

Lowly NFC North has diamonds in the rough

12 Packers finish first at their positions

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Chicago - Sometimes the best thing to do, no matter how painful it might be, is to admit the truth and move on.

"We all stink in this division this year," an executive in personnel for one of the four NFC North Division teams said last week.

One of his peers with another team in the division can't wait for the off-season so he doesn't have to scout any more NFC North games.

"I've got to admit it," the scout said. "I've never seen such bad football. If you watch the football being played in the NFC, it's awful. I don't know where all the players are. What the heck is going on?"

The woeful level of play in the NFC North was symptomatic of the entire National Football Conference. The NFC is merely 19-41 in games against the AFC this season with four games left. If the NFC goes 0-4 today for a 19-45 finish (29.7%), it would break the record of inter-conference futility set by the NFC in 1979, when it went 16-36 (30.8%) against the AFC.

Green Bay, which won the NFC North for the third consecutive season, was 1-3 against teams from the AFC South. Tennessee and Jacksonville pulled upsets at Lambeau Field, Indianapolis beat the Packers by two touchdowns and Houston lost to them on a last-second field goal.

"We used to get three teams in the playoffs every year," one division scout said. "Now we struggled to fill with a team that was 8-8."

Last week, at least one scout from all four teams in the NFC North agreed to select the 11th annual all-division team for the Journal Sentinel. Although the Packers overcame a 1-4 start to win eight of their last 10 games and catch fast-starting Minnesota for the second consecutive season, they were nowhere in the individual awards.

Almost always in the past the divisional coach of the year came from the team that won the division. This year, that honor went to Chicago's Lovie Smith despite a last-place finish, although one scout initially replied, "None of 'em," when asked for his selection.

Culpepper is the MVP

Vikings quarterback Daunte Culpepper was named most valuable player in the NFC North, breaking Packers quarterback Brett Favre's streak of three MVP awards in a row. Culpepper also was offensive player of the year and teammate Kevin Williams was defensive player of the year.

Clearly, a rash of injuries that wiped out most of their finest players eliminated any chance the Bears had to win the title. Detroit also received enormous setbacks when its best linebacker, Boss Bailey, didn't play a down because of a knee injury and wide receiver Charles Rogers was lost for the season in the opener with a broken collarbone.

"There were a lot of factors that took our division to its knees at times," another of the division scouts said. "I think the injuries dictated a lot of things. But I really don't believe it's a bad division, not in my evaluation of teams.

"I think Minnesota has an organization that's heading upward. Green Bay, because of the nature of their organization, is one that probably replenishes itself and stays on top. I think the Bears are well-coached by Lovie Smith and that he's a guy that knows how to win. And right now, Detroit knows (it's) in better shape than the year before because (the Lions) have a guy (Kevin Jones) that can carry the ball."

The common denominator in the NFC North was below average to terrible defenses. After 15 games, the rankings in overall defense were 17th for Chicago, 23rd for Detroit, 27th for Green Bay and 29th for Minnesota.

Green Bay and Minnesota were 1-2 mainly because of their prolific offenses (the Vikings rank third, the Packers rank fourth). However, the Lions were just 27th offensively and the Bears were 32nd.

The scouts were asked to rank the top three players in the division at each position. They were not permitted to vote for or even consider their own players, and none of the comments that follow in the position-by-position rundown was made by a scout about a player on his own team.

A first-place vote was worth three points, a second-place vote was worth two and a third-place vote was worth one. Thus, the maximum point total for any player was nine and the minimum was three.

Of the 22 starting positions, a total of 11 were unanimous choices. Six played for Green Bay, including tackle Chad Clifton, guard Mike Wahle, tight end Bubba Franks, fullback William Henderson, running back Ahman Green and safety Darren Sharper.

Again considering just the 22 starters, for the second year in a row the Packers had 12 players finish first at their position compared to six for Minnesota and Chicago and five for Detroit. Five of Green Bay's starters finished second at their positions, three were third and only two, center Grey Ruegamer and defensive end Aaron Kampman, finished fourth.

