



Zebra Your Edge Podcast

Hosts:

- Adam Petrus, Business Development and Sales Lead, Sports & Entertainment, Zebra
- Hale Hentges, Former NFL Player and (Current) Vertical Account Manager, Sports & Entertainment, Zebra

Guest:

- TJ Tampa, Cornerback, Baltimore Ravens, NFL

Transcript

00:00:00:00 - 00:00:23:12

Adam

And welcome back, everyone. Good day to you. I'm Adam Petrus along here with my colleague Hale Hentges. And boy, today on Chalk Talk we are going to have a great conversation. And, you know, we're going to be talking with a player who ESPN's Mel Kiper said was the most underrated player of the 2024 NFL draft: Mr. TJ Tampa.

00:00:23:14 - 00:00:56:09

Adam

Now, TJ is an All-American, All Big 12 first team cornerback out of Iowa State University who was picked up by the Baltimore Ravens. So all you Ravens fans out there, you guys are in for a treat today and this year. And so fourth round draft pick despite experts predictions that he would go on day two. Now you know they say everything happens for a reason, TJ, and I truly believe that this may be a blessing in disguise, because I think what you're going to be able to do is show everybody what's up as you go into training camp and then of course, end of the season.

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Adam

But you know, Hale and I were talking...in a way, it's reminiscent of Mr. Tom Brady's entrance into the NFL many moons ago now. Wouldn't you say, Hale?

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Hale

Yes. No, absolutely. And great points there, Adam. You know, much like Tom Brady, right, TJ all you need is a shot. Right? I was in a similar position as you. So you just need an opportunity to make that roster. And certainly you have a good one there in Baltimore with a great team, great head coach, you know. TJ over to you...

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Hale

How's it feel my man? Are you ready to rock the NFL?

00:01:26:18 - 00:01:38:25

TJ

Yeah I'm I've been waiting for a while now. Now that I'm here, I'm definitely ready. I know that I'm ready. I'm confident going into it and just ready to work and get that roster spot.

00:01:38:27 - 00:02:01:18

Adam

That's it. That's awesome. That's awesome. And so, hey, you're in the Baltimore. You're in the B-More here today talking to us. Lots of activity here in the NFL world. So let's take it back, though. So you're sort of a Florida boy like me. I happen to be on the road today, but, I know you weren't there for your entire childhood, but you graduated out of high school in Saint Petersburg after spending many years up in Hotlanta.

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Adam

And I know you went to college in Iowa, but are you ready for those Baltimore winters?

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TJ

Yeah. I'll say I'm ready. When I moved to Iowa, it wasn't too bad to get used to. You just throw a coat on and I'm good to go. You're not really outside for too much. Practice, mean, it's indoor, but you go outside to practice. At the end of the day, you're just playing football.

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Adam

That's it, that's it. All right, man. So tell us, how has the transition been from draft day to now reporting. What is life like for TJ Tampa?

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TJ

Life is good. Going through rookie minicamp, of course. It's just all rookies. You get to see all the rookies and compete against them. And I had a good rookie minicamp - I feel like I got better - which led into OTAs, which I felt like I was ready for - performed really well. Got to meet some of the new players and got to meet some the vets and everything.

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TJ

So, it went really good.

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Hale

Awesome. That's great, TJ. And you know, one thing that I always thought of, and what people told me as I was making that transition from college to the NFL, was how much more of a mental step up it was from college. And certainly you're a smart guy and you'll pick up on it quick, but talk to the viewers a little bit about just that transition from college playbooks, understanding college offenses to now having to dissect now what people, you know, like, the, Cincinnati Bengals and Joe Burrow are going to do.

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Hale

How does that make you feel? And are you ready for that transition?

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TJ

Yeah, this transition with the playbooks is definitely a big transition. There's a wider playbook in college. We try to simplify everything to make it to where you can learn it pretty fast. In the NFL, they kind of shoot everything at you straight. And it's either you pick up on it or you don't, and just using that extra time chilling at home and going over the playbook, it helps a lot.

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TJ

But yeah, it's definitely a lot of adjustment to the playbook. But it's going really good.

