



Packers' rookie crop proving its worth

Posted Jan. 02, 2010 @ 4:27 p.m. ET
By Dan Arkush

Give Ted Thompson five.

The Packer GM's fifth draft in Green Bay might not be as bountiful as his 2006 crop, which produced five starters — ILB **A.J. Hawk** (first round), OLG **Darryn Colledge** (second), WR **Greg Jennings** (second), C **Jason Spitz** (third; on injured reserve) and DLE **Johnny Jolly** (sixth) — as well as the team's primary return specialist when healthy (**Will Blackmon**; fourth; on I.R.).

But it's definitely the second-best crop, featuring a host of newcomers who have made their presence felt — from top to bottom.

It's unlikely there's any team in the playoffs on which youth will be served like it will for the Packers, with seven of their eight '09 picks figuring in the postseason mix in varying degrees.

Let's start with the designated starters in the group — OLBs **Clay Matthews**, who has played well enough to warrant serious consideration for Defensive Rookie of the Year honors, and **Brad Jones**, who has more than held his own since replacing the injured **Aaron Kampman** on the left side.

Thompson obviously saw something special in Matthews, trading up in a draft for the first time to snag him late in the first round, and the USC product with the long blond locks has turned out to be better than any of our sources could have imagined.

As for Jones, while he has adequately filled in for Kampman and shown some pass-rush skills, the verdict remains out as to whether the seventh-round pick has what it takes to be a solid long-term starter at the pro level.

As it is, veteran **Brady Poppinga** has been gradually taking more snaps at left outside linebacker and could very well end up splitting time with Jones in the playoffs.

Two other '09 rookies could end up in what amount to starting roles in the playoffs — fifth-round FB **Quinn Johnson**, a better pure blocker than either **John Kuhn** or **Korey Hall**, and first-rounder **B.J. Raji**, who might have to step in at a moment's notice for gimpy NT **Ryan Pickett** (hamstring).

In addition, sixth-rounder **Brandon Underwood** is likely to be entrusted with filling the all-important "dime" DB role against pass-happy offenses, while fourth-rounder **T.J. Lang** and sixth-rounder **Jarius Wynn** will be at the ready in reserve roles on the offensive and defensive lines, respectively.

 Comments (0)

Login!

Member Name:

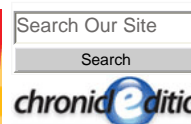
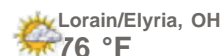
Password:



[Not Registered?](#)

or Register!

No comments yet



HOME NEWS SPORTS OBITUARIES LIFESTYLE CLASSIFIED SUBSCRIBE PIX & FLIX NEWSPAPERS IN EDUCATION CONTACT



US

Browns notes: Mangini defends use of QBs



Filed by **Scott Petrak** January 5th, 2010 in **Sports**.

[Print this story](#)

[Read comments and discuss this story](#)

BEREA — Coach Eric Mangini received a lot of criticism for his handling of the quarterbacks this year.

He split starting repetitions between Derek Anderson and Brady Quinn in training camp and the preseason, and neither found a groove. He gave Quinn the season-opening start, then benched him after 10 quarters. He went back to Quinn after eight games.

Would he change the way he handled things?

"Umm, no, I wouldn't have," Mangini said Monday. "There were two players that both had really strong arguments to start. I wanted to set up a situation that was fair to both guys. I don't think there's anything wrong with creating an opportunity for two really good players to make their case to start at quarterback for this team.

"I think both of 'em grew, I think both of them learned, I think both of them had to play throughout the season. It was designed to set up an equal opportunity for two guys who deserved an equal opportunity."

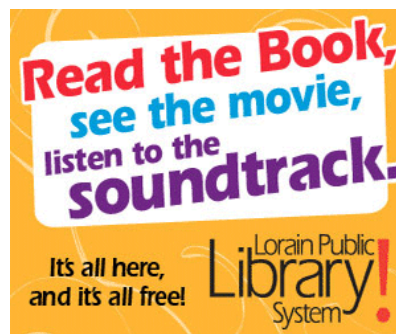
Quinn went 2-7 as the starter, completing 53 percent of his passes with eight touchdowns, seven interceptions, 19 sacks and a 67.2 rating. He missed the last two games after hurting his foot and heading to injured reserve.

Anderson went 3-4 as the starter, completing 45 percent with three touchdowns, 10 interceptions, 11 sacks and a 42.1 rating.

At the end of the 2008 season, coach Romeo Crennel named Quinn the starter for 2009, even though Crennel wasn't expected to return. Mangini wouldn't go down that road.

"That's the great thing about Mike Holmgren coming in," he said of the new president. "He knows a lot about quarterbacks and he'll give a lot of insight on that and I'll be excited to listen to his thoughts on it."

Holmgren prefers the West Coast offense and may determine he needs to look outside the roster for a starter.



Not done yet

Offensive lineman Hank Fraley knows his future is uncertain following his 10th season, but he's not ready to retire.

"I hope I'm not hanging it up yet," he said as players cleaned out their lockers. "I feel good, my body has held up great. I definitely want to be back here next year as a Brown. If it doesn't work out, hopefully there's 31 other teams watching that film and know what I can bring to the table.

