

# Cigar Snob

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**Win  
Lose  
or Draw**

BY NICOLÁS ANTONIO JIMÉNEZ  
PHOTOS BY NATALIA AGUILERA

LOCATION: CASABLANCA CIGAR LOUNGE

ED REED SPENT HIS COLLEGE AND NFL CAREERS BUILDING A STRONG CASE THAT HE'S THE BEST SAFETY WHO EVER PLAYED FOOTBALL. THROUGH ALL THE UPS AND DOWNS ALONG THE WAY, ED HAS MAINTAINED ONE CRITICAL RITUAL: CIGARS.

**F**ootball being a team sport with such distinct responsibilities tied to each position, Ed Reed doesn't like to be called a GOAT. But he likes Ball Hawk just fine.

And his peers and fans all agree that his résumé makes a strong case for him as the best safety in the history of football.

One of the keys to Ed's success — from his stand-out high school career to his championship runs in college and the pros and all the records and highlights he racked up along the way — is his free, fun-loving approach to the game.

He calls himself a "park baby" because it was in neighborhood parks that he developed the tone of his game. It's free-flowing, fun-loving, and imposing all at the same time. New England Patriots coach Bill Belichick, who frequently had to plan for facing Ed, has called him the best free safety he's ever seen.

That style makes perfect sense for a guy from New Orleans, and there could have been no better adoptive home for Ed's college years than Miami, where style can be at least as important as getting results. Ed took his time at The U before embarking on and eventually fulfilling a long quest for a Super Bowl ring with the Baltimore Ravens, where he and fellow Cane Ray Lewis were the core of a downright scary defense.

Over the course of his career, Ed also played in nine Pro Bowls, was named All-Pro First Team five times, earned Defensive Player of the Year Honors, led the NFL in interceptions in three seasons, and set an NFL record for career interception return yards (1,590) as well as the record for longest interception return (107 yards).

Since his college days, Ed's been a cigar guy, lighting up to unwind on Coral Gables golf courses, to celebrate wins (as well as losses and draws) or to smoke while studying game film. And now he's looking to bring all the style, passion and dedication that brought him success on the football field to the cigar world.



Our night of cigars, spirits and stories with Ed started with our photo shoot. After loads of poses, wardrobe adjustments and cigar touch-ups, each of us finally got to kick back, microphones in one hand, cigar in the other. Except it turns out that to Ed, a native New Orleanian, microphones are for singing first, talking second.

So as I settled into my chair, I heard the Ball Hawk's voice coming through my headphones. But he wasn't recalling a pick six. He was singing some Teddy Pendergrass.

**Lookin' back over my years  
I guessed, I've shed some tears  
Told myself time and time again  
This time I'm gonna win  
But another fight, things ain't right  
I'm losin' again  
Takes a fool to lose twice  
And start all over again**

**Think I'd better let it go  
Looks like another love T.K.O.**

— Teddy Pendergrass.

And as if the whole thing had been rehearsed, Ed segues seamlessly, with Pendergrass-level smoothness, from Teddy's Love TKO to the one he himself felt after the 2011 AFC Championship Game.

**Ed Reed:** I got a great story about that. So we're playing in the AFC Championship Game. Fourth one in a row. We're in New England. We lose the game. This is 2012, the year before we won the Super Bowl.

I'm in the locker room after the game and I'm like, "This is ridiculous. It's my tenth year in the league. It's hard to get to the Super Bowl. New England is like the greatest ever. Bill Belichick, Tom Brady and those guys are hard to beat." I get in the locker room and everybody wants to talk to you. How are you feeling? Can I get an interview? And I'm getting dressed the whole time, just putting on my clothes, singing Teddy Pendergrass like, "I think I better let it go. It looks like another love T.K.O." Which it was. While I'm singing that song, I was believing it and thinking, "You know what? It's just football." And then it clicked: the Super Bowl was in New Orleans the next year. In my backyard. "We're going to win it."