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Hale

Yeah. And one thing you mentioned, too, was, you know, just learning from some veterans, right? Making some friends. And, you know, certainly a great player up there at the Baltimore Ravens is Marlon Humphrey, the guy who I played with at Alabama. Talk a little bit about Marlon. And maybe is he one of the guys that's taken you under his wing at an early time.

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TJ

He's definitely a vet coming off an injury. He's been around just in a lot of rehab. And you get to see him doing...how he is taking care of his body and just putting that within my schedule. He's helping a lot.

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Hale

Good.

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Adam

That's great. You know, so with the Zebra, I've had the pleasure and the honor of co-managing the NFL Next Gen Stats program for five years prior to the role that I have here within sports/entertainment as a sub vertical of North American hospitality. And so I had the opportunity to travel to many of the various training facilities in the National Football League.

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Adam

And I've got to tell you folks listening, watching today, if you've never been to Baltimore, to the Baltimore Ravens' campus, if you will, or chalet, you are in for a real treat. Now, TJ, you get drafted by the Ravens. You show up at their facility. Man, will you just describe what that facility's like?

00:05:10:23 - 00:05:36:15

TJ

Man, it is a sight to see. Honestly, it looks like a castle. One of my dad's friends was telling me about it, and how he said it's really crazy, it's one of the best. And I've never been. So just getting to see it in person, it's like, okay, like they really take time and effort into making it good for us to have some place that we could call home. And we be there most of the day anyway.

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TJ

So it's good that they take care of us.

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Adam

Yeah, no doubt about it. And it is truly an impressive site. And I'm sure there's gonna be some folks googling Baltimore Ravens practice facility. But it is really something special. Definitely very fortunate for you certainly to be drafted in the NFL. Dream come true. Give us a little bit of just insight about how long are the days. And, or actually, before that is: when you got ready for the combine and then the draft, you know, what was that process like for you?

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Adam

What was your mental state of mind?

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TJ

Oh, my mental state was just taking it day by day and getting better every day, trying to take my times down just a little bit each day. Even when times aren't going too good, just keep going and keep fighting really. It can get stressful when you don't make time certain days, but you just keep pushing.

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TJ

But the days I was training at Exos for the combine, those days are pretty chill. You workout in the morning and come back for a lift and then you got a lot of time. But you can work on your body, and there's a lot of field work going on. So the days weren't too bad. But you definitely work it.

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Hale

Yeah, absolutely. And certainly took great advantage of that. And yeah, I know that's a great program over there and have had a lot of mutual friends who have gone through it. So that's fantastic you got to do it now. I think one thing, TJ, about being successful in the NFL is really understanding your weaknesses. Certainly, you know, playing to the strengths that you have, which are a lot.

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Hale

But talk to us a little bit about, you know, hey we've had a couple practices, gone through minicamp. Where do you feel like you need to go next to take your game to the next level?

00:07:13:25 - 00:07:32:29

TJ

Yeah, coming into a new team, a new organization, you need all of that. You really want to come in open to hearing and changing anything you have done because you're not doing things like your coach wants to in college. You're entering a new atmosphere, new coaches that you want to figure out how they want things to be done.

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TJ

So was really focusing on that and trying to perfect that each day is really what I took off with the OTAs and minicamp. Just trying to figure out how my coaches want things done.

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Adam

Nice. So our producer Sara put some notes together for us, TJ, and I understand that we've had some Zebra cameras following you around, you know, since the draft and we were able to capture that special moment. But I understand you grew up in a athletic household. Your dad and sister played college basketball. You played basketball. You've been a dual sport athlete since the age of nine.

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Adam

So have you found the learning curve transitioning to professional sports to be easier, having so much exposure to different athletes throughout your years? What has that been like for you?

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TJ

I would say I would say it's a little easier just being around a lot of different people that are in a lot of different sports. When you come in the locker room, it's not like you've never been in a locker room where you didn't know anybody. And especially when you move in early, just getting used to a lot of different people and a lot of different personalities.

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TJ

It's easier for me to be able to mess with those guys and spark a relationship with them rather than making them trust me and I trust them so we can get on the field and play well.

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Adam

There you go. Hey, so in the Baltimore, how far are you living away from the facility?

