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Day 9: Still Some Running Back Concerns

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Still Some Running Back Concerns

<< Day 8

Although Cowboys head coach Bill Parcells said Monday he was pleased with the efforts of his four running backs in Saturday's scrimmage, he expressed his concerns about "leaving yards on the field," or not gaining as many yards as possible from a designed play.

"The plays were blocked better than the result," Parcells said. "I thought maybe we could have broken something, which we didn't do."

The Cowboys' projected starter entering camp, Troy Hambrick, rushed for 26 yards on four carries, but never broke into the open field. His long, though, was a nice 12-yard run. The only time that happened was fourth-teamer ReShard Lee's 42-yard scamper, and the second-longest run was on a reverse by wide receiver Antonio Bryant.

"I'd like to break about three of those a week," Parcells said of Lee's run.

Parcells has stated he would not be opposed to using a platoon system at running back this season if a strong candidate doesn't emerge in training camp. The defending Super Bowl champion Bucs, he says, successfully employed that strategy in 2002.

Allen Sits Out

Despite having a day off Sunday and not showing up on Parcells' injury report, left guard Larry Allen dressed but did not practice Monday afternoon.

Allen arrived late to the field after the team finished its sprints and had about a five-minute conversation with Parcells. Tyson Walter replaced him at first-team left guard during team drills.

Since camp opened, Allen has not looked like the dominating lineman and seven-time Pro Bowl selection from past seasons. He reported to San Antonio at the lowest weight of his career but is clearly out of shape and may be injured.

D-Line Needs Consistency

While the Cowboys defensive line may have silenced a few critics with its stellar play in Saturday's scrimmage, Parcells isn't at all convinced, and he said as much Monday at his press conference.

The doubts about the D-line may have lessened after Saturday's scrimmage with the Texans. Defensive end Ebenezer Ekuban, who recorded one sack all last season, exploded for three of the team's eight Saturday. Third-year tackle Willie Blade, cut by Dallas last year and then buried on the Texans' practice squad, emerged as a potential answer at nose tackle with his relentless pursuit of the Houston quarterbacks.

But Parcells still refuses to give Blade praise this early, perhaps to keep the big guy motivated. When asked to comment on Blade's progress in camp, Parcells said, "Not yet."

As for Ekuban, who is entering a contract year, Parcells said he wants to see that type of inspired play against the offensive line beasts of the NFC East, not the Texans' third unit.

Dantzler on D

Camp Photoboard

PHOTOBOARD



See a few shots of the Dallas Cowboys Training Camp.

Scouting Report

GARY LUSK



He's a Dallas Kimball High School product who would love to fulfill his dream of playing for the Cowboys, and

although wide receiver Gary Lusk is a long shot to make the team, his confidence hasn't faded.

Gary Lusk

Go

Quick Hits

Temperature: 72 degrees

(Alamodome)

Today's Attendance:

PM - 2,662

Total - 47,981

What's Up - The Cowboys will practice outdoors at Burbank High School Tuesday morning from 9-11 and back at the Alamodome in the afternoon from 3-5. Also note, Thursday morning's practice previously scheduled for the Alamodome this week, has been moved to Burbank High School. Logon to www.dallascowboys.com to listen to head coach Bill Parcells' daily press conference at 11:30 a.m. (CDT).

You Don't Say

"Our sideline was chaos. It was like junior high getting out early. We're going to fix that this week."
-- Head coach Bill Parcells talking about Saturday night's scrimmage against the Houston Texans.

Who's Hot!

WR DeVeren Johnson: He's yet to stand out much this training camp, but the second-year pro caught everything that came his way Monday afternoon, including two circus catches where he had to leap high and extend his arms as far as he could to bring the ball in. It was a nice start to the week after not having a pass thrown his

All his life, Woody Dantzler had been an offensive player. Now he's working as a safety, as Parcells tries to find him a spot on the team in addition to his ability on special teams.

"I've never done it before, but it's going pretty well," Dantzler said about playing safety. "This (transition) is going to take time."

One of the biggest concerns about Dantzler playing safety was whether or not he would be willing and able to tackle. That question should have been answered when he threw his body at a Texan runner during Saturday's scrimmage.

Parcells said he plans to give Dantzler more opportunities to play, so that he can learn the position. Dantzler's increased opportunity will probably be at the expense of third-year pro Lynn Scott.

