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Chauncey Billups goes through drills

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PLAYA VISTA, Calif. -- [Los Angeles Clippers](#) guard [Chauncey Billups](#) didn't anticipate he would be ready to return to the court until November when training camp started last week. But Billups participated in contact drills Thursday for the first time since he had season-ending surgery to repair a torn left Achilles tendon in February.



Billups

"Chauncey practiced a little bit more today, which was good," Clippers coach Vinny Del Negro said. "He actually went through a couple of contact drills that we had. Not long, but more than in the past."

Billups, who this summer had hoped to be ready by opening night, is still a long shot to start on Oct. 31, when the Clippers open the season against the [Memphis Grizzlies](#). But he could be back in the starting lineup soon after if he doesn't have any setbacks.

"He feels good," Del Negro said. "He's moving good. You can be in condition but the body contact and the up and down things, he's got to get in shape, but he's got plenty of time. As long as he keeps on, not having any setbacks and keeps on working, as he's been doing, he's going to be in good shape."

More On The Clippers



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Billups has been working on the side during camp with [Chris Paul](#), who underwent surgery to repair a torn ligament in his right thumb on Aug. 21. Paul said he's still on pace to start at least one preseason game before the season opener.

"I'm pretty close," Paul said. "The trainers let me know what the protocol is every day."

While he has been unable to participate in contact drills, Paul said working out with Billups has made going through practices easier for him.

"It makes it a lot easier because we both can't do any live action," Paul said. "We do 5-on-0 and all that different type stuff. It makes it a lot easier on me knowing I can shoot with him and work out with him."

Chauncey Billups expects 'high-spirited' rivalry in

Bill Ingram, Hoopsworld.com

7:37PM EST October 5, 2012 - Last season, for the first time ever, we saw the Clippers threaten to overshadow the Los Angeles Lakers in Los Angeles.

The addition of Chris Paul gave Blake Griffin and company an elite floor leader to usher in a new era of playoff basketball. It's a reason to believe in their team as possible contenders.

They fell short of that goal in postseason play, but Chauncey Billups believes the franchise he adopted put itself in the division as an arena rival.

PHOTOS: [Scenes from NBA training camps \(http://www.usatoday.com/picture-gallery/sports/nba/2012/10/03/scenes-from-clippers-training-camps/1611825/\)](http://www.usatoday.com/picture-gallery/sports/nba/2012/10/03/scenes-from-clippers-training-camps/1611825/)

"I think last year we made a huge step in even trying to have a rivalry with that team," Billups said. "Of course, over time history doesn't tell you that, but expectations of talent, upgrades around here. It's a lot different around here now. Last year we had some games with them, some high-spirited games with them, and I expect the same thing this year."

Though the Clippers lost in the second round last season, Billups believes the team grew up a lot by going through a tough series with the Memphis Grizzlies and even through losing to the San Antonio Spurs.

"I thought the Memphis series, for our team, our young guys grew up a lot that series, to be honest with you," said Billups. "It was a 3-2 situation on the road and it could have gone either way. We could have lost that series, but the guys, man, and the pressure, the guys showed really impressed me. I think that it surprised some of our guys too, and it was just great. I thought it was a lot. Then you go play a team like San Antonio, and they basically ran through us, man, and I think it all had to do with, not the detailed things that cause a big deal in a playoff series that we never knew about as a team."

"Obviously, it showed up in a big way in that San Antonio series, and that'll be some of the things that myself, and I'm sure the team, about this day forward. It's the small things, slipping throughout the season, that when you're playing games and winning, that's that great of a win because you just got over on athletic talent as opposed to playing good basketball. Those are the things that get you deep later in series."

Billups suffered a torn left Achilles' tendon last season and missed the majority of the lockout-shortened campaign. He's on his way to a trip to China with the team, but he has been out doing as much as he can during the training camp process.

Chauncey Billups expects 'high-spirited' rivalry in L.A.



about with the guys, but I'm not released yet to play five-on-five," said Billups. "We'll see when the guys will be good for me. I'm in shape, and feel good and everything, but I'm not quite in basketball shape yet. I don't want to take your time, and I'm not really in a rush to be honest with you. I listen to my body, and I'll be back out there."

ceeding as expected, but it doesn't change the disappointment of missing out on so much while injured.

(Photo: Robert Hanashiro, USA

TODAY)

"The toughest part is you're missing out, you're losing the season," said Billups. "Missing out on something you've worked for at the Olympics, that was tough. Physically, you get down, but injuries, quite frankly, are really a part of the game. There really isn't an injury like that. But the Achilles, in particular, fifteen to twenty years ago, this particular area was a death sentence as far as basketball goes. Obviously times have changed now. I'm going to try to let people know that times have changed and you can get back to work after an injury, but it does, it takes time, it takes a lot of time."

The fact that the Clippers are an even deeper team this season, particularly with Lamar Odom and Jamal Crawford joining, gives him the peace of mind to take his time and really get his body right before he returns.

"Actually, the depth that we have now, it gives me a little sense of relief," said Billups. "It lets me take my time and come back because we have such great depth, guys that can get in there and do the job, so that gives me a lot of relief."

It is also his team's depth that gives Billups a great deal of confidence in the Clippers heading into the 2012-13 season.

"This is going to be the deepest team I've ever played for," said Billups. "As far as being deep all the way throughout, it's not just this team, but the league. But as you know, talent doesn't always — that's not it. You got to put it together. You got to take time. You also have to have more importantly than that, guys got to accept their roles. I think we have a great locker room, great guys, great experience. We have a really great route, now we just got to let things take their course a little bit, let things kind of happen. Hopefully, they'll have a great season."

The Lakers may have upped the ante with the acquisitions of Steve Nash and Dwight Howard, but the Clippers look to be the team to watch this season, as well. Most pundits will have a hard time seeing the Clippers as the best team in Los Angeles, let alone the Western Conference, but counting the Clippers out would be a huge mistake. Los Angeles' *other* team is loaded and ready to run.

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