

After training with Darrelle Revis, cornerback Kyle Wilson looks to improve in second year with Jets

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By **Jenny Vrentas/The Star-Ledger**



William Perlman/The Star-Ledger Jets DB Kyle Wilson, a first-round pick last year, went through a grueling offseason regimen to improve his game.

Their days began at 8 a.m. in Phoenix.

At Fischer Sports, Darrelle Revis and Kyle Wilson threw themselves into a rigorous sequence of physical therapy; core work with sledgehammers, tires and medicine balls; 40 minutes of flexibility exercises; speed work indoors and out; defensive back drills, and strength training with ropes and sleds.

At noon, the **Jets** cornerbacks ate lunch. They spent afternoons breaking down film of their performance last year and the opposing receivers they expect to face this season.

This is the routine that helped Revis achieve All-Pro status. And it's the one he introduced to Wilson this May during a month-long boot camp as Wilson worked to transform from an inconsistent rookie to a solid nickel cornerback. Already in training camp, his coaches have seen a change.

"Right now, he's different," coach Rex Ryan said. "And I think he's carrying himself differently."

Part of the difference, Ryan said, is Wilson's strength — a necessary attribute in Ryan's aggressive defensive scheme. But it's also confidence, something Wilson's coaches saw take a hit when the first-round pick had some early struggles last season.

This year, the Jets are counting on Wilson to be consistent in his nickel cornerback role alongside Revis and Antonio Cromartie — three cornerbacks Ryan has said he's very satisfied to have for at least three more years.

"I want to play consistent, play well and be a factor on the field," Wilson said. "That's my attitude coming into camp. That's why I worked so hard this offseason."

Defensive coordinator Mike Pettine said Wilson's rookie struggles were "a little overblown." But Wilson no doubt hit some early bumps, which the coaches attributed in part to an information overload.

During Revis' holdout, Wilson was getting time at the outside cornerback position and nickel cornerback — which he did not play at Boise State — as well as trying his hand at punt returns.

When Revis injured his hamstring, Wilson was asked to start in Week 3 at Miami, a forgettable performance in which he got beaten a few times. Calling Wilson "snakebitten," the Jets turned to Drew Coleman the following week. Coleman's performance limited Wilson's role until later in the season, when Wilson earned back some playing time.

"He had some confidence issues," Pettine said. "I think it got a little overwhelming for him. As a rookie, that is a lot of pressure, especially to be in our defense, our style of defense. Sometimes that's the hardest position. If your confidence goes as a corner, very similar to what happened to Lito Sheppard two years ago."

Enter Revis. Also a former first-round pick, he understands expectations as well as anyone. So he invited Wilson to Arizona — to train together, and to get to know each other better.

At first, Wilson was amazed at Revis' industrious approach to the offseason, said Brett Fischer, owner of Fischer Sports. But Wilson also was a sponge, gaining strength and knowledge and confidence daily.

One target area was Wilson's core, Fischer said, which ties into balance and how fluid your hips are — critical for a cornerback. Will Sullivan, a speed coach and defensive backs coach who works out of Fischer Sports, also refined Wilson's technique: working with him on using his hands against opposing receivers in the permitted 5-yard range, instead of just being a mirror image to their movements, and teaching him to slide with receivers in the slot, rather than backing up and allowing them space to get past him, as he did last year.

Fischer saw the positive reviews of Wilson's performance in camp so far and texted Revis Monday night: "Thank you so much for bringing Kyle out. You made a difference."

"I remember my rookie year, it was tough," Revis said. "My head was spinning left and right, and I just think it's just one of those things, you need to learn and grow. Now you can

see it. You can see the confidence when he walks into the building, and you can see the confidence when he steps out on the field.”

Safety Jim Leonhard has noticed Wilson is spending less time thinking about his responsibilities on each call, and instead focusing on reading the receiver. His footwork is cleaner, Leonhard added, and he’s becoming more assured in the blitzes the Jets like to draw up for their nickel corners.

Wilson is ready for the season to start, so he can show the rest of the league how far he has come.

“The big thing is, I haven’t forgotten last year,” Wilson said. “I go out each day trying to improve and use that as experience.”

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