

FOOTBALL

NEW YORK

Titans' Young named top rookie on offense

Vince Young looks as if he'll make the NFL his personal playground, too.

The dynamic quarterback for the Tennessee Titans won The Associated Press Offensive Rookie of the Year Award on Wednesday.



YOUNG

He did it in the same fashion he turned around the Titans' season — running away from the rest of the field.

Young, who led Texas to the 2005 national championship and was the third overall pick in April's draft, overwhelmed one of the strongest rookie classes in NFL history. He received 23 votes from a nationwide panel of 50 sports writers and broadcasters.

That beat New Orleans wide receiver Marques Colston and Jacksonville running back Maurice Jones-Drew with nine votes each.

Young led the Titans to an 8-8 mark and became the first rookie quarterback to rush for more than 500 yards in the Super Bowl era.

NEW YORK

Texans linebacker Ryans earns defensive honors

DeMeco Ryans came into the NFL as Houston's second choice to bolster its defense. He leaves his first pro year as The Associated Press Defensive Rookie of the Year.

The linebacker, chosen at the top of the second round of April's draft — 32 spots after the Texans made defensive end Mario Williams the first overall selection — was a runaway winner of the award announced Wednesday.

Ryans led the league in solo tackles with 126, and his 156 total tackles were 33 more than the next-best rookie, Detroit linebacker Ernie Sims.

In fact, no rookie in the past 20 years had more tackles than Ryans, who was an All-American at Alabama in 2005. And Ryans had more tackles than any of the other five linebackers who won the award this decade, including Brian Urlacher and Shawne Merriman.

Chicago end Mark Anderson finished second in the voting.



RYANS

BASKETBALL

CHARLOTTE, N.C.

Original WNBA franchise Charlotte Sting folds

The WNBA's Charlotte Sting folded Wednesday, three weeks after the Bobcats gave up control of the team.

The WNBA was unsuccessful in finding a buyer for the Sting, one of the original eight franchises.

"It was driven by economics, certainly not philosophy," said Greg Economou, the Bobcats' chief marketing officer. "We believe in the women's game. If it could work here, we'd be all for it. "The situation we're in is trying to build the Bobcats' brand. It was difficult to absorb losing as much money as we were on the Sting side to continue."

The Sting were owned and operated by the Charlotte Hornets when the WNBA formed in 1997. The Sting stayed in Charlotte when the Hornets moved to New Orleans in 2002, and Bob Johnson took control of the team when he was awarded the Bobcats' expansion franchise in 2004.

The Sting struggled to draw fans in recent years. They averaged 5,783 fans in 17 home games in 2006, 13th of 14 WNBA teams.

HOCKEY

DETROIT

Arrest made in stabbing of restaurant workers

A former employee of a Detroit sports bar owned by the Red Wings' Chris Chelios was charged with murder Wednesday in the stabbing deaths of two employees.

Justin Blackshere, 17, was fired from Cheli's Chili Bar several weeks ago, though it was not immediately known why.

Investigators think he returned to the eatery and stabbed manager Megan Soroka, 49, of Dearborn, Mich., and cook Mark Barnard, 52, of Detroit, shortly before their bodies were found Tuesday morning on the second floor, prosecutors said.

Blackshere was arraigned Wednesday evening and ordered held without bond until a Jan. 16 preliminary examination.

He faces a mandatory life in prison without parole if convicted. Chelios did not play in Tuesday's win against Anaheim.

• Sanders

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

bench, the run defense dropped to No. 32 and set a franchise record by allowing 5.3 yards per carry.

Coach Tony Dungy warns Sanders cannot solve all the team's defensive problems, but when he plays, the Colts are clearly different. The defense plays quicker, more aggressively and with more confidence.

In a November game at New England, Sanders made a surprise start, and the defense delivered one of its best performances of the season. Not surprisingly, Sanders had 10 tackles, an interception and took down runners with reckless dives. The Patriots averaged 4.5 yards a carry, had five turnovers and lost 27-20.

Sanders' impact is so strong that his offensive teammates sometimes notice, too.

