

ALL-NFC NORTH TEAM

The best of the NFC North Division

Last week, (late December 2013) executives in personnel for each of the four NFC North Division teams were asked by the Journal Sentinel's Bob McGinn to rank the top players in the division at each position. They were not permitted to vote for their own players, and none of the comments 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. An asterisk denotes a unanimous (nine-point) selection.

OFFENSE

NO. 1 WIDE RECEIVER: Calvin Johnson* (Det), 9 points. Others: Brandon Marshall (Chi), 7; Jordy Nelson (GB), 5; Greg Jennings (Minn), 3.

In 2008, Johnson's second season, he tied Jennings for first team. The next year, Jennings edged him out. They tied again in '10. Since then, "Megatron" has been a unanimous choice. "He's more of a difference-maker than Marshall," one scout said. "Calvin was banged up this year but he still put up monster numbers." According to STATS, Marshall dropped 10 of 154 whereas Johnson dropped eight of 156. Unanimous as the No. 2 WR in 2011-'12, Nelson was third in this field. "When Aaron (Rodgers) was playing, the play-making ability that he showed, in the red zone and playing both inside and outside, (Nelson) played at a Pro Bowl level," another scout said. Jennings' only 100-yard game came Dec. 15. "He's a hard one to read," a third scout said. "I don't know if he's as fast as he used to be but they had a hard time getting it to him sometimes, too. That made it difficult to know if there was any type of decline or it's just the crappy quarterback play. There were times he's open and the ball's going in the dirt or over his head."

LEFT TACKLE: Jermon Bushrod (Chi), 8. Others: Matt Kalil (Minn), 7; Riley Reiff (Det), 6; David Bakhtiari (GB), 3.

Bushrod, the former Saint, was the Bears' best LT since John Tait almost a decade ago. "Looks the same as he did in New Orleans," one scout said. "He can get bullied a little bit but not (bad). He's steady." Kalil, a unanimous choice as a rookie, didn't play as well. One scout called him a "phenomenal" athlete. Said another: "He was better in the run game than as a pass blocker. He kind of struggled mirroring and matching inside moves. He gave up a lot more pressure than last year." Reiff, another first-round pick in 2012, started for the first time and was OK. "Sound, not overpowering," one scout said. Bakhtiari supplanted injured Bryan Bulaga in mid-August and held up fine. "Game wasn't too big for him," one scout said. "Good pick. Athletic. Just needs to get stronger."

LEFT GUARD: Josh Sitton* (GB), 9. Others: Rob Sims (Det), 7; Charlie Johnson (Minn) and Matt Slauson (Chi), 4.

The move from RG to LG didn't hurt Sitton. He was a unanimous choice for the fourth straight year. "He doesn't have the best feet in the world, which gets him in trouble sometimes," one scout said. "But he's very physical and he looks polished as a pass protector and run blocker. I like his power level. I like the way he plays. He ran his mouth, too." Sims, the first-team LG from 2010-'12, was a backup this time. "There's a little bit of a decline overall in his play but he's still a solid starter," one scout said. "He's more of a phone-booth guy, not a guy that can be too fluid adjusting on the second level or be a very effective puller, as he was in the past." Slauson played better as a Bear than he did for the Jets. "He's a stiff, tough guy," said one scout.

CENTER: John Sullivan* (Minn), 9. Others: Evan Dietrich-Smith (GB) and Roberto Garza (Chi), 6; Dominic Raiola (Det), 3.

A last-place finisher in 2010, Sullivan gained his third first-team berth (and second straight unanimously). Played better late than early in '13. "He's smart with his hands," one scout said. "Good, agile athlete. Can anchor against power. Pretty good football player all-around." Dietrich-Smith, a first-year starter, was an improvement over Jeff Saturday. "The guy's not a bad player," one scout said. "He's scrappy. Gets the most out of his ability. Doesn't have the length or size you want. Good leverage. He's just OK." Garza, 34, was first-team RG in 2007 and '09. "Tough kid," said one scout. "Physical. Leader. He's smart. Sets the pace for that group. That line has improved remarkably this year." Raiola, 35, added some weight this season. "Last year he wasn't very good,"

one scout said. "He's scrappy, tough, smart. He's just older. Can't move. He doesn't have the feet. Not a great finisher."

