



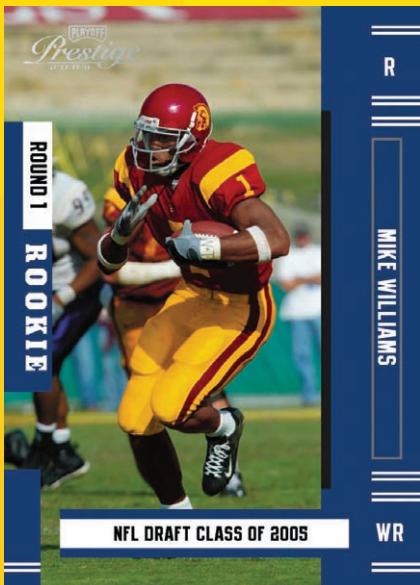
# Politics, Religion and

# Rookie Cards

**Will Mike Williams' 2005 cards be considered Rookie Cards when he had three produced last year? We present all the facts about this hot hobby topic.**

By The Beckett Football Staff

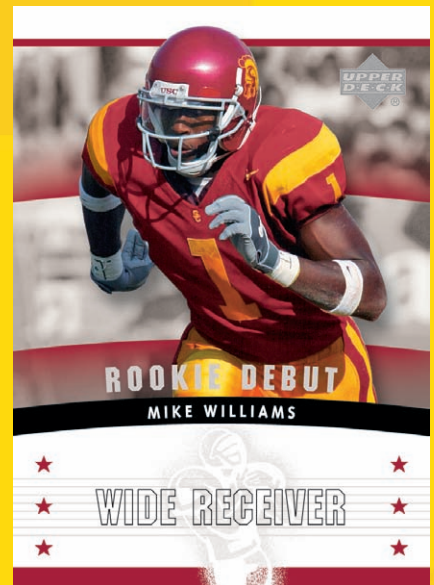
## Mike Williams Cards to Come:



2005 Playoff Prestige



2005 Topps Draft Picks and Prospects



2005 Upper Deck Rookie Debut

The draft may be over, but there still are plenty of questions that need answering.

The first NFL-licensed card products will release within a month, and with them will come the first Rookie Cards of 2005. Former USC receiver Mike Williams and former Ohio State running back Maurice Clarett will have cards in those and many other 2005 products. But Williams' and Clarett's 2005 cards will not be your average Rookie Cards. Both players were represented in 2004 products – Williams with three base cards and Clarett with one.

As you probably remember from last year, an initial court ruling forced the NFL to allow Clarett to enter the draft early, and thus opened the door for Williams, who was a sophomore at the time. However, the Supreme Court later overturned the ruling, thereby blocking both players from eligibility. NFL rules state that a player must be three years removed from his high school graduation to be eligible for the draft. Neither player met that requirement. Williams and Clarett had to be pulled from most 2004 NFL-licensed card products since they were not in the NFL. However, three sets were produced early enough to include them.

This creates a truly unique situation unlike the hobby has ever seen. Williams was included in rookie subsets in Playoff Prestige, Topps Draft Picks and Prospects and Ultra. Clarett had one rookie subset base card in Playoff Prestige. All of those cards have been tagged as "RC" in the Price Guide for nearly a year. Williams' cards have been hot for a couple of months, with his Prestige card rising to \$135 this month. However, over the past few months the "Rookie Card" status of those cards has come into question.

What will happen to those 2004 cards once the 2005 cards hit the market? Should the 2005 cards be tagged as RCs or not? Should the 2004 cards remain RCs or perhaps be given an XRC (Extended Rookie Card) tag?

The answers to these questions are a little more complicated than a simple yes or no. We'll look at different viewpoints from collectors and try to dispel some misconceptions about this situation.

## RCs vs. XRCs

Before we go any further, let's take a look at the commonly accepted definitions for Rookie Card and Extended Rookie Card.

**RC** – Rookie Card. A player's first appearance on a regular-issue card from one of the major card companies. Each company



Steve Young's 1985 Topps USFL card is one of the most well known XRCs in the hobby.

typically has a number of regular-issue sets per season. With a few exceptions, each player has only one RC in any given set. A Rookie Card cannot be an insert or parallel card. It can, however, be a coach card or a rookie subset card.

