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**Helene Elliott**

## **Clippers guard Chauncey Billups is looking like a rebounder**

**The veteran is on the court and says he's 'far ahead of schedule' in returning from Achilles' tendon injury — great news for a team that had a busy off-season.**

Helene Elliott

8:13 PM PDT, September 6, 2012

Soon, perhaps sooner than anyone dared hope, Chauncey Billups will regain his game and a piece of his identity.

The man who was initially reluctant to join the Clippers after they won his rights in an amnesty waiver auction last December can't wait to rejoin a team he liked enough to re-sign with for another year. Expected to need at least eight months' healing time after tearing his left Achilles' tendon on Feb. 6, the veteran guard is back on the court, though he hasn't played five-on-five yet and wouldn't declare a target for his return.

"When my body feels right, that's when I'll be back," he said. "That being said, I'm far ahead of schedule."

"It's not even like I had a summer. I've been on the whole time, doing rehabbing and other work every day. I'm looking forward to getting back to playing and being with the guys and resuming my normal life as a player."

Billups became the Clippers' glue in his 20 starts before his injury, adding poise and experience to the 14.9 points, 2.5 rebounds and 4.0 assists he averaged over 30.4 minutes. He was a leader on the court and in the locker room, providing guidance to Chris Paul and a voice of knowledge for Blake Griffin, DeAndre Jordan and Eric Bledsoe.

Even after his Feb. 15 surgery left him to clomp around in a protective boot, he dispensed advice and analysis from a seat near the bench.

"He has very good insight, great experience and he's been successful at every level," Coach Vinny Del Negro said. "Some of our younger players, by the way he approaches them and gets things across, it's very easy for them to accept and listen to."

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Billups stayed in Los Angeles most of the summer to work out with teammates and coaches, pushing himself when it felt right and easing up when necessary.

"I never one time thought I wouldn't come back or had doubts that I would come back because I knew was going to do everything I could," said Billups, who will turn 36 on Sept. 25, four days before the Clippers open training camp.

"Twenty years ago this injury was like a death sentence. The way the world of technology is now, I knew there were a lot of guys that made it back from this injury and I was going to be the next one."

Del Negro said he was pleasantly surprised when he first saw Billups on the court 10 days ago.

"He was cutting and shooting jump shots and getting some elevation off his shot. And crossing over and taking step-back shots, which is one of his favorite moves," Del Negro said. "He still doesn't have that pop back but he's not supposed to right now. I was just pleased to see his movement overall, which was good."

That's great news for the Clippers in an off-season that has generated reason for optimism — and how many times in previous summers could that be said without provoking laughter?

Billups said that adding guard Jamal Crawford and forwards Lamar Odom and Grant Hill enhances prospects that were elevated by the team's seven-game playoff series win at Memphis. It's natural to measure the Clippers' moves against the Lakers', but Billups isn't applying that standard.

He called Dwight Howard the best center in the league, praised Kobe Bryant and future Hall of Famer Steve Nash and said the Lakers had "a wonderful summer. You can't deny that." Still, Billups said the Clippers are looking beyond their next-locker-room neighbors in setting their goals.

"When you're trying to compare and get better — and we want to try and win the Western Conference and have a chance to play for the whole thing — you compare yourself to the Western Conference champ, and that's not the Lakers," he said.

"They had a great summer and I'm sure their expectations will be great as well. But we don't compare ourselves to them. We try to go after the big fellas."

Bold? Sure. And the Lakers can throw some championship banners into any argument. But watching Billups and the Clippers chase those "big fellas" promises to make this a memorable season for both of Staples Center's NBA tenants.

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## PATRIOTS BLOG

### Solder ready for his new job

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September 7, 2012 11:58 am

By Paul Kenyon

Nate Solder knows that he will be under the microscope Sunday when the Patriots visit

“I’m certainly excited to play,” the Patriots new left tackle said Friday before heading o

Solder takes over protecting Tom Brady’s blind side. Matt Light, who held that job for t  
other things, it is a change in personality at that position. Light was one of the team’s pr  
everyone know when he was around. Solder is much quieter, much more serious.

The team’s first-round draft choice in 2011, Solder was candid in speaking about how h  
new job. He played a lot at right tackle last year when Sebastian Vollmer missed time b

“I’ve certainly improved on some things and I have more to improve on,” he said. “My  
bit. Understanding the schemes better, understanding the system better all kind of helps.

He will be part of a new line that also is expected to include Ryan Wendell at center an

“We certainly all have to be working together, kind of see things through the same eye: part of what we do,” he said. “A lot of times that just comes down to being clear with t what you see, having good film study, understanding what you see and being able to re

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