

If Courtland Sutton is good for Broncos, it's bad for Emmanuel Sanders. And he's OK with that.

By Mark Kiszla
The Denver Post
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Once an apprentice in the No Fly Zone, cornerback Bradley Roby now walks through Broncos headquarters like he owns the joint. Roby, the star of John Elway's 2014 draft class, won't like me saying this. But he pushed Aqib Talib out the door to Los Angeles.

Talib gave the No Fly Zone an edge as nasty as a poke in the eye. Roby, however, made Talib expendable, which explains how a five-time Pro Bowler was traded to the Rams for a fifth-round draft choice.

In the NFL, every job is temporary work. Everybody's expendable.

"No more Talib questions," Roby said Wednesday, uncomfortable discussing a mentor who taught him so well that Talib is no longer a Denver teammate.

Well, not to harsh Roby's mellow, but Talib is scheduled for a return appearance to Colorado with the Rams in October, so maybe we haven't seen the last pick-six in this dusty old cowtown by our old friend.

What Roby really would rather not talk about, however, is the unavoidable bummers of a mean business. Money keeps intruding on the locker room camaraderie all championship teams cherish.

Is Roby a better shutdown corner than Talib? No way. No how. What favored Roby was the math. With the Broncos paying him \$8.5 million this season, the team figured it could let the Rams pick up the \$11 million tab on Talib, who celebrated his 32nd birthday in February.

With Denver selecting edge rusher Bradley Chubb with the fifth overall pick in the NFL draft, there's no room for charity regarding Shane Ray, whose 13 sacks since being the team's top draft choice in 2015 don't merit any financial guarantees beyond this season. So why should anyone be surprised Elway declined to pick up the fifth-year option on Ray's contract? It was a tough move, but also a prudent decision.

In the Expendables Football League, everyone is a replaceable part. The salary cap allows no room for sentimentality. When the Broncos used two of their top six selections in last week's draft on receivers Courtland Sutton and DaeSean Hamilton, the message was loud and clear.

In veteran receivers Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders, Denver has invested nearly \$17 million in base salary and allocated over \$22 million in cap space for 2018. After Elway minced no words in demanding more production from his core vets on both sides of the ball, notice has been served. It would make little sense to keep both Thomas and Sanders around beyond this season, especially if the Broncos fail to make the playoffs again.

With quarterbacks Trevor Siemian, Paxton Lynch and Brock Osweiler stumbling over musical chairs all season long, Sanders caught only 47 passes, by far the worst production of his four seasons in Denver. Yes, injury caused him to miss four games in 2017. But Sanders knows the score: "The moment you get over 30 in the NFL, they automatically say, 'He's getting up in age.' "

In a dog-eat-dog business, isn't Sanders worried if he teaches new teammates Sutton and Hamilton too well, they will take his job and he will be the next star over age 30 to be pushed out the door at Dove Valley?

"That is going to happen anyway," replied Sanders, figuring there's no reason getting angry about the harsh realities of pro football. "Once you get up (in age) in this league, you start making too much money, and they say ..."

Next!

In the NFL, younger is cheaper. Even a well-established star can be chewed up and spit out by the roster-churn machine. This time, it was Talib's turn. A year from now, the planned obsolescence could tap Sanders on the shoulder.

"Look, I understand the business of it," said Sanders, vowing to show Sutton and Hamilton all the tricks in his route tree, because he wants to help the rookies feed their families.

"All I can do is make plays every single day and show that if I become expendable here, just show some other team, 'Hey, look, I still got it. I still got the juice.' Maybe they want to pay me. That would be selfish of me to say, 'I'm not going to teach you everything that I know because you're going to beat me.' At the end of the day, if he's going to do it, he's going to do it. I can't avoid that."

In the Not For Long, Roby made Talib expendable.

And now the Broncos are hoping Sutton can do the same for Sanders or Thomas.

Courtland Sutton ready to learn from Denver Broncos' veteran receivers

By Gina Mizell
The Denver Post
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Courtland Sutton understands if Demaryius Thomas finds him annoying.

Ever since Thomas reached out to Sutton on Friday night to welcome the Broncos' second-round draft pick to the team, Sutton has continued to pepper Thomas with text-message questions.

"When are we going to be able to get on the field and start working?"

"How did you get to the point that you're at?"

"How are you elevating that to continue to be great?"

It makes sense that Sutton would want to pick Thomas' brain. Sutton, the headliner of the group of offensive playmakers the Broncos drafted last week, is already drawing comparisons to Thomas, Denver's two-time all-pro receiver. Sutton is 6-foot-4, 220 pounds and, according to general manager John Elway and coach Vance Joseph, possesses a "special skillset" that should enable him to develop into the Broncos' future top pass-catching target.

"He has No. 1 traits," Joseph said. "I am excited about a guy like that."

The Broncos gave Sutton a first-round grade, impressed with the SMU product's versatility to play outside or in the slot, as well as his smooth route-running and knack for making highlight-reel catches. Last season, Sutton had 68 receptions for 1,085 yards and 12 touchdowns.

But perhaps Elway most likes Sutton's still-untapped potential. Sutton entered college as a safety before flipping to the offensive side of the ball. Though Sutton believes his time in the secondary helps him understand how to find holes when the defense tries to disguise coverage, he acknowledges he's still fine-tuning his skills as a receiver. He credits his season playing for Larry Brown on the SMU basketball team — when he was tasked with boxing out opposing players close to 7-feet tall — with helping him develop the physicality he now applies while battling defensive backs for contested balls. And when Sutton gets on the field, his jovial personality and wide smile flips to an intense mentality that "demands respect."

"I am not going to be a guy who sputters and makes plays every now and then and disappears during game time," Sutton said. "... I have been that presence on the field."

Sutton is already acquainted with two of his new pass-catching teammates. He trained at the same Florida facility as DaeSean Hamilton, the Broncos' fourth-round selection out of Penn State. And while in college, Sutton occasionally reached out to fellow SMU alumnus Emmanuel Sanders, asking for advice on how he reached the NFL from a smaller school.

Now Sutton is excited to observe how the Broncos' receivers work. He plans to ask a bevy of detailed questions about how to best set up cone drills or catch balls out of the jugs machine. He wants to know the "why," not just the "what," in his quest to improve his game.

Naturally, several of those questions will be directed at Thomas. And Sutton can't wait for when those interactions — annoying or not — move from their cellphones to the field.

"We do have some of the similar traits to play this position," Sutton said of Thomas. "But I'm still trying to get some of those little traits that make him the great player that he is. I was sending text messages, just asking questions (like), 'What makes you, you?' I'm going to continue to do it once I get into the same locker room as him."

Five things you might not know about Courtland Sutton

By Henry Chisholm

BSN Denver

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Courtland Sutton is now a Denver Bronco.

The former SMU star, who once recorded 252 receiving yards in a single game, was selected by John Elway in the second round of the draft, Friday night.

Before Sutton touches down in the Mile High City to join his new team, here are five things you should know about him:

HE WASN'T A HIGHLY RATED RECRUIT

Just like Denver's first round pick, Bradley Chubb, Sutton was only a three-star prospect in high school. And, just like Chubb, he grew into a body that oozes with NFL potential, defying the projections of those who scouted him.

Sutton signed with SMU as a safety, shortly after the University of Colorado brought him to Boulder just to tell him that the program had run out of scholarships and send him back home. He quickly shifted to the offensive side of the ball, but lost the majority of his true freshman season to an ankle injury. He received a medical redshirt.

But from his redshirt-freshman year on, Sutton was a star. Just look at the numbers:

Redshirt freshman year: 49 receptions, 862 yards, 9 touchdowns.

