

# Top pick ready to Rolle

## Cardinals sign cornerback to six-year deal

By **DARREN URBAN**  
TRIBUNE

**PRESCOTT** • Antrel Rolle is signed, and that was clearly a hurdle for the Arizona Cardinals.

But having their No. 1 pick — who agreed to terms Tuesday — and having him slide right into a starting cornerback spot after missing eight

days and 15 training camp practices are separate issues.

"We have the toughest position," veteran cornerback David Macklin said. "Any time the ball is caught, it's seen. Anytime a touchdown is caught, it's seen. As a corner you have to get an advantage over the receiver, and that takes training.



Antrel Rolle

"Hopefully, he'll come in in top shape. We want him here to make our team better."

The Cardinals had to get him signed first. That came with a six-year contract in which Rolle will end up with more than \$13 million in guaranteed money.

"I'm excited," Rolle said when reached prior to the contract being finalized.

Rolle was unavailable for comment after the deal was done. He arrived for team meetings Tuesday night and will practice today.

**MORE ON PAGE C7**  
**BACK:** Running back Jamal Lewis returns to the Ravens after his prison and halfway-house stay for a drug conviction.

"We're just glad to have Antrel in, because he's wanted to just play football," agent Ben Dogra said.

Dogra said the major sticking point was the Cardinals' rookie pool number, which forced the sides to be extra creative on the structure.

"There were a number of

factors that complicated the process this year," vice president of football operations Rod Graves said.

Among them, Graves said, were limitations from the soon-to-expire collective bargaining agreement (which allows teams to spread bonus money only over five years for salary cap reasons) and an interruption in negotiations when the Cardinals had to scramble and find new

SEE CARDS • PAGE CB

## CARDS: Rolle will likely earn starting spot opposite Macklin

FROM PAGE C1

training camp accommodations.

Also, Graves noted, "There were a lot of individuals involved who had an interest in this process and they wanted to be comfortable."

Graves didn't elaborate, but coach Dennis Green also had mentioned Rolle's parents last week and it's believed they took a major role in negotiations.

The final year of the deal is not voidable, although an NFL source said the contract is heavily backloaded and will likely force the Cardinals to renegotiate the deal before it expires. With the heavily backloaded final year, the deal is worth more than \$40 million.

"Let's just say whether it is backloaded or frontloaded," Graves said, "Antrel should be very happy."

So are the Cardinals. Green said Rolle will initially work with the second unit and that the rookie will play Saturday against Dallas in the preseason opener, although the coach wasn't sure how much.

By the time the preseason is over, however, Rolle should be starting opposite Macklin. Rolle and fellow draftee Eric Green both should play major roles at cornerback this season.

"I felt (Rolle) was one of the

best players in the draft," Dennis Green said. "That was a position we felt we were going to go young and we made no bones about it. Sometimes you need to do that, start training new people to do a new job."

Defensive coordinator Clancy Pendergast was a secondary coach with the Cowboys, and he recalled having two young starters — rookie Mario Edwards and NFL Europe alum Duane Hawthorne — one year early in his career.

The decision was made to use a lot of Cover 2 zone to try and protect them, except that teams still picked on the cornerbacks and threw for too many yards.

"From that time on, the philosophy was 'Screw it, we're going to let those guys play,'" Pendergast said. "We challenged them like that."

The Cowboys finished with a top-five pass defense, Pendergast said.

Of course, that won't stop opponents from attempting to exploit the rookies. The choice to trade Duane Starks and let Renaldo Hill walk as a free agent has left a big neon sign inviting the pass.

"If you make plays, they'll only pick on you for so long," Eric Green said. "I'm just trying to flip this thing around. You get off on the right foot, and then maybe they won't pick on the rookie."



TORU KAWANA, TRIBUNE FILE

**HE'S IN:** Cardinals first-round pick Antrel Rolle, here with his parents at the NFL draft, signed a six-year contract with more than \$13 million in guaranteed money.

"At least, I don't want to be the rookie they pick on."

Rolle certainly doesn't want to be picked on either, although he has some work to do to catch up on what he's

missed.

"Antrel's work ethic is outstanding," said veteran cornerback Robert Tate, whose starting spot is in jeopardy with Rolle's arrival. "As long

as he comes in here and gets a couple of days under his belt, he'll be fine."

**CONTACT WRITER:** (480) 898-6495 or [urban@aztrib.com](mailto:urban@aztrib.com)

TRIBUNE  
AUG 1 0 2005  
2 of 2