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AFC NEWS 'N' NOTES

FOR USE AS DESIRED
AFC-N-5 9/19/06

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CORNER CLUES: HOW TO KEEP YOUR MAN COVERED

When a wide receiver does his job well on a given play, it can engender fireworks (or cannon fire in the case of San Diego), in addition to a throng of 70,000 fans celebrating as one. Conversely, when a cornerback takes care of business, it can simply translate to a pass thrown in another direction.

Fair trade-off? Perhaps not, but that is the life of an NFL corner – run step-for-step with an opponent who's as fast and oftentimes taller than you and keep him from making a difference in the game.

Four standout AFC cornerbacks discussed the indicators they look for in preparing to face an opponent: **CHAMP BAILEY** of the Denver Broncos, the Jacksonville Jaguars' **RASHEAN MATHIS**, **TERRENCE MC GEE** of the Buffalo Bills, and the Pittsburgh Steelers' **IKE TAYLOR**.

CORNERBACK	TEAM	OBSERVATIONS/CLUES SOUGHT IN FILM STUDY OR AT SCRIMMAGE LINE
Champ Bailey	Denver	"I watch the receiver and the quarterback on film. I watch when the ball is delivered. I watch when the receiver gets in and out of his breaks. "When I was younger, I didn't look at enough film. Now, I watch more of it and notice a lot more things. I think that comes with learning how to watch film."
Rashean Mathis	Jacksonville	"First, (in film study) I want to see how fast he is to see if I have to worry about him running away from me. Second, I need to see how well he runs his routes in case I am 'off' and not pressing up on him. Third, I have to see how well he gets off the jam. "When I'm at the line, if I'm pressed, I'm concentrating on just getting my hands on the receiver. If I'm 'off,' then I'm just staying down in my backpedal and pacing myself, because I know if I'm at a good pace then I have a great chance of getting my hands on the ball."
Terrence McGee	Buffalo	"Basically, I like to watch how the receiver reacts to the defender. If he's up in press, how does he react to it? If he's in off-man, what type of stuff does he do? I look at how he comes out of his break. I watch how other defenders defend that receiver. "You really want to read a quarterback's steps once the ball's snapped. You read your keys – look at the quarterback. See if it's a quick pass. If it's not, then you get back into your pedal and read the receiver and what type of break he's about to make. But these days you can get double-moved real quick, so you have to read their hips also."
Ike Taylor	Pittsburgh	"I watch the way a receiver breaks the huddle. I read his body language. Is he coming out with pep in his step for a pass or is he jogging out because it's a run? His mouthpiece, is it in or out? Maybe he only has a mouthpiece in if it's a pass. Splits, lineup, there are a whole lot of little things that I maybe shouldn't be saying, but hey, those are some of the details I look at. That's what my coaches tell me – 'Look at the little things,' and you'd be surprised what you find."

In discussing which quarterback-receiver combinations are the toughest to play against, both Bailey and Mathis cite **PEYTON MANNING** and **MARVIN HARRISON** of the Colts, noting their communication and timing. Mathis also points out that Cincinnati's **CARSON PALMER** and **CHAD JOHNSON** are a difficult duo.

"It's tough for me to single one particular person out," says McGee. "If they're out on the field, they can beat you. They're all tough. It's a challenge every Sunday."

"The **TERRELL OWENSES**, Chad Johnsons, **STEVE SMITHS** – what makes them better than a lot of people is that you can't really figure them out," says Taylor. "They're running out of the huddle with the same momentum whether it's a run or pass. They're at full speed every snap."

"You can do a lot of studying, but it all comes down to playing football."