DeRonde's Emergence

In his press conferences, Parcells has talked at great length about "specialty players," which are players who are not starters, but are valuable to a team because of their ability to play special teams and come into games in specific situations.

One of these is linebacker Kevin DeRonde, who is being looked at as a pass rusher in the nickel defense, and in goal line situations, adding extra beef to the defensive line. But DeRonde knows where he is going to have to do most of his damage to make the team.

"If I'm going to make this team, it's going to be on special teams," DeRonde said. "I have to prove to coach Parcells and (special teams coach) Bruce DeHaven that I can play. I'm on every one, whether it be as a backup or a starter, so that's where it's at."

DeRonde did not hurt his chances of getting more action in the nickel defense during the scrimmage, as he recorded a sack on the Texans' first possession.

Johnson Update

Rookie center Al Johnson, who sprained his right knee during Saturday morning's practice with the Texans and subsequently missed the scrimmage, did not practice Monday.

Johnson spent the afternoon on a stationary bike and did light resistance work. Parcells said he did not think it would be long before the second-round draft pick is back on the field. The injury appears to be a re-aggravation of an old injury to his meniscus.

If Johnson continues to have problems with the knee before he returns to the field, Parcells said he could face arthroscopic surgery, which would keep him out 10 days to two weeks.

If the injury does keep Johnson out of the preseason opener against Arizona Saturday, it the Cowboys will use a rotation of Matt Lehr, Tyson Walter and Dustin Keith at the center position.

Practice Points

- Linebackers coach Gary Gibbs has not yet returned from Oklahoma City after his wife and daughter were involved in a car accident early Friday morning. Defensive coordinator Mike Zimmer has taken over Gibbs' position during practice during his absence.
- Matt Lehr lined up at first-team center in place of the injured Al Johnson. Tyson Walter, who had been competing with Johnson at center, remained at left guard and also worked with the first team.
- Tackle Joe Johnson (sprained ankle) did not practice Monday and instead rode a stationary bike and did some light resistance work.
- Wide receiver Randal Williams was back at it today, working his magic in practice. Williams made several nice catches without dropping a single pass. It was a nice bounce-back after dropping two of three passes thrown his way in the scrimmage.

Short Shots

For the first time in camp, the Cowboys concluded practice with full-speed, sideline-to-sideline sprints. Greg Ellis, Ebenezer Ekuban, Pete Hunter, and Kevin DeRonde were among the players displaying the most hustle . . . Aaron Boone delighted the crowd with a diving, juggling touchdown catch from Clint Stoerner during the two-minute drill . . . Saturday night's scrimmage against the Texans drew a 7.48 rating with a 16.1 share, impressive numbers for an event with less hype than even a preseason game . . . The Cowboys' Monday afternoon practice at the Alamodome was the site for ESPN's "Monday Night Countdown" preview of the Packers-Chiefs preseason game.

way during Saturday's scrimmage.

Who's Not?

G Larry Allen: He's been dodging the question of injury all training camp, but on Monday, Allen was late getting on the field, missing the team's warm-up run and, although he was in full pads, didn't participate in drills. No reason was given for Allen not participating in practice.

Play of the Day

It was a relatively slow practice until quarterback Chad Hutchinson handed off to ReShard Lee, who then pitched back to Hutchinson, who then hit wide receiver Antonio Bryant for a 75-yard touchdown pass. Bryant was wide open as every defensive back bit on the flea-flicker.

The Situation

Now for the obscure. Did you about the rule that gives a team the opportunity to take a free kick following a fair catch of a punt or kick-off? That's what the Cowboys worked on Monday. A punt returner would call for a fair catch and then kicker Billy Cundiff would trot on the field with holder Toby Gowin to attempt a long field goal on the free kick. If the kick goes through the uprights, the team three points. It's true. Look it up. Gowin also tried one from about 60 yards, missing wide to the left.

Hi Mom!

Good first week here in San Antonio, but got to tell you what I found in one of the grocery stores down here. Must be San Antonio, because I don't think I've ever seen this previously. At the Handy And, there was a sign in the freezer: "Hog's head, 68 cents/pound. Hog's head. Sure enough, in this big plastic bag, there was the cleaned structure of a head. Sounds delicious.

