



Notes

Linebacker Jones to play bigger role

Could line up on outside, opposite Matthews

By [Bob McGinn](#) of the Journal Sentinel

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Green Bay - By the end of the season **Brad Jones** was playing better than the Green Bay Packers' five other outside linebackers with the exception of **Clay Matthews**.

His coach, **Mike McCarthy**, views Jones as an important contributor next year.

"He's a good football player; he really is," said McCarthy. "Very instinctive. Tough. Outstanding on special teams. Special teams says a lot about a guy's heart and instincts."

Jones, a seventh-round draft choice from Colorado in 2009, and **Jamari Lattimore**, a rookie free agent from Middle Tennessee State, will be looking at expanded roles in 2012. The Packers intend to play them at inside as well as outside linebacker.

"I haven't had a chance to talk to them about it, but their position coaches have," McCarthy said. "We definitely feel we have some flexibility there."

Jones played 58 snaps in the first 14 games but then received 86 snaps in the last two games and the divisional playoff. The Packers became disenchanted with **Erik Walden** at right outside linebacker and, with **Frank Zombo** in and out because of injury and **Vic So'oto** and Lattimore feeling their way, the call went to Jones.

He didn't disappoint, registering one of the team's two sacks against Detroit and the only one against the Giants.

Lattimore, who played 29 snaps in 17 games, will be asked to increase his weight from the low 230s. Still, McCarthy doesn't want to fall into the same trap that the Packers did two years when they asked the 242-pound Jones to add bulk.

"We were trying to get Brad to swell up and be that traditional outside linebacker, but that's not what Brad is," McCarthy said. "He can play that position, but in a limited role. To ask him to go compete with tackles for 70, 75 plays, it's not in his best interests."

"At the end of the year we played both him and Erik. We put them on rep counts and Brad played extremely well. He's just not a 260-pound man."

"I think we can move Brad to all four linebacker locations and get more utilization out of him. The way he slithers, he's an awkward guy to handle. Now he will have the ability to train again as an outside rusher."

McCarthy said he'd like to at least add one more outside linebacker. If the Packers don't acquire a starting-caliber rookie or veteran, look for Jones to get first crack at the job opposite Matthews.

Making amends

Despite a 32nd-place finish in defense, there was never a doubt in McCarthy's mind that he would bring back **Dom Capers** and his six defensive assistants.

"Making staff changes, to me, was not an option," said McCarthy. "I thought the best way was to improve the people we already have there, both players and coaches."

As McCarthy assessed the problems on defense, he made it clear that his tone of voice and demeanor was different in post-season meetings.

"Trust me, this conversation ain't nothing compared to what we've had," he said. "I'll tell you what. There's a lot of urgency in our defensive staff right now. Rightfully so."

"We were 15-1. We did everything we planned on doing. We positioned ourselves to make a run, and we didn't get it done. It's not all on the defense, either."

"They're good football coaches. That's why we're going to stay the course. We're going to go as a staff and get better."

Behind Rodgers

With **Matt Flynn** expected to depart via trade or free agency, the Packers will determine if **Graham Harrell** can move from No. 3 to No. 2 quarterback.

"I'm hopeful he can," McCarthy said. "I think he's got instincts and toughness. I want to take him to the quarterback school. I like his makeup."

McCarthy expressed interest in drafting a quarterback as well.

The third quarterback on the roster is southpaw **Nick Hill**, 6 feet 2 ½ inches and 215 pounds. He played in the Arena Football League in 2010-'11.

After playing basketball on scholarship at Western Kentucky in 2003, Hill transferred to Southern Illinois and played three seasons. He completed 68.3% and had an NFL passer rating of 115.1 in 31 games (27 starts). He ran 40 yards in 4.78 seconds and scored 25 on the 50-question Wonderlic intelligence test.

Failing to get drafted, Hill spent the off-season with the Chicago Bears before being waived July 30, 2008. That was his only previous NFL contract.

Hill's three-year, \$1.44 million contract with Green Bay has no bonus.

New deal

One of the pluses for the Packers regarding **Jermichael Finley's** new two-year, \$14 million contract is the fact he should remain motivated as he pursues a longer-term deal.

"From a business standpoint I understand why it came down to this, and I'm fine with it," said McCarthy. "He's 24. The way it was expressed to me, this is a bridge to the next one. I think it's good for Jermichael, where he is and his age. It's a very fair situation."

McCarthy said more than one person has inquired about Finley's eyes in lieu of his 13 dropped passes last season. McCarthy said all players have their eyes examined as part of their annual physicals.

Making plans

Just because the Packers haven't signed an unrestricted free agent since center-guard **Duke Preston** in March 2009 doesn't mean they're going to sit out again.

"Well, we'll see," said McCarthy. "We're talking about it. The personnel staff has distributed names to the coaches and we did reports on them."

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