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# Rodgers-Cromartie so close

Lakewood Ranch graduate 'right there' for Holmes' winning catch

By NICK WALTER  
nwalter@bradenton.com

Standing like one of the fans at Raymond James Stadium, Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie could only watch what may be remembered as one of the most memorable receptions in Super Bowl history.

Just before him in the corner of the Cardinals' end zone, Rodgers-Cromartie saw teammates Ralph Brown and Aaron Francisco frantically try to keep a pass from Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger from finding wide receiver Santonio Holmes with 35 seconds remaining.

Brown leapt for the ball, and missed. Francisco plowed an elbow into Holmes' shoulder. Still, Holmes, his body almost horizontal with the field, dragged his toes inbounds and tucked the ball, and the Super Bowl, away.

"I was right there," Rodgers-Cromartie said. "I knew he caught the ball. I wanted to drop my head but you know that that is not in me."

Pittsburgh won 27-23, and Holmes was named the Super Bowl Most Valuable player after recording nine receptions for 131 yards. Four of those receptions came on the final 64-yard, 2:02 drive.

But Rodgers-Cromartie, who played a year at Lakewood Ranch High School, was not necessarily responsible for Holmes on the final drive, since the Cardinals primarily played in zone defense. But Roethlisberger's scrambling broke the zone down.

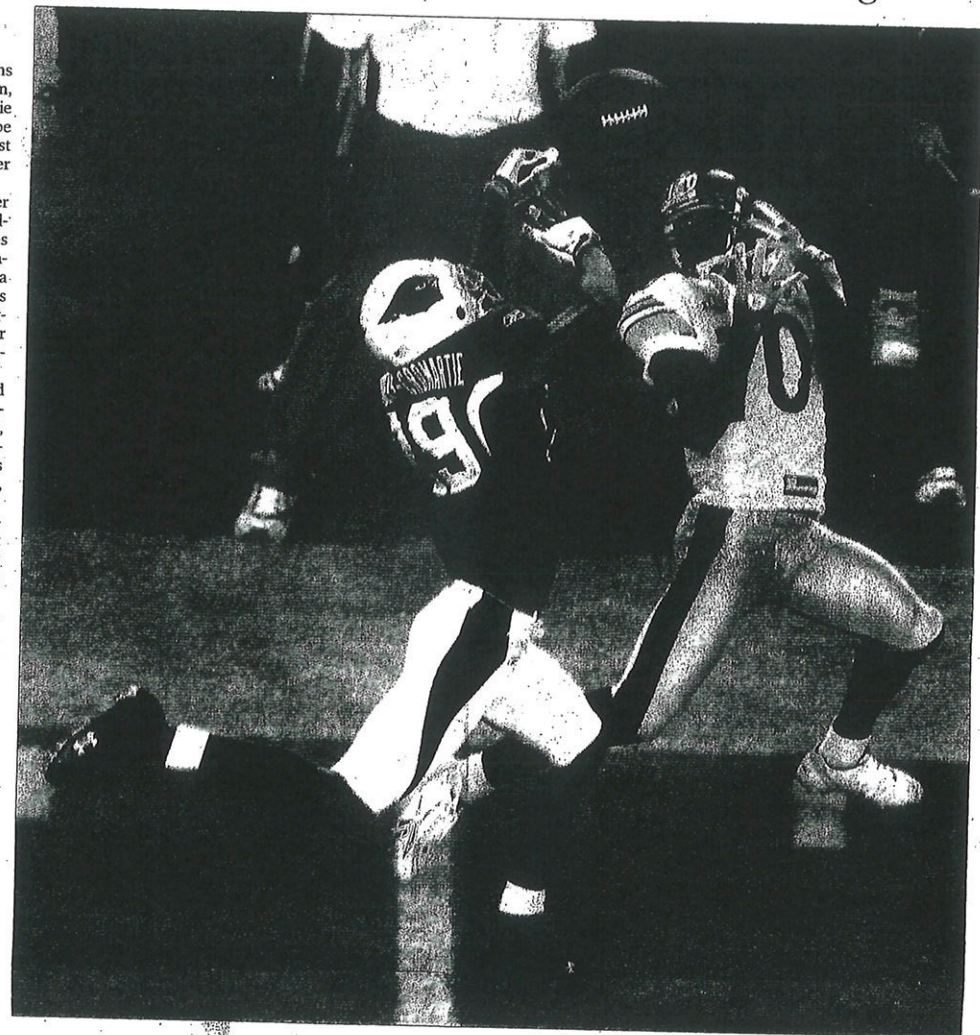
"It was a 'cover-eight,'" Rodgers-Cromartie said. "We were in zone. When Ben Roethlisberger got to scrambling, my eyes were bad and I got taken out of my zone."

