

# Right or wrong, history dogs Hampton's Baker



DT Chris Baker  
(Scott Boehm/Getty)

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Posted Apr 4, 2009



**We introduce you to perhaps the second-best nose tackle prospect in the draft. Penn State transfer Chris Baker, who was coached at Hampton by former Packers cornerback Jerry Holmes, impressed at the Scouting Combine and his pro day workout, which was directed by the Packers' John Dorsey. We talked to Baker and others in yet another Packer Report draft exclusive.**

**Chris Baker** can't escape history.

Look up the defensive tackle's official draft biography on NFL.com, and it's right there in the first two sentences. "Baker struggled with off-field incidents at Penn State. He was suspended from the team at the end of the 2007 season and finally dismissed from the Nittany Lions in July 2008 after pleading guilty to two counts of misdemeanor assault and criminal trespass following two fights in 2007."

There are two sides to every story, and Baker and his supporters present a very different version.

So, who is Chris Baker?

Baker played just two years of high school football but blossomed into an all-state performer at Windsor High School in Connecticut. After redshirting in 2005 and playing sparingly in 2006, Baker started seven games at defensive tackle in 2007. He was arguably the Nittany Lions' best defensive lineman with 37 tackles, including eight tackles for loss and 4.5 sacks.

Then came the highly publicized off-the-field incidents. Coach Joe Paterno, who was under fire because several of his athletes had made the wrong sort of headlines, wound up kicking Baker off the team.

“It was a case of misidentification in both incidents,” Hampton told Packer Report in a phone interview last week. “I took a plea deal so I could get everything situated so I could get back on the football team. It was more convenient for my parents to just take a plea deal because each case was \$20,000, so it was the best thing for me to do to get everything resolved and get back to playing football.”

Baker landed at Hampton University, a Football Championship Subdivision program that was coached by ex-Packers cornerback Jerry Holmes. He dominated the lower-rung competition with 62 tackles, including 16.5 tackles for loss and 8.5 sacks.

With one year of eligibility remaining, Baker decided to head for the NFL. After a strong Scouting Combine and pro day — an on-campus workout directed by Packers director of college scouting John Dorsey — Baker is considered a second- or third-round prospect. One insider told Packer Report that the 6-foot-2, 326-pound Baker, not Boston College’s [Ron Brace](#), is the second-best 3-4 nose tackle prospect in this draft. Baker would fill a major need in Green Bay, which needs another nose tackle to rotate with [Ryan Pickett](#).

“I’m hearing a lot of good things,” said Donovan Rose, an 18-year veteran of Hampton’s coaching staff who replaced Holmes as head coach in January. “The time he was here, he was a model guy. He’s a great guy, character guy. He came in and had a great sense of humor and got along with the guys immediately. We had no problem with him. He had a strong GPA and was a model student. A ‘yes sir, no sir’ guy. Worked hard. He was definitely a great, great kid.”

Hampton has sent several players to the NFL, including Rose, who played for the Kansas City Chiefs and Miami Dolphins as well as in the CFL in the 1980s. So, when he said Baker is “without a doubt” an NFL-caliber player, he knows what he’s talking about.

“He’s a strong guy, has great technique,” Rose said. “He ran well at the Combine, and to be that big, he is surprisingly quick. A lot of folks have called on his behalf.”

According to Rose, only one or two teams have asked him about the Penn State incidents. Baker, not surprisingly, has been asked repeatedly.

“The more that they dig into it, the more that they see that it was just a situation where I was wrongly identified and at the wrong place at the wrong time,” Baker said. “A lot of them have been talking to the coaches at Penn State, and they’ve been hearing very positive reports, which just shows the kind of person that I am.”

And just what kind of person is Baker?

He was his high school’s class vice president during his junior and senior years. He organized bake sales and car washes for fund-raisers. He was active in his church.

“I’ve always been a person to help people out,” he said.

Baker acknowledges that he put himself in some “bad situations” at Penn State. Those

situations, he says, don't define who he is. He calls being kicked off the team a "humbling experience," but it's an experience that made him work harder to keep his NFL dreams alive. "It's been fun, because it was my dream to play in the National Football League. I was determined to still make it, even after the Penn State incident," Baker said.

Asked what his pitch would be to a general manager like the Packers' Ted Thompson, Baker says: "I'm a humble kid. I'm a hard-working kid. Most of all, I make plays. That's what every team boils down to: Can you make plays on the football field? I think my play on the football field stands out. I'm a good playmaker, I'm a good kid, a good citizen. That's what a coach needs, and that's the person I am."