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Wheatley plagued by injuries

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FOXBOROUGH, Mass. -- [New England Patriots](#) cornerback [Terrence Wheatley](#) can't seem to catch a break.

Just when he was on the cusp of emerging as a rookie in 2008, making his first career start, he broke his wrist while defending [Indianapolis Colts](#) receiver [Marvin Harrison](#). That ended his season after six games.



Terrence Wheatley has played in only 11 games in two seasons.

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A knee injury against the [Washington Redskins](#) last preseason got his 2009 off to a rocky start, and he never fully emerged, appearing in only five regular-season games (all as a reserve).

As if that weren't bad enough, Wheatley learned the morning after the team's crushing playoff defeat to the [Baltimore Ravens](#) that the Dallas-area home he purchased had severe damage from flooding, requiring \$150,000 in repairs.

If a penalty flag could have been thrown for piling on, Wheatley would have drawn one at that point.

And that doesn't factor in an unexpected trip to the hospital this offseason for an emergency appendix procedure, something he wouldn't confirm (the Patriots prefer that players don't speak about injuries) but which teammates have discussed publicly.

Add it all together, and it is well within bounds to say that the first two years of Wheatley's NFL career haven't unfolded as he'd hoped, as more was expected from a 2008 second-round draft choice (62nd overall).

The 25-year-old Wheatley, much like his Dallas home, is now in rebuilding mode.

"I think the one thing that has my attention now is that the time is now. You can't have any more 'free' years," Wheatley said during a break in the team's offseason program. "If you got it, you got it. If you don't, you don't. That lights a fire under me, and you have to go out there and show what you can do.

"You have to stay healthy," he continued. "That's been my biggest issue for the past two years and in college. It's kind of been the story of my career. I think if I stay healthy, I'm going to be all right."

Wheatley (5-foot-9, 185 pounds) currently finds himself deep on the cornerback depth chart, behind [Leigh Bodden](#), [Darius Butler](#), [Jonathan Wilhite](#) and [Shawn Springs](#). For parts of last season, [Kyle Arrington](#) played over him because of his special-teams contributions, and one has to figure that 2010 first-round draft choice [Devin McCourty](#) will also leapfrog him as well.

This puts Wheatley in a category of bubble players at training camp, along with others from his draft class, such as third-round draft choice [Shawn Crable](#).

While that could put some players on edge, Wheatley is trying to approach it a bit differently.

"I think a big issue of mine is that I'm a perfectionist, so it's easy for me to get frustrated with certain things," he said. "But now it's just relax and play, and no more excuses, in a way. Either you got it or you don't, and that's kind of my mindset going into it."

Wheatley has been a full participant in the team's offseason program from Day 1, and said he is spending more time watching tape than he has since coming to New England. Before returning to town, he did the demolition work on his flooded Dallas home and remodeled parts of it himself.

"I started my offseason conditioning a little early, knocking down walls, picking stuff up, pulling sheetrock off," he cracked. "I told [strength coach] Mike [Woicik] that some of the hardest workouts I've done was fixing my house."

It's a good thing, because Wheatley faces what looks like his toughest challenge in the NFL.

"I haven't really done a whole lot in some people's eyes," he said. "That's fine. Everybody is going to have an opinion on whether I should have been drafted where I was and stuff like that, but obviously, Bill [Belichick] has faith in me or I wouldn't be here. So I have to go out there and just really do what I need to do to gain his trust back and allow him to put me out there and stay healthy."

Mike Reiss covers the Patriots for ESPNBoston.com. [Follow him on Twitter.](#)

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