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## Heisman winner Smith starting over with Ravens

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Aug. 8--WESTMINSTER, Md. -- One year ago, **Troy Smith** graced the cover of just about every college football magazine on the rack.

One day ago, he took snaps from someone named Ikechuku Ndukwe (spellcheck just blew up) and delivered handoffs to someone named P.J. Daniels.

In January, Smith was the most celebrated college player in America. He carried Ohio State into the national championship game.

On Tuesday afternoon, after a two-hour practice in 97-degree heat at Baltimore Ravens training camp, he carried something else: starting quarterback Steve McNair's shoulder pads.

"As you can see," Smith said, half-smiling, "I'm still a rookie."

Cruel world, sports.

One minute, you're working on your Heisman Trophy acceptance speech. The next, you're trying to fend off Drew Olson for the right to play behind Kyle Boller, who plays behind McNair.

Top of the world ... bottom of the depth chart.

Despite a spectacular career at Ohio State, Smith lasted until the fifth round of the NFL Draft. He was the 174th player taken, 62 picks after the Steelers took a punter.

Few were surprised, because Smith, at an even 6 feet, doesn't fit the NFL prototype for a quarterback -- never mind that Drew Brees is the same height. What's more, he was coming off a disastrous performance against Florida in his final college start.

That game, for some reason, seemed to outweigh Smith's sterling 25-3 career record, including three victories over Michigan in which he rang up 1,151 total yards and nine touchdowns.

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The Ravens liked Smith's arm and poise enough to take a low-risk gamble. Eric DeCosta, the team's director of college scouting, said Smith was drafted on the notion he could develop into a solid backup and "maybe more than that."

The feeling around Ravens camp is that Smith will make the final roster as the No. 3 quarterback.

That's all he's looking for -- an opening. That's what enabled him to rise from backup running back to star quarterback in Columbus, Ohio.

He might be a baby in the pro game -- still learning how to throw to a spot instead of waiting for a receiver to break open, for example -- but he's a winner. At 22, he exudes uncommon maturity, charisma and humility.

"My ego was silenced a long time ago, man," Smith said, as he sat on a bench outside the team's locker room at McDaniel College. "I have a firm belief that in any team sport, egos should go. It's all about one heartbeat. That's how you win."

It's not easy for a rookie to impress a hardened group like the Ravens. Smith already has.

"He's a very mature person, and he has a tremendous arm," linebacker Bart Scott said. "I think he has a chance to be a steal, like a Tom Brady (sixth-round pick of the Patriots in 2000).

"We all know (McNair) only has so much longer to go, so the cards are set up for Troy to come in and play and start early in his career for a pretty good football team."

That might sound overly optimistic, but anyone who saw Smith play at Ohio State -- or in the streets of East Cleveland -- knows he's a fighter. Flash back to his spectacular touchdown pass against Penn State last season, the one where he escaped two tackles, reversed field and delivered a 37-yard strike to Brian Robiskie.

This fight has only just begun.

"Man, I was fighting (at Ohio State), too, even though I was the main guy," Smith said. "I practiced every day like someone was after my job. That's the only way you can do it, practice like your job is on the line."

At the moment, it is.

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