

## 2006 Pitt Positional Breakdown

### THE OFFENSE

#### QUARTERBACKS

**WHO'S BACK:** Senior **Tyler Palko** returns for his third season as Pitt's starting quarterback. A two-time second-team All-Big East selection, Palko threw for 2,392 yards while completing 56.6% of his passes (193 of 341). He threw 17 touchdowns against nine interceptions. Palko enters his final season ranked fifth all-time at Pitt with 5,472 passing yards. Owing both skills and smarts, he could emerge as a national honors candidate this year.

Palko's chief backup, sophomore **Bill Stull**, returns. Stull made two appearances last year in late-game situations. He threw two passes, completing one for 17 yards. Also taking repetitions during the spring will be senior walk-on **Matt Flaus**.

**WHO'S GONE:** Shane Murray worked at quarterback last year as a true freshman. After taking a redshirt during the 2005 season, Murray will move to the secondary this spring.

**NOTABLE:** Palko has thrown 41 touchdowns against just 16 interceptions during his two years as a starter. Depth at quarterback figures to increase in the fall when freshman recruits Dexter Davidson and Kevan Smith arrive, giving the Panthers a total of four scholarship QBs on the roster.

#### RUNNING BACKS

**WHO'S BACK:** Tailback **LaRod Stephens-Howling** led Pitt in rushing as a true freshman, compiling 434 yards and averaging 4.5 per carry in nine games. His strongest outings were against Syracuse (101), Nebraska (98 yards) and South Florida (91). Despite a midseason ankle injury that forced him out of the lineup for a pair of games, Stephens-Howling left an impression with a speedy and elusive running style. Stephens-Howling will share carries during the spring with sophomore **Brandon Mason** and redshirt freshman **Shane Brooks**. Also in the tailback mix is a pair of junior walk-ons, **John Pettiford** and **Calvin Drewery**.

Pitt's top three fullbacks last year were all seniors. The outlook at this position is decidedly greener in 2006 with sophomore **Conredge Collins** being the most experienced returnee. Initially slated for a redshirt, the highly regarded Collins moved into active duty in midseason when injuries struck and played in five games. He will be pushed by junior **Mark Yezovich** and redshirt freshman walk-on **Chris Bova**.

**WHO'S GONE:** Pitt lost two of its top three tailbacks from last year in Raymond Kirkley (graduation) and Rashad Jennings (transfer). Also departing due to graduation were fullbacks Tim Murphy, Justin Acierno and Kellen Campbell.

**NOTABLE:** Two true frosh who played in Pitt's backfield last year compiled some impressive high school stats. LaRod Stephens-Howling rushed for 4,597 yards and 57 TDs while at Pennsylvania's Greater Johnstown High, while Conredge Collins ran for 4,331 yards and 52 TDs at Monsignor Edward Pace in Miami, Fla.



*Tailback LaRod Stephens-Howling will be a major part of Pitt's 2006 rushing attack.*

#### WIDE RECEIVERS

**WHO'S BACK:** Pitt's top returning wideout is junior **Derek Kinder**, who had 37 receptions for 374 yards (10.1 avg.) and three touchdowns playing opposite All-Big East receiver Greg Lee. Kinder emerged as a starter early in the season and became a dependable playmaker. Senior **Joe DelSardo** (15 catches for 156 yards) also contributes experience to the receiving corps. Sophomore **Marcel Pestano** gained reps last year in multiple-receiver sets and will look for a bigger role this year. Pitt also welcomes the services of two players who redshirted as true freshmen, **Cedric McGee** and **Oderick Turner**. Additional competition will come from a pair of sophomore walk-ons in **Justin Latore** and **Austin Ransom**. Senior walk-on **Branden Ballard**, a letterman on special teams last year, will miss spring drills due to a wrist injury.

**WHO'S GONE:** Two-time All-Big East receiver Greg Lee bypassed his senior season to enter the 2006 NFL Draft. Lee led the Big East in receiving yards per game each of the past two years, averaging 87.5 last season and 108.1 in 2004.

**NOTABLE:** Pitt has had three underclassmen wide receivers declare early for the NFL Draft over the last five years, including Antonio Bryant in 2002, Larry Fitzgerald in 2004 and Greg Lee in 2006.

