



## Smart money's on Strickland making plays

By [Kevin Acee](#), UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

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John R. McCutchen / Union-Tribune

Donald Strickland (left) pursues Josh Reed in a training camp drill.

Donald Strickland's signing bonus from the Chargers this past offseason won't even cover the cost of the cornerback's pending patent.

It cannot be verified that he is the only player about whom the previous sentence could be written, but it's a safe bet.

Same with the following:

Strickland's mechanical engineering degree has fostered his ideas for business, but a desire to actually know how to run one drove him to take accelerated business courses over consecutive offseasons at Penn, Harvard, Stanford and Northwestern.

"You're always one injury away from not being able to play," Strickland said.

This is not a cliché when it comes from Strickland's mouth.

"I have definitely experienced a lot of injuries," said Strickland, who has yet to play a full schedule in eight NFL seasons. "That's why I made (education) a point of emphasis in case I can't continue to live this dream."

While Strickland built up quite a list of contacts while playing in four cities before signing here in March, most of his current teammates have no idea about his impressive degree, patent ideas and his company's plans for an interactive memento experience he can market to, among others, universities for their halls of fame.

What the Chargers do know is he can cover in the middle of the field, so far seemingly as well as anyone has here in several seasons.

"You can tell he's sharp — talking to him and the way he plays," quarterback Philip Rivers said.

Strickland made a couple of big plays against the Chargers in January as a member of the New York Jets, including doing what few defensive backs had been able to do all season — win a battle for a ball with Malcom Floyd.

But, as has become his pattern, Strickland also missed time during the 2009 season with injuries — a high ankle sprain, concussion and thigh bruise.

A third-round draft pick of Indianapolis in 2003, Strickland was released by the Colts in the middle of the 2005 season and played part of that year with the Philadelphia Eagles and then three seasons in San Francisco before joining the Jets in '09.

That's a lot of moving around, something valuable players usually don't do. His limitations as a corner and, moreover, his injury history (including multiple shoulder surgeries) explain his transiency.

But the fact that he is still in the league, at 5-10, 185 pounds and with a penchant for being injured, says something.

"He's got to be doing something right to be sticking around," cornerback Quentin Jammer said. Already, what that is has been on display.

"He's just a smart player," Rivers said. "... He's terrific in disguising stuff. It's one thing to disguise and it really doesn't look like anything I've read before. But it's another thing where you disguise and it all looks the same. It's like, 'Man, I can't figure this guy out.'"

It is not coincidence that much of this camp, while trading almost from series to series the upper hand with the offense, the Chargers' pass defense has looked tighter than it has in some time. The players and coaches who are here are getting on the same page, the players more familiar with what they're being asked and more compliant.

But also, the new guy playing nickel has a hand, foot and mind in the middle of breaking up a lot of passes.

Signed by the Chargers for a paltry \$15,000 signing bonus a week after being released by the Jets, Strickland is a true nickel back. Most nickels also play corner, and Strickland could play outside in an

emergency. But he was signed to be the guy the Chargers line up opposite the inside (slot) receiver.

Playing nickel requires a discipline, knowledge and technique that is more complicated than for a cornerback. This largely has to do with the fact that an inside receiver can run either way without consideration of the sideline, but it also has to do with the necessity for a nickel to read run or pass and act accordingly.

“It’s a corner and safety all in one,” Strickland said.

“I think it’s the hardest position to play,” Jammer said.

Being counted on to play the nickel, allowing Steve Gregory to move back to his natural position of safety, the Chargers will hope Strickland can stay healthy.

Strickland said he has changed the way he’s played in an effort to stay on the field.

“I know what I’m capable of,” Strickland said. “I’ve learned over the years how to maintain my body. I’m a big hitter. With my size, the law of physics, it just doesn’t add up. Now I’m being smarter. I don’t look for the big hit. I just look to get them down and live to play another day.”

That’s probably smart.

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## Green Bay Packers kicker Mason Crosby shows strong leg

BY KAREEM COPELAND • KCOPELAND@GREENBAYPRESSGAZETTE.COM • AUGUST 7, 2010

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The Green Bay Packers held their Family Night scrimmage on Saturday night and Mason Crosby was one of the stars of the evening.