"When he's healthy, he's a special player," said tight end Dallas Clark, a college teammate of Sanders at Iowa. "It's just instincts and God-given talent the way he can read and run. It's natural to him. He was born to be a football player."

But lingering soreness and swelling in the knee created frustration for Sanders.

His name has been more prominent on the weekly injury reports than the lineup card,

and whenever it appeared he was close to returning, he endured yet another setback.

Dungy spent the past several weeks saying he thought Sanders would play before the regular season ended. It didn't happen.

On Tuesday, Sanders tested the knee in practice and by Wednesday was more optimistic about playing against the Chiefs.

While he insists the knee is healthier and stronger than at any time since surgery, Dungy needs Sanders' teammates to feed off his emotion and style.

"One person can't do it, and Bob Sanders can't be a savior," Dungy said. "Everyone has to do their job, and Bob is a big part of that. We've got to make sure everyone is in the right place and use our speed."

Sanders' return will be a welcome respite to a secondary that has been beaten up, sometimes badly this season.

He understands the defense, doesn't hesitate to make plays and is one of the team's top tacklers, all problem areas for the Colts.

What Sanders must still answer, though, is how quickly he can return to full speed. He's played only one game in the past two months and acknowledges it might take a few plays to shake off the rust.

Sanders practiced Wednesday but is listed as questionable for Saturday's game.

Clark and wide receiver Reggie Wayne also are questionable. Both practiced Wednesday. Clark is battling a sore knee; Wayne injured his quad Sunday.

"It's just instincts and God-given talent the way he can read and run. It's natural to him. He was born to be a football player."

Dallas Clark
Indianapolis Colts tight end,
on teammate Bob Sanders

Bad time for controversy

Chiefs starter Green has sore ankle; fans clamor to see Huard

By DOUG TUCKER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KANSAS CITY, Mo.

Trent Green's sore ankle limited him in practice Wednesday, and there are signs Kansas City coach Herm Edwards may have his struggling quarterback on a short leash.

Green, who committed three turnovers and got booed in Sunday's playoff-clinching victory against Jacksonville, still is slated to start Saturday at Indianapolis.

But waiting in the wings is fan favorite Damon Huard, who was an impressive 5-3 in eight starts while Green recuperated from a severe concussion sustained in the season opener.

"I anticipate (Green) starting," Edwards said Wednesday. "But we'll see how far he comes along (today)."

Since returning against Oakland on Nov. 19, Green hasn't looked as sharp as the quarterback who passed for more yards (16,334) from 2001-05 than anyone in the NFL except the Colts' Peyton Manning.

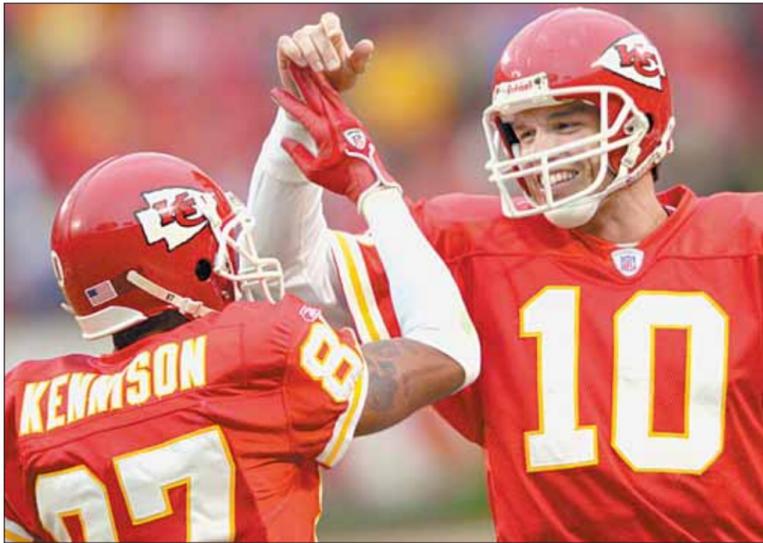
He has thrown seven touchdown passes with nine interceptions and has been sacked 24 times. His poor quarterback rating of 74.1 is dwarfed by the 98.0 of Huard, who threw 11 TDs and only one interception while subbing for him.

