

Nate Solder to protect Tom Brady's blind side in second year From rook to king

By Tom Layman | Monday, August 6, 2012 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | **N.E. Patriots**



Photo by Kelvin Ma



FOXBORO — Nate Solder swears his approach heading into training camp this season hasn't changed much from his rookie year.

In fact, the second-year left tackle out of the University of Colorado doesn't really think that too many situations he's faced to this point in training camp are that much different at all.

"There are some things, I know where the locker room is, that helps," Solder said with a wry smile. "There are definitely some things that I can build off of from last year and I'm happy about that."

From the **Patriots** [\[team stats\]](#) perspective, a big change in the way things are done at the left tackle position wouldn't be a good thing for an offensive line that is in flux at the moment.

Matt Light won three Super Bowls and started 153 games in his 11 seasons in a Patriots uniform with three Pro Bowls and an All-Pro nod in 2007 before calling it a career before this season began.

Solder, who started 13 games in the regular season and three postseason games last year, is going to have to slide into the role of protecting **Tom Brady [stats]**'s blind side for the first time in 2012. The 24-year-old has basically been handed the keys to the position in camp since he has been the only constant on an ever-changing offensive line that is lacking veterans **Logan Mankins [stats]**, Brian Waters, Sebastian Vollmer and just-retired Robert Gallery.

Solder knows that the reps in practice will only make the transition to full-time left tackle that much smoother.

"I think confidence comes from hard work and improving and getting better," Solder said. "That's what we are all working at here."

Solder is a soft-spoken guy, and you wouldn't expect that coming from a 6-foot-8, 320-pound man. But this camp he's shown a little bit of a mean streak that some of the better tackles in NFL history have had to possess to get their point across to defensive players. He has been in several brushes with his defensive mates so far, highlighted by the much talked about scrum with linebacker Brandon Spikes last week.

Solder was asked if he was trying to prove to his teammates and coaching staff that he could show a little of that feistiness on the field.

"I think toughness is certainly a part of offensive line play," he said, "and being a good football player."

But in terms of the fighting, Solder said he was ready to put that behind him and focus on hitting somebody not wearing a Patriots uniform.

"That's behind us," he said. "We are moving on. We are playing. We are getting better."

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Nate Solder says competition with Chandler Jones, others has been 'awesome'

Left tackle **Nate Solder** and defensive end **Chandler Jones** — the Patriots' first picks in each of the last two drafts — have had some great battles through the first week and a half of training camp. Jones has seemingly gotten the better of Solder during one-on-ones, but Solder has done a solid job during 11-on-11s.

"It certainly makes you better," Solder said. "All these guys do. That's my one goal is to get better, so it's awesome."

Solder then artfully dodged a question about the challenge of lining up opposite of Jones.

"I won't talk about specifics about Chandler. But I have to say all the defensive ends that go against us is great competition," Solder said. "Really, the harder it is (at practice) then the better it is to get ready for the season."



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StarTribune

Irwin's game finally takes flight

Article by: BRIAN STENSAAS
Star Tribune
August 5, 2012 - 10:52 PM

It turns out Hale Irwin still has some game left in the tank.

The three-time 3M Championship winner is in the midst of a trying year on the Champions Tour, with four top-25 finishes in 13 events.

He was among the first to tee off Sunday, following back-to-back 2-over-par 74s to start this year's 3M Championship.

"After Friday," Irwin joked, "I was looking for the airport."

He decided to stay. It was worth the wait.

Irwin, 67, fired a 7-under-par 65 in the final round at TPC Twin Cities in Blaine, the first time in his career he has shot below his age. He's matched his age five times.

"So we got a history lesson today, huh?" said Irwin, a three-time U.S. Open champion. "Boy, there were some fireworks. It was a really good round. Found a few things with the putter."

His iron play wasn't too shabby, either.

Using a 6-iron, Irwin holed his second shot from 171 yards on the difficult par-4 ninth hole. It's the first eagle made on No. 9 since the tournament moved from Bunker Hills to the TPC course 12 years ago.

"It's a damn hard hole," said Irwin, who made double bogey there in Round 1 and bogey on Saturday. "It's kind of hard to pull the right club because the wind can carry you or push it down. Kind of a guess. I don't think any of the players are going to feel confident about the club selection."

He guessed right Sunday, and went on to birdie six consecutive holes on the back nine.

