Obituary: Ernest B. Bonelli / Fullback, defensive back who played for Panthers, Steelers

Died Oct. 12, 2009

When the Steelers brought back players from the 1940s as part of their 75th anniversary season, Ernest B. Bonelli stood on the grass at Heinz Field to rub elbows and shake hands with James Farrior, Ben Roethlisberger and others prior to a game against the San Francisco 49ers.

Mr. Bonelli was a 60-minute man who played fullback and defensive back on the 1946 team under Jock Sutherland, who also was his college coach at the University of Pittsburgh.

"He always said he was very blessed to have an opportunity to play for the Steelers and the Panthers," said Mary Bonelli, one of his five children.

Mr. Bonelli, 90, died Monday surrounded by his wife and children at Friendship Village in Upper St. Clair. Over the weekend, he was able to watch on TV as Pitt and the Steelers won their games.

A native of Russellton, he was a person of distinction during Super Bowl week. Mr. Bonelli began his professional career in 1945 with the Chicago Cardinals, who later became the Arizona Cardinals, the Steelers' opponent in Super Bowl XLIII. He watched the game from his home in Siesta Key, Fla., rooting for the Steelers.

The son of a coal miner, Mr. Bonelli was a baseball player who didn't want his father to know that he was involved in the rough-and-tumble sport of football. He had a sister forge his father's signature on the permission slip required by Aspinwall High School.

"He almost hit the roof when he found out. But after he went to see my father play, he became a big fan," said Mary Bonelli.

Athletics opened doors for Mr. Bonelli. He accepted a scholarship from Pitt, where he was a varsity letterman of distinction because he played football and baseball for the Panthers. He was also a teammate of famed running back Marshall Goldberg.

In 1939, Mr. Bonelli was on the first college team to take an airplane to a game, even though it still took three days to fly to Seattle to play the Washington Huskies.

"Some of the players got airsick and couldn't eat their meals. My father always had a healthy appetite and had a couple of extra meals during that trip," Mary Bonelli said.

Also in 1939, when some Hollywood starlets came to Pittsburgh on a promotional tour, Pitt athletes provided escorts for a dance at the William Penn Hotel.

"He danced the night away with Lana Turner," his daughter said. "He always was a hoofer."

Two months before Pearl Harbor, Mr. Bonelli enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps. When war broke out, he served as a radar operator on B-17 combat missions and was part of the invasion of French North Africa at Casablanca in 1942.

During the war, he played for the Third Air Force Gremlins, sharing the backfield with future NFL Hall of Famer Charlie Trippi. After hostilities ended, he played in the College All-Star Game in Chicago, where Cardinals owner Charlie Bidwill saw enough to offer him a contract for $400 a game.

"He was very excited about the opportunity, but his mother was worried about him and wanted him to 'get a real job,'" Mary Bonelli laughed. "He made the decision to play in the NFL, and it worked out."

He was traded to the Steelers for the 1946 season, then spent the next 36 years as a sales representative for Sherwood Medical Co.

The former president of the Pitt Varsity Letterman's Club, he was a member of the Steelers Alumni Association. He was a former baseball coach in Mt. Lebanon and he belonged to that community's Parent-Athletic Council. In later years, he was inducted into the Italian-American Sports Hall of Fame in Chicago, the Fox Chapel Area Hall of Fame and the Western Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame.

http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/09288/1005650-122.stm
Friends will be received from 2 to 4 p.m. and 6 to 8 p.m. today at Laughlin Memorial Chapel in Mt. Lebanon. Mass will be at 10:30 a.m. tomorrow at St. Anne's Church in Castle Shannon, with entombment following in Mt. Lebanon Cemetery.

Contributions are suggested in his name to the Panther Football Scholarship Fund at 316B Craig Hall, 200 Craig St., Pittsburgh, PA 15260.

Bob Dvorchak can be reached at bdvorchak@post-gazette.com.

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Steelers' Smith to miss rest of season

Kirschke first in line to replace him

Thursday, October 15, 2009
By Ed Bouchette, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Pittsburgh Steelers defensive end Aaron Smith will miss the rest of the season due to a torn rotator cuff in his right shoulder.

Aaron Smith's right shoulder ached for weeks before tests this week finally showed the Steelers' defensive end needed season-ending surgery to repair a torn rotator cuff.