Sophomore year: 76 receptions, 1246 yards, 10 touchdowns.

Junior year: 68 receptions, 1085 yards and 12 touchdowns.

And the best part? He never missed another game.

HE WAS DESTINED TO BE A COWBOY

This might not be what you want to hear, but it's true: Sutton and the Cowboys seemed like a match made in heaven.

First of all, Sutton was a huge Cowboys fan growing up, which isn't a surprise given that he was born and raised three hours south of Dallas in Brenham, Texas.

Second, he modeled his game after Dez Bryant, another big-bodied, number-one receiver prototype.

"I really enjoy watching Dez Bryant play the game right now," Sutton told Draft Wire last summer. "He plays with such passion and determination to be successful. He knows that he's going against the best corner each week and doesn't shy away from it."

And the Cowboys showed interest, too. Jason Garrett was the only NFL head coach to attend Sutton's pro day and Mike Fisher, 105.3 The Fan's Cowboys insider, said that Sutton was the Cowboys' number one rated receiver in this draft class. NFL Network's Ian Rapoport added that he would have been Dallas' pick had he dropped 10 more spots.

HE'S A FREAK ATHLETE

Everybody who gets drafted is a great athlete, it's just one of the prerequisites. But Courtland Sutton is on a different level.

Despite his 6-foot-3-plus, 218 pound frame, Sutton had the second-fastest 60-yard shuttle time of any receiver at the combine, the third-fastest three-cone drill time and the fourth-fastest 20-yard shuttle time. He was also in the top 10 in the broad jump and the bench press.

Last summer, Sports Illustrated reported that Sutton had 6.4 percent body fat. There are videos floating around the internet of him doing a 60-inch box jump and he once broad jumped over 10 feet.

So far, those skills seem to have transferred seamlessly to the football field.

HE IS A SELF-DESCRIBED COUNTRY BOY

Sutton grew up on a farm that had been in his family for generations, according to NFL.com's Chase Goodbread. His family raised crops and animals, including 60 head of cattle.

"I'd give him post-hole diggers and have him go three feet deep, into hard ground. It was hard enough work that anything else he came across was going to be a piece of cake compared to it," Sutton's father told Goodbread. "My father did the same for me, and I turned out alright. I didn't go to school and get an education, but I could work with my hands. The good Lord makes doctors, lawyers and us laborers, too. And that's OK. But I'm glad Courtland went to school and got a degree. Now he's got both."

And when he wasn't playing sports or working on the farm, he was down at the river catching fish.

HE HAS OTHERWORLDLY HANDS

Sutton's a big guy, but you knew that.

What you might not know is that he has a 6-foot-6 wingspan, giving him a massive catch radius and making him an even bigger target for quarterbacks.

He also has 9-3/4 inch hands. And they're soft as a kitten.

So soft in fact, that Sutton appeared on NFL Network before the draft and caught a pair of poorly-thrown eggs with ease.

But if that doesn't impress you, then maybe one of his highlight-reel worth grabs will. He practiced one-handed catches every day during practice in college, so it should be no surprise that his YouTube film is chock full of special snags.

And when he decided to return to SMU for his redshirt junior season—he graduated in three and a half years—he put those hands to use in a different way: He learned to play the piano.

How he fits: Second-round pick Courtland Sutton

By Andrew Mason
DenverBroncos.com
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The Broncos don't need Courtland Sutton to start right now -- not with Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders both returning on the outside. But down the line, the Broncos have a receiver who should be able to reach passes others can't.

Only three wide receivers likely to be drafted have a bigger wingspan than Sutton, whose 79-1/4 inch wingspan allowed him to pluck plenty of downfield passes out of the air in SMU's offense.

But Sutton could make a role for himself right away in the slot, even as he grows into a receiver who could eventually start on the outside.

The Broncos are likely to have a lively competition at slot receiver, with 2017 third-round pick Carlos Henderson and 2017 practice-squad player River Cracraft among the receivers in the mix. Sutton's ability to make catches in traffic and his quickness are strong attributes if he is asked to contribute there.

"Being able to have that [versatility] in my game is a key trait," he said.

Although his wingspan and height (6-foot-3) are his defining measurable characteristics, his quickness numbers also catch the eye. He posted the third-best three-cone drill among wide receivers at the Combine (6.57 seconds) and the fourth-best short-shuttle time (4.11 seconds).

The two other receivers who finished with top-5 three-cone and short-shuttle times -- Texas Tech's Dylan Cantrell and Missouri's J'Mon Moore -- both had slower 40-yard dash times and smaller wingspans than Sutton.

Few have Sutton's blend of quickness and size, and his versatility could help the Broncos right away.

Courtland Sutton Has All the Tools to Be a Steal in the 2018 NFL Draft

By Sean Tomilson
Bleacher Report
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The build-up to the NFL draft is an obstacle course for prospects. It begins with the scouting combine, then goes on to pro days and private workouts, and hopefully ends with an early chance to bear-hug Commissioner Roger Goodell.

Over three months, the best first-round hopefuls are asked to check off boxes. Are they fast enough? Agile enough? Can they jump high enough? Block well enough? Catch consistently enough?

Only a select few put a checkmark on every box. The rest can still be first-round picks while compensating for their weaknesses with appealing strengths.

Which brings us to wide receiver Courtland Sutton and his draft journey, which could end with a late first-round selection. Some development is still needed, but he has the physical gifts to contribute right away and rise fast while far outperforming his draft slot.

There are questions hovering over the entire wide receiver group in the 2018 draft class, and there is no clear leader. However, a late pick in the first round seems to be a growing projection surrounding Sutton, the SMU standout who caught 195 balls over four seasons.

Daniel Jeremiah of NFL.com has Sutton slotted to the Dallas Cowboys at No. 19 in his most recent mock draft. That makes sense given how similar he is in body type and playing style to Dez Bryant, who was just cut by the Cowboys. However, Tony Pauline of Draft Analyst recently reported the Cowboys don't consider Sutton a first-round talent, even if head coach Jason Garrett logged valuable one-on-one time with him, per Ian Rapoport of NFL Network:

That feeling is mutual among several in the draft community. Sutton isn't listed in the first round in three of the five other mock drafts at NFL.com. He's also absent in the latest from Bleacher Report's Matt Miller. And at CBSSports.com, Chris Trapasso is the outlier, as he has Sutton coming off the board all the way up at No. 9 to the San Francisco 49ers. Three others have him projected for the 24th-overall pick or later.

If he lands at the end of the opening round, or even further back, it might be because Sutton's route running needs some fine-tuning. Lance Zierlein of NFL.com noted as much while observing that Sutton's "route wiggle is average and feels gradual rather than sharp."

An NFC regional scout agreed, but still had a positive outlook on Sutton.

"He's got to get quicker and learn to separate or he's going to be wearing coverage around the field," he told Zierlein. "He's very mentally and physically tough, so I think he'll get it figured out."

That faith seems well-placed. Sutton has imperfections that can be navigated if coaches give him the proper guidance to ensure an upward trajectory continues. As that development happens, the 6'3", 218-pound deep threat and red-zone specialist can be an immediate difference-maker, then become even more of a weapon as he emerges.

He has the length, acrobatic ability and body-positioning instinct in midair to thrive amid chaos while snatching contested catches. Sutton leaned on a wide catch radius to haul in 31 touchdown passes over his final three seasons at SMU.

Throughout his collegiate career, Sutton scored on 15.9 percent of his receptions. The highlights from his 2016 and 2017 seasons—when he scored 22 combined touchdowns—show a receiver who can rise above the chaos of high-traffic areas and also accelerate with breakaway speed after the catch.

The latter skill there will be key for Sutton to have success at the NFL level.

