Ian Wharton's 2017-18 NFL Cornerback Handbook

Methodology

Let me give you an idea of what the heck the Coverage Productivity project is and why I've been compiling this data since 2014.

The first thing that I must mention is how much I appreciate pushing the limits in terms of analysis. I'm not talking about strictly football, either. I like trying new viewpoints and data sets, as I believe we can dig deeper to find out more quality information. The traditional way of looking at performance can flawed, especially so with cornerbacks. I don't really care about how many yards someone had unless you tell me about the alignment, defensive call, and quality of the coverage.

While I don't care for all-encompassing grades, contextual stats help paint part of the picture as to usage and roles. I don't solely rely on that type of data, nor do I believe it's the end-all be all. That includes the data I chart myself. It's all a piece of the puzzle that we can use to form an opinion.

There are very few analysts looking at the position in depth. One big issue is the lack of time and film available to people. We see games from a limited television angle. We cannot see the cornerback until the ball arrives. But there is a major void that's missed up until that point, regardless of whether the result is good or not.

That's why I created the Coverage Productivity concept. I want to see exactly how effectively a cornerback provides coverage on every route. If the cornerback is within an arms' length of the receiver at the top of their route, they are very likely to earn a win. The other way they can earn a win is if they play a well-thrown ball to perfection to help make up for any mistakes throughout the coverage process. Competing at the catch point by forcing a very difficult catch or even knocking the ball away is likely to earn a win. Although giving up a positive offensive play is never a positive, a good show of technique and challenging at the catch point generally will lead to better results as sample sizes grow over time.

On the other hand, there are clear losses that don't necessarily lead to box score statistics. A dropped ball shouldn't erase the fact the cornerback was beaten. And we shouldn't overlook that a quarterback didn't see his receiver breaking open, or delivering an uncatchable ball. Even on interceptions, a cornerback can lose but end up with the ball because of poor offensive execution.

Not every man snap is tallied as a win or a loss, though. There are many obvious clear-out routes that aren't considered as part of this project. Pattern-match snaps that are either correctly picked-up or blown do count. Some of the totals will look minuscule in comparison to how many pass coverage snaps a defense faced, but these are just what I deemed as qualifying routes, not the actual total of routes faced.

This process has been quite successful over the last several years, including predicting breakouts for Marcus Peters, Casey Hayward, Trae Waynes, A.J. Bouye. It also foretold early downfalls for Joe Haden, Byron Maxwell. It's not perfect, as it can favor some No. 2 corners, and small sample sizes can create strange results. This year, it's Darryl Roberts, Pierre Desir, and Ross Cockrell who seemed to outperform what I'd have expected based on the film.

I don't always fully agree with the stats (especially the success rates for slots this year as it was the first-year I charted them specifically) but I do have confidence this is an effective way to measure corners.

2017 Boundary Success Rate Rankings

Only features those with enough qualifying snaps on the season

Cumulative Success Ranking	Name	Team	Cumulative Wins	Cumulative Losses	Total Qualifying Routes	Cumulative Success Rate
1	Casey Hayward	Chargers	44	8	52	84.62%
2	Marcus Peters	Chiefs	74	16	90	82.22%
3	Jimmy Smith	Ravens	74	19	93	79.57%
4	Bradley Roby	Broncos	81	21	102	79.41%
5	Jason McCourty	Browns	65	17	82	79.27%
6	Marlon Humphrey	Ravens	73	20	93	78.49%
7	Pierre Desir	Colts	43	12	55	78.18%
8	Trae Waynes	Vikings	135	38	173	78.03%
9	Stephon Gilmore	Patriots	89	27	116	76.72%
10	Ross Cockrell	Giants	52	16	68	76.47%
11	Robert Alford	Falcons	106	33	139	76.26%
12	Tramon Williams	Cardinals	64	20	84	76.19%
13	Trumaine Johnson	Rams	93	30	123	75.61%
14	A.J. Bouye	Jaguars	111	36	147	75.51%
15	Darryl Roberts	Jets	58	19	77	75.32%
16	Kyle Fuller	Bears	109	36	145	75.17%
17	Cordrea Tankersley	Dolphins	52	18	70	74.29%
18	Aqib Talib	Broncos	75	26	101	74.26%
19	William Jackson	Bengals	68	24	92	73.91%
20	Artie Burns	Steelers	80	29	109	73.39%