Green came out of the Jacksonville game briefly with an ankle injury and watched Huard march the offense down field to a quick touchdown, setting up the score with a beautifully thrown 40-yard gainer to Eddie Kennison.

Edwards said Green did not do any team work Wednesday.

"It's sore, I know that," he said of Green's ankle. "We'll see (today)."

A quarterback controversy has simmered for two months, with a growing number of fans climbing on board the Huard bandwagon. Edwards seemed to encourage that faction on Tuesday when he admitted he would be more inclined to replace a struggling player in the playoffs than he would in the regular season.



Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Trent Green, right, congratulates wide receiver Eddie Kennison

after Kennison caught a touchdown pass during Sunday's win against the Jacksonville Jaguars.

"You have to win the game," Edwards said. "There's no tomorrow. And you have to do whatever is best for the football team at that point. I'll do whatever I have to do. When you're in the playoffs, you're desperate."

Green said Wednesday he's not looking over his shoulder.

"I'm more worried about the Colts' defense and trying to get as healthy as I can for this game," he said. "I've taken some shots the last few weeks and am trying to get as healthy as I can and worry about the Colts' defense."

"Whatever everybody else is saying or whatever decisions are being made, the Colts are my main focus."

Told that he would be giving hope to the

anti-Engel clamor, Edwards became defensive.

"People will think whatever they want to think," he said. "At the end of the day, I make the decisions. I made a decision to start Trent when he was ready to play. He's our starting quarterback. He's our starting quarterback going into the playoffs, and I anticipate he's going to play good."

Huard said he's not expecting to play against the Colts.

"I'm just going to prepare the same as I always prepare every week," he said. "You've always got to be ready to play on a second's notice. You never know, just like last Sunday. I had to go in there when Trent got nicked up. So you're always ready to play."

RACING

INDIANAPOLIS

Franchitti to return to AGR for 2007 season

Dario Franchitti will remain with Andretti Green Racing in the IRL's IndyCar Series and join his brother Marino Franchitti and AGR teammate Bryan Herta in the American Le Mans sports car series this season.

The team said Wednesday that the 33-year-old Scotsman will be one of its four full-time drivers in the IndyCar Series, along with Tony Kanaan, Danica Patrick and Marco Andretti, the son of AGR co-owner Michael Andretti.

Patrick, who drove for Rahal Letterman the past two years, will replace Herta in the IndyCar series.

Michael Andretti came out of retirement to drive in the Indianapolis 500 last year and finished third, behind winner Sam Hornish Jr. and Marco Andretti. He has not said whether he will race at Indy this year.

Franchitti, who has four IRL wins, was seventh at Indianapolis in 2006. He missed the final race last season because of a concussion he suffered in a crash during qualifying for a vintage auto race in England.

Coaches bury hatchet before playoff game

By DENNIS WASZAK JR.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HEMPSTEAD, N.Y.

Eric Mangini smiled when asked if his knack for making halftime adjustments was something he learned from watching Bill Belichick at "the other place."

That, of course, is New England. And the New York Jets' coach often has referred to his former employer with that vague description. Mangini changed all that Wednesday.

"We can say 'New England' now," he said, causing the contingent of at least 40 media members at the Jets' practice facility to chuckle. "When I was at New England, with Bill, I thought he made outstanding adjustments."

That might have marked the



BELICHICK



MANGINI

first time this season he said the words "New England" and Belichick's first name in one breath.

"We all evolve and change," Mangini said with a grin. "I had a lot of great experiences at New England."

"We can say 'playoffs' now, too. I think there's a lot of words we can talk about now, but, no, I don't attribute it to some epiphany that I had late at night."

Maybe not, but being in the playoffs apparently thaws out even the frostiest of relationships.

The two coaches, who'll meet again Sunday in the first round of the playoffs, were full of praise for each other Wednesday. It was a bit of a departure from the tension-filled comments that at times overshadowed their first two meetings as opposing head coaches.

"Eric has done a great job, and he's seen the team improve through the course of the year," Belichick said on a conference call with Jets reporters, noticeably referring to Mangini by his first name a number of times.

"I'm not surprised at all," he added. "It's a good football team, it's been a good football team, and I'm sure they'll continue to be a good football team."

