Last year, he was a lot better against pressure. That had been a kryptonite of his."

"We don't have to sugarcoat it. We don't want to run from it. He doesn't, they don't. Where he can get better is being who he is in the regular season in the postseason. That's kind of where he can get better, but when it comes to the day-to-day, week-to-week performance, you're not going to get much better than he is at that position."

Orlovsky praised Jackson for not overreacting to the playoff struggles by trying to make massive changes in his style and approach.

"It's the elephant in the organization. When you're trying to figure out how to get past it and get the monkey off your back, it doesn't have to be these drastic changes," he said. "It's these little, small things that become these big things. If everybody has a little more accountability and it's coming from you, that's going to allow not only him, but everybody to play their best when it matters the most. When your best player is your most demanding player, not only of himself but others, it only elevates the group."

Jackson's teammates have been receptive. In fact, Linderbaum smiled when asked whether he likes a more vocal and intense Jackson, saying, "We need more of that."

Jackson certainly doesn't discriminate, and that's one of the reasons he's so well respected in the locker room. He's just as likely to be seen having a conversation with one of the defensive players as he is with one of his receivers. Jackson is fiercely private and protective of his space when it comes to allowing reporters and outsiders into his orbit, but he's very approachable for teammates.

And nobody at the Under Armour Performance Center doubts that the quarterback's focus is in the right place. Regardless of who Jackson is talking to, it doesn't take long for the conversation to shift to just how badly he wants to win a Super Bowl and the accountability that he needs to take to help everyone achieve that goal.

"One of the most impressive things about Lamar is how he continues to get better every year. How many players in the league win MVPs and still come back and look better?" Ravens tight end Charlie Kolar said. "Part of that is being more vocal, holding teammates more accountable. As football players, we get really focused on ourselves. He does a good job of not only personally getting better, but also holding us accountable.

"If you don't want your leader to lead, then we have problems. We want him to lead, and he leads. I could talk about the guy all day."

Travis Jones Is Ravens' Best Player You Know Nothing About. That's Exactly How He Wants It

THE ATHLETIC | AUGUST 19, 2025 | JEFF ZREBIEC

A longtime high school football coach, John Acquavita, had gotten similar phone calls before. This one didn't feel any more unique or promising than the others.

Joycelyn Ward told Acquavita that she wanted her son, Travis, to join the football team at Wilbur Cross High in New Haven, Conn. He was spending too much time inside and needed to be more active. She told Acquavita that Travis had never played football, but she thought he would be good at it.

After all, he was pretty big, she told him.

"I've heard that before," Acquavita said. "Then you get 5-foot-8, 230, and they are pudgy guys."

Nonetheless, Acquavita invited Ward to bring Travis down to the school. The football team was in the middle of its summer lifting program, and the head coach would make sure to get Travis acclimated.

"When I got there that day, there was a car in the lot already," Acquavita recalled. "It was this Honda Accord. I was walking by the back of it, and I saw the car was literally tilted to the right side. I look into the car, and I just see this mass of humanity. This kid has never seen me in his life, but I walked up to him, gave him a hug and I said, 'You and I are going to be best friends over the next four years.'"

Travis, who was about 6-foot-2, 240 pounds at the time, didn't want to play football. He was a baseball player, he insisted. He was going to bat cleanup in the big leagues. Ward remembers having to push him out of the car that first day.

Now? Travis Jones is probably most comfortable when he's out on the football field or in the weight room. He loves everything about it, the countless hours of practice and preparation included.

"That's where I feel at home," he said. "You just have to embrace the hard stuff. You have to go through it. After all of that, you're going to get what you really want."

The fourth-year Baltimore Ravens defensive lineman is a 6-foot-4, 341-pound embodiment of a nose tackle in today's NFL. He anchors that large backside and those meaty thighs and calves to absorb double-teams and keep blockers away from the inside linebackers. He uses his oversized hands and arms to toss aside centers and guards. He's strong enough to treat the guy in front of him like a blocking sled and quick and explosive enough to shoot a gap and throw a scare into the quarterback.

"If you go watch the first couple games (last year) when Trav was healthy, you could argue he was just as dominant as Dexter Lawrence out there," Ravens outside linebacker Kyle Van Noy said. "If you really watched the film, he was that dominant."

On a defense stocked in big personalities with big resumes, Jones might just be the Ravens' best player whom you don't know anything about. That's exactly how he wants it.

As he spoke to a reporter following a training camp practice last week, Jones rested a towel over his head, partially obscuring his face. It was a long and hot day, so the towel served a clear purpose. It was also tough not to look for further meaning, as Jones has put up a barrier between himself and the media for much of his young career.

The 25-year-old is always pleasant and wearing a big smile. He's always smiling. Did you see the video of him in the pool last week getting swimming lessons from Michael Phelps? The grin extended across his face.

Just don't ask Jones what makes him tick or any probing questions about himself, because he'll have little to say.

"I hate talking about myself," he said, "and I don't enjoy the attention."

That's one reason Jones has spent three-plus seasons in Baltimore, starting 18 games as a 2022 third-round draft pick, in near anonymity. That's also a product of the position he plays. Interior defensive linemen don't get a ton of glory unless they are prolific sack guys. Jones is not that, at least not yet. He has 3 ½ career sacks, but quarterbacks are aware of where he is on every play.

There's also the matter of Jones having little interest in letting anybody in or even returning anybody's calls or texts. Acquavita once jokingly told Jones he was going to start charging him a yearly stipend for the number of calls he got from people who were going through him to get a message to his former player.

"Look, I'm his mom and I have to think of ways to pull it out of him," Ward said. "You have to get really creative. He doesn't like to talk. It's that simple."

Jones insists that there's nothing particularly interesting or unique about his path to the NFL. He maintains that he didn't face any major challenges in his youth, that he was never left wanting or coveting what other kids his age had.

Born in New Haven, Jones' birth father wasn't a regular presence in his life, but he still had a sizable support system with Ward, his older sisters, Amber and Alana, and his grandparents, Isabella and Clarence Windley.

Ward was his biggest advocate and fiercest protector. She shielded her son from some of the family's struggles. His older sisters looked after him, and still do. Jones joked that they can be overbearing at times. Clarence, the father figure in Jones' life, never pushed sports on him, but he did harp on a message that has served Jones well: If you're going to start something, finish it. And don't cheat the process along the way.

Jones had no premonition that football would stick. He still fancied visions of succeeding on the baseball diamond, where he was so big and intimidating as a pitcher that parents from the opposing team would threaten to not allow their kids to step in the batter's box against him. At the very least, they wanted to see his birth certificate.

It didn't take long for Acquavita, though, to realize he may have something special.

Acquavita was intrigued. Kids Jones' size weren't exactly frequenting the halls of high schools around the country.

Acquavita brought Jones and his buddy, Rickqueal Warren, both of whom were freshmen, up to the varsity for a preseason scrimmage. He eased Jones in, sending him on the field in the third quarter.

On his first play, Jones split a double-team and took the running back down in the backfield. Such plays became regular occurrences.

"I never looked back," Jones said.

Jones was a force, and he was getting bigger and stronger, while not sacrificing athleticism. Acquavita remembers Jones soaring above the rim to dunk a basketball with two hands at nearly 360 pounds. Jones' play took a significant step forward when he learned how to lift and adhere to a workout regimen. When he'd come home from school and start reciting the names and stats of NFL players, Ward knew her son was hooked.

He garnered interest and scholarship offers from a number of Power 5 programs. Jones hastily committed to Rutgers, yet he got cold feet. UConn had a struggling football program, but what mattered most to Jones was that Storrs was only about 30 minutes from home. His friends and family could attend every one of his home games.

"I have no regrets about him going to Connecticut," Ward said. "At the time, it was best for him. But I'm like, 'If he went to a place like Alabama, he would have gone first round.' The football player, I wish he could have gone (elsewhere). The boy, Travis, I was glad he stayed."

Jones was recruited by Connecticut and other programs as an interior offensive lineman. He said all of his scholarship offers were to play offensive guard, and he was OK with that. However, after he arrived on campus, the Huskies' coaching staff had a change in plans. Their standout defensive tackle, Foley Fatukasi, had just gone to the NFL, and they needed a replacement.

"When you saw him come out of high school, you just saw that raw ability that he had," said former UConn coach Randy Edsall. "The biggest thing is we knew that he never was going to reach his full potential while he was at Uconn. He was still on the rise. Some guys peak in college. Travis was just ascending as he was coming out of college. You knew his best years were going to be ahead of him."

A local kid staying home, Jones became one of the faces of a rebuilding football program. The Huskies went just 4-32 in Jones' four years at the school, but he persevered through the losing and embraced the college experience. He worked on his body, losing 30 pounds ahead of his sophomore season. He was an impactful player on the field, with teams quickly realizing he needed to be double- or triple-teamed.

Clemson decided that it didn't need to double a defensive tackle from Connecticut, and Jones had one of his most impactful games. When he took a step up in competition, like at the Senior Bowl, Jones flourished.

He was still uncomfortable being the center of attention, but he became a walking billboard for everything the Huskies needed more of in their program.

"He was just a great kid, and he was brought up the right way," Edsall said. "He was a kid that struggled a little bit academically, but he always did the work and was always going to put in the time and do everything he was supposed to do. You never had to worry about it. His mom was a stickler for doing things the right way, and Travis did those things. He was just a very respectful kid. You have 105 on your roster. You'd like to have 105 Travis Joneses."

Ravens center Tyler Linderbaum, a two-time Pro Bowler, was asked by a reporter last year to identify the toughest player he's ever had to block. He shot a glance toward Jones' locker and said, "Can I say Travis?"

"I don't remember anyone stronger than him that I've ever gone against," Linderbaum said last week. "The power that he plays with is crazy. If your technique is out of sorts just a little bit, he's going to make you pay. That's just how strong he is. We see it every single day in practice. Sometimes he's almost unblockable with the things that he's able to do."

Jones was dismissive of a question about whether the upcoming season could be his best yet. He said all he cares about is helping the Ravens win games, and he understands that means doing a lot of the dirty work that doesn't show up statistically.

Believe it or not, he said he's hoping to be more vocal with his teammates. Jones broke down the huddle after an offseason practice and wants to be more comfortable the next time he's asked to do it.

Otherwise, he had no interest in looking back or playing the "what if?" game. He doesn't wonder if his career would have been different if he had gone to a perennial football powerhouse rather than UConn. He doesn't think about how last season could have been different if he hadn't sustained a high ankle sprain while in the middle of the best stretch of his career.

He also didn't want to look ahead and talk about his contract status. Jones is entering the final guaranteed season of his rookie deal.

"The last thing on my mind right now," Jones said.

