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Rigorous Off-Season Gave Revis His Edge



Frank Franklin II/Associated Press

Darrelle Revis usually faces an opponent's best receiver. His nickname is Shutdown.

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Before Darrelle Revis shut down two of the [N.F.L.](#)'s top receivers to open this season, before he entered the discussion for the league's top cornerback, he went to Arizona and trained like a boxer preparing for a championship bout.

There, he found sweltering heat, marathon workouts and the personal torture chamber that is Will Sullivan.

[Sullivan](#) is Revis's off-season coach. They meet at [Fischer Sports](#) in Phoenix, where Revis works on strength and conditioning for four hours each morning and trains on a field for three hours every afternoon, alongside pros like Philadelphia's [Donovan McNabb](#).

This was two-a-days before two-a-days, Sullivan joked.

"He wants the punishment," said [Diana Gilbert, Revis's mother](#). "Just to see how much he can endure."

Revis arrives in Arizona in late June, when many of his N.F.L. counterparts relax or take vacations. Everything with Revis and Sullivan is a competition, be it basketball, video games or training, filled with jawing back and forth.

But this year, as Revis sought to become the best cornerback in football, the training took on added intensity.

Revis came with a goal sheet that included, for the first time, earning top honors at his position. He brought a list of opposing receivers he would be shadowing across the field under the new defense installed by Coach [Rex Ryan](#), with film on each.

Sullivan and Revis broke down that film together, then went about preparing for each receiver on the field. They fine-tuned Revis's footwork, focused on his weaknesses, discussed receivers like Atlanta's Roddy White whom Sullivan had trained.

Sometimes, after seven hours of training, the two headed to the basketball court, where they engaged in one-on-one games that lasted hours without water breaks.

"I've been training Revis since he was a junior at Pitt," Sullivan said. "He's always been focused. But this year, he took it to a different level."

Before Revis heads to Arizona, he spends one week with [his family outside Pittsburgh](#). When he leaves, he shuts off most contact with the outside world,

turning down tickets secured by his agent to award shows, finding a singular, obsessive focus.

To that end, his family has noticed a newfound maturity in Revis as he begins his third N.F.L. season. Diana Gilbert said her son had tightened his inner circle, dropping bad influences and keeping those who spoke truthfully and kept him grounded.

None keep Revis more level than his uncle, the former N.F.L. defensive end Sean Gilbert. After Revis shut down New England's [Randy Moss](#) on Sunday, Gilbert told him, "Two games down, 14 left, you still stink."

When Revis entered the league, among the first advice dispensed by Gilbert was this: Do not believe all N.F.L. players have heart, because they do not. Ultimately, the game comes down to will.

"There are two ways to deal with the pressure," Gilbert said. "You feel it. Or you apply it. I ask him every day. 'Which are you doing?' I want him to go after their best player, and I want him to take his will."

Wise beyond his 24 years, Revis has matured on the field, becoming smoother in his footwork transitions and quarterback reads, as he increases his awareness.

The [Jets](#) have bestowed the nickname Shutdown upon Revis, and on the NFL Network last weekend, [Deion Sanders](#) ranked Revis among the top three cornerbacks in football.

This came after Revis shadowed Moss and Houston's Andre Johnson. With help on both players from his teammates, Revis held Johnson to four catches for 35 yards and Moss to four catches for 24 yards, and Revis intercepted a pass against the [Patriots](#).

Most instructive, though, were those receivers' numbers in the games in which they did not face Revis. Johnson tallied 10 catches, 149 yards and 2 touchdowns in the second week. In the opener, Moss caught 12 passes for 149 yards. They call this the Revis Effect.

Revis possesses a rare combination of speed and strength for a cornerback, built in part by those training sessions in the Arizona heat. Revis played Moss

physically, bumping him at the line, jamming his routes, even sitting across from Moss when both players were on the bench.

“If he went to the bathroom, I went, too,” Revis said.

Moss and Johnson played down the impact of a cornerback like Revis. Both said all cornerbacks received help from safeties, or other cornerbacks, and Moss even went so far as to suggest he could play cornerback in the right defense.

Regardless, the Jets’ defense has yet to allow a touchdown in eight quarters, and Revis may be the single most important piece of Ryan’s system. He stands alone on what teammates have started calling Revis Island, matched up each week against the best receiver on the opposing team.

Of course, Revis studied all of them back in June and July. Sullivan reminded him of that Monday morning, via a text message that read simply, “Who’s next?”

Sullivan says Ryan’s system is tailored for Revis’s talents. But as Gilbert was quick to remind his nephew, more tests lie ahead. This season, Revis will defend Marques Colston (New Orleans), [Terrell Owens](#) (Buffalo), Steve Smith (Carolina), Moss again and Atlanta’s White.

“You work for what he’s doing,” Gilbert said. “For the notoriety, to have the reputation as a shutdown corner. The biggest test comes when you’re playing against receivers that don’t have those expectations and want to build themselves up off your notoriety.

“Really, the biggest test is coming up against Tennessee this week.”

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