

Packers have 5 picks among first 91

By JACOB WESTENDORF
Green & Gold Express

Brian Gutekunst's last two draft classes have gone exactly according to plan. He found players that were both impactful as rookies and players that look to building blocks for the foreseeable future.

That sets up for the Packers to need a war chest of salary cap space to give second contracts to all of those players as soon as next offseason, but that is a good problem to have.

The Packers at this time a year ago were in unknown territory. Aaron Rodgers was gone. Jordan Love was going to be the starter. Yes, the Packers were publicly confident in Love, but until something happened on the field, it was hard to know exactly what the team was going to get.

Combine that with the fact the offense was going to be historically young, there were no expectations for the Packers to compete for a Super Bowl.

Those days are gone now. Love is good. The Packers have a quarterback of the future. The rest of the roster is set to be built around him now.

This year's draft class is going to be scrutinized heavily, because it could be the one that pushes the team over the top and into the Super Bowl for the first time since 2010.

Here is a list of the picks the Packers will have for this draft class.

- Round 1, Pick 25
- Round 2, Pick 41 (from Jets for Rodgers)
- Round 2, Pick 58
- Round 3, Pick 88
- Round 3, Pick 91 (from Bills for Rasul Douglas)
- Round 4, Pick 126
- Round 5, Pick 169*
- Round 6, Pick 202
- Round 6, Pick 219*
- Round 7, Pick 245
- Round 7, Pick 255*

With those picks in mind, here are some scenarios that could emerge for the Packers' draft class with the help of Pro Football Network's mock draft simulator.

Day 1:
Gutekunst has been noticeably unpredictable during the first round during his tenure as general manager.

He took a cornerback during



Running back Aaron Jones poses with family, friends and fans after the Packers lost to the San Francisco 49ers in the NFC Divisional Round earlier this year. It turned out to be Jones' last game with the Packers, as he was released two months later. For more on Jones and other players released in the offseason, turn to page 7.

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his first draft class that the team would historically have thought was too short. That player was Jaire Alexander.

He's taken an inside linebacker and older prospect in the first round. Of course, he was also responsible for one of the biggest stunners in recent draft history.

He moved up to pick Jordan Love following a 13-3 season and appearance in the NFC Championship Game.

One thing appears to be certain. Gutekunst will treat the draft like a long-term proposition regardless of the situation of the current team.

This year, however, is where the first round is interesting.

The Packers could be looking to fortify their offensive line by taking a tackle early, such as Georgia's Amarius Mims or Washington's Troy Fautanu.

Gutekunst could also look to fortify the interior of his offensive line with someone like Duke's Graham Barton. Barton is not limited to just playing guard

or center. Some teams could see him as a tackle, and the Packers could be one of those as well. Some have speculated that he is a better prospect than Elgton Jenkins.

The Packers loved Jenkins and spent the 44th overall pick on him. It's unlikely they'll have the luxury to wait for the second round of this year's draft class to be able to take Barton. He is flying up the board in mock drafts from the experts.

Jackson Powers-Johnson from Oregon could be another option if the Packers wanted to upgrade at center.

If the Packers decide to go away from the offensive side of the ball, something they've done every year but one in the last 10 years, they could address their defense at any of the three levels.

The defensive line or edge rushing group could use another boost. The Packers took Iowa's pass rusher Lukas Van Ness last year with the 13th overall pick. That said, there are never too many good pass rushers on a defense, and Preston Smith will be 32 this upcoming season.

If UCLA's Laiatu Latu is available, that could be a consideration at the Packers' pick in the first round. The same is true for Florida State's Jared Verse.

If they're looking on the defensive line, there are a few players that could fit the mold.

Texas' Byron Murphy or Illinois' Jer'Zhan Newton are both guys that could give the defensive line a boost.

Kenny Clark is playing on a contract set to expire following the 2024 season. TJ Slaton is playing on an expiring contract as well. While it seems unlikely, the Packers could look to the

future early.

While Devonte Wyatt and Karl Brooks have had some nice moments, neither has proven to be a high impact player.

Linebacker is another position the Packers need to add bodies. Texas A&M's Edgerrin Cooper appears to have caught the Packers' eye enough to bring him in for a top-30 visit prior to the draft.

The defensive backfield is another popular spot for the first round. Iowa's Cooper DeJean is one of the favorites amongst mock drafters for the Packers to select in the first round. He could play nickel corner or safety in Jeff Hafley's 4-3 scheme.

A scout recently told Bill Huber of Packer Central that DeJean was the perfect complement to Xavier McKinney.

DeJean may not be available when the Packers are on the clock, which could cause them to look elsewhere.

The safety class, by consensus, is not a good one, which could cause the Packers to wait until later to add to their safety room.

If they did not want to wait, Minnesota's Tyler Nubin or Washington State's Jaden Hicks could be players that sneak into the end of the first round.

If they wanted to add a cornerback, Alabama's Terrion Arnold and Kool-Aid McKinstry are potential options. Toledo's Quinyon Mitchell is the best fit for Hafley's scheme but likely requires a move into the top half of the first round.

Day 2:

Gutekunst has four picks on the second day of the draft, which arms him with the ability to move anywhere.

For as much focus as the first

round has had on defense, every pick the Packers have had in the second round over the last two years have been used on offense.

Last year's second- and third-round picks were Luke Musgrave, Jayden Reed and Tucker Kraft.

All three players look to be building blocks for the future.

The second round could be where Gutekunst looks to address the running back room, depth at safety, and the offensive line.

Running backs that could go on Day 2 include Michigan's Blake Corum, Texas' Jonathan Brooks and Tennessee's Jaylen Wright.

Wright and Florida State's Trey Benson both fit well as change-of-pace types to the Packers' current backfield of Josh Jacobs and AJ Dillon.

Safety depth could be players that slip through the cracks of the first round and into the second round like Nubin. Other players could include USC's Calen Bulllock and Georgia's Tykee Smith and Javon Bullard.

Yale's Kiran Amegadjie was referred to as the most interesting player in the draft class at offensive tackle by Dane Brugler.