**XRC** – Extended Rookie Card. A player's first appearance on a card, but issued in a set that was not distributed nationally, or in an otherwise unique manner. In football, this term generally refers to the 1984 and 1985 Topps USFL sets.

On the surface, it seems that the 2004 cards in question meet the commonly accepted definition of a Rookie Card, but not the definition of an XRC. However, these definitions are used to describe special cards, and as history has shown, definitions can change over time based on how the terms are commonly used. The XRC tag was created to identify a player's first appearance on a non-traditional card. The term has evolved since the mid-1980s.

Now, let's cover some issues and concerns that have arisen in readers' e-mails and letters.

## Fact and Fiction

**FACT:** Williams' and Clarett's 2004 cards were released in NFL-licensed sets.

**FICTION:** The 2004 cards were "mistakes."

Before the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the NFL's appeal, Williams and Clarett were eligible to be drafted. Both players signed the necessary Group Licensing

Agreement (GLA) with Players Inc, which, to put it simply, allows the card companies to put their faces on cards. So, their 2004 cards are fully licensed, just like any other cards from those sets.

The three products mentioned earlier were too far along in the production process for Williams' and Clarett's cards to be pulled. Donruss/Playoff brand manager Nick Matijevich explains that, "Since both players had signed their GLAs and were approved for use, we didn't want to pull them from the program early if they ended up being drafted. By the time a decision was made, it was too late for them to be pulled from the program."

Topps and Fleer encountered the same situation. Upper Deck's first 2004 product, SP Game-Used, released late enough for the players to be pulled from the set. However, had all of the card companies had time to pull these cards, they would have. That is to say, had Williams and Clarett never had the small window of eligibility, no 2004 cards would have been produced. So, these cards were not mistakes or some form of error cards. That circumstance alone makes this situation unique.

**FACT:** Mike Williams and Maurice Clarett were not drafted in 2004.

**FICTION:** Their 2004 cards can't be Rookie Cards since they were never drafted.

Many players have Rookie Cards who are not drafted or who never play a down in the NFL. That's not the issue here. What also makes this situation unique is the fact that neither Williams nor Clarett have ever been part of the NFL in any way.

**FACT:** Licensed cards of players that released prior to them playing in the NFL have been labeled XRCs.

**FICTION:** Tagging a card as XRC in the Price Guide diminishes its significance and value.

The most common football XRC examples are in the 1984 and 1985 Topps USFL sets. The 1984 set includes XRCs of Jim Kelly, Steve Young, Reggie White and Herschel Walker, among others. A Doug Flutie XRC can be found in the 1985 set. The USFL cards were released and distributed only as complete, boxed sets. These players' XRCs are more valuable than their RCs. For example, Young's \$120 XRC vs. his \$20 RC found in 1986 Topps.

More recent cards receiving the XRC tag are the 2000 Leaf Rookies and Stars 2001 draft picks cards. These were issued as "nameless, faceless" redemption cards in 2000 Leaf R&S. The redemption cards were good for the first five players drafted at each position (QB,

## The 2004 Releases

### Mike Williams

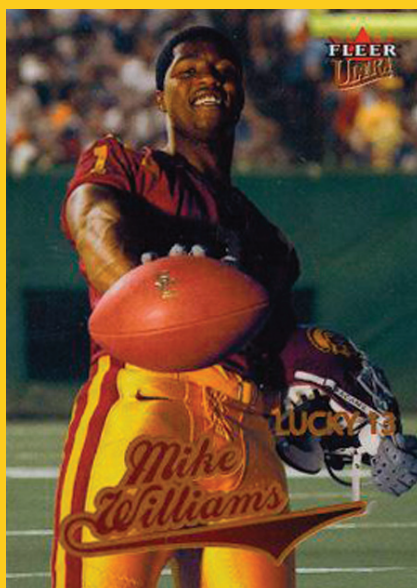
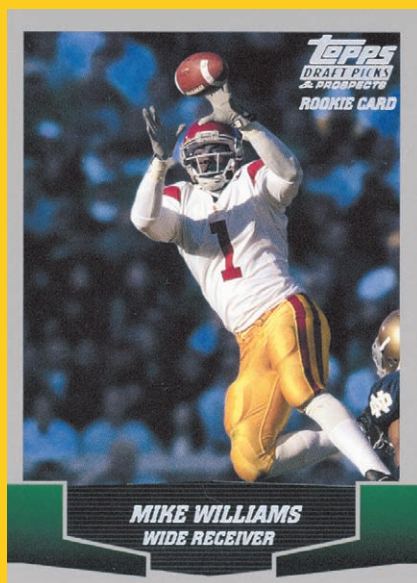
**2004 Playoff Prestige SP #220** – Williams' best Rookie Card from 2004. This was one of only eight short printed RCs in the base set. Notice that it's missing the NFL team name at the bottom and the draft round on the right. Secondary market activity on this card has heated up during the past two months in anticipation of the draft. It rose to \$135 this month and has been selling for more than \$100 consistently for months.

