

Jets' Smith Does His Job and That of Several Others

By GREG BISHOP
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In nearly three decades of coaching, Mike Westhoff has taught thousands of players with hundreds of different skill sets. He thought he had seen them all. At least until he met Brad Smith.



Rick Stewart/Getty Images

Brad Smith threw a touchdown pass, and had 84 return yards and 11 rushing yards in a lopsided victory against the Bills on Sunday.

we've got 'em."

Those words rang true Sunday, when LaDainian Tomlinson, Mark Sanchez and the Jets' defense — the usual suspects — stole the headlines, and Smith turned in a typically understated performance that was equally important in a 38-14 victory over the Buffalo Bills.

Smith's most obvious contribution came midway through the third quarter, with the Jets leading, 17-7. He took a direct snap near the goal line and rolled right, with five confused defenders in pursuit. There was mostly open space between Smith and the end zone. He took both his time and then two steps forward, indicating he might run before firing a tight spiral to tight end Dustin Keller, who caught the ball for a 3-yard score that put the game out of reach.

The Jets list Smith as a wide receiver, which is a laughably incomplete description, as misleading as the Swiss Army knife, which has a dozen or so functions but is named after only one.

Technically, Smith is a receiver. But he also returns kickoffs, blocks on punts, plays quarterback, runs the option, covers kickoffs, covers punts and forces opponents to spend extra time preparing for his varied deployments each Sunday.

"Brad leaves," Westhoff said last week, "I'm leaving."

Westhoff, one of the N.F.L.'s foremost special-teams coaches, remains a tough, no-nonsense coach, both brutal in his criticism and sparing in his praise. That is why players hold so much respect for him.

So his compliments of Smith last week spoke volumes. He called Smith "a good football player" — which ranks among Westhoff's highest compliments — who "enables us to do a lot of things." He said that Smith performed so well in so many roles, all of which require film study and meetings, that he often felt fatigued.

Westhoff termed Smith tough and versatile and credited him with setting up Eric Smith for a blocked punt this season.

"If you saw what Brad Smith did, wow," Westhoff said, adding: "Brad Smith gives us a lot of weapons. We haven't used them all yet. But

It was Smith's first N.F.L. touchdown pass in five seasons, but certainly not his first score. Previously, he caught two touchdown passes, ran for another touchdown and returned a kickoff for a touchdown in the A.F.C. championship game last season.

After the Jets dismantled the Bills, Coach Rex Ryan joked that he had a quarterback controversy on his hands.

Against the Bills, Smith returned the opening kickoff 38 yards and had 84 return yards over all. He carried the ball three times — an option in the first quarter, a reverse option in the second quarter and an end around in the fourth quarter — for 11 yards. His presence forced the Bills' defense to take a timeout in the first half. He also made a tackle on a kickoff return.

Smith took the field for every Jets special-teams play, his presence as indispensable as Tomlinson, or Sanchez, but with less fanfare. The Jets expected his versatility when they drafted Smith in the fourth round in 2006 out of Missouri, where he became the first quarterback in N.C.A.A. history to pass for more than 8,000 yards and rush for more than 4,000 yards.

On Sunday, Smith talked about the friends and family from his hometown, Youngstown, Ohio, who traveled to the game. He detailed his touchdown pass to Keller (his first instinct was to run, but the play called for a pass). But when the subject turned to his job, or jobs, as the case may be, he shrugged.

"My job is, when I step on the field, to do what I'm asked to do," Smith said. "That's my focus, and that's my goal, just to do my job well."

If that continues, Smith will keep two people employed. Him and Westhoff.