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AFC ROOKIES MAKE THEIR MARK AS SEASON NEARS MIDPOINT

They carried doughnuts into meeting rooms during training camp, but now NFL rookies are carrying their weight – and then some – by making significant contributions to their clubs.

Three AFC rookies lead their teams in rushing yards, four lead or are team co-leaders in sacks, and many others are starting or holding down key roles for their teams.

"I feel like I'm getting better each week," says Indianapolis rookie running back **JOSEPH ADDAI**, who leads the undefeated Colts (6-0) with 354 rushing yards on 70 carries for a 5.1-yard-per-carry average. "I think it goes back to practice; just going out there and fully understanding what's going on."

As the NFL season approaches the half-way point, below is an AFC team-by-team look at some of the rookies making standout contributions:

BALTIMORE: Drafted No. 12 overall from Oregon, **DT HALOTI NGATA** is one of 13 first-round selections by the Ravens since 1996 who have a combined total of 28 Pro Bowl distinctions. Through seven games (all starts), Ngata has chalked up an interception – which he returned 60 yards – along with 19 tackles to help Baltimore reach a 4-2 start, good for a share of first place in the AFC North...Fifth-round pick **S DAWAN LANDRY** (Georgia Tech) has five starts under his belt and stands fifth on the team with 33 tackles, including three passes defended.

BUFFALO: Two rookie safeties are bolstering Buffalo, as first-round selection **DONTE WHITNER** (Ohio State) and fourth-rounder **KO SIMPSON** (South Carolina) have started six of seven games together. Whitner leads the team's defensive backs with 49 tackles and earned NFL Defensive Rookie of the Month honors for September. Simpson has racked up 40 tackles – including a sack – and both players have an interception.

CINCINNATI: Handling the team's No. 3 cornerback position, **JOHNATHAN JOSEPH** (first round, South Carolina) has impressed, already having broken up seven passes. "He's done everything well," says head coach **MARVIN LEWIS**. "He's been great on the blitz. He's been a good tackler. He's understanding how and what we're doing."...**LB AHMAD BROOKS** (supplemental third round, Virginia) made his first start in Week 6 and led the team with 14 tackles. In the Bengals' Week 7 win against Carolina, Brooks notched his first sack along with a pass defended for 4-2 Cincinnati.

CLEVELAND: Key cogs of every Browns defensive game plan are rookie **DE KAMERION WIMBLEY** (first round, Florida State) and **LB D'QWELL JACKSON** (second round, Maryland). Wimbley's speed off the edge has helped him reach a team-best 3.0 sacks – the fourth most by a rookie through seven weeks – with 23 tackles and six QB pressures. Jackson's instincts have led to 55 tackles, good for second most on the team, including two for losses.

DENVER: Standing 5-11 and weighing 250 pounds, **DE ELVIS DUMERVIL** (fourth round) proves to play bigger than his size with 2.0 sacks in a Week 6 win against Oakland and 3.0 more last Sunday in Cleveland. Dumervil, who posted the second highest single-season sack total (20.0) in NCAA history for Louisville last season, became the first Denver rookie to post 3.0 sacks in a game since **RULON JONES** in 1980...Fifth-round pick **TE TONY SCHEFFLER** (Western Michigan) has played in all six games for the AFC West-leading Broncos (5-1).

HOUSTON: The NFL's youngest starter (21) on Kickoff Weekend, No. 1 overall pick **DE MARIO WILLIAMS** (North Carolina State) has 2.5 sacks with a pair of QB pressures. Williams' 18 tackles tie him for the most among Texans defensive linemen...**LB DE MECO RYANS** (second round, Alabama) tops the team with 54 tackles in handling starting middle linebacker duties...Fourth-round pick **TE OWEN DANIELS** (Wisconsin) has three TD catches. Only four NFL tight ends have caught more on the year.

INDIANAPOLIS: With a large chunk of the undefeated Colts' rushing responsibility on his shoulders, first-round pick **JOSEPH ADDAI** of LSU has produced. The do-it-all performer leads rookies with 28 first downs (21 rushing, seven receiving). Addai is the only rookie with as many as 350 rushing yards (354) and 10 receptions (14)...From Howard University, sixth-round pick **S ANTOINE BETHEA** is third on the club with 42 tackles and has started every game.

