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Photo/ Getty Images

David Bakhtiari's play in the first three practices in pads has put him in the competition for a starting job.

Bakhtiari ready for takeoff

By JASON WILDE

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GREEN BAY – David Bakhtiari had his flight all booked. The Green Bay Packers rookie tackle had a commercial airline ticket through the team, one that would have taken him from Southern California to Green Bay – not direct, of course – for his first NFL training camp.

Then the guy he'd been working out with the past few weeks -- linebacker Clay Matthews -- offered an alternative.

"He had gotten (the private jet) and he was nice enough to offer me a ride instead of riding by himself," said Bakhtiari, who'd posted a photo from his flight on his Twitter account. "It was very nice of him."

Well, Bakhtiari had better make sure his seat belt is securely fastened, because he's starting an ascent on the Packers' offensive line depth chart, too.

After Bakhtiari impressed the coaches with three consecutive standout practices in pads, Packers coach Mike McCarthy said Wednesday that he's earned himself more opportunities. So when Bakhtiari reports for practice on Thursday morning, he can plan on his snaps going up.

"I think David's off to an excellent start, as far as the reps with the way we're utilizing him. I think he's someone who is worthy of more reps in furthering the competition along the offensive line," McCarthy said. "He's clearly one of the guys that has made a step in the padded work. So I'm very pleased with what he's done so far."

To this point, Bakhtiari has been working at left tackle with the No. 2 offensive line behind Bryan Bulaga, and working with the No. 3 offensive line at right tackle behind Marshall Newhouse and Don Barclay. Although Newhouse has taken most of the snaps with the starters for most of camp, Barclay, who is also working as a backup center,

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was at right tackle for the final no-huddle 11-on-11 period of practice Wednesday.

Now, it appears Bakhtiari has injected himself into the competition, much like Josh Sitton did at right guard as a fourth-round pick in 2008. After a strong start in his first camp, Sitton was starting by the third preseason game, and had he not suffered a knee injury, he likely would have been the team's opening day starter this year.

That's a lot further down the line than Bakhtiari was ready to think on Wednesday afternoon, but he was certainly excited about the increased opportunities – wherever they come.

"If they give me the opportunity, I would love to," Bakhtiari said. "Like I said when the pads came on, I'm going to do what I know how to do, and that's play football. And then whatever the coaches think and where they want to put me, that's completely on them. I just know all I control in this is how I play football and how I block a player."

A fourth-round pick from Colorado, the 6-foot-4, 300-pound Bakhtiari was the Buffaloes' starting right tackle as a redshirt freshman, then transitioned to left tackle for his final two seasons in Boulder before declaring for the draft after his junior season last year. He fell to the 109th overall pick, the same pick where the Packers got another starting lineman – guard T.J. Lang in 2009.

"I think he's catching on quick," Lang said of Bakhtiari Wednesday. "He's a guy who doesn't make a lot of mental errors, which is one of the things that you look for, that he knows what he's doing. He's just a guy that goes out there and battles. He's asked to do a lot right now with switching from right tackle to left tackle – that's a lot to know as a rookie. But I think he's making improvements, and definitely a good addition to our room."

Because of the line reshuffling, Lang would be the one lining up next to the rookie if he won the right tackle job. Although Bakhtiari was enjoying the media attention created by McCarthy's comment Wednesday, he wasn't getting ahead of himself.

"It does feel great, and having all you guys here, that's nice," he said at his locker. "But as I've been saying, I want to keep a level head. It's been what, three days in pads? Yeah, I've had some bright shining moments, but I definitely haven't been perfect. I've had some downright in my mind god-awful plays that I wish I could have back."

"It's a good foundation for me to build upon and hopefully if I can continue improving and getting better, then we can come back and talk about (how) this has been a really good thing that's helped me. I'm doing good, but I've still got a long ways to go."

One reason Bakhtiari has been able to get off to a fast start has been his familiarity with the NFL world. His older brother Eric, a journeyman linebacker who has spent time with seven NFL teams, started indoctrinating him during David's senior year in high school, and one of Eric's best friends has also helped in the process: Matthews.

"They knew each other, and then once I got drafted by the Packers, we started hanging out a lot more," Bakhtiari said of Matthews, who not only worked out with him in California but let Bakhtiari crash at his house after being drafted. "I even told him, I said, 'You made the transition a lot easier coming in.' So it's been a lot easier transition than it could have been."

But it's been Bakhtiari who's made the transition on the field. While he says left tackle still feels more comfortable to him because of the time he spent there in college, he's ready to join the competition on the right.

"I thought I was taking a lot of reps, so the more the merrier I guess," he said. "Right now, they have me second-string left and third-string right. We'll see (what happens). I haven't met with any coaches, so I don't know."

Listen to Jason Wilde every weekday from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. on "Green & Gold Today" on 540 ESPN, and follow him on Twitter at twitter.com/jasonjwilde.



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Crosby takes Round 2 of kicking competition

Written by Weston Hodkiewicz

Aug. 1, 2013 |

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As much as Mason Crosby is competing with Giorgio Tavecchio for the Green Bay Packers' kicking job, the biggest factor in whether Crosby will be back for a seventh season with the team largely remains himself.

During Thursday's practice, there wasn't much to fault the 28-year-old kicker for as he blasted five attempts through the north-end uprights of Ray Nitschke Field from 33, 37, 43, 47 and 51 yards during field-goal team drills.

Solid trajectory on each of his makes reenforced the notion that Crosby's play throughout training camp likely will have more say in if he stays than the 23-year-old Tavecchio, a street free agent signed in April whom Mike McCarthy mistakenly referred to as "Sergio" during his post-practice news conference.

