

Eric Saubert, recovered from torn meniscus that affected him last season, primed for Year 2 with Broncos

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When the Broncos drafted tight end Greg Dulcich in the third round last month, Eric Saubert thought that signaled the end of his tenure with the Broncos.

But general manager George Paton had other plans.

“When they took Greg, I was like, ‘Ok, no way I’m coming back to Denver,’” Saubert recalled. “My agent called me and said, ‘You never know, but it looks like you’ll be going somewhere else (as a free agent). But to my surprise, George then called and talked to my agent, and made it clear the Broncos still wanted me.”

Saubert, 28, re-signed with Denver on May 4, a one-year deal with a \$1,047,500 cap hit. In his first season in Denver last year, Saubert appeared in all 17 games as both a core special teams player and as the No. 3 tight end behind Noah Fant and Albert Okwuegbunam.

With Fant dealt to Seattle as part of the March trade for quarterback Russell Wilson, Okwuegbunam is now TE No. 1 and Dulcich is a complementary threat. That means Saubert will be taking on a similar role to last year. The 6-foot-5, 253-pounder was mostly used as a blocker; he had eight catches for 47 yards and a touchdown, and per Denver Post game charting had 4.5 “bad” run plays in 290 offensive snaps.

But this year, Saubert is feeling healthy. During OTAs in 2021, Saubert tore his meniscus, and played the entire season with an injured knee before getting it surgically cleaned up in January. And he feels like he can make more of an impact in the passing game, where he’s had 18 catches for 132 yards in his career.

“I definitely lost a little bit of a step last year,” Saubert said. “You saw me relegated to that in-line role more often, but I feel brand-new now and how I was before. I know (critics) like to pigeonhole tight ends as either a blocker or a receiver, but I feel like I can do it all in the pass game, too. I feel good coming out of my breaks.”

First-year head coach Nathaniel Hackett gave the sixth-year pro and former Falcons draft pick an early endorsement.

“Saubert’s done a great job after being able to be integrated into (learning the offense) a little bit late,” Hackett said. “His ability to block, and he runs really well. Watching him get down the field and catching the ball, he’s definitely somebody we’re excited to have here.”

Wideout Courtland Sutton said Saubert brings a veteran presence to the huddle, and projects that Saubert will have a considerable influence on the development of both Okwuegbunam and Dulcich in 2022.

“Albert has some playing time under his belt, however, to have a (veteran) guy like (Saubert) is big,” Sutton said. “They have a veteran leadership in the room who can explain what happens when they’re going full-

speed with their hand in the ground... All of that in-game reps and experience (by Saubert) bleeds down to the young guys.”

Saubert said the arrival of Hackett and Wilson in Denver convinced him coming back to the Broncos was the right move. And, echoing a common theme during the Broncos’ offseason program in Dove Valley, Saubert believes a return to contention is imminent for a team that’s missed the playoffs six consecutive seasons.

“There were some other teams that reached out, but ultimately, I wanted to be back here and I wanted to be a part of Hack and Russ being here, the culture change, the chance at a Super Bowl,” Saubert said. “I feel like I’m just hitting my stride in this league . I’ve learned a lot, done a lot (between playing for four different teams). I’m excited for what’s next and I feel this team can do something special.”