Coach Mike Tomlin Tuesday said that Smith's shoulder was injured at some point in the game against the Lions in Detroit. But Smith complained about pain in his shoulder long before that, even though it rarely drove him off the practice or playing field until Sunday in Detroit.

"His shoulder's been bugging him for a couple of weeks now," said Travis Kirschke, the most likely defensive end to start in place of Smith on the left side Sunday against the Cleveland Browns.

"So he's been playing with pain for a few weeks. It got to the point in this last game that it was enough."

Smith will have surgery on his shoulder tomorrow.

Many players practice and play through pain, and it is not unusual that Smith would do it. He was not listed on the team's injury report last week.

"Obviously, he didn't know how bad it was until he got his X-rays, and it came back that it was pretty bad," Kirschke said.

The shoulder bothered him enough, however, that Kirschke took some practice reps for him the past few weeks on the left side. Kirschke has spent most of his time with the Steelers the past four years on the right side as a backup and fill-in starter.

"I've been able to practice a little bit of it since Aaron's been hurt the past few weeks," Kirschke said of moving to the left. "And so they've been putting me over there. I've gotten a little practice time."

Kirschke did not practice yesterday because of a recurring back problem that has bothered him for years but never has caused him to miss a game the past four seasons.

"It just needs time to calm down. Today, it feels a lot better than the last two days and, hopefully, it'll continue to get better each day."

The gang of 3

The Steelers will use a Gang of Three to replace Smith with Kirschke, Nick Eason and rookie Ziggy Hood. They also signed rookie defensive end Sunny Harris, their sixth-round draft choice, off Carolina's practice squad to replace Smith on the roster.

They likely will start Kirschke, 35, because he has been their top backup defensive end and has started 12 games, including one in the playoffs, since joining them as a free agent in 2005. They are 8-4 with him as a starter, including 3-3 when he started at left end.
Yet some veterans believe it is time for Hood to show why the Steelers drafted him in the first round.

"Oh, yeah, this is his time," said linebacker James Farrior, a co-captain. "This is his time to step in and show everybody why they drafted him so high and what a good player he is."

Said safety Ryan Clark, "Obviously, we don't know much about Ziggy being in the heat yet, so it's going to be an opportunity for him to show why we picked him in round one."

Hood, the first defensive end drafted by the Steelers in the first round in the past 21 years, is looking forward to an opportunity.

"Yes, [I'm] very excited, it's an opportunity to play a little bit more and bring a little something to the defense."

He has played only a few plays each game this season.

"You can't replace a guy like Aaron Smith," Hood said. "He's done so much more than anybody can believe. Given an opportunity to go out and show what I can do is a blessing. For right now, I'm just filling a spot until he gets healthy."

Special shoe for Parker

Willie Parker will wear a special left shoe that Nike had made for him to protect his turf toe injury as he practices this week and returns to play Sunday.

Parker, who missed the past two games, and Troy Polamalu, who has not played since the MCL in his left knee was sprained in the opener, went through their first full practices yesterday.

Nike had a pair of the shoes made for Parker so they will match.

"You don't want to feel awkward or off balance," Parker explained. "It's better than a steel plate. It's some type of fiber plate, better than straight steel. I think the steel aggravated it."

The Steelers outfitted Parker's shoe with a steel plate, he said, when the injury occurred Sept. 27 in Cincinnati. He played the rest of the game with it.

Polamalu, who will wear a brace on his left knee, said missing the past four games was not all bad.

"Quite honestly, not too bad. You know, I really enjoy watching my brothers play out there. I really feel like I'm out there anyway. I ride the emotional roller-coaster of wins and losses if I play or not.

"Of course, I want to play and I really enjoy being out there. My role changed a little bit, helping those guys on the sideline."

Gifts for Harrison, Woodley

The starting two outside linebackers picked up some gifts yesterday. The NFL named James Harrison AFC defensive player of the week, and the Elias Sports Bureau awarded LaMarr Woodley an extra half a sack.

Last week, halfback Rashard Mendenhall was the offensive player of the week.

Elias, the official keeper of NFL statistics, changed a scoring decision from Detroit. Instead of Woodley and cornerback William Gay sharing a sack, they gave the full sack to Woodley.

So, Woodley has two sacks, tied with Aaron Smith for second behind Harrison's six. Gay has one sack instead of 1.5.
Browns can expect to see Steelers' Polamalu

By Mark Kaboly
Daily News Sports Editor
Thursday, October 15, 2009

Steelers safety Troy Polamalu participated in a full practice for the first time since injuring his knee during the first half of the first week of the season and is expected to play Sunday against Cleveland.