Day 3:

The third day of the draft is typically about depth and fortifying the special teams.

Gutekunst will likely look for more depth on his offensive line and has stated he wants to get back into the practice of drafting quarterbacks. Tennessee's Joe Milton is the most interesting of quarterback prospects that could go on the third day of the draft.

For special teams, one potential option is Michigan wide receiver Cornelius Johnson.

Where can I watch the 2024 NFL draft?

The 2024 NFL Draft presented by Bud Light will be televised nationally by NFL Network, ABC, ESPN and ESPN Deportes.

On-air coverage of the draft will begin at the times listed below. All times listed are Central Time.

April 25: 7 p.m., NFL Network, ABC, ESPN, ESPN Deportes (Spanish).

April 26: 6 p.m., NFL Network, ABC, ESPN, ESPN Deportes (Spanish).

April 27: 11 a.m., NFL Network, ABC, ESPN, ESPN Deportes (Spanish).

In addition to TV coverage, the networks will have information through apps and websites.

For more information on NFL Network's Draft Week Coverage, visit www.nfl.com/network/events/nfl-draft.

New faces excited for next chapter in Green Bay

Running back Jacobs, strong safety McKinney among big additions for Packers

By **LUKE REIMER**
Green & Gold Express

While the Green Bay Packers overperformed last season and finished a game short of the NFC Championship, general manager Brian Gutekunst and his staff deemed it appropriate to make some changes.

Among those changes were the signings of two young players who are expected to make a major impact that may help Green Bay get over the hump. The first signing that Green Bay made when the new NFL season opened was running back Josh Jacobs.

Jacobs was drafted by the Las Vegas Raiders with the 24th pick of the first round in 2019 out of the University of Alabama. While at Alabama, Jacobs recorded a total of 1,491 rushing yards and 16 touchdowns. While those numbers don't scream anything crazy, in 2018, he shared the Crimson Tide's backfield with three other NFL running backs in Damien Harris, Najee Harris and Brian Robinson.

After being selected by the Raiders, Jacobs was finally given the opportunity to be the No. 1 guy in the backfield. That proved to be a great addition for the Raiders, as in his rookie season, Jacobs totaled 1,150 rushing yards and seven rushing touchdowns. He followed that season up with another stellar performance as a sophomore in the NFL, totaling 1,065 rushing yards and 12 rushing touchdowns. With high expectations, Jacobs somewhat underperformed in his third campaign, as he ran for 872 yards and nine touchdowns.

With many in the NFL world criticizing Jacobs after his third season, the Alabama alum more than proved the doubters wrong in his fourth season. Playing in

his first complete season, Jacobs led the NFL in rushing with 1,653 yards and tied his career high with 12 rushing touchdowns. During the season, Jacobs added a career-best 400 receiving yards as well. He followed that season up with 805 rushing yards in 13 games last season.

While Green Bay made the splash in free agency by signing Jacobs, many thought the team was going to partner him with Aaron Jones. Gutekunst had different plans though, as Jones was subsequently released, leaving the backfield wide open for Jacobs.

The change from Jones to Jacobs will be an interesting dynamic, as each player plays a different style of football. Jones was able to exploit defenses by hitting one cut hard and gashing the defense with as little contact as possible. Jacobs works the running back position by bruising his way through the offensive and defensive lines, trying to wear down defenses with his physical style of running.

While both styles have proven to be effective in the NFL, Jacobs' style of running may give the Packers a little more flexibility when it comes to designing inside runs.

"I had a few (teams) to choose from, but ultimately it came down to what I have seen and what I have believed in this team," said Jacobs, on why he opted to sign with Green Bay. "Young quarterback, young skill guys and good offensive line, so for a running back, you can't load the box and when you do, you still have guys that can move around."

Jacobs wasn't the only one who made the move to Green Bay though. With an obvious weakness at the strong safety position, the Packers brought in Xavier McKinney, who spent his first four

seasons in the NFL with the New York Giants.

While he was with the Giants, McK-inney totaled 279 total tackles and nine interceptions. Also out of Alabama, McK-inney figures to slide into a prominent role on a Packers defense that is eagerly looking to limit players like Christian McCaffrey, David Montgomery and Puka Nacua, among other stars in the NFC.

McKinney will look to start immediately at the strong safety position to give the Packers a fast and strong secondary. What Packer fans should be excited about, too, is McKinney played in every game for the Giants last season.

As a whole, McKinney flies around to the ball and oftentimes uses his speed to greatly limit opposing quarterbacks. With 27 pass deflections, two forced fumbles and two fumble recoveries, McKinney is at the top of scouting reports for every opposing offensive coordinator.

Partnering him with Jaire Alexander gives Green Bay a solid one-two punch and a great base for its growing secondary.

The Alabama alum should also bring new defensive coordinator Jeff Hafley some flexibility on that side of the ball. While with New York, McKinney was able to line up all over the secondary, taking snaps at safety, slot corner and even up in the box as a hybrid linebacker. With his speed and playmaking ability, it seems likely that McKinney will be able to make an immediate impact.

"For me, I am more so like whatever we need for that game I want to go do," said McKinney, on his favorite position to play. "I try not to get too focused on one spot. I never try to box myself in, and I think that is what gives me the ability to

play in different spots in the defense and in any scheme at a high level."

In classic Gutekunst fashion, both of these big name signings come with youth. It has become fairly obvious that Green Bay is looking to keep its team as young as possible while keeping solid talent. Coming into his sixth season, Jacobs is just 26 years old and McKinney entering his fifth season in the NFL is just 24 years old.

As has been the theme with Green Bay in recent years, the front office has not shied away from moving on from aging veterans who have had great careers in Green Bay.

In the past three offseasons, Green Bay has said farewell to Davante Adams, Aaron Rodgers and Aaron Jones. Those three have been replaced by Christian Watson, Romeo Doubs, Jordan Love and Josh Jacobs, all of whom are 26 or younger.

The youth movement in Green Bay should obviously pay dividends when the team can gel together like what was shown last season.

As we saw last season, the young Packers team needed time to figure out its game plan and play styles before being able to really compete. When it did work out the kinks, the Packers looked like one of the better teams in the league.