Point leaders

The Packers led the division in total composite points for the fourth year in a row and the eighth time in 11 years. They finished with 249 points, 10 fewer than the last two seasons. Detroit climbed from fourth last year with 207 points to second this year with 239, followed by Minnesota with 226 and Chicago with 222.

When the basic 22 starting positions were considered, the Packers were first with 156 points, followed by Minnesota with 129, Detroit with 126 and Chicago with 117.

Detroit led five categories of special teams with 38 points, followed by Chicago with 33, Minnesota with 26 and Green Bay with 23.

Because of widespread situational substitution, a total of 14 categories for backup players were used again this year. The Lions had the most points among the backups with 75 followed by the Bears with 72, the Vikings with 71 and the Packers with 70.

Based on total points by position, the Packers' offensive line, running backs, linebackers and secondary ranked first among the four teams; their receivers (wide receivers and tight ends) ranked second; their quarterbacks were third; and their defensive line was fourth.

To complete their ballot, scouts were asked to vote for one individual in 11 special categories.

Larry Beightol, the Packers offensive line coach since 1999, finished in a four-way tie for position coach of the year. It marked the fourth year in a row that he has won or shared the award.

Here is the All-NFC North Division team as picked by division scouts for the Journal Sentinel (unanimous picks are denoted by asterisk):

OFFENSE

NO. 1 WIDE RECEIVER: * Randy Moss (Min.), 9 points. Others: Javon Walker (GB), 7; David Terrell (Chi.) and Roy Williams (Det.), 4.

Comments: A midseason hamstring injury stopped Moss from making a reception for five games but he still was a unanimous choice over an improving Walker. "(Walker) had such a great year but I'll still go with Moss," one scout said despite Walker's wide margin in yards, 1,300 to 701. Williams was extraordinary in the first month before suffering an ankle injury in Week 4 that affected him the rest of the season. One scout still described him as a "dominant receiver."

LEFT TACKLE: * Chad Clifton (GB), 9. Others: Jeff Backus (Det.), 7; Bryant McKinnie (Min.), 5; Qasim Mitchell (Chi.), 3.

Comments: Clifton, according to one scout, “is like fine wine. He’s still getting better. Excellent technician.” Backus was the 18th player selected in ’01, one year after Clifton was the 44th pick. “Backus plateaued in his second year and never took his game to an elite level,” another scout said. “He breaks down too much. Clifton’s man is never around the quarterback.”

LEFT GUARD: * Mike Wahle (GB), 9. Others: Ruben Brown (Chi.) and Chris Liwienski (Min.), 6; David Loverne (Det.), 3.

Comments: Wahle can’t buy a Pro Bowl trip but he has made the all-division team four years in a row, including the last three as a unanimous choice. “Really a top player,” one scout said. “He gets a little high at times but he can connect on targets out in space. I like him better skill-wise than (Marco) Rivera.” Brown, a Pro Bowl pick from 1996-2003 in Buffalo, played nine games before suffering a season-ending neck injury. “He’s talented but indifferent,” one scout said. “He never finishes plays like the great ones do.”

CENTER: Matt Birk (Min.) and Olin Kreutz (Chi.), 8. Others: Dominic Raiola (Det.), 5; Grey Ruegamer (GB), 3.

Comments: Kreutz was a first-team pick for the fourth year in a row but it’s the second time he had to share the honor with Birk. “Kreutz has not had a good year,” one scout said. “He gets gunned down some. It’s not intent, believe me. It’s size.” Regarded as a marginal starter in the past, Raiola improved in ’04. As for Ruegamer, who replaced injured Mike Flanagan, another scout said: “He gave their offensive line toughness and competitiveness. He didn’t give them a lot of skill.”

RIGHT GUARD: Marco Rivera (GB) and Damien Woody (Det.), 8. Others: David Dixon (Min.), 5; Rex Tucker (Chi.), 3.