"We are excited to have him back," safety Ryan Clark said. "Me and TP will be back there this week, so hopefully you will leave us alone about it the rest of the year."

Polamalu said he had an earlier date circled for when he expected to return.

"I was hoping to return a couple of weeks earlier," Polamalu said. "I guess I was overly optimistic."

Polamalu just began to practice last week on a limited basis.

"With time, I was able to heal a little bit more," Polamalu said. "It will be exciting this week to pick it up a notch."

Cleveland quarterback Derek Anderson completed only 2 of 17 passes last week against Buffalo, and Clark knows that won't happen this week because the Browns' coaching staff won't allow it.

"Coaches won't let a player sink like that again," Clark said.

Clark is expecting plenty of screens and short passes early in the game to get Anderson into the flow.

"(Once he gets) warmed up and they get him into the flow of the game, then they will try to do some other things," Clark said. "I don't think you can pass judgment on Derek Anderson from the Buffalo game."

• A scoring change from last week's game in Detroit that originally gave LaMarr Woodley and William Gay a half sack each has been amended to credit Woodley with a full sack. Woodley now has two sacks on the season and Gay has one.

• Sitting out practice for the Steelers were WR Hines Ward, OL Trai Essex, LB Andre Frazier and DL Travis Kirschke.
QUOTABLE

"I'm not going put a big 'S' on my chest and be a Superman. When you do that, you play out of the framework of the defense and when you do that, that breaks down the defense." — Nick Eason, one of three players who will fill in at defensive end for the injured Aaron Smith.

DIGITS

47 — Times Lions quarterback Daunte Culpepper dropped back to pass (including runs and sacks) against the Steelers last week

21 — Blitzes Steelers defensive coordinator Dick LeBeau called in the game.

Mark Kaboly can be reached at mkaboly@dailynewsemail.com or 412-664-9161.
Steelers' Parker still on fence for Sunday

By Mark Kaboly
Daily News Sports Editor
Thursday, October 15, 2009

Willie Parker is going to take a wait-and-see attitude on his availability Sunday against Cleveland when it comes to his banged-up toe.

The Steelers' speedy running back was back on the practice field Wednesday for the first time since suffering a turf toe injury more than two weeks ago, and he was sporting some new shoes.

Parker was wearing specially designed shoes by Nike to protect his injured toe.

"It definitely works," Parker said after practice.

Parker said the extra protection is not made of steel; rather, it is constructed of fiberglass. Parker originally had a steel plate inserted around the toes of his shoe when he first got injured during the Cincinnati game.

"It has your toe in it, so it won't move or bend," Parker said. "It is a pretty good shoe. I felt good with it on today."

Parker received the shoe weeks ago but didn't feel the need to use it until yesterday because he wasn't able to go full speed to test it.

"It is better than just a steel plate," Parker said. "It is better than straight steel because that would kind of aggravate that."

Parker said he will be wearing the specially constructed shoe on both feet.

Mark Kaboly can be reached at mkaboly@dailynewsemail.com or 412-664-9161.
Harris: Give Holmes benefit of the doubt

By John Harris
TRIBUNE-REVIEW
Thursday, October 15, 2009

Steelers wide receiver Santonio Holmes was MVP of Super Bowl XLIII with nine catches for 131 yards and the game-winning touchdown. He duplicated those numbers with nine catches for 131 yards and a 34-yard score in the 2009 opener against Tennessee.

What have you done lately, Santonio?

In the second game of the season, Holmes injured his left wrist and dropped three passes — including a potential touchdown in the fourth quarter of a loss to Chicago.

He had another drop the following week in a loss to Cincinnati, along with being blamed for running the wrong route on Ben Roethlisberger's pick-six interception against the Bengals.

Coach Mike Tomlin defended Holmes at his weekly news conference following the Cincinnati game when asked if his receiver was having trouble focusing. In response, Tomlin talked up Holmes' prowess as a run blocker.

Focus?

How focused was Holmes when he made catches all over the field against Tennessee before injuring his wrist a week later?

"I don't think I have any lack of focus — never did," Holmes said Wednesday.

A sore wrist isn't a receiver's best friend.

Holmes takes offense to the inference about his lack of focus, but he accepts full responsibility for his drops.

