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Packers safety Evan Williams reported to training camp wiser in the ways of keeping himself healthy



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Key Points AI-assisted summary

- Packers safety Evan Williams suffered a thigh injury during the 2024 season that hampered his performance.
- Williams visited Badger Athletic Performance to analyze his running form and identify potential causes of his injury.
- The analysis involved sensors and evaluated Williams' strength, flexibility, and running mechanics.

GREEN BAY – When it comes to treating chronic soft-tissue injuries like hamstring pulls, the Green Bay Packers have been sending their younger players to Badger Athletic Performance on the UW-Madison campus to help them learn how to treat their bodies.

When you think of that group, you think of receiver Christian Watson, cornerback Eric Stokes and running back MarShawn Lloyd.

You don’t necessarily think of safety Evan Williams.

The 2024 fourth-round draft pick’s name is associated with being a training camp phenom, an eventual starter opposite veteran Xavier McKinney and having a rookie season worthy of being named to the Pro Football Writers of America all-rookie team.

But Williams' body let him down last year, just like it had previously for the other three. He missed three games with a thigh pull and then played at half speed after aggravating the injury in the middle of the wild-card playoff loss to the Philadelphia Eagles on Jan. 12.

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"I think it was the first quarter, I tore it even worse, like on a punt or something like that," Williams recalled after a training camp practice this week. "I played the rest of that game – I mean, you don't get to play many playoff games, right? – and was able to kind of fight through it.

"It was definitely a challenge, especially just fighting through that knowing you're kind of doing a little more damage to it."

Williams initially injured his right thigh in a Saturday practice before the New Orleans game Dec. 23. He wrenched it so badly that he was ruled out of the game the same day. He missed two more games after that. He started practicing on a limited basis the final week of the season and made his seventh start of the year against the Eagles.

Once the season was over, Williams said, it took a month for his thigh to heal so he could start training for 2025. But before he hit the treadmill, the Packers sent him to Badger Athletic Performance to find out if there was something he could do to avoid the kind of lower-body injury that affected his season.

"He's got to continue to learn his body because I know there were some injuries last year," coach Matt LaFleur said during offseason workouts. "Just to make sure that he's available. I think it's just building on what he's already done and being consistent with it.

"He's another guy that loves the game. He's extremely intelligent. He comes in with the right mentality and he just works."

After technicians fitted him with sensors on more parts of his body than he knew he had – “I felt like I was about to be in Madden,” he said – all of his athletic movements were digitalized and evaluated to see if he had any strength imbalances or could improve his running style.

“They just track your running form, like any stress that you might put on your hamstrings, on your quad, kind of get you fully hooked up to a bunch of sensors,” Williams said. “And just see how the way that you run might affect the injury that you have.

“They test your strength, test your flexibility, all that, just making sure you know why things happen the way they did, and what you can do to prevent or be proactive with those type of things. I got the answers that I needed.”

Williams said his thigh is healthy and body feels good. It’s clear he added some more muscle to his 5-foot-11, 200-pound frame. He said he feels lean and fast.

“I’m just really ready to tear it up this year, honestly,” he said. “Just make that leap.”

Williams has been the starting strong safety opposite free safety McKinney. He’s in competition with fellow second-year pro Javon Bullard for the second safety spot, but Bullard appears destined to play slot corner a good deal more than safety and may not be much of a factor in the deep part of the field.

Williams showed a knack for being around the ball in training camp last year, picking off five passes to lead all players.

Coming out of camp, however, Bullard was the starter and it wasn’t until Week 4 that defensive coordinator Jeff Hafley decided he needed to get Williams on the field more. In his starting debut against the Los Angeles Rams, he had 10 tackles and two pass breakups.

He was an active tackler and solid defender in the pass game, but his only interception came in Week 2, when he clinched the victory over Indianapolis with a late steal of quarterback Anthony Richardson.

Coming into his second season, Williams has much higher expectations. So, do his coaches.

“He’s a very intelligent player,” Hafley has said of Williams. “I think one of the biggest things he’s done to put himself in the situation that he’s in now and having a bigger role is he’s starting to learn how to study the game more and he’s starting to understand how serious you need to take it because, when those opportunities come, you have to be ready for it.”

Now that he’s healthy, Williams sees himself in prime position to help the defense take a big leap.

“I think I've grown tremendously just as far as the habits I have, being able to take care of my body like a professional and just kind of just learning from all the guys that have been here,” he said. “I feel like I'm taking steps, just, you know, how to study film, the little things.

“I’m taking walk-throughs as serious as you can and being intentional with all you do here. I can definitely say that I'm just fully committed to the cause. Of course, I’m not there yet. I'm going to keep trying to progress. But I like the direction I'm going.”