Comments: Rivera got the nod for the third year in a row but had to share it with Woody, a former Patriot. “Rivera’s on the downside,” one scout said. “He’s not the best right guard in the division let alone in the NFC. Woody is strong and more athletic than Rivera.” Said another scout: “I love Rivera’s toughness and what he stands for. He finishes.” Woody gets knocked for his work habits. “He’s a great talent and huge naturally,” another scout said. “He’s grooved. Yet, he’s lazy. Not a great finisher.”

RIGHT TACKLE: John Tait (Chi.), 8. Others: Mark Tauscher (GB), 7; Stockar McDougle (Det.), 6; Adam Goldberg (Min.), 3.

Comments: Tauscher, who shared the honor in ’03, slipped to second behind Tait. “Tait does OK,” one scout said. “He’s not the dominant force you’d think for that money that he should be.” Tauscher was reliable against a steady diet of top ends. “God bless Tauscher,” another scout said. “He’s a starter with limitations. Not a great athlete but plays within himself and in their scheme he doesn’t get exposed.”

TIGHT END: * Bubba Franks (GB), 9. Others: Stephen Alexander (Det.), Desmond Clark (Chi.) and Jermaine Wiggins (Min.), 5.

Comments: Franks had his typical season and was rewarded with his fourth first-team berth in a row, including two by unanimous vote. "He won't stretch a defense but he's improved his blocking over the years," one scout said. Added another: "He's a vital cog. He's one of the best red-zone targets around and he's never been hurt." Alexander and Clark are better receivers than blockers. So is Wiggins, whose surprising 64 receptions were 29 more than Alexander's total. "Boy, you talk about a bad body guy," a third scout said, referring to Wiggins.

NO. 2 WIDE RECEIVER: Nate Burleson (Min.) and Donald Driver (GB), 8. Others: Tai Streets (Det.) and Bobby Wade (Chi.), 4.

Comments: The two first-team choices each scored nine touchdowns. "I like Driver but Burleson has great hands and run after the catch," one scout said. Of Driver, another scout said: "Actually, he's their guy when it comes down to it." Streets and Wade were starters only by default.

QUARTERBACK: *Daunte Culpepper (Min.), 9. Others: Brett Favre (GB), 7; Joey Harrington (Det.), 5; Chad Hutchinson (Chi.), 3.

Comments: Culpepper overtook Favre after finishing second to him the last four seasons. "It's a changing of the guard this year," one scout said. "This was Culpepper's best year. Nothing against Brett but Brett's had an up and down year. He can't do it all anymore. He's basically carrying them on his back and you can see it's wearing him down. Their defense is pitiful." Added another scout: "Golly, Favre's unbelievable. When it's crunch time he gets it done." The only other time in the 11-year history of this team that Favre didn't finish first was '99, when he was runner-up to Minnesota's Jeff George.

FULLBACK: * William Henderson (GB), 9. Others: Cory Schlesinger (Det.), 6; Bryan Johnson (Chi.), 5; Sean Berton (Min.), 4.

Comments: Schlesinger won the last two years but lost out this time to Henderson, who also was picked in '99 and '01. "Henderson's really smart, takes great angles and catches the ball, too," one scout said. Added another: "Fullback's the oldest position in the league. I've always liked the guy (Henderson). He's still slamming it up in there."

RUNNING BACK: * Ahman Green (GB), 9. Others: Kevin Jones (Det.), 7; Thomas Jones (Chi.), 5; Onterio Smith (Min.), 3.

Comments: Green's playing time and production decreased because of rib, knee and Achilles' tendon injuries. Still, he was a unanimous pick for the fourth straight year. "I think he's leveled off," one scout said. "He didn't have one of his stellar years." As for the second-half surge of Kevin Jones, another scout said: "Over time, Mr. Jones will be a force to be reckoned with."

NO. 3 WIDE RECEIVER: Robert Ferguson (GB), 8. Others: Marcus Robinson (Min.), 6; Bernard Berrian (Chi.) and Az-Zahir Hakim (Det.), 5.