"That had an impact on me dropping those balls in Chicago," Holmes said about the wrist injury. "But, after that, no. I can't make any excuses. I play wide receiver. I'm supposed to catch the ball."

How about looking at the big picture and giving Holmes, who scored a touchdown in every postseason game last year, the benefit of the doubt?

When second-year receiver Limas Sweed dropped a touchdown pass against
Cincinnati, Tomlin benched him for a game. The local media has blasted Sweed because he doesn't have a track record as a NFL receiver.

Holmes has a track record as a clutch receiver — at least he did last season.

This season, Holmes is being treated like a player with something to prove instead of a proven commodity.

I'm giving Holmes the benefit of the doubt because of his accomplishments with the Steelers.

A four-year veteran, Holmes should just be entering his prime.

The results, so far, have been mixed.

Holmes is third on the team with 23 receptions for 334 yards.

In continuing what has amounted to an impressive trend for Holmes this season, all four of his catches in Sunday's 28-20 win at Detroit were for first downs.

In fact, 22 of Holmes' receptions have resulted in first downs this season. The only catch that didn't was a 9-yarder against Tennessee on first-and-10.

"I would probably prefer to have more catches than what I have at this point," said Holmes, who hasn't recorded more than five receptions or 83 yards in a game since the opener. "The way I started out, I wouldn't expect it to be such a drastic (dropoff) right now."

Holmes has been targeted a team-high 41 times. Hines Ward has been targeted 40 times.

Ward, however, has a team-high 33 catches — 10 more than Holmes.

"If I want it thrown at me, catch it," said Holmes, who was targeted 11 times in the opener compared with only six times against Detroit. "That's pretty much our standard as a receiver in this league and in this locker room.

"The ball is definitely getting spread around to a ton of players. I can only go with whatever opportunities I get. If they throw me the ball eight times a game, I'm trying to catch all eight of them. If they throw it to me one time, I'm going to catch that one pass."

Displaying some of the negative effects of the wrist injury against Chicago and Cincinnati, Holmes had six receptions in those games despite being targeted 19 times.

In his past two games, Holmes has been targeted 11 times with eight receptions.
A sore wrist could have contributed to some of Holmes' uncharacteristic drops. Given his track record, I can accept that explanation a lot better than I can accept questioning any lack of focus on his part.

*John Harris can be reached at jharris@tribweb.com or 412-481-5432.*
Steelers brace for defensive end's absence

By Scott Brown
TRIBUNE-REVIEW
Thursday, October 15, 2009

The Steelers will go to extremes, in a sense, as they embark on the daunting task of replacing defensive end Aaron Smith for the rest of the season.

At one end of the spectrum is Travis Kirschke, who is in his 13th NFL season and nearly retired after the Steelers won the Super Bowl — Super Bowl XL almost four years ago, that is.

At the other end is Ziggy Hood, a precocious rookie who last April became just the second defensive lineman the Steelers have used a first-round draft pick on in the last 20 years.

The two will head what coach Mike Tomlin called a "committee," and it is charged with turning in the superb and selfless play that has long been Smith's signature.

The Steelers placed Smith on injured reserve Wednesday after X-rays revealed he had torn the rotator cuff in his right shoulder.

Smith had been playing with pain in that shoulder since the early part of the season, and it finally gave out in the Steelers' 28-20 win over the Lions last Sunday.

"He's pretty bummed," Kirschke said of Smith. "He says it probably won't sink in until game time and he's not out there."

The Steelers hope they also don't get a reality check Sunday when they host the Browns.

Smith has been an indispensible part of their defense — strong safety Troy Polamalu called him "irreplaceable" — and his loss could be a crippling one.

The Steelers have reason to be optimistic that they can cobble together a credible rotation among Kirschke, Hood and Nick Eason, who will dress for a game Sunday for the first time this season.

Kirschke started six games for the injured Brett Keisel at right defensive end last season, and the Steelers did not experience much of a drop-off, if any, with the 6-foot-3, 298-pounder in the lineup.

"He is the ultimate warrior," linebacker James Farrior said of Kirschke, who has
been with the Steelers since 2004. "He has been in the league a long time and he is a crafty veteran. He knows how to play this game, and we have the utmost confidence in him."

The one issue with Kirschke, the oldest player on the Steelers, is a cantankerous back that is the product of the pounding to which the 35-year-old has subjected his body.

The biggest question mark with Hood, meanwhile, is whether he is ready for a more prominent role given how steep the learning curve is for rookie defensive ends.

