Feeling Defeated? Step Back, Leap Forward

Wide receiver George Wilson's biggest career-related complication led to his biggest sports achievements.

September 5, 2012 As told to Kate Ferguson

When I became a professional athlete, being a wide receiver was my life. Then, in 2007, the team asked me to switch from playing offense to defense and become a strong safety. For those unfamiliar with football, this is not an easy transition. But I thought about it this way: Maybe this transition is the opportunity I've been waiting for my entire career.

When I went into training camp, I wasn't promised or guaranteed anything but an opportunity. With that chance, I worked diligently each day to learn that position and impress my coaching staff.

At the end of training camp, I earned a spot on the roster as a third-string safety. But even though I was third string, I approached my job the same. I still prepared like I was starting out in the game. As a result, by week five, due to team injuries, I was thrust into the starting lineup against my childhood team, the Dallas Cowboys, on Monday Night Football.

Then, during the third play of the game, Dallas overthrew the ball and I caught my first career interception. Not only did I get the interception, but I ran it back for a touchdown. People always ask me, What did that moment feel like? My answer? It felt like a little piece of heaven because I'd dreamed of playing professional football from when I was in the fourth grade; 16 years later I'd seen my dream become a reality.

But suppose I'd never suffered a setback and switched positions?

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