So I walk out of the locker room talking on the phone to my financial adviser, Brad Schwartz. I'm like, "What's up bro?" He's pissed. "Man, we just lost the game. This guy did this, that guy did that." I'm like, "Whoa. Are you on the bus with me or not? We're going to New Orleans. Gonna win the Super Bowl next year." At that point, I'm sitting on the bus, waiting for the team to come before I calmed down and got off to smoke a cigar. That's what I used to do after the games with a couple of my coaches; we used to smoke cigars. Win, lose or draw, have a stick. It's just a game.

And sure enough we won [in New Orleans the next year].

**Nicolás Jiménez:** So the Super Bowl is obviously one of the highest highs in anyone's career. Let's go to your start, though. Tell me about growing up in New Orleans.

**ER:** Man, it was rough. I grew up in a small town on the west side of New Orleans called Metairie, Shreveport, Louisiana. My mom and my dad lived in a one-bedroom apartment raising four and later five baby boys. I'm number two, like Austin Powers. The determined one as some people may say. I had a great older brother who taught me how to play football at a young age. He was a super athlete — got it from my dad.

We moved to another, bigger one-bedroom apartment, but the neighborhood was limited in what you could do around there. My baby brother was

born, which made five of us. That's when we got a two-bedroom apartment. At this time, I'm like 12, 13 years old. And my dad and my mom chose to move back to the old neighborhood where my dad grew up. It was a place called Saint Rose where he went to the same high school I went to, but he left that high school because of some racial stuff going on. I saw my dad moving and getting us to a four-bedroom apartment in the neighborhood where my dad grew up. He had left the high school, went to Shreveport. That's where he met my mother. You know, I didn't want to leave that neighborhood, man. I was crying when we left. I was trying to go to high school there and thank God I didn't. I probably wouldn't be sitting here in front of you now. I'm from a small place where sports is needed as an outlet for kids to get that energy out.

**“Michael Jordan was like my guy. I watched a lot of sports, but Michael Jordan was my guy. He had a suit on. He's smoking a cigar. He was winning championships and he was making plays at crucial moments.”**

I was at the park all the time. I always say I'm a park baby. Michael Jordan was like my guy. I watched a lot of sports, but Michael Jordan was my guy. He had a suit on. He's smoking a cigar. He was winning championships and he was making plays at crucial moments. Growing up a young black kid, I wasn't living at a time when you had the Martins and the Malcolms, you know? Kids tend to gravitate to winners and Michael was my guy. I wanted to be like him in every way. Of course I wanted to be like Bo Jackson, Deion Sanders and Ronnie Lott. But basketball is where I got my defense from. Basketball is where you get Ed Reed the playmaker.

**NJ:** What drew you to the University of Miami?

**ER:** I was a fan of FSU growing up. I was a huge Charlie Ward fan, Peter Boulware, Todd Rebol, Derrick Brooks, Warrick Dunn and those guys. But the first college game I saw was Alabama versus Miami in the Sugar Bowl and Miami cut up. What drew me to Miami even more when I got here is the tradition that I knew the university had. I was always around the university because I was engulfed in orange and green. And even

more than that, what I loved about being at the University of Miami, even more so is that all of us were about making each other better.

I was born to be a Cane. When I got here, it was home. Miami's my second home, Baltimore's my third, and Atlanta, where I live, is my fourth.

**NJ:** What would you say is the most New Orleans thing about you? When do you feel the New Orleans really coming out?

**ER:** That's funny, man. Probably when I'm in the cigar lounge, because we're so hospitable in New Orleans. You can come from any walk of life and find conversation with somebody in Louisiana and the same thing goes for a cigar lounge. A cigar can bring a billionaire and a janitor to the same level. That's New Orleans.

**NJ:** New Orleans is a cigar town, but you got into cigars while you were at UM, right?

**ER:** Yeah. My first cigar came because of our tight end Bubba Franks. Me and Bubba used to go play golf all the time. We used to go to Granada, which is a nine-hole course. We're hacking at the ball and Bubba hands me a Montecristo. This is when I really started to enjoy cigars. Bubba was a little older and a little bit more mature when it came to cigars and stuff like that. He handed me that cigar and that was it. From there, I went to the Arturo Fuente and that became my golf stick. And going to Granada was the wind down from everything we did in football. In stressful times, we'd get to Granada, start smoking cigars and hitting the ball. Nothing else mattered. Sometimes we'd shoot 54 on that nine-hole course. Who does that? I've still got balls in the trees at Granada.

