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Frank: Wheaton excited to play next to Deion

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the 22-year-old rookie could see significant playing time this season.

Zimmer said Wheaton will work out on the first and second teams during training camp, which starts in mid-July in Austin, Texas, and Zimmer went as far to say that if either Deion Sanders or Kevin Smith gets injured during the season, it is conceivable Wheaton would step into the starting role.

If he does not get a starting spot, Wheaton will still get playing time in the Cowboys' nickel defense. Zimmer said on second and third down, he will have multiple cornerbacks on the field and Wheaton could be one of those.

Wheaton could also find playing time on special teams, most likely the punt coverage team.

Alundis Brice, the Cowboys' only other cornerback, will be out this season rehabbing his knee; however, Dallas did select two more cornerbacks in the later rounds of the draft.

But from what Zimmer said, it appears Wheaton is Dallas' third cornerback, which isn't too bad for a small, slow third-round pick.

Wheaton had hoped to go earlier in the draft and was frustrated with waiting until just three spots before the fourth round.

But he now relishes his chance in Dallas.

"I love it. I don't think I could be in a better situation," Wheaton said.

And who better to learn from than the NFL's top cornerback, Deion Sanders.

"I'm going to love it. It's going to be fun to be out there with a player of his caliber," Wheaton said. "I feel he is the best and I want to learn from him."

And owner Jerry Jones has assured the Dallas' coaching staff that Sanders will play in every regular-season game this season, Zimmer said.

While Wheaton, Zimmer and former Oregon defensive coordinator Charlie Waters said they know the former Duck can succeed in the NFL, the so-called experts have said otherwise.

"Wheaton was a good college player, good instincts, questionable recovery speed and size," ESPN draft dork Mel Kiper Jr. said on ESPN.

But Wheaton is not letting experts' knocks worry him.

"Everyone is entitled to their own opinion. If I was as slow as people make me out to be, I wouldn't have been as successful as I was at Oregon," he said.

And in time, Wheaton will be just as successful in Dallas.

Ryan Frank is the sports editor for the Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the paper.

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