Throughout the game, Rodgers-Cromartie often matched up one-on-one with the Steelers speedster, keeping him out of the endzone through the first 59 minutes. He battled Holmes numerous times on one-on-one screen passes, sometimes taking Holmes right to the ground. He erased Pittsburgh's option of using Holmes as a long-bomb play breaker.

But in the end, on what could become one of the most memorable final three minutes in Super Bowl history, Rodgers-Cromartie could only stand and watch.

"I understand that it was one of the greatest experiences of my life," Rodgers-Cromartie said. "I've had a long journey to get here and then the hype surrounding it and the fans were into it and the crowd... it's a great experience."

It didn't take long for Rodgers-Cromartie to show the world



Arizona Cardinals defensive back Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie, left, breaks up a pass intended for Pittsburgh Steelers wide receiver Santonio Holmes on Sunday during the second quarter of the Super Bowl XLIII in Tampa. ASSOCIATED PRESS

his remarkable talent. From the Cardinals 44-yard line, Roethlisberger attempt to find Holmes on a deep pass down the middle. Holmes had a few steps on Rodgers-Cromartie, and although the pass was slightly underthrown, Rodgers-Cromartie caught up to Holmes to bat the ball away at the goalline.

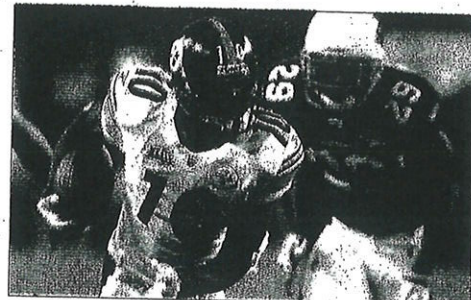
So the Steelers went short. Roethlisberger often made passes to Holmes right after the snap, leaving Holmes one-on-one with Rodgers-Cromartie at the line of scrimmage. Once, in the third quarter, Rodgers-Cromartie stepped to the right and blasted to the left, leaving Rodgers-Cromartie behind for a 15-yard gain.

Earlier, Holmes picked up a 25-yard reception on a screen play that left Rodgers-Cromartie in the face of a blocker.

"You have to give it to them," Rodgers-Cromartie said. "Their game plan worked. They know I play off the line. They got me early on with a lot of short routes."

Rodgers-Cromartie had 15 tickets for family and friends at the game. "That's the part of the loss that affected him the most."

"It was very tough," he said. "I had all of my family and friends. We were bringing everybody out here and them wanting you to do well and you come up short. It's just going to be hard to go back home and smile."



Pittsburgh Steelers wide receiver Santonio Holmes carries the ball during the fourth quarter Sunday in Tampa as Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie gives chase. ASSOCIATED PRESS

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ers and their legion of followers. The Steelers earned their record-sixth Super Bowl with a



Fitzgerald's 64-yard touchdown run, a bolt strong enough to penetrate steel.

Suddenly, all those Terrible Towels that found their way in-

There were 35 seconds left in last year's Super Bowl when the New York Giants scored their winning touchdown. Spooky.

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