

MSU's Dillon Day goes from undrafted to the Super Bowl

By Michael Bonnor
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Nine months ago Dillon Day's football career nearly ended. He waited through seven rounds and 256 picks of the NFL Draft to hear his name.

An NFL team never called his name. But it may have been the best thing to happen to the former Mississippi State offensive lineman, allowing him to instead sign as an undrafted free agent with any team.

Two weeks ago, Day danced with teammates in celebration as confetti fell from the sky at Sports Authority Field in Denver.

Day, a practice squad player for the Broncos, was headed to Super Bowl 50.

"I could've been drafted in the sixth or seventh round by some other team, been on a different path," Day said. "I could've been over with football. I think everything is working out like it should."

This year's Super Bowl marks the Golden Anniversary of football's biggest game. A Mississippi State player will compete in it for the ninth straight season. A former Bulldog will hoist the Lombardi Trophy for the fourth consecutive season.

"It's certainly a point of pride any time you have former students go on and achieve success really in any field," Mississippi State athletic director Scott Stricklin said. "But the Super Bowl, obviously, is a big platform and a big stage."

Forty-six players have represented Mississippi State in the Super Bowl. Kyle Love, of the Carolina Panthers, joins Day in Santa Clara and will play in his second. Love lost as a member of the New England Patriots in Super Bowl XLVI.

Love and Day both latched on with NFL teams as undrafted free agents after their time in Starkville.

"Ever since the recruiting process and coming out of high school, I was always the underdog and no one really wanted me," Day said. "Mississippi State actually gave me a chance to do something I love and play football. It's just another obstacle in my path."

Day had multiple free-agent offers after the draft. On the advice of his agent, he signed a three-year deal worth \$1.5 million and an \$8,000 signing bonus with the Broncos, according to overthecap.com.

The Louisiana native compared his first season in the NFL to redshirting in college as he transitions from center to guard.

"They were doing most of the things for me, like what is the best fit for me?" Day said. "I know I had some other offers, but essentially, they made the decision for me. I trusted them."

The trust allowed for the realization of a childhood dream. Day began playing football in the second grade. Memories of him and his dad watching the Super Bowl extended even further beyond that.

"I mean it's really hard to even think," Day said, searching for the correct words to describe his feelings less than 24 hours prior to kickoff. "You know, when I'm out there, I don't even know. I'm just trying to hold the emotions back."

Day narrowly jinxed his trip to Santa Clara two Sundays ago. As the Patriots' drive stalled at the 50-yard-line, thoughts of the Super Bowl crept into the guard's head.

On fourth-and-10, Tom Brady completed a 40-yard pass to Rob Gronkowski.

"I was standing on the sidelines and I was like, "Damn, we're about to win this game,"" Day said. "They got a fourth-and-10 or something. I was like, oh shoot. They're definitely making it close."

New England's two-point conversion attempt failed. Denver recovered the onside-kick.

Day's career began with him looking from the outside in at the NFL. His first season ends on sport's biggest stage.

"It's a surreal feeling," Day said. "You always hear about the Super Bowl and now you're here. So it's a great opportunity. It's just great to support the Mississippi State alumni, too. It's a great feeling."

West Monroe product helps Broncos prepare for Super Bowl 50

By Cody Futrell

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The right recipe. The winning formula. The right combination.

Depending on what part of the country you live, the sports lingo for putting together a championship caliber team may differ..

Louisianians love good food as much as good football.

And one local product is giving a Louisiana flavor to the recipe that has the Denver Broncos in Super Bowl 50 on Sunday against the Carolina Panthers.

West Monroe native Dillon Day has spent the year as a center on the practice squad of the Broncos. It is a job that comes with little attention or fanfare. The practice squad runs the opposing team's plays in practice and — save for injuries ahead of them on the depth chart — will not get in the game. But behind the scenes they have an important role in the success of the team each week.

Day continues to learn and is taking the experience in stride as he hopes to impress the coaches.

"It has been a different feeling," Day said following years of starting for West Monroe and Mississippi State. "I just go out to do the best I can and do my role. You still want to make a good impression on the coaches while giving (the team) a good look."

Day has been taking in all the sights and sounds of Super Bowl week in San Francisco as the team prepares for the Super Bowl 50 kickoff at 5:30 p.m. on CBS.

"It is so surreal," Day said. "Growing up in West Monroe, you play or you go to the West Monroe (High School) games. Everybody is impacted by the sport. You grow up watching the Super Bowl and now to be a part of it is really cool. It is the biggest game in the world, but you approach it like another work week."

Growing up in football

Day has never forgotten that he represents a community as much as himself this week on the biggest stage of them all.

"It means a great deal," Day said of all the support he has gotten through social media, texts and phone calls of support.

"It means a great deal to me," Day said. "To know you have all those people in your corner is a great feeling."

From a young age, Day impressed the coaches at West Monroe High School.

Offensive coordinator Glenn Hunt, then the offensive line coach of the Rebels, said he was told by legendary West Monroe coach Don Shows that Day had “it.”

“Some kids have the ‘it factor’,” Hunt said. “We talked all the time about how Dillon has that. Some have that something extra, and it is hard to coach or teach something like that.”

Hunt helped Day buckle down and control his emotions on the field, which has always been a staple of his play — an intense love of the game.

“You never have to worry about Dillon playing hard,” Hunt said. “We just had to refocus him. It is about the team when you are out there and not an individual, and some of those things you can live with because he played so hard and with good technique.”

Hunt, who played alongside New Orleans Saints Hall of Fame offensive tackle Willie Roaf at Louisiana Tech, said Day is in a good position to be on the roster going forward if he works hard.

“The practice squad is a great way for those guys to get a look and to learn the system,” Hunt said. “He can learn guard and center and be in that system a whole year to learn.”

“It is good insurance for the team in case there is an injury,” West Monroe coach Jerry Arledge said. “It is an important part (of the organization). We hope he can have the opportunity, moving forward, to move up in the organization. He is an outstanding football player. I would have loved to have him on defense when he was here (2007-2010). He was a defensive mentality on offense. He played with that type of aggression.”

Inspiring the next generation

As much as anything, Day is following in the footsteps of other West Monroe alumni that a new generation of players can look up to and inspire to follow their dreams.

“You know he was once in our shoes,” West Monroe sophomore linebacker John Bailey Gullatt said. “It proves that if you work hard that one day it will work out for you to possibly play college football or play in the NFL.”