

# Panther secondary allows for defensive versatility

by Pat Bostick

A successful blitzing defense must have a good secondary. If a team's secondary can't match up, blitzing can leave the defense susceptible to big plays, as blitzing will often result in one-on-one coverage.

The Panthers have the personnel to blitz the quarterback. Their front-seven (DL and LBs) is a deep, talented group complete with size, power and speed. Thus, defensive coordinator Keith Patterson is hoping to see quarterbacks on the ground when he calls a blitz. But in the event the opposing signal caller is lucky enough to attempt a pass against the blitz, he'll be throwing into a coverage unit laden with talent and experience.

The Panthers' secondary is led by a trio of experienced safeties. Jared Holley, a 5-foot-10 180-pound redshirt junior, is the clear leader of the group.

"I've been really impressed with Jarred Holley. He's smart, and always does what he's supposed to do exactly right," Coach Todd Graham said. Coach Graham went so far as to say, "If I had to pick a leader of the defense, it would have to be Holley."

These are strong words from the Panthers' new head coach, but they are backed with hard evidence. Holley has started 21 games in his career, totaling 102 tackles and eight interceptions. The Second Team All-Big East performer's combination of size, sure tackling and tacky cover skills will be put to good use in Pitt's attacking defense.

Redshirt sophomore Jason Hendricks and redshirt junior Andrew Taglianetti bring valuable experience and ability to this group of safeties. Hendricks is a tall (6-0), rangy and explosive defensive back. Waiting in the wings behind former Pitt safety Dom DeCicco, Hendricks started five games last season, giving him invaluable experience. He'll look to build on that experience this season. Taglia-

netti brings character and leadership to the Panthers' secondary. He was recently accepted into the prestigious Blue and Gold Society (a student ambassadors group), and is an excellent student. On the field, Taglianetti boasts 26 games of experience (two starts), and has been a key contributor on special teams throughout his career — tallying five career blocked punts. Both safeties will see significant playing time this fall, and will likely be on the field together when offenses bring in extra wide receivers (nickel and dime situations).

The perimeter of the Pitt secondary showcases a crop of talented corners. The most battle-tested member of this group is senior Antwuan Reed. Reed has 12 career starts, and has picked off two passes during his career. Reed's combination of experience and dependability will serve the Panthers' secondary well this season.

"Looking at last year's film, Reed, he's very steady and dependable," Coach Graham said. "There is no substitute for experience."

Though not as seasoned as Reed, the Panthers have two other corners who have a great deal of talent: redshirt senior Buddy Jackson and sophomore K'Waun Williams. When talking about this group of corners Coach Graham sounded confident.

"I would say K'Waun Williams is the most solid. Buddy Jackson is right up with him there," he said.

Jackson has had an up and down career thus far. His talent is well-noted, but he has yet to reach his full potential. This could be the year we see the NFL-like talent Jackson possesses. At 6-foot-1, 180-pounds, he has NFL size and is physical. He boasts a 40-plus inch vertical, and is the fastest Panther on the roster (I can remember him being clocked at 4.3 in the 40). Jackson will be a key contributor on defense this season, and he



Jarred Holley is a leader for the Pitt defense.

also promises to be an explosive addition to Pitt's kickoff return team.

Williams is probably the most complete corner in the Panther secondary, to echo Coach Graham's sentiments. He measures only 5-10, 175-pounds, but he will hit opponents like a linebacker. In his first career start against Kentucky in last season's BBVA Compass Bowl, Williams amassed nine tackles. Couple his tackling ability with his great cover skills and you have a pretty complete corner. Williams, a true sophomore, can only get better. Pitt fans can look forward to seeing some special things from him this season.

The Pitt secondary has enough skill and experience to

provide great coverage behind a blitz-happy front seven. Holley will serve as the quarterback of the defense, directing traffic in the secondary. Hendricks and Taglianetti are excellent tacklers and coverage players. The corners are a sizeable and talented group of veterans — Reed, Williams and Jackson should all have great years. Coach Graham's Tulsa secondary led the conference in interceptions, and there is reason to believe the Panthers could do the same this year.

---

*Pat Bostick played quarterback for Pitt from 2007-10. Each week, he breaks down Pitt football and the changes that are being made in each area.*