With a full season under the belt with Love, expectations are high for Green Bay. After faltering against San Francisco, opting to replace Jones with Jacobs and Darnell Savage, who was picked up by the Jacksonville Jaguars, with McKinney, young, strong pieces may be in place to help the Packers finally beat the 49ers.

If all else fails this season, Jacobs and McKinney are young enough to where they should be able to play in the Green Bay system for years to come.



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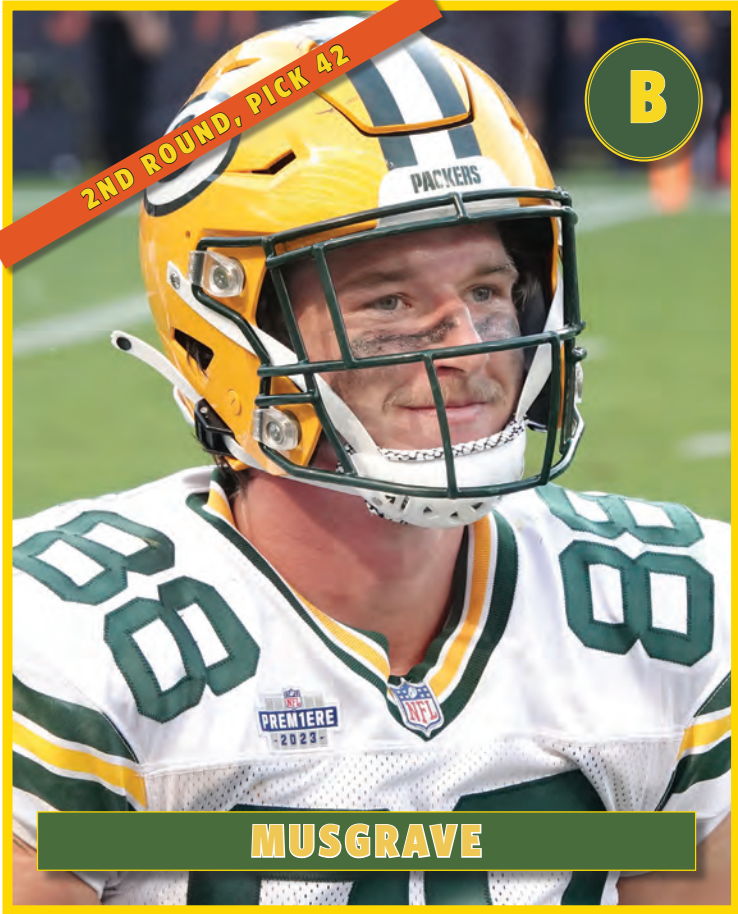
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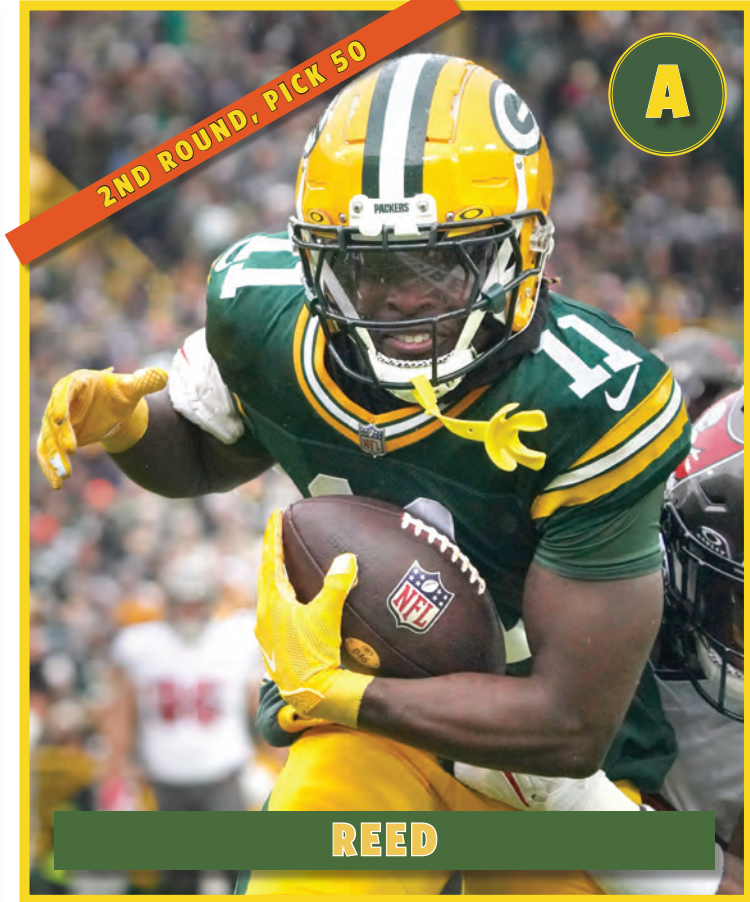
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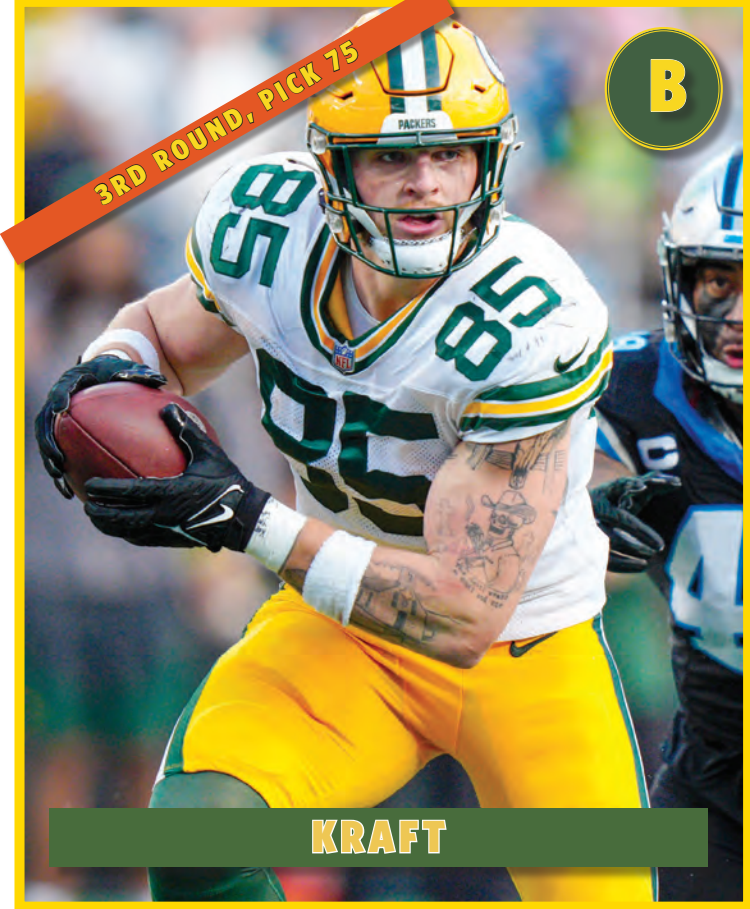
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By JACOB WESTENDORF
Green & Gold Express

