

## In this corner: Terrence Wheatley Contender fights back

By Karen Guregian | Tuesday, August 17, 2010 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | N.E. Patriots

FOXBORO - When it came to making early roster projections for the **Patriots** [[team stats](#)], and coming up with the easiest name to toss out from the cornerback mix, Terrence Wheatley was the choice.

He was on his way out. There was no need to view more evidence. Two years was plenty enough. He already was being chalked up as a second-round bust. And with ample reason.

Whether set back by injury woes, or simply falling out of favor with the coaches, Wheatley slipped so far down the depth chart last season, it was hard to find him. Even he had a tough time figuring out his place on the team. Worse, he had started to lose confidence in being able to find his way back.

But with the dawn of a new year, and a renewed commitment, Wheatley has rediscovered what made him so attractive to the Patriots in the first place. The way he sees it, the game comes a lot easier if you just go out and play - and stop worrying about everything else.

"I probably think too much. That's what I've been told. So I kinda just stopped thinking," Wheatley said following yesterday's indoor practice. "Obviously, I go through my presnap reads. But once the play is going on, I shut the brain off a little bit and just play."

On Sunday, coach **Bill Belichick** noted the change in Wheatley and how the player has progressed. Belichick pointed out a pass play during Thursday night's preseason win against the New Orleans Saints, on which the cornerback quickly diagnosed a slant route, as a sign of maturity. Wheatley also snuffed out a quarterback sneak a few plays later.

There's no question he's a much more confident version of the corner we've seen the past two seasons. And while still in a fight for a roster spot, likely with Jonathan Wilhite, Wheatley is no longer so easy to cast aside.

Judging by Belichick's compliments, Wheatley definitely opened some eyes at training camp and served notice that he's not going down without a fight.

What we forget sometimes is that opinions can change, and they can do so in a hurry. An athlete with the proper makeup can often give himself a second chance or another opportunity to change people's minds.

Wheatley is doing just that.

"This is still a game. It's a job, yeah. And I've been brought in to play, and play well. And I really haven't played well," Wheatley said. "But there could be worse things in life that could be going on right now. I mean, I could have no job, and not be here, No. 1. After all I've been through in my life, this is really not that difficult. You just have to make your mind up that you're going to do it, and that's pretty much what I did."

He spent most of the offseason trying to get back on the horse. He trained and studied. He was a film-room junkie.

Essentially, he was looking to reconnect with his comfort zone. He watched and studied film when he played corner in college at Colorado. That's where he was most successful, so he tried to bring some of those principles back into his game.

When asked if his chief motivation for all the offseason work was the fear that this might be his last chance with the Pats, Wheatley claimed it was more about maturing as a player.

"We are professionals. So you have to find a way to get better, whatever it is," he said.

"At that point, I thought, well, let me go back and see how I used to play. And obviously, it worked back then. So let me see if it works up here. It's been working so far, so hopefully it'll continue to work."

Wheatley understands this is a make-or-break year for him. That's no secret. But he won't dwell on that. He's just going to relax, play and let the chips fall where they may.

"Ultimately, it's up to them what they want to do," Wheatley said. "Until then, I'm just going to play."

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Photo by Ted Fitzgerald



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## Lions' Jordon Dizon stunned by season-ending injury

BY DAVE BIRKETT  
FREE PRESS SPORTS WRITER

Jordon Dizon was in the midst of his best camp as a Lion, so when he got the news Monday morning that his season was over because of a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee, he was understandably devastated.

"You're more in a state of shock when it happens," Dizon said as he leaned against crutches, his left leg in a brace, on his way out of the locker room.

"When I got the news this morning, it was pretty sad. Heartbreaking."

The Lions placed Dizon on injured reserve before practice Monday and re-signed linebacker Lee Campbell.

Campbell, originally claimed off waivers from the New York Giants in June but released before training camp last month, practiced with the third string at middle linebacker -- without a name on his jersey.

The Lions made two more moves Monday, releasing backup defensive end Jason Hunter -- who whip-sawed into Dizon's leg in the second quarter of Saturday's 23-7 loss to the Steelers -- and activating safety from the physically unable to perform list.

With 79 players, the Lions still can add a player.

"Lee was a guy that we had in minicamp, and we had taken a look at him there and liked what we saw," coach Jim Schwartz said.

"He was a guy that was sort of on the top of our list to bring back if we did have an injury."

Starting middle linebacker DeAndre Levy returned to practice on a limited basis Monday for the first time since Aug. 1 because of a back injury, and Vinny Ciurciu took Dizon's regular reps on the second team.

Dizon said he has to wait for the swelling to subside before he can have surgery.

"This is devastating for me," he said. "It's hard to see them go out to practice and me not be able to go out with them, so it's tough."

