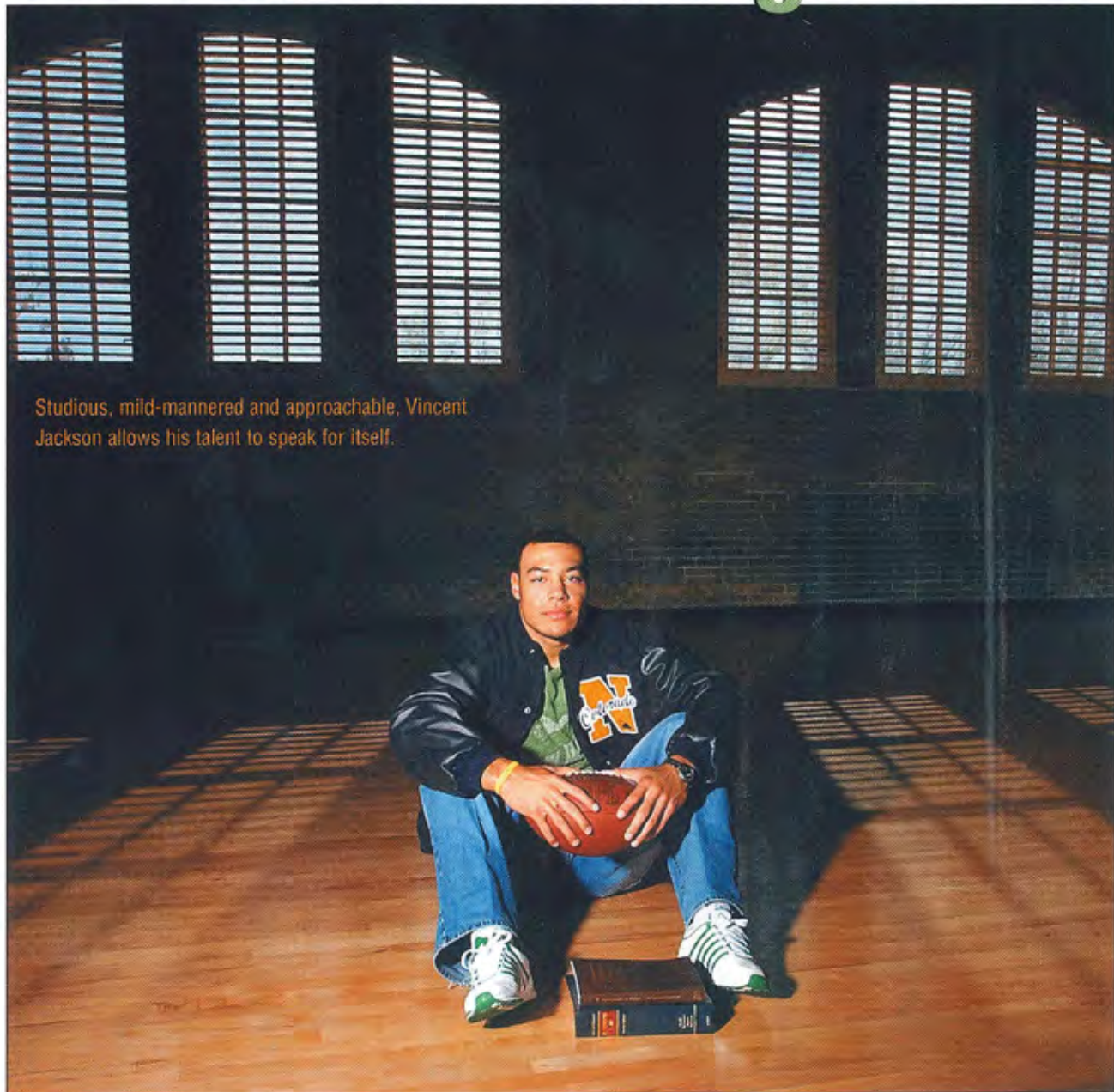


# No I-NFL-ated Ego Here



Studious, mild-mannered and approachable, Vincent Jackson allows his talent to speak for itself.

**EVEN WITH PRO FOOTBALL IN HIS FUTURE,**

*BY NATE HAAS*

*PHOTOS BY  
JIM RYDBOM*

Jackson catches a touchdown pass against UC Davis. The Oct. 2 game was a record-breaking performance for Jackson, who caught nine passes for 246 yards and three touchdowns.





It's an overcast day outside a quiet classroom in Kepner Hall. The gray sky and brisk temperature are reminders that change is an inevitable force of nature.