RIGHT GUARD: Kyle Long (Chi) and Larry Warford (Det), 7. Others: T.J. Lang (GB), 6; Brandon Fusco (Minn), 4.

Long and Warford were the first rookie guards to make first team in the 20-year history of the all-division team. One scout described Long as "a bull in a china shop." Said another: "He's got some freakish athletic ability for a guard. When he gets everything down he might be a pretty darn good one for a long time." Warford doesn't look good but played good. "At the combine you saw a big, bad-body guy," said one scout. "But this guy was a hell of a pick. I'd say he was their best offensive lineman. He's probably up in the top 15 guards in the league. That kid played his butt off." Lang shifted sides in the off-season. "He's a steady, solid player," one scout said. "Not a great one." Fusco, a second-year starter from Slippery Rock, was effective, too. "He had a very good year," said one scout. "He was much more physical and consistent in pass protection. He was a good starter this year."

RIGHT TACKLE: Phil Loadholt (Minn), 8. Others: Jordan Mills (Chi), 6; Don Barclay (GB) and LaAdrian Waddle (Det), 5.

"Oh, boy," said one scout. "Not a very good group." The best of the lot was the lumbering Loadholt, who also made first team in 2009 and '12. "He's still physical and a hard guy to get around due to his size and his length," one scout said. "But he did have his struggles. He was much more consistent last year." Mills and Waddle, who wasn't drafted, started as rookies. "Mills has a lot of grit to him," one scout said. "For everything you say he's not he does do a good job physically. He gets his hands on guys and can redirect them and keep that pocket clean. Waddle and Loadholt have good size and length but don't bend well." Barclay, another free agent, beat out Marshall Newhouse. "Their tackles have been better in the past," one scout said. "(Chad) Clifton, (Mark) Tauscher, Bulaga, they're all better. These guys look like backups to me."

TIGHT END: Martellus Bennett (Chi) and Kyle Rudolph (Minn), 8. Others: Brandon Pettigrew (Det), 5; Andrew Quarless (GB), 3.

When two-time pick Jermichael Finley went down in Game 6, it opened the door for Quarless. "I'm not a big fan," one scout said. "They've had better. He's not very physical at all at the point." Bennett, Rudolph and Pettigrew are three of the more complete TEs in the league. "The last two years, since he left Dallas, Bennett has been playing his best football," one scout said. Rudolph went down with a foot injury at mid-season. "Rudolph is very talented," said one scout. Pettigrew got even better as a run blocker but still had too many drops.

NO. 2 WIDE RECEIVER: Alshon Jeffery* (Chi), 9. Others: James Jones (GB), 7; Nate Burleson (Det) and Cordarrelle Patterson (Minn), 4.

Jeffery exploded into prominence. "Marshall is still demanding the double (teams)," said one scout. "So Jeffery is getting more one-on-one opportunities and he's making them pay for them. But, gosh dog, they look the same now. They're a cold weather team, and those big trees out there are something else." Jones was a first-team pick in 2007 and 2010-'12 at either No. 3 WR or No. 4 WR. "Like him," said one scout. "Consistent, steady player. Every game looks the same." Burleson missed seven games with a broken arm suffered in a one-car accident when out on a late-night pizza run. Patterson might have been the Vikings' No. 1 WR down the stretch. "His routes are still very raw," said one scout. "He's had dynamic flashes."

QUARTERBACK: Aaron Rodgers* (GB), 9. Others: Jay Cutler (Chi) and Matthew Stafford (Det), 6; Christian Ponder (Minn), 3.