With other players, that would be hard to believe. With Jones, who says his hobbies are watching the occasional movie/show and working out, it isn't.

Acquavita remembers taking Jones and Warren out to dinner a week before the 2022 NFL Draft. Given an opportunity to pick the place, Jones chose a \$10 per plate barbecue joint. While there, Acquavita told Jones how much his life was about to change.

"I said, 'Travis, next week, you're going to be a millionaire,'" Acquavita said. "He was so innocent about it. He had no idea what was coming down the pike, and he didn't care. It was like, 'I get to play football? I'd do it for a couple of pizzas and maybe a car so I can make it to practice.'"

"I've been doing this for a while, and I've only coached three or four players who love everything about football. Travis is one of them. He just loves being a football player."

Rookie Tyler Loop Is Trusting His Process As He Enters First Season As Ravens' Kicker

THE ATHLETIC | SEPTEMBER 1, 2025 | JEFF ZREBIEC

This was pressure, or at least the closest thing to it for a boy who craved a cold, sugary treat.

As young Tyler Loop lined up for a goal kick, a parent of one of his soccer teammates shouted from the sideline.

"Slur-pee, slur-pee, slur-pee."

Loop knew what was at stake. If he was able to put a goal kick over midfield, his teammate's father had a standing offer to buy him a 7-Eleven Slurpee after the game. So, of course, Loop locked in. He measured his run-up, placed the ball on an elevated patch of grass and swung his right foot, sending the ball high and deep downfield.

He did it over and over again, in practices and games, establishing an appreciation for kicking that ultimately carried over to another sport. A few years later, when Loop had an opportunity to continue his development as a soccer player overseas, he had already fallen in love with the art of kicking a football.

"I think the most fun thing about kicking is almost annoyingly so, the process. It's very methodical," Loop said. "Kicking is fun."

Baltimore Ravens senior special teams coach and kicking expert Randy Brown's wide and thorough search for a successor to Justin Tucker this offseason ended with the team using a sixth-round pick on Loop, who was one of the top kickers in the country at the University of Arizona. The Ravens have participated in 30 NFL Drafts, and Loop is the first kicker they've ever selected.

Brown loved Loop's leg strength, believing it was essential for kicking in the elements that often present themselves at stadiums in the AFC North. He was impressed by Loop's tendency to kick a straight football, a quality all the great kickers to come through Baltimore have had. Brown's background work yielded affirmation of Loop's ability to handle the ups and downs of performing in one of the most pressurized roles in football.

But to Brown, what separated Loop from the other kickers the Ravens were considering was his approach and devotion to a process that has many levels and challenges before the ball sails through the uprights.

Over a 2 1/2-hour meeting at a Tucson, Ariz., restaurant, Loop described his "process" to Brown in vivid detail. He and Brown spoke the same language about kicking; Loop even found room at The Monica restaurant to do a demonstration.

"We kind of moved a couple tables away and I said, 'All right, show me,'" Brown recalled. "He ... steps back over and shows me, 'OK, this is how I would hit the ball here. This is my lean on my ball.' I texted (coach John Harbaugh) afterward. I said, 'I think we have our guy.'"

Loop strengthened the Ravens' belief by having a strong preseason, going 8-for-8 on extra-point tries and 9-of-11 on field goal attempts, making five kicks from 50-plus yards, including one from 61 with distance to spare. Still, when you're replacing the most accurate kicker in NFL history, you're only as good as your next kick, which is why Loop will probably be more scrutinized in his regular-season debut Sunday against the Buffalo Bills than any Raven not named Lamar Jackson.

That, Loop says, is what he signed up for. That's what the 24-year-old has been preparing for since he realized he could kick the ball a long way with pinpoint accuracy.

The Ravens concede it's impossible to know how Loop will react in a clutch situation until he's thrust into one. They didn't initially know that about Tucker, either, when they chose the undrafted free agent out of Texas over veteran incumbent Billy Cundiff heading into the 2012 season. All Tucker did was become one of the game's most reliable performers for over a decade.

Loop, however, can already picture what will happen. He's played the scenarios over in his head time after time. You know, as a kid, when you're playing basketball in your driveway and you count down the final seconds before tossing the ball toward the rim, hoping to make the game winner?

Loop has done that with kicking, too.

"Fifty-eight yards for the win and all of the fun stuff," Loop said. "You go through all of the scenarios in your head, and you get excited about them. Then, they come around and you're like, 'This is it. Let's go do it.' That part of it is really fun. It makes it special."

Loop bristled at the question, but he did once tell a reporter he "hated" football. Such a comment was blasphemous growing up about a half hour northeast of football-crazed Dallas. Loop added context, saying he was about 12 years old when he made that comment and was a devoted soccer player.

"Once I started kicking footballs, it was like, 'OK, I actually like this,'" Loop said.

Loop was encouraged to try placekicking by his father, Steve. He had such a strong leg, so why not give it a try? His proficiency went to another level when he started attending Kohl's Kicking camp and getting professional coaching as a sophomore in high school.

"Tyler was very, very athletic. He was a really good track kid, but he had great leg speed that translated to kicking the football," said Jamie Kohl, the director of Kohl's camps. "He just stuck out immediately. The couple of things that made Tyler different were not only his athleticism, but his innate self-belief. He is someone, as was (Tucker) when he came through our camps, who once he competed against other top guys, in his mind, he felt like, 'Yep, I can do this.' That's important. I don't think you can coach that."

Loop played on the soccer and football teams at Lovejoy High in Lucas, Texas, but he ultimately faced a choice. A high-level soccer player, Loop had an opportunity to go train in England for one of the branches of the famed Liverpool youth program. He talked the decision over with his parents and soccer coach, who was aware of Loop's ascending national ranking as a prep kicker.

It wasn't the norm for teenagers to drill 50-plus-yard field goals on a semi-consistent basis. They all agreed that football was his most enticing path forward.

Loop first had to wait his turn at Arizona. The Wildcats had a future NFL kicker in Lucas Havrisik on their roster, so Loop served as the team's punter in the COVID-19-shortened 2020 season. The next year, Loop was used on extra points and short kicks, and he was a perfect 12-for-12 on kicks under 50 yards.

Then, Loop, who became the Wildcats' primary kicker in 2022, had to get over some mental hurdles that arose when he'd hit a rough patch. He started working with sports psychologists in the Arizona program who helped him learn how to shrug off a miss and focus on the process. He learned to trust himself.

"That was a very important focal point for his offseason, being able to snap back in and adjust to the ebbs and flows of the game," said Jordan Paopao, Arizona's special teams coordinator in 2022 and 2023 and now the tight ends coach at the University of Washington. "That was the biggest growth that I saw. He already was a very physical talent who was definitely playing-on-Sundays worthy, but the mental aspect, when he started putting the energy and time into it, that's when I really thought this kid was onto something."

Paopao fondly recalls some of Loop's practice and pregame kicking sessions. Before Loop arrived, he had never seen a kicker converting from 60-plus yards on a semi-consistent basis.

Loop worked really hard to understand proper kicking mechanics. He studied what worked and what didn't with other kickers. He learned to communicate better with his long snapper and holder about his expectations. He's always worked hard on his strength and conditioning.

But beyond the thud he creates when his right foot strikes the ball, what made Loop one of the top kicking prospects in college football and what sealed the deal for Brown and the Ravens was how he developed and refined his kicking routine and approach.

In his mind, Loop boils the process down to 30 seconds. That's the time from when he, holder Jordan Stout and long snapper Nick Moore jog onto the field to when the kick lands, hopefully after splitting the uprights. Loop visualizes the entire process and every minute detail involved.

"It's easy to get lost in the physical aspect of it and the mechanics and all of that stuff, but you struggle through your process, or if you're easily distracted through it and you lose your keys, it's hard to get back on track," Loop said.

"You have to be really efficient. I take my steps. I get over, I visualize the ball. I visualize how it's going to be held. I see my target. I imagine the ball going to my target. I look back down. Just going through that process and the cues and how I communicate with Jordan and learning those skills was something that was really helpful."

Trust in that process is also what allows him to get over a miss, and Loop certainly wasn't perfect during organized team activities, minicamps and training camp. During one practice, he missed three kicks with Ravens owner Steve Bisciotti standing about 10 yards away. With the Ravens having built a roster that many believe is Super Bowl-caliber, the kicking transition was arguably the biggest story in training camp, and every Loop miss was documented. He remained unfazed.

"Let's say something does happen to go wrong, you have to be able to step back to your process and know that this process has worked every day," Loop said. "It's worked for me. It's tried. I've worked on it, I've spent hours and hours refining it. I can trust that. Nobody bats 1.000, but I go out expecting to make every kick. Sometimes things happen."

"Part of my job is being able to say, 'Hey, I know my process. I trust Jordan, I trust Nick. I can go out there and stick to my process and we're good.' Move on. The next kick is another opportunity."

Loop isn't shy about discussing the importance of faith in his life. He spends a lot of time talking to his friends about "what burdens me, what encourages me." Paopao said Loop's devotion was "infectious" with his teammates and left a lasting impact on those in the Wildcats' locker room.

Before the draft, Loop and his fiancée, Julia Otto, prayed on what was to come next. Loop, though, knew exactly where he wanted to be. So confident that he'd wind up in Baltimore, Loop bought a Ravens T-shirt that he could wear when his name was called. Both the Ravens and Loop sweated it out, but at pick No. 186, Baltimore found its kicker.

The NFL can be treacherous terrain for rookie kickers. Very few of them get a lot of leeway, particularly from teams with Super Bowl aspirations. The spotlight on Loop will be even more intense given whom he's replacing.

"It's one thing being athletic and talented enough to be a starting kicker in the NFL. The other part that's really an important aspect is the experience of playing on different surfaces, different stadiums, different conditions, different schedules, longer seasons," Kohl said. "There has to be a little bit of a grace period for anybody their first year or two until they get comfortable. Even if Tyler Loop is as talented or more talented as anyone in the league, there's still an adaptive phase.

"I know it's a win-at-all-costs league and jobs are on the line based on wins and losses, but the reality is there are going to be some moments that might not be great for rookie kickers. It doesn't mean he can't be successful. ... Following a legend is very hard, but I do feel that Tyler has been handled appropriately by the team. They've done a nice job of taking him through this journey."

The Ravens released Tucker, who was under investigation by the league and subsequently suspended for the first 10 weeks of the season after he was accused by 16 Baltimore-area massage therapists of improper conduct, about 10 days after the draft.

The Ravens then cut Loop's "competition" for the kicking job, fellow rookie John Hoyland, just over a week into training camp. After Baltimore's second preseason game in Dallas, Loop got a far bigger reward than a Slurpee.