The 2023 draft class for the Green Bay Packers could go down as one for the ages. If they win a Super Bowl in the next few seasons, it's likely that many of the foundational pieces for that championship team will have come from this draft class.

Brian Gutekunst entered this draft loaded with ammo at the top end of the draft due to the trade of Aaron Rodgers to the New York Jets.

While Rodgers' move to the Jets was the ending of an era, it was necessary to move to the next stage of Green Bay Packers football.

The Rodgers trade paved the way for Jordan Love to become the team's starting quarterback, something that he was uncertain was ever going to happen at the same time one year earlier.

Rodgers had just signed a new contract, and Love felt resigned to remaining on the bench in Green Bay until a new opportunity arose.

"I'll admit I think the hardest time was when he signed the contract last year," Love said to Green Bay media last May. "It was kind of like, 'OK, well, where do we go from here? What do I do?' I think I just sat back, kind of thought to myself, and just came back with the approach, like, just go ball out. Any opportunity I get – I'm going to get the preseason – who knows what happens after that."

Instead, Love was installed as the starter and Gutekunst went to work trying to build a team around him.

The wide assumption, as it has been for the last four seasons around draft time, was that the Packers would end the drought of selecting a first-round wide receiver. That drought extends back to 2002 when Mike Sherman traded up to take Florida State's Jaxon Walker.

Those claims got louder when the trade of Rodgers moved the Packers up two spots in the first round.

Consensus was building that the Packers were targeting Ohio State wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba.

Gutekunst did not take him. Instead, his draft class started with a pass rusher and ended with a wide receiver.

First Round Pick 13 – Lukas Van Ness, OLB, Iowa

Van Ness was a player the Packers clearly targeted in a move from 15 to 13 in a trade with the New York Jets that sent Rodgers to the East Coast.

Van Ness was a rotational pass rusher, mostly behind Rashan Gary and Preston

Smith for most of the season. His development track looks a lot like Gary's from when he was a rookie.

By the end of the season, however, Van Ness looked to be finding his sea legs as an NFL player.

He finished the season strong and should be able to take starting caliber reps during his second season.

Grade: B
Second Round Pick 42 – Luke Musgrave, TE, Oregon State

Musgrave was the Packers' starting tight end from the moment he was drafted. Part of that was a byproduct of Robert Tonyan and Mercedes Lewis moving on in the offseason, but it was mostly due to what the Packers thought of him.

Musgrave flashed explosive ability to stretch the seam and gave one of the great locker room moments of the year when he was able to stay on his feet for a long touchdown against the Dallas Cowboys.

Musgrave and draft classmate Tucker Kraft will allow Matt LaFleur to have plenty of tools at his disposal to toy with opposing defenses.

Grade: B
Second Round Pick 50 – Jayden Reed, WR, Michigan State

Reed's chemistry with Love was on display early in training camp. By the end of the season, he was Love's go-to guy. Reed led the team in receiving yards and tied for touchdowns with Romeo Doubs.

He made plays in the run game as well.

Reed was seen as a consolation prize to the first round receiver fans and pundits were clamoring for. Instead, he just outperformed any of the receivers taken in the first round.

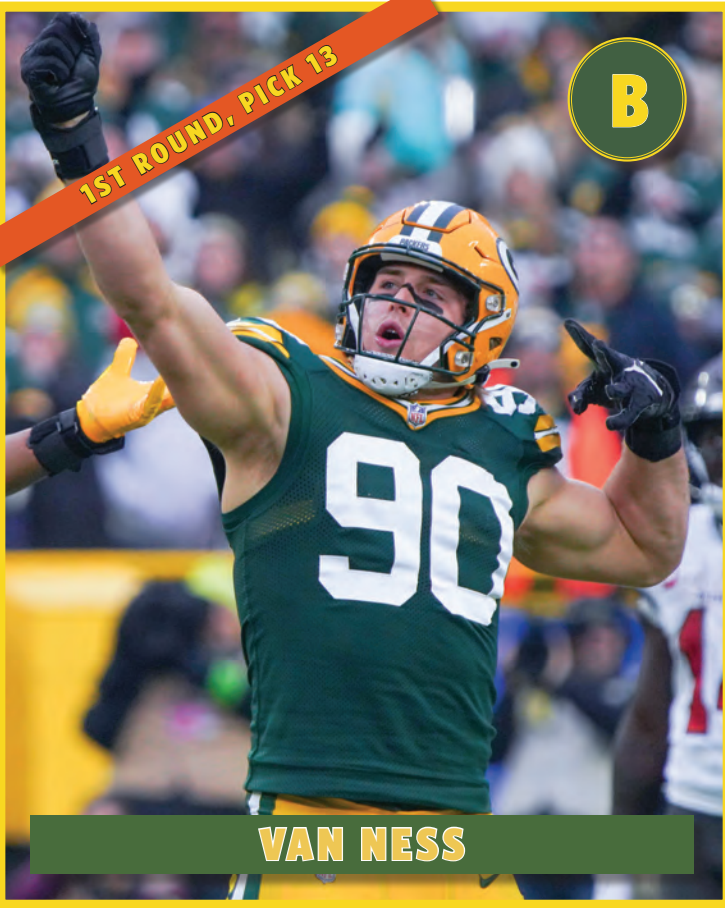
Reed's game reminds many of what Randall Cobb was like in his prime, but Reed is probably faster.

