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USC CB Wright to be sidelined with vertebrae hairline fracture

By Bruce Feldman
ESPN the Magazine
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Top-ranked USC will be without its top coverman for the next few weeks. After Monday's practice Trojan coach Pete Carroll announced that cornerback Shareece Wright will be out "a number of weeks" after sustaining a hairline fracture in one of his vertebrae. The Trojans are hopeful he can return by early November.

"Things happen," Carroll said. "Unfortunately for Shareece, this is going to be a long recovery for him."

The injury is believed to have occurred during the third quarter of the Trojans' 35-3 victory over Ohio State Sept. 13. Initially it was thought to be a stinger. Wright, a junior, was held out of practice last week while still experiencing pain in his neck.

He practiced Sunday but was held out of contact drills and was not cleared for full contact before getting evaluated and diagnosed earlier Monday.

"He was in surprisingly good spirits," Trojan secondary coach Rocky Seto said of Wright, who was not at Monday's practice. "And we're all really thankful because it could've been a lot worse."

Trojan coaches have been raving about Wright's ability for weeks, suggesting he might emerge as the best corner USC has had in the Carroll era. In addition to Wright having great quickness, Carroll has gushed about Wright's toughness and his knack for making plays. Wright also is one of the Trojans' gunners on their punt coverage unit.

In Wright's absence, senior Josh Pinkard, who started six games in 2005 at cornerback for USC before a pair of serious knee injuries derailed his career, will become the starting corner opposite Cary Harris.

Pinkard also has played a lot at corner in the Trojans' first two games as part of their defensive rotation with Wright and Harris.

"Josh is really good," Seto said of the 6-foot-2, 210-pounder. "He's fast, physical and has tremendous ball skills."

The injury hinders the Trojans' depth. USC's four-man rotation at corner likely becomes a three-man platoon with Kevin Thomas becoming the first guy off the bench. Blue-chip freshman T.J. Bryant will be available, but the coaches would prefer not to burn his redshirt season if they don't have to.

Monday's diagnosis is the latest twist for Wright, who has been in the news a lot in the last few

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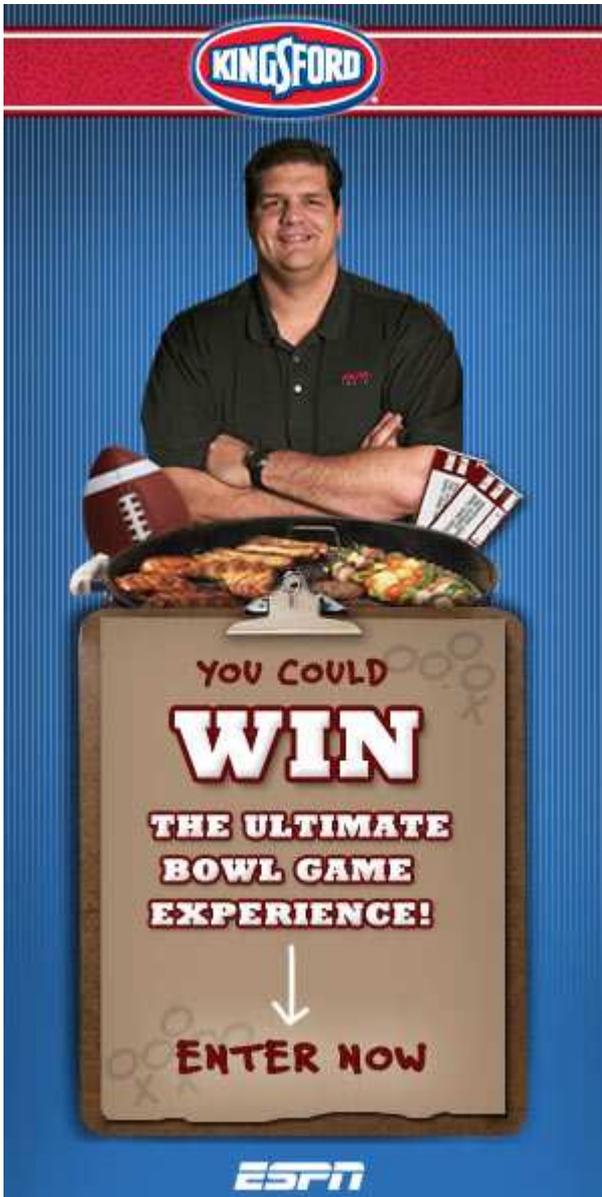
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weeks. Last Wednesday, Wright was arraigned in San Bernardino County Superior Court in connection with an incident at a Sept. 7 party that led to his being charged with felony resisting a police officer. Carroll has said Wright was being disciplined internally for that situation.

Bruce Feldman is a senior writer at ESPN The Magazine.

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