As Tomlin said earlier this week of Hood, "He's not out of the oven yet."

The Steelers may have to crank up the oven to 450 degrees given Hood's talent and the need they now have at a position where they were deep prior to Smith's injury.

"I still have that rookie mentality of thinking too much rather than go out there and play," the 6-3, 300-pound Hood said. "Right now when I do get the opportunity to play, everything will start to come together."

_Scott Brown can be reached at sbrown@tribweb.com or 412-481-5432._
Notebook: Polamalu, Parker good to go

By: Mike Bires
Beaver County Times

SAFETY DANCE

Strong safety Troy Polamalu and RB Willie Parker got through practice Wednesday without problems and appear ready to play Sunday when the Steelers host Cleveland.

Polamalu, who’s missed the last four games with a sprained knee, will start barring any setbacks in practice the rest of the week.

“I’ll be as good as I can be,” Polamalu said when asked if he’ll be 100 percent by Sunday.

It’s too early to tell if Parker, who missed two games with a turf toe injury, will be the featured back. However, the Steelers may want to keep a good thing going and give Rashard Mendenhall his third straight start. Mendenhall rushed for 165 and 77 yards the past two games, both wins.

“I feel a lot better,” said Parker, who’s wearing special customized cleats that will hopefully protect his damaged toe.

In other practice news, three other Steelers sat out with minor injuries: LB James Farrior (elbow), G Trai Essex (ankle) and LB Andre Frazier (thigh). Farrior and Essex will start. Meanwhile, veteran WR Hines Ward was given the day off.

SMITH SURGERY

Defensive end Aaron Smith, who was placed on the season-ending injured reserve list, is expected to have surgery Friday. He’s out for the year with a torn rotator cuff injury.

HARRISON HONORS

Linebacker James Harrison was named the AFC Defensive Player of the Week for his performance in the Steelers 28-20 win over the Lions.

Harrison, last year’s defensive player of the year, recorded three sacks for 24 yards in losses. He leads the Steelers with six sacks.

STAT CHANGE

The NFL changed some of the sack figures from Sunday’s game in Detroit.
On the second of four sacks of Daunte Culpepper late in the fourth quarter, LB LaMarr Woodley and CB William Gay were originally given a half sack apiece.

But upon review, Woodley is being credited with the whole sack on that particular play. For the game, Woodley had two sacks, his only two of the season.
Begginning of ends for Steelers

By: Mike Bires
Beaver County Times

PITTSBURGH — To patch the latest hole in their defense, the Steelers are calling on a 13-year backup with a chronically sore back.

Now that Aaron Smith is done for the year with a bum shoulder, Travis Kirschke, pictured, will take over as the starter at left defensive end.

Smith, who’s started 155 games in his 11 seasons with the Steelers, has been universally praised as the prototypical D-end for a 3-4 defense.

But now, coach Mike Tomlin said that Smith will be replaced by a “committee of bodies. The usual suspects: Travis Kirschke, Nick Eason and Ziggy Hood.”

While Eason and Hood may get their share of reps, it will be Kirschke who gets the most, starting Sunday against 1-4 Cleveland.

“I have big shoes to fill,” Kirschke said. “Obviously, Aaron is a great player. It’s going to take a great effort by myself, Nick and Ziggy. But that’s what we’re here for.”

Kirschke, a Southern California native who played college football at UCLA, is a fascinating story.

He’s the oldest player on the Steelers’ roster (he turned 35 on Sept. 4). He’s one of two 13-year veterans on the team. The other is linebacker James Farrior.

But unlike Farrior, who was taken by the New York Jets with the eighth overall pick of the 1997 draft, Kirschke was an undrafted free agent.

Kirschke spent six seasons in Detroit, where he started only 10 games. He spent the 2003 season in San Francisco, where he started 15 games. Then in 2004, his football fortunes changed when he signed with the Steelers.

“It’s been a blessing for me,” Kirschke said of his pro career. “I’ve enjoyed every minute of it. And I’m really enjoying it now. Coming into this league, all the critics said I wasn’t supposed to be here.”

Before coming to Pittsburgh, Kirschke played in just two playoff games, both wild-card loses during his days in Detroit. Since becoming a Steeler, he’s played in 10 playoff games, including three AFC championship games and two Super Bowls.
After he battled through nagging back and abdominal muscle injuries in 2005, Kirschke seriously pondered retirement after Super Bowl XL. When he returned to his home in Lone Tree, Colo., he debated whether or not he should come back for the ’06 season.

