



Billups pays  
for Team USA  
on and off  
court

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# Billups pays for Team USA on and off court

**Sean Deveney**

**SN**Sporting News

To most, it seemed that Chauncey Billups was kept on as a member of Team USA to play a similar role to the one Jason Kidd played in the 2008 Olympics. Billups—who will be 34 this month—would be an elder statesman, a positive off-court influence and, given the fact that he wasn't quite as athletic or talented as the youngsters around him, a guy who would play a handful of minutes before deferring to others.

It hasn't quite worked out that way. In fact, it's become obvious that, after leading scorer Kevin Durant, the best player on Team USA has been Billups, who is not only a stabilizing factor on the floor, but often takes the toughest matchup on the wings and has gotten his outside shot together.

In a hard-fought win over Russia, Billups spent much of the game guarding one of Russia's key players, 6-7 point guard Anton Ponkrashov, helping to hold Ponkrashov to 0-for-6 shooting. Billups was the team's second-leading scorer, with 15 points, going 4-for-8 from the 3-point line. And he dished out five assists with just one turnover, on a day when the U.S. got sucked into too much one-on-one basketball and not enough ball movement.

Sure, it made sense for Billups to be more off-court leader than on-court producer. But he never saw it that way. "I mean that's just what I feel like I'm here to do," Billups said. "Just try to guide these guys, be a difference-maker, not only talk about it but get out there and play and do it and be about it. Whether it's with my team, the Nuggets, or with this young USA Basketball team my role is the same—it's just lead and do what I do and be me."

Coach Mike Krzyzewski has to be thankful he has Billups on hand. Six of Team USA's players are 22 or younger, and few of the players have had big-game experience since leaving college. Four players have never been to the NBA playoffs. Billups has been in 139 playoff games, while center Lamar Odom has been in 92. The rest of the roster has been in 79 combined playoff games and only one player has ever been part of a team that actually won a playoff series (Tyson Chandler, whose Hornets won one series in 2006).

Billups relishes the role of a leader, in part because he entered the NBA as a young player in need of a mentor. He drifted through four teams in his first three years in the NBA before he finally found a home—and some guys he could model his leadership skills after—with the Timberwolves. In Minnesota, he cites Terrell Brandon and Sam Mitchell as two of the guys who taught him how to be a leader. "That made an unbelievable difference to me in my career," Billups said. "Once I learned how to do that then I was able to step up be a leader and people follow me."

He is applying that to his time with his young U.S. teammates in Turkey. When he was a young player, he needed to learn leadership. So he's trying to teach that to the young guys around him now. "That's the reason why I do the things I do for a guy like Ty Lawson who is on my team, or some of these young guys – Steph Curry, D[errick] Rose, Russell Westbrook, guys who really look up to me and what I've been able to accomplish," Billups said. "I don't know if they had that kind of veteran on their team that can kind of show them the way, show them everything. I take that role very seriously because I wish that somebody did that for me earlier in my career and maybe I would have been better earlier."

He's doing it now. And for Team USA, the timing is perfect.

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Kevin Durant

# The Seattle Times

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## Tyler Polumbus could start at left tackle

Danny O'Neil

**Tyler Polumbus** is looking like the starting left tackle. Offensive coordinator **Jeremy Bates** said the team is preparing as if Polumbus will be the starter as **Chester Pitts** works his way into condition as he recovers from microfracture surgery.

Here's the "Coordinator Q&A" with Bates following Thursday's practice:

### Q: What kind of problems does guys pose?

**Bates:** It's a good outfit. They're strong, they're big, they're physical and they're fast. They do a very good job, scheming. They've got a veteran group. They do a lot of stuff. There's not a lot of guys looking around to figure out what defense or what system is called. They're experienced and it's going to be a big challenge on Sunday.

### Q: It's a tough situation that you've got at left tackle without your starter at the position.

**Bates:** You know it's the National Football League. You're going to have injuries. You're going to miss out on guys. You can't look in your rearview mirror. You've got to move on. Tyler has come in and done a great job this week. We're going to go play with the 11 we've got on the field, and that's the attitude we're going to take.

### Q: Does it look like Tyler Polumbus will be the starter or are you going to wait another day before settling on that?

**Bates:** Right now, it looks like Tyler. Chester has been practicing, but we're going in with the mindset Tyler is going to be starting.

### Q: You knew him a little bit from your time in Denver. What were your impressions of him there when he got there?

**Bates:** He's got great length. He's got good size. He's good for the zone offense. Good left tackle. He can play right tackle and likes the game of football.

Q: With the departure of Alex Gibbs, does anything change in the short term?

**Bates:** Yeah, **Art Valero** is now the offensive line coach, and he's going to have some different eyes, everyone has different ideas. You can't be someone else so we're going to go in without Alex and Art's got the job now.

### Q: Do things in terms of schematics change?

**Bates:** Yeah, like I said. Art has been at Tampa, he has been at St. Louis. He has learned some football that has been different than Alex. You have to be comfortable with the style of the way you're coaching and your philosophy. I think the toughest position would be if we made him do exactly what Alex did. There's going to be a lot of carryover, but at the same time you've got to be yourself.

**Q: What have you seen from Forsett that has allowed you to be comfortable starting him?**

**Bates:** He has had a great OTAs and two-a-days. At the same time, all the running backs, we're excited about that group. You're going to see **Julius (Jones)**, you're going to see **Leon (Washington)**. They're all going to get an opportunity to carry the ball.

**Q: What is something that Justin does that you particularly like? What is something he excels at?**

**Bates:** He gets positive yards. All through the camp, all through last year. He has a good average. He can get that extra yard, and we look forward to him doing it on Sunday.

**Q: Michael Robinson comes in, a guy like that at the last minute, how much can you work him into the game reasonably?**

**Bates:** You know, I think it's up to the person. With Michael, he's a quick study. The information that we got before we got him is that he'll learn every position. He has been here about four days and he knows a lot of our stuff and I'm extremely impressed. As a former quarterback, you've got to know every position. I think the game comes easy to him, and he's a student of the game. Impressive kid.

**Q: You don't have Pete's history with Mike Williams, but what have been your impressions of how he has handled this situation?**

**Bates:** I think he has done everything in his ability to make the team and be the starting X (split end). He came in underweight like we asked. He has been working his tail off, and he has made a lot of big plays during the preseason. We look forward to him exploding onto the scene again.

**Q: It really was one of those progressive things, wasn't it? It seemed like he just kept getting better from OTAs to minicamps.**

**Bates:** I think it was more just being consistent. He didn't have a bad day. Every day was a solid performance.

**Q: Coach Carroll has always emphasized ball control, and you guys did a nice job during the preseason. I don't think the first team had any turnovers at all. How do you balance that with taking shots when you need to take shots, particularly when you're in the red zone?**

**Bates:** We're going to be aggressive, but you've got to be smart with the football. The number one statistic with wins and losses is turnovers. Coach Carroll preaches it and so we're going to live and die with it.

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