

BEST DEFENDER IN SPORTS

# NONE

# SHALL

DARRELLE REVIS HAS SHUT DOWN THE NFL'S BEST RECEIVERS. AS FOR BEING A TEAM LEADER AND BECOMING A LEGEND? YEAH, HE'S GOT THAT COVERED, TOO.



E:60

# PASS



## ASK DENNIS THURMAN TO DESCRIBE THE DANCE THAT DARRELLE REVIS DOES BEFORE GAMES AND THE JETS DEFENSIVE BACKS COACH STAMMERS, "WELL, HE KIND OF ... I MEAN, THERE'S THAT ... OH, HECK, WHAT CAN I SAY? IT'S JUST GOOFY."

It takes a home video that Revis put on YouTube to understand what Thurman means. There, in a Miami hotel before this year's Pro Bowl, the cornerback does a bow-legged, crotch-grabbing, hip-hop jig that looks like something Jay-Z might do if he were learning to polka. It's the last thing you'd expect to see from a young legend in the making, a guy whose timing is so accurate that he has re-inspired a cheeky catchphrase—two-thirds of the world is covered by water; the rest is covered by Revis—not to mention a Facebook page welcoming you to the Church of Revis Christ.

Jets coaches can't say enough about the fourth-year pro, who keyed a defense that held opponents to a league-low 252 yards per game last season. In fact, it's tough for anybody to categorize Revis, because while there are all sorts of ways to

describe offensive success, the dictionary for defense is crude by comparison. To explain how dominating the 5'11" Revis was in holding receivers to a 33% completion rate against him in coverage, while allowing a league-low 3.5 yards per attempt, the analysts at Football Outsiders had to reach across the line of scrimmage, declaring Revis' performance the equivalent of a wideout's breaking Jerry Rice's single-season record for receiving yards, or a QB's topping Dan Marino's iconic 1984 passing-yards total.

The Revis effect washes over the Jets. Rex Ryan's 3-4 defense is already the most intricate in the NFL, with linebackers always in motion, shifting between the strong and weak sides, so that offenses never know who's rushing on any given play. When defensive coordinator Mike Pettine says

that Revis "helps us heavy up the box," he means that by shutting down the league's best playmakers, Revis frees the other Jets D-backs to crowd the line, which provides more blitzing power. No wonder Gang Green held opponents to just 215 yards a game over their final eight contests before their AFC title game loss to the Colts. "Most teams use their best corner on the second-best receiver and double-team the No. 1," Ryan says. "But with Darrelle we can man-to-man their best. It makes you feel like you're playing with 12 guys."

Ask Revis how he does what he does and he answers with a deep, rolling belly laugh that shakes his shoulders. "I'll show you," he says and lifts up his left shirtsleeve to reveal a tattoo of a robot attacking an alien with a football. It's a vision that came to him in a dream after he spent a night watching sci-fi flicks. "I'm the robot," he says playfully.

Body snatcher is more like it. Take his second-quarter interception against the Bengals during a first-round playoff game last January. Chad Ochocinco's fade-stop route had been a money play for Cincinnati during the season, designed to get the ball safely to the receiver's right shoulder as he tiptoed along the sideline. But Revis ran body-to-body with No. 85 at full speed, eyes pointed upfield, waiting until the last second before he turned around and snagged the ball, as if seeing right through Ochocinco's face mask. "It's unusual for a defender to get to the ball, because it's so far out of reach," says Bengals receivers coach Mike Sheppard. "Much less intercept it."

Revis flummoxes offenses the way that Lawrence Taylor, Ray Lewis and Deion Sanders once did. At 24, he is already a household name in the NFL's biggest media market, where the negotiations to make him the highest-paid cornerback in history have vied for media attention with the BP oil spill. Revis waves off reports that he's demanding a \$100 million deal, saying he just wants "50 cents more" than Nnamdi Asomugha, the 28-year-old Raiders corner who became the league's highest-paid defensive back last off-season, with a three-year, \$45 million deal. But it's clear that Revis has history in mind—the kind he studied to get here and the kind he wants to make.

