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Wednesday, October 9, 2013

Rhythm key to Mason Crosby's revival

By Rob Demovsky

GREEN BAY, Wis. -- [Mason Crosby](#) has his rhythm back.

Perhaps more than anything else, that has allowed the [Green Bay Packers'](#) kicker to bounce back from his nightmarish 2012 season, when he converted a league-low 63.6 percent of his field goals.

If that wasn't evident already, Crosby solidified his return to form by making all five of his field goals in Sunday's 22-9 victory over the [Detroit Lions](#). For that, Crosby was named the NFC's special-teams player of the week on Wednesday.

Such a performance would have seemed improbable a year ago, when Crosby was mired in the worst slump of his career. In a stretch where he missed 12 of 24 kicks, Crosby regularly faced questions about whether his problems were physical or mental -- or some combination of both. At the time, answers were tough to come by.

This season, however, the reason for Crosby's success -- he has made all nine of his field goals -- has become clear.

"I think he is much more rhythmic at this point," Packers special-teams coach Shawn Slocum said. "It allows him to be in balance when he strikes the ball."

Crosby's start is reminiscent to 2011, when he made his first 16 field goals of the season on the way to a career-best 85.7 percent conversion rate.

It appeared Crosby had come out of his slump late last season, when he made his last six field goals (including two in the playoffs). Facing competition from another kicker in training camp for the first time since he beat out [Dave Rayner](#) in his rookie season of 2007, Crosby stumbled early on. He missed five of eight field goals during the team's annual scrimmage, and the questions returned.

By the end of camp, he had turned things around again. He [accepted a pay cut](#) that reduced his salary by \$1.6 million. But he's on pace to earn every dollar of that back through incentives. In fact, he made \$400,000 of it back just by being on the roster last week.

"I feel like the work we've put in through the last few months and through the last year has just really come through," Crosby said. "Every time I go at the ball, I just feel like I can be as smooth as possible. If anything, I feel like I'm going at it slow, and our timing might be slow, but our timing is perfect."



Mason Crosby has yet to miss a field goal or extra point attempt this season.

Crosby had to walk a fine line between slowing down his rhythm and still getting the ball off in less than 1.3 seconds from snap to kick.

“We’ve always been really quick, so I had some room there,” Crosby said. “We’re still quick. It’s still right where we want to be.”

Counting preseason games this past summer (when he went 6-for-6) and playoff games last season, Crosby has made 21 straight field goals in game situations.

“You can dive into fundamentals and all the things that go into breaking down all the technical stuff, and I did that work in the offseason and really looked at every little aspect,” Crosby said. “But then I just let that go and just said, ‘Smooth tempo, go into the ball, stick a good plant (foot) and then just swing.’”

When asked why he couldn’t figure that out last season, Crosby said: “It’s not that it wasn’t there at some points. It was like that one kick in games I’d get a little quick and some things would go.”

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Tomlinson ready to step up

- by: Nick Smart
- From: Herald Sun
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Nate Tomlinson at Tigers training. Picture: Colleen Petch

Source: HeraldSun

MELBOURNE Tigers guard Nate Tomlinson has vowed to step up in the clubs NBL season-opener on Sunday following the decimation of the clubs star-studded backcourt.

Injuries to guards Chris Goulding and Stephen Dennis have left the Tigers reeling ahead of the trip to Sydney to take on the Kings.

They have brought it in a new import in Ayinde Ubaka , but the Californian guard is at long odds to be cleared by game time.

Tomlinson said it was a tough position to be in coming into a new season.

"It's definitely been hard – we lost basically our whole backcourt in a week," he said.

"Steve gone for the year is going to hurt us a bit, but we're pretty deep so that's lucky for us.

"Bubbles (Goulding) will be back in a couple of weeks so we're just looking to hold the fort for now."

Tomlinson said he was ready to help fill the void and play big minutes until help arrived.

"I was so disappointed for Steve, but as a team we must move on," he said.

"For me, my role greatens a little bit and I'll have to do a little bit more.

"But I'm ready for that – I've put in the work in the off-season.

