

# The Scheiners: 2009 NFL award predictions



## by Adam Schein

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It's OK. Bring it on.

As one of the 50 voters for the Associated Press awards in these categories, there was a lot of thought put into these selections. I am excited to hopefully be ahead of the curve on two breakout all-stars on offense and defense for 2009.

We introduce the best of the best in the NFL with Schein's fifth annual preseason awards on FOXSports.com.

### **MVP — Aaron Rodgers, Packers QB**

I wish he wasn't tearing it up in the preseason, basically having a perfect August. I was hoping Rodgers would fly under the radar so I could shock the world.

Brett Favre, eat your heart out.

It's Aaron Rodgers time.

When you go back and think of everything Rodgers went through last year, 2008 was truly impressive, dealing with the Favre hangover drama and a porous defense. And yet through it all, Rodgers passed for 4,038 yards and 28 touchdowns, and completed 64 percent of his passes.

I think the touchdowns and completion percentage will only go up. Rodgers will get balance with a bounce-back year from Ryan Grant. And he has the deepest 1 through 5 group at wide receiver in the league, highlighted by the explosive Greg Jennings and the consistent Donald Driver. Plus, Jermichael Finley adds some potential sizzle at tight end.

Rodgers went through ups and downs at the end of ball games and I firmly believe he is ready to even out his play down the stretch of contests. And it will be his play late in games that will help him become MVP.

Rodgers proved himself as the true leader of the Pack last year and into this offseason, where his dedication to the program got rave reviews and will prove to be a spring board to greatness in 2009. Rodgers and head coach Mike McCarthy are on the same page and the quarterback serves as an extension of the coach on the field.

I really think Aaron Rodgers blossoms into an elite player in 2009, guiding the Packers deep into the postseason and he will define the word value.

Look for fellow QBs Tom Brady, Drew Brees, Philip Rivers and a wild card named Tony Romo to also be in the hunt.

### **Offensive Player of the Year — Drew Brees, Saints QB**

I've heard some people ask if Brees can do it again. I'm here to tell you that Brees will only be better.

Think about it.

Sean Payton is committed to balance (finally) and that will prevent teams from teeing up on Brees. Marques Colston is healthy. Lance Moore has a great rapport with Brees. Robert Meachem is having his best August as a pro.

Statistically, where do you want to begin? 40 passing touchdowns? A 2-1 touchdown to interception ratio? 5,000 passing yards? I'll sign Brees up for all of the above. He's that good.

Other choices are Rodgers, Chargers QB Philip Rivers, Cardinals WR Larry Fitzgerald, Patriots QB Tom Brady and Vikings RB Adrian Peterson.

## **Defensive Player of the Year — Haloti Ngata, Ravens DT**

He is so underrated in the galaxy of stars in the Baltimore defense. But this year he gets out of the Ray Lewis/Ed Reed shadow.

I voted for Ngata for first team All-Pro in the Associated Press awards last year. He was dominant. He's always commanded extra attention and still excelled. Under Rex Ryan, Ngata could be asked to drop back in coverage with his freakish athleticism. The 6-4, 340-pounder is a one-of-a-kind physical specimen.

But this year the Ravens will play more of a four-man front and Ngata will get to the quarterback. He told me in training camp he will sack the quarterback eight times. If he does that, with his ability to stop the run and change a game by demanding double teams on every play, Ngata will run away with the award.

Special love to runner-ups Texans DE Mario Williams and LB DeMeco Ryans, Colts DE Dwight Freeney, Giants DE Justin Tuck and Panthers LB Jon Beason.

## **Coach of the Year — Ken Whisenhunt, Cardinals**

Is it possible that last year's NFC champs are underdogs once again? It seems to be the case. I don't know anyone picking the Cards to repeat as conference champions. Some think 'Zona won't even win the West. Remember these comments when it comes to Coach of the Year voting and Whisenhunt aptly guides the Cardinals to at least 11 wins.

Look, the playoff run wasn't a fluke. Whisenhunt made the Cardinals put the "big-boy pads" back on after the humiliating and humbling loss to New England in December. That's coaching.

Even with the stars in the passing attack, Whisenhunt makes sure there is an emphasis on running the ball and defense.

Whisenhunt will play the underdog card with his club all year long.

New England's Bill Belichick, Green Bay's Mike McCarthy, New Orleans' Sean Payton and the Jets' Rex Ryan are other coaches to watch.

## **Offensive Rookie of the Year — Donald Brown, Colts RB**



**Haloti Ngata anchors Baltimore's ferocious defense.** (Andy Lyons / Getty Images)

It's a bit of a risk here with Joseph Addai in the picture. But Brown is a total stud and ready-made to dominate. He has pure power, speed, a high football IQ, can pass protect and has a great attitude. All of the above is vital when you are playing with Peyton Manning. And remember how awful the Colts' running attack was last year? Addai was terrible in short-yardage situations, a strength for Brown. I think the former UConn star will supplant Addai by midseason and accumulate the necessary yards to win the award.

Choosing this award was perhaps my biggest debate, with Arizona's stud running back, Chris "Beanie" Wells and Denver running back Knowshon Moreno a nose away.

## **Defensive Rookie of the Year — Aaron Curry, Seahawks LB**

I truly think this cat is ready-made for the pro game. Jim Mora loves Curry and he'll be in a great position to accumulate tackles and stats. You can book him for 100 tackles in his first NFL season.

I strongly considered Lions safety Louis Delmas, Rams LB James Laurinaitis and Redskins DE Brian Orakpo.

## **Comeback Player of the Year — Antonio Cromartie, Chargers CB**

"Cro", as he has told me on several occasions, was never healthy last year with a hip injury. At 100 percent, Cromartie will pick off at least 10 passes this year and reclaim his rightful status as one of the elite cornerbacks in the NFL.

I know that Shawne Merriman, Tom Brady, Carson Palmer and Matt Hasselbeck are the en vogue names for this award. And I get it.

But remember what Cromartie was before 2008 and just how awful he was last season while showing tremendous toughness. Cromartie knew that opposing teams didn't fully realize how hurt he was, so he tried to play through the immense pain.

Cromartie is a rare athlete and a true shutdown corner — and those traits, on display in 2007, will take over this season.

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**Donald Brown could be Indy's main man in the running game.** (Scott Boehm / Getty Images)