

For Gonzalez, life is good

OSU receiver, Rhodes Scholar candidate will soon catch for the Colts.

By Reggie Hayes

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INDIANAPOLIS – Anthony Gonzalez isn't merely happy to be here.

He's ecstatic and heading toward bliss, as well he should be.

Gonzalez is a wide receiver heading to the NFL to catch passes from Peyton Manning for the defending Super Bowl champion Indianapolis Colts.

Life is good, indeed.

"Nothing I could have hoped for would possibly top this experience," Gonzalez said after being taken with the last pick of the first round, 32nd overall, on Saturday. "Part of this experience being as unbelievable as it is, is that I'll get to play with Hall of Famers and a team that just won the Super Bowl. You cannot beat the situation I've been lucky enough to be chosen into."

The Colts bucked the conventional wisdom that they should draft defense first. Instead, they pegged Gonzalez as the successor to Brandon Stokley at slot receiver. Those are big shoes in one respect – Stokley had 1,077 yards receiving and 10 touchdowns in 2004. On the other hand, Stokley never found his groove or his health last season, so Gonzalez steps into a wide-open position.

Gonzalez's arrival will allow the Colts to better utilize Dallas Clark in a true tight end position.

"From the beginning of this process, we felt if we could get Anthony Gonzalez, we've made a heck of a pick," Colts President Bill Polian said. "He's a universally well-thought of pick from the top of the organization on down. There's not a scout, not a coach, not anybody, that didn't feel Anthony Gonzalez was the right choice for us."

Gonzalez was the second Ohio State receiver picked in the first round: Ted Ginn Jr. went to Miami at No. 9. A third Buckeye receiver, Roy Hall, joined Gonzalez when the Colts picked him at No. 169 in the fifth round.

Polian said Gonzalez was the best available player and the one whose talent line came closest to the Colts' need line. The pick was reminiscent of 2001 and 2002 when the Colts needed some defensive help – as they do this year – and went with wide receiver Reggie Wayne and tight end Clark.

"This feels more like Dallas," Polian said. "We saw right from the start, this guy's a Colt. He's got the horseshoe stamped all over him from the minute you saw him perform at the collegiate level."

Gonzalez entered Saturday's first round hoping the Colts would pick him. When the phone call came, he saw the 317 area code on his phone. His brother told him it was Chicago, but he found

out soon enough it was the Colts.

“You try not to get your hopes up for one particular team, but in the back of my head the whole time, I was thinking, ‘I hope it’s the Colts,’” Gonzalez said. “If I was being recruited and I had a choice, this is where I would want to be.”

Gonzalez put up some big numbers last season for the Buckeyes, who went undefeated until the national championship game against Florida. He caught 51 passes for 734 yards (14.4 yards per catch) and eight touchdowns and earned first-team All-Big Ten honors.

Off the field, Gonzalez was a Rhodes Scholar candidate and an academic achiever. He plans to donate a portion of his off-field income to two charities: the American Cancer Society and the Arrupe Neighborhood Partnership Program at St. Ignatius High School in Cleveland.

In other words, he looks like a prototype Colts player.

Colts coach Tony Dungy said Gonzalez’s experiences at Ohio State – when he didn’t always get the ball because of teammates Santonio Holmes and Ginn – should serve him well in the Colts’ talent-loaded lineup.

“I think Anthony will be a great fit for us,” Dungy said. “He’s the type of person we’ve had success with. We feel he’ll fit right in.”