**DIANA GILBERT**, who ran track as a kid in the Pennsylvania steel town of Aliquippa, northwest of Pittsburgh, was a single mother who kept her oldest son off gang-infested corners by using the kind of one-liners that Darrelle still quotes with reverence: "Associate with successful people, and you'll be successful." But it was Diana's brother, NFL defensive lineman Sean Gilbert, who showed her boy the way to the big time. The third overall pick in the 1992 draft, Gilbert played 11 seasons; he is best known, however, for sitting out the entire 1997 campaign, to force a trade from the Redskins that got him a seven-year, \$46.5 million deal from the Panthers, at the time a record sum for his position.

Uncle Sean was at the top of his career in Carolina, and a fixture in his nephew's life, when Darrelle was at Aliquippa High. In those days, "Rell Rev" was a hoops star, the high scorer on his two-time state championship team. But the NBA wasn't really an option for a kid his height, and there wasn't much of a market for a drummer from the Sound the Alarm Ministries chorus. So Darrelle and his uncle watched football game films together, dissecting the one position they knew he could play at the next level: defensive back.

By the time Revis got to Pitt, he had modeled himself after Sanders—"I loved the way Deion was always up in a guy's face," he says—and another tough-as-nails Aliquippa alum, Pro Bowl corner Ty Law. Pitt defensive coordinator Paul Rhoads saw in Revis a hard charger who hated to get beat in practice. But what really impressed Rhoads, now the head coach at Iowa State, was that "nobody ever got separation from Darrelle."

Revis studied opponents like he studied jazz drumming, going as far back as their high school game films to get tips on their timing. "I watch how they stand when they're still," he says. "If it's a running play, are they more relaxed? If it's a pass play, are they tenser? Is the heel up or flat? Is the guy grabbing his gloves tight? If I'm in your timing, I'm in your DNA."

The Jets made Revis the 14th pick in the 2007 draft, and it took him time to find his rhythm. For one thing, he had to learn how to tackle (which he did with abandon,

notching 87 as a rookie). And he still remembers being stunned the first time Randy Moss gave him an elbow in the back while going up for a ball. "I was so bugged out," he says. "I was like, Wow, I got a lot to learn."

When Brett Favre came to town the next year, Revis was a bright spot in a dismal secondary. But he wasn't quite Revis Christ. Facing a barrage of Pro Bowl receivers—Moss, Brandon Marshall, Larry Fitzgerald—he allowed receivers a



Can Revis top his own act in 2010? His coach and uncle say yes.

45% completion rate against him. Good, but not elite.

What a difference a new coach makes. Following a late-season collapse, the Jets fired Eric Mangini and hired Ryan, who ushered in a system that makes Revis the most critical defender on the field. Ryan is fond of quoting his dad, Buddy, as saying, "It's easier to hit a guy than cover him." And Revis has made that his mantra. "As D-backs, all we have is those first five yards," he says. "My goal is to make those five yards the hardest I can on

you with my hands. I want to be a master of those five yards, because free access is what makes receivers great. My game plan is to get up in their faces. But I also like the little things, whether it's getting in position to tackle or giving the defensive end a call where he goes into the C-gap and makes a play."

The Jets list Revis' weight at 198 pounds, but he's closer to 215, thanks in part to his annual July retreat to Phoenix, where he works out in the 120°

### HOW HISTORIC WERE REVIS' DEFENSIVE METRICS IN 2009? IF HE WERE A QB, HE WOULD HAVE THROWN FOR 5,500 YARDS; AS RECEIVER, HE WOULD HAVE PILED UP 1,900.