Inside the inviting red-bricked building, a metamorphosis of an intellectual kind takes place. Business professor Lynn Hoffman motions for his assistant to move to the next computer slide in his lecture as the class dutifully takes notes from an overhead projector displaying key points of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Only a keen observer will spot Vincent Terrell Jackson. Wearing designer jeans, a plain black long-sleeved shirt and stylish loafers, Jackson gets passing marks for blending in with the rest of the students. He joins them in politely snickering after the professor finishes a lesson-applicable anecdote about losing too much weight as a high school wrestler.

For the most part, Jackson keeps to himself. He is quiet but cordial and approachable—reflections of his military upbringing. His only flash is the occasional reflection of light flickering off his wristwatch—the kind you'd find in most department stores for less than \$100.

Though he's listed on the roster at 6-foot-6, 235 pounds, Jackson's imposing frame is concealed behind the desk, further camouflaging him among his classmates. His mild-mannered nature surprises many. Even those who don't know him personally are familiar with the on-field accomplishments that destine him for the National Football League.

"He's different from the norm," says Josh Obie, a classmate of Jackson's who sits on the opposite side of the room from the Bears' wide receiver. Obie says he hasn't talked to Jackson, but finds his disposition a refreshing change from boastful NFL prospects.

special attention or treatment because of what I do on the athletic field."

#### THE PROOF:

■ He parks off campus and walks to his business classes. He doesn't fuss about not having a parking pass for the lot at the business college. Understanding the principle of supply and demand, he blames himself for not purchasing a pass in time.

■ Jackson sometimes races across campus from Kepner to Candelaria Hall for a speech class only to find it has started. Rather than burst in on a student giving a speech, Jackson waits quietly outside the closed door until the student finishes. Once inside, Jackson gives rapt attention to each speaker.

■ His role models are his parents. Jackson is at a loss when asked to name an NFL wide receiver he admires. "I can't tell you anyone I look up to or want to be like just because I've never been a big sports fanatic," he says. "I have no favorite team. I can't tell you rosters or stats. My roommate Tony Lee says, 'You're the best athlete I know that knows nothing about sports.'" Jackson

relies on teammates and friends like Lee, a Bears graduate assistant coach, for updates on NFL players. He wears a No. 81 jersey because it was given to him as a freshman.

■ Jackson's not a publicity hound, although he's been featured by local, state and national media. After a class, a student compliments Jackson on an article about him. He automatically thanks her, although he has no idea what she is talking about. Someone hands Jackson the sports section, which has a story on him becoming the first UNC player

#### Odds of making the NFL

971,000 high school football players every year

65,000 will play in college

6,000 will be scouted by the NFL

340 will get invited to the NFL

Combine

875 will sign an NFL contract

300 will make an NFL roster

140 will play four or more seasons

in the NFL

Source: NCAA

## UNC WIDE RECEIVER REMAINS GROUNDED.

### DOWN TO EARTH

Despite setting UNC's record books ablaze and being scouted by the NFL, Jackson seems anything but coddled and conceited.

"Even though you're a good athlete and may be receiving a lot of attention, you don't have to be that bad guy," Jackson says. "You don't have to be that arrogant guy walking around cocky and rude to everyone. I don't expect any

selected to the Senior Bowl, college football's premier all-star game. He simply responds: "Cool." He hands back the newspaper until being assured it's his to keep. "Thanks," he says.

■ Jackson and two teammates volunteer once a week as tutors at Greeley's Scott Elementary School. He tries to attend every volunteer function that involves the team.

"He's the epitome of a scholar-athlete," says Bears head foot-





Vincent Jackson begins a record-breaking year at the Bears' first practice of the 2004 season.

ball coach Kay Dalton. "Every coach in the world would like to have a lot of Vincent Jacksons on their team."

### GAME OF LIFE

Jackson's biggest pet peeve is arrogance, but he doesn't confuse that with confidence.

"How you feel about yourself is confidence," he says. "Arrogance would be how you want others to feel about you. I want people to think I'm a good player, but that's not my focus. Confidence is knowing that I can make that play to help my teammates."

When pressed, Jackson will only brag about being a good cook and tidy around the house. "I make a mean manicotti," he says. "My roommates call me Martha Stewart because I'm always cleaning the house or cooking." Jackson thanks his parents for keeping him grounded. "They've always supported me in my athletic career but have always harped on education, being a good kid and staying out of trouble," he says.

He tries not to take anything for granted—his father's plight with a strange illness years ago gave Jackson a greater

respect for life. Thankfully, Jackson's father, Terence, recovered and retired from the Army a first sergeant.

Jackson's military upbringing provided a unique perspective. After moves from Louisiana, Arizona and Colorado, he learned to adjust to new environments. He even spent three years in Germany before settling in Colorado Springs.