Comments: Both Robinson and Hakim were too one-dimensional, Robinson as a deep sideline receiver and Hakim on short routes from the slot. "Ferguson isn't dominant in anything he does," one scout said. "He's not a big guy and he can't flat (expletive) run by you. But he can catch and run."

NO. 4 WIDE RECEIVER: * Kelly Campbell (Min.), 9. Others: Justin Gage (Chi.), 7; Antonio Chatman (GB) and Reggie Swinton (Det.), 4.

Comments: Campbell got the nod on the basis of speed. Invisible as a wide receiver in '03, Chatman made defenders pay attention to him in '04. "Chatman benefited from their other people and got a lot better," one scout said. "Sometimes, either he'd have to catch it or get a hole put through him."

NO. 2 TIGHT END: Casey FitzSimmons (Det.) and Dustin Lyman (Chi.), 8. Others: Jeff Dugan (Min.) and Ben Steele (GB), 4.

Comments: FitzSimmons leveled off after a decent rookie season, according to one scout. Dugan had to play when Jim Kleinsasser went on injured reserve after one game. Ditto for Steele after David Martin went down in Week 9. "Just long and lanky," one scout said, referring to Steele. "Overextends as a blocker. Flashes on the seam but doesn't have runaway speed."

UTILITY OFFENSIVE LINEMAN: Steve Edwards (Chi.), 8. Others: Kevin Barry (GB), 7; Nat Dorsey (Min.), 5; Matt Joyce (Det.), 4.

Comments: None of the scouts had much complimentary to say about the group. Remembering the ample midsection on the 355-pound Edwards, one scout said, "He's like the 'Michelin Man.' Awful." Barry didn't impress scouts as much as last year. One doubted that the Packers would be satisfied starting Barry if one of their guards were to depart.

NO. 2 QUARTERBACK: Mike McMahon (Det.), 8. Others: Gus Frerotte (Min.), 7; Craig Nall (GB), 5; Craig Krenzel (Chi.), 4.

Comments: "There's not a starter in the crew," one scout said.

NO. 2 RUNNING BACK: Michael Bennett (Min.), 8. Others: Shawn Bryson (Det.), 6; Tony Fisher (GB) and Anthony Thomas (Chi.), 5.

Comments: Bennett battled injuries half of the season before becoming the starter. Bryson and Fisher essentially were third-down backs and Thomas fell out of favor in Chicago. "A.T.' isn't a pretty runner and he's a little stiff, but he's a tough guy and I like him," one scout said. As for Fisher, another scout said: "He's so versatile. He can go out as a wide receiver. He just makes plays."

DEFENSE

LEFT END: * Adewale Ogunleye (Chi.), 9. Others: Kenny Mixon (Min.), 6; Cory Redding (Det.), 5; Aaron Kampman (GB), 4.

Comments: Acquired Aug. 21 from Miami, Ogunleye fit the Bears' one-gap pressure scheme. Mixon, Redding and Kampman plugged the run and were removed on passing downs. "Kampman is a steady guy but I'd think they're looking for better," one scout said.

NOSE TACKLE: Grady Jackson (GB), 8. Others: Dan Wilkinson (Det.), 7; Spencer Johnson (Min.), 6; Ian Scott (Chi.), 3.

Comments: Jackson missed all but three plays of the first six games with a knee injury. "He's fine doing what he does, holding the point," one scout said. "As far as anything else, he's too big for that now." Wilkinson was regarded by another scout as a better pass rusher than Jackson. "I can make a highlight film of 'Big Daddy' that will absolutely blow you away," a third scout said. "Not that he's lazy but he's not consistent. He's lost a little bit of his big-play skills."

THREE-TECHNIQUE TACKLE: Shaun Rogers (Det.) and Kevin Williams (Min.), 8. Others: Tommie Harris (Chi.) and Cletidus Hunt (GB), 4.

Comments: "It's close," one scout said of Rogers and Williams. "They're both great players. Rogers actually tailed off. Once he gets his contract he'll be a bust." Harris' initial quickness reminded another scout of a young Warren Sapp, a first-team pick from 1998-'01. One scout disparagingly compared Hunt to former Bear Bryan Robinson. "But Hunt had to start out this season as a nose tackle and played it pretty well," a third scout said. "He was around the quarterback despite not having big numbers."