He'll be a big part of this offense for years to come.

Grade: A
Third Round Pick 75 – Tucker Kraft, TE, South Dakota State

Kraft had a tough start to the season. He admittedly felt like he was swimming upstream.

There were times he was surpassed on the roster by Ben Sims, an undrafted free



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agent.

By the end of the season, Kraft was in the discussion as the team's best tight end on the roster.

Whoever the best guy at that position is does not really matter. Kraft and Musgrave can combine for one of the best tight end combinations in all of football if they continue to develop.

Grade: B
Fourth Round Pick 116 – Colby Wooden, DL, Auburn

Wooden was surpassed early by fellow draft classmate Karl Brooks. The plays he made were few and far between, but he did finish the season strong, blocking a field goal against San Francisco.

Of the top five defensive linemen on the roster, it's Wooden's spot that feels the most tenuous should the Packers decide to add another guy in the draft.

Grade: C
Fifth Round Pick 149 – Sean Clifford, QB, Penn State

Clifford was a backup quarterback who showed well in preseason. He played well in mop-up duty. The Packers are happy with him, and he never had to play. That's all most teams will ask for with their backup.

Grade: B
Fifth Round Pick 159 – Don-tayvion Wicks, WR, Virginia
Wicks was the second half of a dynamic duo that emerged with Reed before the end of the season.

He was sensational down the stretch while battling through a multitude of injuries. Wicks was always open and saved his best for a playoff clincher.

He scored two touchdowns against the Bears and another the following week against the Cowboys in what might have been Love's best play of the season.

Wicks' future is bright, and this is one of the steals of the draft.

Grade: A
Sixth Round Pick 179 – Karl Brooks, DL, Bowling Green

There's an argument to be made that Brooks was the second-best defensive lineman on the roster last season.

He had four sacks and flashed some violent hands in the pass rush game. He should be given more opportunities to get after the quarterback in Jeff Hailey's even fronts. That should excite Packers fans.

Grade: B+
Sixth Round Pick 207 – Anders Carlson, K, Auburn

Carlson led the league in missed kicks during his rookie season. After starting the season hot, he missed a kick in every game save for one following the bye week.

Carlson's struggles were mostly brushed off by the coaching staff, but he missed a crucial 43-yard field goal in the team's divisional round loss to the San Francisco 49ers.

The Packers have brought in a veteran, Greg Joseph to compete with Carlson this offseason.

Unfortunately, the competition was brought in too little too late. Carlson's leash was too long a season ago, and his miss to help end the season would have been forgivable if it were not so predictable.

Everyone gets low marks for drafting an ineffective kicker and being stubborn enough to stick with him throughout a playoff run.

Grade: F
Seventh Round Pick 232 – Carrington Valentine, CB, Kentucky

Valentine was one the pleasant surprises of the 2023 season. He was pressed into

duty during the season with injuries ravaging the cornerback group and acquitted himself well.

During training camp, he was the star of the show. He was always around the ball and felt like he made at least one big play per day in practice.

That did not translate to regular season games. Valentine did not record an interception on the season, but he was sticky in coverage. The passer rating he allowed against him was 81, which is more than ever could be asked for from a rookie cornerback picked in the seventh round.

Valentine started every game after Rasul Douglas was traded before the deadline and looks to be in line to start across from Jaire Alexander in 2024 as well, depending on the injury status of Eric Stokes.

Regardless of what happens, this pick is already a massive success.

Grade: A
Seventh Round Pick 235 – Lew Nichols, RB, Central Michigan

Nichols was injured early in camp and subsequently released with an injury settlement. Even when he was healthy, Emanuel Wilson looked like a better player. Nichols doesn't get a failing grade as a seventh round pick but gets low marks considering Gutekunst typically keeps all of his draft picks, especially as rookies.

Grade: D
Seventh Round Pick 242 – Anthony Johnson Jr., S, Iowa State

Johnson Jr. was a preseason darling after showing up as a potential first-round pick in a mock draft over at PFF by Cris Collinsworth. Instead, Johnson Jr. was picked in the seventh round. He hauled in one interception on the season and was seeing some time as a safety at a position that was in flux for most of the year.

Johnson's primary contributions come on special teams. With the addition of Xavier McKinney in free agency, and no other players being brought in as of yet, Johnson Jr. is in line to start next to him. Whether he does or not remains to be seen, but he has at least proven himself as a quality backup.

Grade: C
Seventh Round Pick 256 – Grant DuBose, WR, Charlotte

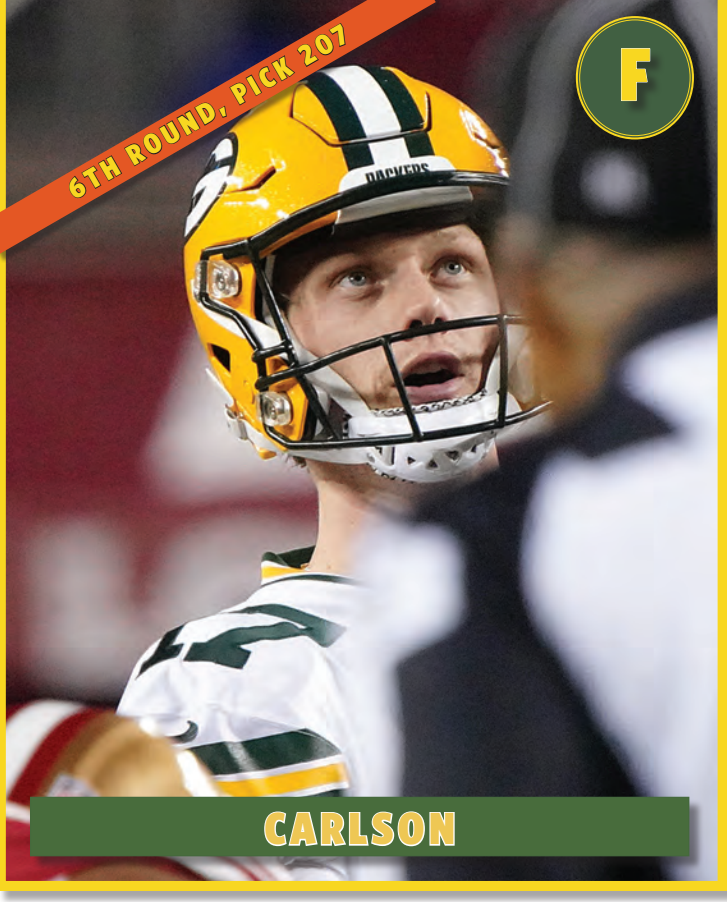
DuBose spent most of the season on the practice squad. He was elevated for the final game of the season against the Chicago Bears but was made inactive when Wicks was able to play that day.

