

STHS grad clinging to dream to make it in the NFL

By Rich Cimini, ESPN

FLORHAM PARK, N.J. – South Lake Tahoe High grad Garrett McIntyre, 26, is still clinging to his NFL dream even though he has been tossed by three teams. In between tryouts, he has worked in construction, pouring cement foundations – and “that really sucked,” he said.

Josh Baker is a well-traveled rookie who lost nearly two full years because of injury and suspension. At his low point, he made \$10 an hour at an office-supply store, unloading trucks to earn money for courses at a community college.

Michael Campbell also is a rookie, out of Edison, N.J., so serious and so determined – yet hoping that one momentary lapse in concentration doesn’t cost him his dream.

They’re the long shots, the bottom-of-the-roster guys – undrafted free agents. They’ve been overlooked and underappreciated, but now they have an invite to the big dance – an NFL training camp. McIntyre, Baker and Campbell are among about two dozen long shots on the New York Jets’ roster, each hoping to make the final 53.

The Jets’ roster is sprinkled with players who came up the hard way, including homegrown gems such as defensive tackle Mike DeVito and guard Brandon Moore. Maybe the best “Rudy” story of them all is ex-Jets player Danny Woodhead, who has achieved near iconic status with the New England Patriots.

These are the toughest days. The first mandatory cutdown is next Tuesday (80 players), followed by the final cutdown Sept. 4. Because of the lockout, rookies weren’t able to sign until late July, making it harder to stick. They have one week – two

more preseason games – to fulfill their lifelong dream. Or be crushed.

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McIntyre grew up in South Lake Tahoe, a play land for the rich and famous but not exactly a football hotbed. His high school team went 0-9 his senior year, and he didn't receive any scholarship offers. He walked on at Fresno State and – long story short – he was an All-WAC defensive end by the time he left.

He wasn't drafted in 2006, beginning a free-agent journey that would take him from the Seattle Seahawks to the Arizona Cardinals to the Tennessee Titans. He didn't make it to training camp in Seattle, and he lasted only a week in the Arizona and Tennessee camps. After getting cut by the Titans, he received a league suspension for testing positive for a banned substance.

“After you get cut the first time, it's hard,” he said. “Words can't really describe how it feels.”

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