

2016 Green Bay Packers Secondary Projection » Last Word On Sports

Cornerbacks

The Packers are potentially the youngest group of corners in the **NFL** with their elder statesman, [Sam Shields](#), only being 28 years old. After that you have [Damarious Randall](#) (23), [Quinten Rollins](#) (24), [Ladarius Gunter](#) (24), [Demetri Goodson](#) (27), and a handful of younger rookies. With youth comes speed, and this group is poised to blow past the rest of the league.

[Sam Shields](#) is the veteran of the group in his seventh year with Packers and only his eighth year as a defensive back. He is the staple of the corners and without a doubt, the team's lockdown player, which is why Thompson rewarded him with a four-year, \$39 million contract in March of 2014. Since his arrival to the Packers in 2010, Shields has continued to prove his worth.

According to [ProFootballFocus.com](#), he only allowed one receiving touchdown, which was tied for second best in the league in 2015 among players who played at least 50 percent of their team's defensive snaps. Shields will likely match up against many, if not all of the opposing team's number one wide receivers, and expect to not be able to recall many of their names at the end of the season. Sam Shields is not only quiet on and off the field, but he manages to quiet the receivers he faces as well. Just call him Sammy "Silence" Shields.

Behind Mr. Shields is one of the most exciting names on this year's team: [Damarious Randall](#). Last year, Thompson went out and drafted a corner in the first and second rounds of the draft, leaving a lot of fans in complete confusion. But as we have learned many times before, just trust in Ted. Randall was selected in the first round of the 2015 NFL Draft with the 30th overall pick, an interesting selection due to the fact that Randall had only really played football at Arizona State for two years.

He started out his collegiate career at **Butler Community College** playing Baseball. Randall then transferred to **Mesa Community College** to play football. After one year there, he transferred again to Arizona State, where he missed the first four games due to a leg injury. In 2014, his senior year, he was able to play in all 13 games, recording 87 tackles and three interceptions. When Randall arrived in Green Bay, he was quickly thrust into the starting position opposite Sam Shields. Not a problem for this athlete. Randall was named the NFL's Defensive Rookie of the Month for November. He also was tied for second among NFL rookies in interceptions with three.

More importantly he played in all 15 games with nine starts (six at left cornerback, two at right cornerback, and one in the slot). In the process, he posted 59 tackles (50 solo) and three interceptions (tied for team lead), including one for a touchdown. He also led the team with 16 passes defensed. He was only a rookie, and teams tested him, only to find out the youngster was much more than they gave him credit for. In Green Bay's second 2016 preseason game, Randall picked off [David Carr](#)'s first deep ball to [Amari Cooper](#). It looks like the second season may be as good as the first.

[Quinten Rollins](#) was the second corner to be drafted by Thompson in the 2015 NFL Draft. He was selected in the second round with the 62nd overall selection. This was another interesting choice, because Rollins had only

one year of organized football under his belt. From 2010 to 2014, Rollins played basketball for the Miami (Ohio) Redhawks, where he finished second in team history for steals. A premonition? Perhaps. In 2014, Rollins joined the football team and was named the MAC Defensive Player of the Year after recording 72 tackles and seven interceptions.

Rollins rookie season was limited to mostly special teams. However, he did play in 14 games with four starts (two at left corner and two at right corner). In those 14 games, Rollins recorded 35 total tackles (25 solo), a sack, two interceptions (one for a touchdown), and nine passes defended. As a special teamer, Rollins was second among Packers rookies ([Aaron Ripkowski](#)) with seven special teams tackles. Bottom line, this kid a game changer. Whether it was picking off passes in basketball or on the football field, he knows where to be and when to strike. The idea of him and Randall growing as a duo in this secondary is what allows me to sleep at night. Watch for a breakout year from Rollins.

Both [Ladarius Gunter](#) and [Demetri Goodson](#) assume the fourth and fifth positions, respectively. Gunter came in with Randall and Rollins as an undrafted free agent. He was the star of the 2015 preseason with a team-high five passes defended and an interception. In the regular season, Gunter played in eight games, recording two tackles on special teams. A product of the University of Miami, Gunter brings a different skill set to the group. Both Randall and Rollins are 5'11 whereas Gunter comes in at a lanky 6'2. A lot of scouts labeled Gunter as a Cover-2 corner; in other words a slow corner. Thompson focused more on the long-armed defender's technique in press-man coverage and his ability to neutralize taller receivers, which is something this teams needs considering the average height of our corners is 5'11.