He's more than just a red-zone vacuum. Sutton ran the 40-yard dash in 4.54 seconds at the scouting combine, which is a solid time at his size. He used an imposing combination of size and speed to average 16.5 yards per reception at SMU, with 1,000-plus receiving yards overall in each of his final two seasons.

What drives Sutton's short- and long-term NFL value, and why he has draft-steal potential, is his consistent effectiveness on deep routes. As Pro Football Focus charted, his passer ratings in 2017 when targeted on corner and post routes were high above NCAA averages:

[View image on Twitter](#)

After the catch, he's a punishing presence while powering through contact for extra yards. That's how he rounds out an intensely physical package. His after-the-catch physicality and speed led to 26 missed tackles over his final two college seasons, again per PFF.

Even with all his promise, Sutton may land outside the first round due to team needs and circumstances beyond his control. But that shouldn't be an indictment on his professional potential. Remember, the Steelers' JuJu Smith-Schuster produced right away with 917 regular-season receiving yards and seven touchdowns as a rookie after being drafted 62nd overall.

There are logical first-round fits for Sutton beyond the Cowboys. The Jacksonville Jaguars (29th overall) could use a bulked-up deep threat and more wide receiver depth after the departures of Allen Robinson and Allen Hurns. And the New Orleans Saints (27th overall) would benefit from a better wingman alongside Michael Thomas.

His future team will be getting a physically gifted pass-catcher who can stretch secondaries and come down with low-percentage catches. More importantly, that team will be getting a potential No. 1 receiver, likely for a fraction of the market value.

That's how draft robbery happens.

SMU WR Courtland Sutton shares how Chad Morris helped him develop into elite draft prospect

By Michael Wayne Bratton

Saturday Down South

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When the 2018 NFL Draft rolls around next week, SMU receiver Courtland Sutton will be among the first players at his position to hear his name called. Much of that has to do with the fact he played for Chad Morris.

The Arkansas coach has a strong track record of producing elite receivers with Sutton being that next guy in line. In a recent video published by the Razorbacks, the former SMU star discussed how Morris was incredibly supportive during the previous offseason when trying to decide whether to go to declare early for the draft or not.

Here is what Sutton had to say regarding the thing that stood out from Morris during that difficult decision.

“I did have the opportunity to leave early last year and Coach Morris, being the guy that he is and just being the man that he is and the coach he is,” Sutton said, “he sat me down and the thing I love most about the whole process when I was trying to decide whether I wanted to leave early or not was he sat down and gave me all the facts. ‘Whatever you decide to do, I’m going to support you 100 percent. If you decide you want to leave and that’s what’s right for you, I will fly you out to wherever you need to go and get stuff done,’ he said. ‘I will be there walking with you hand and hand.’”

Sutton also touched on the great receivers to come out of Clemson under Morris that are now in the NFL and how that inspired him to improve.

NFL Draft Profile: SMU's Courtland Sutton Is More Than Just A Football Player; He's A Finisher

By Chase Crosby
Forbes Magazine
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By now, most football fans are waist-deep in NFL mock drafts and projections. That means there have been quite a few discussions regarding which young prospects will be taken and where those players will wind up in the upcoming NFL Draft. While it is impossible to know for sure until draft day, how players perform at the NFL Combine and college pro days will go a long way in determining who teams will fall in love with and which of those players teams will work hard to avoid.

One of those players that need not worry is the 6'4", 225-pound wide receiver from Southern Methodist University. His name is Courtland Sutton, and chances are you have heard of him. If you haven't, please make your way to YouTube and enjoy the next few minutes of watching highlight reel catches followed by broken tackles and touchdowns — many, many touchdowns.

Sutton's measurables are undeniable, and that is why draft pundits have him currently going as high as sixth overall in the upcoming draft (to the New York Jets). He is that good. One thing many may not know, however, is that Sutton had a similar opportunity to enter the NFL Draft last season, but chose instead to return to SMU because he had unfinished business — both in the classroom and on the football field.

A football player who is eligible to enter the NFL Draft with a first-round grade returning to a non-Power Five school, instead of taking guaranteed millions, is not a story you often hear about, and that is why I decided to sit down with Sutton and his parents, Ryan and Phelicia Marshall, to discuss the last 15 or so months — mainly, why Sutton turned down the guaranteed money and the instant fame to return to a school that had no chance of winning a national championship. (Sorry, SMU fans.)

I'll give you a hint: because Courtland Sutton is a finisher — and that has more to do with him as a person than a football player.

Chase Crosby: Talk to me a little bit about Courtland's time growing up on the farm and how — I'm sure as parents you still see that young kid who was working in the yard, also playing in the yard, running routes on the football field next to the house. Talk to me about that little boy and how you see that little boy in this growing young man, who is about to be a 1st round pick in this upcoming NFL Draft.

Ryan Marshall: I guess for me, I just wanted to raise him the same way I was raised. I grew up in Houston, [but spent a lot of time helping my dad] in the country. I had to feed cows, haul hay and really work hard. I wanted [Courtland] to go to school and get a great education, but also [have that work ethic].

Phelicia Marshall: Teaching [Courtland] how to work early in life was really important. Working at the farm taught him how to be responsible [and] he's carried [that life lesson among others] throughout his life.

Crosby: Talk to me about the empty field next to the house that Courtland used to play on.

R. Marshall: It was already there when we moved in. The first [sport] [Courtland] played was tee-ball. So, we turned the field into a [baseball field] with a batting cage and a pitching mound. Whatever we had to do, we did it all right there. [Courtland] maintained the grass over there.

Crosby: That's an indication of the type of young man that you both raised and are, to a certain extent, still raising, because you never stop being mom and dad, right?

R. Marshall and P. Marshall: Never!

Crosby: At what point did playing at the next level, whether collegiate, or the NFL, become something that was a realistic and a very strong possibility?

R. Marshall: Our [sole concern] was for [Courtland] to go to school and get a good education.

P. Marshall: You couldn't say that you wanted to be a professional athlete in [our] house. It was important for him to get his education, and in getting his education, if something else came with that then it was gravy.

Crosby: You both are huge proponents of education. Was that part of your conversation with Courtland when exploring the possibility of him entering the NFL Draft after his redshirt sophomore season—when draft pundits had him rated as a 1st or 2nd round talent? What made him go back to SMU?

P. Marshall: [Courtland] was too close to finishing. It was important for him to finish. Anyone could say that they are going to go back to school and finish, but we knew it would be so much harder to [try to do so].

R. Marshall: Education is far more important. Nobody can take that from you.

Crosby: Was the main conversation you both had with Courtland after his successful sophomore season about him getting his degree?

R. Marshall: Yes sir! That's it in a nutshell.

Crosby: Courtland graduated with a degree in sports management. My understanding is that he would like to be Director of Player Development for a university when he is done playing in the NFL. What specific traits does Courtland possess that will allow him to succeed in that role when he retires?

P. Marshall: Courtland has been a sponge. He has always been able to listen to and learn from his coaches. Being the leader that he is, I believe that is going to be one of the greatest contributing factors for Courtland moving forward. He is a great leader and is someone that people can look up to. He is relatable. He is easy to talk to. I think that [he is able to reach a lot of kids] because of his own experience.

R. Marshall: That's the main thing. He has been through it all.

Crosby: Colorado recruited Courtland out of high school, but by the time you all were able to fly out for a visit they told him that they didn't have any more scholarships. What was that like? How did you encourage Courtland through that process because that had to be a difficult time?