There couldn't have been a better setting for him to have his best performance of training camp.

Many fans have been questioning whether Crosby can be the kicker of the future after connecting on just 75 percent of his attempts in 2009. Coach Mike McCarthy has backed the four-year veteran by not bringing in another kicker as competition.

Regardless, going 7-for-8 in front of an announced crowd of 47,844 was significant in terms of fan confidence.

"It's a scrimmage, but it's Lambeau ... and it's a game-like situation," Crosby said. "We've got to perform. That's what people want to see. It was good to come out here and hit the ball well and see the operation is getting as sharp as it needs to be.

"It's always good that first time back in the stadium."

Crosby connected on field goals of 26, 31, 36, 41, 47, 51 and 53 yards. The lone miss came from 44 yards. Crosby said the 53-yarder was the longest field goal he has made in training camp. He entered the night 19-for-27.

"The ball came off his foot very well tonight," McCarthy said. "Even on the kickoffs. We had to slow him up a little just so we could get the returns. He's a very strong, gifted kicker."

Punters Tim Masthay and Chris Bryan split time as the holder, taking four attempts each. Bryan was the holder on the lone miss.

"It's nice we can mold and work together so it gets perfect for all of us," Crosby said. "I said it early in camp, we have to earn that trust and work on it and make sure that operation is flawless.

**Additional information**  
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### Green Bay Packers Family Night scrimmage analysis (02:35)

The cornerbacks and punters were among things that caught Rob Demovsky's attention in his analysis of Saturday's scrimmage.

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Green Bay Packers receiver Jordy Nelson (87) makes a catch in between cornerback Pat Lee (22) and safety Charlie Peprah (46) during the Packers Family Night scrimmage Saturday night at Lambeau Field. Nelson left the scrimmage after sustaining a bruise to his side. Evan Siegle/Press-Gazette

### INJURY REPORT

♦ Did not participate: S Atari Bigby, CB Charles Woodson, S Will Blackmon, CB Al Harris, RB James Starks, LB Frank Zombo, LB Brady Poppinga, LB Nick Barnett, WR Donald Driver, DE Ronald Talley.

### Photo Galleries

- 📷 Packers Family Night Scrimmage: Saturday, Aug. 7, 2010
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"Tonight was as close as we've been. We just have to keep sharpening it up."

### Banged Up

The Packers were hit with three new injuries during the scrimmage. Receiver Jordy Nelson made a spectacular catch between two defenders for a 27-yard gain off an Aaron Rodgers pass. Safety Charlie Peprah leveled Nelson as soon as he caught the ball. Nelson immediately left the field and never returned. He had the wind knocked out of him and sustained a bruise to his side.

Linebacker Clay Matthews tweaked his hamstring and receiver Brett Swain left with a knee sprain. Matthews missed time during the early portion of camp last year with a hamstring problem.

"You want to come out of this controlled scrimmage healthy, there's no doubt about it," McCarthy said. "But at some point, you're going to be in live action. And this is our first opportunity to get in front of a live crowd. This is the first opportunity to have live action and work through fundamentals, blocking, tackling, handling the football, and that's very important."

### Family Night Rookie

B.J. Raji, the No. 9 overall selection in the 2009 draft, participated in his first Family Night scrimmage. Last year, Raji was in the midst of a holdout (also, the scrimmage was canceled when threatening weather hit the area).

"It's everything I thought it would be," Raji said. "I got off at (U.S.) 41 and I saw people out there like it was game day."

"People are always excited when you talk about football. We have thousands of people coming out to practice every day."

### No Pain

Outside linebacker Brad Jones said he felt no pain during the scrimmage after missing five practices with a back bruise sustained on the first day of training camp. He tied linebacker Alex Joseph and linebacker A.J. Hawk for the second-most tackles of the night.

"I have to go back and watch the film to really know how good of a day I had," Jones said. "but I was just trying to play hard and make plays. Obviously, I'm more critical of myself than you guys probably are. But I think I did all right."

"The back felt good. Everything felt good. It was a good day."

