

## JEFFERSONVILLE'S JERMAINE

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This past NFL offseason, history was made as it was the first time a major sports club was relocated back to the city that they originally moved from. The St. Louis Rams franchise was relocated to their new (technically returning) city of Los Angeles.

On Sept. 25, in the team's third regular season game, Rams

wideout Brian Quick scored the team's first passing touchdown since moving back to California. Quarterback Case Keenum hit Quick on a deep post route for a 44-yard touchdown pass against Tampa Bay. It was the first passing touchdown in Los Angeles since December 24, 1994.

So why should Jeffersonville, Ind. residents be concerned with this?

Well the last touchdown the Rams scored before moving to St. Louis was a 36-yard pass to Jermaine Ross, a Jeffersonville High School alumni.

A member of the 1989 graduation class, Ross played football, basketball and ran track in his time at JHS. He ultimately received a scholarship to run track at Purdue University and walked-on to Purdue's football team.

"My time in college really showed me how to be independent," Ross said. "At first, I received a scholarship to run track at Purdue, but football was my real passion. So, I decided to walk-on."

During his college career, Ross had a total of 74 receptions for 1322 yards, seven touchdowns, and averaged 17.9 yards per reception. His time on the field caught the attention of several professional teams, and he would later enter his name into the 1994 NFL Draft.

"I had the New Orleans Saints reach out to me during the draft. They told me that they were going to pick me in a later round," Ross explained. "After the draft, I was officially an undrafted free agent, meaning that any team could pick me up. The Saints reached out to me again, so did the Cincinnati Bengals, L.A. Rams and the Washington Redskins. It came down to the Rams and Bengals, but ultimately I spent my rookie year in L.A. They gave a bigger signing bonus."

Fellow rookie Keith Lyle joined the Rams the same time Ross did. Drafted in the third round (71st overall pick) out of the University of Virginia, Lyle was one of Ross' good friends that he met in his time in the NFL. Lyle played three years with Ross in the NFL.

"Jermaine always played aggressively. It was his mindset," Lyle said. "He took advantage of every opportunity he had, his work ethic was his biggest strength."

Ross' rookie year would also be the last for the Rams in Los Angeles, as the team's owners wished to relocate to St. Louis, Mo.

Ross had been held catchless all season heading into the last game of the 1994 season, where the Rams faced off against the Washington Redskins. The Redskins would go on to top the Rams, who finished 4-12 on the season, by a score of 24-21.

However in the game's waning minutes, Ross got open and his was hit by quarterback Chris Miller on a 36-yard post route. The catch would be the first, and last, reception for Ross that season.

It would also be the final touchdown by the Rams in Los Angeles before the franchise moved to St. Louis.

"I didn't really expect (the touchdown) to mean much," Ross said. "It was my only touchdown and my only reception of that season."

In Ross' second year, he suffered an ACL tear, which would end his season prematurely. He would spend two more seasons with the Rams before being released. Ross would then sign with the Jacksonville Jaguars before breaking his left arm. He tried a comeback with the Cleveland Browns before he was ultimately cut. Ross retired in 2000 and moved back to Indianapolis, where he became an engineer at Allison Transmission.

Despite bouncing around different cities during his football days, Ross was always loyal to the city of Jeff. In fact Lyle, his former teammate, had never heard of the small town until Ross told him where he was from.

"Your environment has everything to do with your personality, and I think that stands out with Jermaine. Outside of football, he's a smart guy -- he became an engineer," Lyle said.

Ross' nephew, Brendan Lawler, grew up in that same city. Lawler is currently Charlestown High School's quarterback, and knows what kind of bar his uncle set for him.

"He has been a major influence on me," Lawler said. "What he achieved is nearly impossible and it kind of set the bar for me, especially me being a football player from this area. It gives me hope that maybe I can do the same thing he did someday."

A determination to make it to the NFL is what drove Ross to be the very best he can be, even after starting his collegiate career as a walk-on.

"The thought of never making it to a higher level was never on my mind," Ross said. "I knew it was my destiny to play professional ball. One time, a veteran player said that none of us (rookie receivers), including myself, would make the team. I was the only one to make it."

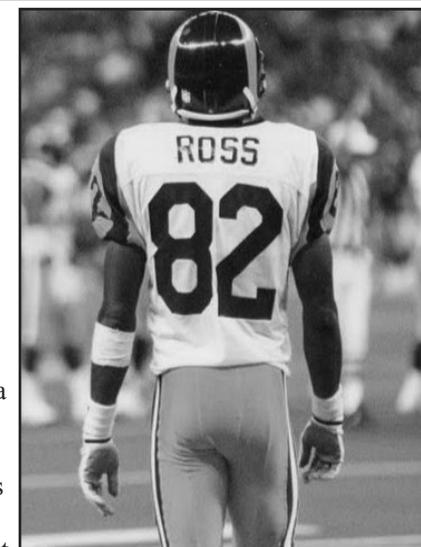
The significance of a local athlete making it to the largest stage in professional football has given a deeper

meaning to current athletes vying for the same in the southern Indiana area.

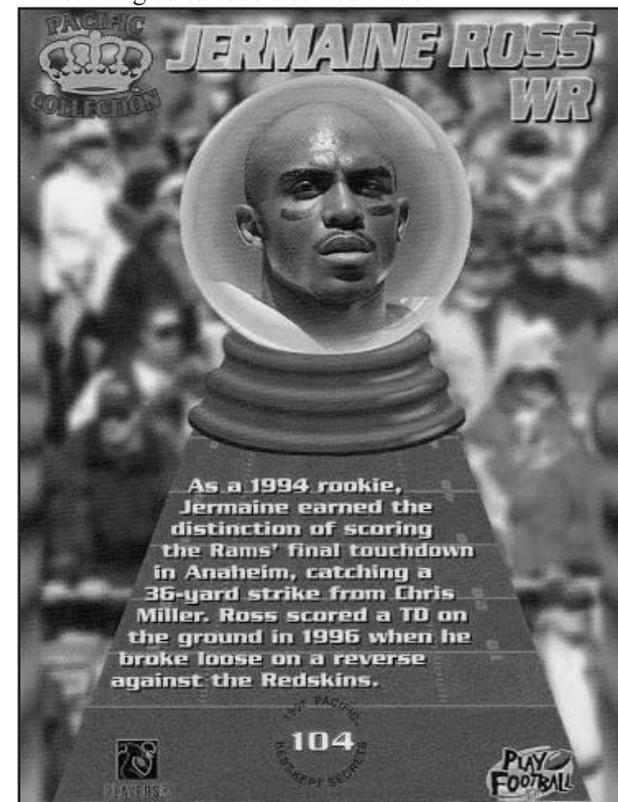
"I think it means a lot, not only to the city of Jeff, but southern Indiana as a whole. It's very rare to see an athlete in this area to make it to make it to that level," Lawler said.

To come from a city that few people are familiar with, Ross has set his mark.

"Jeff was good to me," Ross said. "I'm very proud to be from there. Whenever someone ask me where I'm from, I always say Jeffersonville, Indiana. Never Louisville. I'm glad to have that Red Pride."



Submitted photos



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