The broken collarbone that sidelined Rodgers for almost eight full games evened the divisional deck. "He was elite," one scout said. "He's the best." Except for his tie with Brett Favre in '09, Rodgers has been a unanimous pick since '08. Cutler, dogged by injury, has three seconds and two thirds. Meanwhile, Stafford has four seconds and a fourth. "Cutler is the same as Stafford," one scout said. "He'll turn the ball over at times but he also can make all the throws you want to see. Stafford can really take over a game. The turnovers are what doomed that offense." Injuries and poor performance limited Ponder to nine starts. "I just didn't see a guy that was comfortable in the offense or had any command or much poise when teams started to pressure him," one scout said. "He's just a game manager."

RUNNING BACK: Adrian Peterson* (Minn), 9. Others: Matt Forte (Chi), 7; Reggie Bush (Det) and Eddie Lacy (GB), 4.

Peterson, a six-time unanimous pick, got the nod over a stellar group. "But even before the (groin) injury I didn't think he ran with that violence he ran with last year," one scout said. "He wasn't quite the same guy." Forte was exceptional. "Hard to argue with 1,200 yards rushing and 70 receptions," one scout said. "It really was his best year. Just really well-rounded." Bush was a big-play threat but hurt the Lions with fumbles (five, lost four). Lacy, said one scout, "really had a good year. It's just if he can stay healthy."

FULLBACK: Jerome Felton* (Minn), 9. Others: John Kuhn (GB), 7; Tony Fiammetta (Chi), 5; Dorin Dickerson (Det), 3.

Felton made first team for Detroit in 2010. Now he's repeated as a unanimous pick for Minnesota. "He's a very much improved blocker," one scout said. "They're better running the football when he's in there." Kuhn was first team in '11. "Improved as a lead (blocker)," one scout said. "He's valuable because he's really good in pass pro and he can catch the ball."

NO. 3 WIDE RECEIVER: Jerome Simpson* (Minn), 9. Others: Earl Bennett (Chi) and Jarrett Boykin (GB), 6; Kris Durham (Det), 3.

Simpson, the former Bengal, provided a deep threat. "He can be explosive," one scout said. "I thought he was more consistent this year." Boykin made the most of his chance after Randall Cobb went down Oct. 13. "Big and physical," one scout said. "Not dynamic. He's speed-deficient but he uses his frame to box out. He's a little stiff and not real explosive out of his cuts. Deliberate. Catches the ball."

NO. 4 WIDE RECEIVER: Kevin Ogletree (Det), Marquess Wilson (Chi) and Jarius Wright (Minn), 7. Others: Myles White (GB), 3.

Wright was by far the most productive of this motley group. "He didn't really develop but he's still explosive and he's capable of making some big plays," one scout said. "He didn't have the same year he had last year."

NO. 2 TIGHT END: John Carlson (Minn) and Joseph Fauria (Det), 8. Others: Brandon Bostick (GB) and Dante Rosario (Chi), 4.

Carlson's season ended this month with another concussion. Seven of Fauria's 15 receptions were for TDs. "Carlson is similar to Rudolph but just not as big and as athletic," said one scout. "He catches the ball really well. He's a cover-up blocker...Fauria is more of a big target in the red zone. Needs to get stronger." Bostick had seven catches in 11 games. "I do think he has tremendous upside," said one scout. "I see a good athlete. I see a guy with good burst up the seam. But there was just too little for me to evaluate."

NO. 6 OFFENSIVE LINEMAN: T Corey Hilliard (Det), 8. Others: T-G Eben Britton (Chi), 7; C-G Joe Berger (Minn), 5; T-G Marshall Newhouse (GB), 4.

Newhouse, a starter in 2011-'12, had a brutal year. "Newhouse is awful," one scout said. "I thought he had a chance back in 2011 and 2012. But I thought he regressed. You don't see the competes." Hilliard tied for the top spot in 2010.

NO. 2 QUARTERBACK: Josh McCown* (Chi), 9. Others: Matt Cassel (Minn), 6; Shaun Hill (Det), 5; Matt Flynn (GB), 4.

