



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**CHARGERS LB SHAWNE MERRIMAN, SEAHAWKS LB LOFA TATUPU,
BENGALS LB ODELL THURMAN, COWBOYS LB DE MARCUS WARE
& BUCCANEERS RB CARNELL "CADILLAC" WILLIAMS
NAMED 2005 DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR FINALISTS**

Fans To Vote For Winner On NFL.com or Via Sprint Wireless Service

The National Football League today announced the five finalists for the **2005 DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR** award.

2005 DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

SHAWNE MERRIMAN	Linebacker	San Diego Chargers
LOFA TATUPU	Linebacker	Seattle Seahawks
ODELL THURMAN	Linebacker	Cincinnati Bengals
DE MARCUS WARE	Linebacker	Dallas Cowboys
CARNELL "CADILLAC" WILLIAMS	Running Back	Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Fans can vote for one of these five players on NFL.com or SuperBowl.com from January 6 through January 30 to determine the **2005 DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR**.

In addition, for the first time, NFL fans may cast their votes for the **2005 DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR** using phones with Sprint wireless service - an opportunity available only to Sprint customers. This fast, convenient voting method involves texting the word PEPSI to short code 51933. Sprint customers will then receive an interactive text message ballot that lists the five finalists.

The winner will be presented the **2005 DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR** award during a press conference in Detroit, the site of Super Bowl XL, on Thursday, February 2, 2006.

The five finalists were selected for their outstanding performances throughout the 2005 NFL season. Each week, five nominees were chosen for Diet Pepsi NFL Rookie of the Week and NFL fans voted for the winner on NFL.com. Those results were used to help determine the finalists.

Following is a closer look at the five **2005 DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR** finalists:

SHAWNE MERRIMAN (San Diego Chargers) – Merriman finished the season ranked first among NFL rookies, and 15th overall, with 10 sacks. He made an immediate impact on the Chargers' defense, recording 57 tackles, the fifth-highest total on the team. Some of Merriman's best performances came in San Diego's biggest games. In a Week 8 victory over the AFC West-rival Kansas City Chiefs, he recorded five tackles and two sacks. Then, when the Chargers knocked off the previously-undefeated Indianapolis Colts in Week 15, he recorded seven tackles and two sacks. Merriman, who attended the University of Maryland, was nominated for four Diet Pepsi NFL Rookie of the Week awards, winning once.

LOFA TATUPU (Seattle Seahawks): In his rookie season, Tatupu led the Seahawks defense with 104 total tackles, to go along with his four sacks, three interceptions and one fumble recovery. In a Week 10 victory over the NFC West-rival St. Louis Rams, Tatupu recorded 10 tackles and one sack. He had a 13-tackle performance in a win over the New York Giants in Week 12 and scored his first career touchdown on a 38-yard interception return the

following week in a victory over the Philadelphia Eagles. Tatupu, who attended the University of Southern California was nominated for four Diet Pepsi NFL Rookie of the Week awards this season.

ODELL THURMAN (Cincinnati Bengals): Thurman led the Bengals in tackles with 98 and led all rookies with five interceptions this season. The middle linebacker got off to a fast start in 2005, recording seven tackles and one interception in his NFL debut, a Week 1 Bengals victory over the AFC North-rival Cleveland Browns. Thurman, scored his first career NFL touchdown on a 30-yard interception return in a Week 6 victory over the Tennessee Titans. In a Week 13 victory over the rival Pittsburgh Steelers that helped the Bengals clinch the AFC North title, Thurman recorded nine tackles, one interception and one forced fumble. Thurman, who attended the University of Georgia, was nominated for three Diet Pepsi NFL Rookie of the Week awards this season, winning one.

DE MARCUS WARE (Dallas Cowboys): Dallas linebacker DeMarcus Ware ranked second among NFL rookies with eight sacks this season. His 58 tackles in 2005 were fifth-most on the Cowboys' defense. Ware recorded a sack in four consecutive games from Week 3 to Week 6, with the Cowboys winning three of the four contests. He also finished the season strong, registering nine tackles, three sacks and three forced fumbles in a Week 16 victory over the Carolina Panthers. Ware, who attended Troy University, was nominated for three Diet Pepsi NFL Rookie of the Week awards, winning one.

CARNELL "CADILLAC" WILLIAMS (Tampa Bay Buccaneers): Williams set a Buccaneers single-season record with six 100-yard rushing games in 2005, including three to start the season. He finished with 1,178 yards and six touchdowns on 290 carries. Williams rushed for 148, 128 and 158 yards respectively in Weeks 1-3, announcing his arrival on the NFL scene. He provided the Buccaneers with several strong performances down the stretch of the season as well, including a 112-yard, two-touchdown effort in a Week 14 victory over the NFC South-rival Carolina Panthers and a 150-yard, one-touchdown game in a Week 16 victory over the NFC South-rival Atlanta Falcons. Williams, who attended Auburn University, was nominated for seven Diet Pepsi NFL Rookie of the Week awards, winning three.

Diet Pepsi is the official soft drink of the NFL. This is Pepsi's fourth year as a league sponsor.

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