“I was in pretty bad shape. I wasn’t feeling that good,” he said. “But it’s amazing what a little time off can do. So I can understand what Brett Favre went through.

“You realize that maybe you do have a little more in your tank. You want to make sure you’re done because you never want to look back and say, ‘What if?’”

Now, Kirschke is about to enter what may be the most significant phase of his career.

How well he plays may play a major role as the Steelers’ try to recapture first place in the division.

Although his back still bothers him on occasion, it’s nowhere near as painful as it was in recent years. He sat out Wednesday’s practice because his back flared up in Detroit. But he’ll return to practice today.

On Sunday, he’ll make his first start of the season.

Reminded that he’s 8-4 in the 12 games he’s started as a Steeler, Kirschke just shrugged.

“I don’t worry about things like that,” he said. “I just try to go out there and do my job.”
Steelers preparing to deal with loss of Smith

10/15/2009 3:32 AM

PITTSBURGH - The last time the Steelers spent a significant amount of time without defensive end Aaron Smith, things didn't work out well.

Pittsburgh lost three of its final four games - including the one in which he suffered torn biceps - without the defensive stalwart to close the 2007 season. The Steelers allowed an average of 157.2 yards rushing.

On Wednesday, the Steelers (3-2) were without Smith again after he was placed on injured reserve with a torn rotator cuff. The team signed defensive end Ra'Shon "Sunny" Harris from the practice squad of the Carolina Panthers to take his place on the 53-man roster.

With the addition of Harris, a sixth-round draft pick of the Steelers who was released at the end of training camp, Pittsburgh now has two rookies among their seven defensive lineman, the other being No. 1 pick Ziggy Hood.

"There will be a little more studying, a little more class time," said reserve nose tackle Chris Hoke. "We have to make sure everyone knows what's going on with the defenses, where the blitzes are, where they fit. We've got to do more film watching to make sure we're all on the same page."

Veteran Travis Kirschke will get the first opportunity to replace Smith, whom the Steelers consider the best 3-4 defensive end in the NFL.

Kirschke, a 13-year NFL veteran, has started 36 career games, including four in place of Smith in 2007. He'll rotate with veteran Nick Eason and Hood.

Hoke said that while the run defense was the most glaring weakness in the 2007 collapse, the blame should not all fall on Kirschke. The Steelers also were missing All-Pro safety Troy Polamalu.

"It wasn't just him; it was a lot of factors," Hoke said. "I kind of took exception to that the last time because it suggested that Travis wasn't doing his job. Travis was playing good football. Aaron is a special football player and he makes a lot of plays that he's not supposed to make and makes all the plays he's supposed to make. He does a good job. But I think there were a lot of factors that went into that; it wasn't just the guy playing his spot."

Still, the Steelers admit they'll have to work hard to replace Smith's production.

"You don't just replace Aaron Smith," said linebacker James Farrior.

One plus for the Steelers this time is that they'll have Polamalu in the lineup. Polamalu, who missed the past four games with a knee injury, returns Sunday when Pittsburgh hosts Cleveland.

Polamalu said not having Smith will be a huge blow for the Steelers.

"A guy like that, I truly believe is irreplaceable," Polamalu said. "There's a lot of other big role positions that get a lot of prestige that can be replaced, myself included, but it's always tough when it has to deal with our line. I believe our defensive line controls the outcome to our games."
Farrior knows what the best cure will be.

"We need to win," Farrior said. "We need to win so guys won't talk about Aaron being out."

Not that Smith will ever be far from anyone's mind. His ability to deal with his son's leukemia diagnosis last season inspired his teammates.

That might be the hardest thing to replace.

"The last couple of years, he's had a tough go of things," Hoke said. "He had the biceps injury in 2007 and his son last year, and this year he has the shoulder. He's a guy we all look to for leadership. He's been around here the longest (on defense) and is a guy who plays at a high level every game. You just don't replace that."

**Odds and end zones**

In addition to Polamalu, running back Willie Parker returned to practice Wednesday. Parker has missed the past two games with a toe injury. Farrior sat out practice with an elbow injury. He was joined on the sidelines by guard Trai Essex (ankle) linebacker Andre Frazier (thigh), Kirschke (back) and wide receiver Hines Ward (not injury related). ... Harris will wear No. 77.

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