McCown, 34, went 3-4 for the injured Cutler, and his passer rating of 109 is third-best in the NFL. "Very frustrating," said one scout. "I was hoping they'd go to (expletive) when Cutler went down, and they didn't. He played very well. At times, he actually looked better (than Cutler)." The Vikings' players responded better to Cassel than Ponder, according to one scout. "He's got a better command of the offense," one scout said. "He just doesn't have great mobility." One scout said the Lions would have been better off inserting the poised, productive Hill when Stafford was having bad games. Flynn righted the ship in Green Bay. "Hey, man, a guy who had been cut three times got a couple wins, which seemed unlikely," one scout said. "Great competitor."

NO. 2 RUNNING BACK: Joique Bell* (Det), 9. Others: Toby Gerhart (Minn) and James Starks (GB), 6; Michael Bush (Chi), 3.

Bell, a free agent from Wayne State (Mich.), rushed for 619 yards (eight TDs) and caught 49 passes. "Doesn't have great speed but he's instinctive, strong and can catch the ball," one scout said. Gerhart also had his best season. "Gets the quiet yards," one scout said. "He's one of those guys, you look up and he's got 60, 70 yards and you say, 'Where were they?' He's just constantly pounding it in there." Starks is averaging a lofty 5.2. "Always liked him," said one scout. "Straight-line-speed kind of runner. If he gets a lane he's dangerous."

DEFENSE

LEFT END: Brian Robison (Minn), 8. Others: Willie Young (Det), 7; Johnny Jolly (GB), 5; Shea McClellin (Chi), 4.

Robison, a third-year starter, reached the top at a position led by Cliff Avril the past three years. "Constantly brings pressure off the edge," one scout said. "He's a better athlete than you want to give him credit for. You like his effort." Neither Robison nor Young is outstanding against the run. "Young isn't the flash player that Cliff Avril was but he brings a lot of juice to the field," one scout said. "His length is impressive, and he has some power from his leverage." McClellin wasn't fast or physical. Jolly was so-so after a three-year absence. "Jolly started off OK," said one scout. "Short-area power. He doesn't have any quickness and he doesn't make any plays on the move. He can't rush the passer."

NOSE TACKLE: Nick Fairley* (Det), 9. Others: Stephen Paea (Chi), 6; Ryan Pickett (GB), 5; Letroy Guion (Minn), 4.

First-team utility D-line as a rookie in '11, Fairley has been unanimous at NT two straight years. "He's more disruptive than he is sound," one scout said. "He's good. He's active. Unique quickness for his size. Can make the splash play. He's just not gap sound or disciplined." Though undersized, Paea has tremendous strength and quick feet. Pickett has never made first team. "He played well at times but wasn't consistent," said one scout. "I do think his range is limited and he doesn't bring anything in terms of rush. But he was stout at the point taking on blocks and occupying space. I don't think he made as many plays as he did the year before."

THREE-TECHNIQUE TACKLE: Ndamukong Suh* (Det), 9. Others: B.J. Raji (GB) and Kevin Williams (Minn), 6; Corey Wootton (Chi), 3.

Suh has been first team in all four of his seasons, including two unanimous. "I didn't see anybody really able to block him," one scout said. "Only person that blocked him was himself being dumb. He really gave people fits. Everybody else on that line rotates but him. He takes over a game." Raji, a first-team NT in 2010 and '11, fell off the past two years. "Still a good player," one scout said. "I don't think he was dominant. Motor runs hot and cold. Didn't see much pass rush out of him. Stats aren't everything, but he had 15 (solo) tackles and no sacks. Please. That's hard to do, isn't it?" Williams, 33, had a streak of seven first-team berths end in '12. "I didn't see a decline where you'd say this guy is close to being done," one scout said. Henry Melton's season-ending knee injury forced the move inside for Wootton, who was too tall for the task.

RIGHT END: Clay Matthews* (GB), 9. Others: Jared Allen (Minn), 7; Ziggy Ansah (Det), 5; Julius Peppers (Chi), 3.