RIGHT END: * James Hall (Det.), 9. Others: Alex Brown (Chi.), Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila (GB) and Kenechi Udeze (Min.), 5.

Comments: "KGB" had made first-team the last three years but slipped in '04. "He's just a speed guy off the edge," one scout said. "I didn't think he had his best year. He's too undersized for me." The other three are bigger and judged to be more complete players. "Hall isn't dominant in anything he does but he's strong enough at the point and has developed pass-rush skills," another scout said. Brown badly outplayed Detroit's Backus last week.

STRONG-SIDE LINEBACKER: Teddy Lehman (Det.) and Hannibal Navies (GB), 8. Others: Keith Newman (Min.), 5; Hunter Hillenmeyer (Chi.), 3.

Comments: With Detroit's Boss Bailey out all year with a knee injury, Lehman replaced him and did well. "Love him," one scout said. "He's intelligent. He can run. He's a great athlete. He can make plays on the ball." Navies gained mild notice by playing hard at the point.

MIDDLE LINEBACKER: * Brian Urlacher (Chi.), 9. Others: Nick Barnett (GB), 7; E.J. Henderson (Min.) and Earl Holmes (Det.), 4.

Comments: Injuries limited Urlacher to just nine games but he made first team for the fifth time in his five-year career, unanimously for the third year in a row. "He may be a little bit overrated, but if you're starting a defense you want him on your team," one scout said. Barnett had 7 votes in '03, too. "Barnett's OK," another scout said. "He's got speed but he's not physical. I'd like to see him play weak-side. Those other two guys (Henderson and Holmes) aren't starters."

WEAK-SIDE LINEBACKER: Lance Briggs (Chi.) and Na'il Diggs (GB), 8. Others: Chris Claiborne (Min.) and James Davis (Det.), 4.

Comments: Briggs and Diggs were repeat choices but Briggs played strong-side in '03. "Briggs is OK in coverage but primarily he's a read and react guy," one scout said. "Claiborne is just a fat (expletive). He's got half of his gut hanging out of his uniform."

LEFT CORNERBACK: Antoine Winfield (Min.), 8. Others: Fernando Bryant (Det.), 6; Ahmad Carroll (GB) and Charles Tillman (Chi.), 5.

Comments: Winfield cost the Vikings \$12.8 million in signing bonus to leave Buffalo. "He's a tenacious tackler and willing to compete," one scout said. Bryant, another high-paid unrestricted free agent, was hurt a lot and didn't impress. Carroll started the last 11 games as a rookie. "He's got speed but he holds all the time," another scout said. "He doesn't have confidence." Tillman also was heavily penalized. "He's overrated," a third scout said. "Before the rules changed he could do a lot of things. Now he's getting called a lot more."

RIGHT CORNERBACK: Dre' Bly (Det.) and Al Harris (GB), 7. Others: Brian Williams (Min.), 6; Jerry Azumah (Chi.), 4.

Comments: Bly, a unanimous pick in '03, tied with Harris. "He's all or nothing is what he is," one scout said, referring to Bly. "He should be a nickel back. He's got great instincts. He's not a great tackler." Harris covered many top receivers all over the field. "He played really well this year," another scout said. "He's improved every year, he plays extremely smart and his technique is pretty darn good. Added a third scout: "He doesn't have the speed to be a consistent No. 1. If he can't get you at the line he's in trouble. I'll bet he can't run 4.65."

STRONG SAFETY: Mike Green (Chi.), 8. Others: Corey Chavous (Min.), 7; Mark Roman (GB), 6; Bracy Walker (Det.), 3.

Comments: Green Bay's Marques Anderson, Chavous and now Green are the last three first-teamers at a position led by either LeRoy Butler or Tampa Bay's John Lynch for eight years before that. "Isn't that awful," one scout said, considering the group. "I don't want any of these guys." Another scout said Roman was a better athlete than player. "As bad as that front seven played, he had to make 1,000 tackles and I think he wore out," he said.

