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Cards' Wells returns to Valley as pro

by **Kent Somers** - Apr. 30, 2009 09:06 PM
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On Beanie Wells' first couple of trips to the Valley, he packed with the skill expected of a college student. Both times, he and a couple of his Ohio State teammates forgot underwear, and a Fiesta Bowl volunteer drove them to Wal-Mart to buy new ones.

No such problem for Wells when he arrived Thursday for this weekend's three-day minicamp. The Cardinals' first-round pick, Wells was well-appointed in a three-piece, plaid suit with a pink shirt and tie.

And there was no need for a Wal-Mart run.

"I got them this year," Wells said, laughing.

Wells and the Cardinals are all smiles after last weekend, when the Cardinals took the Buckeyes running back with the 31st overall selection. Wells fulfills a lifelong dream of playing in the NFL, and the Cardinals get the big, fast running back they were seeking.

"If we had known at the beginning of the draft we'd be sitting here with Beanie Wells, we would have been very, very satisfied with that," General Manager Rod Graves said.

Wells played three years at Ohio State and twice played in the Fiesta Bowl. While being drafted by the Cardinals isn't quite like staying in his home state of Ohio, it's close.

"I guess you could say it was like going back to my vacation home," Wells said.

A Warner welcome

Quarterback Kurt Warner took an early step to help the rookie feel at home, sending Wells a text message last Saturday, welcoming him to the organization.

"I was in shock," Wells said. "Kurt Warner was sending me a text message. I remember a few years ago, I was maybe in the sixth and seventh grade, we were watching the St. Louis-Tennessee Titans Super Bowl, and watching him."

The next few days will be a whirlwind for Wells. He arrived in the Valley on Thursday and will take part in the minicamp that begins Friday and runs through Sunday.

After that, NFL rules prohibit Wells from practicing with the team until some time in June, when Ohio State concludes its school year. He will be behind when he returns, and the guy he's competing with, Tim Hightower, plans to help him catch up.

As a rookie last year, Hightower benefited from Edgerrin James' willingness to share knowledge. Hightower has been in the league only one year, but he said he'll pass on whatever he can to Wells.

"I was surprised that Edge was so helpful and open with me," Hightower said. "I thought it was every man for himself. I appreciated it and it's something I'll never forget."

Durability no issue

At 6-feet-1 inch and 235 pounds, Wells possesses an uncommon blend of power and speed. Yet, he fell to the end of the first round because scouts questioned his durability and toughness.

He played through several injuries in college, including those to the wrist, thumb, foot, hamstring and toe. He missed only three games in three years, but some scouts thought he was tentative at times.

"He's played a number of games in a physical conference," coach Ken Whisenhunt said after drafting Wells. "Even though he's had some nicks . . . he's been productive and played a lot."

The questions about Wells' toughness and durability don't seem to bother him. He's accustomed to the questions and handles them with a smile.

"The NFL is a big business and guys are going to nit-pick each and every thing they possibly can," Wells said. "I missed three games in three years and I don't understand the durability questions."

The NFL, Wells acknowledged, is a different level. Perhaps to signify that, Wells took No. 26 with the Cardinals. Safety Keith Lewis wears No. 28, Wells' number at Ohio State, but Wells is happy with a new number.

"It was time for a change," Wells said.

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