

Packers Rookie Orientation Camp; Camp helped DeBauche kick away woes; Former Badgers punter could push Ryan for job

Article from: The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Article date: May 3, 2008

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Green Bay -- Kenny DeBauche had become such a pedestrian punter late in his career at Wisconsin that two National Football League special-teams coaches didn't even know his name several weeks before the draft.

DeBauche's confidence wasn't high in late March when he paid his way to Phoenix for three days of workouts with Gary Zauner, the Milwaukee native and NFL special-teams coach from 1994-2006 who is now a consultant and instructor.

Two weeks later, DeBauche had an outstanding workout in Green Bay which, in turn, led to a free-agent contract with the Packers.

"He definitely helped me," DeBauche said of Zauner. "He didn't give me anything new but some different ways to think about things and different drills to work on. I feel more confident now."

In mid-April, DeBauche worked out in the Hutson Center before general manager Ted Thompson, the special-teams coaches and various personnel people.

"I was on the spot," DeBauche said. "I punted five down the middle, five to the right and five to the left. In that time I don't know that I got fully warmed up. I don't think it's the best I ever hit the ball but I was pleased."

The Packers signed DeBauche almost immediately after the draft to a three-year contract.

"Coach (Mike) Stock (special teams coordinator) said he was really impressed," DeBauche said. "He said it was one of the best punter workouts like that he has ever had in his years of coaching. For a guy like him to say that, it was not only nice to hear but it also helped my confidence."

The first day, March 27, Zauner wasn't sold on DeBauche. But after making some adjustments Zauner now says DeBauche should be a worthy challenger to Jon Ryan.

"He's smooth, very smooth," Zauner said. "We changed his drop and all of a sudden he started hitting 4.8s, 4.9s and 5.0 hang time."

Last season, Ryan posted a net average of 37.6 yards, 12th in the NFL and the finest in Green Bay since 1969. His gross mark of 44.4 was the fourth-best in club history. He also has worked to become an effective holder.

However, Ryan did have a terrible game in Chicago on Dec. 23 that led in part to training-camp competition.

"I'll tell the truth if I punt bad," said DeBauche, who also excels as a holder. "If I go out there and see that Jon Ryan is a better punter than me, that I don't have a shot, I'll tell it like it is. But that's not how I feel right now. I feel like I can punt in the NFL . . . and for the Packers."

Every 10 years or so, the Packers sign a player from Green Bay, which isn't exactly a hotbed of high-school

football. DeBauche, who played three sports just outside the city at Bay Port, views the home-town angle as far more of a positive than a negative "as long as I don't get bad publicity."

Although one NFL scout said DeBauche clearly punted better in his first two seasons than his last two at UW, DeBauche isn't convinced.

"I know there're punts I could have hit better," he said. "But I try to look back at games and I can't remember many games where I was out-punted. You've got to take into consideration the conditions and the (game) situations."

Just one punter, Georgia Tech's Durant Brooks, was drafted (sixth round). NFL people labeled this a bad year for punters but DeBauche, with a new lease on life, doesn't see any reason why he might not turn out to be the best.

"Most teams knew nothing about him," Zauner said. "A few coaches later saw some tapes of him on my website and said, 'Hey, that was pretty good.' I do think he has a shot."