Harbaugh announced what had become obvious. Loop would be the Ravens' kicker this season.

"He's earned it and he's ready," Harbaugh said. "I have tremendous confidence in him, just like all the guys. He's going to go out there and play great."

Meet Ravens Rookie Kicker Tyler Loop, Who Loves The Big Stage

[BALTIMORERAVENS.COM](https://www.baltimoreravens.com) | JUNE 12, 2025 | MATT RYAN

As Tyler Loop settled into his parents' house to watch the NFL Draft, he took a moment to the side.

Loop and his fiancé decided to say a prayer before their lives changed forever.

"Just asking God, 'Bring us where you want us ... but we kind of want Baltimore.'"

Loop's nerves rose when the Ravens picked three other players before him on Day 3, but then his phone rang. He saw the 410-area code and knew his prayer was being answered.

The Ravens selected Loop with the No. 186 overall pick, making him the first kicker ever drafted by Baltimore. Now, after the release of Justin Tucker, Loop is the favorite to be the Ravens' place kicker in 2025.

However, playing football wasn't always his goal.

Finding Football

Growing up outside of Dallas, Loop wanted to be a professional soccer player. He swam, ran track, and played lacrosse in his early years, but soccer was his main love.

His leg was special. One of Loop's coaches even convinced Tyler's dad, Steve, to build his son a wall that he could boot balls into.

Eventually, Steve took Tyler to a local football field to see what he could do. "Just humor me," he told his son. "He was kicking 55-yard field goals in the seventh grade," Steve said.

Steve pushed Tyler to show his middle school coach what he could do, and that's where it all began. Tyler balanced kicking for Lovejoy High School while starring for the soccer team, and one day after a soccer game, he told his parents his long-term plan.

Tyler was going to play in the Premier League when he was older. But then he added a disclaimer: If not, he would kick in the NFL.

Through the years, Tyler's love for kicking grew. He became infatuated with the mechanical side, learning every detail to diagnose his swing. He began training with Kohl's Kicking and turned into one of the top kickers in the nation. By the time he was a senior, Tyler had quit soccer and was kicking full time.

"At one point, Tyler said, 'Look, Dad, you may have 1,000 people show up to a Division I soccer game. You get 100,000 people to show up to a Division I football game. I'm doing that,'" Steve recalled.

Tyler committed to Arizona and became one of the most storied kickers in program history. His 62-yard field goal last season set a Wildcat record, and he leads all Arizona kickers with an 83.75% field goal percentage over his five-year career. With a sold-out crowd on the road against Deion Sanders-coached Colorado, Tyler booted a 52-yard field goal and capped his day with a game-winner.

Tyler wanted the spotlight, and he got his wish.

Seeking the Moment

Tyler was on a local swim team as a 3-year-old, and after the meets, everyone would sit back and watch as he closed things out.

Wearing swim trunks and floaties, Tyler would climb to the top of the diving board and make sure the couple hundred people in attendance had their eyes on him.

"Talk about wanting the spotlight," Tyler's mom, Linda, said.

Not much has changed since.

Tyler has always been a player who relishes the moment. Steve said that most people see their heart rate tick up when the pressure is on, but Tyler is the opposite.

"He feels in his element," Steve said. "If there's a point where somebody needs to have the ball and it needs to be on him, he wants to be the guy."

Kicker can be an isolating position, out there on an island. In the ultimate team sport, some people see it as an individual position, but Tyler disagrees.

He knows in the biggest moments his teammates, coaches, and fans are all counting on him to come through.

"I get to have your back now, and I get to go do this. I couldn't do what I do without the other guys. When it comes down to it, and it's like, 'Hey, we need you to do this.' I can say, 'Yeah, I got your back. I'm going to do it.'" — Tyler Loop

Having the clutch gene is one of the most pivotal parts of kicking, and Tyler has proven throughout his career that the pressure isn't too much.

When Tyler was a sophomore, Lovejoy trailed in the final minute of a state playoff soccer game. Tyler came in off the bench with the season on the line, and Steve and Linda knew exactly how it was going to end.

"Linda and I looked at each other. There's a certain body posture that Tyler gets when it's go time, when it's that moment," Steve said. "And I think we both knew when we looked at that, it's like, 'Oh no, here it goes. He's going to score.'"" Tyler did, and Lovejoy won on penalties.

Morgan Lineberry, a Kohl's Kicking coach who has worked with NFL kickers such as Cade York and Austin Seibert, started coaching Tyler when he was a freshman. Lineberry has seen Tyler's affinity for those big moments as a kicker, from high school to college, and soon the NFL.

"Not only is he accepting of wanting to go on that stage, he relishes that because ultimately that's what it is, you're on an island," Lineberry said. "You have to be comfortable with all eyes on you, and you have to be able to step on the stage and call on it."

'Know God and Make Him Known'

Tyler went to church every week growing up and entered Arizona as a man of faith. But one day, early in college, his teammate and housemate, Blake Pfaff, decided to talk to him.

Pfaff felt that while Tyler saw himself as a man of strong faith, his actions weren't reflecting that.

"He's like, 'Hey, I care about you and I love you. When I look at your life, I don't see someone who loves God and loves other people.' We had a lot of conversations about that, and it took a while for me to really understand," Tyler said. "Finally, it clicked for me."

Tyler altered his life from there, focusing on exhibiting his beliefs rather than just saying them. Tyler said that looking back, he "didn't have a heart that was loving" and described himself as "arrogant" and "not humble." Now, that's far from the case.

"I think my description around Tyler is [he] has a servant's heart. He's very unselfish. He thinks of others first. And I think he gets a lot of pleasure out of serving others and making a difference in other people's lives." — Steve Loop

Tyler joined student ministry at Arizona and developed a strong circle of people around him, including his fiancée, Julia Otto.

The two were friends for most of college before they started dating during Tyler's last year at Arizona and got engaged in March.

"What stands out about Tyler, then (as friends) and even now, is how intentional he is with his relationships," Otto said. "If Tyler cares about someone, he's extremely loyal and he's willing to do just about anything, drop anything for that person. In his conversations, he's really intentional with what he says, how he says it, how he treats people... He's quick to point everyone back to the hope that we have in Christ."

After the shift in his faith, Tyler lives by the mission to "know God and make Him known."

He's consistently working to improve the world around him, whether it's helping fund mission trips, or using his experience in American Sign Language to communicate with the deaf on mission trips of his own.

God helped him become a better person, and he's hoping to pass that along.

"I just started to see my relationships with people change," Tyler said. "How I cared for my teammates changed. How I viewed even kicking and sports and stuff like that. It was no longer something for me, it was something that I could use to be generous with the financial gain that comes with it [and] use my platform to speak in other people's lives in a loving way. It just changed my entire purpose and goal and vision for life."

Dealing With Failure

When Tyler first started working with Lineberry, his mental range was all over the place.

It could feel like this monumental disappointment anytime he missed a kick. However, Lineberry's stoic personality began to shift over to Tyler.

"Someone who early on helped me find how do we look at a kick and performance objectively and just say, 'Hey, this went right, this went wrong' [was Lineberry]," Tyler said. "We can fix the things that went wrong, and we can go make a kick, and so his approach helped me."

Lineberry said that early on with a player, you can tell if they have the physical tools to make it far. He saw that in Tyler, but he also saw his mental game develop over time.

Between Tyler's second and third years at Arizona, he began to be able to deal with these ups and downs on his own, and that's when he started taking things to a new level.

"When you have somebody that's hyper competitive, that has a bar that's set so high and always wants to win, you got to balance that out with, look, this is a marathon, not a sprint," Steve said. "Not everything's going to go your way. It's what you do with it when it doesn't. ... It became internalized with him, and then he became his own manager of that. Then he really took off once he could self-assess."

Part of that newfound ability to take a step back comes from Tyler's strengthened faith. He's comfortable in his mission in life, and that gives him the freedom to go onto the field with a clear mind and be in the moment.

"I can miss or things can go wrong, I could get injured, the game of football could be taken away from me tomorrow, and I will be fine," Tyler said. "My life, it will change in a sense of what I'm doing, but my goal, purpose, and mission in life won't change. Because now it's built on something rather than 'Did I make the kick or did I not, and is that going to affect who I am as a person?'"

"Finding faith allows you to kind of take the step back and be like, 'Okay, I'm good. Things will be fine. We're going to be good.' I believe that type of mental freedom takes away the pressure and allows you to perform to your best."

Meet The Mechanical Engineering Major Turned Ravens Training Camp Darling

BALTIMORE SUN | JULY 29, 2025 | BRIAN WACKER

The first thing to know about Ravens rookie defensive back Reuben Lowery III — other than his ascendance to training camp darling for three interceptions during the spring and another one last week — is that coach John Harbaugh knows his name.

Most times, a number will suffice.

"Reuben is all ball," Harbaugh said of the undrafted free agent out of Tennessee-Chattanooga. "He's all ball every day. All he thinks about, all he talks about, eats it, sleeps it. He comes out here and flies around. He's a very smart player. He is doing a nice job."

Perhaps the most revealing thing to know about the Powder Springs, Georgia, native, however, is that he majored in mechanical engineering, graduated with Latin honors and a 4.0 GPA, and was a member of the "Rocket Mocs," a student group that earned NASA recognition as one of the best in the country for five years running.

For good measure, Lowery, the youngest of three with two older sisters, was also a prominent member of the school's Fellowship for Christian Athletes Group and nominated as a junior in 2023 for the American Football Coaches Association Good Works Team, an annual award given to players who "demonstrate exceptional community service and volunteerism."

"He's like the perfect human," Tennessee-Chattanooga defensive coordinator Mike Yeager told The Baltimore Sun. He's the nicest person alive. He's the hardest worker. He's the smartest kid."

It has apparently been that way for a while.

"He's the kid you want to date your daughter, marry your daughter," Lowery's former high school coach, Phillip Ironside, told The Sun. "He checks all the boxes."

"He's not gonna be in trouble, you're not gonna read about him doing something stupid, he's gonna know his playbook. He's prepared."

For five years, he also prepared to be an engineer — his father Reuben II, a former pastor, is an engineer and IT professional, his mother Tisha a math teacher. Given his small size (5-foot-9, 204 pounds) it was, like an aerospace or energy project, a plan rooted in logic.

But it will have to wait — Lowery has a history of playing bigger than he is.

In 46 career games at Tennessee-Chattanooga, he had 166 tackles, including 19 for loss and two sacks, 15 passes defended with three interceptions, two of which he returned for touchdowns. As a senior, he was second on the team in both tackles (62) and tackles for loss (7.5), had six pass breakups and two interceptions and was a first-team All-Southern Conference selection.

