



NFC NEWS 'N' NOTES

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CONTACT: MICHAEL SIGNORA (212/450-2076)

ROOKIES ON THE RISE: NFC NEWCOMERS MAKE MAJOR IMPACT

As the NFL season nears the mid-point and teams aim for a second-half push, rookies around the league are playing vital roles.

The Tampa Bay Buccaneers, for instance, have driven their brand new "Cadillac," as in rookie running back **CARNELL "CADILLAC" WILLIAMS**, to excellent results. Despite missing the past two games due to injury, the No. 5 overall pick from Auburn leads all NFL rookies with 447 rushing yards, averaging 111.8 yards per game.

Williams helped the Bucs win four consecutive games to start the season, and his 434 rushing yards after three games was the most by a rookie in NFL history.

In Seattle, the Seahawks' leading tackler is second-round linebacker **LOFA TATUPU**. In Dallas, the Cowboys' sack leader is first-round linebacker **DE MARCUS WARE**. And in Chicago, a fourth-round pick, quarterback **KYLE ORTON**, has helped the Bears to a 3-3 mark and a share of first place in the NFC North.

A team-by-team look at this year's outstanding NFC rookies:

ARIZONA: The NFL Draft has yielded yet another impact rookie for the Cardinals, this time along the offensive line. Fourth-round pick **ELTON BROWN** of Virginia has started all six games at right guard after earning first-team all-America honors as a senior. Brown is bidding to become the first rookie offensive lineman to start every game for the club since **LEONARD DAVIS** in 2001.

ATLANTA: The Falcons have received contributions from rookies on both sides of the ball. Wide receiver **RODDY WHITE**, a first-round pick from Alabama-Birmingham, has played in every game, posting five catches for 44 yards.....On defense, several draftees have made a contribution, including defensive tackles **JONATHAN BABINEAUX** (second-round, Iowa) and **DARRELL SHROPSHIRE** (seventh-round, South Carolina), defensive end **CHAUNCEY DAVIS** (fourth-round, Florida State) and linebacker **MICHAEL BOLEY** (fifth-round, Southern Mississippi).....Rookie free-agent punter **MICHAEL KOENEN** has a 42.9-yard average and converted his only field goal attempt, a 58-yarder.

CAROLINA: A rookie starter in the defensive backfield is nothing new for the Panthers – in fact, it has become an annual occurrence. Rookie first-round safety **THOMAS DAVIS** (Georgia) has played every game for Carolina, with two starts, posting 15 tackles and 1.0 sack. The Panthers have had a rookie cornerback or safety make at least one start for the club in each of the past three seasons (**RICKY MANNING**, '03; **CHRIS GAMBLE**, '04) – joining Chicago, New England, Oakland and Tennessee as the only clubs to have done so.

CHICAGO: **KYLE ORTON** joined **JOHNNY LUJACK** (1948) and **ZEKE BRATKOWSKI** (1954) as the only Bears rookie quarterbacks to start a season opener since 1933. The fourth-rounder from Purdue has led the team to a 3-3 mark and a share of first place in the NFC North. Orton has guided the club to consecutive wins over Minnesota and Baltimore, tossing four touchdown passes and just one interception in his last three games. Orton has a fellow rookie as a target in wide receiver **MARK BRADLEY**. The second-rounder from Oklahoma has totaled 13 receptions for 142 yards.

DALLAS: First-round pick **DE MARCUS WARE** has made the transition from a collegiate defensive end at Troy to an NFL rookie linebacker. And thus far, the results have been impressive. Ware leads all rookies with 4.0 sacks, has started every game and totaled 22 tackles.....Irving (TX) High School product **TYSON THOMPSON** earned a job as a rookie free agent and has rushed for 161 yards and averaged 25.0 yards per kickoff return.

DETROIT: For the second consecutive season, a "Williams" rookie has made strides at wide receiver. On the heels of **ROY WILLIAMS'** outstanding rookie year in 2004, 2005 first-rounder **MIKE WILLIAMS** from Southern California is making an impact. He has posted 12 receptions for 154 yards and one touchdown, starting two of six games. Williams' fellow USC Trojan, second-round defensive tackle **SHAUN CODY**, has played in every game, posting 1.5 sacks.