FREE SAFETY: * Darren Sharper (GB), 9. Others: Brock Marion (Det), R.W. McQuarters (Chi.) and Brian Russell (Min.), 5.

Comments: With Chicago's Mike Brown injured, Sharper was a unanimous pick for the second time in three years. One scout said Sharper's career was on the downside but two others really liked what they saw. "He's one of the top guys in the league when he's healthy," another scout said. "He can make the interception and break your heart." Marion is over the hill, McQuarters was asked to move from cornerback for the final five games and Russell should be replaced.

NO. 3 DEFENSIVE END: *Lance Johnstone (Min.), 9. Others: Kalimba Edwards (Det.), 7; Michael Haynes (Chi.), 5; R-Kal Truluck (GB), 3.

Comments: Johnstone had 11 sacks, second most in the division. "Highly productive," one scout said. Edwards has a world-class first step but can't play the run. Truluck was a disappointment. "He's a non-aggressor and not a run-down player," another scout said.

NO. 3 DEFENSIVE TACKLE: Cullen Jenkins (GB), 7. Others: Alfonso Boone (Chi.) and Chris Hovan (Min.), 6; Marcus Bell (Det.), 5.

Comments: Jenkins, an undrafted free agent, drew praise. "He's got a little bit of La'Roi Glover in him," one scout said. "He's a well-kept secret. He's a wide-body guy with a quick twitch." Another scout also liked Jenkins but only as a pass rusher. "He gets knocked off the ball," he said. Hovan, the division's defensive player of the year in '02 and a first-team pick in '03, was benched at midseason. "They asked him to two-gap this year," another scout said.

UTILITY DEFENSIVE LINEMAN: Jared DeVries (Det.) and Tank Johnson (Chi.), 8. Others: Darrion Scott (Min.) and Corey Williams (GB), 4.

Comments: The injury-prone DeVries did next to nothing in his first five seasons for the Lions but blossomed in '04. "He found a way," one scout said. "He should get an award because he's the ultimate overachiever."

NO. 4 LINEBACKER: * Paris Lenon (GB), 9. Others: Dontarrious Thomas (Min.), 6; Alexander Lewis (Det.), 5; Joe Odom (Chi.), 4.

Comments: Lenon, a free agent, was a unanimous pick after finishing last in '02 and serving as a deeper backup in '03. "I like him as a utility guy," one scout said. Another said Thomas, a second-round pick, "is fast but real tight in the hips."

NO. 3 CORNERBACK: Andre' Goodman (Det.), 8. Others: Nathan Vasher (Chi.), 7; Joey Thomas (GB), 5; Terrance Shaw (Min.), 4.

Comments: Not much of a group. Goodman was up and down, Vasher returned his five interceptions for 177 yards but is too small to be a starter, and Shaw is over the hill. "Thomas has some cover ability," one scout said. "But he's not too thrilled about coming up and tackling people."

NO. 3 SAFETY: * Bhawoh Jue (GB), 9. Others: Terrence Holt (Det.), 7; Todd Johnson (Chi.), 5; Willie Offord (Min.), 3.

Comments: Jue fared respectably in three midseason starts for an injured Sharper but didn't play much after that. "He's getting better," one scout said. "He just doesn't look very aware, which is what took him out of corner, but he does have athletic ability and toughness."

SPECIAL TEAMS

KICKER: Jason Hanson (Det.) and Ryan Longwell (GB), 8. Others: Morten Andersen (Min.) and Paul Edinger (Chi.), 4.

Comments: This was Hanson's seventh first-team berth. Longwell, who made four game-winning field goals in the waning seconds, also shared it with him in '02. "He's been clutch all year," one scout said, referring to Longwell. "I've been impressed with him (kicking) outside. That's really tough to do." Hanson is superior on kickoffs and made 84.6% of his field goals, a notch back of Longwell's 85.2%. Andersen was reliable inside 40. Edinger went in the tank.