## Positional Breakdown...

### TIGHT ENDS

**WHO'S BACK:** Senior **Steve Buches** has been a major player at tight end the last two seasons. He earned six starting assignments last year along side full-time starter Erik Gill, who has graduated. Buches was Pitt's fourth-leading pass catcher with 17 receptions for 168 yards and two touchdowns. Junior **Darrell Strong** made the transition from wideout to tight end last year and displayed flashes of big-play potential in the passing game. With his 6-5, 260-pound frame, Strong showed the ability to make athletic plays in the secondary. He caught 16 passes for 226 yards with one TD and also had a pair of 2-point conversion catches. Sophomore **John Pelusi** lettered as a reserve during his true freshman season. Pelusi will miss the spring, however, due to an offseason knee injury. He is expected to be ready for fall camp. Also in the tight end mix this spring will be freshman walk-on **Dustin Walters**.

**WHO'S GONE:** Erik Gill, a two-year starter, has graduated. Gill was Pitt's third-leading receiver last year with 21 catches for 244 yards and a TD.

**NOTABLE:** Pitt's three primary tight ends – Gill, Buches and Strong – accounted for 54 catches for 638 yards last year.

### OFFENSIVE LINE

**WHO'S BACK:** Pitt returns four starters on the offensive front – sophomore left guard **C.J. Davis**, senior center **Joe Villani**, senior right guard **John Simonitis** and junior right tackle **Mike McGlynn**. Simonitis is the elder statesman with three years of starting experience. McGlynn has been a two-year starter, while Villani and Davis are coming off their first seasons in starting roles.

Another returning veteran is junior **Chris Vangas**, who lettered the last two seasons as the backup center and will look to push Villani.

The lone vacancy on the offensive line is at left tackle. Candidates to fill that void include sophomore letterman **John Bachman**, freshman **Kevin Hughes** and sophomore **Dave Weber**. Weber, however, will miss spring drills due to a knee injury.

Competing behind McGlynn at right tackle are sophomores **Chase Clowser**, who lettered on special teams last year, and **Frank Kochin**, a walk-on.

At left guard, sophomore **Dominic Williams** will provide experienced competition. He played in 10 games last year with two starts. Also vying for time will be a pair of juniors, **Mike DeLuca** and walk-on **Kevin Cimador**. Redshirt freshman **John Brown** will provide depth at the right guard spot.

**WHO'S GONE:** Charles Spencer earned All-Big East each of his final two seasons. Spencer played guard as a junior before moving to left tackle last season. The Panthers also lost to graduation versatile backup Dale Williams, who contributed at guard and tackle last year.



*Senior end Charles Sallet enters his third year as a starter for Pitt's defense.*

**NOTABLE:** Senior guard John Simonitis has made 30 starts over the last three seasons, the most of any player on Pitt's 2006 roster.

## THE DEFENSE

### DEFENSIVE LINE

**WHO'S BACK:** Pitt will need to retool its interior defensive front, where both tackles were lost to graduation. Three sophomore lettermen return in **Corey Davis**, **Rashaad Duncan** and **Nick Williams**. Each saw significant time in the tackle rotation last season. New to the mix will be redshirt freshmen **Craig Bokor** and **Derrell Jones**.

Pitt welcomes back both starting defensive ends, senior **Charles Sallet** and junior **Chris McKillop**. McKillop led the team with 3.5 sacks and 6.5 tackles for loss. Sallet was second on the team with 5.5 TFLs. Three players who each lettered as reserves last year are also back in senior **Vernon Botts**, junior **Joe Clermond** and sophomore **Gus Mustakas**. (Mustakas will also get work at tackle.) **Doug Fulmer**, who redshirted as a true freshman last year, joins the mix this spring.

**WHO'S GONE:** Starting tackles Thomas Smith and Phil Tillman were lost to graduation.

## Positional Breakdown...

**NOTABLE:** Defensive end Chris McKillop was the only player to start all 11 games on the defensive front for Pitt last year.

### LINEBACKERS

**WHO'S BACK:** Pitt returns one of the nation's most productive middle linebackers in **H.B. Blades**. A two-time first-team All-Big East selection, Blades has his sights set on All-America honors as a senior this year. Last season he led all Big East defenders with 121 tackles and ranked 13th nationally with 11 stops per game. Providing depth behind Blades are sophomore **Scott McKillop**, who lettered as the chief backup last year, and redshirt freshman **Steve Dell**.

Senior **Clint Session** will be the chief Sam linebacker this spring. One of the defense's most experienced players, Session battled injuries for most of 2005 before earning a pair of starts at the end of the season. Junior **Derron Thomas**, who started nine games at Sam last year, will work at Will linebacker during spring drills but could see time at both spots come fall. Thomas was Pitt's fourth-leading tackler with 45 stops last year.

Sophomore letterman **Tyler Tipton** will compete for a prominent backup role at the Sam. Junior walk-on **Kashif Henderson** will also work at that position.

Senior Will linebacker **Brian Bennett** will be on the shelf this spring due to his recovery from a 2005 ankle fracture. He is expected to be fully recovered for fall camp and vie for a starting role. In his absence sophomore letterman **Adam Gunn** will work to push Derron Thomas. Gunn emerged as the primary backup at Will following Bennett's early season injury.

**WHO'S GONE:** Pitt lost only one member of its 2005 linebacker rotation. Departed senior J.J. Horne was the team's third-leading tackler (52 stops) as a starting Will linebacker.

**NOTABLE:** H.B. Blades is striving to become the first three-time first-team All-Big East honoree in Pitt history. The senior was a first-team pick in both 2004 and '05.

### DEFENSIVE BACKS

**WHO'S BACK:** Pitt's secondary boasts one of college football's rising stars in junior cornerback **Darrelle Revis**. The first-team All-Big East pick excelled in pass coverage, run support and as a punt returner last year. Revis led Pitt with four interceptions and was second with 13 total passes defended. He also blocked a kick. Owning an impressive package of size, speed and production, he figures to gain a national profile this year.

Revis will man the left corner position. Behind him will be senior **Reggie Carter**, who has lettered each of the past two years. Carter will be pushed by redshirt freshman **Irvan Brown**. Also competing at left corner will be a trio of walk-ons: sophomore **Julius Eggleston**, redshirt freshman **Ross Ventrone** and sophomore **Shawn Besong**.

At right cornerback, junior **Kennard Cox** will look to seize a starting job after earning two letters as a reserve. Competition will

come from sophomore **Kelvin Chandler**, a converted receiver, and redshirt frosh walk-on **Mike Toerper**. Additionally, the Panthers will welcome freshman **Jovani Chappel**, a December high school graduate who enrolled at Pitt in January. Chappel was an all-state performer at Ohio's Trotwood-Madison High last fall.

Senior **Sam Bryant** returns as the starter at strong safety. He will be pushed by sophomore **Tommie Campbell**, who cut his teeth on special teams last year, and redshirt freshman **Shane Murray**. Redshirt frosh walk-on **Brian Kaiser** will also be in the mix at the strong spot.

Junior **Mike Phillips** will be a leading candidate at free safety. He started at strong safety the opening three games of last year until an ankle fracture ended his season. Phillips, who will miss the spring, is expected to be fully recovered for fall camp. In the interim, junior **Jemeel Brady**, a regular in the secondary the last two seasons, is the top prospect at free. Sophomore letterman **Eric Thatcher** will lend competition.

**WHO'S GONE:** Pitt's only two departures in the secondary were significant. At cornerback, Bernard "Josh" Lay was a two-time All-Big East honoree. Another all-conference pick, Tez Morris, was a four-year starter at free safety.

**NOTABLE:** Pitt ranked second nationally and tops in the Big East in pass defense, yielding just 152.8 yards per game through the air.

## THE SPECIALISTS

**WHO'S BACK:** Senior placekicker **David Abdul** will look to resume the starting duties he held in 2002 and '03. Abdul, who redshirted in 2004 while recovering from a car accident, was the chief reserve a year ago and accounted for 12 points in two games (2-of-2 field goals and 6-of-7 extra points). Abdul will be pressed by sophomore **Conor Lee**. Also getting kicking reps will be sophomore **Cody Sawhill** and redshirt freshman **Lucas Stone**. Senior punter **Adam Graessle** returns after ranking second in the Big East last year with a 42.2 average. A 2004 All-Big East selection, Graessle has displayed All-America potential during his career and could be a vital weapon in the field position battle this year. Also taking punting reps this spring will be junior **Dave Brytus**, a transfer from Purdue who will have to sit out this season due to NCAA transfer guidelines.

The kicking game will get a boost from the return of sophomore long snapper **Mark Estermyer**, who handled the punt snapping duties in all 11 games last year.

**WHO'S GONE:** Pitt's most significant loss in the specialist area was Josh Cummings, a two-time All-Big East placekicker who accounted for 155 points his final two years.

**NOTABLE:** Pitt had four returns for touchdowns in the kicking game last year, including two kickoffs, a punt and a blocked field goal. The last time the Panthers returned both a kickoff and punt for a TD in the same season was 1977.