Mangini took it a step further when asked about Belichick.

"Obviously, Bill is going to the Hall of Fame as a coach," he said. "You can see that consistently in the level of play and the level of execution week in and week out."

That almost qualifies as a love-fest, considering the apparent cold feelings the two have had since Mangini relinquished his role as Belichick's defensive coordinator to join the Jets last January.

It's uncertain what led to the strain because neither coach will address it, but it was clear something went sour.

"I've never said anything negative," Belichick said before repeating the statement twice more.

The teams split their games this season, each winning on the road.

• Saban

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

Huizenga announced the departure at a news conference Saban didn't attend.

"It is what it is," Huizenga said, borrowing Saban's pet phrase. "I'm not upset, because it's more involved than what you think."

Since late November, Saban had issued frequent, angry public denials of interest in moving to Tuscaloosa. Huizenga said the change of heart wasn't driven by money, and Saban never sought a raise or contract extension.

Instead, Huizenga hinted that family issues for Saban and his wife, Terry, were a factor. The Sabans, natives of West Virginia, have a son in college and a daughter in high school.

"I've been through this with Nick for quite some time now, and I feel the pain and so forth and so on of Nick and Terry, and it's not a very simple thing," Huizenga said. "I think Nick's great. I'll be Nick's biggest fan. I'll be cheering for him to win that bowl game."

A preference for the college game and the campus lifestyle may have swayed Saban. He won a national championship at LSU and is



New University of Alabama football coach Nick Saban greets fans after arriving in Tuscaloosa, Ala., on Wednesday. Saban spent the past two years as coach of the Miami Dolphins.

15-17 with the Dolphins. This was his first losing season in 13 years as a head coach.

The Tide first approached Saban shortly after firing Mike Shula. Huizenga has said he received repeated assurances from Saban that he would return in 2007, and two weeks ago Saban said: "I'm not going to be the Alabama coach."

But when the Dolphins' 6-10 season ended Sunday, Alabama sweetened an offer that reportedly would make him the highest-paid coach in college football. He has three years

remaining on his Miami contract at \$4.5 million a year.

"We have been through a period of uncertainty the last month or so, and we finally have some stability," Tide center Antoine Caldwell said. "Coach Moore said all along he was going to find us a proven coach with a winning record, and he has done that with Coach Saban."

In the past, Huizenga has been persuasive when dealing with coaches. He talked Don Shula into retirement in 1996, talked Jimmy Johnson out of retiring three years later and was able to lure Saban to the pros in 2004 after other NFL teams had failed.

But this time, Huizenga failed to change Saban's mind.

They met briefly Tuesday, when Saban asked for another day to consider Alabama's offer. The coach was emotional when he called the Dolphins' complex Wednesday morning and informed his coaching staff by speakerphone that he was leaving, said Dom Capers, special assistant to the head coach.

After Saban turned down the Tide in early December, they offered the job to Rich Rodriguez, but he decided to stay at West Virginia. Alabama lost last week to Oklahoma State in the Independence Bowl to finish 6-7.

Got news?

Tell us about it.

Call the Daily Journal
at 736-2712 with news tips.

Local Naples, FL Weather is 80°
Yes, you wish you were here.

Naples, FL: You can too be enjoying Florida's sunny skies and wonderfully balmy weather. Briar Landings is surrounded by natural beauty offering the lifestyle you desire. Fine dining, trendy 5th Avenue shopping, and pristine beaches are just minutes away!

ASK FOR OUR SPECIAL INCENTIVES

BRIAR BLANDINGS
AT THE ENCLAVE

1 & 2 Bedroom
Condominium Homes
Starting at \$154,900

1.888.403.7182
Exclusively marketed by VIP Realty Group Inc.

Find Freedom This Year

Drive for Schneider National and enjoy the freedom of the open road.



Company-provided CDL training for qualified candidates
\$33,500-\$60,500 (depending on experience)
Low-cost medical and dental insurance

APPLY ONLINE AT
schneiderjobs.com

1-800-44-PRIDE • 1-800-447-7433

SCHNEIDER
NATIONAL

BOEYER/STEV