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Eagles' Lyndell Jones: A little guy gets a big break

By George Shirk
Inquirer Staff Writer

He's so little that he can disappear in a swarm of flies.

He carries no impressive resume of past glories. By his own admission, the highlight of his collegiate career at Hawaii was the day he made two pass interceptions in a single game. In the past, he seemed curiously indifferent about his football career.

And yet on Thursday night, little Anthony Lyndell Jones probably will be the starting left cornerback when the Eagles open their preseason against the Oilers in Houston.

"It surprises me a lot," Jones said yesterday as the Eagles opened workouts after a day off Sunday. "When you come out of college as a free agent, just to get a shot at starting is a big shock."

It is more shocking, perhaps, for Eagles fans. Jones, at 5 feet, 8 inches, will be the next-to-last line of defense on the Eagles' left side in their first preseason game.

At 5-8, Jones is an inch smaller than Little Louie Giammona, who looks like a green-helmeted mosquito.

Lined up against a standing Harold Carmichael, Jones has a clear view of Carmichael's knee and not much else.

Not final

Although coach Dick Vermeil has not given Jones the final word, the diminutive player probably will be there for the first ground onslaught by Earl Campbell and the first aerial attacks intended for receivers Ken Burrough, Mike Barber, Mike Renfro, et al.

He will be among the first to get a look at the advance scouting reports on the Oilers, and he will be the easiest target of attack for Oilers quarterback Gifford Nielsen.

Despite all this, Lyndell Jones (he prefers his middle name to his first) still hasn't made the team. But he has taken advantage of the cruel opportunities of a football training camp — other players' injuries.

Out for the Houston game is regular left corner Roynell Young, who is recovering from a hamstring injury. Also out is the No. 2 man, Richard Blackmore, who is recovering from a strained knee. That leaves Jones and Reggie Ware, and of the two, Jones is first on the depth chart. So far, he has survived.

"It's been a lot of hard work, and with the other people getting hurt, it was a matter of taking the opportunity," Jones said.

Wasn't drafted

Passed up in the NFL college player draft and invited as a free agent to only three camps, Jones almost did not get an opportunity at all.

But Vermeil had it on the word of Hawaii coach Dick Tomey, a former Vermeil aide at UCLA, that Jones could play, and for Vermeil, Tomey's word was enough. Still, the fact that Jones is here is somewhat unusual.

As a high school running back and cornerback in Seattle, Jones' body went on "hold" while others' kept on growing.

Although he loved the game, he realized he was not destined for the National Football League by virtue of his running, so he chose to go to cornerback, taking the advice of his high school coach.

When he left high school, he stood at 5-7 and weighed a measly 150 pounds. As a result, he was offered only two college scholarships, to Washington and Washington State, but he spurned those and thus nearly committed career suicide.

"I was tired of Washington and was ready to go away," he said. "I didn't want to go to Washington or to Washington State."

But a junior college coach at Columbia Basin persuaded him to give his career another shot, and after two years there, the out-of-state scholarships came pouring in. "My first intent was to go to Michigan State," he said, "because everybody kept telling me that because it was the Big 10, I'd get a better look."

But Jones instead opted for the Western Athletic Conference and the University of Hawaii, because the WAC is a better passing conference. He figured that if he were going to make it in professional football, he would have to get used to passes floating his way.

He won no conference honors. He was selected to no conference all-star teams. He was never a Most Valuable Player. And when his name popped up in the NFL draft, it was passed over by every one of the 26 professional teams.

"After the draft," he said, "New England, Kansas City and Philadelphia said they wanted me, but I chose Philadelphia because I thought I'd get a better shot here."

His decision turned out to be the best he could have made because of the injuries to Young and Blackmore.

Practicing with the first team, Jones has received specialized coaching from secondary coach Fred Bruney, who, among other things, has altered Jones' tackling technique from face-tackling to shoulder-tackling.

Also, the opportunity to play has given Jones ample opportunity to cover regular receivers such as Carmichael and Charlie Smith, who he believes are the best in the league, and to perfect the techniques he used in college to counter his lack of height.

Blessed with good jumping ability — he says his vertical jump measures 31 inches — the essence of his pass coverage is in positioning himself "under" a receiver so that his jump is as nearly vertical as possible. An off-balance leap would exacerbate the effect of his limited height.

"I just try harder," he said of his height. "Sure, I hear about it all the time, but those are the things I think about when I'm working out."

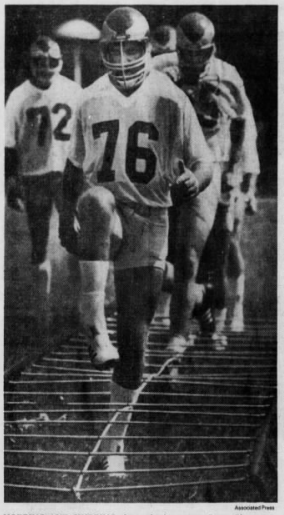
Today and tomorrow, Jones will combine his physical workout with a mental one, since his head is full of thoughts of Houston.

He also is a realist, perhaps because, by all rights, he should not be here.

"Filling in Roynell Young's shoes are big shoes to fill," he said, "and the shock of doing that hasn't hit me yet.

"But then, being in a pro camp hasn't hit me yet."

