



# Packers re-sign linebacker Brad Jones

## Ensures competition at inside position

By [Tyler Dume](#) of the Journal Sentinel

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**Green Bay** - The first wave of free agency was more of a ripple in Green Bay. Ted Thompson let other teams shop and spend.

But one order of business became clear Thursday. The Packers general manager wanted to keep all of his inside linebackers in house.

A position that could have been uprooted through free agency remains intact. First, Robert Francois re-signed on a one-year deal. Next, A.J. Hawk took a massive pay cut. And on Thursday, the team re-signed free-agent inside linebacker Brad Jones. Terms of the deal are unknown.

With everybody back, competition is expected at inside linebacker during training camp. That competition will certainly include the 6-foot-3, 242-pound Jones, who started the Packers' final 14 games (including playoffs), when Desmond Bishop (hamstring) and D.J. Smith (knee) were lost to season-ending injuries.

In the 6-foot-3, 242-pound Jones, the Packers retain a five-year veteran with experience both inside and outside. Thrown into a difficult situation last year, Jones finished with 77 tackles, two sacks, one forced fumble and four pass breakups.

Thus, entering a weak free agent class at his position, the versatile, smart Jones figured to be a hot commodity. One league source said that nine teams expressed interest in Jones. Six of those saw him competing to start next season, and of those six, four teams entered substantive contract discussions. Jones visited the Tennessee Titans last week and then met with the Packers at Lambeau Field on Wednesday for about an hour.

Jones, 26, likely sought starter's money. Or, in other words, there's a good chance Jones signed for as much - if not more - than the \$3.6 million per year Hawk is now making on his restructured deal.

That would certainly speak volumes, considering the Packers did not engage in any first-week bidding wars for Cullen Jenkins, Chris Canty or others elsewhere.

Drafted in the seventh round out of Colorado, Jones started seven games at outside linebacker as a rookie, totaling four sacks and 33 tackles. The following year, he suffered a season-ending shoulder injury. In 2011, Jones played primarily on special teams. And last season, Jones seemed to find a home at inside linebacker.

At this position, the Packers may be greenlighting more competition this summer. Plenty hinges on Bishop's

recovery from a torn hamstring.

At the NFL scouting combine, Bishop's agent said the linebacker's recovery was going well.

"He's been rehabbing daily, getting the strength back in his quads and his legs," agent Blake Baratz said then. "I think he's 85, 90%. I'd have to ask him, but he's getting there. He's getting there. I think he'll be fully cleared for all of the off-season stuff."

Restructuring Hawk's deal and bringing back Jones and Francois does give the Packers more peace of mind if Bishop and/or Smith are not the same players. Jones proved to be a quick study inside, and may benefit from another full summer at the position.

The Packers sorely missed Bishop's presence in 2012. Green Bay's run defense allowed 4.5 yards per rush (sixth-worst in the NFL) and fell apart at the finish line. Adrian Peterson ripped Green Bay for 298 rushing yards in back-to-back games before the San Francisco 49ers rolled up 323 yards and four touchdowns on the ground.

Hawk improved, yet failed to generate a turnover for a second straight season. Upon taking over next to Hawk, Jones played in 99% of the snaps, but wore down by January. In Bishop, Hawk, Jones, Smith, Francois, Terrell Manning and Jamari Lattimore, the Packers have options.

Manning's rookie year was stunted by a parasite in his stomach that caused colitis, the swelling of the large intestine. In year two, maybe he'll warrant a closer look.

This has been another tranquil March for Thompson. But the general manager has made it clear he's not taking any chances at inside linebacker.

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

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