

Hendricks, defense seeing Pitt development



For safety Jason Hendricks, Pitt's change in its defensive scheme doesn't necessarily mean the players need to relearn each aspect of the sport. After all, Hendricks said, it's still the same sport each player has been a part of since a young age.

"It doesn't matter what formation we're in or what drill we're doing, it's still football," the Brooklyn, N.Y., native said with a grin. "I'm just a little more tired than usual."

After redshirting as a freshman in 2009, Hendricks started five games and appeared in all 13 as a strong safety last year. After two years of practicing against a pro-style offense, he became acclimated to a slower pace, a defensive huddle and defending against a traditional set.

So when the Panthers began revamping their offense, each look was different. Not only did Hendricks have to think about the change he and the defense were making in their own sets, he was adapting to a completely new look in practice. So far, it's a

challenge he's been excited about.

"Defending against the shotgun, from my position, you can actually see everything develop in front of you," he said. "There are different reads, but I have a great perspective from where I'm lined up."

There have still been plenty of challenges, though. Pitt has played against no huddle offenses in the past, but Hendricks said he's never seen an offense quite like the one the Panthers are currently running. Match that with the fact that he's learning a new formation himself for the defense, and it makes for an interesting practice.

"When they spread you out and run it down the middle, it's pretty tough to stop," he said. "And the tempo is hard to keep up with. We're getting used to it, though. The offense is unique. That's one of the things I like about the way we play."

Like the offense, Pitt's defense is also adapting to a variety of new drills during spring practice. Some of that comes with the tackling drills, while other changes

have been footwork and conditioning."

"There are some similar things as far as playing goes, but a lot of the drills are different," he said. "We're doing some tackling circuits we haven't done before, and every day there's something new we add in."

"In one of the drills, there is a net above us while we do back-pedals, which helps us stay low to the ground. If you stand up or aren't low enough, you'll hit the net. You'll definitely feel it."

Hendricks played the majority of last season alongside fellow safety Jarred Holley, an All-Big East selection who has 21 starts in two active seasons. During that time, Hendricks compiled 42 tackles, three pass breakups and a fumble recovery in his first active year, and is looking to continue his growth within Pitt's new defensive scheme.

"I'm excited, I'm happy with what we're doing out there," Hendricks said. "No matter what, it's still football. It's fun."