Jackson, an only child, was introduced to sports early. He won father-son competitive runs with his dad, whom he says has an ironman's work ethic. In Germany, Jackson played soccer. That's when Terence first noticed his son's athletic talent.

"He had something special as far as sports was concerned," Terence says, recalling his son's domination on the soccer field at age 7.

When his family moved to Colorado Springs, Jackson played football and basketball and ran track at Widefield High School. He grew several inches and added bulk before graduating third in his class, but Division I schools showed little interest. Ironically, it was the athletic ability he displayed on the basketball court that caught the attention of Earnest Collins (BA-96), the former Bears assistant football coach who helped recruit him.

Jackson didn't play on the UNC basketball team—at least not right away. (That came after a few players on the team urged him to try out. He led the team in scoring his junior year, but decided to turn his full attention to football his senior year).

At UNC, Jackson flourished, even early on. In his first game, he returned a punt 85 yards for a touchdown. His prowess as a punt and kick returner didn't earn him a spot in the starting lineup as a wide receiver, though. He came off the bench the first two years.

"Of course, I'm such a competitor that I wanted to be out there," Jackson says. "I made the best of it and figured my time would come."

His patience paid off. As a junior, Jackson eclipsed UNC records, including those set by Collins and Bears assistant coach Keith Grable.

"I've had some very fine receivers," says Dalton, who has coached in the NFL for the Denver Broncos, Buffalo Bills, Houston Oilers and Kansas City Chiefs. "Because of his size and because of his athleticism, I think Vincent is the best I've coached."

### STANDING OUT

Although his talent puts him in the spotlight, Jackson prefers to be low-key. As he walks along 8th Avenue outside Kepner Hall, a young student riding a school bus shouts from his window: "Good luck Saturday." In typical fashion, Jackson waves back and smiles.



It's another story on the football field. His acerbic opponents hurl insults during games. "I usually don't say too much," Jackson says. "I'll give them a look that says I want to physically dominate them. Sometimes I talk back. I keep it pretty clean, though." After games, youngsters seek his armbands for keepsakes.

"I tell them, 'Hey, I'm a poor college student. I can't afford to give you those,'" Jackson says.

Yet, he's quick to compromise.

"One kid asked for my eye-black stickers," says Jackson, who happily obliged.

Jackson's fans aren't the only ones who want a piece of him. Whispers that the NFL could come calling have turned into legitimate commentary from respected publications. Projections have Jackson going in the first three rounds of April's draft. To put that in perspective, consider that 1 percent of college football players sign NFL contracts, according to the NCAA. One online draft board has Jackson ranked as the 12th best receiver in college football. Last year, 32 wide receivers were drafted.

"Sometimes people will want to ask questions like, 'What team do you want to play for in the NFL,'" Jackson says. "I tell them if I get lucky enough just to get in there, I don't think I really mind what team I play for."

Jackson has already had several chances to impress scouts. Dalton says Jackson has auditioned in front of as many as six scouts at once, and some have returned for a second look.

If Jackson is nervous in front of people who may shape his future, he doesn't let on. Even with NFL scouts fewer than 15 yards away, Jackson cracks jokes with teammates and performs the robot dance. It's all business, however, when he's called to run a route.

"He has a real big heart," says Bears wide receiver Tyrees Bingham, who played against Jackson in high school basketball. "He likes to play around with you, and then, when it's time to get serious, he does."

Jackson was invited to five post-season all-star games but chose to play in the one with the most NFL eyes watching—the Senior Bowl. Before the draft, he'll also likely go to the NFL Scouting Combine, the equivalent of a pro-football job fair.



UNC mascot Klawz congratulates Vincent Jackson on a touchdown against South Dakota State University at Nottingham Field. It was Jackson's final college touchdown.

## THE AGENCY

Jackson's foray into the NFL means he's encountered what some consider the seedy side of the business: agents.

His parents have taken over the bulk of the work in determining who will represent their son. "It hasn't been too much of a distraction because my parents do such a good job," Jackson says. "They scare most agents off."

Terence and Sherry Jackson have researched the business and developed a

screening questionnaire, which catches many agents off guard. One was so impressed that he suggested Sherry compile a how-to workbook for prospective NFL players.

About 75 agents have offered their services to Jackson. He is convinced there are good ones. "You want to find one that's not too big that they won't give you individual attention, but not too small that they don't have leverage with GMs," he says.

## LIFE AFTER FOOTBALL

"Think about it guys, every one of us will have some kind of disability in our lives," Business professor Lynn Hoffman tells Jackson's human resources class.

