

How Andre Gurode became Cowboys' most tenured veteran

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IRVING – At times, Andre Gurode admits he will look around the Valley Ranch locker room and wonder where the time has gone.

He can point across the room to where Emmitt Smith held court. He can look to his right and know that Terence Newman now occupies Darren Woodson's old locker with a message about the Super Bowl tradition on its back wall. He can look straight ahead and see where Flozell Adams sat for years.

Now Gurode is the old man in the room.

Not in terms of age or years of NFL service – those go to backup quarterback Jon Kitna (37 and 14 respectively) – but in tenure with the Cowboys.

Gurode is entering his eighth season with the Cowboys.

"I wouldn't say it felt like yesterday," said Gurode, a second round pick in 2002 after Roy Williams and before Antonio Bryant, "but it felt like I just came here a few years ago. I couldn't imagine going through the stuff I've been through and the years and just all of the things it took to get to this point. It's like, 'Wow, it's really been a journey.'"

Gurode was Adams' teammate for eight years, who was once Michael Irvin's teammate, who played with Everson Walls, who was a Cowboy with Harvey Martin, who played defensive line with Bob Lilly, the Cowboys' first draft pick in 1961, who came a year after Eddie LeBaron was the quarterback for an 0-11-1 team in the franchise's first year.

Call it the six degrees of Andre Gurode.

There isn't a hint of grey in Gurode's goatee or on his head. He can joke with the rookies as easily as he can the veterans.

"I remember going to the mall in Arlington and asking the guy – and this is probably two or three months after the draft – who was the Cowboys' draft pick in the second round?" Gurode remembered. "He's like, 'They drafted Roy Williams and they drafted Antonio Bryant.' I asked him if they drafted another guy before AB? 'No, no, no, I'm sure. I would know. I've been a Cowboys fan for 40 years.' Most of the people knew Roy and Antonio, and I'm here but kind of forgotten."

Gurode started 14 games as a rookie. He played in 15 and 13 in Bill Parcells' first two years before spending 2005 mostly as a backup. Since 2006, he has been Pro Bowl center for the Cowboys.

Gurode turned 31 in March and is signed through 2012. He was 9 years old when he told his mother he would play in the NFL one day, but he never had a cap on how long his career would be.

"When I got drafted and I got here for the rookie mini-camp and then for training camp, it dawned on me that I made the NFL, but it was, 'Now, how do I get in the NFL?'" Gurode said. "With guys like Solomon Page, Kelvin Garmon. Larry [Allen], Emmitt [Smith], Rocket [Ismail], these guys come in your life for a reason, Greg Ellis, and you learn how you can be an athlete and make it, but you have to be a professional to stay and play and have an effective career."

And now he passes that message on to younger linemen like Robert Brewster and Doug Free, as well as cornerbacks like Mike Jenkins and Orlando Scandrick.

"Some guys come into town and it's, 'OK, I made it here,'" Gurode said. "There's a difference in making it here and being successful at this level. It's a lot of work."

It's about tenure

A look at the longest-tenured Cowboys on the current roster:

2002 – Andre Gurode, second round

2003 – Terence Newman, first round; Jason Witten, third round; Bradie James, fourth round, Tony Romo, undrafted

2004 – Patrick Crayton, seventh round; Mat McBriar, free agent

2005 – DeMarcus Ware, first round; Marcus Spears, first round; Marion Barber, fourth round; Jay Ratliff, seventh round; Marc Colombo, free agent; L.P. Ladouceur, free agent