

# Annual report card: Defense

## Defensive Line

### Aaron Kampman

Defensive end led the team in sacks for the third straight season, but his total slipped to 9½ (down from 12 in 2007 and 15½ in 2006). Led the team with 27 quarterback hurries/pressures, which was 17 more than any other defender. But his total was down from 34 in 2007. Decline was more to due extra attention because of the lack of support from other pass rushers on the line. Rarely came off the field and led all defensive linemen with 87 tackles. Was penalized four times (two offsides, one hold, one roughing the passer).

**Grade: B**

### Ryan Pickett

Defensive tackle was the most consistent of the interior linemen and rarely got caught out of position. Played in all 16 games despite missing all of training camp due to a hamstring injury and finished fifth on the team with 81 tackles. Didn't play much in obvious passing situations and had 1½ sacks and three pressures. Committed only one penalty (offsides).

**Grade: C-plus**

### Johnny Jolly

Defensive tackle didn't take the next step and develop into a consistent every down player. Solid against the run, finishing fourth with 82 tackles, and made plays that Pickett couldn't but got caught out of position too often. Didn't show any pass rush ability and finished with no sacks and three pressures. Only penalty was a hold on special teams.

**Grade: C-minus**

### Colin Cole

Stout defensive tackle was solid but probably played too much. Finished fifth among defensive linemen with 42 tackles and had a half sack and three pressures. Only penalty was an unnecessary roughness on special teams.

**Grade: D-plus**

### Michael Montgomery

Defensive end flashed early in the season, including an impressive 11-tackle performance at Tennessee (Nov. 2) but then didn't do much down the stretch. Finished fourth among defensive linemen with 71 tackles and had 2½ sacks and six pressures but by the end of the season wasn't a regular member of the nickel pass rush group. Free agent who might be worth re-signing for the right price. Committed five penalties (four offsides, one illegal block).

**Grade: D-plus**

**Jason Hunter**

Combination end/tackle had his only two sacks in the final two games, when he lined up inside in the nickel defense.

**Grade: D**

**Jeremy Thompson**

Rookie fourth-round pick was billed as a pass rusher but didn't record a sack and had only two pressures in nine games. Needs to add strength and refine his moves.

**Grade: D-minus**

**Justin Harrell**

First-round pick in 2007 has been a bust to date. Injured his back in offseason lifting, missed all of training camp and the first seven games of the season after two surgeries. Had a couple of decent games at Tennessee and at Minnesota but then got hurt again and was inactive for the final three games. Recorded just 13 tackles in six games. Desperately needs a healthy offseason to develop, otherwise might never amount to anything.

**Grade: F**

**Cullen Jenkins**

Combination end/tackle was off to a torrid start with 2½ sacks and 10 pressures until a torn pectoral muscle ended his season after only four games. Finished second on the team in pressures despite missing the final 12 games.

**Grade: Incomplete**

**Alfred Malone**

Defensive tackle promoted from the practice squad on Dec. 1 and played in the final four games. Registered four tackles in a limited role.

**Grade: Incomplete**

**Anthony Toribio**

Defensive tackle promoted from the practice squad on Dec. 18 but wasn't activated for any games.

**Grade: Incomplete**

**Kenny Pettway**

Free-agent defensive end signed on Oct. 1 played in eight games, mostly on special teams, before a season-ending knee injury.

**Grade: Incomplete**

## **Linebackers**

### **Brandon Chillar**

What does it say about the linebacking corps when the best of the bunch was only a part-time starter? Look for Chillar to be one of the regulars next season after a solid first season. The most versatile linebacker on the team made seven starts and played extensively in the nickel defense. Gave up completions 69 percent of the times he was targeted but allowed a respectable 8.5 yards per completion, second-best among the tight ends, and didn't allow a touchdown pass. Committed one penalty for pass interference. Had one sack in limited opportunities as a blitzer and was tied for fourth in special teams tackles with 13.

**Grade: C-plus**

### **Nick Barnett**

Play dropped from his near Pro-Bowl level in 2007 and then blew out his knee on Nov. 9 at Minnesota. ACL surgery might make it tough for the middle linebacker to be ready in time for training camp next season. Wasn't around the ball as much with just one forced fumble, no fumble recoveries, no sacks and no interceptions in nine games, but poor play by the interior of the defensive line no doubt had a trickle-down effect. Allowed an average of 9.8 yards per completion against him and one touchdown pass but was not penalized.

**Grade: C-minus**

### **A.J. Hawk**

Claimed he was over chest and groin injuries but if so, then there's reason to be concerned about his ability to run. Didn't move with anywhere near the speed and fluidity he did in 2007. Moved from weak side to the middle after Barnett got hurt, had one great game against Chicago (Nov. 16) and then flopped despite leading the team with 121 tackles. Had three sacks but no interceptions, fumbles or recoveries. Committed one penalty (a hold) and allowed an average 9.5 yards per pass completed against him and two touchdown passes.

**Grade: D-plus**

### **Brady Poppinga**

Improved in coverage, allowing only 6.3 yards per completion and no touchdowns, but had fewer opportunities because Chillar often replaced him in coverage situations. Had little or no impact as a hand-down rusher on the edge in the nickel defense late in the year. Didn't record a sack, a fumble, a recovery or an interception. Might be reduced to a situational player or a backup next season. Penalized three times on defense (one illegal contact, one personal foul, one pass interference) and once on special teams (illegal block).