**2004 Topps Draft Picks and Prospects #160** – This card was not short printed. It's a relative bargain at \$25.

**2004 Ultra L13 #209** – This was one of 13 cards in the base set numbered to 500. It was part of the Lucky 13 subset featuring the top 13 rookies of 2005. It rose to \$125 in this issue.

### Maurice Clarett

**2004 Playoff Prestige #219** – Clarett's only base card from last year's NFL-licensed products was also one of the short printed cards in Playoff Prestige. It commands a respectable \$50, but it's nowhere near as popular as the Williams.



RB, WR, Defense) in the 2001 draft. So, the cards picture 2001 rookies, but technically were released in a 2000-year product. The most popular cards are the Michael Vick at \$60, the Drew Brees at \$25 and the LaDainian Tomlinson at \$50. This was unique case in which it made sense to use the XRC tag.

## The Debate

Readers offered their opinions via e-mail and the Beckett.com Message Boards. Here are some good thoughts for both sides of the debate.

### His 2004 Cards Should Be Rookie Cards

"I believe that the 2004 cards should be listed as RCs. That was the first time the player was pictured on a card that was licensed by both the NFL and NFLPA. Whether or not they were drafted is irrelevant. Players have cards who are drafted or signed as undrafted free agents and never make NFL rosters."

– Ken Freeman, Owner, #1 Sports Stow, Ohio

"Look at the Olympic card of Mark McGwire. He wasn't on an MLB team roster when that card was released, but it's considered an RC because it meets the criteria of being the first card of a player released in a widely distributed set. Do the 2004 cards meet the requirements for being designated as RCs? I believe the answer is yes."

– Michael Cathro, Evansville, Ind.

"The 2004 cards of Williams and Clarett are the RCs. They weren't issued as redemptions, like the 2000 Leaf Rookies and Stars draft picks cards. Also, these 2004 cards were as available as the other RCs in the sets. I didn't hear anybody not calling those cards RCs during last season."

– Jason Bryant, Fayetteville, Ga.

"The 2004 cards are the true RCs by definition – the first cards produced in a widely distributed, licensed set. The definition says nothing about when the player is drafted or when they actually start to play."

– L. Ken Casteel, Ashland, Ore.

"Rookie Cards don't have to be issued in the player's rookie year. Take for example NASCAR cards. Some drivers' RCs are issued one or two years before that driver competes full-time in the Nextel Cup Series."

– Ryan Balderson, Lynchburg, Va.

## His 2005 Cards Should Be Rookie Cards

"I feel that his 2004 cards should not be his RCs. Since he was not in the NFL and was not even eligible to be in the NFL, those cards should not be considered RCs. I think that if the player is not even eligible to be in the league, then he should not have any RCs. Those cards from '04 should be labeled XRC, or maybe nothing at all."

– JuliusJones22, via Beckett.com

"I think [the 2004 cards] should be labeled as XRC. He wasn't signed with any team or even available as a free agent. And then he wasn't available for the draft, so technically, he was never supposed to be on any cards."

– Jimmy Wolfrey, via Beckett.com

"I strongly believe his 2004 cards will be XRCs, just like the 1984-85 Topps USFL cards of Jim Kelly, Steve Young and Reggie White. The 2004 cards should be XRCs because they are his first cards (just like Kelly, Young and White). The 2005 cards should be RCs, because they are his first cards being in the league. Whoever thinks that the people who spent big money on his 2004 stuff got ripped off is being silly. Those USFL cards sure held their value."

