

Michael Roos: From Estonia to Eastern to the NFL

By Dave Cook

Eastern's proud tradition of sending players to the ranks of professional football continues.

Since moving to the NCAA Division 1-AA in 1984, Eastern has had 43 players drafted or sign free agent contracts with National Football League or Canadian Football League teams. Twelve of them have been offensive linemen.

This spring marks a special moment in that tradition as Michael Roos – a 6-foot-7, 320-pound offensive tackle on the Eagles 2004 championship team – was selected April 23 by the Tennessee Titans in the second round of the National Football League draft. With that, he becomes Eastern's highest-ever NFL draft choice.

"I'm very happy," Michael said, "and I'm a lot less nervous now. It's hard to sit and wait because there are 15 minutes between each pick." (He was the 41st selection overall in the draft and the first NCAA Division 1-AA player taken.)

"It didn't surprise me," said Eagle head coach Paul Wulff. "There are a lot of really good players... but I truly thought he was one of the best players in America – period."

A college education, let alone a professional football career, was not something Michael ever expected when he was a boy. Born in 1982 in Tallinn in the Baltic state of Estonia, his early childhood was set against the backdrop of a country seeking independence from the Soviet Union.

Michael's divorced mother moved her three children to the United States in 1992 and worked at two jobs in Vancouver, Wash., to provide a new opportunity for the family. Michael played soccer and basketball in Estonia, so it was natural that he gravitated to basketball in an American high school. He only tried a stint at football – and tight end, at that – during his senior year at Mountain View High School.

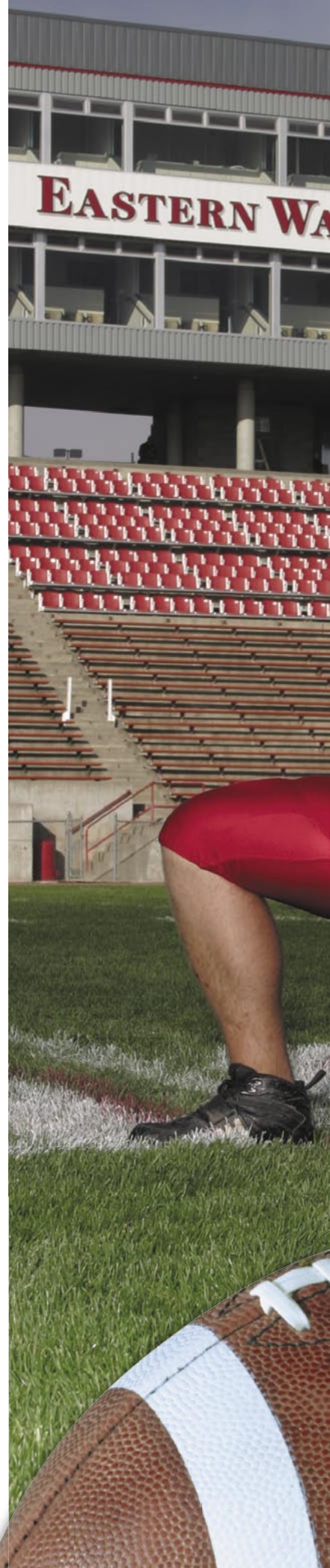
It was during that same year that Eagle head football coach Paul Wulff happened to be watching a videotape of another player on Michael's high school football team when he noticed a tall and somewhat gangly (6'6", 225-pound) tight end/wide receiver. A few days later, Wulff took a closer look by attending one of Michael's high school basketball games and knew in a moment what he was looking at – an offensive lineman in a tank top, shorts and sneakers.

"I knew all along from the first five seconds I saw him," Wulff said. "He didn't know that until a year and a half later."

Michael started in 35-straight games at left offensive tackle for the Eagles. After a variety of All-America honors last fall, Michael was tapped for the East-West Shrine Game and Senior Bowl. And he received a spate of recognition, such as 1-AA.org's Lineman of the Year, American Football Coaches Association Division 1-AA first team and first-team Big Sky Conference honors.

Michael has earned his B.A. in business with double majors in finance and economics. He appreciates his education and the athletic scholarship that made it possible. He knows his family didn't have the resources to send him to college and that having only played one year of football in high school, not many colleges were willing to take a chance on him.

But then, there's a tradition within Eastern Athletics for spotting and developing student athletes and for giving deserving students a chance. Michael is the latest proof.





Former Eagle Offensive Linemen in the NFL or CFL

Name - Years at EWU - Signed/Drafted By

Ed Simmons, 1983-86, drafted in the sixth round by the Washington Redskins. Selected to *Sports Illustrated's* All-NFC East Team in 1995.

Jeff Mickel, 1985-88, drafted in the sixth round by the Minnesota Vikings, played for three other NFL teams, plus two in the World League.

Gary Needham, 1989-90, signed a free agent contract with the Seattle Seahawks and another contract with Miami.

Kevin Sargent, 1988-91, signed a free agent contract with the Cincinnati Bengals and started 63 of 73 games in the six full seasons he played.

Trent Pollard, 1990-93, drafted in the fifth round by the Cincinnati Bengals, formerly the highest-ever draft choice for EWU (132nd pick overall).

Tom Ackerman, 1992-95, drafted in the fifth round by New Orleans, the first offensive lineman in Washington and in the Big Sky Conference to be taken in the 1996 draft (fifth round, 145th pick overall). Tom is now an assistant coach with the Eastern Eagles.

Jim Buzzard, 1995-97, signed a free agent contract with the San Diego Chargers. He was a first team All-America selection on five different squads during Eastern's run to the NCAA Division I-AA semifinals in 1997.

David Andres, 1995-98, signed a free agent contract with the Indianapolis Colts. Like Michael Roos, he was an Eastern offensive lineman who was a standout basketball player in high school (Pasco).

T.J. Ackerman, 1995-98, signed a free agent contract with the Toronto Argonauts; earned honorable mention All-America honors as a senior.

Luke Fritz, 1997-00, signed a free agent contract with the Carolina Panthers. A native of Canada, he was the seventh player picked in the first round of the 2001 CFL draft and is currently playing for the Montreal Alouettes.

David Sherrod, 2000-01, signed a free agent contract with the Chicago Bears, Miami and Oakland before a shoulder injury ended his career. He also played in NFL Europe for Barcelona in 2003.

Kurt Sigler, 2000-03, signed a free agent contract with the Buffalo Bills.