



Notebook: Green Bay Packers shuffle LBs as Brad Jones return to practice

By Kareem Copeland •

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Green Bay Packers outside linebacker Brad Jones returned to the field on Thursday and found he had been moved to the right side and dropped to the second unit.

Additional information

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Jones opened training camp as the starting left outside linebacker before getting hit in the back by a helmet and missing five consecutive practices with a bruise.

In what may be a permanent change, starter Clay Matthews has spent the week at left outside linebacker with Brandon Chillar manning the right side. Brady Poppinga has lined up as the left outside linebacker with the second unit.

"We're not giving the job to Brad, we're not giving the job to Brandon," Packers coach Mike McCarthy said. "Availability is the No. 1 component to being on the field and Brad's had an issue with that last year and the beginning of this year.

"We've got healthy competition. We like the rotation, now that it's been created, with Brandon over there."

The move is a stark difference from an expected starting lineup of Nick Barnett and A.J. Hawk on the inside, Matthews on the right and Jones replacing Aaron Kampman on the left.

But Chillar is taking advantage of the opportunity and put together a strong evening practice, recording probable sacks in 3-of-6 plays during the blitz period. (Quarterbacks cannot be hit during practices.)

"You've got to compete for your job, always," Jones said. "Whatever the coaches want to do, I'm all for it. Obviously, they've been in the NFL longer than I have."

The coaching staff has tinkered with the linebackers all week, moving Matthews to the left side and Chillar to right outside linebacker from inside linebacker.

"It just gives you more flexibility in your defense," Capers said. "Those guys, for us, play every down. You want to watch guys both rush and drop from both sides.

"A lot of people in the league will flip those guys. We line them normally left and right because we think that over a period of time they get double the reps working on something from one side — then their technique improves."

Matthews and Jones admitted there's an adjustment switching sides of the field. Just about everything is opposite of what they are used to. Linebackers place their left foot forward when on the right side and their right in front on the left side. Also, their weight is distributed differently before the snap.

"Beyond all that, it's kind of seeing how plays develop," Matthews said. "You've got to learn how

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to set the edge against a tackle or tight end. Gotta learn how to rush the passer, kind of tilt your hips (differently).

"It's all relatively the same, but you've got to tip your brain upside down and take it from there. ... It shouldn't be too much of a problem for us to switch."

Big plays on defense

The morning session concluded with two 2-minute drives and a no-huddle possession — and the defense went 3-0.

Quarterback Aaron Rodgers drove the offense from its 35-yard line to the defense's 37 before throwing an interception. Cornerback Pat Lee and receiver James Jones got their hands on the ball nearly at the same time, but Lee wrestled the ball away as the pair hit the ground.

Quarterback Graham Harrell moved the unit from the 35 to the defense's 18 on the second possession before another interception ended the drive. Linebacker Robert Francois snagged the errant pass that was left floating in the air after a Poppinga deflection.

Quarterback Matt Flynn led the no-huddle possession, but that ended at the 8-yard line when practice time ran out.

Talking tackling

The Packers have placed an emphasis on tackling periods during training camp after a 2009 season in which coaches were disappointed in that area. The tricky part is there is no all-out tackling during practices.

So, how do you practice tackling without simulating game speed and force?

"In a way, it's a little bit of a lost art," Capers said. "Once the salary cap came in and you were really limited on players, you had to be careful in terms of tackling guys. You see we're trying to get as much as we can into those (padded) bags where we can follow through and finish. What I've seen happen to tackling drills, nobody finishes because they don't want to take the guy to the ground. So, we've got the pads here so we can come through and finish. You're being safe as far as injury.

"It's always driven me crazy when guys do tackling drills and guys just tag off, because that's not the way it happens. You've got to wrap, drive your legs, shoot your hips, follow through the techniques as close as they're going to be on Sunday."

Transactions

Receiver Jeff Moturi was placed on injured reserve with a knee injury. The Packers also signed receiver Jason Chery, General Manager Ted Thompson announced.

Chery (5-foot-10, 185 pounds) is a first-year player out of Louisiana-Lafayette. He signed as a undrafted free agent with Carolina in 2009 and spent time on the Panthers' and Steelers' practice squads.

Chery will wear No. 13.

Banged up

LB Frank Zombo limped off the field early in the morning session and had his ankle taped before returning for the rest of the workout. Afterward, he had a pronounced limp and had the left ankle taped from just below the knee to his toes.

