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Highlighting Solder's rookie year

By Mike Reiss



*Stew Milne/US Presswire*Patriots rookie Nate Solder.

One line of thinking was that the NFL lockout would make it hard for rookies to contribute immediately, especially those needing some extra time to gain strength to play at the line of scrimmage. Offensive tackle Nate Solder, the Patriots' first-round draft choice, was supposed to fall into that category.

He hasn't.

Solder has been on the field a lot for the Patriots because of a combination of injury to starting right tackle Sebastian Vollmer and his solid play as a power tight end. He's played well, appearing in all 13 games, starting 10 of them (8 at RT, 2 at TE).

"You can't say enough about what Nate's done as a rookie," offensive coordinator Bill O'Brien said Tuesday. "Being coached by Dante [Scarnecchia] is a big deal; he came in and was able to be a productive guy right away as a rookie. We put a lot on his plate. We ask him to know different parts of the game-plan, obviously, and he's done a good job and fits in to that whole group."

When O'Brien notes two parts of the game-plan, it's the differences between offensive tackle and tight end, the latter spot in which Solder has been charted on the field for 102 plays.

Solder figures to draw some added attention this week, as the Patriots' trip to Denver represents a homecoming for him. He grew up in Buena Vista and played in college at Colorado.

Solder downplayed his return home.

"It's just about the game for me," he said, later adding that he might have been a Broncos fan growing up but there is no doubt he's a Patriots fan this week.

Asked about the possibility of hitting a "rookie wall" at this point of the year, Solder said, "I think it's a long season. I've been working to improve every week. I just take it week by week and that's really helped me. It's gone quickly."
