

BABCOCK'S DEVELOPER: 'ACTIONS ... LOUDER THAN WORDS'

On gridiron, Kitson learned tools of success

BY GLENN MILLER

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Syd Kitson is the chairman and CEO of his own development company, Kitson & Partners, which recently purchased the 91,000-acre Babcock Ranch. The company Web site features a photo of a balding, neatly-groomed, tie-and-jacket-wearing Kitson.

Once, though, he was No. 64 for the Green Bay Packers, a shaggy-haired and bearded offensive guard, a 6-foot-5, 285-pound behemoth good enough to be selected in the third round of the 1980 draft out of Wake Forest University.

Kitson, 46, is now down to about 215 pounds.

"Most people think I was a wide receiver or the waterboy," Kitson said.

He runs four miles four days a week, plays tennis and golf and works out with weights.

As a player in the National Football League, he spent four seasons with the Packers and part of one season with the Dallas Cowboys. His coaches included Tom Landry (Cowboys) and Bart Starr (Packers), two football legends. Teammates included players who became Pro Football Hall of

Famers such as Tony Dorsett (Cowboys), Randy White (Cowboys), James Lofton (Packers) and Jan Stenerud (Packers).

The discipline and teamwork he learned as an athlete has contributed to his success in business, Kitson believes.

"There is absolutely no question that football had an enormous amount to do not only with what I became, but how," Kitson said. "Football teaches you a lot. First of all, you have to learn how to deal with disappointments and the ups and downs of the sports world."

Kitson was never a star.

"I think he was one of those old-fashioned try-hard guys that made the most of his ability," said Larry McCarren, who played center for the Packers on the same line as Kitson. "Always count on him to give his best shot at it every day. He was also one of those guys that everybody likes."

Kitson played for the Packers in 1980 and 1981. He missed the 1982 season with a shoulder injury. He returned to action in 1983 and split the 1984 season between the Packers and Cowboys.

"A good solid player," said McCarren, who is now the sports director of WFRV-TV in Green

Bay and also does color commentary on Packers radio. "There's an echelon of players in the NFL that are scary good. Then there's the rest of us."

Kitson, who grew up in New Jersey, realized he wasn't one of those elite, scary-good players. He chose Wake Forest for its academics as much as football.

"I understood football is a fleeting, short-lived career," Kitson said.

He was good enough, though, to letter for three seasons in Division I football. Only 60 players were selected ahead of Kitson in the 1980 draft. He made an immediate impact in Green Bay.

A writer for The Packer Report, a fan publication, was taken with the Wake Forest kid. As a rookie, Kitson was described as "a rugged hewn easterner with well chiseled features of a Robert Redford."

The publication also quoted a coach who described Kitson as "the best athlete in the 1980 college guard crop."

The Packer Report writer was clearly taken with Kitson. By 1984, Kitson had graduated from a Redford comparison to this: "Syd, whose blond and bearded visage gives him the look of a Viking. ..."

When pressed for a career high-

light, Kitson recalled catching a pass, which is a lineman's dream.

"I caught a pass against the Minnesota Vikings," Kitson said. "It was third down and they put me in. I would go in as a blocking tight end. It was funny. Lynn Dickey was the quarterback then. I was blocking. There was nobody to block. He started to scramble. I did a little flare pattern. I yelled his name and I think I scared him."

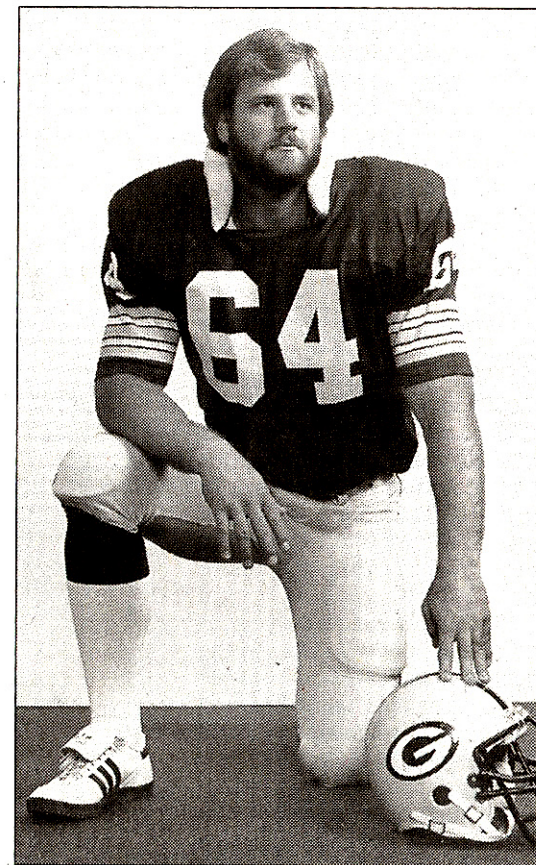
Dickey may have been startled, but he recovered in time to loft a pass to Kitson, who played some tight end in high school and college.

"I caught it and got a first down," Kitson said.

He doesn't recall how many yards he gained on his only pass reception but Packer records show that he caught one pass for 9 yards in 1983.

Kitson said football is rarely brought up in his business career, but he savors his football memories.

"I don't have any regrets," Kitson said. "I loved every bit of it. If I had to do it over, I would have liked to play a few more years. I didn't have as good a career as I could have. I think I got the best out of my talent."



SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS

■ Syd Kitson played pro football for the Green Bay Packers in the early 1980s.