P. Marshall: It was extremely difficult. God shows you things and puts obstacles in your way for a reason. Our original flight [and subsequent flights] were canceled flying out of Houston to Colorado. We had to drive to San Antonio in order to fly to Colorado. When we finally got there, we were thinking that everything was going to be good. They gave us the tour [of the university]. The next day we [were preparing] to go into our meeting [when they told us] that they had given his scholarship away. [In hindsight, God was using those obstacles to direct our steps.]

R. Marshall: Keep in mind that during this time, we wouldn't commit to anyone because I always [taught Courtland] to be a man of his word [so making a commitment to a school and then reneging on that commitment was not an option]. When they pulled the scholarship it was a hurtful thing, but it worked out in the long run.

P. Marshall: If you ask God for something and you ask Him to lead you a certain way, you have to be patient enough to listen and know that if you have asked in faith—that God is going to provide.

Crosby: What is it going to be like to hear Courtland's name called on the first night of the 2018 NFL Draft?

P. Marshall: Surreal. Courtland has worked hard. He has followed directions. He has listened to us. He has listened to his coaches. He has listened to God. For this kid from Brenham, TX to have accomplished so much, including going to school, earning his degree and [being able to be on that stage when his name is called] is just crazy.

R. Marshall: I just get a little emotional about the whole thing.

Crosby: What would you like GMs, fans and the general public to know about your son?

P. Marshall: Courtland is a compassionate person. He is a hard worker. He is very handsome (laughing). He has a heart of gold. He is always willing to not only be a leader, but to be lead [as well].

R. Marshall: His work ethic speaks for itself. He has always been an underdog—whether he was playing baseball, basketball or football. A lot of people didn't give Courtland the benefit of the doubt. [He persevered].

Crosby: When you are going through the process of selecting an agent, what are you looking for?

P. Marshall: We wanted someone that was God-centered and someone who had Courtland's best interest at heart. We wanted someone that would continue to [reinforce] the values that we instilled in him when he was young.

Crosby: When Courtland decided to go back to SMU after his redshirt sophomore season were there any injury concerns?

R. Marshall: Accidents happen. That was a chance we were willing to take. [All of the decisions we have tried to make as parents and as a family] have been made with faith. Courtland's decision [to go back to SMU in lieu of a potential big payday] was one of those faith decisions.

P. Marshall: Whatever God's plan is for you—that is [what's] going to happen. We believe in God's plan.

Crosby: Thank you both for your time.

Crosby: Courtland, walk me through your decision to return to SMU after your redshirt sophomore season instead of heading to the NFL and receiving a signing bonus along with guaranteed money?

Courtland Sutton: A few main [factors] influenced my decision. [First], my parents, Coach Morris (former Head Coach at SMU) and Coach Stepp (former Wide Receivers Coach at SMU) were huge in my decision to return to SMU. Coach Morris showed me every statistic and every mock draft whether good or bad. He told me to make the best decision for me and my family.

Crosby: Second?

[Second] part of that decision was Coach Morris [showing me] how close I was to earning my degree. I knew I was close, but I didn't know exactly how close I was. [For me to leave SMU at that point would have been] like running a marathon and [seeing the finish line], but then quitting. What's the point in starting if you aren't going to finish? Football isn't going to last forever. What are you going to do with the life you have left after the NFL? You have to be able to contribute to society after football. Earning my degree was something that could never be taken from me. It was of great importance to me [and my family].

Crosby: Third?

Sutton: [Third], I wanted to return to SMU to finish what we started. I wanted to leave the program better than I found it. I love my teammates. We were able to build something special at SMU. My first year there we won one game. [The next season we won] two games. I knew we were so much better than that and I wanted to be a part of finishing what we started. [We were able to do that this past season—winning seven games and reaching a bowl game].

Crosby: How does it make you feel now that you are on the other side of your decision to return to SMU after a successful redshirt sophomore season? Your path to the NFL has certainly been a process of mountains, valleys and obstacles. Did getting hurt ever cross your mind?

Sutton: I have a different philosophy when it comes to getting injured. If it's God's will for me to play in the NFL then His will will be done no matter what. So many people were questioning my decision to return to SMU instead of taking the guaranteed money in the NFL, but I knew [what was right for me and my family and that was trusting God's plan]. It never crossed my mind that I could get hurt and lose millions of dollars. Never. There were a lot of people telling me not to play in the bowl game. [They said that I was putting myself in harm's way for a meaningless game]. For me, it was about finishing. With our coaches leaving [for Arkansas] going into the bowl game, I felt a responsibility as a leader on that team to be there with my teammates and to finish the season with my teammates.

Crosby: Coach Stepp said that he couldn't leave for Arkansas until after he coached the final game of your SMU career. He and his wife are also expecting a son and are reportedly going to name him Courtland. Can you tell me what your relationship with Coach Stepp has meant and how it makes you feel to hear a coach be that openly proud of you?

Sutton: Coach Stepp is [my guy]. He was always encouraging. He has been a mentor to me. Everything happens for a reason. When Coach Morris came to SMU, I was blessed to have Coach Stepp as my receivers coach. He took an interest in me as a person and I really appreciated that. I talk to Coach Stepp on a weekly basis.

Crosby: What is that moment going to be like for you when you hear your name called?

Sutton: Surreal. To get to this point where I am fortunate enough to have the opportunity to play in the NFL, it's surreal. Everybody dreams of it, but not everybody gets that chance. It's God working and it's a blessing. I tell people I won't be crying, but when that moment comes—it will be a moment. God's got His hand in the pot working.

Crosby: A lot of mock drafts have you going early in the first round. Some had you going sixth to the New York Jets and a few others had you going eighth to the Chicago Bears. What would you like for any team that is thinking of drafting Courtland Sutton to know about you?

Sutton: I would want them to know that they are getting more than just a football player. They are getting someone who wants to come in and contribute to the community. Someone who wants to grow into the leader that the coaches [can trust] and can count on. I want teams to know that I want to be that guy. That whenever it's a tough down and distance or the team is in a tough spot—that coach knows he can find Sutton. I can be that guy and I will be that guy... on the field and off the field. It's more than just football to me.

Crosby: Who is your favorite former NFL player?

Sutton: My favorite player is Terrell Owens. The way he played the game inside the lines [was incredible]. He needs to be in the Hall of Fame. Even when he was 75% [healthy], you knew he was on the field and had to respect him. [He] played in the Super Bowl with screws in his ankle and [had over 100 yards receiving].

Crosby: Who is your favorite current NFL player?

Sutton: [I have a few]. Dez Bryant is [one of my favorite players] because he plays the game with passion. Even when he has been hurt, teams have still doubled him because he commands that attention.

Crosby: Who else?

Sutton: Another [one of my favorite players] is Julio Jones. He plays at such a high level. I want to be that guy that puts up video game numbers.

Crosby: Anybody else?

Sutton: The other [player I watch a lot] is Larry Fitzgerald. They call him “Larry Legend” for a reason. He has been with the Cardinals for his entire career and I want to be like that. He carried his team through the good and the bad and I want to be able to lead like that. I want to be able to put an organization on my back and carry it through the good and the bad like Fitzgerald. When Bruce Arians came in, he moved Fitzgerald to the slot and instead of him taking it as a slight, he took it as an opportunity to better himself as a player and learn a new position. He is coachable and he is a legend.

Crosby: You often write 1 Corinthians 15:10 and Psalms 27:1 on your tape before practices and games. What do those passages mean to you?

Sutton: *recites the passage* 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. It’s a very humbling verse. I write it on my tape before every practice and every game. It just reminds me that I am nothing more than a vessel to be used by God. We all are. He works through us for specific reasons. It’s not for me to boast.

Crosby: And Psalms 27:1?

Sutton: *recites the passage* 1 The Lord is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid? That [verse] lets me know that I have nothing to worry about when I have God. Anyone who has faith in God knows that there is power in His name. That’s where my faith [and my confidence] come from.

