

Late signee Gurode taking nothing for granted

Vic Tafur

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One would think that a free-agent offensive lineman with five Pro Bowls under his big belt would be waiting for a team like the Raiders to call. And that when they did, he would sign and plan on starting before the ink dried.

Andre Gurode swears that is not the case.

"I was just looking to compete and make the team," said Gurode, who signed three weeks ago. "There were no promises. I didn't look at the depth chart or anything."

Gurode has played most of his career at center, and some thought Stefen Wisniewski might be moving back to guard. But Raiders coach Dennis Allen said that wouldn't happen, and this week he inserted Gurode at right guard and gave ineffective Mike Brisiel a chance to rest.

Gurode has looked good, but Allen says Brisiel, 30, who has a sore knee, is still in his plans.

"I want to make sure that he's ready to go," Allen said. "Sixteen games is a long season, and he's a veteran, an older player."

Gurode, 35, can relate. He is coming off two knee surgeries and after starting only five games for the Ravens in 2011, didn't play a game in 2012 despite spending two weeks on the Bears' active roster.

Gurode said he feels great now and, besides going to the gym, went to church a lot waiting for a team to call.

"Because your faith gets tested," he said.

Allen's patience has been tested with all the minor injuries at training camp, and Gurode and free-agent signee Alex Barron have been lifesavers. On Tuesday, with Brisiel, left tackle Jared Veldheer and rookie tackle Menelik Watson hurt, Gurode was at right guard and Barron at left tackle.

"Those are guys that we didn't anticipate when we started training camp, and I think those guys have come on and given us a little bit more depth at that position," Allen said. "Obviously we're still waiting on Menelik Watson, and I think, once we get him back out here, we're going to have some depth on the O-line."

Allen said he had no idea when Watson would return after he tried to come back last week and reinjured his calf. Veldheer was getting his second MRI exam on a sore triceps Tuesday.

The Raiders want their linemen to be versatile, and starting right tackle Khalif Barnes could move to guard and compete with Gurode, Brisiel, Lucas Nix and Tony Bergstrom when Veldheer returns.

As for Gurode, he played guard for 2 1/2 of his nine seasons with the Dallas Cowboys. He is great for depth - if he gets beaten out for a starting job.

"I'm not just a guy who wants to come in here and occupy a spot," he said. "I want to come in and compete and make my presence known."

The 6-foot-4, 320-pound Gurode says he feels better than he did three years ago and credits Brisiel for helping him when the offensive line watches film.

"I think Andre's done fairly well," Allen said. "It was a position that we hadn't worked him a whole lot at early in training camp. Having a guy like him - who can play guard for us, that can play center for you, that's a huge upside."

Meanwhile, Nix and defensive end Lamarr Houston returned to practice after being out with minor injuries.

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