



Rookie Nate Solder ready to tackle first postseason

By Karen Guregian | Wednesday, January 4, 2012 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | **N.E. Patriots**

FOXBORO — Many rookies are eased into action during their first seasons. That's not unusual, even for a first-round draft pick. Nate Solder's rookie campaign with the **Patriots** [[team stats](#)], however, was more like being put on speed dial.

Miami's Cameron Wake, Kansas City's Tamba Hali, Indianapolis' Robert Mathis, Philadelphia's Jason Babin. Those are just some of the premier pass rushers Solder was asked to keep away from quarterback **Tom Brady** [[stats](#)].

Talk about trial by fire, Solder was rushed into duty thanks to the injury woes of starting right tackle Sebastian Vollmer. Solder has also spent some time at left tackle filling in for **Matt Light** [[stats](#)] while he nursed an injured ankle.

For the most part, Solder has held his own. Sure, he's been beaten here and there, and gotten Brady creamed a few times. That had to be expected given he was essentially rushed into duty. But Solder has been pretty good not only at tackle, but also as a third tight end.

And now he's preparing for his first postseason, likely as a starter if Vollmer continues to be hobbled with back and foot problems.

"I had no idea it was going to end up like this. It's been a lot of work up to this point," Solder said. "But I'm so happy we're here. It's awesome. It's a great opportunity."

There were doubts he could learn the ropes so quickly. With longtime offensive line coach Dante Scarnecchia cracking the whip, Solder has managed to get by just fine.

Did he envision being thrown into the fire early and emerging still standing?

"I'm doing my best," Solder said, laughing at the question. "I'm still learning every day. I'm still a rookie. There's still so much to learn and everything. I'm just going through the paces, getting better."

The Patriots must have had a crystal ball regarding their numerous injuries on the offensive line. The selection of Solder at No. 17 in the first round last April was not only wise for the future, but has really helped them in the present.

When asked which of the top pass rushers that he's faced was the toughest, Solder naturally gave a politically correct answer.

"I think it's just every week, there's someone really good you've got to be ready for," the Colorado product said. "It's so much unlike college, where every three weeks you'll have a tough opponent. There's so many good players in the NFL, I think it's just every week, there have been a lot of tough opponents."

In the grand scheme of things, that can either be a positive in a young player's development, or it can be a crushing reality. In Solder's case, it's helped him grow and mature quickly.

"Yeah, it's always a challenge," he said. "It's always exciting, it's always fun."

The other element Solder has dealt with is hitting the rookie wall. He never played this many games in college and now he's headed for at least one, and perhaps three more in the postseason.

"I was thinking about that earlier today," Solder said. "We had a 2-10 season my freshman year in college, and that was far longer of a season than this. At least, it felt far longer."

Solder began chuckling at that miserable thought.

He's been aided by the veterans on the line. Light, Brian Waters and **Logan Mankins** [[stats](#)] have been through a few of these rodeos.

"All these veteran guys, they've been great at teaching me how it is," Solder said. "It's exciting. The excitement has stayed high the entire year."

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