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No Briggs? Consider Bears' Iwuh ready

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BY MARK POTASH, Sun-Times Media

A lot of things you hear at Halas Hall these days have to be checked out. But Brian Urlacher's endorsement of teammate Brian Iwuh sounded as if it could stand on its own merit.

"If he's playing next to me, I trust him," Urlacher said Thursday. "He does a good job. He knows where he's supposed to fit. He doesn't say much. He just goes out there and plays."

Iwuh, one of the Bears' core special-teams players, could start at weakside linebacker Sunday against the Seattle Seahawks in place of Lance Briggs, who missed his second consecutive day of practice Thursday because of an ankle injury he suffered in the game against the Carolina Panthers.

"Lance Briggs' ankle is a little bit of a concern," coach Lovie Smith said. "Whenever you don't practice two straight days, it's a little bit of a concern. But going off of history, he normally comes through at the end of the week."

In other words, Iwuh is ready to go. The 6-foot, 239-pound Houston native started three games in four seasons with the Jacksonville Jaguars from 2006 to '09. He was signed by the Bears in May after the Jaguars cut him in April.

Iwuh overcame an injury early in training camp to beat out Tim Shaw - who set a team record with 30 special-teams tackles last year - for a roster spot with the Bears because he's considered a better fit for their defense.

"I always prepare (to start)," Iwuh said. "If something does happen, I'll be ready to go. I feel like I can handle it."

Iwuh is known as a player who can make an impact in small doses. In a preseason game last year with the Jaguars, Iwuh returned an errant Donovan McNabb lateral 92 yards for a touchdown. He had five tackles in place of Briggs against the Arizona Cardinals during the preseason.

"You notice him when he's out there," Smith said at the time.

Iwuh has six special-teams tackles this season, and also helped spring Devin Hester for a 62-yard punt return for a touchdown against the Green Bay Packers. He was on defense for one play against the Dallas Cowboys and two against the Panthers.

"My No. 1 strength is my instincts," he said. "I've got pretty good instincts and anticipation of the play."

Iwuh, whose position coach at Colorado was former Bear Brian Cabral, said he benefitted from playing for Jack Del Rio, a former linebacker, at Jacksonville.

"He was a good coach," Iwuh said. "He really knew what he was talking about. He put a lot of pressure on the linebackers. I'm kind of used to the pressure. He put a lot of emphasis on the linebackers making all the plays on the field. So it was a good thing playing for him. I liked it a lot."

Defensive coordinator Rod Marinelli said the Bears won't alter their defensive game plan without Briggs.

"I don't even know if we're losing him," Marinelli said.

But just in case ...

"All through camp (Iwuh's) been very solid, real sound," Marinelli said. "He'll be fine. We believe he's a heck of a player."

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