The run, which tied David Peoples' season-best streak on the Champions Tour and most ever in the 3M, included a 30-foot putt on No. 16. He also rolled in two putts from 15 feet.

A hiccup bogey on the 18th came after he plopped his second shot into the water, trying to play it safe.

"Go for the layup, and lay it up in the water," Irwin said. "That's a synopsis of my game right now. It's keeping those really good scores from emerging."

Irwin wrapped up his historic day just as the overnight leaders were set to tee off. A winner in the event in 1997, '99 and 2002, Irwin has finished in the top 10 only twice since his last victory in Minnesota.

His 17 consecutive starts are the most in the 20-year history of the event.

"Not many out at 7:40 a.m. watching, but I do kind of feel like a second cousin here," said Irwin, who designed the Jewel Golf Club layout in Lake City. "And why I keep coming back is the people."



Few were watching as Hale Irwin, the three-time winner of the 3M Championship, went out in style with a closing 65.

Carlos Osorio, Associated Press

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Irwin shoots under his age in final round of 3M Championship

August 5, 2012 - 1:40 PM

Just as Sunday's final group of leaders teed off Sunday in the 3M Championship, a three-time past champion finished with a bogey on No. 18.

But what a round it was for 67-year-old Hale Irwin.

Playing in the day's third group out after consecutive rounds of 2-over-par 74 to start the tournament, Irwin turned in a 65 on Sunday, the first time in his career he has shot under his age. He's shot his age six times.

Irwin jarred a 171-yard 6-iron shot on No. 9 for an eagle during his round, the first eagle ever on the ninth at TPC Twin Cities in Blaine during the annual Champions Tour event.

"It's a damn hard hole," Irwin said.

After the eagle, Irwin went on to birdie six consecutive holes on the back nine -- matching Day 2 leader David Peoples' Champions Tour and 3M Championship record-tying marks from Saturday -- before the hiccup on the 18th.

"Got a history lesson here today, huh?" Irwin said. "Kind of a bonehead move there at the end, but there were some fireworks."

Irwin has played 17 consecutive 3M Championships, winning in 1997, '99 and 2002.

At the top of the leader board Sunday, second-round leader Peoples birdied two of his first three holes to get to 16 under par and take a four-shot lead over Eduardo Romero.

Jeff Sluman, Olin Browne, Craig Stadler and Joel Edwards were at 11 under as of 1 p.m.

BRIAN STENSAAS

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Crosby wants extra practice inside renovated Lambeau

Mason Crosby plans to kick inside Lambeau Field at least a couple times before the Green Bay Packers play their exhibition home opener on Aug. 16 at the newly renovated stadium.

The Packers are adding a section of seats at the top of the stadium in the south end zone and already have put in a new scoreboard and replay screen the new section, which likely has altered the swirling wind patterns in Lambeau.

Crosby kicked in the renovated stadium for the first time at the Family Night scrimmage last week. He made his first six attempts, all from 40 yards or shorter, but then missed five of his final eight attempts, all of which were from 45 yards or more. That included going 2-for-6 on kicks that ranged from 53 yards to 65 yards.

"It's not something I'm going to overthink," Crosby said. "We play in so many different places and different wind conditions. It's going to be a little different, but it's one of those things where you go through warm-ups, go through the normal pregame process, and figure it out each day you go out."

Crosby's longest make on Family Night was from 60 yards during a period in which he

tried several ultra-long field goals. His missed included from 60, 62 and 65 yards.

"As I got further back, the wind did a little bit more, just how the air moved in there," Crosby said. "There were a couple where I thought I hit a good ball and I had them undulate, moving back and forth, which was kind of different to see, because I've been hitting the ball very solid and really straight. That was a little different. It could have been the night, it could have been the way the ball came off my foot. We'll evaluate as we move forward. I'm not going to over read into it. I'm just going to make sure I go out there every time I'm on the field, pregame or if we get to go and practice on there, just take it how I did before that addition was put on."

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Crosby gets a kick out of new construction

Aug 06, 2012 -- 5:23pm



Photo/Associated Press via ESPN.com

GREEN BAY – An avid golfer, Mason Crosby saw last Friday night's annual Family Night Scrimmage as the kicking equivalent of a trip to the driving range or practice putting green.

With the new \$143 million expansion of Lambeau Field's south end zone well underway, the Green Bay Packers kicker was anxious to get a game-like opportunity to see how the new construction would affect his field-goal attempts, particularly those from long distance.

