

Excerpt from Chapter Eleven: *Swagger*

It takes more than blazing speed to make it to the NFL. It also takes more than Herculean strength to earn the right to call oneself a professional football player. Wide receivers who run the most precise routes, quarterbacks with pinpoint accuracy and running backs who bounce off tacklers like a human pinball all need something more. Linebackers who literally knock the snot out of people and cornerbacks who run stride for stride with the fastest of humans must also have a little something extra. Offensive linemen who possess the ability to move small pickup trucks and defensive ends who have reinvented the term athlete cannot do without this most integral feature. Any young man who attempts to complete the journey to the NFL must carry a swagger to that destination.

Swagger is a term quite common among professional athletes. It is also a prerequisite for making it in the NFL. There are different types of swagger, but all fall under a similar definition.

“A guy who has swagger is someone who is cool, calm and collected,” Kenny explained. “I have swagger because not too much phases me. I’m pretty confident in my craft of being a receiver. When you’re confident, you kind of walk with a swagger. You got to have swagger to play this game. I tell them boys down in South Carolina all the time, ‘you gotta have some swag’.”

Kenny’s swagger seemed a little louder than any of the other players at TEST. From the way he walked to the way he talked to the way he played, his swagger practically screamed out, ‘I’m something special.’ It was hard not to notice Kenny when he stepped into a room. However, his swagger shouldn’t be confused with being cocky. He wasn’t conceited, arrogant or condescending by any means.

“I think I might have more swagger than most people,” Kenny said with a grin. “I think it has to do with the way I came up. I’m from Atlanta, so you got to have it growing up. Coaches in Atlanta teach you swag. Your mamma, your daddy, your sisters, your cousins, everybody from Atlanta grew up with it.”

Kenny’s football swagger had grown into what it was from making so many extraordinary plays on the field. He was the type of player whose moves dazzled spectators and frustrated defenders. As a result, Kenny was often the focus of many highlight reels. In fact, his college career earned him the right to have his number retired. It was the first number to be retired by the University of South Carolina since Sterling Sharpe received the honor twenty-two years earlier. Kenny had just learned of that tribute while he was training at TEST.

“Coach Spurrier called me and told me they’re retiring my number,” said Kenny. “It’s a great accomplishment. It’s awesome. Sterling got his retired in ‘87, so it’s been over twenty years since anybody got their number retired. It’s a big deal down there. It really

hasn't hit me yet.”

Kenny not only used his swagger to gain respect on the football field, but his swagger also demanded respect when he took off the pads. And it was his swagger that helped him deal with potential problems that surfaced in his everyday life.

“Coming from Atlanta, you got to have swag just to make it through the day,” said Kenny. “When you go places, you can tell which people got swag. Certain places in America, people don't have swag. They ain't used to it. But in Atlanta, you gotta have swag.”