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Ravens sign Pro Bowl center Andre Gurode to one-year deal

Signing of former Cowboys lineman raises questions about health of Matt Birk

By [Jamison Hensley](#), The Baltimore Sun

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The Ravens reached a one-year agreement Sunday with five-time Pro Bowl center Andre Gurode, increasing questions about Matt Birk's availability for the season opener against the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Birk, the Ravens' starting center for the past two seasons, didn't play this preseason after having knee surgery Aug. 3. He didn't participate in the team's only practice since the preseason finale.

Gurode, 33, is the best insurance policy the Ravens could have gotten at center. The 6-foot-4, 318-pound lineman was rated as the 57th-best player in the NFL Network's Top 100 poll this year and has gone to the past five Pro Bowls for the Cowboys, who released him after they failed to restructure his contract.

His deal, which has a maximum value of \$3 million, according to ESPN, is contingent on him passing a physical.

"We just got better as a team," Ravens general manager Ozzie Newsome said in a news release. "To have a successful season, you have to have quality depth across the board. We just added great depth to the interior of our offensive line with Andre."

Gurode has had to deal with injury issues, too, after having knee surgery in June. He had missed three weeks with a knee injury but returned two weeks ago for Dallas.

After playing in the Cowboys' third preseason game, Gurode practiced all week but was forced to sit out the preseason finale because Dallas didn't want him to get hurt while it tried to trade him. The Cowboys saved \$5.5 million against the salary cap by cutting Gurode.

He visited the Seattle Seahawks, Detroit Lions and the New England Patriots before agreeing to terms with the Ravens.

Considered to be very durable, Gurode started every game the past three seasons and all but two over the past five years.

Gurode will long be remembered for getting stomped in the face by volatile defensive tackle Albert Haynesworth in 2006. He needed 30 stitches.

The Ravens have been shaping their offensive line throughout the summer. They added veteran left tackle Bryant McKinnie on Aug. 24, which moved Michael Oher to the right side.

This is the Ravens' second attempt this year to add a veteran center. The Ravens reached an agreement with Casey Rabach but he failed his physical on Aug. 3.

For the entire preseason, the Ravens' starting center has been Bryan Mattison, a converted defensive lineman and 2010 practice squad player who is the son of former Ravens defensive coordinator Greg Mattison.

Birk said last week that he planned to start against the Steelers barring any setback. He returned to practice last weekend and

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participated in drills leading up to the preseason finale, but he didn't play in Atlanta.

He hasn't missed a game since 2005.

"Like I said, it feels good now," Birk said Aug. 29. "But who knows what is going to happen? It's a long season. A lot of things happen. Hopefully, the worst is behind me."

So, the Ravens are looking to team a five-time Pro Bowl center in Gurode with a former six-time Pro Bowl center in Birk.

Birk didn't return a phone message from The Baltimore Sun on Sunday.

When Gurode signs his contract, the Ravens will have to make a roster move to make a spot on the 53-man roster.

jamison.hensley@baltsun.com

twitter.com/jamisonhensley

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