Matthews has been a unanimous choice three times in four years. "He didn't have as good a year," one scout said. "Obviously, the (thumb) injury affected him. He gets overmatched some at the point of attack. But he's a top athlete with speed, chase, slippery, desire, pass rush." Allen, 31, brought his best every week. "Jared Allen is still Jared Allen," one scout said. "He gives you a motor and pass rush off the edge." Ansah served notice that he will be a force to be reckoned with for years to come. At the other end of the spectrum was Peppers, a first-teamer the past three years who finished last. "It wasn't the same guy coming off the edge," said one scout. "He's a little off and on with his effort, as he's always been. I think it was a little worse this year."

STRONG-SIDE LINEBACKER: Chad Greenway* (Minn), 9. Others: Mike Neal (GB), 7; James Anderson (Chi) and Ashlee Palmer (Det), 4.

Greenway, in his eighth season, debuted on the first team in '12 and followed up with another unanimous berth. "Does a lot of different things," said one scout. "Overall, a good, solid football player." Neal made the conversion from DE. "Kind of a mixed bag," one scout said. "He had good burst off the edge and he was above average against the run. He got (fooled) on misdirection. With more experience the picture becomes clearer."

MIDDLE LINEBACKER: A.J. Hawk (GB) and Stephen Tulloch (Det), 8. Others: Jonathan Bostic (Chi), 5; Audie Cole (Minn), 3.

Hawk and Tulloch tied for the second straight year. "Hawk's a little better," one scout said. "Instincts. Finds the ball. Tough. Doesn't have the great speed or range. Gets exposed in coverage. Athletic limitations. But he's around the ball." Tulloch also gets exposed in space and has average range. However, he's more of a heavy hitter inside. The loss of D.J. Williams in Game 6 thrust Bostic, a second-round pick, into the lineup. "He's up and coming," said one scout. "He brings some snap. Good hitter. Physical kid. Can run a little bit. As he gets more experienced you'll see a better result."

WEAK-SIDE LINEBACKER: DeAndre Levy (Det), 8. Others: Lance Briggs (Chi), 7; Brad Jones (GB), 5; Erin Henderson (Minn), 4.

Levy, a Milwaukee native and former Badger, made the first team in his fifth year as a starter. His six interceptions lead all LBs and are two off the NFL lead. "Best year, by far," one scout said. "He's a very good player. He looked more fluid. His instincts were better, especially in coverage. He just looked like a totally different player. His body, his weight, everything." Briggs sat out seven games with a broken shoulder. "Looks like the wheels have fallen off," said one scout. Jones battled injuries and pedestrian performance. "Tough but inconsistent taking on," said one scout. "Gets lost in traffic. Not great in coverage. He just kind of plays by the numbers. Just kind of a stiff-hipped guy."

LEFT CORNERBACK: Tim Jennings (Chi) and Tramon Williams (GB), 8. Others: Chris Houston (Det), 5; Josh Robinson (Minn), 3.

A unanimous choice in 2010 and '11, Williams tied with Jennings for the second straight year. "He played OK," one scout said. "He got challenged a little vertically. But you've got to be cognizant of where he is because he is a ballhawk that can make plays." Jennings, 30, stands just 5 feet 8 inches but is aggressive. "He's still making plays," one scout said. "He's got stickiness in coverage. Like him." As for Houston and Robinson, one scout summarized: "They can cover and they can run. There's just something missing and they don't make plays."

RIGHT CORNERBACK: Charles Tillman* (Chi), 9. Others: Sam Shields (GB), 7; Rashean Mathis (Det), 5; Chris Cook (Minn), 3.

From 2003-'11, Tillman never made it although he did have four seconds. This was his second straight unanimous berth. "Even though he got hurt he's still the anchor for that defense," one scout said. "Gets to the ball. Good player." Shields, said one scout, saved the Packers' season in Dallas. "He's talented but has some holes," one scout said. "Just not very physical. Will turn it down in traffic." Added another scout: "He was over Calvin Johnson a whole game and played him well. He will have his up and down moments, of course. He has to be more consistent. I thought he played a little bit better and sounder than he has in the past." Mathis, 33, was a Band-Aid in Detroit. "Real spotty," said one scout. "Can't run."