JACKSONVILLE: Standing tall among the league's most productive rookies is 5-7, 212-pound **RB MAURICE JONES-DREW** of UCLA. The second-round pick leads NFL rookies with five touchdowns and joins Philadelphia **RB BRIAN WESTBROOK** as the only players in the league with at least three TDs rushing and two receiving. In addition to 278 yards on 11 kickoff returns (25.3-yard avg.) for the seventh-best mark in the league, Jones-Drew is averaging 4.6 yards per carry with 187 yards on 41 rushes.

KANSAS CITY: Selected with the 20th overall selection from Penn State, **DE TAMBA HALI** is matching results with consistency. The Liberia native, who fled the war-torn country at age 10, stands third on the team with 37 tackles along the line of scrimmage, 3.5 sacks, a pass defended and a club-best four forced fumbles...Second-round pick **S BERNARD POLLARD** (Purdue) has a special teams tackle in four of the past five games and a forced fumble on the season.

MIAMI: Taken in the third round from Arizona State, **WR DEREK HAGAN** has pulled down 11 receptions for 119 yards and a touchdown in the past two games. Hagan's six receptions in Week 6 were the most by a Miami rookie since **CHRIS CHAMBERS** had seven in 2001 against New England. Hagan names **JERRY RICE** as his favorite athlete as a youngster...**S JASON ALLEN**, the Dolphins' first round selection from Tennessee, joins Hagan as a rookie Dolphin to have played in every game this season.

NEW ENGLAND: Leading the Patriots and all rookies in rushing yards (361) and standing 10th among all AFC rushers is **RB LAURENCE MARONEY** (first round, Minnesota). Maroney is tied with Jacksonville's Jones-Drew for the most rushing TDs by a rookie with three...Opening up holes for Maroney and protecting **QB TOM BRADY** is rookie and starting **T RYAN O'CALLAGHAN**, a fifth-round selection from California...**K STEPHEN GOSTKOWSKI** (fourth round, Memphis) is five of eight (62.5 percent) on field-goal tries and a perfect 17 for 17 on extra points.

NEW YORK: Several rookies have started for the Jets in their first seven games, including **T D'BRICKASHAW FERGUSON** (first round, Virginia), **C NICK MANGOLD** (first round, Ohio State), **RB LEON WASHINGTON** (fourth round, Florida State), and **CB DREW COLEMAN** (sixth round, Texas Christian). Ferguson and Mangold have been offensive line mainstays while Washington leads the team with 346 rushing yards – only 15 yards behind the NFL's top rookie rusher Maroney. **WR-QB BRAD SMITH** (fourth round, Missouri) has contributed on special teams and has carried the ball nine times for 46 yards, reaching a first down on seven of those carries.

OAKLAND: Five 2006 Raiders draft picks are on the club's roster. First-round pick **S MICHAEL HUFF** of Texas has started every game, while second-round pick **LB THOMAS HOWARD** of Texas-El Paso has started five of six. Huff and Howard have played key roles in helping the NFL's fifth-ranked defense limit opponents to 273.0 yards per game.

PITTSBURGH: Selected No. 25 overall from Ohio State, **WR SANTONIO HOLMES** is averaging 15.9 yards on his 14 receptions. The rookie is sprinting to a 24.9-yard average on 13 kick returns and also has returned eight punts for 72 yards (9.0 average)...**S ANTHONY SMITH**, selected in the third round from Syracuse, has six special-teams tackles and has played in all six of Pittsburgh's games.

SAN DIEGO: Adding to the Chargers' power surge is starting **T MARCUS MC NEILL**, the team's second-round choice from Auburn. McNeill is a key reason the team has not allowed a sack in three games on the season and possesses the league's No. 3 rushing attack, averaging 148.0 yards per game. McNeill earned NFL Offensive Rookie of the month honors for his work on the San Diego line...**CB ANTONIO CROMARTIE** (first round, Florida State) contributes to the NFL's No. 1-ranked defense (241.2 yards allowed per game) as its nickel back and has played in every game this season.

TENNESSEE: One of the league's most exciting young quarterbacks, No. 3 overall selection **VINCE YOUNG** of Texas has passed or run for a touchdown in four consecutive games...**RB LEN DALE WHITE** (second round, USC) is averaging 4.3 yards per carry on the season with 26 rushes...Selected in the seventh round from Samford, **CB CORTLAND FINNEGAN** serves as the team's nickel back and has 2.0 sacks, a forced fumble, a pass defended and 15 tackles in six games...**DT JESSE MAHELONA** (fifth round, Tennessee) has rung up 18 tackles and a sack in six games.

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