DuBose is competition for the back of the roster, but his spot is far from safe. The Packers could add someone that has more value on special teams.

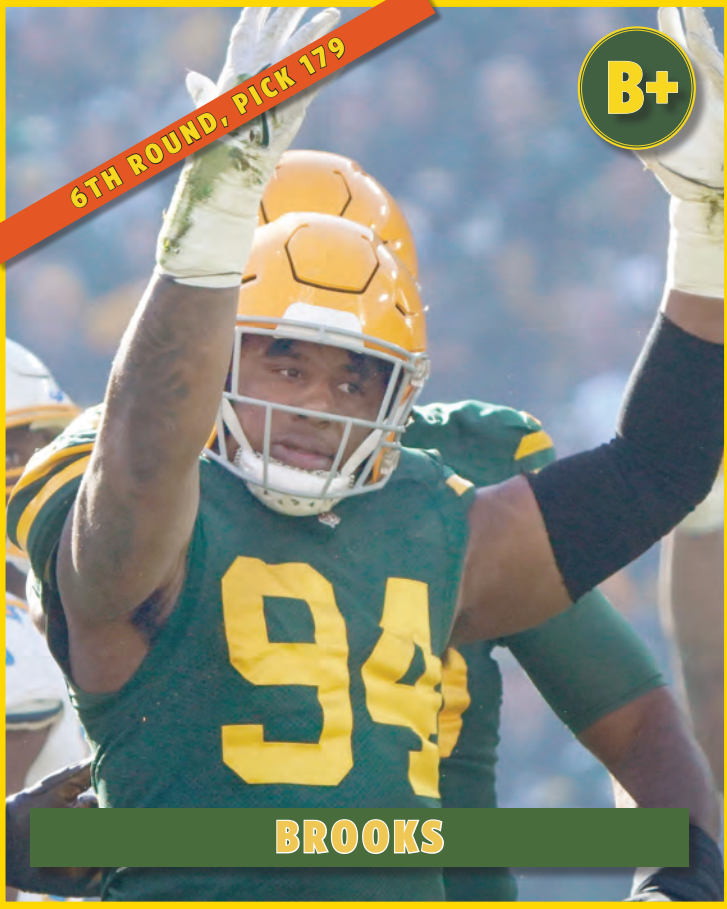
Grade: Incomplete



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Packers need help at several positions

Draft, trades, free agents provide opportunities for Green Bay to shore up offense, defense

By **JACOB WESTENDORF**
Green & Gold Express

The Green Bay Packers' offseason has been a roller coaster ride.

The 2023 season ended after the Packers outplayed the San Francisco 49ers for the better part of three and a half quarters.

Unfortunately, the game is four quarters long, and the Packers house of horrors stung them again as they went home with a 24-21 loss.

The future, however, looks bright. Jordan Love played like an MVP candidate down the stretch of the 2023 season, establishing himself as not only the Packers' quarterback of the future but one of the best players in the sport at his position.

Love and his band of pass catchers should have the offense feeling like they're in a good spot for the future if they can fortify some depth on their offensive line.

One key to overcome will be the loss of Aaron Jones. Merely weeks after Brian Gutekunst called Jones the heartbeat of the football team, he cut the heart out of the team.

Jones was released after refusing to take a pay cut for a second consecutive season and signed with the Minnesota Vikings.

Jones was replaced by Josh Jacobs, who the Packers reportedly agreed to terms with hours before Jones was released.

Jacobs is younger and won the rushing title in 2023. The question will be how the Packers fill the leadership void that Jones filled so admirably during a tumultuous time in Green Bay.

Jacobs will be flanked by AJ Dillon, who the Packers surprisingly were able to re-sign after his market was limited in the offseason.

The offensive line also said goodbye to its best player when David Bakhtiari was released before the start of the new league year, ending a three-year saga of unfortunate knee injuries that have wrecked what could have been a Hall of Fame career.

On the defensive side of the ball, the big additions were at defensive coordinator, and safety.

Jeff Hafley was tabbed as the man to replace Joe Barry, who was let go after the team finished in the bottom third of defensive rankings for the third year in a row.

Matt LaFleur's hire was certainly outside the box. Hafley was not seen as a primary candidate after Barry was fired, but he brings an attacking style defense that should better suit some of the players that the Packers have on the roster.

One thing they did not have that Hafley needed was a game-changing safety.

The Packers did what they rarely do



Green Bay Packers coach Matt LaFleur will work with general manager Brian Gutekunst to improve the team from its 2023 playoff run. The Packers have late stages of free agency, the draft or trades to still try and improve a roster that according to everyone in Tittletown, is ready to win a Super Bowl right now.
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and dipped into the top end of the free agent market to give him one.

Xavier McKinney was signed to a four-year contract worth \$68 million to stabilize a position that was in flux throughout all of 2023.

The work to improve the team is not done. The Packers have late stages of free agency, the draft or trades to still try and improve a roster that according to everyone in Tittletown, is ready to win a Super Bowl right now.