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Notes

# Packers' Crosby gets off on right foot

## He converts first four kicks before missing from 44

By [Greg A. Bedard](#) of the Journal Sentinel

Aug. 7, 2010 | [\(12\) Comments](#)

**Green Bay** —**Mason Crosby** just may be OK after all.

Kicking in front of 47,844 fans worried about his place on the team and ready to voice their displeasure at the first sign of weakness, the Green Bay Packers' kicker showed some of his old form in making seven of eight kicks during the team's intrasquad scrimmage.

"I think Mason kicked the ball very well," coach **Mike McCarthy** said. "He had the one miss, but there was pressure off the right side. He's a very strong, gifted kicker."

After struggling down the stretch last season and starting camp by making just six of his first 11 kicks (54.5%) Crosby looked fairly solid in the first pseudo-pressure conditions of camp.

"Tonight, yeah, was definitely a good night to get started and moving in the right direction," he said.

Crosby made his first four kicks before missing from 44 yards with a questionable hold from punter **Chris Bryan**.

Crosby has had some trouble with the holds from the two punters, both of whom don't have much experience doing it. Crosby seems most uncomfortable with the holds of Bryan, the former Australian Rules Football player with no American football experience.

"It looked just a little off, but we'll correct it and move on," Crosby said. "He put it down perfect on the next one and drilled it through. Probably the most important thing is making sure we correct it on the fly because in the game you don't have the luxury of looking at film and then correcting it after that."

**Matthews, Bell banged up:** McCarthy, already unhappy with the amount of injuries on his team, saw linebacker **Clay Matthews** and cornerback **Josh Bell** leave with injuries that could keep them out of practice.

Matthews tweaked his hamstring. McCarthy did not know the severity. The Packers are already missing **Brady Poppinga** (concussion) and **Frank Zombo** (ankle) on the outside.

Bell left with a right foot injury and was on crutches. He said X-rays were negative, but he'll have an MRI today.

**Jordy Nelson** made a sensational catch in traffic after 27 yards but took a hard hit from safety **Charlie Peprah** and was shaken up.

The Packers said Nelson had the wind knocked out of him and was icing his side as a precaution.

**Brett Swain**, who is attempting to return from ACL surgery, said he'll be OK after having a scare. While holding a block on kickoff return, Swain was rolled up from behind by cornerback **D.J. Clark**.

"They checked it on the field and they said everything looked strong still and it was kind of a relief to hear that," said Swain, who initially thought he had reinjured the knee. "I was pretty upset and scared. I let me emotions take over a little bit."

**Woodson, Driver held out:** McCarthy gave the most senior players on the team, cornerback **Charles Woodson** and receiver **Donald Driver**, the evening off.

**Will Blackmon** (knee) and end **Ronald Talley** (knee) were also held out.

"(**Pat McKenzie**) thinks Will is going to be fine," McCarthy said. "This is kind of a normal protocol that particularly a skill position that's a returner, a safety and a corner, the pounding of being on it every day for those long practices, we just have to be smart with him."

**Happy return:** Running back **Brandon Jackson** opened some eyes when he returned a kickoff 95 yards for a touchdown and showed some good speed in the process.

"Brandon knows how the kickoff return needs to be run," McCarthy said. "It's a little change of philosophy than we've done in the past, and he demonstrated tonight that he can do it the right way. He'll definitely have an opportunity for that."

Though not on special teams, aspiring punt returner **Sam Shields** showed why the Packers are looking at him on punt returns with his sensational 98-yard interception return. Shields showed his 4.2 speed running from one side of the field to the other.

However, Shields has had trouble catching punts in practice.

**Punters solid:** The punting competition between Bryan and **Tim Masthay** continued to be close. On five kicks, Bryan had a 50.4 average, Masthay a 47.0.

"I thought they did very well," McCarthy said. "We wanted to try to create as close as we possibly can to a true game atmosphere, put pressure on them from the four areas on the field, and I thought they handled it very well."

"It's going to be a very good competition. They're both very talented."

**Host with the most:** Wide receiver **James Jones** invited eight kids from the Milwaukee Rescue Mission to the scrimmage.

Jones, who was homeless for part of his childhood, arranged for his guests to be picked up and brought

to Lambeau Field for the evening. The Milwaukee Rescue Mission has been a frequent recipient of Jones' support.

*Tom Silverstein and Bob McGinn of the Journal Sentinel staff contributed to this report.*

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