**NJ:** What was it like for you to not only be a great player, but to be part of such a storied program?

**ER:** I came from Destrehan High School, where my first year we went to the championship game and then the sophomore and junior year were terrible, though we built it back and won the district title my senior year. Then I come to Miami and I know what Miami stands for. Championships are here. Coach [Butch] Davis came to my house and my mom woke me up like yelling at me yelling my name. "Ed! I know you're not back there sleeping. That man is here. You knew he was coming!" I go in there and coach Davis crosses his legs and puts that championship ring across. I'm like, "Oh he knows what he's doing." I was already like, "Okay, this is where I want to go." Because I already knew like I was going to be around the best. We ain't talking games; we're talking practice. When I visited Miami, I knew this was the place for me when I got to the football

offices, they got all the plaques on the walls.

**NJ:** The team got so much better in the second half of your college career. Talk about the progression from your first year, when you went 9-3, to your last in 2001, when you went undefeated and won a national championship.

**ER:** We were as close to the old school way as possible, you know? While at the same time being smart about what we did because you couldn't replicate what previous Canes guys did. But we wanted to bring that back to the university. We wanted to bring it back to the city. Especially the guys who came in with me in '97 — Reggie Wayne, Santana Moss, Delvin Brown, Daryl Jones. These guys all bought into the idea that working together, winning together, all of us would be successful. That was the difference, I think, between those first years and those latter years that I had there. [At the end], we had a team versus individuals trying to leave and go to the league and get paid, you know?

Our production director, Ivan Ocampo, was hanging out with us for this interview. Unable to contain himself around a legend like Ed, he chimed in with some (welcome) questions from a die-hard UM homer's perspective. We had to cut most of it out, but you can hear more of Ivan's questions for Ed — along with the uncensored version of this interview — on the Cigar Snob Podcast.

**Ivan Ocampo:** Was the first time where you really felt that shift the last game of the season in 1998 against UCLA? You caused a pivotal fumble at the end of that game.

**ER:** Yeah, that was it. That was the moment when we knew. No doubt about it. [When I was a redshirt freshman in 1997], you couldn't tell that team we weren't winning a national championship. We went 5-6, but we still had a championship mentality, you know? The next year we got a little better. We just had to get the camaraderie back between the players.

**NJ:** How do you see the stigma that's sometimes still attached to Hurricanes football?

**ER:** Being at the University of Miami, from when you first get there, you understand that nobody likes you. I think it's because you have more black athletes there. You know, I think it's still because Miami used to always have more Miami guys than any other place.

I don't think society likes that, you know what I mean? Convicts versus Catholics and stuff like that. You know, it's funny how that came up a

year ago with the Notre Dame game. I'm like, "You don't even know these kids. These are not the same kids."

So I knew people didn't like the University of Miami, man, 'cause we were good. And the swag was like out the roof in the '80s. Guys were loud, but guys were not that loud. They had the 30 for 30 and all that stuff, but that's everywhere. I know the stories, I know the players, you know? Stuff you wouldn't even hear about.

I've always said that the University of Miami is to college football what Tiger Woods is to golf. When Tiger Woods is at his best, golf is at its best. When Miami Hurricanes football is good, college football is really good.

**NJ:** From a fan's perspective, it doesn't look like it. But did you ever have a humbling moment during your transition to the NFL when you realized you were entering another level of competition?

**ER:** Yes and no. When I was getting recruited to come to the University of Miami, it was a business decision for me, knowing that my foot was in the door to the NFL. I was already being prepared for it. There were agents around, financial advisers around, our pro day had a lot of coaches there, so you know. I stayed for five years and I had one class my fifth year. I had already graduated in the spring of 2001. I had one class to write a paper for and I was good. So my life was football. From 7:30 in the morning to 5:30 in the evening, I was at the facility. When I leave the facility, I go home and I'm still at work for the most part because it's fresh on my mind. So what I used to do is grab a glass, fill it up to the brim, no ice, with a brown beverage. Then I'd grab a cigar and I started watching tape. So the transition for me was a lot easier.

