

**COMMENTARY**

**Williams' injury hits too close for Texans players**

By **RICHARD JUSTICE** Copyright 2008 Houston Chronicle  
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Matt Slocum AP

Texans WR Harry Williams was carted off the field while playing special teams against the Cowboys.

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**FAN VOICES**

IRVING — Harry Williams lay motionless on the turf in a scene that's by now both sickening and familiar. Suddenly, everything the Texans came here to do seemed meaningless.

The Texans and Cowboys were back playing the game moments after Harry Williams was transported off the field, before he was even loaded into the ambulance that had been moved to the edge of the playing field.

The show must go on, right? NFL players understand this part of the business. They joke darkly about being carried off and replaced by someone else.

Later, the Texans would announce that Harry Williams had suffered a fracture of the C-3 vertebrae and that he would undergo surgery this weekend to stabilize the area. They emphasized that while he had been paralyzed from the neck down on the field, he had regained movement in his arms and legs within minutes. They were optimistic about a full recovery.

As for his football career, that part of the story seemed irrelevant, an issue for another day. That he was expected to walk again was enough.

This night was another of those in which we're reminded how frighteningly violent the NFL can be. No amount of equipment can fully protect players that are bigger and stronger and faster than ever.

Players understand the risk and they take it anyway. It's not just money, either; although money is part of it.

For some of them, it's all they've ever done. It's the thing they love most in life. It's the competition and the challenge, and all the other stuff coaches always talk about.

**Coaches love him**

Harry Williams is one of those players coaches love. He was the 240th pick of the 2005 draft, a long-shot wide receiver from Tuskegee.

The New York Jets thought he was worth a shot because he'd been productive in college and because he was fast enough and because he had heart.

He was both a track and football star at Tuskegee while studying electrical engineering. He got into one game that first season for the Jets.

He was released once early in the season, re-signed, then released again after the season. There are dozens of players like Harry Williams, players that believe they just need the right opportunity to prove they belong.

He had two stints with the Giants and one with the Packers before the Texans signed him to their practice squad early last season. He was activated for two games, made brief appearances on special teams.

He was re-signed after the season, partly to provide training-camp depth and partly because the Texans believed he had a shot.

He began training camp as the sixth wide receiver on a club that planned on keeping six. As Jacoby Jones struggled, coaches talked about how good a camp Harry Williams was having.

**Lighting a fire?**

NFL teams do this kind of thing all the time. Sometimes they're trying to light a fire under someone else, in this case Jones. Sometimes they're trying to give a guy with no chance a figurative pat on the

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back.

Anyway, Harry Williams entered this third preseason game having had as good a camp as he could. He was maybe one injury away from starting his fourth professional season in the NFL. And then two minutes into Friday night's game, he rushed down the field to cover a kickoff, and after diving for the ballcarrier and colliding with teammate Nick Ferguson, his helmet hit the turf hard.

As the players untangled, one didn't move. These little nightmares unfold a moment at a time. Was he merely dinged? Stunned? Was it

a knee or a shoulder? As trainers and doctors rushed to his side, Harry Williams remained completely still on his stomach, neither his legs nor head moving.

First a trainer, then a doctor, then two more. Play was stopped for around 20 minutes as Williams was moved gingerly onto a stretcher and onto a cart for the trip to the ambulance at the end of the field.

By halftime, the news was good. He had feeling in his arms and legs. Afterward, the Texans learned Williams wasn't out of jeopardy.

Their locker room was subdued after the game, their concerns someplace else. At least there was reason for optimism. Some.

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