STRONG SAFETY: Glover Quin (Det), 8. Others: Morgan Burnett (GB), 7; Major Wright (Chi), 5; Jamarca Sanford (Minn), 4.

Signed from Houston in March for \$23.5 million over five years, Quin proved to be well worth the investment. "They couldn't get that right and he kind of solidified them on the back end," said one scout. "He can cover tight ends. Probably best in the box. Doesn't have great range but is smart. Just a steady, solid football player. Kind of the glue that put that undisciplined group together." Burnett missed too many tackles and doesn't have an interception. "Not a big hitter but athletic and can cover ground," said one scout. "Just doesn't make many dynamic plays." Wright and Sanford are much better near the line but neither is the long-term solution.

FREE SAFETY: Louis Delmas (Det) and Harrison Smith (Minn), 8. Others: Chris Conte (Chi) and M.D. Jennings (GB), 4.

Delmas will play 16 games for the first time in his injured-riddled career." This was his fourth straight first-team berth. "He's a downhill, collision guy," said one scout. "He can be an impact player in the box but injuries have taken a toll on his speed and range. Poor angles. Hard hitter, but he's not a fundamental tackler." Smith missed eight games with turf toe. "He didn't play as well as he did last year," said one scout. "I didn't see him being as aggressive as he was in run support. He did show good awareness deep." Conte, a three-year starter, and Jennings, a two-year starter, might have played themselves out of jobs. "Conte isn't very good, but I don't know why everyone thought he was going to be the next top safety," one scout said. "Jennings just is not real physical. He's a straight-line athlete. Just doesn't make any plays."

NO. 3 DEFENSIVE END: Everson Griffen* (Minn), 9. Others: Devin Taylor (Det), 7; David Bass (Chi) and Datone Jones (GB), 4.

Griffen, a first-teamer at this position three years running, ranks third in sacks (4½) and QB hits (25) for the Vikings. "He's a good pass rusher inside or outside," one scout said. "I don't know if he's dangerous." The towering Taylor (6-7) showed promise. "(Expletive), he's strong, good reach, can push the pocket," one scout said. "High cut and leggy, but he was impressive." Jones made minimal impact. "I'm drawing a complete blank on Datone," said one scout. "I don't remember. That's how good he played when I was watching him."

NO. 3 DEFENSIVE TACKLE: Mike Daniels (GB) and Sharrif Floyd (Minn), 8. Others: C.J. Mosley (Det) and Jeremiah Ratliff (Chi), 4.

Daniels was the Packers' best inside rusher. "Very good year for a compact guy," said one scout. "You see his power, his quickness and his explosion. Uses his natural leverage and high motor." Floyd, the 23rd pick in 2013, started to show late. "You saw a guy who could be disruptive," said one scout. "His pass rush got a little better at the end."

UTILITY DEFENSIVE LINEMAN: Israel Idonije* (Det), 9. Others: Josh Boyd (GB), 6; Fred Evans (Minn), 5; Landon Cohen (Chi), 4.

Idonije, 33, departed Chicago for Detroit on June 26 and resurrected his inside-outside relief role. Previously, he was first team here in 2007, '08, '09 and '12. "He had some good rushes off the edge," one scout said. "You could still see his power and ability to use his good length." Boyd opened a few eyes late. "He hustles," said one scout. "Has size and good play strength. He does have a little bit going for him." Evans flashes talent but is forever jumping offside.

NO. 4 LINEBACKER: Nick Perry* (GB), 9. Others: Khaseem Greene (Chi), 6; Marvin Mitchell (Minn), 5; Rocky McIntosh (Det), 4.

Perry battled a foot injury much of the year. "Second-effort guy," one scout said. "High-effort rusher. He just doesn't have that juice to win the edge. You'd want a more dynamic rusher." Greene, a fourth-round pick, made four starts for the injured Briggs. "I think he can develop into that (a starter)," one scout said. "He runs around a little bit. You see his snap. He has feel for the game."

