

Colts' Rhodes will get shot at replacing 'Edge'

By MICHAEL MAROT
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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All Dominic Rhodes wanted was a chance to start in the NFL. It looks like he'll get the opportunity this fall.

The Indianapolis Colts have paid out a \$1.45 million bonus to keep Rhodes under contract next season, his agent, Mike McCartney, said Tuesday.

The move, combined with the loss of free agent Edgerrin James to Arizona during the weekend, means Rhodes will presumably compete for the starting job during this summer's training camp.

"Everything we've heard from them has been great," McCartney said. "Dominic's got his chance, and he's thrilled and chomping at the bit to get into the offseason program right now."

Rhodes, at 5-foot-9 and 203 pounds, is short by NFL standards and at age 27 is only five months younger than James. But Rhodes has taken far fewer hits.

While James had a franchise-record 2,188 carries in seven seasons with the Colts, Rhodes has carried only 363 times in five seasons and only 130 times since 2002.

In 2001, Rhodes replaced an injured James for the final 10 games and set an NFL record for undrafted rookies by rushing for 1,104 yards. He also scored nine

THE RHODES FILE

Name: Dominic Rhodes

Team: Indianapolis Colts

Position: Running back/kick returner

Number: 33

Size: 5-foot-9, 203 pounds

Experience: Five NFL seasons

Age: 27

College: Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas

Career stats: Has rushed for 1,633 yards on 363 carries (a 4.5 average) and 14 touchdowns. Rhodes' best season was in 2001, when he rushed for 1,104 yards and nine touchdowns for the Colts.



touchdowns and caught 34 passes for 224 yards.

Last season, he ran 40 times for 118 yards and four TDs, bringing his career totals to 1,633 yards and 14 TDs.

But since James returned from knee surgery in 2002, Rhodes has been relegated primarily to spot duty and returning kicks.

The big risk is injuries. Rhodes has had surgery on a problematic left shoulder that has been dislocated several times since he joined the Colts. He also missed the 2002 season after tearing the anterior cruciate ligament in his

right knee during training camp. But for now, he's one of the few options the Colts have as a replacement to James.

James Mungro, the Colts' short-yardage back, also is an unrestricted free agent, and the only other running back on the roster is Kory Chapman. The Colts signed Chapman, a free agent, in September, and he has never had an NFL carry.

With team president Bill Polian already saying the Colts are likely to sit out the first few weeks of free agency, it's more likely the Colts will use an early round draft pick on a running back in April who will compete with Rhodes for the starting job.

"I don't think they're bringing anyone in free agency unless someone falls through the cracks," McCartney said. "My impression is that they'll draft someone."

McCartney said the bonus was paid out Saturday, one day before James signed a four-year, \$30 million deal with the Arizona Cardinals.

The move is perhaps an indication the Colts were already preparing for life without their all-time leading rusher.

The Colts also made another move Tuesday to bolster their roster by re-signing free agent kicker Jose Cortez to a one-year deal worth about the league minimum, which is \$585,000 for a player with six years of experience.

• Pacers

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

from an elbow injury that sidelined him for several weeks, handled all the backup point-guard minutes behind starter Anthony Johnson.

Jasikevicius, who has started and come off the bench at point guard, didn't play for the first time all season.

Johnson and Tinsley simply played too well. And if they continue to flourish, Jasikevicius will likely continue to sit.

"The only thing I'll say is, we're in a much stronger position than we were a week and a half ago, having Jamaal back," Carlisle said. "And now he's got some games and minutes under his belt. It's clear off the last two games that he's a playmaker for us."

So is Johnson, who is having the best season of his nine-year career.

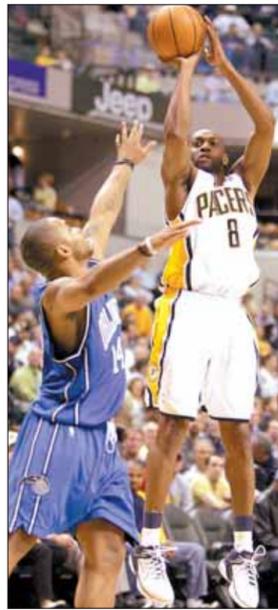
Playing for his sixth NBA team, Johnson has started 38 of the Pacers' 54 games this year and is averaging 4.2 assists and a career-high 9.0 points per game.

He scored a team-high-tying 21 points Monday night and has reached double figures in nine of the past 10 games.

The Johnson-Tinsley combination worked so well against Orlando that the two were occasionally on the floor together when starting shooting guard Stephen Jackson came out.

Tinsley handled the point while Johnson and Fred Jones filled in for Jackson, which further depleted the need for Jasikevicius, who also plays shooting guard.

"It worked out because I was making shots," Johnson said.



AP PHOTO

Pacers guard Anthony Johnson, right, shoots over the Magic's Jameer Nelson during Monday's game at Conseco Fieldhouse.