At Hillgrove High School — where he was teammates with Cincinnati Bengals defensive end Myles Murphy, Los Angeles Rams safety Jaylen "Tank" McCollough and Tennessee Titans tight end Chig Okonkwo — he was at or near the top of the team's weight room rankings for squats and power clean. He also played all over the field at cornerback and safety for Phillips' 4-2-5 scheme.

"He was a coach's dream in the secondary," said Phillips, adding that Lowery is cerebral, intelligent, quick to process information and always got the defense in the right call.

Still, playing in the NFL always seemed more like fantasy than possibility for much of Lowery's childhood given a diminutive stature.

"It was, 'What's your reality?'" his father said. "He always said his goals were to make sure to go to school, no student loans and a good career."

But when Lowery was able to hold his own against varsity players at a strong high school as a freshman, that reality began to shift.

Then at Tennessee-Chattanooga's camp for high school players, he caught head coach Rusty Wright's attention, was offered a scholarship and quickly proved a worthy investment off the field and on it.

After appearing in all five games as a freshman during the COVID-shortened 2020 season, the next season he helped spearhead a defense that gave up its fewest passing yards (153.5) per game in seven years. And as a third-year sophomore, he returned his first career interception 45 yards for a touchdown. By his junior season, he was named team captain and started at slot safety and outside corner.

"He was the best blitzer we had, one of the best man coverage guys we had, one of the best zone coverage guys we had, one of the smartest guys in terms of fits, had great hands getting off blocks," Yeager said. "He's a technician. Whatever the coaches told him to do technically, he worked at it every single day so it's a natural reflex."

All the while, he maintained a spot on the dean's list and honor roll.

"We'd have a team meeting and Reuben would be sitting in there with a laptop doing homework," Tennessee-Chattanooga coach Rusty Wright told The Sun. "As soon as we started meeting, it went off and it was time to go play football. He's very compartmentalized. He knows how to handle his business."

Making the Ravens' roster, however, could be Lowery's most challenging math problem yet.

Baltimore already has a deep and talented secondary, led by safeties Kyle Hamilton, first-round rookie Malaki Starks, and second-year safeties Sanoussi Kane and Beau Brade, along with cornerbacks Marlon Humphrey, Nate Wiggins, Jaire Alexander, Chidobe Awuzie, Jalyn Armour-Davis and T.J. Tampa Jr., among others.

But the Ravens also like versatility and keeping a lot defensive backs, for their prevalence of nickel and dime looks and to account for injuries.

Already, they lost safety Ar'Darius Washington for what is expected to be at least most of the season with a torn Achilles suffered during offseason workouts. On Monday, Armour-Davis also suffered an undisclosed injury that required an MRI, while Alexander was out because of swelling in his knee.

Barring any significant long-term injuries, there don't figure to be a lot of open jobs, but that could of course change.

And at the least Lowery has an excellent shot at the practice squad.

"This is one of the most competitive rosters that we've had since I've been here," defensive coordinator Zach Orr said. "But, Reuben has made plays since he's been here. We're upfront with our guys in the meeting rooms. We tell them, 'Hey, block out distractions. Don't count numbers, don't worry about who's in the room. All you do is show up, work hard, make plays and be consistent. That will lead to productivity. Now you put yourself in a great situation to do great things,' and so far, Reuben has done that, so he's playing all over the secondary for us."

That bodes well.

"He's been really impressive," Orr said.

That much, at least, has never been in doubt.

Inside How Ravens UDFAs Made Roster: ‘How Could They Not Be On The Team?’

BALTIMORE SUN | AUGUST 27, 2025 | BRIAN WACKER

Jay Higgins IV was sitting at lunch with fellow Ravens linebacker Jake Hummel and center Tyler Linderbaum on Tuesday afternoon in Owings Mills when he felt a tap on his shoulder in the team’s dining room. He was being summoned upstairs to see general manager Eric DeCosta.

With roster cuts looming, the undrafted rookie free agent out of Iowa thought that he was going to meet his football Azrael, so he started to feel lightheaded.

As he walked down the hall, his heart rate kept “rising and rising,” he said. When he walked into DeCosta’s office, it “really started beating.”

Undrafted free agent cornerback Keyon Martin had also gotten a tap on the shoulder to head upstairs.

“Heart was racing a little bit,” he said. “Everybody know about those tough conversations. Thought that’s what I was going up there for.”

But when undrafted free agent rookie safety Reuben Lowery — who at one point in the spring was competing with Martin for a potential nickel role — passed Martin on the stairs, their smiles told their fates. Without a word, each knew the other had survived and, along with Higgins, beat the odds to make it on Baltimore’s initial 53-man roster.

“It’s definitely unusual,” coach John Harbaugh said Wednesday about three undrafted free agents landing on a roster replete with first-round picks and All-Pro talent. “When it comes right down to it, it comes down to what you do on the field.”

In that way, there was little argument, even for a team expected to contend for a Super Bowl.

Higgins stood out this summer with an interception of Colts quarterback Riley Leonard in Baltimore’s preseason opener, then followed with a team-high six tackles and a strip-sack the next week against the Cowboys. Martin, meanwhile, recorded a safety with a sack of Cowboys quarterback Joe Milton III and last week against the Commanders returned an interception for a touchdown. And Lowery has consistently had his nose around the football since the spring, including on an interception against the Cowboys.

But it was the plays big and small that caught coaches’ attention all summer.

“He’s really instinctive, high football IQ,” defensive coordinator Zach Orr said of Higgins, perplexed that the All-American out of Iowa didn’t get drafted. “A lot of linebackers now got moved to linebacker late in college or his first time playing the position was in college. He’s been a linebacker basically his whole life. So, he understands how to read linemen, read pulls, understands zone drops, man drops, spacing in coverage.”

“He was a great player in college. His resume speaks for itself, he should have been drafted, but measurables probably knocked him down. He’s definitely athletic enough [and] fast enough to play at this level.”

For Martin, who had to wait for the Ravens to invite him for a tryout before he could even sign after the draft when no one else called, the path was longer and more challenging for the 5-foot-9, 170-pound Louisiana alumnus by way of Football Championship Subdivision Youngstown State.

Yet, Harbaugh’s notes that he scribbled down detailed the appeal: “No hesitation player, a player that can process accurately and quickly and then without hesitation and can go respond and show up where he’s supposed to show up on time or ahead of time.”

When it came to Lowery, there were even fewer doubts.

“From Day 1, he was asking all the right questions,” senior secondary coach Chuck Pagano said. “He takes care of himself; he takes care of his body. He’s not going to be one of those guys that walks out on the field and is not prepared and doesn’t know what he’s going to do.”

Still, there were few openings and tough decisions that had to be made in trimming down the roster from 89 players.

There was also belief — evident by some of the Ravens’ surprising cuts as much as who they kept.

Twenty-seven years ago, DeCosta was just a lowly personnel assistant in Baltimore and Priest Holmes an undrafted free agent running back who’d spent much of his college career at Texas behind Ricky Williams. While Williams went on to win the Heisman Trophy and be selected fifth overall by the New Orleans Saints in 1999, Holmes had gone undrafted in 1997.

Holmes signed with the Ravens, topped 1,000 rushing yards after winning the starting job in his second year and went on to star for the Kansas City Chiefs, where he was a three-time All-Pro and twice led the NFL in rushing touchdowns and in 2001 led the league in rushing yards.

Fast forward to Wednesday, and it's easy to understand the hopeful retrospection.

"We really are just hoping to hit on one guy every year," DeCosta said of the undrafted free agent class. "We probably had five guys, legitimately, that we thought had a chance to be on this team that were undrafted this year."

"So, it was a great year."

Time will tell, but Higgins, Martin and Lowery understandably fell into the general manager's arms for a warm if not relieved embrace when DeCosta delivered the news in his office Tuesday afternoon.

"I had a long night last night!" Higgins said before doubling over.

"Heart racing man!" said Martin, smile stretched wide, head back, when DeCosta asked if he was nervous.

The emotion from each of their parents was even more palpable when they phoned them to let them know the news.

Higgins' dad Roy, who became a social media celebrity during his son's college days, shared the Ravens' video of the exchange on the family group text. Martin's mom Kimarya exclaimed, "Yes! Oh my God!" Lowery's father Reuben II started calling family members.

Their ascendance was also validating, to them when no other teams called, and to the Ravens when they did.

"We didn't expect it for sure," DeCosta said. "I think these guys, just when you think about the games, I mean you look at those guys and look at what they did, the production, the big plays and just the consistency. How could they not be on the team?"

"It just became abundantly clear that these were talented players that for whatever reason were overlooked by the entire league, including us, and deserved to be on teams and who can help us be our best."

Roquan Smith Sets The Example By Learning To Swim

[BALTIMORERAVENS.COM](https://www.baltimoreravens.com) | AUGUST 13, 2025 | RYAN MINK

One of Roquan Smith's favorite sayings is "chin up, chest out." It's a reference to taking on challenges head-on, without fear or regrets.

In the pool at Loyola College's aquatics center Tuesday afternoon, that saying took on figurative and literal meaning for Smith.

It may seem odd that one of the NFL's toughest guys and a three-time All-Pro linebacker doesn't know how to swim. But growing up in rural Montezuma, Ga., Smith didn't have those resources at his fingertips.

So, as many of his teammates did cannonballs off the high dive and raced each other across the pool, Smith waded in the shallow end as an eager student. Who better to teach him than the best swimmer of all time, 23-time gold medalist Michael Phelps, and his foundation?

Smith got lessons on how to float on his back. He learned how to kick his feet properly. He practiced holding his breath under water with teammates. He was all ears, taking the lessons and applying them, just as he does on the football field.

"I'm the type of swimmer that if I have to swim less than 20 yards, I could survive somehow because I could doggy paddle," Smith said.

"But as far as actually swimming and knowing how to breathe and things of that nature, honestly, it was my first time. It was really cool. It was really solid, some of the lessons they gave me. I feel a little more confident."

Building confidence in water is exactly the mission of the Michael Phelps Foundation, both with youth and adults.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), drowning is the second-leading cause of unintentional death for children ages 5-14. The CDC reported last year that drowning deaths are on the rise in the United States. Part of the reason is because almost 40 million adults (15.4%) do not know how to swim, and over half (54.7%) have never taken a swimming lesson.

"Thank you guys for taking this step and being vulnerable," Phelps told the Ravens. "I know not all of you do know how to swim. So, thank you so much. This whole city, you know, looks up to every single one of you. You guys getting into the water to do this could potentially save and change somebody else's life in a positive way."

Along with Smith and several other Ravens players, eight kids from the Boys and Girls Club of Metropolitan Baltimore joined to learn how to swim. Pools are not always accessible to every corner of communities, which is why Phelps' foundation partners with Boys and Girls Club of America, Special Olympics International, and a coalition of other partners.