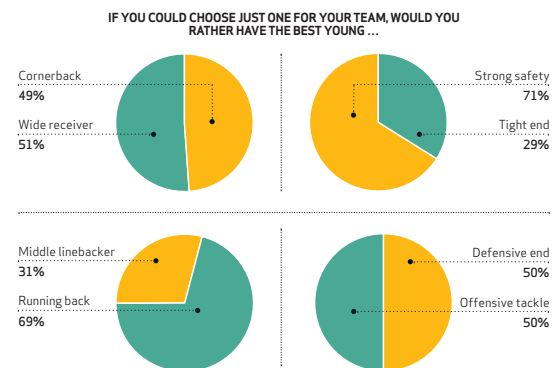
heat at the Fischer Sports training center alongside Donovan McNabb and Titans corner Rod Hood. As Sheppard, the Bengals coach, puts it, "You can't move him, so you have to go around him." And that's when you know you've arrived on Revis Island, a place patrolled by hands as deceptively smooth as the blunt end of a butcher's mallet.

At a predraft party in Manhattan this spring, Revis ran into Jerry Rice, who said that if he were still playing, he'd lose Revis with a couple of shakes at the line. Revis nodded politely and thought, *That's exactly what I'd want you to do.* Because in the course of swinging wide and to the outside, Rice would be pinned between Revis and the sideline. In fact, Revis rarely runs more than a few inches away from his man. The Jets coaching staff has been nagging him to drop back a few yards, so he can have more time to react to the ball. But he can't do it. Being that far away dulls his senses, makes him nervous. To



### X'S OR O'S

In a perfect world, your NFL team would have both a top-shelf offense and a first-line defense. But as BP execs will attest, this world is far from perfect. So if it comes down to a choice between D and O, which is the wiser play? We had the Nation go matchup by matchup.



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feel the hunt, he needs to be closer. "A lot of teams have started to put receivers in motion, so they can get me to back off," he says. "Which is kind of funny, because I'm not going to back off. I'm not going anywhere."

To show what he means, Revis pops a DVD into his MacBook. It's a play from the Jets' game with the Patriots early last season, when New York was down 3-0 in the first quarter and Moss was in motion on a first-and-10. Revis is playing two yards off the line, keeping Moss facing him. After the snap, Moss tries to juke, but Revis is too close, too inside Moss' pads, if not his head. The two end up running 35 yards upfield along the sideline, at which point an errant Tom Brady pass curls into Revis' outstretched hands.

In those moments, you have to marvel at what Thurman calls Revis' "natural balance," which lets him backpedal, pivot and run at full speed with poise. "A lot of guys who run fast lose control of their bodies," Thurman says. "Now, some can improve, but not to that level. At that level, it's just genetics." Adds Will Sullivan, Revis' speed and strength coach at Fischer Sports: "If he can't reach out and get a hand on you in those first five yards, he'll get a body on you down the field. In the NFL, position is power."

Revis coolly sums it up by saying, "When I'm in it, I don't freak out. Everything is like in slow motion." But when Bill Belichick refused to give him any credit for holding Moss to four catches and 24 yards that day, saying Revis was aided by "a lot of over-the-top coverage," it started a debate about whether—*gasp!*—Revis

was truly indispensable or just a replaceable cog in Ryan's machine.

It's unlikely Revis would have had the same kind of season anywhere else. Since the Jets' pass rush forces quarterbacks into quick dumps, and he always lines up with the A-wideout, he gets a ton of action. "We don't want him to get bored," quips Pettine. Revis' 31 passes defended last season were 15 more than he had in 2008, before Ryan arrived. And compare the 96 passes thrown his way with the 25 that Asomugha saw in Oakland. Asomugha was limited by the fact that his coaches lined him up on only one side of the ball, and his weaker teammates get thrown at more often. As a result, he only recorded four passes defended.

The voters who choose the AP's Defensive Player of the Year presumably knew all that, but they picked Green Bay's Charles Woodson over Revis by a 28-14 vote. And they weren't the only ones offering a contrarian perspective. KC Joyner, the "Football Scientist" and a contributor to ESPN Insider, stirred the blogosphere in June by suggesting that the Jets could make do by putting Dwight Lowery and newly acquired Antonio Cromartie opposite one another, with first-round draft pick Kyle Wilson in the nickelback position, and still have "one of the best secondaries in the league."

