

Middle of the road

Thompson assesses Packers' 2005 draft

By BOB McGINN

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Green Bay - There's no reason for anyone to turn cartwheels or cry in their beer when it comes to the Green Bay Packers' draft of 2005.

Of the Packers' 11 selections, Nick Collins looks like a full-fledged starter, Will Whitticker at least started as a rookie and four players served as situational substitutes on defense.

"I'm reasonably pleased with all the individuals," general manager Ted Thompson said Friday. "There's not many that have been disappointments. I think it's far too early to try to rate it in terms of historical value."

Major injuries struck down Terrence Murphy, Brady Poppinga and Kurt Campbell. The top pick, Aaron Rodgers, barely played. Just one of the 11 was cut. Rookie free agent Samkon Gado has a chance to turn out to be the best of the bunch.

Some of the top drafts in '05 belong to Dallas, Denver, New England and Seattle.

In 2000, Thompson conducted his first draft for the Seattle Seahawks as their vice president of football operations. Four of the nine picks remain on the Seahawks' roster, including running back Shaun Alexander and wide receiver Darrell Jackson. A third starter, tackle Chris McIntosh, had his promising career cut short by injury.

This was how Thompson assessed his first class of Packers draftees:

Round 1, 24th pick, Aaron Rodgers, QB, California: "He certainly looks the part. He has a tremendous arm and tremendous accuracy. He carries himself well. I think he understands how to act as a quarterback. I think he has a bright future. Now you never really know until they get out there into the mix and see how they respond. I'm very enthused about it. He's a very accurate passer if you just watched it off practice. But I think there's always some caution because we haven't seen him that many times in a game."

2-51, Nick Collins, S, Bethune-Cookman: "He's done a nice job coming in and being thrust into the fray. He is athletic. He is fast. He has tremendous range. He's very active. He's fine making calls. I think he has the athletic ability to play any of the spots in the secondary. I think he probably could (play cornerback). Probably, at least for the time being, the die has been cast. Looks like he's going to be a free safety for a while."

2-58, Terrence Murphy, WR, Texas A&M: "He was doing very well. He was nicked in training camp. I think he's a really talented kid and a good person. He wants to be good. Obviously, the (spinal) injury situation is something we've got to work our way through. I think he certainly has that type (starting) ability. He's working out. We're still seeing some experts to make sure that everything's going to be fine."

4-115, Marviel Underwood, S, San Diego State: "He's played hard in nickel and dime situations. I think he's a better player than what he's done so far. Sometimes, it takes guys a year or two. I remember Brian Williams was sort of like that. We still have hope for him. He would probably be the first to admit that he can play better than he's played this year. I thought I would have seen a greater impact on special teams knowing back there it will take a while to learn everything and to play two rookies right away would be a little bit of a stretch."

4-125, Brady Poppinga, LB, Brigham Young: "I think Brady is a good football player that plays with the kind of passion and energy that we're looking for. He's going to be a good player here. I think he did an excellent job. He got a hamstring or something early in camp and sort of fell out of the rotation. He didn't get any defensive reps until halfway through the season. But he was playing so well on special teams that they kind of factored him more and more into the defensive plan. You can do a lot of different things with him. Athletically, he can run and move and bend and change directions. He played linebacker his senior year in college. Most of his play time in college was as a pass rusher. The timing of it (torn anterior cruciate knee ligament) is tough. He is very into football and he wants to be good. He will do everything he can to get back as quickly as he can."

5-143, Junius Coston, G, North Carolina A&T: "He's a very talented young man that I think everyone here thinks has a chance to be a really fine player. For a man his size certainly he's good enough (athletically). I think being involved in the off-season program will be a tremendous benefit for him. There was a time we were playing him as a left tackle in practice and considering using him as an emergency left tackle in the game. There's nothing to say he couldn't do that. My best guess is he'll wind up being a guard. Absolutely (he could compete for a starting job in '06)."

5-167, Mike Hawkins, CB, ex-Oklahoma: "Athletically, he's a gem. These little nagging things have held him back. I think he's still growing and maturing as a player. I think an off-season will be really good for him to be involved in the program and add some strength and substance. He's certainly a very talented young man. There's been several times where we get to a Friday and we're counting on him and something happens in practice and he's unable to go in the game. I have hopes but you have to see it in this league. You have to prove it. I don't think he's going to be a daredevil, but I think he can be a functional (tackler)."

6-180, Mike Montgomery, DE, Texas A&M: "He's a good football player. I think he's played well in his role. He likes to play. He has a natural ability to use his hands and play with leverage. I think he will improve as he physically matures. Percentage-wise, for the

number of plays he's in there, I would think in terms of making plays and being in on tackles he's probably as productive as anybody we have on defense. I think he's going to get bigger, stronger and faster."

6-195, Craig Bragg, WR, UCLA: "He's on a practice squad somewhere (Chicago). He had some injuries and it just didn't work. It looks like we just made a mistake."

7-245, Kurt Campbell, S, Albany: "We really liked what we saw in training camp. Obviously, he got injured early (torn ACL on Aug. 2). The rehab part is coming along very well. We're hoping for good things. He can run. There's no question about that. Athletically, that's fine. He was a (safety) in college."

7-246, Will Whitticker, G, Michigan State: "He's done OK considering. I think he's had some games he could have played better, but he's also played pretty solid. In a perfect world, especially in the offensive line, you wouldn't have to play young guys. Outside of quarterback, it's the most difficult position to come in and play right away. I think he can play. I think he needs to get better. He has a chance. Like most big guys, if he was a little bit lighter he'd be a little more effective."

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