Goodson, who has only one more year of experience, is still three years older than Gunter and Rollins. This is because Goodson began his collegiate career by playing basketball for three seasons at Gonzaga (2008-11) before transferring to Baylor in 2011 to play football. In 2014, the Green Bay Packers selected Goodson in the sixth round of the NFL Draft. He quickly became a solid special team's player, recording six special teams tackles, second best among rookies behind **Jayrone Elliot**. In 2015, he played in 14 games and both post-season contests.

2016 will be a rough start for Goodson as he is scheduled to miss the first four games of the season due to a suspension handed down by the NFL for violating the league's policy on performance-enhancing substances. Behind Goodson is a bevy of young rookies (**Mankinton Dorleant**, **Warren Gatewood**, **Randall Jette**, and **Josh Hawkins**, who is the front runner with consistent improvement and an interception in the preseason) and one, second year player (Robertson Daniel).

Safeties

This group, led by the veteran [Morgan Burnett](#), includes quite possibly the best tandem in the entire league. With both experience and speed, you can expect great things at the safety position. Burnett is the rock, the leader of this defensive backfield. Drafted in 2010, Burnett saw the field immediately at the strong safety position before sustaining a season-ending knee injury (ACL). Last year Burnett was coming off his best season with 125 tackles (99 solo) and had high expectations. Unfortunately, he suffered another injury causing him to miss five games. Even with those missed games he still racked up 74 tackles (55 solo). Burnett, when healthy has been an **All-Pro** caliber safety.

The only concern is his health. Since being drafted in 2010 he has only completed two full season (2011 and 2012). Injuries are inevitable in this game, but it has to be a cause for concern going into the future. He has a surplus of talent, but that talent is only useful on the field. It is time for Thompson to start looking for a replacement, but in the meantime, expect Burnett to once again be in the top two in tackles this year and provide a strong leadership role for this defense.

Burnett's counterpart, [Ha Ha Clinton-Dix](#) is the real deal, and one of the gems to come out of Alabama. He was ranked on the top tier of safeties in the NFL last year by [Pro Football Focus](#). Clinton-Dix is entering his third year and expectations are through the roof for this rangy safety. Clinton-Dix can play the pass (two interceptions), make open field tackles (missed only nine tackles last season), and be an impact blitzer (three sacks). Last season, he led the team with a career-best 117 tackles (97 solo). He played in 99.7 percent of the defensive snaps in the regular and postseason, which ties for second highest percentage among defensive players in the NFL (Philadelphia S [Malcolm Jenkins](#), 99.8 percent) according to [footballoutsiders.com](#).

In just two season, Clinton-Dix has become one of the best players on the entire Green Bay Packers defense. Expectations are All-Pro for this youngster. Behind him is [Chris Banjo](#), a three-year vet out of **SMU**, who has been a leader in the locker room and a special team's machine. He led the team in special team tackles with 21 in 2015, the most by a Packer since 2009. After Banjo is a trio of young safeties in **Kentrell Brice** (rookie), **Marwin Evans** (rookie), and **Jermaine Whitehead** (second year).

X-Factor

The NFL continues to progress and that means new positions. One of the positions I think you will be hearing a lot about in the next year or two is the "hybrid back". We have seen it with [Tyrann Mathieu](#) and [Deone Bucannon](#) in Arizona. With the progression of the passing game, it is too difficult for the classic linebacker to keep up with the speedy tight ends. You need a player who can come down, hit, and play the run like a linebacker, but also be able to drop back into coverage.

That player for the Green Bay Packers is [Micah Hyde](#). Since being drafted in 2013, Hyde has been anything but a constant fixture. He has returned punts, played the slot, played safety, lined up at corner, and quite possibly taken your grandma to the zoo. Simply put, he can do it all. Hyde is the most versatile of players on this defense, which is why he is my Defensive Player of the Year for the Green Bay Packers.

Overview

It is safe to say that this year the Packers will be able to sit safely knowing that no one will throw for over 400 yards against them. Looking at the division, the scariest combo is in Chicago. With [Alshon Jeffery](#) and [Kevin White](#), you have talent but also size, but half of that talent is still unproven. Though Jeffery and White are still catching passes from [Jay Cutler](#), who doesn't have the cleanest of records against Green Bay.

Detroit lost their only true threat in [Calvin Johnson](#). [Golden Tate](#) is a decent wide receiver who has shown some signs of stardom in him, but besides that, all there is [Anquan Boldin](#), who respectfully is at the end. In Minnesota, they have four "maybe" receivers. [Laquon Treadwell](#), [Cordarrelle Patterson](#), [Charles Johnson](#), and [Stefon Diggs](#) all have potential. Luckily, Green Bay is so deep that even with four "maybes" they still reign supreme. This secondary is filled with talent, speed, and youth. This is going to be a fun ride, so sit back and enjoy the show.

Main Photo: