

# The book on the birds

By LES BOWEN

## Breaking down the roster

### Quarterback

► **The big question:** Can Donovan McNabb reclaim his stature as an elite QB who can lead his team to the playoffs, staying healthy and consistent?

► **Our position is:** McNabb is coming off his best training camp in recent memory. There is no reason right now to think he can't do this.

### Running back

► **The big question:** can Brian Westbrook provide another record-smashing, 368-touch season, as he turns 29?

► **Our position is:** It's unlikely Westbrook will break the franchise records he set last season. Lorenzo Booker might be able to share a little of the load, particularly as a pass-catcher.

### Wide Receiver

► **The big question:** There are a couple, really. How quickly (and completely) can Kevin Curtis get back from sports hernia surgery? And how much can DeSean Jackson help here as a rookie?

► **Our position is:** Jackson is for real, and this group ought to be able to hold things together through midseason. But for the stretch drive, Curtis needs to be back and be productive and Jackson needs to be more than a typical rookie.

**Brian Westbrook figures to carry much of the offensive load.**

### Offensive Line

► **The big question:** Jon Runyan turns 35 this season, Tra Thomas turns 34. The big tackles are a huge part of the Eagles' success. Can they continue to play at a high level, staying healthy?

► **Our position is:** This is a solid group, with Herremans and center Jamaal Jackson determined to have bounce-back years. The o-line ought to be OK.

### Defensive Line

► **The big question:** Can the Eagles finally get a little pass-rush pressure up the middle, and a more consistent rush from the end opposite Trent Cole?

► **Our position is:** Not sure about the middle or about the other side. Haven't seen enough of Chris Clemens at LDE and don't know when Victor Abiamiri will be back. Maybe playing the ends inside will get the rush up the middle.

### Linebackers

► **The big question:** Are these guys experienced enough not to get fooled by tricky offenses?

► **Our position is:** They'll prove themselves, and be one of the strengths of a solid defensive unit.

### Secondary

► **The big question:** This is another spot where there are two crucial questions. Can the cornerbacking triad of Asante

### HOW THEY'LL LINE UP

Offense		
Pos.	Starter	Backup
WR	Kevin Curtis	Jason Avant
LT	Tra Thomas	—
LG	Todd Herremans	Mike McGlynn
C	Jamaal Jackson	Nick Cole
RG	Shawn Andrews	Max Jean-Gilles
RT	Jon Runyan	Winston Justice
TE	L.J. Smith	Brend Celak
WR	Reggie Brown	DeSean Jackson
QB	Donovan McNabb	Kevin Kolb
RB	Brian Westbrook	Correll Buckhalter
FB	Tony Hunt	—

### Defense

Pos.	Starter	Backup
LDE	Juqua Parker	Victor Abiamiri
LDT	Mike Patterson	Trevon Laws
RDT	Brodrick Bunkley	Dan Klecko
RDE	Trent Cole	Darren Howard
SLB	Chris Gocong	Tank Daniels
MLB	Stewart Bradley	Joe Mays
WLB	Omar Gaither	Akeem Jordan
LCB	Asante Samuel	Joselio Hanson
RCB	Sheldon Brown	Lito Sheppard
SS	Quintin Mikell	Sean Considine
FS	Brian Dawkins	J.R. Reed

### Special teams

Pos.	Starter	Backup
P	Sav Rocca	—
K	David Akers	—
H	Rocca	Avant
K	Akers	—
KR	Quintin Demps	Booker
PR	DeSean Jackson	Demps
LS	Jon Dorenbos	Howard

BRAD J. GUIGAR/Daily News

Samuel, Lito Sheppard and Sheldon Brown be happy and effective, and can Brian Dawkins still be Brian Dawkins for a whole season, as he turns 35?

► **Our position is:** This should be one of the great all-time Eagles secondaries.

### Special Teams

► **The big question:** Quintin Demps for kick-offs and DeSean Jackson for punts equals a way better return game, right?

► **Our position is:** You ought to see decent improvement in just about every phase.

## Three players to watch



DAVID MAIALETTI / Daily News

### Watch that DeSean Jackson go.

1. DeSean Jackson: Like you need us to tell you this. Try not to let your grief over the departure of Reno Mahe keep you from appreciating DeSean. That just isn't fair to the kid, you know?

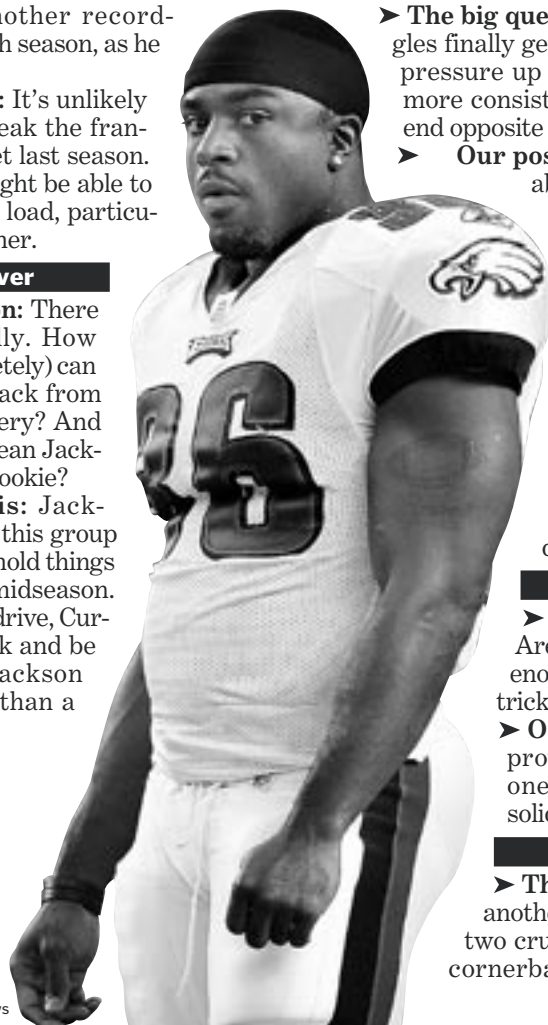
2. Brian Westbrook: Because he's Brian Westbrook, and someday you'll be able to tell your grandchildren you saw him play in his prime.

3. Stewart Bradley: The new starting middle linebacker has the size, speed and smarts to be a star. He also makes both Sarah Palin and Barack Obama look experienced. How quickly Bradley gets comfortable could be one of the keys to the season.

Stewart Bradley



YONG KIM / Daily News



DAVID MAIALETTI / Daily News

## Three story lines

1. Donovan McNabb will either be healthy and will lead the Eagles back to the playoffs, or he'll be wearing another uniform next season, most likely. McNabb can reestablish himself indefinitely with a strong year.

2. This is the year Andy Reid matches Greasy Neale for the longest tenure in franchise history. Reid is in no danger of losing his job, but the populace would sure like to see that the five playoff berths the first 6 years are more indicative of who Reid is than the one playoff berth the last 3 years.

3. Lito Sheppard wants out of here. He has made that clear. Can Reid and Jim Johnson somehow keep Sheppard reasonably happy while not trading him and most probably not starting him much of the time, which will affect both his trade value and the contract he's seeking from his next employer?