Here's a look at some of the needs they still need to address.

Offensive line
The offensive line has gone through some change this offseason. Bakhtiari, Jon Runyan Jr. and Yosh Nijman have all moved on. Nobody has been brought in as of yet to replace them.

If the season began today, Sean Rhyan would replace Runyan Jr. at right guard. Royce Newman would be the team's primary backup on the interior of the offensive line. Caleb Jones would be the swing tackle.

Of the team's current players on the roster, only Newman has played snaps as a reserve lineman.

Rhyan had a better second season than rookie year, but that was a low bar to

clear. He still struggled and never fully grabbed hold of the starting spot at right guard despite competing with Runyan Jr. throughout the back half of the season.

Rhyan is far from a slam dunk as a starter. Josh Myers has been inconsistent and is entering a contract year.

Both players could be replaced as soon as the 2024 draft, if not the 2025 season, should a replacement be selected in this year's draft class.

The Packers could also elect to go the veteran route at that position. Dalton Risner remains available, and he's played a lot of snaps in his career, most recently with the Minnesota Vikings.

There are still question marks at tackle as well. Zach Tom looks like a building block at right tackle. He was the team's best player on offense in 2023.

Rasheed Walker finished the season strong but also struggled mightily early in the year after being pressed into duty following Bakhtiari's injury.

Walker's strong finish has overshadowed the fact he was still rotating with Nijman as late as the week before Christmas.

He could be the team's left tackle of the future but likely would not prevent Brian Gutekunst from taking an offensive tackle early in this year's draft class.

Safety
McKinney is going to lead the safety room for years to come. The issue for now is there is nobody around him. That is nearly a literal translation.

Anthony Johnson Jr. Benny Sapp III and Zayne Anderson are the only other safeties under contract right now. Johnson Jr. is a former seventh-round pick. Sapp and Anderson were both primarily used on special teams.

McKinney is a good start to fixing the safety room, but they'll need more help back there. That could mean a bargain free agent and a draft pick. They need bodies.

Whether it's Iowa's Cooper DeJean, Washington State's Jaden Hicks or Minnesota's Tyler Nubin, Gutekunst will likely be in the market to add at least one player to that group via the draft.

Cornerback
On paper, the cornerback group looks OK. Jaire Alexander and Eric Stokes have both played good football in the past. Alexander is a two-time All-Pro selection.

Closer examination, however, reveals this group's stability is tenuous, at best.

Alexander has struggled with injuries and bizarre behavior from a season ago that resulted in a suspension for the team's penultimate game of the season.

Alexander and the team have said that situation has been put in the past, and Alexander did play well in the team's final three games of the season. When he's on the field, he's a game changer.

Stokes has struggled with injuries and spent two separate stints on injured reserve a season ago. When he did play, he really struggled. There's questions as to whether he's lost some athleticism as well due to the lower body injuries he's sustained in his career.

This could be a position where the Packers use yet another high pick to protect themselves in the event that Alexander and Stokes both struggle with injuries, and Carrington Valentine's strong rookie season turns into a mirage.

Running back
Yes, the Packers brought in Josh Jacobs and were able to re-sign AJ Dillon this offseason. This is the same regime that selected Dillon in the second round when they had Aaron Jones and Jamaal Williams both on the roster.

Both Jones and Williams were on expiring contracts at that time. Dillon's contract will expire. Jacobs' contract is essentially a one-year deal with three team options.

The Packers need to find a young running back for the future. With Jacobs and Dillon both being more powerful runners, this is a position group that could stand to add some speed.

Tennessee's Jaylen Wright, Florida State's Trey Benson or Texas' Jonathan Brooks are all players that could fit that sort of mold.

If Gutekunst wanted to pair similar styles to Jacobs, Michigan's Blake Corum or Wisconsin's Braelon Allen could be options as well.

The Packers theoretically could stand to add two players to this group as well in the event that Jacobs and Dillon both move on after the 2024 season.

Linebacker
Of all the spots on the roster, linebacker might be the thinnest group at the moment. Quay Walker will return for his third season, but he has been inconsistent through his two years as a pro.

Isaiah McDuffie is set to start, and he has the benefit of having played for Hafley before at Boston College.

Those are the only two linebackers that have played significant snaps on the roster. De'Vondre Campbell was released and went to San Francisco this offseason.

Kristian Welch and Eric Wilson are around to play special teams.

The veteran linebacker class was picked over during free agency, leaving that group as thin as the draft class. The Packers have hosted Texas A&M's Edgerrin Cooper on a top-30 visit for draft picks.

Would the Packers be willing to use another premium draft asset on an inside linebacker? That remains to be seen, but there's no question that Gutekunst needs to add at least one or two players to this position group.

NFL 2025 draft coming to Green Bay

Detroit is just days away from hosting the 2024 NFL draft, but there are plenty of Green Bay area officials and residents already looking ahead to 2025.

The 2025 NFL draft will be held April 24-26 in and around Lambeau Field and Tittletown.

Festivities will include several days of activities throughout Green Bay and will feature the NFL Draft Experience — a massive free football festival — near Lambeau Field to allow fans of all teams to participate and test their football skills, enjoy interactive exhibits and autograph sessions, and take pictures with the Vince Lombardi Trophy. The Draft Experience will be open all three days of the event.

Green Bay is expecting around 250,000 fans.

Lodging will be at a premium during the event. Expect more people to make their residences available on of short-term

home rental services like Airbnb and Vrbo.

Discover Green Bay is providing a guide to short-term rentals for those willing to have others stay in their homes.

Highlights of the guide include an overall review of guidelines, applying for a license and arranging for an inspection, getting a state sellers permit, confirming local requirements (including local room taxes), reviewing your homeowner's or renter's insurance, and listing your property.

While discussions have been held at the Shawano Country Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center, no definite promotions are in the works yet, said Suzanne Wittman, executive director.

More information about the 2025 NFL draft, including venue information, staffing and volunteer opportunities, and other ways to get involved, can be found at packers.com/draft25 or www.greenbay.com/draft25.



