

Harding grad eyes spot with Ravens

Reggie Smith will miss college graduation to attend rookie camp.



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By Reggie Hayes

Reggie Smith will try to earn a spot with the Baltimore Ravens as a wide receiver, punt returner and kick returner. “It’s been a long, hard journey” to reach his dream, he says. Photo courtesy WANE, Channel 15

Former Harding High School football star Reggie Smith will miss his graduation ceremonies May 8 at Elizabeth City State University in North Carolina.

He has a good excuse.

Smith will be in rookie camp, trying to land a job with the NFL’s Baltimore Ravens.

“It’s been a long, hard journey,” Smith said. “I’m just excited. I’ve been at it so long, and I just can’t wait to get there. I’ll be even more excited to get there and get inside the stadium and see how professional coaches and professional players operate.”

Smith, who’ll try to make the Ravens as a wide receiver, punt returner and kick returner, has spent six years getting to where he has a chance to be a professional player. At times, he thought he’d hit insurmountable roadblocks – including two years away from the game because of college eligibility issues – but he never gave up on his dream.

“I’m just going to go in there and play football,” Smith said. “I don’t want to worry about it too much or get too nervous. I’m just trying to get ready to play football and show them my best game.”

Smith, a 2004 Harding graduate, earned the invitation with the help of his agent, Eugene Parker, a Fort Wayne native who is one of the most successful agents in sports. Smith, who is 5-feet-11 and 200 pounds, also improved his stock by lowering his 40-yard dash time and increasing his strength working in Fort Wayne under the instruction of Athletes with Purpose (AWP), a local sports performance organization run by Michael Ledo and Bryan Bourcier.

“I was training in Florida for two months, but I wasn’t getting as explosive and as fast as I wanted to be,” Smith said. “I worked with AWP for five weeks and got much faster and made the progress. That was very helpful to me, and I’m very glad I worked with them.”

Smith played quarterback in high school, leading Harding to the state championship game as a senior. He then spent two years at Grand Rapids Community College, earning awards for his skills as a return man.

Smith wanted to continue on at an NCAA Division I school, but didn't have enough credits to make the transition. So he came home, spent the year away from football and worked on his academics at Ivy Tech.

After deciding to go to Elizabeth City State, he was ready to resume his career. He had even started two-a-days when the word came that he wasn't yet qualified to be eligible under NCAA Division II rules. So he sat out another year.

"I thought things were coming to an end for awhile; it was very tough," Smith said. "My first year back, I was real rusty."

That didn't last long. Smith ranked second in Division II in punt return average his first season at Elizabeth City State, then repeated that ranking last season. He was also in the Top 12 in kick-return average.

Smith said Parker has been positive about the opportunity to make the Ravens squad. A few other NFL teams expressed interest before the Ravens extended the invitation, Smith said.

"If (Parker) didn't have faith in me, he wouldn't give me a chance and all these opportunities," Smith said. "Talking with Michael Ledo, I know he has a lot of confidence in my work and dedication."

Smith finished his college work this week and has earned a degree in criminal justice. He won't be there to walk through the graduation ceremony, but if all goes well in Baltimore, he'll have no regrets.

"This chance is a dream come true," Smith said.