"I'm not ready to give up or get into coaching."

Fraley was a starting center for eight straight NFL seasons before being replaced by rookie Alex Mack this year. Fraley saw time at right guard and as an extra tight end, starting four games. He soaked in the atmosphere Sunday at Cleveland Browns Stadium.

"I was just relishing the moment, enjoying being a Brown and the way we finished the season," he said.

Lucky No. 7

The Browns will draft seventh in April. They tied Seattle and Oakland at 5-11 and had the middle strength of schedule of the three. Seattle has the sixth pick and Oakland No. 8.

The Browns had the fifth choice last year, but traded down three times until picking Mack 21st. They also had a top-10 pick in seven of the last 10 years.

Early draft needs are cornerback, safety, right tackle, tight end and running back.

Building for future

Rookie receiver Brian Robiskie missed the finale with a high ankle sprain and finished with seven catches for 106 yards in 11 games. Those aren't the numbers expected from the 36th pick in the draft.

"It was definitely frustrating at times, not playing as much as you would hope, losing, it was definitely hard," he said. "If I was playing, if I wasn't playing, there was a lot of stuff going on, but I knew I was going to be able to learn a lot and I did that. Hopefully I can apply it for next year."

Robiskie said the adjustment to the NFL goes beyond the field.

"It was not strictly X's and O's," he said. "It was a lot of the NFL, being a rookie, getting adjusted to a new level and a new game."

Vickers excited

Fullback Lawrence Vickers is one of several key players set to become free agents. The unsettled status of the collective-bargaining agreement will determine if he's restricted or unrestricted, but either way other teams will have a shot at him.

"It's exciting and scary. It's both," he said. "Hopefully it unfolds like I want it to, I'll get the deal I've been waiting for."

"Everything don't always happen the way you want it, so I'll just have to sit back and wait."

Vickers finished with a flourish, as the Browns turned to the running game and used him much more. He helped Jerome Harrison rush for 561 yards over the final three games.

"We figured out what kind of team we wanted to be, a runoriented team," Vickers said. "It was awesome to put it on my back and awesome for me to handle the situation."

Vickers, a sixth-round pick in 2006, hopes to return to Cleveland.

"Absolutely, absolutely. Especially if they're going to sign that check," he said. "I love Cleveland. I love the fans mostly. I love the Dawg Pound."

Harrison, safeties Brodney Pool and Abram Elam and linebackers D'Qwell Jackson and Matt Roth are also scheduled to hit free agency in March.

Tough year

Defensive end Corey Williams described this season as the worst of his six-year career. He started only two games, played sparingly and finished with 31 tackles and four sacks.

"It was rough," he said. "But it is what it is. Had my ups, had my downs. The most important thing is I fought through it."

Williams signed a six-year, \$38.6 million deal after being acquired in a trade in 2008. He never completely made the conversion to the 3-4 scheme and would welcome a return to tackle in a 4-3 under Holmgren.

"I hope he does bring that here, I love it," Williams said. "I'll feel like I'm at home then."

Williams was limited to one play by a sore thigh Sunday.

"It acted up on me," he said. "I tried. I did everything I could to get out there and it wouldn't do it."

Extra points

- Players packed their belongings and cleared out their lockers. Many took helmets and jerseys around the locker room to get them autographed by their teammates.
- ESPN's John Clayton reported Seattle director of pro personnel Will Lewis will be a strong candidate for a front-office spot, possibly general manager.
- ESPN's Adam Schefter reported Crennel will become Kansas City's defensive coordinator under coach Todd Haley.

Contact Scott Petrak at 329-7253 or spetrak@chroniclet.com.

» [Print this story](#)
 » [Report an inappropriate comment](#)
[ShareThis](#)

In order to comment, you must agree to our [user agreement and discussion guidelines](#).
 You must be registered and logged in to post a comment. If you aren't already registered, [click here](#).
 If you are registered, [click here](#) to log in.
 Need help? [Email Us](#).

Leave a Reply

You must be [logged in](#) to post a comment.

7 Great Reasons To Choose The AbbeWood

Peace of Mind: Rest assured knowing we are here 24/7

Experience: Take advantage of our 23+ years of service excellence.

Independence: Enjoy freedom from home maintenance.

Fine Dining: Savor restaurant-style meals served daily.

(440) 366-8980

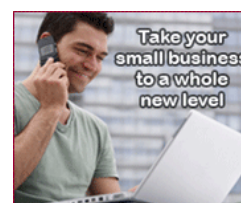


Independent
and Assisted
Living available

The ABBEWOOD
SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITY

1210 South Abbe Road
Elyria, Ohio 44035

www.abbewoodretirement.com



Advertise with us | [Subscribe](#)

Print - Online | [Contact Us](#) | [Job Openings](#) | [Terms of use](#) | [Join NorthcoastNOW.com](#) | [Login to NorthcoastNOW.com](#) | E-Edition
 Follow us on [Twitter](#) | [Become a Facebook Fan](#) | [Rss Feed](#) | Put our headlines on your web site | [Purchase Photos](#) | [Laminations & Reprints](#)

© 2010 Chronicle-Telegram.