## Pitt Personnel at a Glance

### RETURNING PERSONNEL

**Lettermen Returning: 46**  
**Starters Returning: 13**

**20 Offense (6 starters)**  
**23 Defense (6 starters)**  
**3 Specialists (1 starter)**

**NOTE:** *Players are listed under 2005 positions. This listing does not reflect any position changes for the 2006 season.*

*CAPS indicate returning starters.  
 \* indicates letters earned.*

#### ■ OFFENSE (20)

**Wide Receiver (5):** DEREK KINDER\*\*, Joe DeSardo\*\*\*, Branden Ballard\*, Kelvin Chandler\*, Marcel Pestano\*  
**Tackle (3):** MIKE McGLYNN\*\*, John Bachman\*, Chase Clowser\*  
**Guard (3):** JOHN SIMONITIS\*\*\*, C.J. DAVIS\*, Dominic Williams\*  
**Center (2):** JOE VILLANI\*\*, Chris Vangas\*\*  
**Tight End (3):** Steve Buches\*\*\*, Darrell Strong\*\*, John Pelusi\*  
**Quarterback (1):** TYLER PALKO\*\*\*  
**Tailback (2):** Brandon Mason\*, LaRod Stephens-Howling\*  
**Fullback (1):** Conredge Collins\*

#### ■ DEFENSE (23)

**End (5):** CHARLES SALLET\*\*\*, CHRIS MCKILLOP\*\*, Vernon Botts\*\*, Joe Clermond\*\*, Gus Mustakas\*  
**Tackle (3):** Corey Davis\*, Rashaad Duncan\*, Nick Williams\*  
**Linebacker (7):** H.B. BLADES\*\*\*, DERRON THOMAS\*\*, Brian Bennett\*\*\*, Clint Session\*\*\*, Adam Gunn\*, Scott McKillop\*, Tyler Tipton\*  
**Strong Safety (4):** SAM BRYANT\*\*\*, Tommie Campbell\*, Mike Phillips\*, Eric Thatcher\*  
**Free Safety (1):** Jemeel Brady\*\*  
**Cornerback (3):** DARRELLE REVIS\*\*, Reggie Carter\*\*, Kennard Cox\*\*

#### ■ SPECIALISTS (3)

**Kicker (1):** David Abdul\*\*  
**Punter (1):** ADAM GRAESSLE\*\*\*  
**Long Snapper (1):** Mark Estermyer\*

### PERSONNEL LOST

**Lettermen Lost: 23**  
**Starters Lost: 11**

**14 Offense (5 starters)**  
**8 Defense (5 starters)**  
**1 Specialist (1 starter)**

#### ■ OFFENSE (14)

**Wide Receiver (3):** GREG LEE\*\*\*, Terrell Allen\*\*, Larry Moore\*  
**Tackle (3):** CHARLES SPENCER\*\*\*\*, Dale Williams\*\*\*\*, Neal Tracey\*  
**Guard (0):**  
**Center (1):** Eric Fritz\*  
**Tight End (1):** ERIK GILL\*\*\*\*  
**Quarterback (0):**  
**Tailback (3):** RAYMOND KIRKLEY\*\*\*\*, Rashad Jennings\*, Marcus Furman\*\*\*\*  
**Fullback (3):** TIM MURPHY\*\*\*\*, Justin Acierno\*\*\*, Kellen Campbell\*\*

#### ■ DEFENSE (8)

**End (0):**  
**Tackle (3):** THOMAS SMITH\*\*\*\*, PHIL TILLMAN\*\*, Ron Idoko\*\*  
**Linebacker (3):** J.J. HORNE\*\*\*\*, Keith Malley\*, Doug Roseberry\*\*  
**Strong Safety (0):**  
**Free Safety (1):** TEZ MORRIS\*\*\*\*  
**Cornerback (1):** BERNARD "JOSH" LAY\*\*\*\*

#### ■ SPECIALISTS (1)

**Kicker (1):** JOSH CUMMINGS\*\*  
**Punter (0):**  
**Long Snapper (0):**

## Final Pitt 2005 Two-Deep

The following lists Pitt's final depth chart of the 2005 season. The class listing for each player indicates athletic eligibility at the start of the 2005 season. An asterisk after a player's class denotes redshirt year. Names listed in italics indicate those players who will not be returning in 2006.