When I got to Baltimore, man, I don't really think I had that moment because I also had so many professionals around me, Peter Boulware, Ray Lewis, Trevor Price, Derek Mason, Adalius Thomas. My coaches were Dennis Thurman, Donnie Henderson, Bennie Thompson. Coach Billick had won the Super Bowl. I had so many people around me.

My first-year wake-up call, honestly, was going from Miami and having a Cadillac CTS in Baltimore when it snowed. I can't get my car up the hills to get to work. So I turned around and went back home. I called and they were like, "Where you at?" I'm like, "I'm at home. I can't drive to work." They said, "Okay sit tight."

**NJ:** I lived in Missouri and Wisconsin and had the same thing happen. There's a half of the country that doesn't realize the terror of being from the southern half and driving

in snow for the first time.

**ER:** Yeah. They just don't know. So I got a truck after that week and I never missed another day.

Honestly, the combine was another wake-up moment before I even got to the league. I knew things were about to be different. My grand parents worked in the fields. My grandmother, my dad's mom, tended to a white family's home when I was growing up. She didn't just tend to that family's home; she was part of their family, you know? So fast forward to the combine and it's like a meat factory. All of us being paraded around, you got six or seven doctors over you and they're pulling you from right to left. You know, it was a different experience for me, you know, how they treat the players and what they do for the players and how much the players do for the league. Even now. It was an interesting process that I didn't really take too well.

**“I’ve always said that the University of Miami is to college football what Tiger Woods is to golf. When Tiger Woods is at his best, golf is at its best. When Miami Hurricanes football is good, college football is really good.”**

That's probably why I probably fell low in the draft. I didn't take the Wonderlic test and I know they know I didn't take it. I didn't take it seriously at all because, you know, you're asking me personal stuff that has nothing to do with football. And I get that you want to question the person, you want to get to know him. But a lot of stuff that Houston, to be exact, was asking me at the time ... and I remember who the guy was. He's an analyst now. I know he don't know nothing because he didn't draft me. He drafted David Carr. Nothing against David Carr, but you know, he was dead wrong. 'Cause I remember the interview and it was the worst interview I had. I knew the guy didn't know anything about football and now he's an analyst on ESPN.

**IO:** Casserly.

**ER:** That's him. It's Charley Casserly. I didn't want to say his name, but yeah. Charley, you were wrong. He was asking me stuff about family

and I'm like, "Look, family's family. You're going to take care of family regardless. You don't get to choose your family when you're born, you know? But you can distance family when things are not right; I have to manage my family, because if I don't manage my family, I'll be broke." That's just the God's honest truth. Not everybody where I'm from has financial literacy. I was just one of those people fortunate enough to be good with numbers.

**NJ:** Going pro obviously means a lot of money. What was that part of the transition like for you?

**ER:** For me, that transition was to have a plan. How are you going to survive off this first check? How are you going to survive off this first contract? You know, and then make a plan. God willing, I get to a second contract, you know? But you've got to play now like you're not getting that. I was all right with it because I had already graduated. I already had my degree. And I know right now I can go coach better than a lot of these coaches in the league.

**NJ:** Is that something you want to do?

**ER:** Yeah, I want to do it. You know, they just make it so tough. It's almost run like the country, man. You take care of your own. Just because somebody is in coaching don't make them a good coach. I've been around bad coaching. I've watched bad coaches get head coaching jobs. So I want to do it and I think they should be leaning toward players coaching. But they push us out, man. They make it really tough for players to get back in and coach.

**NJ:** I know you didn't wait too long between cigars, but are there moments or relationships in your career that you felt were enhanced by cigars?

**ER:** After almost every game, we had a cigar. It was me and a couple of coaches, maybe a few players. And, win, lose or draw, I'd invite the DBs over to get dinner at Ruth's Chris, then we'd go to the Havana Club [the cigar lounge in the now closed Ruth's Chris]. We'd be up there smoking cigars and shooting pool with the Ravens owner, Steve Bisciotti. Steve might be giving you some business tips, which helped me to grow as a man, save my money and do the right things with it. Steve was one of those owners who would come and speak to the team. He was with us in the lounge shooting pool with our family.