"Whenever you're making shots, you can find a position on the court."

Jasikevicius hasn't been making shots, and that likely sealed his fate on the bench.

He scored two points during Sunday's loss at Toronto and has tallied double figures only twice in the past 11 games.

Billed as one of the top shooters in Europe, Jasikevicius has made only 10 of his past 32 3-point attempts and has shot only 38 percent from the field in the past 10 games.

So if there's an odd man out of

the rotation, it's likely to be Jasikevicius, at least for the near future.

"I'm not going to look to play three guys just to play three guys," Carlisle said. "I'm going to look to try to have a rotation guys can be comfortable with on the one hand, but you've got to be accountable and play your minutes hard; otherwise there's good players behind you."

"That's just a fact. Our point position hasn't been this strong in a long time, so it's good news for us."

Indiana (32-29) plays the second of a four-game homestand tonight against the surging Denver Nuggets (36-29), who have won five of their past six games.

By comparison, the Pacers have only won two of their past five and are trying to rebuild momentum for the playoffs. They are fifth in the Eastern Conference playoff race and are bidding for the fourth seed with 21 regular-season games remaining.

"This next week is going to be very pivotal for our chances as a playoff team," Carlisle said. "We have to avoid becoming stagnant. We have to keep a certain amount of energy in the lineup."

Johnson and Tinsley are happy for the chance to provide it.

"We have three quality point guards," Johnson said. "I've been out of the loop a little bit at the start of the season. That's Rick's job, to get the guys out there on the court that he believes are going to help us win."

"So right now I find myself in the loop."

So does Tinsley.

"I just want to play," Tinsley said. "My job is to compete and do whatever I can for the team. I try to be aggressive and win ball games."

• Turkeys

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

superior eyesight and hyper awareness of their immediate surroundings.

Neither curious nor brave, wild turkeys don't wander in unfamiliar habitat and flee at the slightest unnatural sound or movement.

As a result, hunters not only have to be fully camouflaged from head to toe, they have to display patience beyond that of deer hunters.

And they have to be able to sound exactly like a hen, or better. "When we try to call them, we try to do a better job of calling them than the real hens that are in the woods," said Phil Hawkins, a Franklin resident who also knows a thing or two about talking turkey.

Overhunting in the 1800s wiped out Indiana's wild turkey population by the turn of the 20th century. But the birds were reintroduced in the late 1960s.

Hawkins, 74, has never missed a hunt.

He has bagged 26 birds over the years, including one taken during Indiana's first legalized hunt in 1971.

An avid outdoorsman who hunts

a variety of game, Hawkins favors turkey hunting above all because of the unique challenge.

Indiana's spring hunting season coincides with mating season. Males typically roost in trees and make calls to attract hens. Males never roam in pursuit of hens. Hens typically flock to a single male.

For hunters, the challenge is to get nature to reverse itself.

To do it, they usually find an elevated ridge within 130 or 150 yards of a mating area. Using a hand- or mouth-operated calling device, hunters then try to mimic the sound of a hen to lure the male within firing range, preferably not more than 40 yards away.

Birds are timid and can require hours of patient coaxing.

"We're trying to sound like a hen, so we're competing all the time with all the other hens in the woods against nature's way of trying to get him to come to us," Hawkins said. "It takes a lot of patience."

One false move, unnatural sound or poor camouflage can wreck an opportunity in a split second.

"They fly like a helicopter and run like a deer," Hawkins said.

"The slightest little movement or the slightest little something that shines or is off-color; they'll pick it up immediately."

"Most of the turkeys see us,

and we never see them because their eyesight is so good."

Wild turkeys inhabit all of Indiana's 92 counties, although the best hunting grounds are in the southern part of the state.

In Johnson County, turkey hunting is offered at Atterbury Fish and Wildlife Area. The first of Indiana's three turkey hunting seasons starts April 26 and runs through May 14. The fall archery season runs Oct. 1 through Oct. 23. And the fall firearms season is Oct. 19 through Oct. 23.

One bird of either sex can be legally taken during the fall seasons. But most hunters prefer the male birds.

In Indiana, average gobblers weigh 18 to 24 pounds and can get as large as 27 pounds. Jakes average 14 to 18 pounds.

"They really are fun to hunt," Hawkins said. "Anytime you try to call something into you, that's a big thrill. They're wonderful to hunt. They are probably my favorite thing to hunt."

Turkey hunting is permitted in 90 Indiana counties. During the 2004 spring season, a total of 10,765 males were taken in 78 counties, according to the latest figures from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

The harvest was a 4 percent increase from the previous year, which reflects the abundance of

the wild turkey population and the sport's increasing popularity with hunters.

Morrett looks forward to sharing his calling skills with local sportsmen who want to take on the challenge. Besides calling demonstrations, the 90-minute to two-hour seminar will include a video and spectator interaction.

"We just try to have a lot of fun; that's the bottom line," Morrett said. "If there's kids there, we try to get them involved, too."

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