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**Wednesday, January 13, 1999**

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## Skins hopeful for Westbrook

ASHBURN, Va. (AP) - Doctors say that Washington Redskins receiver Michael Westbrook could return to football next season after undergoing neck surgery to repair a herniated disk.

Westbrook had two vertebrae fused together with a metal plate in the operation performed by Dr. Robert Watkins on Monday in Los Angeles.

Redskins trainer Bubba Tyer said Tuesday that the surgery went "perfectly," adding that "Westbrook has an excellent chance to return to football according to Watkins."

Westbrook, the No. 4 overall selection in the 1995 draft, was having his best season when he was injured on a tackle by San Diego Chargers cornerback Charles Dimry Dec. 6.

Tyer said Westbrook would be hospitalized for two or three more days, then wear a neck brace for six weeks. It will be three months before Westbrook can begin vigorous exercise and six months before any football contact.

"There is no reason why Westbrook couldn't be ready for training camp," Tyer said.

Despite playing in only 11 games, Westbrook finished tied for the team lead with a career-high 44 catches. He also set career marks with 736 yards and six touchdowns.

The troubled Westbrook was benched for two games at



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midseason after failing to make a team meeting and practice the day before a game.

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