2017 Off-Man Stats

Only features those with enough qualifying snaps on the season

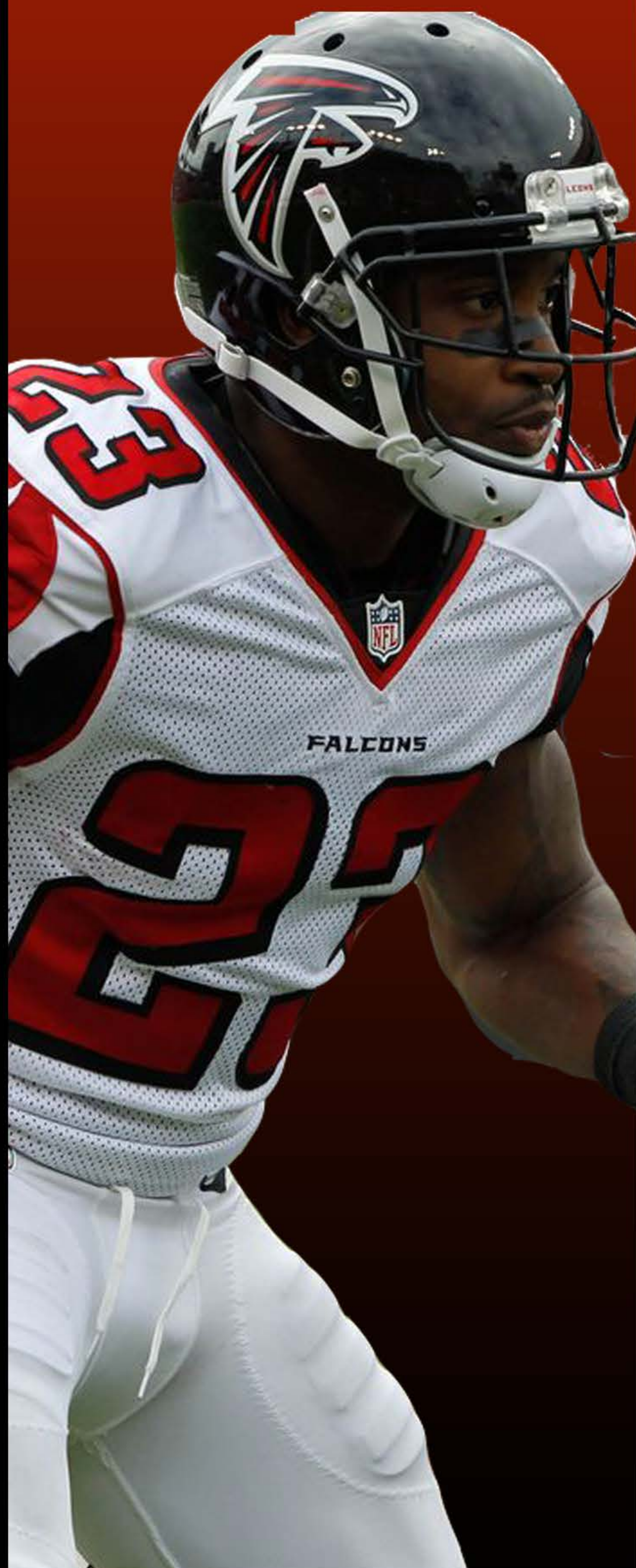| Name	Team	Targets	Receptions	Completion %	Average Completion Depth	Yards Allowed	Blown Yard %	TDs Allowed	Penalties
Casey Hayward	Chargers	29	15	51.72%	10.8	218	58.72%	1	0
Marcus Peters	Chiefs	42	23	54.76%	10.1	270	44.81%	2	1
A.J. Bouye	Jaguars	39	14	35.90%	10.1	171	78.95%	0	0
Jason McCourty	Browns	41	22	53.66%	11.0	274	33.58%	1	2
Artie Burns	Steelers	26	12	46.15%	11.2	140	32.14%	0	0
Trae Waynes	Vikings	49	26	53.06%	11.2	351	58.40%	2	1
Stephon Gilmore	Patriots	20	11	55.00%	10.1	182	76.92%	1	0
Tramon Williams	Cardinals	31	12	38.71%	10.6	153	55.56%	0	1
Kyle Fuller	Bears	69	29	42.03%	12.0	427	68.15%	1	1
William Jackson	Bengals	15	6	40.00%	9.2	83	60.24%	0	1
Darryl Roberts	Jets	31	13	41.94%	14.6	210	55.71%	1	2
Bradley Roby	Broncos	27	12	44.44%	10.0	135	66.67%	1	1
Patrick Peterson	Cardinals	20	6	30.00%	13.2	79	64.56%	0	0
Sean Smith	Raiders	21	14	66.67%	11.1	224	56.70%	1	0
Desmond Trufant	Falcons	24	12	50.00%	11.2	170	64.12%	1	0
Darius Slay	Lions	60	33	55.00%	9.7	355	53.52%	0	1
Nevin Lawson	Lions	19	12	63.16%	9.3	133	66.17%	1	2
James Bradberry	Panthers	48	29	60.42%	10.8	362	64.64%	1	0
Robert Alford	Falcons	40	17	42.50%	10.1	202	60.89%	0	2
Brent Grimes	Buccaneers	45	23	51.11%	11.1	356	69.10%	1	0