The resulting backlash—Ryan blasted the AP vote, and one commentator at thejetsblog.com argued in response to Joyner that getting rid of Revis would be like "the Bulls getting rid of Michael Jordan because B.J. Armstrong and

John Paxson were good"—suggests that Revis has tapped into the local psyche in a big way. His shut-down of Moss (58 yards in two games), Houston's Andre Johnson (35 yards) and Indy's Reggie Wayne (88 yards in two games) last season puts him on a par with Yankees closer Mariano Rivera as a stopper in the minds of New York fans.

Curiously, Revis' jersey is still more recognizable than his face. When his friend Ice-T called recently to say that Snoop Dogg wanted to meet him, Revis grabbed the keys to his Dodge Charger and headed to Hoboken on his own, blending in with the crowd. But this is an off-season full of change for the Jets star, as he becomes more comfortable with his growing fame. He's building a house in Livingston, N.J., with a

Welcome to Revis Island: Lining up all over the field, No. 24 saw an NFL-high 96 passes thrown his way last season.

the team has added Cromartie, who reportedly needed a \$500,000 advance on his salary to deal with at least five separate paternity suits, as well as Antonio Holmes, the troubled former Steeler's wideout who spent the spring explaining why cops met with him at the Pittsburgh airport for refusing to shut off his iPod during a plane landing. "Darrelle has the respect of everyone in the locker room and the league," Ryan says. "Now he has to understand he can use that like Tom Brady does in New England. He has to make the players around him accountable."

When Revis was still in high school, his Uncle Sean took him to look at expensive watches in a Charlotte mall. "I love watches, but that wasn't the point," Darrelle says. "He wanted to show me the difference between being rich and having class."

With that lesson learned, Gilbert is trying to keep his nephew focused on history. "A lot of great players have 10-year careers, but just a few have awesome ones," Gilbert says. "How many guys get to have an impact?"

It seems hard to imagine that No. 24 can outdo himself this season. A couple of slips on the New Meadowlands Stadium turf, and he'll easily give up more than the 2 TDs he allowed in 2009. But of course there's always room for improvement. Thurman says that Revis tipped away four balls that could have been game-changing interceptions last season, and that by playing a little more off the ball, he'll improve his vision.

Looking at the new schedule, Revis picks out the matchups he's anticipating most. He has never faced Minnesota's Sidney Rice, or Donald Driver and Greg Jennings from Green Bay. "Oh, and Calvin Johnson," he adds, pointing to the Jets' date in Detroit on Nov. 7. "That's a good one too."

Does he worry that opponents won't throw at him as often this year? He starts that belly laugh until his shoulders are shaking again. "You know, the other guys trust their player too," he says. "That's their big playmaker. They're still going to throw at him. So am I worried? No. As long as I'm watching that guy, I'll get my chances."



## THE JETS THINK REVIS CAN BE THEIR TOM BRADY. WELL, EXCEPT THE PART ABOUT THE CONTRACT SQUABBLE.

full-service recording studio, complete with mixing board and instruments, so that his friends can come over to jam. (He also bought a home in Fort Lauderdale last off-season to spend more time with the kids whose names are tattooed on his arms: Deyani Shavae, 4, and Jayden, 2. He's giving himself a new look, too, trading the Charger for a tricked-out Mini Cooper and his silk threads for preppy glasses and bow ties, so "I can go all Andre 3000.")

But what were supposed to be low-key negotiations to extend a six-year rookie deal that has earned him \$15 million so far, but will shrink to \$1 million this season, went off the rails when he staged what appeared to be a sit-out protest one morning at minicamp in June. (For the record, he claimed to be lightheaded.) It was a curious statement from a player whose practice habits are so fierce. It also gave heartburn to a coaching staff that needs Revis to lead in the locker room. The Jets said goodbye to a trio of veterans: safety Kerry Rhodes and running backs Thomas Jones and Leon Washington. Meanwhile,



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