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TJ

Right now I'm in the team hotel, so about nine minutes away.

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Adam

Okay, man. So it's team time 24/7.

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Adam

Nice.

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Hale

Awesome. Yeah. No that's great. You know, speaking of other sports and you know you talked about growing up, that's great. And one sport that I played a lot of growing up outside of football was golf and certainly know the benefit to that. And, TJ, did you know that golf is the official sport of business? If you want to go on a business someday,

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Hale

not that you'll need to because you'll have a long career in the NFL, but knowing how to play golf is certainly a benefit that I think you could do some great business on the golf course. But I heard you just played golf for the first time. Tell us how that went my man.

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TJ

Yes. like I've been to Top Golf before, but I've never been on a course. And I could never hit the ball on Top Golf. I never really tried, but when I did, I couldn't. But my first time actually golfing, I did really well. I got some pointers from my teammates. But the best thing is I was consistently making contact with the ball, which.

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Hale

There you go.

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TJ

Was the best thing. We were playing best ball, and they played my ball maybe like twice. So, I felt good about.

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Hale

Nice. Yeah. No. That's awesome. I always tell people golf is the toughest sport physically and mentally because one small critique is going to change your shot drastically. You know, obviously in football, if you take a seven inch step versus an eight inch step, it might not...you could still be okay. Right? In golf, that's the difference between hitting it out of bounds and hitting the fairway.

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Hale

So it's a tough sport. And kudos to you for venturing out and doing it because it will serve you for a long time. My grandpa's 85 and still plays every day. So, continue to play right?

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TJ

Yeah, I'm just trying to get better.

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Adam

That's it. That's a lesson to live by, right? Always want to get better. And certainly you've got a hyper focus right now. You are in football mode. It's no longer off season. You've been drafted, you've reported, we're going to be going into the summer campaign and program. But as you look at going into each phase of the football season, are you setting some expectations for yourself and some benchmarks of where you want to be come week one?

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TJ

Of course, like just setting my standards on practice every day and making sure I'm giving 100% effort. I'm getting better at one thing each practice, focusing on one thing of practice and getting better at that. Yeah. By the time game one hits, then I definitely want to be at a certain point and throughout the whole season, just keep setting goals for myself.

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Hale

Awesome. And, you know, TJ, I talked about this certainly when I was entering the league, I had, you know, visions or maybe nightmares of having to block people. Right, like J.J. Watt and, you know, people like that. And I'm like, oh my gosh, it's crazy that I potentially have to go against this person, right? But certainly on the other side of the ball talk about some receivers or quarterbacks,

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Hale

you know, that you're looking forward to playing against, or maybe you're not looking forward to playing.

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TJ

I would say there's there's not really anybody I'm just not looking forward to playing.

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Hale

That's good. Right mindset.

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TJ

Yeah, there's of course a lot of receivers - of course my old teammates - some that I don't want to go against like Xavier, but some receivers that I'll look at the schedule again to see if we play them. But I definitely want to go against Stefon Diggs. So yeah I want to line up against I feel like I can I can name a lot.

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TJ

But I'm really, really excited to go against someone, to go against Brock. That's the quarterback. Yeah. Hopefully. All right.

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Adam

Nice.

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Hale

Yeah that'll be fun. That'd be something, if you can get an interception against Brock Purdy, that would be bragging rights there for you.

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TJ

We'll see them down the line.

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Hale

There you go. Good. Good man. Well that's awesome. Certainly got some tough competition over there on the AFC North. but not a better conference to play in. And certainly, one of the powerhouses of the NFL. So great way to get your career started.

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Adam

Hey, so tell us about, what number are you going to be rocking this year with the Ravens?

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TJ

Yeah, I'm rocking number 27 this year.

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Adam

The ole' two-seven.

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TJ

Feels like it a nice number.

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Adam

Okay so, in college, I believe what number two?

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TJ

Yes.

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Adam

And what was the significance behind number two?

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TJ

There was a couple things you can say, like I'm a "junior" - that's number two. The tandem two coverage. just with my last name. A lot of things It's like that kind of incorporated with the brand and everything.