Robert Alford
#10 Overall
#6 in Press
#19 in Off-Man

Desmond Trufant
#21 Overall
#22 in Press
#15 in Off-Man

Brian Poole
#10 in Slot

Ronald Darby Route Breakdown

Press-Man	Total Routes	Success Rate	Rank	Targets	Receptions	Yards (blown)	TDs	Penalties
Cross	1	100%						
Quick In-Out	3	67%		1	1	(7)		
Slant	4	75%		4	1	(57)	1	
Comeback	1	100%						
Curl	4	75%		1	1	8		
Deep Out	0	N/A						
Dig	1	100%						
Corner	0	N/A						
Post	1	100%						
Go	7	71%		3	1	(25)		
Cumulative	22	77%	DNQ	9	4	97(89)	1	

Game	Press Routes	Success Rate	Off-Man Routes	Success Rate	Game	Press Routes	Success Rate	Off-Man Routes	Success Rate
1	1	0%	4	75%	9	0	N/A	0	N/A
2	0	N/A	0	N/A	10	1	0%	7	71%
3	0	N/A	0	N/A	11	2	100%	9	78%
4	0	N/A	0	N/A	12	4	75%	8	62%
5	0	N/A	0	N/A	13	0	N/A	9	67%
6	0	N/A	0	N/A	14	8	75%	8	62%
7	0	N/A	0	N/A	15	6	100%	2	50%
8	0	N/A	0	N/A	16	1	100%	1	100%

Off-Man	Total Routes	Success Rate	Rank	Targets	Receptions	Yards (blown)	TDs	Penalties
Cross	5	80%		1	1	3		
Quick In-Out	3	33%		1	1	(9)		
Slant	2	50%		3	2	(30)		
Comeback	0	N/A						
Curl	10	100%		9	4	25		
Deep Out	7	29%		7	4	57(48)		
Dig	7	86%		4	1	(13)		
Corner	1	100%						
Post	2	100%		1				
Go	11	55%		8	1	(25)		3
Cumulative	48	69%	25	32	15	180(125)		3

Jason McCourty Breakdown

Overall:

Picked up on a prove-it deal despite a solid 2016 season, Jason McCourty was one of the best corners in the NFL in the first-half of 2017 before getting banged up and dipping a little bit. He was also stuck in a disastrous defensive scheme, often playing in cover 3 alignments with improper support from both linebackers and a safety, so he was on his own island for the majority of snaps. The results were still great, which is a testament to McCourty's talent and versatility. He's a capable press-man corner and off-man corner, with 2017 really highlighting the latter skill.

Cumulative	Targets	Completion %	Completion Depth	Yards Allowed	Blown Yard Percent	Yards After the Catch
Total	51	50.98%	11.4	346	37.57%	49
Rank	43	47	42	38	1	24

Press:

McCourty didn't qualify with enough press-man snaps to be ranked, but he performed well in his 19 snaps. The majority of his snaps on the year came in zone, too, making McCourty an odd-fit for whatever defensive coordinator Gregg Williams wanted to do. His length and play strength are especially good, as he disrupts the timing of passing plays with great consistency. He still has the burst out of his cuts to mirror receivers on sharp-cutting routes and is one of the more disciplined corners on double moves. He should play more press moving forward as he joins a more aggressive defensive scheme.

Press	Targets	Completion %	Completion Depth	Yards Allowed	Blown Yard Percent	Yards After the Catch
Total	10	40%	13.5	72	52.78%	18
Rank	DNQ	DNQ	DNQ	DNQ	DNQ	DNQ

Off:

This is where McCourty really shined, finishing the year ranked fourth in success rate. His workload was still too low compared to his performance level, but McCourty accomplished a highly uncommon feat despite being in a tough position with the lack of help schemed for him. He allowed a blown yard percent of just 34%, which was 10% below any other corner, and one of only three corners whose blown yard percentage was under the 50% mark. That's as good as it gets as far as isolating performance.

Off-Man	Targets	Completion %	Completion Depth	Yards Allowed	Blown Yard Percent	Yards After the Catch
Total	41	53.66%	11	274	33.58%	31
Rank	46	34	34	45	2	23

Projection:

The biggest potential issues for McCourty in 2018 aren't going to be based on anything he showed on the field this past season. He was excellent in a tough situation, and the New England Patriots will use him in more man roles than zone, playing to his strengths. But he's turning 31 this year and has missed at least two games in each of the last three years. He'll need to stay healthy. If he does, he should be one of the best No. 2 corners in the league as a versatile veteran who rarely beats himself.