Crosby: Thank you for your time, Courtland.

It would be irresponsible of me to act as if I have no dog in this hunt, as the saying goes. After all, I am a huge Dallas Cowboys fan and wouldn’t mind seeing them use their first selection this coming April to select Sutton. Those who have analyzed the disappointing season of America’s Team pointed to their production — or lack thereof — at the receiver position as a reason for the team’s decline. It just so happens, Sutton is one of the top-rated players at a position of need for the team. Only problem is, he may be long gone by the time the Cowboys are on the clock.

That is their problem. Not his.

I expected this piece to focus on a small-town kid who bet on himself after years of being overlooked. Instead, I walked away with an editorial about a young man who is wise beyond his years, who is grateful for all that he has received, who is hungry for the challenge of the NFL, who is committed to finishing whatever he starts and is excited to trust a plan greater than his own.

Sutton will make some team extremely happy come draft night.

Turns out, good guys don’t always finish last.

From farm to NFL's table: Hard work paying off for SMU's Courtland Sutton

By Chase Goodbread

NFL.com

January 3, 2018

In a few weeks, an NFL scout will stretch a measuring tape across Courtland Sutton's hands at the scouting combine to assess the wide receiver's most valuable asset. It'll be done in about two seconds.

The measurement will be taken from the tip of the thumb, across the palm, to the tip of the pinky finger, and from that point on, Sutton's hands will become just a number. It will get lost amid hand measurements for more than 300 other draft prospects, all recorded with the same rapid-fire brevity, and booked into record by all 32 NFL clubs.

From that number, they'll know exactly how much pigskin will fit into the hands of the Southern Methodist wideout.

But they'll know absolutely nothing about what else Sutton's hands can do.

SUTTON'S HOMETOWN OF BRENHAM, located just south of College Station, halfway between Austin and Houston, is known as the baseball capital of the state. Former Milwaukee Brewers slugger Cecil Cooper is from here, and the Brenham High Cubs have proudly notched seven state titles.

The Blue Bell creamery serves as the economic heartbeat for the town's 17,000 residents, and Sutton played football just down the street from the massive ice cream factory, which also sponsors the school's athletics.

There is plenty of farming in the area, too.

And long before Sutton became a three-sport athlete for the Cubs, he was introduced to farm work by his father, Ryan Marshall.

On the outskirts of Brenham, near the Brazos River, the Marshall farm has been in the family for generations, and Sutton spent his share of weekends there as a kid. Located in an area called Old Washington, the ranch includes 60 head of cattle, some hogs, and an endless list of chores. When he was younger, it was more of a place to goof around with cousins and have fun, but as Sutton got older, he built his work ethic with some of the most physically demanding tasks on the property.

"I'd give him post-hole diggers and have him go three feet deep, into hard ground. It was hard enough work that anything else he came across was going to be a piece of cake compared to it," said Marshall, a lineman for the electric company. "My father did the same for me, and I turned out alright. I didn't go to school and get an education, but I could work with my hands. The good Lord makes doctors, lawyers, and us laborers, too. And that's OK. But I'm glad Courtland went to school and got a degree. Now he's got both."

Fence-mending. Cattle-feeding. Building water gaps. T-post-driving. Young Courtland learned a variety of skills, and none of them were much fun.

"You know what a mesquite bush is?" Sutton asks with a grin, because he knows the answer will almost certainly be no. "It's a big thorn bush that can grow into a thorn tree. My grandfather tried everything to get rid of them. We'd cut them down, we'd get the tractor and mow them down, and then they just grow back stronger."

When the farm chores were done, and not a minute sooner, Sutton would turn to his favorite hobby: fishing. Right on the farm, he could hook bass, crappie and perch, but the bass were his favorite. His father taught him to cast a line, and he could reel them in for hours on end, either with his family, or with his best childhood friend, Jacob Deramus, who now runs cross-country at Stephen F. Austin.

Asked if he's been city-fied by four years in Dallas, Sutton calls himself "still 75-percent country boy."

When he first arrived at SMU, however, he quickly learned fishing wouldn't come easily. He'd open maps of the Dallas area, look for anything blue, and drive there with his pole -- only to find the water was on a private golf course where fishing wasn't permitted.

Then, he and Myron Gailliard, a fellow fishing enthusiast and Mustangs wide receiver, stumbled into a honey hole.

"We found a secret place that doesn't even show up on a map. There are huge fish there, and they bite hard. And we don't tell anyone where it is," Sutton said. "It's in the Dallas area. I'll just say that."

Sutton clammed up on the topic from there, like any self-respecting fisherman. It doesn't matter that his NFL destination -- unless it's his childhood favorite Dallas Cowboys -- will force him to explore new spots of blue on an entirely different map. What matters is that, whenever he makes his way back to his secret Dallas fishing hole, it's remained untouched since his last visit.

Asked about his biggest catch ever, he holds his hands about a foot and a half apart, then separates them a little farther.

"I'm not into weighing them. Maybe 8, 9 pounds?" he responds. "Fishermen never tell the exact truth on that."

IF TRUTH BE TOLD, Sutton wasn't the highly sought-after recruit one would expect of an eventual elite NFL draft prospect. In 2013, Texas and Texas A&M passed on the three-star prospect. He took an official weekend visit to Colorado, only to be told the team was out of scholarships.

"When he took his official visit to Colorado, at that time, your parents had to pay your way," said Brenham High coach Glen West. "They flew back in from Denver for the team banquet that Sunday night, and I remember how disappointed they were."

How Sutton slipped through the recruiting cracks is a complicated tale. For one thing, he was a late bloomer physically. He's grown three full inches since arriving at SMU, and back in his junior year of high school, when most firm scholarship offers are distributed, he was about 6 feet and 190 pounds.

Not only that, but he was a 6-foot, 190-pound tight end. Brenham was loaded at the receiver position, and Sutton's role was as an undersized, hand-on-the-ground tight end whose primary job it was to block.

And 190-pound blocking tight ends don't stand out to college recruiters on film, no matter how well they block.

"I used to have to watch film with the O-line," Sutton said with a laugh. "I knew that wasn't where I was supposed to be, but it's what the team needed."

Just a year earlier, he had caught 22 TD passes for the JV team. A year later, as a senior, he was a prolific receiver for a Brenham squad that reached the state championship game. But by then, scholarships had long been offered to and claimed by others.

As a three-sport athlete -- football, basketball and baseball -- he didn't have time to attend many camps. And when college coaches came to Brenham to evaluate prospects for spring practice, Sutton was often on the baseball field.

His one option was BYU, and it didn't appeal much.

The week before signing day, SMU came to Brenham in a scramble. One of its commitments had backed out, and the Mustangs were looking to fill the spot.

"BYU was going to be a bit much on momma, losing her baby that far away," said Courtland's mother, Phelicia Marshall. "SMU was a prayer answered. It was, 'Send us a good school, a close school, here in Texas.' SMU came the week before signing day and we went up for a visit that weekend."

SMU's coach at the time, June Jones, started Sutton off at safety, a position Sutton also played in high school. A back injury in his third game forced him to take a redshirt year. The following spring, Chad Morris, who had coached the likes of DeAndre Hopkins and Sammy Watkins as Clemson's offensive coordinator, took over the program and saw a much different future for Sutton.

"(Morris) texted me one night and said, 'Gosh, I'm in love with Courtland Sutton. What's he doing here?' " said West. "Chad's offenses always feed their best receiver, so that was a perfect storm. I don't know if his career would've taken off like it did if it weren't for Chad Morris. He started featuring him right off the bat."