– studogg200, via Beckett.com

"The 2004 cards should be tagged as XRCs, or not at all, and his 2005 cards as RCs. A player shouldn't have a RC before he's a professional athlete. Until a player has been drafted or signed with a pro team, his cards shouldn't carry the RC designation."

– David Lubetkin, Staten Island, N.Y.

"A card should be considered a Rookie Card when the player is either draft eligible

or eligible to sign as an undrafted free agent. Since neither player met this requirement in 2004, none of their 2004 releases should be considered RCs or even XRCs. In 2005, since they are eligible to join the NFL, any cards produced should be considered RCs."

– Ryan Mikkelson, Jamestown, N.D.

"How about making a new tag for the 2004 cards, like PRC for Pre Rookie Card or WTTWBTRCRC for We Thought This Would Be Their Rookie Card Rookie Card?"

– Danny Davini, via Beckett.com

## What to Do, What to Do

As we said earlier, this situation is unlike any the hobby has ever seen. The heart of this debate seems to be tied more to the players than to the cards. Being an unprecedented circumstance, it's tough to look back at a similar situation for answers.

The 2004 Williams and Clarett cards are unlike the Topps USFL cards from 1984-85 in that they were not released in complete sets, but were distributed nationally in packs. The 2000 Leaf Rookies and Stars cards we talked about earlier were issued as redemptions, and didn't even exist until after the 2001 draft. Those cards are tagged as XRCs in the Price Guide, but are nothing like the 2004 cards in question.

The closest football example we have to look at is the Ty Detmer situation in 1991. Detmer won the Heisman Trophy in 1990 as a junior at BYU. He had a card produced in 1991 Pro Set that recognized his Heisman award. That card is tagged as an RC. However, Detmer played one more year in college before being drafted in 1992. He had more than 40 cards produced in 1992, when he actually was a rookie, but none of the

1992 cards are tagged as RCs.

Similar situations to that of the Detmer card have occurred in the baseball hobby. Eric Gagne, for example, has one Rookie Card – 1999 Fleer Tradition Update #U42. However, many of Gagne's 2000 cards, which are not tagged as RCs, are part of rookie and prospect subsets. Even though the 2000 cards are not considered RCs, many of them are hotter and more valuable than his 1999 Fleer Tradition Update RC.

Based on readers' responses, the debate is nearly split down the middle as to which Williams and Clarett cards should be tagged as RCs (2004 or 2005). Heck, we've gone back and forth with this issue many times, trying to cover every possible angle. But there is one thing almost everyone can agree on – the 2004 and 2005 cards cannot all be RCs.

The Playoff Prestige, Topps Draft Picks and Prospects and Ultra cards were priced for the first time in our July 2004 issue. We had to make a decision then whether or not to tag the Williams and Clarett cards as RCs. Collectors were treating them as RCs in the way they bought and sold them. Of course, by the time we priced those cards, we knew that Williams and Clarett would not be in the NFL in 2004. Still, those cards were Rookie Cards and they were tagged as such.

The cards are fully licensed and were distributed nationally in packs. They all are regular-issue cards and are the first card appearances by both players. The hobby has treated those 2004 cards like RCs for nearly a year, and that may be the most important aspect of this debate. For now, those cards will remain RCs.

You can bet that the card companies will treat the 2005 cards like any other rookie's cards. They should. Williams and Clarett will be rookies in 2005, and Williams will be one of the top rookies to collect this year. It's likely that he'll have more than 400 total cards produced this year, and they should bring hefty prices worthy of a top draft pick.

However, we will not make a predetermination on the status of the 2005 cards. It has never been our policy to predetermine the status or value of cards before they are released. We'll watch the transactions of the 2005 cards closely to see how the hobby reacts to them.

This situation is not something that can be resolved in a matter of minutes. Rather, it's an ongoing issue that will play out over the coming months. We encourage everyone to keep communication open. Please continue to send us your thoughts on this issue by e-mailing us at [footballmag@beckett.com](mailto:footballmag@beckett.com) or sending your letters to *Beckett Football*; 15850 Dallas Parkway; Dallas, TX 75248. We'll continue to cover the situation over the next few issues.



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