

Chauncey Billups talks rehab, won't return to play for the Nuggets

By Christopher Dempsey The Denver Post The Denver Post

Posted:

DenverPost.com

Lately, Chauncey Billups bounces between Denver and Los Angeles, handling business in his hometown while continuing to recover from Achilles tendon surgery in the City of Angels.

Both are important.

Next week he'll be back in Denver for his annual basketball camp, which starts Monday, an affair that features an appearance by Los Angeles Clippers guard Chris Paul. Billups says he'll be able to move around and interact with the kids at the camp, and that's key.

That's because Billups wants his 15-season NBA career to continue, and that can take place only if he is signed by a team this summer. Prospective suitors will feel more comfortable with their potential investment if Billups shows he's fully healthy after rupturing his left Achilles tendon in February in a game against Orlando.

Calling the rehab process "a tough road," Billups made it clear he's ahead of schedule and expects to be ready when NBA training camps open in October.

"I'm excelling at an unbelievable level," said Billups in a phone interview. "I'm far ahead of schedule. It's going great; I can't complain at all. I don't know percentage-wise, but I'm functional now. I can move around good. I can't go run and jump, but I can be in the gym and shoot. I can't go side to side like I would like. But I'm far ahead of schedule, and it's going good."

"I plan on being ready by training camp. I heard all of these reports that (I'll) be back by January (2013) and all of that. I'm like, nah, that's the regular dude that would have gotten hurt, not me. I'm planning on playing all 82 games."

It was a whirlwind 2011-12 season for Billups, who finished the previous season with the New York Knicks after being included in the Nuggets-Knicks deal that sent Carmelo Anthony to New York. Instead of paying Billups the \$14.2 million he was owed in the last year of his contract and having that count against their salary cap, the Knicks waived Billups using the amnesty clause, part of the new collective bargaining agreement.

The Clippers then scooped up Billups with a waiver auction bid of just more than \$2 million, adding the former George Washington High School and CU star to a talented mix of players on that roster. And just as he was settling into his new surroundings, Billups' season ended Feb. 7.

Now, the five-time all-star is an unrestricted free agent. It will be Billups' first true free-agency process in a whopping 10 years, going back to when Detroit signed him in 2002 after he toiled for two seasons with the Timberwolves. He was traded to the Nuggets in 2008 and then from the Nuggets to the Knicks in 2011.

Billups didn't rule out a return to the Clippers, but is clearly eager to see what awaits him when the free-agency period starts in July.

"I liked Clipperland. I liked the movement," Billups said. "I thought before I got hurt we really had fun and were playing great. I liked it a lot, but of course I would be crazy not to entertain any other offers that I might have. That's the fun of being a free agent."

And though his heart is in Denver, there will be no return to the Nuggets, a team that has traded him twice already in his career.

"I'll say this: Me and (team president) Josh (Kroenke) are cool," Billups said. "I'm good with everybody. But I can't see me, basketball-wise, playing in Denver again. What do you want me to do? They traded me two times. Want me to give them a third opportunity? My years there were great. We accomplished some great things. And they are looking good. ... I had some great years there, and I'm always going to live there, but I can't see that."

With career averages of 15.5 points and 5.5 assists, Billups isn't looking to retire anytime soon.

"Never. Never, never," he said. "I never even thought that. It was funny, because I went down and got hurt, and before I even made it to the locker room people were talking about (me being) done. I'm like, 'Y'all serious?' But no, never."

Christopher Dempsey: 303-954-1279 or cdempsey@denverpost.com