NO. 3 CORNERBACK: Xavier Rhodes (Minn), 8. Others: Micah Hyde (GB), 7; Darius Slay (Det), 6; Isaiah Frey (Chi), 3.

Rhodes, the 25th pick in April, spent much of his rookie season playing LC in sub packages. "He was OK," said one scout. "He's a bigger, physical guy on the line of scrimmage with receivers. He runs fairly well. He's just got a little legginess in his play. He's got a chance to eventually be one of their guys." Slay, a second-round pick in April, "had too many breakdowns," said one scout. He added: "Good speed on vertical routes but struggles to find the ball and plays small in the run game. Not real disciplined or instinctive. It (Slay's score of 10 on the Wonderlic intelligence test) shows up." Hyde won the nickel job down the stretch. "He's steady eddie," said one scout. "A guy you can trust. Physical. I like him."

NO. 3 SAFETY: Don Carey (Det) and Andrew Sendejo (Minn), 7. Others: Sean Richardson (GB), 6; Craig Steltz (Chi), 4.

Sendejo had to start 10 games. "He's just a guy to me," one scout said. "He's just physical. That's all." Carey and Steltz are journeymen. Richardson came back from a cervical fusion to split time with Jennings in December. "Better working downhill," said one scout. "Physical kid. Just a little mechanical."

SPECIAL TEAMS

KICKER: Blair Walsh* (Minn), 9. Others: Mason Crosby (GB) and Robbie Gould (Chi), 6; David Akers (Det), 3.

Gould, a first-team pick from 2008-'11, has watched Walsh take it unanimously in each of his first two seasons. "That's a good group," one scout said. Crosby, a first-team choice in '11 with Gould, rebounded from a bad season. "He's had a bounce-back year," said one scout. "Look where he was last year. (Expletive), last year he made 63%. This year, 88%."

PUNTER: Tim Masthay (GB), 8. Others: Sam Martin (Det), 6; Jeff Locke (Minn) and Adam Podlesh (Chi), 5.

Second in 2010 and '11, Masthay has earned the top spot two straight years. "He was solid, not great this year," one scout said. "You could see his good leg strength. I thought his directional punts were good, but I see some inconsistency with him." Kicking in a dome, Martin's net of 40.8 was first, followed by Masthay's 39.7, Locke's 39.2 and Podlesh's 38.4.

PUNT RETURNER: Devin Hester (Chi) and Jeremy Ross (Det), 7. Others: Micah Hyde (GB) and Marcus Sherels (Minn), 5.

Hester, a unanimous pick five times in eight years, earned his seventh first-team berth. "I still have a warm spot for Devin Hester," one scout said. "I still think he's a difference-making player. He hasn't had the production this year but he can at any moment." Cut by Green Bay on Sept. 23, Ross averaged 18.1. "Truly, he's playing with more confidence," one scout said.

KICKOFF RETURNER: Cordarrelle Patterson* (Minn), 9. Others: Devin Hester (Chi), 7; Micah Hyde (GB) and Jeremy Ross (Det), 4.

Patterson leads the NFL at 33.6. "We all thought we got rid of that guy when (Percy) Harvin left the division," one scout said. "Now we're trying to find a way to kick away from that guy. He's unbelievable back there. Any time he gets his hands on the ball he's scary." Hyde was solid. "He surprises you," said one scout. "You don't think he's a big-play guy but he has two long returns which blow you away because he's not very fast and not very quick. Just gets north and south. He's strong and makes good decisions."

SPECIAL TEAMS ACE: S John Wendling (Det), 7. Others: LB Blake Costanzo (Chi) and LB Larry Dean (Minn), 5; CB Jarrett Bush (GB), 4; S Chris Banjo (GB), 2; S Andrew Sendejo (Minn), 1.

Wendling, 30, led the Lions with 12 tackles. Costanzo, said one scout, "is just a die-hard football player. Run through a brick wall if you needed him to."