**Wade out:** Starting cornerback **Jonathan Wade** sat out Monday's practice with a broken left index finger.

Wade said the injury occurred early in Saturday's 23-7 loss at Pittsburgh, though he stayed on the field.

"Something happened during a play and it started aching," Wade said.

"I kept playing, which was probably dumb, but that's me."

Wade wore a cast that covered his hand and

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extended up his left index and middle fingers Monday, but said he was cleared to practice. He's unlikely to play Saturday night against the host Broncos.

"I don't think it's (life)-threatening," he said. "I'll be all right. I won't miss anything that will be detrimental to us.

"Right now, we're just going to be smart with it because we don't want to get it any worse."

Safety **Randy Phillips** also missed Monday's practice for personal reasons, but was expected back for team meetings Monday night.

**Briefly:** Former Lion **Mike Utley** watched Monday's practice from the sideline. ... Receiver **Mike Moore** practiced Monday for the first time since the start of camp because of a separated shoulder. ... With Wade and nickel cornerback **Dré Bly** out, **Eric King** took first-team reps at cornerback.

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## Jordon Dizon's injury proof exhibition season not always beneficial

*JOHN NIYO**Allen Park*

It's the nightmare reality for any NFL player: One day you're on the field living a dream, and the next you might not be able to walk.

Not that they needed any reminders, but Monday at practice the Lions got a visit from Mike Utley, the former player who was paralyzed during a game in 1991.

Jordon Dizon's fate wasn't nearly that cruel last weekend. There's no comparison, really. But it was painful nonetheless to hear the Lions third-year linebacker talk about the season-ending knee injury he suffered in last Saturday's exhibition opener.

"It was bad," Dizon said, leaning on a pair of crutches in the locker room shortly after his teammates finished practice without him. "I woke up this morning feeling really good, hoping for the best. I got out of bed and I was able to walk a little bit and I thought it was healing. And then I got the devastating news of the MRI, which was a killer for me."

The result -- a torn ACL -- was not unexpected after Dizon was carted off the field in Pittsburgh. He'll undergo surgery the next few weeks, and the Lions placed Dizon on injured reserve Monday, officially bringing an end to his season.

"But it's part of the game," said Dizon, a core special-teams player who was expected to play a key role on defense this season. "It's one of the only sports in the world where you're pretty much guaranteed to get hurt. So it's devastating, but at some point it's expected."

And that's the troubling part about the NFL exhibition season.

On the one hand, you've got the commissioner of the league, Roger Goodell, acknowledging that no one wants to play these games -- at least not four of them.

"It's clear the fans don't want four preseason games," Goodell said recently, beating the drum for an expanded regular season. "It's clear the players don't want four preseason games. And we really don't need it to make the game better."

And yet every time these players put on helmets, they have no choice but to treat it as if their livelihood depended on it -- even when it doesn't.

### 'It just happened'

To be fair, Dizon wasn't complaining about any of that Monday, insisting that "preseason games are just as important as regular season."

"It doesn't matter that it happened in the preseason," he added. "It just happened. And that's the bottom line."

But they'll try in the upcoming labor negotiations, with Goodell and owners pushing for an 18-game regular season to increase revenue. Players understandably will resist, citing the increased injury risk. Because while the total number of games wouldn't change -- two exhibitions would be eliminated -- adding another 100 or so snaps in January, when NFL

locker rooms already look like infirmaries, certainly won't come without a cost.

Still, even veteran linebacker Julian Peterson, who isn't a fan of the "enhanced season" proposal, admits, "You'd rather play in a real game, yeah."

And for real money, I might add. Because the danger is always real in the NFL.

Dizon was far from the only casualty in the opening week of the exhibition season: Houston's Ben Tate, Dallas' John Phillips and Indianapolis' Jamie Silva -- just to name a few -- suffered season-ending trauma, while established starters like Arizona's Larry Fitzgerald and Buffalo's Marshawn Lynch and Fred Jackson also went down with significant injuries.

## Enough is enough

Heck, even the coaches aren't safe: Denver's Josh McDaniels suffered a broken right toe Sunday night in Cincinnati when a chair fell on his foot.

Sure, there's a value to the exhibition season for coaches and personnel departments and for young players trying to make an NFL roster. But the league went from six exhibitions to four back in the late 1970s and it's past time to eliminate a couple more.

With today's year-round training programs, players come to camp in shape -- that's no longer a valid reason. And there's absolutely no justification for asking fans to pay premium ticket prices for a product that hardly qualifies as premium entertainment.

The potential losses far outweigh the gains in the exhibition season, and even if Dizon won't volunteer to be the poster boy, I'll do it for him.

"I was at a point in my career where I was happy," he said Monday, smiling through the pain. "Really happy, really comfortable, really confident in myself. And then this happened."

It happens all the time, unfortunately. And while the games don't count -- quick, anybody remember the Lions preseason record a year ago? -- the injuries do go on your permanent record.

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