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Hale

So yeah, that's actually really solid reasons. I've never had a good reason why, you know, playing tight end, wearing a number in the 80s. I've never had a good reason for it. I mean, those are.. it's like multifaceted I respect that. That's good.

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Adam

Yeah. And you know what I'm thinking, Hale, because we got to get into this Zebra connection that TJ has. But you know, TJ, right now we just released a device called the TC27. And I think the the TJ Tampa TC27 is a best-in-class next-gen device that's going to be delivering some results on the football field.

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Adam

But, yeah. TJ, why don't you tell us a little bit of a little bit of background about how you and the family and how you first came to know about Zebra.

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TJ

Yeah. So yeah, my dad, it was when we were living in Atlanta, he was working for Coke and Coca-Cola in their warehouse, and they were using some of Zebra Technologies' devices to track like packages and trucks and everything. So that's when I first heard about it.

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Adam

That's awesome. I think it's a really cool connection, that, you know, Zebra has in the age of the NIL that we've got a player out there who knows about Zebra - the family roots and story. And certainly, you know, our listening audience is Zebra employees, friends of Zebra, customers of Zebra. And, for them to know that they we've got somebody out there who's an advocate ambassador for Zebra Technologies is a pretty cool story.

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Adam

And, and again, I think we might have to ship you out your own TC27 and get that in the locker, and you can be the spokesman in and around Baltimore for the best in class technology. Yeah. What do you think?

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Hale

It sounds like a plan, man. I got one right here for you. I'll hold it up to the camera. There you go. But this can have your name on it, my friend. But, no, that's fantastic, TJ. And, you know, awesome that your dad used the device. And certainly there are, you know, millions of workers around the world who are using it to enhance their lives.

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Hale

Frontline workers to, you know, managers, to associates, to people in hospitals who are having their lives enhanced by our technology. And it's great that you experienced that firsthand. But, you know, let's take a bigger step back, if you will. You know, when TJ is 37 years old, right? Hanging your hat on a good career, maybe longer than that, right?

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Hale

What are you going to look back on? What are going to be the things that make you say, man, I really did everything I wanted to do. I had a great career. What would that look like to you? What accomplishments? Super Bowls? MVPs? What does that look like for you?

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TJ

I mean, of course everybody wants the Super Bowls, All Pros, everything. And that's something that will be like, if I get those, then, my career has been successful and everything. But in the whole heart of things, really just look back and say, I did everything I could. I worked hard every day. I never got complacent throughout my career.

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TJ

I gave it as many years as I could. And so whenever I'm done, starting a family, making sure my family is straight and generations before me, and I feel like I was successful.

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Hale

That's fantastic. And certainly a great response, and one that I think everyone at Zebra can resonate with. And, you know, as people at Zebra...you probably understand. But, you know, the NFL, football, is a game, right? And it gives and it takes. And there are certainly people who have fantastic careers and there are many people who go on to work in the workforce.

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Hale

But, you know, TJ, you know what you're talking about and things that you said, you have the right mindset. That's going to carry you a long way. And certainly that's, in my opinion, about 70% of it. And your talent can be about 30%. You need to do a great job. But, no, man, it's fantastic. Great response.

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Hale

I think everyone can learn from that.

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Adam

Yeah. No doubt, no doubt. And so, hey, you know that the neat thing, of course, about zebra and, Hale and I get to rock it all the time, is that this we've got this formal partnership with the NFL as the official provider of player and ball tracking that supports Next Gen Stats. You know, you've been a long-time football fan.

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Adam

Have you ever dabbled or looked at the Next Gen Stats data and been like, "Man, that dude's fast" or "the ability to create separation, man, you gotta tighten up on this guy."? How have you been exposed to data coming up out of college and of course, what Next Gen Stats puts out?

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TJ

Yeah, seeing it on watching games and everything, just seeing how fast people are, how fast the ball is going, or the amount of distance people are creating from people, it's always exciting to see. You see it and you're like, "Hey, I wonder how fast I'm going." And then being able to see that throughout my process with Zebra, you know, first I'm going and then seeing it on TV, it's like a dream come true again.

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TJ

Like, just watching everything come to life.

