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## Pack's best NFL prospect ?

It may not be Philip Rivers or T.A. McLendon or Jerricho Cotchery but rather a long snapper named Danny Young

By CAULTON TUDOR, Staff Writer

There's no shortage of prospects to lure NFL scouts to N.C. State this football season.

They'll come to analyze Philip Rivers' passes, Jerricho Cotchery's catches, T.A. McLendon's runs, Chris Colmer's blocks and Manny Lawson's tackles.

But the Wolfpack player likeliest to land on an NFL roster in 2004, according to scouts, is Danny Young.

Your first thought might be, "Who?" -- and that's the best compliment you could pay him.

"If our fans start recognizing my name, I'm in big trouble," Young said.

The 6-foot-5, 247-pound senior from California is the Wolfpack's long snapper. Among the regular players, he has probably the most obscure job. Even the holder on kicks gets to execute an occasional fake.

"My only job on the team is just to get that snap back there," Young said. "Once in a while, I'll get in on a tackle after a punt, but that's rare."

Long snapping will remain Young's only job, too, NCSU special-teams coordinator Joe Pate said.



N.C. State's Danny Young, demonstrating his long-snapping technique, would like to remain anonymous to fans, but NFL scouts know him well.

Staff Photo by John L. White

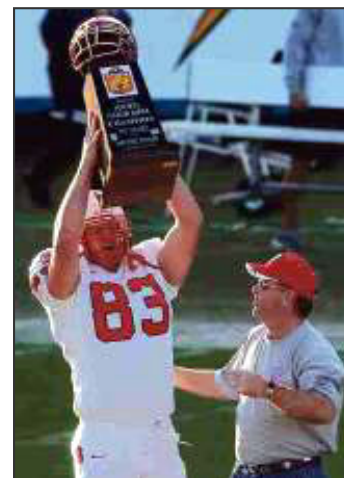
### what the pros look for

Here's a checklist for scouts who are searching for a long snapper -- courtesy of Duke Babb, director of National Football Scouting, a service based in Tulsa, Okla.

1. SNAP SPEED: How long it takes the football to go from the snapper's hands to the holder's or punter's. You can be accurate all of the time, but if you get it back there too slowly, you're asking for a blocked kick.
2. DEPTH: Almost all snaps on place -kicks travel 7 yards, but some college teams set their punters 12 yards back and some 15 yards behind the line. The best snappers are reliable from both distances.
3. ACCURACY: It has to be on target.
4. ARC: A frozen rope is best. The snapper who delivers a looper once in a while can get into trouble.
5. VERSATILITY: It always helps if a snapper can play another role in a pinch.



Young has one job, but it's no snap.



Danny Young gets to share the spoils of victory after N.C. State beat Notre Dame in the Gator Bowl.

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"I think Danny still has fantasies about getting in at tight end for a play or two and maybe catching a pass," Pate said. "But that's what they are. It's sure not going to happen."

For one thing, Young is too valuable to the Pack to risk the exposure to injury. In three seasons, he never has made a bad snap. He hasn't sailed the ball over a punter's head, dribbled a grounder back to the holder or hiked a pop fly that resulted in a blocked kick.

What's his secret? "You get efficient just by repetition," said Young, who settles into a wide stance and tries to keep the ball as far away from himself as comfortably possible so that he can deliver it in one smooth motion. Long arms help.

He has been honing his skill since the coaching staff at Scripps Ranch High School in San Diego asked him to learn it. "Hundreds and thousands" of snaps have made the task second nature, he said, and State recruited him for it.

"For what he does, Danny is as good as they come," Pate said.

NFL scouts agree. Although spokesmen for the two major scouting services -- the Blesto group of Pittsburgh and National Football Scouting of Tulsa, Okla. -- wouldn't talk about specific prospects, Young is rated at or near the top nationally among long snappers by both companies.

In the National Football Scouting spring ratings of the top 40 senior NFL prospects, Young was not only the top-ranked long snapper, but also he and former Georgia Tech running back Tony Hollings were the only ACC players listed.

Hollings, who was ruled academically ineligible, was selected by Houston in the supplemental draft last month.

When Young heard about the ratings from teammates and coaches, he was flabbergasted.

"I think it was some kind of joke everyone was playing on me," he said.

There's no guarantee that Young will be chosen in April's NFL draft, but his chances of making a roster are very good if he continues his level of play.

"Two long snappers got picked last year, and I think we'll see more and more of it in the future," said agent Kevin Gold of Harrisburg, Pa., who is more or less a patron saint of long snappers.

Blesto director Jack Butler agrees.

"How many times each season do those guys have the whole outcome in their hands? It's a heck of a lot," Butler said. "There's a demand for the guys who can do the job every time they go out there. They're becoming more important all the time. It's become a priority for all NFL teams."

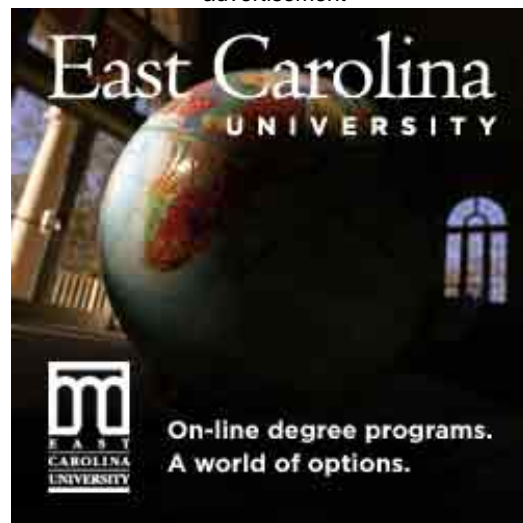
Mark Rodenhauser, a longtime NFL long snapper who ended

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his career with the Carolina Panthers a couple of years back, said Young's future is bright if he does land a roster spot.

"It's a job you can do for a long, long time by NFL standards," Rodenhauser said. "I lasted 12 years, and I didn't make an NFL roster until I was 26. Long snappers don't get rich, but they can make a good living."

The classic example was Trey Jankin, who lasted two decades in the NFL before making an inglorious exit in last season's playoffs. Lured out of retirement by the New York Giants, the 41-year-old Jankin punctuated hundreds of perfect snaps with a bad one that prevented the Giants from getting off the potential game-winning field goal in the final seconds of a wild-card loss to San Francisco.

During the offseason, the Giants replaced him with former Virginia player Ryan Kuehl.

Jankin's fate haunts all long snappers.

"He was probably the best ever," Young said, "but that's the way this position goes. If you make one really bad one, that's what you'll be remembered for."

That's also why Young goes to great lengths to keep his mind off the dark side. He sings songs quietly to himself, guesses at what the next play call will be, silently charts head coach Chuck Amato's constant movements along the sideline, daydreams about what it would be like to be the punter rather than the guy who delivers the ball to him.

"The pressure would eat me alive if I would let it. I don't have any doubt about that," Young said. "I have the simplest job on the whole team. I only get in for seven or eight plays a game. If everything goes the way it's supposed to, no one will ever know I've been out there at all. It's kind of weird to be the only player whose goal is to never get noticed."

But that's the irony. By successfully remaining invisible all of these years, Young finally has been discovered.

"I'll never give up on making it to the NFL now," Young said. "I may have to play in Europe or the Arena League or Canada or who knows where before I get there. But somewhere sometime, a team will need what I can do."

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