Me and Reggie Wayne were way tight before that, but I know cigars brought us closer because we smoked a lot of cigars in college. Reggie and I used to drive home from Miami to Louisiana and we'd have cigars in the car. That was a 13-hour ride. He and I definitely got closer over a cigar

and some beer.

And, again, Steve Bisciotti. I've got so much respect for Steve and of course the Modell family that owned the team before him. And one of my two current financial advisors. My previous advisor was from Miami. His name is Jeff Rubin. I know he's still walking around, which is crazy, because he stole a lot of money from guys.

**“After almost every game, we had a cigar. It was me and a couple of coaches, maybe a few players. And, win, lose or draw, I’d invite the DBs over to get dinner at Ruth’s Chris, then we’d go to the Havana Club. We’d be up there smoking cigars and shooting pool with the Ravens owner, Steve Bisciotti.”**

I met these two guys randomly after a Pittsburgh game we lost when I went over to have a beer with them 'cause they invited me over and they lived directly across from me. Three days later I find out that they're financial advisers. I have them look at my finances and they immediately said, "Something ain't right." I was like, "What y'all got going on for the weekend? Let's go down to Miami." I sat there and mediated between them and Jeff and I fired Jeff on the spot. Then I told my teammates, "Y'all need to check over your stuff." Nobody really listened. Some people lost millions.

You live and you learn. About 15 years later, I'm with the same guys. One of them, Brad Davis, used to smoke cigarettes and I helped him get off that. He started dipping and he slowed down on the dipping and then I took him to the Dominican Republic and that was like the rebirth of him with cigars. That's his thing now. Now he's like always calling me about cigars on auction websites.

**NJ:** So there was a moment on the sideline when Terrell Suggs shakes your hand and says, "You're the greatest safety ever. It's a pleasure to play beside you." At what point in your career or in your life does it sink in that you're not just a pro, you're not

just a champion ... but that when you're done with your career, people are going to look at you that way? When do you realize, "Oh... this is where I am in the football culture?" And what is the weight of that? There's a responsibility there, right?

**ER:** No doubt. No doubt. "To whom much is given, much is required" is the scripture. When did that hit me? To be honest with you, it hits home when I get it from the older players.

**NJ:** Right. It's like you're part of a club now.

**ER:** Yeah. When I'm getting it from cats like Ron Woodson and Ronnie Lott, Deion Sanders. I had the honor of playing with somebody I grew up wanting to be like, doing things that he'd done and now he's in Baltimore. Prime came to Baltimore! I'm playing with Deion Sanders and he chased me down the field after a hundred-yard interception return that got called back against the Jets — and he's like, "You the man. You the dog." Nothing more. Deion said it! Ronnie Lott said it to me. I was like, "Nah, I'm not taking it from him."

**NJ:** But I bet you turned around and told everybody you could, "You know what Ronnie Lott said?"

**ER:** Yeah I did! You know, 'cause there's some questions out here... Who's the guy? I don't claim to be the guy, but to get it from those older guys, that's when it really starts to sink in.

**NJ:** So speaking of validation, talk about the Pro Football Hall of Fame and what it means to be on your way there.

**ER:** Man, I'm still blown away at the College Football Hall of Fame because it just happened. That was not on my radar at all. You know, even the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame wasn't on my radar. Every athlete in the NFL goes through college. Not every athlete in college goes to the NFL. So that number is crazy. 5.2 million play college football; not even a thousand players are in the College Football Hall of Fame. You know, so that was like mind blowing to me. There are guys sitting up there with yellow jackets who aren't in the College Football Hall of Fame.

I have so much respect for pavers. You know, like my parents, my elders, I have so much respect for elders, man. What they had to go through, what the football players before me endured and not making the same money — not even close — to be a paver, man. I'm walking in doing the interview and Jim Brown is walking out... like... I'm about to walk in that same room Jim Brown was in? Barry Sanders was in that room? I wore 20 because of Barry. That was my guy. You know

what I'm saying? I'm a representation of them, so that made me live a certain way.

