

New Orleans Saints linebacker Scott Fujita is named the team's man of the year

By Mike Triplett, The Times-Picayune

December 30, 2009, 9:09PM

Linebacker [Scott Fujita](#) was the first free agent to sign with the [New Orleans Saints](#) in 2006, when the city was just beginning to bounce back from Hurricane Katrina and the team was starting from scratch after a 3-13 season.



David Grunfeld/The Times-Picayune Linebacker

Scott Fujita was selected the New Orleans Saints' Man of the Year, an award that recognizes a player for his value to team and community. Fujita was the first free agent to sign with the Saints in 2006 and he has been involved in numerous community efforts.

He arrived two days before quarterback Drew Brees signed. And like Brees, he has been a cornerstone of the team's rebuilding effort on and off the field.

Fujita was honored for those efforts Wednesday, when the Saints announced him as their Man of the Year -- an award winner that recognizes one player from each NFL team for his value to team and community.

"It's a nice honor, especially in a locker room like this with so many class acts. It's nice to be recognized among them," Fujita said. "I think for my wife (Jaclyn) and I both, kind of speaking for the whole family, this community has been so good to us since we first signed here four years ago. And any opportunity we've had, we've always looked to give back as much as we could. They embraced us, and we love it here."

Fujita and his wife have been involved in countless community efforts, but two causes have held special meaning -- breast cancer awareness and adoption. Fujita, 30, was adopted as an infant, and his mother, Helen, is a two-time breast cancer survivor.

The Fujitas have helped to build support for both endeavors through public service announcements, personal appearances and donations. They also have worked with

[Angel's Place](#), a facility in New Orleans that provides a safe and nurturing environment for children with life-threatening illnesses, and [Crimestoppers of New Orleans](#).

"We should all be proud of Scott's dedication -- not only the members of the Saints' organization, but the residents of our region -- for his efforts to make where we live a better place," Saints owner/executive vice president Rita Benson LeBlanc said.

"Scott Fujita is a player I've known and had the pleasure to coach for a number of years now," said Coach Sean Payton, who also spent a year with Fujita in Dallas in 2005, "and he has always been a great influence to his teammates, both on and off the field and in the locker room."

Fujita has had his most frustrating season with the Saints, missing five games with calf and knee injuries. But he has 71 tackles, one sack and two forced fumbles, and was voted as a Pro Bowl alternate this week.

"He's a great teammate," Brees said. "He's a very productive player, but I'd say just as a voice in the locker room, he's a guy who when he talks, everybody listens. He's just a true professional, and everybody knows what he has invested and how hard he works. . . . I think everybody just has a lot of respect for him, because he's one of those guys that does things the right way."

The Man of the Year is voted on annually by members of the Saints front office, local media and local non-profit and business executives. Each winner receives a \$1,000 donation to the charity of his choice and becomes eligible for the NFL's Walter Payton Man of the Year honor.

Brees shared the league-wide honor with San Diego Chargers tailback LaDainian Tomlinson after the 2006 season. Other recent Saints winners include offensive tackle Jon Stinchcomb in 2008, cornerback Mike McKenzie in 2007 and tailback Deuce McAllister in 2005. *Mike Triplett can be reached at mtriplett@timespicayune.com or 504.826.3405.*