PUNTER: * Brad Maynard (Chi.), 9. Others: Darren Bennett (Min.) and Nick Harris (Det.), 6; Bryan Barker (GB), 3.

Comments: Maynard, a unanimous pick in '01, repeated with his finest season. "He's top-three in the league controlling the ball," one scout said. "He can basically put it anywhere he wants." The Packers ended up replacing Josh Bidwell, a unanimous pick in '03, with Barker.

PUNT RETURNER: * Eddie Drummond (Det.), 9. Others: R.W. McQuarters (Chi.), 7; Nate Burluson (Min.), 5; Antonio Chatman (GB), 3.

Comments: Drummond was putting up sensational numbers (13.2 average, two touchdowns) before suffering a season-ending shoulder injury on Thanksgiving. "He can change the game at any second," one scout said.

KICKOFF RETURNER: * Eddie Drummond (Det.), 9. Others: Jerry Azumah (Chi.), 7; Kelly Campbell (Min.) and Antonio Chatman (GB), 4.

Comments: Drummond averaged 26.2 and had two touchdowns. Chatman averaged 22.6, just above his mark last year of 22.3. "Chatman's not real special in any way," one scout said. "But he's got good initial quickness and he's not afraid."

SPECIAL TEAMS ACE: LB Donte' Curry (Det.) and RB Adrian Peterson (Chi.), 5. Others: RB Larry Ned (Min.), 4; CB Antoine Winfield (Min.), 3; WR Robert Ferguson (GB) and LB Paris Lenon (GB), 2; RB Tony Fisher (GB) and CB Keith Smith (Det.), 1.

Comments: Curry, who led the Lions in tackles with 23, was signed out of Morris Brown by the Packers in April 2001 but was released that September. Peterson led the Bears with 26 tackles. Winfield is the only full-fledged starter among the vote-getters. "I love that kid, the way he plays," one scout said.

SPECIAL CATEGORIES

(Vote for one)

Coach Of The Year: Lovie Smith (Chi.), 3; Mike Sherman (GB), 1.

Offensive Coordinator: Scott Linehan (Min.), 3; Terry Shea (Chi.), 1.

Defensive Coordinator: Ron Rivera (Chi.), 3; Dick Jauron (Det.), 1.

Special Teams Coach: Chuck Priefer (Det.), 3; Dave Toub (Chi.), 1.

Position Coach: Brian Baker (defensive line, Min.), Larry Beightol (offensive line, GB), Karl Dunbar (defensive line, Chi.) and Steve Loney (offensive line, Min.), all 1.

Offensive Player: Daunte Culpepper (Min.), 3; Brett Favre (GB), 1.

Defensive Player: Kevin Williams (Min.), 2; Shaun Rogers (Det.) and Brian Urlacher (Chi.), 1.

Offensive Rookie: Kevin Jones (Det.), 2; Bernard Berrian (Chi.) and Roy Williams (Det.), 1.

Defensive Rookie: Tommie Harris (Chi.) and Teddy Lehman (Det.), 2.

Most Valuable Player: Daunte Culpepper (Min.), 3; Brett Favre (GB), 1.

Executive Of The Year: Scott Studwell (director of college scouting, Min.), 2; Reggie McKenzie (director of pro personnel, GB) and Matt Millen (president, Det.), 1.

IMPACT DECISIONS

- The Lions trade down from No. 6 to No. 7 in first round with Cleveland, selecting Roy Williams at No. 7 and Teddy Lehman at No. 37 with second-round pick obtained from the Browns. Later, the Lions trade up into first round to take Kevin Jones at No. 30.
- Failure of the Bears to have an adequate replacement at quarterback when Rex Grossman suffered season-ending knee injury in Week 3.
- The Lions' decision to trade up for a badly needed running back in Jones.
- The Vikings' difficult decision to replace one-time standout DT Chris Hovan with rookie free agent Spencer Johnson in Week 10. Johnson played much better than Hovan.

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