Crosby looked shaky the first time the two alternated kicks last Friday, going 4-for-6 with misses from 50 and 53, but said a solid week leading up to Thursday's practice buoyed his effort, which trumped Tavecchio's 5-for-6 with a miss-and-make from 51.

"That was a very positive thing with today," said Crosby, who's facing his first competition for the job since his rookie year in 2007. "I hit five really good balls there. I think my biggest thing is carrying over my process, everything I did on Tuesday that I worked on and brought it into the session today. That was really important for me."

Through a week of training camp, Tavecchio has proven he's no slouch — he's made 10-of-12 kicks in camp while displaying plenty of leg — but appears in the rearview of Crosby on kickoffs.

That's not a total deal breaker as punter Tim Masthay is proficient in that capacity and could handle that role should Tavecchio beat out Crosby for the duties, but a noticeable difference between the trajectories of the two players' kicks also plays a factor.

"I thought they both kicked a lot better today," McCarthy said. "I thought, obviously Mason kicked with excellent accuracy but the height of the football is where it needs to be. I thought Sergio made his kicks, but he doesn't have quite the lift that Mason has. It's going to be a good battle. We're going to feature those guys on (Saturday) night like we did years ago with Mason and Dave. It'll be a similar format."

Tavecchio didn't read too much into McCarthy mispronouncing his name, but said he spent the months leading up to the training camp battle working on his kickoffs.

"I know I haven't had too much to do with placement of the ball these past couple years, so these past couple months I've been working on really pinpointing where the ball is going to be placed because I know it helps the coverage team a lot," Tavecchio said. "That's been something I've been working on. I don't think I got as much of the two balls that we kicked yesterday or the day before, I didn't quite get as much of a drive on them as much as I got hang time and placement."

Continuously working on that and once day at a time I guess.”

During Saturday night’s annual Family Night intra-squad scrimmage, it’ll be the first time either kicker has attempted a field goal inside Lambeau Field since the south end-zone expansion recently wrapped up and could play a role in wind currents on the field.

The Washington Post

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Redskins' Tyler Polumbus tries to hold off the competition at right tackle

By [Mark Maske](#), Published: August 1

RICHMOND — There is relatively little up for grabs at the [Washington Redskins](#) training camp, perhaps a handful of roster spots and a starting job or two. One of the few positions where the typical talk about competition for playing time might be more than just talk is right tackle, where incumbent starter [Tyler Polumbus](#) was [re-signed as a free agent](#) in the offseason but two NFL veterans were added as potential alternatives.



Polumbus has continued to work with the starting offense in training camp practices while one newcomer, [Tony Pashos](#), has practiced with the second team and the other, [Jeremy Trueblood](#), has spent his time on the third-string offense. Polumbus probably remains the favorite, and perhaps a strong favorite, to stay put as the starter when the regular season begins.

But the fact the Redskins brought in two experienced players at his position reinforces the notion that Polumbus's hold on the starting job isn't particularly strong. Even so, Polumbus says he is spending this camp focusing on his own play and he didn't fret too much when the Redskins added Pashos and Trueblood.

"They weren't really my concern," Polumbus said this week. "My concern is always myself and just trying to be the best player I can be. Obviously when I went through free agency and went down to Jacksonville and they made me an offer, I talked to Coach [Mike] Shanahan and a lot of guys here and they made me feel comfortable with why they want me here."

Polumbus declined to specify what the Redskins said to convince him to re-sign. But asked what made him comfortable that returning to Washington was best for his career, Polumbus said: "I just knew that Coach Shanahan has always been good to me going back to my Denver days. I feel like his system gives me the best chance to be the player I know how to be."

Polumbus took over as the Redskins' starter at right tackle last season with Jammal Brown unable to play because of an ailing hip. He widely was viewed as the weakest link on an offensive line that was not thought to be among the team's strengths entering the season. But the starting unit remained intact basically all season —

Polumbus missed one start after suffering a concussion while the other four members of the line started all 16 games — and performed well, as the Redskins had one of the league's most productive offenses.

"You just kind of take the highs and lows, and you try to figure out the things you need to get better at," Polumbus said. "I thought it was a good year. Obviously offensively we did very well. There's certain things that I want to get better at."

Shanahan declined to say directly Thursday how firmly entrenched Polumbus is as the starter. He said, speaking more broadly about the team's offensive tackle situation, that he thinks "it's very obvious to everybody who's first-, second- and third-team right now," but added: "There's a lot of different scenarios that can occur."

It is not clear how seriously the team's coaches will consider replacing Polumbus as the starter. If they do make a move, Pashos seems to be the top candidate to step in. He has made 70 starts in [nine seasons](#) with the Baltimore Ravens, Jacksonville Jaguars, San Francisco 49ers and Cleveland Browns. Pashos has remained on the second-team offense ahead of Trueblood, who made [84 starts over seven seasons](#) with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

"I think at any time whether I've been a starter or moving up in the ranks of the NFL, I've always just tried to be at my best and be the best I can for my club," Pashos said Thursday. "That's really what I've been focused on now. I'm trying to come in, get back to the player that I used to be, get used to football again and kind of contribute as best I can in any fashion that this club needs me."

Pashos did not play in the NFL last season after being released by the Browns following surgery for a ruptured tendon in his left foot. He said he hoped all along to return to the league this season.

"I definitely wanted to give it my best effort one last time," he said. "And so far, I'm pleased with it. I'm glad I put in the work. And I'm looking to improve every day now that I'm back in here. I'm happy with the opportunity."

He has felt healthy during this camp, he said, and he has worked to pick up the Redskins' offense while getting back into the groove of playing football again.

"It's not riding a bike," Pashos said. "It's playing pro football. It takes work. Missing out on a year, there's a lot of catching up to do. But with taking advantage of the most that we can do out here and showing up every day and taking advantage of all the work and the reps, it's slowly coming along."

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