Jackson has taken notes on that point. NFL players can suffer career-ending injuries, but Jackson plans on making football a long-term profession. He's turned his full attention to chasing his NFL dreams by putting his business degree on hold. He'll train in Arizona for the grueling mental and physical tests administered at the NFL Combine. He'll return to UNC in March to work out in front of more scouts before the draft.

After the NFL, Jackson hopes to be an investor. He plans to finish the few required classes he needs to graduate, so he can own a real-estate business. He wants a future of financial stability.

"Football can be a great means to do that and get off the ground this young," he says. "...That's pretty much what I'm focused on—just learning as much as I can, being as successful as I can with my career and at the same time being ready to prepare myself for what I want to do after football."

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BY VINCENT JACKSON

## Jackson, UNC: Perfect Match

It took me only two of my allowed five recruiting trips to decide that the University of Northern Colorado was the best choice for me after visiting in February of 2001. The only other school I shopped at was Colorado School of Mines, and despite having above a 4.0 grade-point-average in high school, I just wasn't that interested in becoming an engineer. The Monfort College of Business was a big factor in my decision because it is accredited by the Association to

men football players, I was a bit nervous about the thought of playing the sport against grown men. Just the thought of playing college football against athletes from all over the country was very exciting, but my nerves passed quickly after the first few days of camp. Then, to my surprise, the coaches removed my redshirt and told me I would be able to compete and help this team be successful. It was an honor, considering only a handful of freshmen players in the history of the school have not red-shirted. From there, my confidence began to blossom and continues to grow to this very day. There is no way I can ever thank the members of this university's football coaching staff for how they changed my life and set me off on the right foot.

glitz and glamour of national media. A group of young men comes together from different backgrounds, grows to become a family and works together to achieve a common goal. What I will remember the most is the bond my teammates and I developed through the hot, humid two-a-days, the off-season training, the joys of winning and the pains of defeat. We endured all of these things together, and those who make it through four or five years of that and get their education have a lot to be proud of.

I have had a fairly good career here, and despite this last season, so has the entire program. I am sincere when I say that I could not have done it without the effort of the great players and coaches I have been privileged to play with

**"COLLEGE FOOTBALL IS LIKE NO OTHER SPORT. THOSE WHO PLAY, NO MATTER THE LEVEL, PLAY FOR PRIDE."**

Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, an honor carried by only 34 undergraduate business schools in the country. My focus has always been on what is best for my future. Yes, I wanted to be a successful college athlete, but there will come a time

when I will have to hang up the cleats or sneakers and support myself with my knowledge. As with most incoming freshmen football players, I was a bit nervous about the thought of playing the sport against grown men. Over the years, I have been consistently asked by fans, peers, teammates, opponents and various media about how I ended up at a Division II (recently transitioned to DI-AA) school. It still makes me smile and chuckle a bit because, to me, there has never seemed to be anything wrong with playing football here. Yes, we don't play on ESPN every other week, and we don't have 60,000 fans shaking our campus, but college football is like no other sport. Those who play, no matter the level, play for pride. I believe this is especially true for smaller schools that do not experience the

and be coached by. To all high school players aspiring to play college ball, I can only encourage you to work hard, be patient and make the most of every opportunity you are given. If you asked me four years ago if I would be getting drafted in the NFL, I probably would have laughed. However, as unreal as it still is, it has become my reality. Thanks to my parents and all those who have supported me through this college experience. GO BEARS!

VINCENT JACKSON BROKE 12 UNC FOOTBALL RECORDS IN THE 2004 SEASON.



VINCENT TERRELL JACKSON

UNC BEARS

### 81 VINCENT TERRELL JACKSON

Year	Rec.	Yds.	Avg.	TDs	PR	PK	Avg.	NR	Avg.
2001	9	259	28.8	2	7	1	16	11	14
2002	22	445	20.2	3	27	0	6.5	15	25.3
2003	66	1,462*	22.2	21*	39	0	8.7	13	34.7
2004	107*	1,382	17.5	11	25	0	11.8	13	19.1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>177*</b>	<b>3,548*</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>37*</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>23.6</b>

\* indicates UNC record

**Records With Records:**  
 Highest TD Catch: 21  
 Oldest: Colorado Springs, Colo.  
 High School: W. Arden  
 Born: Jan. 14, 1985, in Fort Collins, La.  
 Single: Single (2 UNC records this season)  
 Favorite for: Mike: Peyton Award given to national best Division I-AA football player; Tim: UNC player to be allowed to play in Soccer Bowl; Jennifer: a year 13 yards for a touchdown in his first college game (vs. Adams State, 2004); Favorite movie at UNC: Star of America and Lemony Snicket.



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Photo by Joe Krosocz