

A Sure Thing

Donnie Edwards Has Stabilized a Chiefs' Team in Transition

Changes abound in Kansas City, where the Chiefs have their third head coach (Dick Vermeil) since 1998 and a host of new players creating a revolving door at various positions.

Just about the only constant has been veteran linebacker Donnie Edwards.

Edwards led the Chiefs in tackles the last three seasons, providing leadership for a defense rocked by the death of all-pro linebacker Derrick Thomas prior to the 2000 season.

"I learned a lot from Gunther Cunningham [Kansas City's de-

fensive coordinator from 1995-98 and head coach in 1999-2000]," Edwards says. "He provided a great foundation to allow me to understand the complexities of the game. It's because of him that I have high expectations for myself and work hard to meet those expectations."

Edwards has improved each season since being selected out of UCLA in the fourth round of the 1996 NFL Draft. In addition to his run-stopping prowess, Edwards has scored 3 touchdowns during his career. The most spectacular was a 42-yard interception return for a score against the Titans early last season.

Edwards entered the 2001 season having started all but one of the Chiefs' previous 64 games. He played perhaps the best game of his career in the Chiefs' 54-34 upset of the undefeated St. Louis Rams in week 8 of last season. In that game, Edwards posted 17 tackles and recovered a fumble.

Contrary to a growing trend of on-the-field showmanship, Edwards plays with a quiet confidence that his teammates and opponents respect.

"Some guys dance [after a sack or tackle], but that's not me," Edwards says. "I do my job and that's it. You know what you're going to get with me. It may not be flashy, but I get the job done."

Despite his consistent performance, Edwards has not been selected to the Pro Bowl, though many of his coaches and fellow players say he deserves the honor. The veteran linebacker does not allow the slight to become a distraction.

"I was upset about it [not being selected] at first, but I realized there's not much I can do other than concentrate on doing my job on the field," he says. "Recognition will come as we're successful as a team."

Edwards put in overtime this offseason. He worked with a personal trainer in southern California and spent countless hours learning the defensive schemes installed by new defensive coordinator Greg Robinson.

Edwards moved from his traditional right outside linebacker position, which had him facing the tight end. In the new scheme, he attacks from the weak side, which enables him to have more freedom and more access to opposing quarterbacks.

"You can expect to see some big things from us," Edwards says. "Greg's told me to expect more sacks, and know that with the talent we have on both sides of the ball, we're going to score a lot of points."

The Kansas City Chiefs had a lot of question marks entering this season. Fortunately, Edwards was not one of them.

With a new coach, a new quarterback (Trent Green), and new schemes on both sides of the ball, fans may not know what to expect from the Chiefs. That is, except for Edwards, one of the few certainties for Kansas City in 2001. ■



OVERLOOKED, NOT OVERWROUGHT: Though Edwards takes his Pro Bowl slights in stride, a vigorous offseason could help him get to Hawaii in 2002.

BY SCOTT JONES