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Hale

Right? Right. And I think one thing wearing the technology, and, you know, practicing and playing and you certainly, you know, personally how fast you're running and then you start to match that up with the data: "Oh I, you know, I hit 22mph today. I hit 23." You know, when you're having good days and you can, you know compare that with the time.

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Hale

For me it was probably 14 or 15mph. But that's why I'm here and you're there, my friend. But, that's fantastic. You're getting to get that instant feedback, and I think that's one of the reasons why it's such a great partnership that you can validate those things and take, you know, the vision of the NFL, this technology-driven machine now that it is and really validate, "Our players are moving quickly."

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Hale

You know, they're recovering correctly. They are doing the right things. And we can see that with raw data right.

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Adam

Are you seeing some of that already now with the Ravens through camp where you guys are looking not only at the video, but then looking at some of the real-time data that comes through at the practice facility?

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TJ

Of course, we get to see it in our weight room. We have leaderboards that show up on the screens, and there we go. Being able to see where I'm at based off anybody on the team is really good. Seeing your name up there, you feel like, yeah, it's something that practice.

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Hale

There you go, no doubt. And a great way to stand out. And you know, speaking of, standing out, I think a great, way for a lot of Zebras to carve their path and figure out, you know, where do I want to go with my career? What do I want to do? It's through mentorship. Right. And that's one thing that, you know, Adam and I have certainly sought out mentors in our career.

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Hale

And, you know, I've benefited from that. But talk a little bit about mentorship with the Ravens. I mean we talked about Marlon Humphrey, but are there any other veterans or people that you're looking to to be that mentor for you? And what are you trying to take from them?

00:20:02:01 - 00:20:23:19

TJ

Yeah. Really a lot of the DBs...I ask questions to them, like, every day at practice just trying to figure out exactly what coach wants and how they've been running things. Any advice I need I just go to any of the corners or nickels or safeties. Anybody. They're all willing to help with open hands.

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TJ

I'm happy that we have some good vets, and they're willing to teach.

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Hale

Fantastic, man. That's great. Yeah, a great response. And certainly important for you to latch on to those guys. And 2 or 3 years down the road, you'll be doing it for rookies, being their mentor. So the cycle continues, right?

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TJ

That's right.

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Hale

Awesome man.

00:20:47:25 - 00:21:09:21

Adam

Yeah. Let's see here. I was going to see if we were going to quiz you on some Zebra technology terminology, but I think we'll give you a pass on this podcast. But, I think we're going to want to circle back during the season, when you get a few moments. But certainly, man, it was an honor to have you on the show today.

00:21:09:23 - 00:21:31:03

Adam

We thoroughly enjoyed your candor. and the fact that you're working hard, and your tie and association with Zebra. You've got a great story. I think Hale and I are, you know, certainly believing that we're on the, on the cusp of being able to one day, many moons from now, come back and say, man, we had TJ Tampa on the show before he was TJ "27"

00:21:31:03 - 00:21:54:00

Adam

Tampa. You know, rocking it in the NFL. All in, all pro. Certainly you're playing for a team that has always been competitive. You, as Hale mentioned, you've got a Hall of Fame coach. You've got a great ownership there that empowers the team, the players. So look, man, we wish you the best of luck and stay healthy.

00:21:54:02 - 00:22:12:14

Adam

Certainly do your thing. We'll all be watching the leaderboard when it comes to Next Gen Stats. Looking at the cornerbacks and defensive backs around the NFL. But, look, don't be a stranger. And, we hope to have you on the show again later in the year. And we'll leave it to you. Any parting words for our audience today?

00:22:12:17 - 00:22:17:19

TJ

Thanks for letting me come on here and speak to you guys. I had a had a good time.

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Hale

Fantastic. And thank you for coming on. And best of luck with training camp. I know you guys are about ready to, you know, pick it up hot and heavy here in about a month or so. But best of luck to you my friend. You know, you're always welcome here on the podcast and I encourage our listeners to, you know, please check out our previous podcast where we sat down with Coach Sean Payton to talk a little bit of ball and X's and O's, just like we did here with TJ.

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Hale

So best of luck, TJ. it's been an absolute pleasure having you on the show. And for Zebra Chalk Talk, I am Hale Hentges...

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Adam

And I am Adam Petrus. And we are signing off.



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