

Cardinals thin at linebacker after cutting Thompson, Woods

By **DARREN URBAN**
TRIBUNE

A week after linebacker Raynoch Thompson said he only wanted to remain with the Arizona Cardinals if they wanted him, the team made its decision.

Thompson was released Monday after the Cardinals tried and failed to find any takers in a trade. It ended a tumultuous five-season stay for Thompson, who was the team's best defensive player for a couple of seasons but who also had off-field issues and never fit into coach Dennis Green's system.

Another backup linebacker, key special teams player LeVar Woods, was also cut Monday.

Thompson could not be reached. Thompson's agent did not return a phone message.

The timing was a little curious, since the Cardinals gain no salary-cap advantage by cutting the former second-round pick now and seem to have created another hole — this time, a lack of linebacker depth — heading into the upcoming draft.

Neither Green nor vice president of football operations Rod Graves were available for comment.

Thompson, who was under contract through 2007, was scheduled to make \$2 million in salary. Because the Cardinals made the move before June 1, they will take a cap hit of \$1.58 million for the

remaining portion of his signing bonus.

A week ago Monday, Thompson had said his future was up to the team.

"Basically it's the team's decision," Thompson said then. "It's a case where if they don't want me here, I don't want to be here. I don't want to be nowhere I'm not wanted."

Green had already shown he didn't think much of Thompson late in the season. Thompson was inactive for a home game against St. Louis, barely played in Seattle the next week, and then never saw the field in the finale against Tampa Bay, something Thompson called "mind-boggling" at the time.

But the relationship

between Green and Thompson had been frayed since June 1, when Thompson and Green talked in Green's office and Green considered cutting Thompson then if Thompson didn't buy into his system.

And Thompson's troubles with the team started before Green's arrival. Thompson was suspended by the team for a game in 2001 after being cited for driving under the influence. During the 2003 season, he signed a four-year contract extension worth more than \$11 million but was later suspended the final four games of the year for violating the league's substance abuse policy, again for drinking alcohol.

Because Thompson had tested positive days before

signing the contract extension, the team decided to withhold part of his \$2.6 million signing bonus.

That angered Thompson, who filed a grievance that has still not been settled. It is scheduled to be heard next month.

The Cardinals added a player Monday, re-signing free agent cornerback Robert Tate to a one-year contract expected to be worth the minimum \$665,000 salary.

"(Returning) was up in the air," Tate said with a smile. "You know how football is."

Tate's signing comes as little surprise, an expected backup plan once fellow free agent Renaldo Hill closed the door on coming back by agreeing to a one-year deal with

Oakland over the weekend.

But Tate mostly played special teams last season and should be a backup. The Cards are expected to draft at least one cornerback during the draft in two weeks.

EXTRA POINTS: The Cardinals also signed guard Jeremy Bridges, currently slated to start, to a one-year, \$305,000 contract Monday. Bridges was an exclusive-rights free agent and his re-signing was expected. ...

Cards free agent defensive end Kyle Vanden Bosch agreed to a one-year contract with Tennessee Monday. ...

Defensive end Calvin Pace, who hadn't been at the team's facility last week, showed up Monday for voluntary workouts.

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