In the four years he was at SMU, the Mustangs won 1, 2, 5 and 7 games. A huge part of the program's resurgence under Morris, Sutton left SMU as a three-time team captain who amassed the third-most receiving yards (3,152) and second-most touchdowns (31) in school history.

The redshirt junior declared early for the draft after the Mustang's 51-10 loss to Louisiana Tech in the Frisco Bowl. With a degree in sports management in his back pocket, there wasn't much left for him to prove. The NFL beckoned.

JUST A FEW WEEKS AFTER Sutton's breakout season at SMU in 2015, in which he caught 49 passes for 862 yards and nine touchdowns, word came down from legendary basketball coach Larry Brown. The Mustangs hoop squad needed practice players because NCAA sanctions had left Brown's team short on numbers. The football roster was a natural place to start the search, and Morris was willing to help.

Sutton got the call, and answered it, even though he wasn't exactly suited for the role at 6-foot-3. The Mustangs needed help in the post, and Sutton battled the tallest players on the team for rebounds in

practice. He credits the experience, in part, for helping him learn to shield defensive backs from contested passes and make tough catches in traffic.

"I was having to muscle up 6-8 dudes to get any rebounds," Sutton said. "The players were like, 'Court, quit banging like that. I'd say, 'Look, I'm 6 inches too short in here, I've gotta do something.'"

Current SMU basketball coach Tim Jankovich, one of Brown's assistants at the time, remembers a remarkably quick learner.

"If you're a football player and you start on Day 1 with a basketball team, that's tough enough. We're on Day 116 by the time he got done with football and came out for us, and I was blown away by how fast he picked everything up," Jankovich said. "A lot of guys in the same situation would just get in the way until they could catch up. Courtland was the opposite."

Sutton endeared himself to the program enough that Brown eventually decided to put him on the team. And on Feb. 7, 2016, near the end of a 92-58 thrashing of South Florida, Sutton played the first two of his four career minutes with the Mustangs basketball team. He hit a 3-pointer in the game's final minute for a highlight he'll never forget.

"The shot clock was going down, and I'm hearing people say, 'Shoot it', but apparently coach Brown was saying, 'Don't shoot it'," Sutton recalled. "But I didn't hear him. He had the softest voice on the bench. The shot clock was running down and I wasn't about to have the only stat of my career be a turnover. So I shot it and it went in."

The bench erupted.

Sutton was considered part of the team, not just a practice body, and SMU strength coach Tru Carroll eventually found out why.

"He'd come and do the winter conditioning with the football team early in the morning. And we'd get after it. Then he'd go over with coach Brown, practice basketball, and if they had weight training, he'd train with the strength coach over there," Carroll said. "So I had to sit him down and say, 'Look, I can't let you over-train yourself.' He'd say, 'Coach, if the basketball team is in there grinding, and I'm on the basketball team, I'm grinding in there with them.'"

"With some guys you have to say go. With Courtland, you have to say whoa."

At season's end, Morris made it clear he wanted Sutton to hang up his high tops, and Sutton didn't put up a fight. By that point, both player and coach knew a pro football career was in the offing.

IT'S BEEN 32 YEARS since an SMU player got a first-round call in the NFL draft, when cornerback Rod Jones (Tampa Bay) and running back Reggie Dupard (New England) were taken with the 25th and 26th overall picks in 1986.

Not only is Sutton expected to end the drought in 2018, but he also has a shot at being the first wide receiver off the board. NFL scouts see his size creating mismatches with smaller cornerbacks, with hands as reliable as the Texas heat.

In SMU's final regular-season game, he made one of the best catches of the college season against Tulane, leaping high to snag an overthrown pass with only his right hand, and securing it before falling out of bounds.

His hands -- the same ones that gained strength through arduous work on the family farm -- are as soft as Charmin, and combined with his physical presence, they make him a dangerous threat on the field at all times.

"He's got such a big body, and knows how to use it, that he's going to be a problem in the red zone, on the back-shoulder throws, and obviously on jump balls," a scout for an AFC team said. "If he's not one of the first two or three receivers picked, I'll be surprised."

Sutton puts his size to use on every down, not just when he's thrown the ball. He's a relentless blocker, so much so that he's drawn three personal fouls in his career for driving defensive backs off the field and continuing to block out of bounds.

"He had one every damn year I've coached him," said former SMU receivers coach Justin Stepp, who has since followed Morris to Arkansas. "Coach Morris would get pissed, and I'd say, 'Well, coach, at least he's blocking his tail off.'"

The lone question scouts might have on Sutton is his speed, and it will be more of a mystery entering the combine than it will be for most other prospects. Carroll doesn't disclose 40-yard dash times -- not even to his players.

The good news for Sutton is that, at 6-foot-4 and 220 pounds, he doesn't even need a blazing 40 to be drafted high. In 2015, Panthers WR Devin Funchess (6-4, 225) ran a slow 4.70-second 40 at the combine and was still selected in the second round. A year earlier, those same Panthers spent a first-round pick on another huge receiver, Kelvin Benjamin, who ran a pedestrian 4.61.

Still, Carroll has no doubt Sutton's speed will impress NFL scouts when the time comes. SMU uses the Catapult system, featuring GPS technology that expresses speed in miles per hour. Sutton has been recorded as fast as 21.57 mph.

"A 20 is really fast. A 21 is elite. We only have one player over 22," Carroll said. "So, for a 220-pound guy to be at 21.57, that's special. Everyone else we have over 21 is a small guy."

The Catapult score doesn't exactly translate to the 40-yard dash, however. The GPS mph reading measures a player's top-end speed, but not initial burst -- how quickly he can reach top speed -- which is not only crucial in the 40 but has truer football application.

Sutton's release at the line of scrimmage doesn't jump off his game film. By another measure of explosiveness, the vertical jump, he's tested at 34 inches, which would have rated in the middle of the pack among receivers at last year's combine.

Nevertheless, his confidence is unyielding; the receiver with 6.4 percent body fat even documented a freakish 60-inch box jump.

"I know for a fact, I'm going to show everybody at the combine, I'm going to run 4.4. It's going to happen," Sutton said. "It's going to shock a lot of people, but it won't shock me or anyone who trains with me. They know the type of work I put in."

It wouldn't shock Stepp, either.

For three years, Sutton was fast enough to play the same position -- the boundary or "9" receiver -- that Watkins and Hopkins played in Morris' offense at Clemson.

"A lot of first reads for our quarterbacks was the boundary safety, and if he's on or inside the hash, we can take a shot to our best player one-on-one to that side," Stepp said. "That's why we put him over there. If you're going to play a safety inside the hash with Courtland, you'd better have a hell of a corner over there."

SUTTON KEEPS A PHOTO of his mom and dad in his locker at SMU. It's been there since his arrival at the school four years ago, and when he arrives at his first NFL locker after the draft, it'll be the first item he finds a place for.

It's both a tribute and a reminder of all the time and money they invested in him -- the rides, the camps, the gear and equipment -- along with the work-first-play-later ethic they instilled in him from an early age.

Nothing was given, and nothing came easy.

There's a parking lot next door to the Sutton home in Brenham, but when Courtland was a kid, it was a grass lot he used to practice football and baseball. With a push mower, he personally kept it groomed and ready for play.

"Wherever he goes, whoever drafts him, he'll do something to help that community prosper," said Brenham coach Glen West.

When it comes to inspiration, Sutton looks to God's hands, not his own. Grounded in family and faith, he writes two biblical scriptures on his tape before games:

» First Corinthians 15-10: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them -- yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me."

» Psalms 27-1: "The Lord is my light and my salvation -- whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life -- of whom shall I be afraid?"

