Antowain Smith’s delayed start to his productive playing career in the National Football League was kick-started at East Mississippi Community College. While not having played prep football until his senior year at Stanhope Elmore High School in Millbrook, Ala., Smith turned down scholarship offers to attend college in order to care for his ailing grandparents, John and Clara Smith. For three years after his high school graduation, the devoted grandson worked a factory job dyeing clothes to help pay for his grandparents’ medical bills. Following his grandmother’s death, Smith came true on his promise of returning to school by joining EMCC’s football team in 1993. Smith blossomed as a sophomore running back for head coach Tom Goode’s Lions, finishing third in the state with 1,013 rushing yards on 150 carries to earn NJCAA All-American honorable mention honors as the Region 23 Most Valuable Offensive Back. Smith then transferred to the University of Houston, where he rushed for 1,847 career yards and 19 touchdowns on 354 carries in 21 games played. The 6-foot-2, 235-pound feature back gained the attention of NFL scouts as a senior by claiming Conference USA Offensive Player of the Year accolades after ranking 18th nationally with 1,239 rushing yards on 202 attempts, including a school-record 14 touchdowns on the ground. As a consensus Conference USA First Team selection in 1996, Smith also earned honorable mention All-American recognition by the Football News publication. Selected in the first round of the 1997 NFL Draft as the 23rd pick overall by the Buffalo Bills, Smith spent four seasons with the Bills before being signed by the New England Patriots in 2001. He made an immediate impact with the Pats by setting personal single-season marks with 1,157 rushing yards and 12 rushing touchdowns as a member of the Super Bowl XXXVI champions. Smith collected another Super Bowl ring two years later in his third and final season in New England. Completing his nine-year NFL career with one-year stints with the Tennessee Titans (2004) and New Orleans Saints (2005), Smith started 75 of 131 career games played, rushing for 6,881 yards and 54 touchdowns on 1,784 carries. He also had 136 career receptions for 982 yards and three scores.