"This is a great opportunity for the kids we serve to learn how to swim from one of the greatest of all time, Michael Phelps, but also Ravens players as well. It's great for them to be able to see that they can learn from folks like that," said Andre Fountain, the Director of External Affairs & Strategic Initiatives.

Smith's hometown of Montezuma has a population of less than 3,000 people and a median income below \$24,000.

Smith was content with what he had, but there wasn't a ton.

Being a Baltimore native and huge Ravens fan, Phelps was thrilled to give back to his hometown and favorite team.

But his foundation reached a kid from rural Georgia on Tuesday, and could have a far-reaching impact that the Ravens helped support with a \$100,000 donation.

"It's awesome what his foundation focuses on – saving lives, mental health, and things of that nature. It's major," Smith said. "Hats off to him, and I'm just grateful I was able to be in there and take something from his team. Obviously, he's a living legend."

Inside Ravens LT Ronnie Stanley's Renaissance: Pilates, Acupuncture, MMA

BALTIMORE SUN | AUGUST 20, 2025 | BRIAN WACKER

The sound of losing, it's usually silent. Inside the visiting locker room at Highmark Stadium in Orchard Park, New York, this past January, though, frustration echoed thunderously through the cramped and dated space for one Ravens player in particular.

While most solemnly dressed and quietly exited, left tackle Ronnie Stanley was still angry. So as another painful playoff loss soaked in, this one by 2 points to the Buffalo Bills in the divisional round, he vented to quarterback Lamar Jackson about Baltimore overcomplicating things during the game one minute and not being able to get out of its own way the next.

"That loss hurt as bad as any, yeah," he told The Baltimore Sun in a recent interview. "To keep adding another one, it's like again? You keep getting so close. In that moment, you're just shattered. Having all these past instances doesn't make it easier, it makes it harder."

That was only part of the motivation behind Stanley's decision to eschew a likely more lucrative free agent offer from another team this past offseason and return for a 10th season with the Ravens, making him the longest-tenured player on the roster.

Yes, the blindside protector of Baltimore's \$260 million face of the franchise considered exploring the riches of the open market, he told The Sun, and there was outside interest from at least a few teams, including the New England Patriots and Washington Commanders. The three-year, \$60 million extension he signed in March was, well, also close enough. But he was acutely aware of what he has in staying with the organization that drafted him sixth overall out of Notre Dame in 2016 in terms of comfort and a talent-rich environment.

There is "unfinished business" in the 2019 All-Pro's eyes as well, and the 31-year-old appears to be having a late-career renaissance after a bounce-back 2024 in which he was selected to the Pro Bowl following years of injury-marred seasons, questions about his commitment and, in 2023, being rotated in and out of the lineup down the stretch of the season because of his poor play.

"That was part of it," he continued. "Also the connection I have with my teammates, this city and this organization. I do have a ton of belief in our team and in our players, our whole organization. We should be winning championships. That's the standard that we have and we've come up short to that standard, but I still believe in us because I know how we work and what type of players we have."

The work Stanley put in during the offseason has continued through training camp. It's notable.

So far this summer, he hasn't missed a practice — an anomaly for a player of his experience, age and what was once a proclivity for his share of veteran days off. Now, on almost any day after practice, he also stays on the field to spend extra time with younger, less experienced linemen, polishing their technique and working on communication, something he started doing midway through last season and said that he used to do in college.

"I think it's really good at the end of practice when your legs are really tired to get a couple technique-focused drills in," Stanley said. "Being able to do it in a slow, controlled environment while you're already that fatigued, it's a good opportunity. You really can't get it unless you're that tired, so after practice is the perfect place."

For an offensive line with three players (left guard Andrew Vorhees, right guard Daniel Faalele and right tackle Roger Rosengarten) with less than two years of NFL experience at their respective positions and an average age of just under 25, the sessions are invaluable as they are impactful.

"He's a tremendous player and an even better dude," Vorhees said. "You guys don't get the opportunity to spend as much time as we do, but Ronnie is an awesome dude. When you get the opportunity to play next to an All-Pro player, kind of makes your life a little easier at times."

Added Rosengarten: "Every piece of information I can get from him, I'll take it."

Said general manager Eric DeCosta after re-signing Stanley: "He's really grown into being one of the leaders of our team, and just looking out at the draft and free agency, we just didn't really see a lot of guys that we felt were better than him."

Last season offered plenty of proof.

Stanley allowed just two sacks, per Pro Football Focus. He also had a pass-block win rate — how often a lineman can sustain their blocks for 2.5 seconds or longer — of 92%, ranking him 11th among offensive tackles, per ESPN analytics.

Few players on the Ravens' historic offense mattered more.

It wasn't perfect, though.

Communication issues and penalties plagued Baltimore's offensive line. In all, the Ravens' O-line was flagged 45 times during the regular season, per nflpenalties.com, more than any other group on the team. Stanley was the biggest culprit, with 13 penalties (though three of those were part of a crackdown for illegal formation in the first game of the season against the Kansas City Chiefs).

Part of the problem, Stanley said, was all the moving parts within the group, particularly early in the year, with three new starters up front. This year, that group returns intact, with Pro Bowl center Tyler Linderbaum, 25, the next most experienced player after Stanley.

Though penalties have reared their head at times during training camp, Stanley insists that things are more "stable" now and the unit is now "operating on a pretty high level at this point."

Time will tell. But it helps that Stanley came into training camp healthy this year for just the second time since 2019.

To do so, he completely retooled his highly regimented routine, both during the offseason and within the plush confines of the Ravens' training facility. "This year and last year my whole lifestyle revolved around my body," he said.

Stanley, who spends much of his offseason in Los Angeles, doled out for all sorts of bodywork, including extra gym sessions, pilates, acupuncture, sauna and cold tub treatments, swimming, foam rolling and a pair of Normatec boots, a type of pneumatic compression device used for recovery and rehabilitation that apply dynamic air pressure to the legs to promote circulation, reduce muscle soreness and aid in the removal of lactic acid.

He also for the first time took part in a mixed martial arts program at Unbreakable, a gym in Hollywood, California, run by Fox Sports' Jay Glazer. In doing so, Stanley said that he was able to get better at different techniques while focusing on certain muscle groups that are integral to blocking.

And throughout training camp, his routine has included daily sauna, ice, stretching and foam rolling, followed by those Normatec sessions every night. "That helps me set up for a better next day instead of going home and waking up super sore," he said.

Most importantly, he believes that all of it will help keep him on the field and playing his best when the stakes are at their highest.

"It's just about sharpening up those little details, playing how you already play in those moments," he said. "You don't have to do anything more or anything else."

Ravens' Ronnie Stanley Sheds Light On Past Injuries, Near Fatal Crash As Teen

BALTIMORE SUN | MAY 13, 2025 | BRIAN WACKER

Ronnie Stanley has always been introspective, if not equanimous. He has also endured excruciating injury during his nine-year Ravens career.

Those two facts merged in a revealing essay by the left tackle for The Players' Tribune that was published on Monday.

Stanley opened up with new details about the 2020 ankle injury that ended his season and led to further complications. The former All-Pro also wrote about a terrifying accident that he was involved in as a 14-year-old, and on a lighter note, touched on his rescue dogs, Lola and Rico, and his relationship with quarterback Lamar Jackson.

It was Jackson, of course, whom Stanley was blocking for in the first quarter of a Week 8 game against the Pittsburgh Steelers five years ago when Stanley's ankle got rolled up from behind by T.J. Watt, sending him to the M&T Bank Stadium grass in agony.

It also turned out to be more than just a dislocated ankle, with Stanley, 31, writing that he also broke his leg on the play.

"I basically tore up everything in my ankle besides my deltoid ligament," he wrote. "They put me in a cast from my hip to my toes. Couldn't bend my knee for three months. I couldn't even sit in a car. I had to lie in the backseat if I wanted to go anywhere. Pain meds were the only thing allowing me to get some sleep, especially early on. I could feel the eight staples in my leg rubbing against the cast every night."

Stanley returned to training camp the following summer, but wrote that he still wasn't feeling right.

The pain was so intense, Stanley said, that it elicited tears as he came off the field for drives in a Week 1 game against the Raiders in his hometown of Las Vegas. His play was poor and Baltimore struggled, too, losing 33-27 in overtime.

After the game, an MRI showed that he tore his deltoid ligament.

But because doctors weren't certain that it was completely torn, Stanley said, he underwent rehab for several weeks while he was inactive for the next five games. Finally, he underwent surgery and didn't play again until Week 5 of 2022.

It also wasn't the first time he dealt with a severe injury.

As a teenager, he said the Can-Am Defender (essentially a "souped-up" golf cart) that he was riding in in his neighborhood flipped and landed on him.

"Before I could even blink, I'm laying in the road, blood everywhere," he wrote. "I knew the whole right side of my body was crushed. I could actually see the bone sticking out of my arm. Neighbors heard the crash, called the ambulance, and came to help. I was getting really sleepy at one point. But everyone kept telling me that, no matter what, I needed to stay awake until the ambulance came."

Stanley spent a week in intensive care and said he was "pretty broken" but that doctors told him the next day if the cart had landed a few inches to the left, it would have crushed his head.

After the accident, Stanley's parents got him and his two siblings two dogs. That "jump started" his interest in animals, and his current two dogs provided "a huge source of comfort and unconditional love that made all the difference on a daily basis," he said, as he battled injuries and the mental anguish that went with him during his professional career.

He also leaned on Jackson.

"There were other guys who had my back, too," he said. "But 8 always had my back. I've never met a more authentic person in the NFL. He's the face of the franchise and has all the pressure in the world on his shoulders. He's got every incentive to just be a Company Man, and instead he comes in every day like his genuine self. Not trying to fit any mold, an elite competitor with that childlike joy for the game. I love it."

All of it played a part.

Last season, after taking a \$7.5 million pay cut to remain with the team following a poor 2023 season and in the final year of his contract, Stanley returned to form. The Ravens went 12-5, won the AFC North, put up historically great numbers on offense, and he was selected to the Pro Bowl.

That led to Baltimore re-signing Stanley for three years and \$60 million just before the start of free agency.

"If you're reading this, and you're feeling really empty, just know that there's a lot of people out there who know and understand what you're going through and how you're feeling," Stanley wrote.

"I don't have any magic words for you to make you feel better. But if you really want to find purpose, I truly believe that a good first step is to stop being afraid to look stupid, or being afraid to fail. In whatever you do in life, do it with confidence and belief in yourself that you can be great. You can even be the best! Why not you?"

