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[Home](#) > Willy, Richard getting chance to shine with Colts

Willy, Richard getting chance to shine with Colts

By AP

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MIAMI -- Rookie Drew Willy went 15-29 as quarterback for the University at Buffalo. Second-year pro Jamey Richard never enjoyed a winning season during his time with the Bulls.

Look at them now.

They're one win away from becoming Super Bowl champions.

"It's pretty crazy," Willy said.

No, neither exactly is a star for the Indianapolis Colts. Including postseason, Richard has appeared in 11 games on special teams for the AFC champions, while Willy spent time as Indy's scout-team quarterback - not bad work for anyone since, well, the Colts are pretty solid under center already with four-time MVP Peyton Manning.

They don't mind. Small roles could still lead to a big championship ring if the Colts beat the New Orleans Saints on Sunday night.

"It's been incredible," Richard said. "From draft day two years ago when they called me, I couldn't have been more excited to be part of an organization. When you get called by a team that is a proven winner year in and year out, to go from a program where you've struggled for years into that situation, it's excitement."

For Richard and Willy, it's been a whirlwind transformation, going from a Mid-American Conference program in Buffalo that's trying to build into something - to, arguably, the elite program in the NFL right now.

And for Willy, working with Manning is another huge plus.

"Learning from the best in the game, it's pretty great every day," Willy said. "This whole opportunity to take all this in, look, some guys won't ever get to go to a Super Bowl after having storied careers and stuff. Being a rookie and being able to be around these great, veteran leaders, it's great to be a part of. I've been truly blessed to be a part of this team."

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WHAT'S MY BID? Way before the NFL became so pass happy, there was Slingin' Sammy Baugh. A true triple-threat - star quarterback, ace kicker, top defensive back - he led the Washington Redskins to the league title as a rookie in the 1937.

The late star is being remembered at this Super Bowl with a tattered jersey he wore during the 1940s, one of the many items on sale at an NFL-sponsored auction this weekend. The league has partnered with Hunt Auctions, with game-worn jerseys of Joe Namath and Brett Favre among the featured lots up for bid.

Leather helmets from the 1930s, autographed championship balls and other memorabilia stretching over several decades are available, and come in all price ranges. Bids are being accepted online, by telephone and in person, and the auction closes Sunday before the Super Bowl. A portion of all sales goes to NFL charities.

The presale estimates on the Namath and Baugh jerseys ranged up to \$30,000.

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PHIL'S PICK: Phil Mickelson will pick his Super Bowl winner in the most diplomatic fashion, by doing what he does best.

During the Super Bowl Today Pre-Game Show on CBS, Mickelson will appear in a spot for Callaway by driving two golf balls with the new Diablo Edge driver. One will represent the Saints, the other the Colts.

Longer drive, that'll be Phil's pick.

Callaway will also spend part of Super Bowl Sunday showcasing a new 90-second commercial.

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TOP COACH: The three best coaches at the Super Bowl might be, in no particular order, Jim Caldwell, Sean Payton and Robert Johnson.

Robert Johnson?

The NFL's high school football coach of the year from Mission Viejo High School in California got a trip to the Super Bowl this week, along with a \$5,000 prize and a \$10,000 grant for his program.

Another part of the perk package was getting to pose alongside NFL commissioner Roger Goodell with his trophy.

The NFL high school coach of the year award was created in 1995.

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UNDECIDED YOUNG: Tennessee quarterback Vince Young isn't sure which way to lean for Sunday's Super Bowl.

On one hand, there's the great story that is the once-woebegone New Orleans Saints.

On the other, there's the Indianapolis Colts, whom Young and the Titans see twice a year in division play. Tough call, Young said.

"It'll be a great game," Young said. "Me having friends on both sides of the ball, I just want both teams to go out there and have a good game. If New Orleans wins, it'll be great for the city. I've got to roll with the AFC as well, because they're representing the AFC South."

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NFL NETWORK: Commissioner Roger Goodell says the NFL is still trying to get its cable network into more homes.

"We are working on that issue daily," Goodell said. "We believe that the NFL Network has been an extraordinary success. When you talk to fans, they love the network. They love talking about football 365 days a year."

In time, Goodell is convinced the NFL will get the reach it wants with the network.

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HUGS4HOLLY: They're calling it The Other Halftime Show.

A performance on the social networking site UStream.tv will begin five minutes after The Who leaves the stage at halftime of Sunday's Super Bowl, featuring musicians from San Antonio who'll be doing a fundraiser for a woman named Holly Julian.

The grass roots organization calls itself "Hugs4Holly" and is trying to raise \$80,000 to cover her out-of-pocket costs for a lung transplant. Their site - www.theotherhalftimeshow.org [1] - has details on how to help.

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OUT ON A LIMB: Carrie Underwood, who'll sing The Star-Spangled Banner before kickoff of Sunday's Super Bowl, did little to contain her excitement to be part of the spectacle.

"I think it's going to be an awesome game," Underwood said.

That being said, she isn't exactly an awesome oddsmaker when it comes to football. Asked who she's picking, the singing star said she's "51 percent" for New Orleans.

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RING'S THE THING: Want to wear a Super Bowl ring? Get to Atlantic City on Sunday and talk your way into a Super Bowl party with Sean Landeta.

A winner of two Super Bowl rings while punting for the New York Giants, Landeta is slated to headline a party Sunday at the Showboat Hotel and Casino. Some lucky partygoers will get to try on his rings.

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AP National Writer Ben Walker and Associated Press Writers Sarah Larimer and Lisa Orkin Emmanuel contributed to this report.

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