

# Will Parks Q&A: Broncos' rookie safety made quick mark, all the way from Philly

By Cameron Wolfe

Denver Post

October 15, 2016

Q. You had your first pick a couple weeks ago. How are the first few weeks of the season going for you?

A: It's going good. Just getting a couple games under your belt, getting your feet wet. We ended the first quarter of the season and got ready for the second quarter. Just keeping focused and keeping your body healthy and keeping the main thing the main thing and that's getting W's.

Q. You played football most of your life, so this isn't new to you. But that first NFL game, tell me how nervous you were.

A: It wasn't so much me being nervous, as me being blessed. Like, 'Wow, I'm really out here. I was just watching the kickoff last season.' I just finished the college game and now I'm a part of something like this. It doesn't get better than that. They're paying us for this! It's what you dream of since you're little. It's what a lot of kids dream about. To be able to live the dream you've had all your life, nothing can beat that.

Q. Off the field, what's the favorite thing you've found in Denver?

A: Believe it or not, the people. I tell everybody. My family members who come into town for the games, they're like, 'What's the No. 1 thing you like?' I say the people. The people here are so free and so open. You don't see too many bad things going on in Denver, not that I know of. If you were outside looking in on it, you wouldn't understand how deep Denver is as far as the people, the culture, the community. So many people know who you are. So many people want the best for you. It don't get no better than that.

Q. How difficult is it getting used to the altitude?

A: Man, I ain't used to this yet. It will probably take me a year. But I'm definitely getting acclimated to it. Slowly, but surely.

Q. What's the most difficult part of playing in the cold?

A: I've been playing in the cold since I was little. Not the last four years in Arizona. But I got definitely got a couple cold games when we played Washington. My sophomore year, it was so cold up in Seattle, the rain was going up and down, instead of just coming straight down. You would have thought God was bringing the rain back up to him. That's the only time I got cold. Or in the New Mexico Bowl when I played against my little brother (wide receiver Delane Hart-Johnson). It was cold there too. But that's football. As long as I've got the Vaseline on, I'm straight.

Q. Thinking back, what's the favorite play you've made in your life?

A: In college, I had a hit against Oregon State, I had the 70-yard interception against Justin Simmons my sophomore year. But in high school I caught a bubble against, whew, Furness High School down in South Philly. The dude was on me, so he basically read the bubble. I juked him. I cut inside. There were two people coming from the outside. I juked back outside. It was similar to the play Sunshine (Jordan Taylor) made (against Tampa Bay), but with more people. I juked the whole team. I can show you. You can go on YouTube. Type in: "Will Parks senior film." At 6:38 seconds, that play is about to come up. You'll see it. That's when I was playing receiver, playing slot. That play was dirty. I watch that play a lot, just to make sure when I do get that interception, I do return it and that's what will happen.

Q. I talked to you earlier this summer when you first got drafted about Philly and what this means back there, the love you've been getting back home watching you.

A: It's definitely been tremendous as far as how many people actually see you do your thing. It's mind-blowing knowing that the whole city is watching your every move. Not just on the football field, but what I post on social media, as far as my community aspects. Just show them that there are different ways to get where you want to be.

# Broncos safety Will Parks is a source of motivation for all of North Philadelphia

By Cameron Wolfe

DenverPost.com

May 9, 2016

If you experience Will Parks' inspiring personality, toothy smile and love for his craft, it's hard to imagine that where the Broncos safety came from is an entirely different ballgame.

North Philadelphia isn't a fertile ground for breeding success. Instead, it's a natural home for drug dealing, gangs and violence. It's a lot easier for young black men to join the street life than it is to get to college.

Parks made sure he was an exception to the rule.

"When my dad put that football in my hand, it was just like, 'This is your tool. This is your way out. This is a way to make a better life for yourself,' " Parks said.

He remembers the freezing winters in an apartment with no heat. He was one of the rare kids in the area who grew up with a supportive mother and father, but that didn't make it easy. People don't grow up in North Philly without picking up the toughness that the city demands.

His parents did provide him with a set a role models who didn't allow him to succumb to being a statistic. People in his neighborhood quickly saw his potential, invested in him and pointed him toward school and the gym.

That's what made April 30 so special for Parks.

When he heard his name called as the 219th pick in the NFL draft by the Broncos, in the sixth round, his emotions took over. All his hard work seemed to pay off.

Success was never just an option for Parks. Defying the odds was the only way he could make it. He's not stopping now.

"I don't want it. I need it," Parks said. "This is the only thing I have in life for me. I'd probably be at home flipping McDonald's burgers if I didn't have this opportunity right now."

In 2012, Parks was a part of the second-to-last graduating class at Germantown High School, one of a growing list of Philadelphia public schools closing because of students choosing safer schools. Soon, he'll be the first male college graduate in his family.

The outpouring of texts and Twitter mentions from people in his hometown thanking him for the motivation has left him speechless. He told them they motivate him even more. He's a trailblazer and didn't even know it.

If Will Parks, from North Philly, can make it to the NFL, maybe one more high school kid will choose chasing his football dreams over selling drugs.

Parks' background and passion translate in his play. The football staff at Arizona knew him as a workout warrior with superb football intelligence.

The 6-foot-1, 194-pounder's strength on the field is his versatility. He was primarily a slot cornerback in 2014 but switched to a safety-linebacker hybrid in 2015, when he was the Wildcats' leading tackler.

He and new roommate Justin Simmons, a third-round pick and fellow safety, have an opportunity to provide depth behind Darian Stewart and T.J. Ward in a star-studded secondary. Both have a good chance of making the team after the departures of David Bruton and Omar Bolden in free agency.

"We don't go toward the box safety that much where you can only play inside," defensive coordinator Wade Phillips said. "The way we pick safeties, basically (the Broncos go with) guys that are versatile."

The buzz word all offseason for the Broncos has been versatility. Parks has the speed (4.52 seconds in the 40-yard dash at his pro day) and the strength (22 repetitions of 225 pounds in the bench press) to play anywhere in the secondary.

Parks played on all the special-teams units in college. He will have to impress there again to make an impact on a deep Broncos roster. He looked up to former NFL stars Sean Taylor and Ed Reed growing up but said Broncos safety Ward has caught his eyes recently.

Now, if Parks makes the team, Parks will play with Ward.

Parks file

A closer look at Broncos safety Will Parks:

Size: 6-foot-1, 194 pounds

College: Arizona

Hometown: Philadelphia

Honors: All-Pac-12 honorable mention in 2015; was on Jim Thorpe and Chuck Bednarik awards watch lists.