**Grade: D-plus**

**Desmond Bishop**

Versatile, athletic second-year player who could factor next season in the middle or the strong side. Made several big plays – a sack and three forced fumbles – in limited action but gave up a 47-yard touchdown reception to Minnesota's Chester Taylor after replacing Barnett. Teams completed all eight passes against Bishop for an 18-yard average. Committed four penalties (one facemask and three special teams infractions) but finished third on the team with 15 special teams tackles.

**Grade: D-plus**

**Danny Linsanah**

Undrafted rookie was promoted from the practice squad on Oct. 7 but played in only five games in a special-teams role (two tackles). A promising prospect.

**Grade: Incomplete**

**Spencer Havner**

Third-year practice squader finally got his chance on the roster and played in the final four games on special teams (three tackles).

**Grade: Incomplete**

**Defensive Backs****Charles Woodson**

Ball-hawking playmaker tied for the league lead with seven interceptions, two of which he returned for touchdowns. Volunteered to move to safety because of injuries at the position and started three games there late in the season before returning to cornerback. Made his first Pro Bowl since 2001. Allowed completions just 37.8 percent of the times he was thrown at and gave up just two touchdowns despite playing through a painful toe injury that required several pain-killing shots. Had three sacks. Reduced penalties to four (two illegal contacts, one hold, one illegal use of hands) after committing a team-high 12 in 2007. Made a rare mistake in failing to breakup a 54-yard completion to Steve Smith in the final minutes of a loss to Carolina.

**Grade: A-minus**

**Nick Collins**

Matched Woodson with seven interceptions, including three returned for touchdowns, and was named a starting safety for the NFC Pro Bowl squad. Allowed completions on just 38.8 percent of the balls thrown at him but gave up four touchdowns. Finished second on the team in tackles with 99. Continued to have a problem with missed tackles and committed two penalties (one for unnecessary roughness, one for illegal contact).

**Grade: A-minus**

**Al Harris**

Made a remarkable comeback from a torn spleen in Week 3 and missed just four games. Teams rarely threw at him, and he allowed just 21 completions on 50 times targeted (42 percent). Gave up two touchdowns. Didn't have an interception and committed seven penalties (two pass interference, two illegal contact, two personal fouls and one hold).

**Grade: B**

**Will Blackmon**

Spent most of the season as the fourth cornerback, getting limited snaps in the dime defense. Allowed two touchdowns and gave up completions 54.8 percent of the time he was targeted. Finished ninth in the league in punt return average (11.1) and returned two for touchdowns. Didn't fare as well on kickoff returns, ranking 34th (21.0). Committed two penalties (one for unnecessary roughness on defense, one for an illegal block on special teams). Led the team with 18 special teams tackles. Graded largely for his role on special teams.

**Grade: C-plus**

**Tramon Williams**

Performed well as a starting cornerback during Harris' absence but then struggled when he returned to his role as the third cornerback in the nickel package. Was targeted a team-high 90 times and gave up completions 53.3 percent of the time and allowed five touchdowns – most on the team. Committed eight penalties, including six on defense (three pass interference, one facemask, one unnecessary roughness and one illegal contact) and two on special teams. Had five interceptions and two forced fumbles.

**Grade: C-minus**

**Atari Bigby**

Tried to play through pain after a preseason ankle injury but could make it for only seven games before landing on injured reserve on Dec. 18. Bothered by the injury, which required surgery, couldn't measure up to his 2007 performance. He missed tackles, gave up completions 52.6 percent of the times he was targeted and allowed two touchdowns, had one interception but was not penalized.

**Grade: D-plus**

**Aaron Rouse**

Much like last season as a rookie, continued to make fundamental errors and assignment mistakes that prevented him from becoming a full-time starting safety despite picking off two passes in a limited role (six starts). Gave up completions 53.8 percent of the time he was targeted and allowed two touchdowns. Was penalized twice (one for pass interference and one for a horse-collar tackle in overtime at Chicago).

**Grade: D-plus**

**Charlie Peprah**

Strong start to training camp was quelled by a hamstring injury that kept him out of the first two games and prevented any chance to compete for significant playing time as a safety. Started against Atlanta (Oct. 5) and made six tackles otherwise played mostly on special teams, where he finished seventh in tackles with nine. Did not commit a penalty.

**Grade: D**

**Jarrett Bush**

Hardly played as a cornerback but was a core special teams player. Finished second to Blackmon with 17 tackles on special teams but committed costly penalties. Had a team-high six special teams penalties (two offside, two holds, one illegal block, one facemask) and made a major gaffe at Chicago by allowing a punt to hit him in the back, and the Bears recovered and eventually scored.

**Grade: D**

**Pat Lee**

Rookie second-round draft pick began the season as the fifth cornerback and played only sparingly in five games before a knee injury on Nov. 30 ended his season. Only penalty was a questionable pass interference call against Atlanta that led to a touchdown.

**Grade: Incomplete**

**Joe Porter**

Practice-squad player was promoted to the active roster on Dec. 1 and played in one game (at Chicago).

**Grade: Incomplete**