



SCOTT BRUN/DN

**FORMER NEBRASKA I-BACK** Lawrence Phillips, the sixth pick in the 1996 NFL draft, faces prison time if he is convicted of a June drunken driving charge.

## Phillips shows signs of future stardom

By DAVID WILSON  
Staff Reporter

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — After being selected No. 6 overall in the 1996 National Football League draft by the St. Louis Rams, former Nebraska running back Lawrence Phillips now must prove he can perform in the NFL — or he won't get paid.

Phillips held out of the Rams' training camp for 16 days before signing a \$5.6 million contract with no signing bonus.

In his first extensive NFL action on Aug. 3, Phillips ran for 37 yards and was particularly impressive on a 3-yard touchdown run, avoiding a tackle in the backfield before speeding into the end zone.

"I'm running mostly on instinct right now and my instincts are pretty good," Phillips told the Associated Press. "You don't want to think too much, just basically react, and when I learn the offense I'll be better."

Against the Kansas City Chiefs Aug. 17, he played only one half, rushing three times for two yards.

"It's tough to run the ball in this league consistently," St. Louis Coach Rich Brooks said.

Phillips was arrested for drunken driving in June while on probation for an attack on a former girlfriend last fall. A year ago, he was suspended for six games during his junior season.

Officials in Nebraska have said they probably would seek to revoke Phillips' probation if he is found guilty on the drunken driving charge, which would mean an automatic 30-day jail sentence.

Phillips is to appear in court Wednesday, four days before the season opener in St. Louis against Cincinnati.

But the Rams, and Phillips' attorneys, are confident that if he is sentenced, his jail time won't come until after the season.

Phillips thinks he'll avoid jail. Starting in training camp, the Rams took pains to keep Phillips from making any more false steps. Besides workouts and meetings that take up most of his day, the team has four ex-

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JOHNNY ROLAND  
St. Louis offensive coordinator

Nebraska players on its roster.

"We have a close-knit group, a family-type situation," Offensive Coordinator Johnny Roland said. "The players will wrap him up in their cocoon, and he'll be on the straight and narrow."

Former Cornhusker guard Zach Wiegert, who is entering his second season with the Rams, said he was confident Phillips could become successful in the NFL.

"Any time you have a running back that plays at a big school — taking 30 carries a game and doing as well as he did — that's going to prepare you for about anything you're going to see," Wiegert said.

"Physically, his tools are all there. It's just learning the system and getting comfortable in the backfield. But he'll definitely be a big asset to this team."

Phillips is counting on big numbers, like the 165 yards he gained against Florida in the Fiesta Bowl, to put his shaky past to rest.

"I hope me playing well and doing the things I have to do will be enough for the fans," Phillips said. "Everybody has an opinion and not everybody is going to like you."

"But if you're worried about everything that's said, you'd spend your whole life trying to defend yourself."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.



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