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Eagles lose Andrews for at least 6 weeks

By Ray Parrillo

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In the overall scheme of a football game, kicking extra points would seem among the least significant plays.

It's likely Shawn Andrews doesn't feel that way these days.

The Eagles announced yesterday that Andrews, their Pro Bowl right guard the last two seasons, would be out for at least six weeks and perhaps as long as three months following surgery to repair a herniated disk in his back.

Andrews was injured while blocking for an extra point late in the first half against Dallas on Sept. 15. He hasn't played since.

Surgery was performed Tuesday by noted back specialist Robert Watkins III at Marina Del Rey Hospital in California. Andrews, 25, is expected to remain under Watkins' care before continuing his rehabilitation in Philadelphia sometime next week.

The Eagles' head trainer, Rick Burkholder, said that Andrews had twice received injections to treat the injury, but that after they failed to alleviate the symptoms, Andrews visited Watkins.

Burkholder said the time frame for Andrews' return was uncertain because his recovery depended on how quickly the symptoms disappeared.

"Dr. Watkins gave us the six-weeks-to-three-months category," Burkholder said. "We've had that before, and guys will come back in five weeks or guys have taken three months."

Eagles tackle Tra Thomas had a similar injury and missed the final six games of the 2005 season. The surgery was also performed by Watkins. Thomas has missed only one game since the operation.

The injuries are "not identical, but similar," Burkholder said. "It's a comparison because they play the same position and they had some of the same symptoms, and they had the same surgeon, but everybody is different."

"Everybody's core is different. Everybody's flexibility is different. So it's really hard to compare Shawn to anybody else."

Little has gone well for Andrews this season. In August, he revealed he was suffering from depression. As a result, he didn't play in any of the preseason games.

Max Jean-Gilles, a fourth-round draft choice in 2006, will continue to play in Andrews' spot. Coach Andy Reid said yesterday that he would gauge Andrews' progress during rehabilitation before deciding whether to make a roster move.

"We're not going to do anything right now," Reid said. "We'll see how it plays out."

Nick Cole, a backup center, will likely back up Jean-Gilles as well.

Reid and quarterback Donovan McNabb praised the 6-foot-3, 358-pound Jean-Gilles, who had time to fall in sync with his linemates on the first unit during training camp while Andrews was absent.

"Max has done a very good job," Reid said. "The thing Max has done, which is important, is improve every week. And the guys around him have a lot of trust in him. He continues to work hard on his game."

Said McNabb: "Max is a guy who we trust in so many situations, whether it's run-blocking or pass-blocking. He's a talented guy, a guy who is a big body, and a guy who can move."

Jean-Gilles stood out with two blocks that helped Correll Buckhalter break loose in the win over San Francisco before the bye week.

He sprinted to the corner to throw a block that enabled Buckhalter to gain 25 yards with a screen pass in the first quarter. In the third quarter, he flattened linebacker Takeo Spikes as Buckhalter gained 28 yards.

Burkholder said Andrews first suffered the injury while playing for North Miami Beach High School and was treated with injections. He said Andrews had no back problems during his collegiate years at Arkansas and in his previous ones with the Eagles.

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