"It's now about guys stepping up and filling roles that might not have been theirs previously but are now."

Tomlinson has enjoyed a strong pre-season with the 24-year-old earning strong praise from Tigers coach Chris Anstey following his performances during the NBL pre-season blitz tournament.

"I've put myself in a good position like anyone should at this time of year," he said.

"The season is about to come around so it is an exciting time.

"It's what we are here for, so I'm ready."

The addition of Ubaka this week has been a big boost the squad's morale following the shocking achilles injury suffered by Dennis at training last week.

Tomlinson said the American, who previously played with the Tigers in 2011-12, was a popular member of the squad.

"I've never played with "Chewy" before," he said.

"But I know all the guys like him and he's a good dude.

"Hopefully he can fit in perfectly with us and help us win some games."

The Shane Heal-coached Kings have assembled a strong squad this season and look to have improved as the pre-season has gone on.

The Kings possess a vast array from strong outside shooters, led by co-captain James Harvey.

"When we played them during the pre-season they had a few guys missing, just like us," he said.

"We see them as a strong defensive side.

"And it's the first game of the year so they'll be ready and we'll be the same."

**ESPN.com:** AFC West[\[Print without images\]](#)

Thursday, October 10, 2013

Gurode learning new tricks at center

By Paul Gutierrez

ALAMEDA, Calif. -- [Andre Gurode](#) is a five-time Pro Bowl center and two-time All-Pro. So logic would dictate there would not be a drop off at center for the Raiders with [Stefen Wisniewski](#), still hobbled by a sprained right knee, and Gurode snapping the ball.

And really, there was not in Oakland's 27-17 win over San Diego on Sunday, even if the last time Gurode played center on a regular basis was in 2010 for the [Dallas Cowboys](#).

So was it simply a matter of the 34-year-old Gurode getting back on the figurative bicycle after starting at left guard the previous two weeks?

"He's never been a great bike rider," Raiders coach Dennis Allen joked of the 6-feet-4, 320-pounder. "Listen, it's different, you go from left guard to center and there's a little bit more responsibility going over to center. But, he's played that position at a high level for a long time in this league, and he really did a good job in the game, and I think the more he plays in there the better he's going to be.

"He's got a tough challenge, but I would look for more improvement out of him this week."

Sounds like Allen is preparing to be without Wisniewski for a second straight game.

Well, Wisniewski missed practice Wednesday and the Raiders have a bye after Sunday's game in Kansas City. The Raiders could do worse than have a five-time Pro Bowler at center, even if he did not join the team until just before training camp.

"One of the things that our coaches always tell us is that you have to be prepared because you're always one play away, so you have to be prepared for multiple positions," Gurode said. "It has been a challenge. But the guys around me have made it very easy.

"I'm just picking their brains and getting back into that mode of playing the center position."

He did have a false-start penalty on the Raiders' second play of the game, backing Oakland up to its own 7-yard line. But he also recovered a [Terrelle Pryor](#) fumble on the Raiders' 11-yard line early in the fourth quarter.

Gurode was a second-round pick of the Cowboys, No. 37 overall, in 2002 out of Colorado. He spent the first nine years of his career in Dallas before playing 13 games, five starts, at left guard for Baltimore in 2011. Gurode was active for two weeks with Chicago last season but did not play.

So yeah, being thrust into the center position for Oakland in Week 5 was a culture shock, especially with how

many times he had to snap the ball back to Pryor in the pistol.

“That’s something that’s different,” Gurode said with a laugh. “They’ve usually been under center or just shotgun or two-minute situations, or something. It is different, but the guys, I continue to work with the guys and they continue to work with me. It’s a work in progress so we’re getting better.”

Allen agreed.

“He was pretty decent at it, you know? He did a good job,” Allen said. “Obviously, a lot of our offense runs out of the shotgun or pistol formation, whatever it may be. He’s got a lot of work at it, it’s not like he hasn’t done it. He’s gotten a lot of work out of it during practice because he’s been our backup all along.

“He’ll go in and do a good job. He’ll anchor the offensive line.”
