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CHARGERS T MARCUS MC NEILL & BILLS S DONTÉ WHITNER NAMED NFL ROOKIES OF MONTH FOR SEPTEMBER

Tackle **MARCUS MC NEILL** of the San Diego Chargers and safety **DONTÉ WHITNER** of the Buffalo Bills are the NFL Offensive and Defensive Rookies of the Month for September, the NFL announced today.

OFFENSE: T MARCUS MC NEILL, SAN DIEGO CHARGERS

- A second-round selection from Auburn (No. 50 overall), McNeill is the starting left tackle for the 2-0 Chargers and has played on every San Diego offensive snap. Protecting the blind-side of quarterback **PHILIP RIVERS**, McNeill is a significant part of an offensive line that has not allowed a sack while establishing the No. 2-ranked rushing attack in the league, averaging 217.5 yards per game. In addition, despite playing only two games, the Chargers' offensive line is the only unit in the league that has paved the way for two rushers to gain at least 175 yards: **LA DAINIAN TOMLINSON** (202) and **MICHAEL TURNER** (175). Beyond not allowing a sack, McNeill and his linemates have afforded Rivers time in the pocket to post the second-highest passer rating in the league (107.4). With the 6-8, 336-pound McNeill helping create holes to the end zone, San Diego is tied with San Francisco for the most rushing touchdowns with five. This past month represents the Chargers' third perfect September in six seasons.

A consensus All-America selection at Auburn, McNeill's honor marks the third time a player from Auburn has won NFL Offensive Rookie of the Month in the past five months as Tampa Bay's **CARNELL "CADILLAC" WILLIAMS** earned the award in September and December of 2005.

DEFENSE: S DONTÉ WHITNER, BUFFALO BILLS

- Making an immediate impact on the Bills' defense, Whitner has shown a propensity to create big plays as part of the NFL's seventh-ranked defense against the pass (169.3 yards per game). Strong enough to apply run support with the quickness needed to employ man coverage on speedy receivers from his safety position, Whitner – selected No. 8 overall from Ohio State – has earned a starting role in Buffalo. The 5-11, 190-pounder registered his first career interception off of New England's **TOM BRADY** in his first NFL game on Kickoff Weekend in Foxboro. The fourth-quarter pick put the Bills in position for a potential go-ahead score in addition to his seven tackles in a 19-17 defeat. In Week 2 at Miami, Whitner made his first start, totaling seven more tackles and posting a key pass deflection on a Dolphins' fourth-quarter two-point conversion try to maintain a 16-6 lead and eventual win. Had Whitner not made the play, the Dolphins would have had the chance to recover an onside kick trailing by eight points in the game's waning moments.

Whitner is the first Bills player to earn a Rookie of the Month Award since **SAM COWART** collected the defensive honor in October of 1998.

2006 NFL ROOKIES OF THE MONTH

	<u>Offense (College)</u>	<u>Defense (College)</u>
September	T Marcus McNeill, San Diego (Auburn)	S Donte Whitner, Buffalo (Ohio State)

Other nominees for the September NFL Offensive Rookie of the Month were:

- Denver running back **MIKE BELL** (free agent, Arizona), who rushed for 114 yards on 27 carries (4.2-yard average) with a long rush of 36 yards and a touchdown along with five receptions for 42 yards (8.4 average). Bell's five receptions tie for third-most on the team.
- New Orleans running back **REGGIE BUSH** (first-round, Southern California), who leads all rookies with 19 receptions and 264 yards from scrimmage as the Saints finished the month 3-0 and in first place in the NFC South. Bush, who is second in the league among rookies with 125 rushing yards, ranks first in the NFL with 10 third down receptions.
- New Orleans wide receiver **MARQUES COLSTON** (seventh-round, Hofstra), the 252nd of 255 players selected in the 2006 NFL Draft, finished the month as the NFL rookie leader with 204 receiving yards and tied for tops with two touchdowns. His 15 receptions are second among rookies, trailing only teammate Reggie Bush. Colston joins Philadelphia wide receiver **HANK BASKETT** (undrafted) and Carolina guard **WILL MONTGOMERY** (seventh-round) as the only seventh-rounders or free agents to have started at least one game this season.
- Pittsburgh wide receiver **SANTONIO HOLMES** (first-round, Ohio State), who caught five passes for 51 yards (10.2 average). Holmes also leads the Steelers with 111 kick return yards on five returns (22.2 average) and has 16 yards on two punt returns (8.0 average).
- Green Bay wide receiver **GREG JENNINGS** (second-round, Western Michigan), who tied for the lead among rookies with two touchdowns, ranked second with 173 receiving yards and third with 10 receptions. His 75-yard touchdown catch last week against the Lions was the 400th of quarterback **BRETT FAVRE**'s career.

Other nominees for the September NFL Defensive Rookie of the Month Award were:

- Tennessee cornerback **CORTLAND FINNEGAN** (seventh-round, Samford), who in three games as the team's nickel back has accounted for eight tackles, 2.0 sacks, one pass defended, one forced fumble, and one fumble recovery.
- Green Bay linebacker **A.J. HAWK** (first-round, Ohio State), who started all three games for the Packers and finished the month tied for second on the club with 24 tackles and posted 1.0 sack and two passes defended.
- Kansas City defensive end **TAMBA HALI** (first-round, Penn State), who leads the Chiefs with 16 tackles through two games.
- Houston linebacker **DE MECO RYANS** (second-round, Alabama), who led the Texans in tackles for two of their three September games, totaling a team-best 30 for the month as the club's starting middle linebacker.
- Detroit linebacker **ERNIE SIMS** (first-round, Florida State), who totaled a team-leading 33 tackles in three starts, recording at least 10 tackles in each of the club's first three games.
- Seattle defensive end **DARRYL TAPP** (second-round, Virginia Tech), who tied for the NFL rookie lead with 2.0 sacks, posting seven tackles for the league's ninth-ranked defense.