

## Williams is preparing in silence

Aeneas Williams is friendly, polite and absolutely no help at all.

Oh, he'll talk about Michael Irvin. He'll speak of their relationship that has been going strong for eight years and 16 games.



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But the answers are perfunctory, clipped. Nothing is revealed.

His matchup with Irvin in Saturday's Cowboys-Cardinals game may be on the marquee, but

Williams has never been comfortable in the bright lights.

"I guess we could do like Iran and Iraq and brief you guys afterward," he says with a smile. "I understand why everybody likes to talk about it, but I just like to fit within the team. Bottom line, it's what the team does."

It always has been this way. Ever since Williams came into the league in 1991, he has clammed up during Dallas week.

Ask him if he looks forward to battling Irvin, and he'll say that he looks forward to every game. Ask him if he sees Irvin as some sort of measuring stick, and he'll say, "I test myself against myself."

"He gets inside of himself," said running back Larry Centers, who was drafted a year before Williams. "I gotta believe he spends a lot of time visualizing."

"He doesn't have to talk about it. He realizes what's at stake. He's one of those 'I'll show you out there' players."

Is there a better duel between cornerback and wide receiver in the NFL? Williams and Irvin have 10 Pro Bowl appearances between them and after 16 games, no one has gained an edge.

On Nov. 15, Williams stopped Irvin's streak of 117 straight games with at least one catch. But in the opening week of the season, Irvin caught nine balls for 119 yards.

Williams held Irvin to a combined six receptions for 54 yards in 1997, but Irvin's top two career games in receiving yardage came against the Cardinals: 210 yards in 1992, 198 in 1996.

"It's a great matchup," Centers said. "Two great athletes and two intense football players going at it."

What makes it so special is that while most clubs double Irvin, the Cardinals often leave Williams in solo coverage. There is no relief. May the best man win.

"They have had some classic battles," said Cardinals defensive coordinator Dave McGinnis.

Even though Irvin's numbers are down (74 catches, one TD), who do you think Troy Aikman is going to look for in the playoffs: Irvin, Ernie Mills or Billy Davis?

"You know Michael Irvin is dangerous. Emmitt Smith is dangerous. Troy Aikman is dangerous," McGinnis said. "Those guys are the Super Bowl Big Three."

A perception exists that Williams had a subpar second half of the season, that his Pro Bowl berth was based on reputation, not performance.

The truth is Williams has set the bar so high that anytime he fails, it's news.

"All of a sudden a guy catches a pass sometime and there's something wrong," said defensive backs coach Larry Marmie. "You're going to have passes completed on you no matter who you are."

And how does Williams judge his season?

He doesn't. At least, that's his party line when it's Cowboys week.

"I don't evaluate myself," he said.

On Sunday, he won't have to. Everybody else will.

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