**NJ:** The Ed Reed Foundation – among many other things – is building a park in your old neighborhood in Louisiana. Tell me about how the foundation was born.

**ER:** Through the foundation, we work with underprivileged kids. Me and my advisor Brad started the foundation in Baltimore. At first, we were going to the grocery store filling up baskets for Thanksgiving and bringing it over to Booker T. Washington, which is a real hard school in Baltimore. I was just trying to show people someone cares and trying to motivate them. I'm from New Orleans and New Orleans to me seemed like they have the same things going on. And in Miami, in the inner cities, the same stuff.

**NJ:** Where did you develop that desire to give back?

**ER:** I'm from those environments, so it's easy for me to do. I also worked with kids as a counselor when I was 16 at the community center in my neighborhood. My mentor is a man named Ben Parquet. Now he's 80 years old, but when I was visiting home from the University of Miami, he would come get me and we'd take rides to junior high schools, talk to kids who were great athletes but getting bad grades. They were on that path that I used to be on, but with his mentorship and without me even knowing it, I just became him to some degree. Half of him, a piece of him. A piece of Ben Parquet is a lot because that man is an extraordinary person.

He's still a mentor. I had people like that in my life. And when I was at the University of Miami, we had stuff we had to do in the community. I used to go over to the elderly home and just sit with them by myself, you know. I'm the only kid in there and they haven't seen their kids or anybody in years. And I'm in there just having conversations with old people. So I was just being groomed for it by so many people.

**NJ:** I understand you have some serious golf aspirations.

**ER:** My dream, my ambition is to play on the senior tour at 45 or 50. I'm 40 now.

**JO:** You gotta give me strokes. I'm older than you.

**ER:** Man. Nobody gets strokes with me. We're just going to play golf. If we're not betting, you don't get strokes.

**JO:** What do you usually play for?

**ER:** I don't play for anything really. Unless I'm with people who bet ...



This piece by Louisiana artist Terrance Osborne depicts Ed Reed against a backdrop that includes a tobacco field and homes typical of New Orleans, Miami and Baltimore.

**JO:** I know Michael Jordan bets.

**ER:** That's crazy, right? So I met Michael Jordan at a golf course here in Florida and I'm walking up and he's on the cart coming towards me and he's like, "What's up young fella?" I'm like, "What's up, Mike?" He asks me my handicap. It was high, like 15. He was like, "You can play behind us." I was like, say no more. 'Cause they were bettin'.

**NJ:** You have a stake in a pretty cool new concept that's coming to Maryland and involves cigars, right?

**ER:** So we're calling the place Guntry Club. It's a high-tech gun range with a cigar lounge where my partners gave me a lot of leeway to do what I want to do as far as the cigars in there. That part is still coming together. We're building the place out and hopefully it'll be done by the fall. It's in Orange Mills in Baltimore. We'll also have a simulator that will enable us to prepare police for active shooters. We'll be able to come in, create a model of your space and show you how to handle that scenario.

**NJ:** Wow, so this is serious stuff. Sounds really cool.

**ER:** It's serious stuff, man. Plus we've got a hundred-yard ranges for rifle shooters. All of this at the Guntry Club. Plus cigars, a lounge, food. We're looking to advance it to a full restaurant, but it's finger food for now. We can also do different things where you can have parties, shoot zombies. It'll be almost like a gaming center for

growups when it comes to what we can do.

**NJ:** All right, let's get back into cigars – but this time, I want to talk about the fact that it looks to anyone who follows you online like you have plans to get deeper into it than just smoking. So for a while now, you've been toying with the idea of creating a cigar brand. When did you start to think you might want to be more than just a smoker?

**ER:** After football, really. Cigars were big when I started. As I got older in the league, no doubt about it. And I knew I'd be smoking cigars after I was done playing. I was sitting at my house in Atlanta in the backyard and just looking at the trees, man. I'm back there smoking cigars thinking, "You've been doing this for a minute and you have a bunch of athletes and entertainers that you've seen put out cigars." It hit me, too, though, that, "I know you're not gonna do it like a sports guy or an entertainer because I'm not into cigars like that."

