

Tulsa Football – Program Feature
Katie Snyder
For 10/23 Game vs. Memphis

Darrell Williams Feature

Darrell Williams had three tackles and his first career interception at East Carolina on Sat. Oct. 17, but just two seasons ago, it was questionable if he would ever run again, let alone play Division I college football.

Williams, a cornerback from Spring, TX, was recruited to come to the University of Tulsa, but had to earn his way onto the field. He red-shirted his freshman year and did not get to play at cornerback in his first active season.

“We had a lot of depth at the position,” Williams said, “So I was really mostly a contributor on special teams the [Conference USA] championship year, my redshirt freshman year. Once [the 2012 seniors] graduated and moved on, my red-shirt sophomore year was when I was able to first compete for a starting job.”

Despite earning the starting position, Williams never saw any playing time in the 2013 season. In the last pre-season scrimmage, he went low for a tackle. A group of linebackers went after the ball, and there was a pile up that trapped Williams left leg on the ground. He felt all three pops as he completely dislocated his knee, tearing his ACL, MCL, and PCL.

“With my diagnosis, early on, [Director of Sports Medicine] Dave Polanski was trying to get me to understand the significance of the injury and how big it actually was. I knew it was a serious injury, but I never felt like I couldn’t come back from it at all. Going into it, I tried to have a positive mindset,” said Williams.

With his knee completely destroyed, Williams was forced to watch the season from the sidelines as he started his rehabilitation. He worked with Polanski closely to get healthy. Though there were people that believed Williams would never play again, perhaps never even run again, he never gave up hope that he would return.

“I knew that everything happened for a reason so I just stayed strong in my faith, and also a big motivation is that I have two younger brothers. Knowing that they look up to me and they are watching me, it was kind of like, well, either I can tank it and lay in a corner, or I can rehab right and try to get back and prove people who didn’t think I would play again wrong.”

His family and teammates have been a big motivation throughout his injury and rehabilitation process, but he admits that they can also make the injuries more frustrating. He says, “When you have someone believing in you, you want to prove

them right and be able to go out and perform and be healthy and play to your best ability.”

His motivation to get back out on the field was so great and his support system so strong, he even overcame fears as part of his recovery. Or, he has gotten closer to overcoming one particular phobia. He confided that needles are one of his biggest fears, but that he must deal with them all the time. “It’s a technique called dry needling,” he explained. “It’s like acupuncture where they stick you with needles and leave them in for some time to let your nerves and muscles recover. I have to do that every week, so I guess my fear for needles is kind of dwindling down a little bit, but I still am not good.”

Williams was able to get healthy enough to play again in his junior red-shirt season, but not to what he felt was the best of his ability. He had a limited return in 2014, but says he felt a step or two slower than he had been. Because he was focused so specifically on rehab for his knee, he did not go through the off-season weight lifting program with his teammates, and he did not build the muscle to get him through the year. Mid-season, pain and frustration set in, and he had to accept the fact that his knee injury limited him on the field.

After going through a complete off-season of training, however, Williams felt great going into his senior season. He had a good spring, was playing without a brace, and started in the first two games this fall. But Williams faced another setback when he went down early in the Oklahoma game. He felt a muscle in his quad pop as he was running and his immediate thought was, “man, not again.” After working so hard through rehab and building up so much anticipation for his senior season, another injury pulled him off the field.

The word he kept using to describe this season’s injury was frustrating. After suffering through a complete knee dislocation, this pull was just a small pain, but nonetheless it was a nagging pain that kept him out for the next two games.

But negativity never clouds Williams’ mind for long. He believes that everything happens for a reason, and said that he is even healthier now than ever. He also said that the new coaching staff has brought a completely new feel to Tulsa Football, one that has him excited. “Like [Coach Montgomery] says in the media all the time, it’s fun, fast, physical football. That’s really what it is. We have so much fun together.” Williams said that this season has had the excitement and energy of his senior season in high school. “We just go out and play and have fun, so it has been really great. The coaches are always enthusiastic with us and keeping us happy and positive, no matter what happens.”

Williams will be graduating in December, after finishing his senior season, with a major in Business Management and specialization in Sports Administration. After football, Williams hopes to put both his business degree and knowledge of the game

to good use, to open his own athletic development facility and offer position-specific training to young players.