Malaki Starks Refused To Let Tough Times Derail His Destiny

BALTIMORERAVENS.COM | AUGUST 28, 2025 | CLIFF BROWN

The Ravens are depending on first-round pick Malaki Starks, but he's used to people counting on him.

Starks' 9-year-old nephew, Isaiah, is autistic. When they are back home in Jefferson, Ga., they are inseparable. Starks connects with Isaiah in a way that nobody else does. That's one of Starks' many gifts. His personality draws people to him.

"We learned that Isaiah was autistic when he was like 3 ½," Malaki's sister Mariah said. "Malaki is really close with him. Even when he barely listens to me, he'll listen to Malaki. He can get him to do things that I can't.

"Malaki's an old soul, to be honest. He's always been good with people. Most of his football career he played against people older than he was. He could handle it, because he's always been grounded."

Starks Wants the Smoke

When Starks makes his regular-season debut against the Buffalo Bills next week, he'll be the only rookie in Baltimore's starting defensive lineup, part of a team with Super Bowl aspirations that's loaded with veteran stars.

At some point, MVP quarterback Josh Allen will test Starks. Allen has played against the four other former first-round picks in Baltimore's secondary – safety Kyle Hamilton, and corners Marlon Humphrey, Jaire Alexander, and Nate Wiggins. But Allen has never faced Starks, the 27th-overall pick who will have to prove he's as good as the Ravens think he is.

Starks welcomes that pressure, and history suggests he'll thrive in it. He started as a true freshman at Georgia on a team that won a national championship. In his first college game, Starks introduced himself to the nation with a phenomenal interception against Oregon quarterback Bo Nix, who's now the Denver Broncos' starting quarterback.

Starks dares quarterbacks to target him often, because he's always been confident in his ability to make plays. He's looking forward to facing the fire and proving he can handle the smoke.

"The biggest thing is just being myself and earning the respect from these guys," Starks said. "That comes with time, and it comes with a lot of hard work, which I'm used to. You'll reach a point where you'll know that you've earned it. I'm just working to get there."

Shaped By Homelessness and Tragedy

NFL quarterbacks can't possibly throw more at Starks than life already has.

When Starks was just 7 years old, his 9-year-old cousin and best friend, Keion Gresham, was killed as part of a domestic murder-suicide. It was 14 years ago, but Starks remembers as if it happened five minutes ago. He and Gresham spent the previous day playing together and had plans to visit a local arcade on the morning he was murdered.

"The day before felt like a movie, the perfect day," Starks said. "The people who I'm closest to were all at the house and we were running around playing. The next day, my parents had to work, so they dropped me and my sister off at my great grandma's. I just remember the phone rang, and my great grandma was screaming."

Starks has worn No. 24 ever since to honor Gresham, who wore that jersey number in youth football. It's a way for Starks to stay close to the cousin he will never forget.

In many ways, the day Gresham died ended childhood for Starks. He learned life can be violent, fleeting and unfair. But what could have made him bitter also made him stronger.

"I had to grow up a lot faster than I planned," Starks said. "Faster than most kids have to. I realized at an early age the things I wanted in life, and the things I didn't want. I've tried to stick to that plan of being the best version of myself."

Not every first-round pick will appreciate his rookie contract the way Starks will. For a three-year period when he was in elementary school, his family lived between hotels and family members.

His parents, Larry and Tisha, are hardworking people who eventually achieved financial stability, but along the way the journey was difficult. Jefferson is a small town with a population of about 18,000, one of those places where it seems everybody knows everybody.

But few people knew the hardships that Starks' family was facing until he shared his story years later.

"When everything first started happening, we went to a hotel for a week," Starks said. "After that, we'd go stay with family and friends. When we moved out of the hotel the first time, it hit me and my sister. We don't have a place to call home."

Those were trying times, but watching his parents work multiple jobs, never give up, and never abandon their Christian faith taught Starks valuable lessons. He believes he can rise above challenges on the gridiron, partly because his family persevered. There is a gospel song entitled, "Trouble Don't Last Always." For Starks, those words ring true.

"I didn't want to lose my cousin," Starks said. "I didn't want to worry about, 'What are we going to eat tonight? Where are we going to live next?'"

"But those experiences helped make me who I am. So, in a way, I'm super grateful."

A Hometown Hero

Starks' combination of athleticism, smarts, and work ethic made him a three-sport star at Jefferson High School in football, basketball, and track.

When Starks entered ninth grade, his high school football coach Gene Cathcart declared to local media that Starks had NFL talent and was the best athlete Jefferson had ever produced. Seven years later, Cathcart's words ring true. But he doesn't think he was bold to envision stardom for Starks.

"That was like predicting Christmas will be in December this year," Cathcart said. "When you see the really special ones, you don't need a scouting report. Your eyes tell you. That's what it was like watching Malaki."

It wasn't just Starks' athletic ability that people in Jefferson admired. It was the way he carried himself. How he interacted with everyone like he wasn't a big deal.

By the time Starks was a junior, he was already a hometown hero. Some classmates came to games wearing his No. 24 jersey, and Cathcart said Starks was so respected that he wasn't just the best player, he was also the most popular.

"Any attention he got, everyone was happy about it," Cathcart said. "He was so genuine, so authentic. His parents did an unbelievable job with him."

Cathcart still gets choked up telling his favorite Starks story. When he was in the 10th grade, Starks noticed that Cathcart left practice early one day. He was headed to South Carolina to visit a relative who was battling addiction. Visiting hours were restricted, and it was the only window that Cathcart had.

Starks kept asking one of the assistant coaches about Cathcart's whereabouts. Later that day, Cathcart's phone rang. It was Starks calling.

"He said, 'Coach, I just want you to know that everything went great at practice,'" Cathcart said. "He also said, 'I don't know the family member you went to visit, but if this person is your family, he's our family. If there's anything you need, let us know.'"

"This is a 10th grader calling me and saying that. I'm a grown man with kids and I'm not that mature, and I definitely wasn't that mature in the 10th grade. That's Malaki. He's the kind of man you want your sons to be like."

Making a Strong First Impression

Starks' intangibles have impressed the Ravens as well. Their interest in him went to another level at the NFL Combine in February.

"Probably one of the most impressive interviews we've ever had," General Manager Eric DeCosta said.

Head Coach John Harbaugh noticed how Starks carried himself on draft night after the Ravens called his name. It wasn't cockiness Harbaugh saw. It was confidence.

"Did you guys see him when he walked down the hallway there and out to the stage?" Harbaugh said. "It looked like he was coming through the tunnel for gameday."

Defensive Coordinator Zach Orr couldn't wait to get Starks on the field at rookie minicamp, so he could throw the entire playbook at the 21-year-old to see how much he could handle. Starks didn't flinch, and Orr could immediately tell how diligently he prepared.

"Safety is one of the toughest positions to play here," Orr said. "We don't designate a guy as a strong safety or free safety. We just play sides. You have to do everything."

"He picked it up right away and was getting other guys lined up. Did he make mistakes? Yes. But when he made the mistake, he didn't make it again."

Starks has been the de facto leader of the 2025 Ravens rookie class from Day 1. On "The Lounge" podcast last month, Starks explained his decision to organize rookie walkthroughs at the team's hotel during training camp. He asked hotel staff if he and several other rookies could use an empty ballroom to rehearse plays. Then the group kept getting larger.

"If you're bonding in various ways, it can help you," Starks said. "This process is hard for all of us rookies. We need to help each other."

A Pair of Aces at Safety

Hamilton was the first safety selected in the 2022 draft (14th overall) and became the highest-paid safety of all time Wednesday. Starks was the first safety drafted this year (27th overall).

No other NFL team has made a heavier investment at safety in recent years, and Starks' presence became even more important after Ar'Darius Washington suffered an Achilles injury that will sideline him for at least the majority of the season.

Pairing Hamilton and Starks gives the Ravens two chess pieces at safety who can cover each other's back, making it harder for quarterbacks to anticipate where they will be from one play to the next.

"Malaki can do so many things," Orr said. "Kyle doesn't have to protect anybody. We don't have to hide any weakness back there. Malaki can fit the run. His coverage skills are excellent. I think if he wanted to play nothing but corner in this league, he could do that.

"Malaki has the temperament of a safety – you have to make plays, and you have to be patient. There might not be much action for you if you're in the right spot, but if we haven't given up any explosives, you're doing a heck of a job. Then, if they throw it your way, you make the play. Malaki's perfect for that."

It Begins in Buffalo

Before Starks runs out of the tunnel for his NFL debut on Sunday Night Football, he'll follow his usual pre-game rituals. He'll write his nephew Isaiah's name on the tape he wears on his arms. He'll call his parents at some point before taking the field. He'll read a letter from his fiancé, Savanna Jackson, who writes him a message before every game.

But once the game begins, the big stage won't be too large for him. He's already handled much tougher situations. Being homeless is hard. Being on a team that's chasing a Super Bowl is exciting.

When asked what it will take for the Ravens to accomplish that elusive goal, Starks gave a thoughtful answer, sounding like a 21-year-old who is wise beyond his years.

"Talent is never really a problem when you get to the highest levels," Starks said. "But staying connected with each other is how you win. That's what carries you in the second half, in the fourth quarter, in overtime."

"I know this is a different level of football, but I'm used to winning. Not only am I used to it, I expect it. I'm excited to be here. I think this will be a great place for me to win."

Ravens Rookie Malaki Starks Was A ‘Nobody From Nowhere’ Who Always Envisioned This Moment

THE ATHLETIC | AUGUST 7, 2025 | JEFF ZREBIEC

There were hardships, for sure. There was a period when Malaki Starks didn't know where he would sleep at night. His cousin, his best friend in the world, was killed in a double murder-suicide at a young age. Another cousin, who Starks maintains is the best athlete from his hometown, got caught up in the system. A friend and former high school teammate was the victim of gun violence.

For Starks, the road out of Jefferson, Ga., was littered with pitfalls and potholes. Yet, there was also great comfort in seeing the same faces, eating at the same restaurants and stopping at the same gas station. Amid the rhythm of growing up in a small town, Starks had ample opportunity to dream big.

"You only know what you see in life," Starks said. "My first time ever seeing a plane was my first away game in college. My first time going to a beach was my freshman year in college. My vision of the world was so short, but my mind was so big, so I was able to adapt to the things that I saw. That helped me on the football field, just with being adaptable, being able to play different spots, being able to be here so somebody else could be there."

Barely three months into his NFL career, the Ravens' 21-year-old rookie safety already looks, talks and acts like a veteran.

Fellow Ravens safety Kyle Hamilton, who has made two Pro Bowls in his three NFL seasons, says Starks is "miles ahead" of where he was as a rookie. Ravens defensive coordinator Zach Orr compared Starks to former Baltimore linebacker C.J. Mosley, who made the Pro Bowl as a rookie and had a standout 10-year career.