NOTES: Wide receiver Phil Farris was cut from the roster yesterday. Vermeil said all other players probably would stick around at least until after the Houston game. . . . Former Los Angeles Rams and Washington Redskins coach George Allen, who as head coach in Los Angeles gave Vermeil his first pro coaching job, showed up at West Chester as an invited on-field guest yesterday, and he planned to stay for most of the week. It was the second straight year that Allen has visited the Eagles' camp. . . . Vermeil said the race for the starting fullback job was "even" at this point. Contending are Leroy Harris, Perry Harrington and rookie Hubert Oliver, the 10th-round draft pick out of Arizona. He also had warm words for back Mike Hogan. . . . Vermeil announced that, if the Houston game goi off the ground, Ron Jaworski would pilot the offense for the first half, Joe Pisarcik would quarterback for the third quarter, and Rob Hertel would get the call for the fourth. . . . As for running backs, he said Harris and Wilbert Montgomery would play the first quarter. . . . Al Chesley, the linebacker who is filling in for the injured Bill Bergey, looked impressive again in yesterday morning's workout. "His attitude," said Vermeil, "is super." Bergey, meanwhile, was getting a final checkup yesterday on his chronically sore left knee, but he unexpectedly showed up in full pads for the afternoon workout.



Associated Press

HOPPING AND SKIPPING through the ropes, Jerry Sisemore leads a pack of Eagles through a drill at yesterday's practice. Rains forced the workout at West Chester to be moved indoors in the afternoon.

Skalbania withdraws bid for Pats' stadium

Associated Press

FOXBORO, Mass. — Nelson Skalbania, the owner of the Montreal Alouettes of the Canadian Football League, withdrew his bid yesterday for control of Schaefer Stadium, home of the National Football League's New England Patriots.

In a letter to Stadium Realty Trust, which leases the stadium to the team, Skalbania said he was withdrawing his tentative offer of $16 a share "reluctantly" because of business aspects and some "non-business problems."

A spokesman for Stadium Realty said Skalbania withdrew his offer after receiving a phone call from Patriots' vice president Charles W. Sullivan and a letter from team owner William H. Sullivan Jr.

A lawyer had said Skalbania was interested in the stadium as part of his plan to expand the CFL into at least seven American cities.

LATROBE, Pa. — Offensive lineman Ted Petersen was admitted to Divine Providence Hospital for treatment of bursitis in his left hip, the Pittsburgh Steelers announced.

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HEMPSTEAD, N.Y. — Jerome Barkum, the New York Jets' tight end, remained in traction at Lenox Hill Hospital, undergoing precautionary treatment for back spasms.

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NOTES: The Cincinnati Bengals waived three rookie free agents, Dennis Dunn, a defensive back from Yale; Jim DeStefano, a linebacker from Cornell, and Tim Odell, a wide receiver from Rutgers, to reduce their roster to 72. . . . The Dallas Cowboys released seven players, including eighth-round draft choice Paul Piurowski and veteran tackle Richard Grimmett, to reduce their training camp roster to 87 players.

. . . Joe Jenkins, an Alcorn State basketball player trying to make it as a tight end, was one of five players cut by the New Orleans Saints. Also cut were running back Quinn Jones from Tulsa, linebacker Tim Scott of Texas A&M, cornerback Victor Jackson of Bowie State and linebacker Stan Holloway of California. . . . The Miami Dolphins waived four players, including nine-year National Football League veteran Carl Barisich, reducing the club's roster to 69 players. Also waived were Seamus Smyth, a rookie placekicker from Delta State, and free agents Ivory Joe Hunter, a cornerback from Florida State, and Ken Johnson, a fullback from Miami, Fla., who had played with the New York Giants.

Pro football

Eagles adjust flight plans to save game

EAGLES, from 1-C

delphia tomorrow afternoon, also aboard United, and arrive at Houston via Chicago. That group, Procopio said, will stay overnight in Houston on Thursday, depart Friday and arrive in Philadelphia early that afternoon.

Yesterday morning the Eagles were uncertain about their travel plans; for a time, the game against the Oilers seemed in doubt.

"If we can't get protection," Procopio had said, "then obviously the game is in jeopardy."

When asked what method he was using to arrange alternative plans, Procopio said he was merely calling one airline after another, "asking if they had 130 seats available."

He said the initial response from air ticket agents was laughter.

The Eagles' charter was dropped because of a government request that all charter flights be canceled due to the controllers' strike.

Coach Dick Vermeil said the team's practice schedule would be altered only slightly because of the travel problems.

"We only had a light workout scheduled for Friday anyway," he said.

Hendrickson's 4-under 140 wins Philadelphia Open

By Mayer Brandschain
Special to The Inquirer

Dick Hendrickson, the Loch Nairn pro who is built like a football tackle, yesterday regained the Philadelphia Open Golf Championship by scoring a four-under-par 71-69—140 over 36 holes on the Whitford Country Club course.

The 6-foot, 7-inch, 270-pound golfer birdied five holes in a rainy afternoon round of three-under-par 35-34—69 to prevail by a margin of two strokes for the top prize of $1,300 from the purse of $6,850.

His round was surpassed only by the four-under-par 35-33—68 of Rick Osberg, the pro at Garrison's Lake in Delaware. He tied for second place at 142 with Don Stough of Honey Run, with each earning $775.

Hendrickson, who also won the title in 1972, succeeded Jay Sigel of Aronimink as champion. Sigel, although he birdied nine holes and eagled one during the two rounds, scored 71-73—144 to finish in a fifth-place tie with Pete Oakley, Rehoboth Beach (Del.) pro. Trenton pro Dennis Milne took fourth place with a 143.

The eagle by Sigel, the 1979 British Amateur champion, was scored on the 511-yard 9th with a drive, a 4-iron and a three-foot putt. Sigel, winner of the title in four of the last six years, did finish as low amateur.

Hendrickson, who was on the Tour for two years, had putts from 1 foot to 30 feet for three birdies in the morning, and his afternoon birdies were scored from 10 feet, 30, 30, 9 and 1 foot on the 15th after a sand wedge to the green. His 69 was matched by George Marucci, the former Philadelphia Amateur champion, who ended at 146.

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