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Packers say goodbye to six in free agency

BY LUKE REIMER
Green & Gold Express

With the induction of the new NFL season, the Green Bay Packers front office was fairly busy when it came to organizing who will be on the field next year.

Out of the players who said farewell to the green and gold, there are six notable names who will see themselves on new teams in the coming season: Aaron Jones, David Bakhtiari, De'Vondre Campbell, Jon Runyan Jr., Darnell Savage and Jonathan Owens.

The first move of Green Bay's free agency when the new season started was the release of longtime tackle Bakhtiari.

Bakhtiari spent the first 11 seasons of his career in Green Bay, where he put together one of the best Packer careers of all time. Forming a strong relationship with Aaron Rodgers, Bakhtiari started 131 games at the left tackle position, where he collected two First-Team All-Pro awards, three Second-Team All-Pro awards and three Pro-Bowl selections.

In Green Bay, Bakhtiari quickly became known as not only one of the best offensive linemen in the NFL but one of the best players in the NFL. The Colorado alum was a major reason why Rodgers was able to succeed and why Green Bay had a potent offense for the better part of a decade. Things changed though when he went down with a knee injury in 2020.

As Green Bay was preparing for a play-off push in the 2020-21 season, Bakhtiari went down with a torn ACL in practice Dec. 31. While he was forced to miss the subsequent postseason, there was optimism that he would be back for the 2021 season. After the injury was set back, he was put on the physically unable to perform list, which meant he was to miss the first six games of the season. That quickly turned into a season-long injury, as Bakhtiari started just one game, the season finale. He was able to return for the 2022 season, but his knee once again acted up, and after 11 games, he was ruled inactive. Finally in 2023, he was limited to just one game.

Finally, general manager Brian Gutekunst and the front office opted to part ways with the veteran due in part to the \$40 million cap hit this season.

On the same day as Bakhtiari's release was the release of running back Jones.

Similar to Bakhtiari, Jones spent his entire career in Green Bay, where he became the team's number three all-time leading rusher with 5,940 career rushing yards. On top of the rushing yards, Jones garnered 45 rushing touchdowns. The move to release Jones came quickly as just minutes before he was released Green Bay had signed former Raiders running back Josh Jacobs.

After Gutekunst had hinted at keeping Jones in Green Bay during his end-of-season press conference, many quickly latched onto the idea of employing a one-two punch of Jacobs and Jones for the upcoming season.

Gutekunst explained that the Green Bay front office asked Jones to take a pay cut, but as negotiations moved along, it became less likely that the two sides could agree.

"Obviously we had to do what was in the best interest of the football team, and that is what we did," said Gutekunst.

While Jacobs is more than capable of being the workhorse running back, his 4.2 yards per carry average is almost one yard less than Jones' 5.0 yards per carry average. When the offense seemed to stall the last few seasons, giving the ball to Jones has more than often provided the spark plug. With Jones now in Minnesota, it will yet to be seen who is that player to step up when things go sideways for the offense.



The first move of Green Bay's free agency when the new season started was the release of longtime tackle David Bakhtiari. He spent the first 11 seasons of his career in Green Bay, where he put together one of the best Packer careers of all time.

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Following Jones' release, Green Bay elected to move on from another veteran, linebacker Campbell.

Campbell started his tenure in Green Bay on a great note, making First-Team All-Pro, the first Packers inside linebacker to be awarded a First-Team All-Pro since Ray Nitschke.

The grace quickly wore off though as in his second season in the green and gold, Campbell became increasingly frustrated with how the Packers were managing his injuries, as well as how he was being received by fans. At the beginning of the 2023 season, Green Bay had inked Campbell to a five-year, \$50 million deal.

That contract ended up being moved, after Green Bay released Campbell and he signed with the 49ers.

With the signing of Jacobs, the Packers will need to continue to look for help in the run game, as starting guard Runyan signed with the New York Giants in the offseason.

While he was somewhat part of a rotation on the offensive line, Runyan started 50 games in his four-year career in Green Bay. Runyan was a sixth round pick in 2020, before becoming the everyday starter after his first season. The release of Runyan came on the back of his expiring rookie contract. With the release of Runyan, Green Bay was not only able to save money but it gives the team a little flexibility on the offensive line with Zach Tom, who can play anywhere on the offensive line.

In 2022, the Packers drafted Sean Rhyhan in the third round of the NFL draft. With the limited play that Rhyhan has had on the offensive line, he has shown that he is more than capable to play in the NFL. Releasing Runyan also gives Green Bay the option to finally see what Rhyhan can do as the everyday starter.

Savage was the fifth veteran who was released in this season's free agency period. Savage was a first round pick for the Packers in 2019. Savage, much like other Packers defensive backs, have performed well when they have been on the field, but injuries have severely hampered his production.

Along with Savage being released was fellow safety Owens. In the previous offseason, Owens signed a one-year deal with Green Bay. From that point, the Missouri Western alum totaled 84 combined tackles and one fumble recovery.

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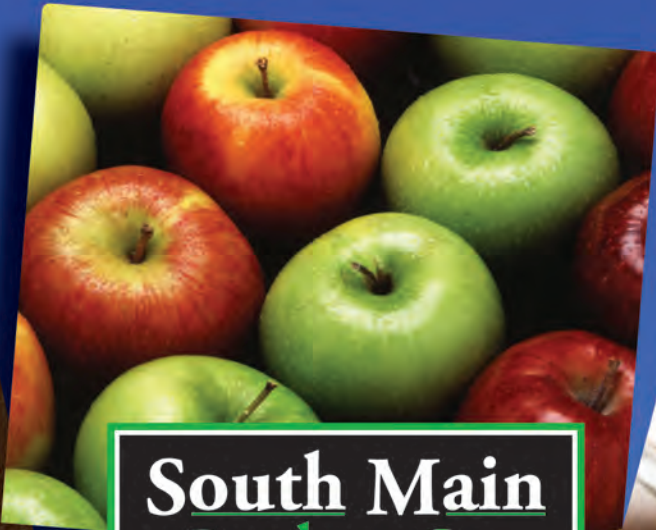




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