Long before Starks became an NFL first-round pick, he envisioned this exact scenario playing out. He's been preparing for this his whole life.

"As long as I've known him, his dream has always been to do this," said Starks' fiancée⁴⁸, Savanna Jackson, who first met him in elementary school.

The first time Starks ever touched the ball in a youth football game, he was so scared to get hit that he ran backward for 15 yards and then directly out of bounds. On his second carry, he sprinted in the right direction, crossing the goal line with his chest puffed out about 20 yards ahead of the kids chasing him. When it came to sports, he's always been a quick study.

He helped the Jefferson High School football and basketball teams reach the state championship, and he was one of the stars of the track and field team that won a state crown. A heralded recruit, Starks traveled about 20 miles south to play college football at the University of Georgia, becoming the rare prospect to start as a freshman for an SEC powerhouse. In his very first NFL practice, Starks lined up as a starter on a defense with six players who had been named to a Pro Bowl.

The Ravens were so enamored with him heading into the draft that their interest was widely talked about around the league, a rare development for an organization that treats draft intel as a matter of national security. Starks may have sealed the deal with an engaging interview at the NFL Scouting Combine in February.

"One of the most impressive interviews we've ever had," Ravens general manager Eric DeCosta said.

The reality was that the Ravens loved everything about Starks. They loved his athleticism, coverage and ball skills, and his versatility. They loved how he led and communicated. And they loved his story. It was a perfect match between player and team.

"He's actually as good as advertised," said Gene Cathcart, Starks' football coach at Jefferson High. "There's not a skeleton in the closet. There's not a thing that we exaggerate. It's just a great opportunity to see something great for someone who really, really deserves it."

Starks still remembers the quizzical looks from players and coaches during the recruiting process.

"You're from where?" they'd ask.

"Jefferson, Georgia," Starks would say.

"Where?" they'd repeat.

"Close to Atlanta," Starks would respond.

"I was a nobody from nowhere," Starks said. "Nobody knew who I was. Nobody knew where I lived. I embraced that. A lot of people see that as adversity, and it kind of knocks them down. I took it all as a challenge. That's something I don't have to live with anymore."

Jefferson, with a population of under 18,000, is the quintessential small southern town. Everybody knows everybody.

Everybody is a neighbor. The town comes alive on Friday nights during football season, and that was especially true when Starks was at Jefferson High, playing on both sides of the ball and making highlight-reel plays look routine.

"He was basically The Beatles in this town," Cathcart said. "You saw (No.) 24 jerseys all over town, even in high school. You still do. Youth night was like a coronation of Malaki Starks."

"Malaki," said Shane Sorrow, his former youth football coach, "is like Jefferson's sweetheart."

Sorrow initially wanted to turn 6-year-old Malaki away from his team. Sorrow already had 29 kids, and that was more than enough to manage. However, he went to high school with Starks' father, Larry, and the director of the rec program pushed for Sorrow to create an opening.

"Trust me," the director said. "You're going to want this kid."

Starks immediately showed that he was the best athlete on the field. Yet, it took a while for Sorrow and his staff to come to grips with a paradox about Starks' game. As a defender, Starks loved to hit people. As a ball carrier, he shied away from any semblance of contact. Most of the time, that hardly mattered. Nobody could catch him anyway.

"As long as Malaki was on the field, you felt like you were going to win the game," Sorrow said. "That's just how it was."

At first, Starks wasn't comfortable with the idea that his athletic exploits were putting him on a pedestal. He was always quick to greet coaches and teammates with a hug, but he didn't say a whole lot to begin with. He was most vocal when he was admonishing his play. His youth coaches begged Starks to stop being so hard on himself.

Starks rarely would ask for help, either, at a time when he was dealing with more grief and heartache than any young kid should.

"We always talked in our house about appreciating the blessings you get," Starks said. "Whenever you think you got it bad, somebody else somewhere has it 10 times worse. Just really take everything as a blessing and trusting in God and his plan."

Keion Gresham was nearly two years older than Starks, but Starks' success on the football field helped convince Gresham to take up the sport and wear the same No. 24. They were cousins, yet they might as well have been brothers.

Starks was 6 when Gresham and his half-brother, Keionte, were killed by their father, who then killed himself. The tragedy forced Starks to "grow up fast" and impacted his outlook on life.

"You don't really know what else to do other than to act as if it happened for a bigger purpose," Jackson said. "What he wanted to do was to take his cousin through this journey as much as he could. That was a huge motivator for Malaki to make it out. He just wanted to be the one to do that for both of them. When you carry a weight like that, you're a little more motivated than the person next to you."

There were other challenges. Larry and Tisha Starks worked tirelessly and did all they could, but there wasn't enough money coming in to maintain a stable home for Malaki and his older sister, Mariah. The family moved around during Starks' third- to sixth-grade years and didn't have a steady home to call their own.

They stayed in a motel before that became prohibitive financially. They moved in with a family friend, but they didn't want to overstay their welcome. They then moved in with an aunt. Cathcart credits Starks' parents for using adverse events as "teachable moments" for their kids.

"You have to be able to adapt," Starks said. "It taught me a lesson. We stayed grounded in our faith, and that kind of led us through the whole process and what we needed to do and who we wanted to be in life."

Starks didn't grow comfortable talking about being homeless until years later. It's not necessarily that he was embarrassed by it. He was just always taught to appreciate what he had, not sweat what he didn't.

Few people in Jefferson knew about the family's struggles, even though Jefferson was a tight-knit and supportive community, and Starks had a cadre of coaches and teammates willing to help. Larry and Tisha certainly weren't looking for anybody's pity. Tisha made sure her kids stayed on the right path, while Larry worked as many hours as he could.

Starks said watching his father put his head down and work day and night taught him what it means to be a leader. Starks put those lessons into action, both in the community, where he worked at a local rec center and helped mentor kids, and on the football field.

Cathcart gets emotional as he tells the story about leaving his players one day during a game week to visit a relative who was at an out-of-state alcohol treatment center. Starks, a sophomore at the time but already one of the team leaders, noticed Cathcart wasn't at practice and pressed an assistant coach for an explanation. That night, Cathcart got a message from Starks.

"He was like, 'Coach, I just want you to know that everything went great today. The meetings were fine. We'll be ready to play,'" Cathcart recalled. "Here's a guy who needed to do no butt kissing, no sucking up. But that's just him. There's just story after story like that."

Cathcart has a picture prominently displayed in his home of Starks consoling Devon Gales after Jefferson's loss in the state championship game. Gales was the former Southern University football player who was paralyzed during a 2015 game against Georgia. Gales spent time around the Jefferson team during the season, and it was Starks who made sure Gales had entry to the locker room, got on the bus and got back to his car safely.

Even after he graduated from Jefferson High and started his career at Georgia, Starks made the short trip home whenever he felt he was needed. When his ex-teammate and workout partner Elijah DeWitt was shot and killed in 2022, Starks returned to Jefferson to honor his friend and mourn with DeWitt's family.

"The week before he passed, I sent him a text," Starks said. "I was like, 'Hey, man, you're special. You have such great talent. Stay out of the way, keep working and I'll see you in a few years. We're going to meet at the top.' He texted me back and said, 'OK, I got you. I love you.'"

"He was special. It was very hard for me, just to see the potential that he had as a person."

Starks and Jackson became boyfriend and girlfriend in the fourth grade. Two years later, Starks attended one of Jackson's soccer games and met her parents. Afterward, they all went out to dinner at an upscale seafood restaurant.

"I'm looking at the menu and I don't know how to pronounce any of the words. I didn't know any of this food," Starks said.

"They ordered calamari, and I was like, 'What's calamari?' They were like, 'It's octopus.' And I said, 'I ain't eating that.'"

Starks did wind up eating it, and he enjoyed it. Now, Jackson says he orders calamari in just about every restaurant they go to. Starks and Jackson are engaged to be married in March 2026, but that may have been the night he won his fiancée's parents over. They marveled at how Starks, after receiving his first, waited until everybody else got theirs before he started eating, an advanced display of manners for a sixth grader.

For Starks, the night was one of many during his upbringing that opened his eyes to what else is out there.

"Experiences stick with kids," he said. "It gives them a different type of drive to say, 'Hey, I was here one day. I know I can get there. Let me figure out how to do it.'"

Starks has already pondered how he can get involved in his new city and give kids experiences he never had. For now, though, his unwavering focus is on the field.

When Starks got the call from DeCosta that the Ravens were drafting him with the 27th pick, he was in the middle of an Uno game with his family. There was no outward display of emotion. This, after all, is what Starks had long envisioned. One of the first questions Starks asked of the Ravens was when he could get his playbook.

"We're from a super small town," Jackson said. "You don't really see a lot of people leave the town. You don't necessarily see people set these big dreams and accomplish these dreams. That's the mindset that allowed him to get to where he is."

Starks worked quickly to embrace his new team and new home. During his first minicamp in May, he took it upon himself to arrange walk-throughs for the other rookies at the team hotel after practices. Coaches and players have raved about his leadership qualities and how quickly he's picked up the defense.

Starks could make his debut in Thursday night's preseason opener against the Indianapolis Colts.

"He has passed every test, but there are more tests to come," Ravens coach John Harbaugh said.

When Starks met with his financial adviser, he said he wanted to make just one notable purchase and invest the rest of his money. The recipient of a four-year, \$16.5 million deal, Starks had an apartment in Baltimore and a car. His parents moved into a new home last year. Starks, though, needed a coffee table for his apartment. Everything else could wait.

He's been preparing for this his entire life. He doesn't want to rush a thing.

"I don't see this as pressure. I think it's a privilege," Starks said. "When I was growing up, I didn't have anybody like myself to look at that came from my spot. Everyone that I saw fell back into the system. You don't really make it out. I'm just trying to be my best self every day and give the most effort I can. I'm trying to do things the right way and be a child of God. That's what led me here."

Meet The Ravens Rookie Who Hopes To Answer Team's Punt Return Prayers

BALTIMORE SUN | AUGUST 5, 2025 | BRIAN WACKER

LaJohntay Wester is used to being the smallest and thus usually doubted.

Long before the rookie was a sixth-round draft pick of the Ravens selected to be their answer to last season's punt return woes, he spent his childhood in southwest Florida sandwiched between his bigger, taller football playing brothers John Jr. and Jaylen, both of whom played defense and often had their way with the diminutive middle child of John and Laquita Wester.

"I didn't really like contact growing up," LaJohntay told The Baltimore Sun. "I wanted to score and dance, so I stayed on the offensive side."

