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Harrison signs extension with Stamps

By IAN BUSBY, QMI Agency

CALGARY - Through the first nine games of the CFL season, the Calgary Stampeders had uncertainty at the left-tackle position.

The return of Edwin Harrison changed that in one week, and now the 26-year-old plans on holding the spot for the foreseeable future.

Although Harrison could have tested free agency this off-season, just like Ben Archibald this year, the second-year Stampeders lineman has found a home in Calgary. He has inked a contract extension, keeping him with the team through the 2014 campaign.

"Stability is huge, especially for an offensive lineman," said Harrison, who spent parts of two season with the Kansas City Chiefs before coming to Calgary.

"I've enjoyed my time here, and I really enjoy the team. I'm happy and grateful to be here.

"Last year, I was getting used to being in Canada. I wanted to make sure this was a place I wanted to be. Last year was my best time playing football that I've had in quite some time. We had a great team, and we did a lot of great things."

The Stamps suffered a blow before training camp started when Harrison tore a pectoral muscle. The sophomore was put on a nine-game injured list while doing his rehab, and he debuted last Friday in Edmonton.

It just so happened to coincide with a rejuvenated rushing attack from the Stamps, who had struggled in that department the previous few weeks.

Gerald Cadogan started the season at left tackle, but he was recently replaced by rookie Tony Washington, who struggled on Labour Day against the Eskimos, taking three penalties and blowing coverage on a crucial forced fumble.

Last week, while Harrison took over at his position, the Stamps also switched centres from Tim O'Neill to Jon Gott. As the Stamps get ready to face the B.C. Lions Saturday, they are keeping the same five guys as the starting offensive line for the first time in a month. Cadogan was released with Harrison back.

As last season's team nominee for top rookie, having Harrison back meant there was a presence on the offensive line again.

"Ed's done an admirable job since he's been here," said Stamps quarterback Henry Burris. "He was a cornerstone at right tackle for us, but he was a left-tackle waiting to happen.

"Ben made the move, and Ed was ready to make that transition. He's as sound as can be but one thing he brings is leadership. When he speaks, the offensive line listens."

Heading into this off-season, the Stamps didn't make a free-agent offer to Archibald, despite the fact he won the CFL's most outstanding lineman award in 2010, and he signed with the Lions.

Believing Harrison would make the transition over to left tackle, the Stamps were comfortable with who they had, as fellow import Stanley Bryant was penciled in at right tackle.

Spending a year with Archibald, Harrison tried to model his game after the Lions' new left tackle.

"He's not only a great player but a great person, a great family man," Harrison said. "Anybody could learn a whole lot from Ben, not only on the football field but off, as well.

"He comes to work every day. He's a true professional. There's nothing more to say than that. Ben always comes to work."

Being out for three months meant that Harrison still needs to work on his conditioning, and head coach John Hufnagel said as much this week.

Harrison can't disagree with that statement, but he's pleased with the comeback so far.

"It's hard to simulate game speed at practice," Harrison said. "You don't want to get any of your own guys hurt. It's a matter of getting used to the game and getting up to the same speed as everyone else.

"It's coming every day. I'm feeling more and more comfortable."