Zombo did not practice during the evening session.

Safety Will Blackmon did not finish the evening practice because of pain stemming from offseason knee surgery. Blackmon has been on a one-a-day schedule and did not practice in the morning.

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Injury report

♦ Did not practice: S Atari Bigby, RB James Starks, CB Al Harris, WR Jeff Moturi.

♦ One-a-day: WR Brett Swain, CB Charles Woodson, S Will Blackmon, S Derrick Martin, LB Brandon Chillar, LB Nick Barnett, C Scott Wells, OT Mark Tauscher, OT Chad Clifton, DE Cullen Jenkins, DE Ryan Pickett, WR Donald Driver, TE Donald Lee, DE Ronald Talley.

Photo Galleries



Green Bay Packers training camp,
Thursday morning practice, Aug. 5, 2010



Green Bay Packers training camp,
Thursday evening, Aug. 5, 2010

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Let The Linebacker Competition Begin

Chillar Competes For Starting Spot

Updated: 11:15 am CDT August 6, 2010

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By Jason Wilde

ESPN Madison/Milwaukee

Special To Channel 3000

GREEN BAY, Wis. -- The Great Brandon Chillar Outside Linebacker Experiment is officially no longer a mere experiment. It's a full-fledged competition between Chillar and Brad Jones for a starting spot in the Green Bay Packers' defense.

It began with Chillar working at right outside linebacker with the No. 2 defense on Sunday night and garnered more attention when he worked in that spot with the No. 1 nickel unit on Monday and Tuesday. But on Thursday night, when Jones was back at practice and Chillar was still working with the No. 1 group, it became more than just an interesting storyline.

With Jones having missed five practices after suffering a bruised lower back during the first practice of camp, the coaches saw an opportunity to see what Chillar could do. Now, they've given themselves an interesting alternative.

"We're not giving the job to Brad; we're not giving it to Brandon," Packers coach Mike McCarthy said after the night practice Thursday. "Availability is the No. 1 component of being on the field, and Brad's had an issue with that the beginning of last year and the beginning of this year. So we've got a healthy competition. We like the rotation now that's been created with Brandon over there."

Jones, who missed the first half of camp last year with back problems, started eight games at left outside linebacker as a rookie seventh-round pick after veteran Aaron Kampman suffered a season-ending knee injury last November and had been working with the No. 1 defense on the left side throughout the offseason. Now, he's working on the right side with Chillar while Clay Matthews, who registered 10 sacks and went to the Pro Bowl as a rookie playing on the right side, moves to the left side.

"I don't know exactly what the coaches are doing. But I'm excited to play the right side if I get a chance to. Clay had all of those sacks on that side, so, hey, maybe I can," Jones said. "I don't know exactly what's going on with everything. But you've got to compete for your job always. It's the NFL. It's the best players in the world. I'm going to have to compete for a spot if I was anywhere on the team."

After having the morning off with the other veterans with seven or more years of experience, Chillar came on strong in practice Thursday night. He had several blitzes that would have been sacks during an 11-on-11 blitz drill and also looked good in the pass-rush sessions.

“I think I can do it. I think I can do anything, play anywhere,” Chillar said of moving outside after playing inside for most of his career – save for some passing situations in St. Louis. “I can pick it up.”

Greene certainly thinks so.

“He can do anything. Remember last year, he played strong safety, remember that?” Greene said, referring to when Chillar played safety in the team’s “Big Okie” package on obvious run downs. “When you’ve got a guy that athletic, you can put him at strong safety, you can line him up at corner. Our outside ’backers have to do everything, so Brandon’s that kind of guy.”

One challenge, though, according to defensive coordinator Dom Capers, is making sure both Chillar and Matthews get enough work together to get the defensive calls straight since Matthews is playing on the opposite side and Chillar is playing a new position.

But, as Capers pointed out, when the Packers opened camp a year ago in the first year of Capers’ 3-4 scheme, Brady Poppinga and Kampman were starting on the outside.

“I liked what I saw,” Capers said. “The one thing about it is they’ve got a much better feel of all of the calls, I think. I just think it’s real important now in training camp for them to get as many repetitions as they can. You think this time last year, the two guys who ended up starting the second half of the season for us (Matthews and Jones) weren’t even practicing because Clay had a hamstring and Brad didn’t get on the practice field until about three weeks (in). They missed a lot of time in training camp.”

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