"The first one reminds me that it's not about me, and that everything I do is God working through me. It reminds me that I'm second," Sutton said. "The other one puts me in the frame of mind, before a game, that I fear no man. I fear only God."

Sutton practices what he preaches.

Last August, when the Mustangs finished up each day during fall camp, the players would cut off their athletic tape and sit in cold tubs lined up beside the field for 10-15 minutes before showering. When

they were done, tape was strewn on the ground, and Carroll was left to clean up the daily mess. Sutton noticed that one day -- only because he'd stayed late after practice to work on his craft -- and helped Carroll collect the trash and throw it away.

A day later, there wasn't a scrap of tape on the ground after practice.

"He went into the locker room, said something to the team, and I haven't had to pick up tape since," Carroll said. "He's what you call a servant-leader."

As NFL scouts made their way through the SMU campus the last couple of years, inquiring about Sutton, stories like that circulated and built the backbone of what will be a first-rate character evaluation for the draft.

Like the time Assistant Athletic Director Mike Morton found Sutton squeegeeing water off the floor of the athletic department's new hydrotherapy room, a job Sutton knew normally came at the end of a 12-hour day for Morton. Or the time he waited until after practice, in private, to tell Morton that a new sports drink flavor had bombed with the team.

"He said he wasn't going to tell me that around other players," Morton said. "He knew if he said something openly, it would just create more negativity."

Then there is Stepp, whose wife will deliver their first child in March, a boy the couple is planning to name Courtland.

"He's the main reason I came back here to coach the bowl game, honestly, instead of just leaving for Arkansas right away," said Stepp. "I wasn't going to have anyone but me coach him in his last game at SMU."

When his football career is finished, Sutton wants to take his degree in sports management -- he graduated in December -- and work in college football as a director of player development. Steve Stigall holds the role at SMU, and Sutton has a keen understanding of the demands.

"Young guys' heads are spinning when they first come in. A lot of guys get redshirted and don't know how to handle it. And the next thing you know, they're gone," Sutton said. "I want to be that guy that they can talk to, help them understand the process. Players have each other to turn to, but that can be the blind leading the blind sometimes. I've been through two coaching changes, a tough recruiting situation. I could be hands-on helping guys through all the things that come up."

There are those hands again.

They can mend fences and feed cattle.

They can hook bass all day.

They can even play a little music now, thanks to a piano class he took at SMU's Meadows School of the Arts in his final semester (appropriately, for his final exam, he played "Lean On Me").

And they can most definitely catch footballs.

Asked how they'll measure up at the combine, Sutton looks down at them with a puzzled glance.

"I don't know, to me, size-wise, I think they're about average," he says. "But they know how to work."

Courtland Sutton put SMU on his back in a performance for the ages against UNT

By Adam Grosbard
Sports Day
September 9, 2017

It started with a dig route that turned into a 62-yard touchdown. Then came the prayer from quarterback Ben Hicks that went over the fingertips of two defenders into the receivers hands as he fell into the end zone. Then a classic jump ball touchdown that has become his trademark. Then somehow a man with three touchdowns already under his belt slipped past the UNT secondary for his fourth of the game.

No matter what UNT did, there was no stopping Courtland Sutton in SMU's 54-32 win Saturday night.

Sutton is in his third season as SMU's main attraction but this was a different level of dominance.

He broke his previous career-high of three receiving touchdowns, set last season against UNT. His fourth touchdown tied the SMU program record for single-game receiving TDs and broke the American Conference record in that category. Sutton's 163 receiving yards were just short of his career-high of 166 set last season.

Sutton's four touchdowns also vaulted him up to fourth place in SMU's all-time receiving touchdowns list, past Jerry LeVias, the first-ever African-American to play in the old Southwest Conference.

"It was time," head coach Chad Morris said of Sutton. "In big games you ask your playmakers to step up and make plays. And he did that. There's no doubt about that.

"He showed why he's an All-American," Morris added. "He showed why he's one of the best receivers in college football."

It was a perfect display of all of Sutton's tools. The first showed his strength and speed as he broke a tackle and beat a defensive back in a foot race to the corner of the end zone. The second showcased his acrobatics as he made the catch falling on his back. The third was a throwback to the jump-ball abilities that made him an overnight star as a redshirt freshman in 2015. The fourth reminded everyone that even at 6-foot-4 Sutton can be surprisingly elusive.

But it was that first touchdown that was the most important. A UNT touchdown and field goal sandwiched an SMU three-and-out in the first three drives of the game. SMU was down by 10 after 6:15 of play.

Then Hicks found Sutton in the middle of the field. Sutton shook off the cornerback attempting to wrap up his legs and was off to the races.

It kick-started a 38-0 run by SMU that lasted until the 6:56 mark of the third quarter.

The only blemish on Sutton's night was an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty after exchanging some words with a UNT defender throughout the game.

"If any other future DBs see this, you can come out, talk as much as you want to. I just use it as fuel," Sutton said. "The personal foul ... that's out of character."

The win improves SMU to 2-0, the first time since 2009 the Mustangs have started a season with two victories. The 112 points scored in the two wins are the most to start a season in program history.

Next up on the schedule is another cross-town matchup, this time in Fort Worth against TCU.

"It's a big deal to coach in it, it's a big deal to play in it," Morris said of TCU. "The only thing I ask is our guys to be better next week than we were this week."

SMU WR Courtland Sutton draws comparison to Corey Davis

By Luke Esterling
Draft Wire
September 8, 2017

The first pass-catcher selected in the 2017 NFL draft was a highly productive prospect from a non-Power 5 school, with the Tennessee Titans making Western Michigan's Corey Davis the No. 5 overall pick.

The 2018 draft class could follow suit, thanks to SMU's Courtland Sutton.

Another big, athletic target with a well-rounded skill set, Sutton compares favorably to Davis, according to NFL.com's Lance Zierlein:

At 6-foot-4 and 216 pounds (school measurements), Sutton is a big receiver and he plays to every inch and pound of his frame. He reminds me of Titans 2017 first-rounder Corey Davis in that he's slick in creating late separation for himself and winning the contested catches. Sutton is my No. 1 WR to watch heading into the season.

As Zierlein points out, Sutton knows how to use his combination of size and athleticism to its full extent, and he's still developing, giving him limitless upside as a prospect.

If he continues to progress throughout the 2017 season, don't be surprised if Sutton earns top-10 hype heading into the 2018 draft.

Under the radar no more, Courtland Sutton hopes to lift SMU up

By Chris Hummer

247 Sports

April 28, 2017

Courtland Sutton's 6-foot-4 frame is stretched out completely under a desk, and he smiles while talking about some of his secret fishing spots in the Dallas area. This is the country boy in Sutton, a native of Brenham, Texas, not the All-American-caliber receiver — and possible 2018 first-round pick — he's grown into over the past few seasons.

Sutton, a redshirt junior, returned to SMU this year with the intention of finishing his degree. The decision to put off millions would perplex some; for Sutton it was never much of a question. An education is important, and so too is what he wants to prove.

A year ago, Sutton served as a light during a 5-7 campaign in the second year of Chad Morris' Mustang rebuild. He hopes to do the same in 2017, this time lifting SMU with him.

"Our conference doesn't get a lot of the recognition because people don't think we're capable and can hold a candle to these Power Five schools," Sutton said. "Winning games will give us the capability to be recognized with the talent we have."

Sutton knows more than a bit about being under the radar.

He committed to SMU at the last minute in what his high school coach Glen West called a happy "accident." Prior to that, Sutton fielded only a handful of offers, all of them projecting him as a safety.

It takes a few breaks for any streak of circumstantial greatness to occur, and Sutton is a perfect example of that. Now, he hopes to be the catalyst and concoct another unexpected jump for the entire Mustang program. So never mind that Sutton still appears on lists like the 10 college football players you don't know but should.