GREEN BAY: The Packers have 10 rookies on their roster, tied for fifth most in the NFL. Included in that group is second-rounder **NICK COLLINS**, a safety from Bethune-Cookman. Collins has started every game, posting 23

tackles.....It looks like Green Bay has another seventh-round find in guard **WILL WHITTICKER** of Michigan State, a starter in every game. The last Packers offensive lineman to be drafted in the seventh round and start at least five games as a rookie was tackle **MARK TAUSCHER** in 2000, who has started 70 of 72 games with the team.

MINNESOTA: Rookie wide receiver **TROY WILLIAMSON** of South Carolina has shown the big-play ability that led the Vikings to select him in the first round. Williamson averages 15.3 yards per catch and has 214 receiving yards (14 catches), both third best among rookies.....Up front, second-round selection **MARCUS JOHNSON** (Mississippi) has started four of six games at right guard while rookie free-agent punter **CHRIS KLUWE** (UCLA) ranks second in the NFL with a 46.9-yard average.

NEW ORLEANS: First-round tackle **JAMMAL BROWN** started the first five games of the season for the Saints before missing the last two due to injury.....On defense, second-rounder **JOSH BULLOCKS** of Nebraska has helped solidify the defensive backfield. The safety has earned a starting role, starting each of the past four games and totaling 21 tackles and one interception.

NEW YORK: The Giants had four draft picks in 2005 and three have already seen significant playing time. Fourth-round pick **BRANDON JACOBS** (two) from Southern Illinois joins **RONNIE BROWN** (three) and **CARNELL WILLIAMS** (two) as the only rookies to have rushed for at least two touchdowns. Jacobs is averaging 4.8 yards per carry (13 carries, 62 yards), converting three of five third-and-one rushing attempts.....On defense, second-round pick **CB COREY WEBSTER** of Louisiana State has posted 11 tackles while third-round pick **DE JUSTIN TUCK** of Notre Dame has played in every game, totaling 16 tackles.

PHILADELPHIA: The Eagles used their first-round choice to help solidify the defensive line, and former USC standout **MIKE PATTERSON** has delivered. Patterson has played in all six games and has totaled 15 tackles and 2.0 sacks, tops among rookie defensive tackles and tied for second among all rookies.....Wide receiver **REGGIE BROWN**, a second-round pick from Georgia, has played in every game, posting seven receptions for 64 yards.

ST. LOUIS: Aiming to strengthen the offensive line, the Rams selected Florida State tackle **ALEX BARRON** with the No. 19 pick in the first round. Barron has started four of his five games, helping the club rush for seven touchdowns, tied for seventh most in the NFL. Fellow rookie lineman **CLAUDE TERRELL**, a guard from New Mexico chosen in the fourth round, has played in six games, starting two.

SAN FRANCISCO: The No. 1 overall draft choice in 2005, quarterback **ALEX SMITH** of Utah, has earned the team's starting quarterback job. Smith, scheduled to make his third consecutive start this Sunday at home against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, is seeking his first NFL victory.....Running back **FRANK GORE**, a third-round pick from Miami, ranks third among NFL rookies with 198 rushing yards, averaging 5.8 yards per carry.

SEATTLE: The Seahawks acquired their leading tackler via the draft and Southern California in second-round pick **LOFA TATUPU**. The linebacker has posted a club-best 44 tackles, has started all seven games and helped the team to a 5-2 start. Tatupu and fellow rookie linebacker **LE ROY HILL**, a third-rounder from Clemson, tie for second among NFL rookies with 2.0 sacks each and are the league's only rookie teammates with multiple sacks.

TAMPA BAY: In addition to the success of **CARNELL WILLIAMS**, the Bucs have enjoyed production from rookie tight end **ALEX SMITH**, a third-round pick from Stanford. Smith's 14 receptions (93 yards) tie for fourth most among rookies. His two touchdown receptions tie for second best among the class of 2005.

WASHINGTON: For the second consecutive year, the Redskins have solidified their defensive backfield with a first-round pick. On the heels of safety **SEAN TAYLOR**'s standout rookie season in 2004, former Auburn star **CARLOS ROGERS** has emerged as a starter. The cornerback has started three of his five games, helping Washington's defense rank fourth overall (266.0) and fourth against the pass (157.5).