### OFFENSE

#### SPLIT END

- 86 *GREG LEE* (6-2, 200, JR)  
4 Joe DelSardo (5-8, 195, JR)

#### LEFT TACKLE

- 56 *CHARLES SPENCER* (6-5, 330, SR\*)  
62 John Bachman (6-4, 260, FR)

#### LEFT GUARD

- 57 C.J. DAVIS (6-2, 290, FR)  
70 Dominic Williams (6-4, 300, FR\*)

#### CENTER

- 68 JOE VILLANI (6-3, 300, JR\*)  
64 Chris Vangas (6-2, 300, SO\*)

#### RIGHT GUARD

- 60 JOHN SIMONITIS (6-4, 325, JR\*)  
74 Dale Williams (6-6, 300, SR\*)

#### RIGHT TACKLE

- 75 MIKE McGLYNN (6-5, 325, SO\*)  
71 Dave Weber (6-3, 310, FR\*)

#### TIGHT END

- 45 *ERIK GILL* (6-5, 275, SR\*)  
84 Steve Buches (6-4, 250, JR\*)

#### QUARTERBACK

- 3 TYLER PALKO (6-2, 220, JR\*)  
11 Bill Stull (6-3, 200, FR)

#### FULLBACK

- 23 *TIM MURPHY* (5-10, 235, SR\*)  
31 Conredge Collins (5-11, 225, FR)

#### TAILBACK

- 43 *RAYMOND KIRKLEY* (5-10, 225, SR\*) OR  
34 LAROD STEPHENS-HOWLING (5-7, 165, FR) OR  
36 *RASHAD JENNINGS* (6-1, 235, FR)

#### FLANKER

- 81 DEREK KINDER (6-1, 200, SO)  
87 Marcel Pestano (6-1, 190, FR\*)

### DEFENSE

#### DEFENSIVE END

- 41 CHRIS MCKILLOP (6-3, 245, SO\*)  
98 Vernon Botts (6-4, 260, JR\*)

#### DEFENSIVE TACKLE

- 55 *THOMAS SMITH* (6-4, 300, SR\*)  
50 Rashaad Duncan (6-1, 280, FR) or  
47 Nick Williams (6-2, 275, FR\*)

#### DEFENSIVE TACKLE

- 91 *PHIL TILLMAN* (6-1, 315, SR)  
97 Corey Davis (6-1, 300, FR\*) or  
52 Ron Idoko (6-2, 300, SR\*)

#### DEFENSIVE END

- 54 CHARLES SALLET (6-0, 235, JR\*)  
58 Joe Clermond (6-2, 250, SO\*) or  
93 Gus Mustakas (6-3, 250, FR)

#### SAM LINEBACKER

- 17 CLINT SESSION (6-0, 235, JR)  
39 Derron Thomas (6-1, 235, SO\*)

#### MIDDLE LINEBACKER

- 51 H.B. BLADES (6-0, 240, JR)  
40 Scott McKillop (6-2, 240, FR\*)

#### WILL LINEBACKER

- 9 *J.J. HORNE* (6-3, 230, SR\*)  
8 Adam Gunn (6-1, 215, FR\*)

#### LEFT CORNERBACK

- 25 DARRELLE REVIS (6-0, 190, SO)  
21 Reggie Carter (6-0, 185, JR\*)

#### FREE SAFETY

- 20 *TEZ MORRIS* (5-10, 190, SR\*)  
24 Jemeel Brady (6-0, 205, SO\*)

#### STRONG SAFETY

- 46 SAM BRYANT (6-0, 230, JR\*)  
28 Eric Thatcher (5-9, 190, FR\*) or  
29 Tommie Campbell (6-2, 190, FR)

#### RIGHT CORNERBACK

- 12 *BERNARD "JOSH" LAY* (6-2, 195, SR)  
5 Kennard Cox (6-1, 195, SO\*)

### SPECIALISTS

#### PUNTER

- 18 ADAM GRAESSLE (6-4, 225, JR)  
22 *Josh Cummings* (5-11, 205, SR)

#### PLACEKICKER

- 22 *JOSH CUMMINGS* (5-11, 205, SR)  
16 David Abdul (5-10, 200, JR\*) or  
37 Conor Lee (5-11, 195, FR\*)

#### HOLDER

- 18 ADAM GRAESSLE (6-4, 225, JR)  
4 Joe DelSardo (5-8, 195, JR)

#### LONG SNAPPER

- PUNT:  
59 MARK ESTERMYER (6-2, 240, FR\*)

#### FIELD GOALS/PATs:

- 75 MIKE McGLYNN (6-5, 325, SO\*)

#### PUNT RETURNER

- 25 DARRELLE REVIS (6-0, 190, SO)  
4 Joe DelSardo (5-8, 195, JR)

#### KICKOFF RETURNER

- 80 *TERRELL ALLEN* (6-0, 195, SO\*) AND  
87 MARCEL PESTANO (6-1, 190, FR\*)