"I don't see it as a bad thing people don't know who I am," Sutton said.

"I'm working to this day on trying to make sure I'm able to put SMU back on the map, so we don't run into this problem when the really great athletes are here."

Courtland's mom, Phelicia Marshall, says of her son: "Whenever you meet him you just remember who he is."

That's true.

Sutton is engaging and gregarious. He recently asked teammate Corey Rau why everyone refers to him as "Bubbles," only to find out Rau dislikes the name. So Sutton instantly agreed to stop the use of the moniker. It's a small thing, but it's why Sutton ingratiates himself easily to others.

But as a recruit, few coaches remembered to offer.

West said plenty of coaches came through and were enamored with Sutton's "sky-high ceiling," but few actually knew what to make of him. Sutton, as one of the biggest players at his high school, played tight end instead of wide receiver on offense, while working at safety on defense.

In-state schools like Texas A&M took a hard look at Sutton as a safety, but they never offered. Eventually, as his senior season winded down, Sutton's only Power Five-level options were BYU and Colorado. Sutton strongly considered Texas State just so he could stay close to home.

Sutton loved Colorado, his first offer, and planned to visit following his high school season. The weather that weekend was horrid, and Sutton's original flight from Houston was canceled. But the CU coaches talked with Sutton's mom and pushed for him to come, so the family drove through icy roads and found a flight out of San Antonio.

At the end of that weekend, Sutton said Mike MacIntyre sat him down and told him: "We don't have your scholarship anymore."

"That was a whole lot of shenanigans," Sutton said.

A recruitment Sutton could only describe as an "awkward process" took yet another turn when then-SMU assistant Derrick Odum showed up in Brenham looking for a player soon after. The Mustangs had just lost a recruit from Houston, and they needed someone to fill up their class.

"Do you have anybody?" Odum asked West.

To which he responded, "as a matter of fact, I do."

West flipped on film Sutton's film, and after 10 minutes Odum called then-head coach June Jones asking if he could offer. Jones approved, and Sutton had an in-state parachute.

BYU made a late push when Bronco Mendenhall visited Sutton and "bashed SMU pretty bad," but Sutton would stay home.

"I committed and nobody even knew SMU had offered me," Sutton said. "It threw everybody for a loop."

Sutton's SMU career actually started at safety.

The Mustangs signed Sutton as an athlete with no promises. But following a Week 1 game with Baylor, SMU needed an extra receiver because of injury. Jones called Sutton over and asked: "Have you ever played receiver before?"

That question puzzled Sutton a bit. The first few minutes of his senior highlight tape were nothing but him playing wide receiver.

“I’m like, ‘Alright, I don’t know who really watched me or not,’” Sutton said.

Either way, Sutton found his way outside.

At this point the line, “the rest was history” would usually come up. But that wasn’t really the case. Sutton’s true freshman season ended after just two games when Sutton suffered a season-ending back injury. By the time he returned, the Mustangs had a new coach – Chad Morris – and Sutton’s career had been thrown into flux again.

Sutton wasn’t sure he’d get to stay at wide receiver. Marshall said the family wasn’t positive Sutton would get to stay at SMU at all as the new staff brought in its own guys.

“When the new coaches came in they didn’t know anybody,” Sutton said. “I had little to no film that showed I could be a receiver.”

Sutton didn’t know it at the time, but he had little to worry about.

Morris came from Clemson, where as offensive coordinator he coached players like Sammy Watkins and DeAndre Hopkins. Both are big-bodied, downfield threats who are at their best snagging the ball at its highest point over defenders.

West and Morris were friends dating back to Morris’ day coaching high school ball in Texas. A day or two into SMU’s spring practice, Morris snapped a text to West.

“Oh my gosh, this Courtland Sutton is amazing,” Morris said.

He couldn’t believe SMU had landed a guy with Sutton’s abilities.

The Morris era started with a steal.

That’s not even mentioning his personality, intelligence – he’s on pace to graduate in three-and-a-half semesters – and willingness to do what the team needs. That’s why he played tight end in high school and started his college career at safety.

Those character traits always manifested themselves, but the explosive athleticism? Eh, not so much.

Sutton never had time for a true weight program or speed training in high school. He moved from football to basketball to track without a break in between. He had functional and natural abilities in droves, but the actual football-specific muscles were far from refined.

“I always saw myself as a receiver, but I wasn’t the fastest guy coming out of high school,” Sutton said.

So Sutton, when fully recovered, approached strength coach Trumain Carroll for guidance.

Carroll sat Sutton down and gave him a lengthy breakdown of what Sutton needed to do. Sutton wanted to be one of the best wide receivers in the nation, and he'd have to train like it.

At the same time, Sutton went through a bit of a year-long crash course off the field.

With Morris' arrival, Sutton had the opportunity to work with one of the best offensive minds in the country. Morris knew plenty about developing top-flight wide receivers, and West called Sutton's partnership with his old friend a "perfect storm."

Sutton also learned plenty from an unlikely source his redshirt freshman year.

SMU's basketball team needed a few extra bodies and wanted some football players to try out, which is how Sutton ended up being coached for a season by Hall of Famer Larry Brown. Sutton played in only three games, but he took plenty of things away from his season on the hardwood.

Brown preached watching other positions and understanding how their jobs worked. In football that meant details like if SMU is maxed out in a seven-man protection, the running back is unlikely to flex out out. But Sutton knows a defender must cover the threat of the tailback regardless, which means there's a gap in the coverage somewhere else.

"He taught basketball toward football," Sutton said.

Morris' first year proved trying for the Mustang program as they went 2-10. But Sutton began to emerge, showing the potential recruiters used to wonder at.

His 40-time dropped, his overall strength improved and his brain-picking sessions helped him become a Freshman All-American. Last season, Sutton improved on his freshman-year numbers in every way, catching 76 passes for 1,246 yards and 10 touchdowns.

The only thing Sutton isn't doing at an elite level is celebrating.

Sutton the safety would've never had the opportunity. But this preseason All-American is stumped as to what he can do in the end zone. Dez Bryant is his favorite player and he'd love to borrow his trademark "X," but there's that whole infringement problem.

"I can't really find anything that's not taken," Sutton said. "I don't want to use the "X" because Dez has trademarked that. I'm surprised he doesn't have a TM next to that."

Sutton doesn't know Eric Dickerson well, but the Mustang great will reach out from time to time on social media. It's a generational bridge for SMU, a hello from one program legend to another.

Dickerson played at SMU in its glory period (his role in its eventual demise aside). His last year in 1982 the Mustangs went 11-0-1. But SMU hasn't won 10-plus games in 30 years. For Sutton, his interactions with Dickerson are a link to what he hopes the Mustangs can be.

"I look it as a huge thing to have a great like himself, not only at SMU but at the next level, show support to me and this program," Sutton said.

It is unlikely Dickerson knew who Sutton was when he became the last member of SMU's 2014 recruiting class. But he certainly does now. Sutton may still appear on lists of unknowns, but the country boy is now a hot commodity in NFL circles.

Sutton, himself, is the same.

He still fishes to get away, and his nights are usually spent playing video games and listening to music – each Friday for Sutton is dubbed "Future Friday." But the athlete the Mustangs stumbled into is now arguably the best receiver in program history.

Sutton plans to emerge from camouflage again this season.

This time, Sutton plans to take others with him.

"I knew what we had going here as a team and what we're capable of," Sutton said. "The only way you'll get the recognition you deserve is to win games. ... I knew what we had – a really good football team that could contend for a conference championship. Once you win, everybody loves winners. It would give exposure to everybody."