So even though he, punter/holder Tim Masthay and long-snapper Brett Goode have been working off-and-on inside Lambeau for the past few months – whenever construction allowed – Crosby took the opportunity to attempt a few additional long kicks. While the

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scrimmage ended his streak of kicks in training camp without a miss, he said Monday it was well worth the experimentation.

"It was good to get out there and get a feel for the new look of it. The stadium feels completely different, being closed off on that side," Crosby said. "For five years now, I've been used to how it is and learning all the nuances. It wasn't a real windy night the other night. We'll get out there as the conditions change. If there are some windy days, we'll come up to the stadium and hit some balls and see how it's flying. We'll get more comfortable with it, visually and with the wind conditions."

Crosby, who has his best NFL season last year as he made 24 of 28 field-goal attempts, including 7 of 9 at Lambeau Field, said the effects of the new construction were most noticeable on longer kicks. That makes sense, since the ball is obviously in the air longer.

"I do think outside of 40, 45 yards, it seemed like the conditions were a little bit different than they were before (the construction) as far as the ball flight," Crosby said. "It's something I'll look at. I might have hit some not as well as I wanted to, so it might have been that, but at the same time, you evaluate every kick. That's what the process is here in training camp, especially."

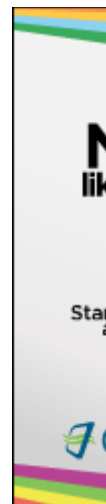
"The one positive thing is the ball was flying well in there. I was happy with that. Both directions, I was getting optimal distance. That could be a benefit, where it might block some of that wind coming from the south (or) it might not be as strong in there. I was messing with some things. I was seeing what the ball flight was doing the other night. I was kind of playing it."

To that end, Crosby said he'll continue to go into Lambeau to test conditions. He also said his leg, which was sore after the extra kicks, has rebounded fine.

"I'm not worried about that at all. If anything, just the feel in that stadium with that new addition, I think it's going to build our homefield advantage so much more," Crosby said. "Even though it was a scrimmage, the noise in there, the new sound system, the screens, just the energy that that brought is really going to be good for our homefield (advantage)."

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Monday, August 6, 2012

Patriots' Nate Solder is soldiering on

By James Walker

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. -- Offensive linemen are dropping like flies around [New England Patriots](#) left tackle [Nate Solder](#).

Veteran free agent [Robert Gallery](#) retired over the weekend. So did [Matt Light](#). Pro Bowl guard [Logan Mankins](#) (knee) is on the physically unable to perform list, and fellow guard [Brian Waters](#)' playing status is still to be determined. Right tackle [Sebastian Vollmer](#) also is dealing with a back injury, leaving Solder as one of the few starting and healthy linemen from February's Super Bowl team.

"I think it's a team effort, and I'm just one of the parts to that," Solder said Monday after practice. "It takes all five of the O-lineman. It takes all of the wide receivers and everyone working together. We're going to play whoever is here, and whatever happens, we're going to be here working hard."

Solder entered the offseason as a young, budding left tackle. Now, he's being relied upon in training camp as though he's one of the veterans.

Solder has one of the most important responsibilities on the team protecting quarterback [Tom Brady](#)'s blind side. But you wouldn't know it from Solder's mentality. He is calm and low key. Solder says he's taken this important second season day by day, which is exactly how the Patriots like their players to think.



Nate Solder is being counted on to take a bigger role this season.

All indications are that Solder has been the most consistent lineman in training camp. Part of it is due to injuries to veterans. But the second-year tackle also is meeting -- and perhaps exceeding -- expectations as a 2011 first-round pick.

"We thought Nate was a good football player when we drafted him," Patriots director of player personnel Nick Caserio said. "He's come in and had a decent first year. And the most important thing with any player is you try to improve on a day-to-day basis and become a more consistent player."

Solder isn't backing down in training camp. He got into a big scuffle in practice last week with Patriots linebacker [Brandon Spikes](#). When we asked about it Monday, Solder chuckled and said, "We're moving on."

Solder has a lot to look forward to. It began the day Light announced his retirement. That catapulted Solder into the starting left tackle role full time in just his second season. The Patriots are legitimate Super Bowl contenders and Solder has a big responsibility in that.

"My reaction [to Light retiring] was it's time for me to get better and work harder," Solder said. "I want to contribute to this team anyway I can. I feel blessed with my opportunities here and it's worked out phenomenally. But it's up to me to really step up and play well."