**NJ:** How do you mean?

**ER:** I don't want you to see me and be like, "The cigar industry is different than football." And I don't want you to see football. I felt like anything I'd done on the football field or anything I was going to do after football would come because of who I was from the football field. And that's why the portrait Terrance Osborne did of me [which will likely be used in future branding] is the way it is.

You know, I was just really intrigued by how much happens before you get a cigar. The details that go into it. You know, it started to remind me of football, of studying. It started to remind me of the training and of the love, the passion that goes into what you do.

**NJ:** I'm using a cheesy metaphor, but everybody sees that pick six and enjoys it. And then there's all this stuff behind the scenes that nobody sees that built up to that one moment. It has some things in common with the fact that people enjoy cigars and sometimes don't realize just how much goes into creating that one- or two-hour smoking experience.

**ER:** They don't see the work, man. They don't see the true work that goes into it. And also just knowing the history of it – how cigars came to the world.

I wanted to do something different when I got into the cigar industry. I wanted people to know me. I want you to know me outside of football. And I didn't want my cigar to say "football." I didn't want to just get with a company and not be



the person who researched it, who, who knew how to give you some etiquette about what I was doing. Because there's etiquette to everything. There's etiquette to football. So I want you to know me outside of football and I want you to know football, but I want you to know the story of how I got here. That maturation took me from Louisiana to Miami to Baltimore – becoming the person that I am.

But I knew whatever I was going to do after football was going to come from football. So it's hard not to put it in there, but once you start the research, the history of cigars and you start to see

these old painting-looking labels ... that brought me to this artwork, which I got from a picture they sent me from Plasencia.

So there's a hawk in there since people call me the Ball Hawk. I don't even go for "GOAT." Don't call me the GOAT because there's no GOAT in football. Football's the ultimate team sport. It can't be one guy. That's also why you can't see my face in the picture. And then you see the homes, these homes right here are from Louisiana, Baltimore and Miami.

**NJ:** So what did it look like when you first

got to know the cigar making process up close?

**ER:** I went to the Dominican Republic to visit La Aurora and Guillermo Leon, who is like an uncle to me, and the family over there are great people. The way they run things is awesome. That was the first factory I visited. I was blown away. Yeah, I mean I was totally blown away on the operations. I got the tour and they told me so much about the process and the right way to enjoy the cigars.

We put together a blend while I was there. It's a blend I put together with a lot of guidance from their master blender, Manuel Inoa. You know, asking him what he thinks the wrappers should be and stuff like that. He might tell me, "You got a lot of viso, you have a lot of seco," he's telling me stuff like that, you know, so I'm just like, I'm going off smell, so whatever it is, just blend it and let me know when it comes to.

**NJ:** So is there going to be an Ed Reed cigar? What is the situation there?

**ER:** Like everything in the tobacco industry, it takes time, I think, to put out a great product. It took time for me to get to the Super Bowl. You know, it's not an overnight process to even smoke a cigar. You gotta just spend some time with it when you first get it, you know? A little cigar foreplay.

**NJ:** This interview just got super sexy.

**ER:** But that's the truth. You know, there's gotta be some foreplay before you really, you know, um, do things right. I know I sound like Barry White right now. But, really, man, it's taking time. You know, I was in conversation with Guillermo and all of them and I had the blend that I wanted, but because of FDA stuff, you know, relationships that they already had, they already had a vision. So I'm just looking for the right partner.

I want smokers to know that I'm not just an athlete doing the cigar, putting my name on something that somebody blended for me. I want them to know that I have respect for what cigar makers do.

You know, I'm a people person. I love being around people. I like just going to cigar bars. Even if I never made a cigar from this day forward. And I said it before, you're still gonna see me in the cigar lounge having conversation. You'll still catch me, you know, talking to guys like yourself or on the golf course with Erik Calviño, just smoking cigars and enjoying each other. Man. And that's what cigars allow you to do. You know, really sit back and enjoy yourself because you don't really want to be on the move smoking a cigar. You want to sit down and enjoy it. ★