

## Colby Jackson sparking special teams

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NC State redshirt sophomore Colby Jackson couldn't wait to make an impact after two years of watching his teammates play.

Jackson has been a special teams wizard with two big blocked punts this season — the first against Cincinnati on Sept. 16, and the second last Saturday against Boston College, which led to freshman safety D.J. Green's touchdown.

Jackson busted through the three blockers in front of Eagles punter Ryan Quigley to block the punt, and the ball rolled into the end zone for Green to pounce on it to give the Wolfpack an early 10-0 lead with 8:04 left in the first quarter.

Jackson was able to engulf Quigley's punt and the ball hit his right hand. The momentum helped NC State roll to a 44-17 win over Boston College and improve to 5-1 overall.

"It's a huge swing of momentum, especially for a score," Jackson said. "Whenever you can score on special teams like that, it deflates the other team."

Jackson's blocked punt against Bearcats punter Pat O'Donnell in the fourth quarter gave the Wolfpack the ball at the UC 25-yard line. Redshirt junior quarterback Russell Wilson quickly turned into a touchdown with an eight-yard toss to junior fullback Taylor Gentry to give NCSU a 30-7 lead. The Wolfpack went on to win 30-19.

"The few punts blocks we've had, everybody has executed their assignments," Jackson said. "When you do that, that leaves a hole open, a gap, and most of the time they can't block three on four. There is one guy coming loose, and thank God lately it has been me. It's been a pleasure to do that. My teammates have definitely been opening it up."

"We've been practicing all summer and every day we just went as hard as we could," Jackson said. "It is paying off now."

The 6-foot-2, 234-pounder from Dublin (Ga.) Trinity Christian said he played special teams his sophomore and junior year.

"I blocked three or four in high school," said Jackson about his punt blocking prowess. "I hope I have that [knack]."

Jackson was used to making big plays on the prep level, but did it playing running back at Trinity Christian. The [Rivals.com](http://Rivals.com) two-star recruit rushed for 2,597 yards on 208 carries and 42 touchdowns his senior year, but had his season end in the first round of the state playoffs with an ACL tear.

Jackson injured the same knee last year, causing him to miss the season. He redshirted his freshman season.

"It's been wonderful and such a pleasure to play football again," Jackson said. "I've had a few setbacks obviously the last two years. I thank God every day about the opportunity to still do it."

"Watching my second year at NC State was my lowest point for me. I was trying to come back, then going down, and then trying to come back, I finally caught on and everything is going well now."

Jackson's return to the field also meant a switch in positions. He moved to middle linebacker because it's easier to protect his knees compared to the duties of playing fullback.

Jackson had 92 tackles at linebacker his senior year of high school, but does miss the thrill of having the ball in his hands.

"It's a lot different than fullback," Jackson said. "It's been fun. I feel more free, and can just run around. It's hard with the ball in your hands to protect your knees.

"I do miss scoring touchdowns. I played a lot of linebacker in high school, but it's definitely not the same. I got usually around 30 carries a game."

Jackson has yet to get a snap at middle linebacker, but has a pretty good mentor on the ins and outs of the position with fifth-year senior Nate Irving. Jackson and redshirt sophomore Ryan Cheek are battling for third-string at the position, though Cheek can also play weakside linebacker.

"It's great to have someone like Nate to watch and learn from," Jackson said. "He's a great mentor, and he helps out with any questions I have. He's helped me with the transition."

Jackson has also added four tackles on special teams for the Wolfpack. He is back to having fun playing football.

"My knee hasn't bothered me at all like it used to," Jackson said. "I feel great this season."