

Billy Turner returns to Broncos with greater wisdom, same desire to win Super Bowl

By Mike Klis

KUSA

September 11, 2022

Play in the NFL long enough and a player will likely confront the same decision Billy Turner encountered late last year.

Get the injury fixed through surgery now? Or try to play through the injury and get it fixed at season's end?

Turner was the Green Bay Packers' starting right tackle last season when in a mid-December game against the Chicago Bears, he suffered a knee injury severe enough to miss the final four games of the regular season. But not the rest of the season. He came back for the postseason to fill in at left tackle and though the Packers were upset at home in their second-round playoff game, credit Turner for making a team-before-self decision.

It was after the playoff loss that Turner underwent arthroscopic knee surgery. Released by salary cap-strapped Green Bay, Turner signed a one-year contract with the Broncos. Had he gone through the knee procedure six weeks earlier when the injury occurred, he would have one, had a stronger market in free agency, and two, been ready to go for the start of training camp.

Instead, he returned four weeks ago, soon enough to be ready to start at right tackle for the Broncos in their season opener Monday night at Seattle. Although officially listed as questionable, Turner is expected to play.

"The knee is coming back to life," Turner said in a sit-down interview Friday with 9NEWS. "It's going in the right direction. It's right where I personally expected it be at this point in time. So all is well there.

"In regards to the situation last year, I had a choice to make. Go and take it care of it then and get ready for the upcoming season. Or do what I can to help my team at the time prepare to go and win the Super Bowl.

"And that was an easy choice and decision for me to make. I made my choice. I made my decision and I rest easy at night with that decision. And I would do the same thing this year if that same situation and circumstance be brought forth this coming season. It was very easy for me to pick my teammates over myself.

"That's me. That's not everyone. I've been in situations where other people have chosen the other route to go get that fixed right then and there, I'd be 110 percent healthy right now and ready for the beginning of training camp. But we had an opportunity to play for something that only a few people can say, that they had played games for a Super Bowl ring."

Turner has most recently served to protect two of the NFL's most elite quarterbacks in Green Bay's Aaron Rodgers and now the Broncos' Russell Wilson. Maybe because they are such crossover stars, their targets for criticism enlarged. Rodgers last year was heavily scrutinized for the way he handled his alternative

methods to the COVID-19 vaccine and Wilson this week as reports out of Seattle put much of the onus on him for his breakup with the Seahawks after 10 years.

It makes you wonder if the leaders need counseling, too, sometimes. And if so, Turner, a peaceful man of wisdom who grew up around the game – his dad Maurice Turner is a former Minnesota Vikings running back – has the credentials to step in and mentor the mentors.

“I’m there for whoever needs me to be there for them on this team,” Turner said. “That’s part of my job. With that being said, you’d be surprised with the things that happened in the media the way they like to attack certain people. For instance, last year with ‘12.’ Aaron. The whole COVID situation. As far as I’m concerned that’s Aaron’s own personal business and no one else’s. It’s just that that was Aaron Rodgers and people wanted to take him apart and get in on Aaron Rodgers’ business.

“And with whatever they’re saying about ‘3,’ with Russ – I couldn’t tell you what it is, I’m not really tapped in to the media in the news, but to be honest with you, you’d be surprised with how they handle things. Russ doesn’t go around the locker room sulking. He’s not a selfish person in that regard. He’s been around the game long enough to understand certain things are going to happen to take him off his game.

“Again I’m there for anyone who needs help in any kind of mental or emotional way in regards to how the media or how the outside world might attack them but with those two guys in particular that you mentioned they might not necessarily need it as much as you might think.”

While with Green Bay, Turner’s offensive coordinator was Nathaniel Hackett. Now that Hackett is the Broncos’ head coach, it’s no coincidence Turner has returned to Denver – where he played from 2016-18 – to play right tackle. Just a guess: Hackett was freer to let loose his happy, enthusiastic self as offensive coordinator and a little more buttoned up now that he’s the boss.

“I think it’s the other way around,” Turner said. “I think he has more freedom now than he did before. He gets to allow some of his personality and likings to flourish in the game now with the Denver Broncos’ organization whereas in the past couple of years there was almost a ceiling. He couldn’t go much higher and maybe do as many things as he may have wanted to. I think he’s freer now. At least that’s my personal opinion from what I’ve viewed in my past couple years with him.”

Against the Seahawks in every-noisy Lumen Field, Turner will line up far enough away from Wilson to where he will have no chance to hear the cadence. How does one block the edge when one can’t hear and therefore loses a fraction of a second in his set up?

“You’re not wrong but at the same time when you’ve been in this game long enough you figure out certain cues and certain things to help numb the noise,” Turner said. “You play in loud environments in the NFL. That’s not anything that’s new this year. You go to Arrowhead once a year playing the Chiefs and that’s one of the loudest stadiums if not THE loudest stadium in the NFL. The loudness and noise factor you kind of get used to it. It’s not something you don’t think of but it’s something you get used to in time.”

Turner, 30, has already done enough in his 9-year NFL career to where he has money in the bank. What else would he like to accomplish?

“I want to win, man,” he said. “I want to win a Super Bowl. Most guys around any locker room around the NFL that’s what we all hunt for. That’s what we all want. It’s not always about the money, but the money is definitely something that makes things a little bit easier.

“I feel like I have years left in the tank where I’m able to go out here and yeah, hopefully make some more money not only for myself but to help my family and help other people in the community as well. But at the end of the day it comes down to two things and that’s trying to win a Super Bowl and just the love of the game and loving to compete.”

Ambitions he proved last year by putting off surgery in the team quest to win it all.