It wasn't always easy to do so in the Wester household, where the boys' father wouldn't return home from his day jobs as a personal trainer and massage therapist until around 11 p.m., walk in the door and immediately challenge his sons to race him out in the street.

"The house was super competitive," John Jr., a former 6-foot-2, 180-pound defensive back at Fayetteville State and Florida Atlantic told The Baltimore Sun. "LaJohntay probably had it the worst being the only offensive player."

Indeed.

His other brother, Jaylen, who also played with the siblings at FAU, is currently a linebacker at Western Kentucky.

"LaJohntay's always been small," John Jr. continued. "But having that extra oomph in his personality is what made him able to make crazy plays."

Still, when LaJohntay was a senior at Palmetto (Fla.) High School in 2019, a college recruiter in attendance for the Tigers' game against nearby Largo told Wester's coach, Dave Marino, that he wasn't interested in talking to the undersized, unranked senior. So Marino promptly delivered the message to Wester before the game and Wester responded by returning a punt and kickoff each for a touchdown and added another score on a bubble screen in the 44-6 rout.

"He was just electric," Marino told The Sun, adding that Wester's ability as a point guard in basketball through high school added to his spatial awareness. "Every time he had the ball in his hands, you were just waiting for something special to happen, even at that young age. But because he was undersized, he always had a chip on his shoulder like, 'I'll show you.'"

Yet even then it took a bit of serendipity.

With Bowling Green and Kansas among the few schools offering a scholarship to the 5-foot-9, 170-pound speedster who was even smaller back then, Marino, a onetime grad assistant with the Philadelphia Eagles who went on to a long and successful high school coaching career called his old friend Willie Taggart, who was from the same area and then in his first year as FAU's coach. Marino pestered him to offer a scholarship to the receiver who in his senior season had returned seven kick and punt returns for touchdowns and tallied 758 receiving yards and eight more scores.

Taggart obliged.

In four seasons for the Owls, Wester racked up 2,703 receiving yards and 21 touchdowns on 252 catches. He also returned a punt for a touchdown, was named American Athletic Conference Special Teams Player of the Year and was an AAC first-team selection at both receiver and special teams as a junior in 2023.

Then came Colorado's Big 12 opener against Baylor last season.

Two seconds on the clock. Third-and-10 from the Baylor 44-yard line. Trailing by 7. As quarterback Shedeur Sanders scrambled left, he spotted Wester, who'd transferred to Boulder to play for coach Deion Sanders and increase his NFL exposure, and heaved the ball into the front left corner of the end zone. Wester broke free from his man and made a sliding grab between two defenders for the touchdown.

Colorado won in overtime and Wester was on his way.

"Deion knows Florida football," Marino said. "He had no hesitation bringing an undersized guy into the Power 5 level of football coming from a mid-major."

Wester ended the season with 74 catches for 931 yards and 10 touchdowns. He also averaged 12.2 yards per punt return, which included a 76-yard return for a touchdown against Utah.

Along the way, he was finally able to switch jersey numbers, too, going from No. 10 to No. 1.

"He wanted the No. 1 when he came here," Sanders told reporters following the Buffaloes' win over Cincinnati. "No. 1 ain't something you acquire, it's given to you. ... He earned it."

Now, he hopes to earn something else: The starting job as Baltimore's punt returner.

Finding a dependable option was among coach John Harbaugh's draft wishes after the Ravens last season ranked 26th in total punt return yards, 16th in yards per return and struggled to find someone who could consistently catch the ball as they uneasily bounced between Tylan Wallace, Deonte Harty and Steven Sims. So general manager Eric DeCosta used the 203rd overall pick on Wester, a player who of course Taggart, now the Ravens' running backs coach, was intimately familiar with.

"What stands out about him is really his returnability," DeCosta said following the draft. "If you watch him, we think he's a twitchy, explosive punt returner."

Through the first two-plus weeks of training camp, Wester has gotten only scant chances to show his stuff. He's caught most but not every ball during kick and punt return drills but at least has looked comfortable fielding them.

"What I'm seeing from LaJohntay every day is the consistency in the ball catching," special teams coordinator Chris Horton said. "He has great technique. He has great fundamentals in really how we want to field the ball."

This week, he'll finally get more opportunities to do so at full speed in a joint practice against the Indianapolis Colts on Tuesday followed by the Ravens' first preseason game on Thursday night against the Colts at M&T Bank Stadium.

When he does, he hopes to channel one of his idols, Devin Hester, who he used to watch highlights of on YouTube and ESPN and then try to imitate. The only player in the Pro Football Hall of Fame as a returner, Hester starred at the University of Miami before going on to set an NFL record with 19 career returns for touchdowns (14 punt, five kickoff) over 11 seasons with the Chicago Bears, Atlanta Falcons, Ravens and Seattle Seahawks.

For now, though, Wester has a simple but effective philosophy he'll lean on first when it comes to the return game.

"Catch the ball," he said. "Before you do anything, before you think about anything, catch the ball. If we make explosive plays off it, that's a big plus. But the main objective is to just catch the ball."

Once he does, the rest should take care of itself.

Nate Wiggins Searches For Elusive Concept Of ‘Consistency’ To Aid In Goal Of Being A Shutdown Cornerback

BALTIMORE BANNER | SEPTEMBER 21, 2025 | GIANA HAN

Everyone in the Ravens building seems to be in agreement — cornerback Nate Wiggins is supremely talented.

But consistency, consistency, consistency is key if he hopes to realize his potential to rank among the greats of NFL shutdown corners.

It's the word coaches, teammates, Wiggins and his trainer repeated as the next step for Wiggins in his second year in the league.

"I think he's one of the more talented guys, if not the most talented guy, in our DB room," Pro Bowl safety Kyle Hamilton said. "And I think, for him, it's just consistency every week. He has the ability to go shut down guys every single week, but he still just turned 22 and is already a great player in this league."

Cornerback Chidobe Awuzie was not a Raven for Wiggins' rookie season, but he said Year 2 presents a challenge for many players.

"Usually, second-year players, you have a decision to make," Awuzie said. "You could stay kind of in that rookie mindset, or you can try to take your game to the next level mentally, with your approach, your preparation. You've got a full offseason for the first time. And I've seen a lot of those things."

Justin Miller, a former NFL cornerback and Wiggins' trainer, started to see the change when Wiggins' rookie year wrapped up.

Wiggins calls Miller a lot to talk through things, both ball and life. For years, he has looked to Miller for guidance. During the offseason, the conversation went differently.

"He called me with his game plan, as opposed to me giving him mine, my assessments," Miller said. "So I think that's a testament he's becoming a pro. He knows what he needs to get better at."

Miller has known him since Wiggins was in eighth grade and identified his skill immediately.

"I told his mother that I think, if she kept him in there, he kept playing and he kept practicing and kept doing the stuff that we were working on, that he had the opportunity of being a Day 1 guy," Miller said.

Miller was right. At just 20 years old, Wiggins became the Ravens' No. 1 draft pick. He was given playing time immediately and eventually became a starter.

He also turned 21 and learned about the differences between being a professional and a college player.

On the field, one of the biggest differences he struggled with, as he told The Banner in his weekly rookie check-ins, was the different rules in how he can use his hands. He was called for four defensive-pass-interference, two defensive holding and two illegal-contact penalties.

Wiggins suffered a setback when he was in a car accident. He was dealing with whiplash and had to sit out Week 2. Miller said he had to "recalibrate." Wiggins' mother, Tamika, also said he's the youngest child in the family and had to learn how to be independent at Clemson. Baltimore presented another step in the journey toward adulthood.

Miller said Wiggins was frustrated by his lack of playing time, which was in part due to his recovery but also the fact he hadn't earned it yet.

"I told him, like, that's a part of being a pro," Miller said. "You have to earn the respect, not only of your coaches but your peers, and part of that is you're playing with consistency."

Consistency — the key word, again. But Miller explained to him it wasn't just about what he was doing on the field.

"If you're consistent every day, if you're on time, you be the first one in the meetings, you're sitting down, you're having conversations with people, you're asking them about stuff, trying to figure out the weakness for the defense and figure out the little things like that, then people genuinely tend to want to listen to you more," Miller said. "They want to talk to you."

Miller, who entered the league at age 21, had tried to impress on Wiggins the qualities of a pro since he started working with him. He also had pitted Wiggins against older, more experienced opponents since he was 14. But, as Miller learned himself, there are things you just have to learn by experience.

Around halfway through last season, he started to notice Wiggins' maturation speeding up. And then they used his first offseason to review what he'd learned and work so he'd come back even readier.

They worked on putting on weight, which Wiggins said would help him absorb collisions more easily. And they worked on those pesky defensive pass interferences.

"In the NFL, you have to truly play with your feet," Miller said. "So, if you play good with your feet at the line of scrimmage, then you truly win the game. ... You have to win within the first 5 yards with your feet. If you can do that, then you eliminate a lot of route concepts."

When Wiggins returned for training camp, he got off to a hot start. Despite the lack of pads, he stood out for his pass breakups and coverage. In one practice, he made two interceptions against quarterback Lamar Jackson.

He also had two new veteran cornerbacks on his team in Awuzie and Jaire Alexander, who both signed in free agency. Wiggins said he's still trying to figure out just what being a pro means, but he's using the resources around him.

"He's always bouncing things off me," Alexander said. "Like what do I see here? How can I be better? So a part of his Year 2 journey is growing up, and he's doing that very well."

Awuzie said Wiggins also peppers him with questions and has become one of his closest friends on the team.

"He's always got some questions about receiver splits or concepts they might run, things to get his body right, how to watch film, note taking, just little things like that," Awuzie said. "And I've seen a really big improvement in him, like the results and the process."

Although Wiggins had a quiet middle of camp, he said coaches and teammates told him he had a really good one overall. That was proven with his strong start.

Although he was called for another pass interference in the season opener against the Buffalo Bills, he rebounded with an exceptional game against the Cleveland Browns after watching lots of film. The ability to rebound is one of the key qualities needed for a successful career as a cornerback.

He capped his outstanding coverage, which earned him a PFF score of 80.7, with the team's first interception of the season.

"I was lit," Awuzie said with a laugh. "He turned me up. He turned me up. You know, I jumped on his back, I was just so excited that he got one."

Alexander was equally excited from the sidelines — although he joked that he can now say he's faster than Wiggins because Wiggins got taken down by a lineman right before the end zone.

It's just the start of what they all think Wiggins can do, and he's looking forward to the next chance to prove himself with the Ravens' Monday night matchup against the Detroit Lions.

"I look for every week just taking my challenge head on," Wiggins said. "They said they want me to lock down No. 1 [Lions wide receiver Jameson Williams], and that's what i'm going to do."