

Bruschi takes stock of future

Patriots awaiting veteran's word

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GLOBE STAFF



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INDIANAPOLIS — Linebacker **Tedy Bruschi** is getting closer to telling the Patriots whether he plans to return next season, according to his agent, **Brad Blank**.

Blank said yesterday at the NFL Combine that Bruschi will make it known soon whether he plans to play his 13th season, all of which have been in New England.

"He's taking inventory right now — that's his term," said Blank. His wife is a part of it and he'll make his intentions known soon."

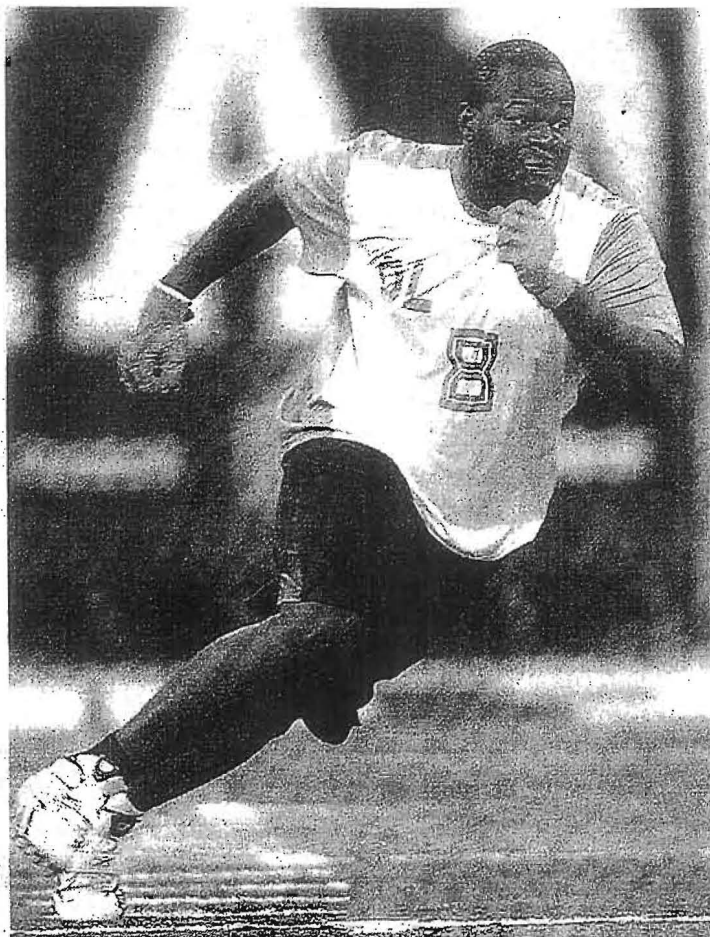
Despite talk that his play has been on the decline, Bruschi, who turns 35 June 9, led the Patriots in tackles for the second straight season with 99, according to coaches' film review, and had two sacks. He started splitting time with **Junior Seau** at inside linebacker, coming off the field in passing situations, but became an every-down middle linebacker again when **Rosevelt Colvin** was lost for the season with a foot injury in late November.

Bruschi, who is a free agent, started all 19 games for New England, including the playoffs, so his loss would leave a substantial hole in the 3-4 defense. It could affect how the team approaches the draft, in which it possesses the seventh overall selection. New England hasn't drafted a linebacker higher than the fifth round since **Bill Belichick** became coach in 2000.

With Seau's status also uncertain, the only inside linebackers under contract are **Eric Alexander**, **Larry Izzo**, **T.J. Slaughter**, and **Oscar Lua** (who missed all of last season with a knee injury), although **Adalius Thomas** and **Mike Vrabel** can play inside and outside.

The Patriots were very interested in veteran **Zach Thomas** and tried to move quickly to bring him aboard. However, Thomas, who visited with the Patriots last Monday, signed with the Dallas Cowboys yesterday.

Homina in on help



MICHAEL CONROY/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Many NFL teams are in a rush to evaluate tackle Gosder Cherilus, who says he benefited from BC's pro-style system.

him at the East-West Shrine Game.

Goff (6 feet 2 inches, 245 pounds) was a two-time, second-team All-SEC selection. Although he played in a 4-3 set with the Commodores, he believes he can adapt to the Patriots' 3-4 scheme.

"Absolutely. At Vanderbilt, our linebackers coach coached us to learn all three positions, just to give us that versatility," said the soft-spoken Goff. "He just taught us that the more versatile you are, the better the player you will be."

Eagles get acquainted

A pair of Boston College prospects, offensive tackle **Gosder Cherilus** and linebacker **Jo-Lonn Dunbar**, sat down with the media yesterday.

Cherilus, who is being eyed as a right tackle, checked in at 6-6 $\frac{3}{4}$ and 314 pounds. He said he'd spoken to at least 22 teams at the Combine, but not the Patriots —

Dunbar, who checked in at 6-1, 232 pounds, said he didn't have to look far for a great influence, patterning himself after Bruschi.

"He's quite a player," said Dunbar. "I do have some of his qualities, the nature of how he plays and how physical he plays."

A stand-up guy?

Vernon Gholston, who was measured at 6-3, 266 pounds, was a defensive end at Ohio State, where he ranked second in the nation in sacks with 14. However, the Buckeyes did ask him to stand at times, and he could project as a 3-4 outside linebacker. That was the route that Vrabel, a fellow Buckeye, took.

"Yeah, I think I could," he said. "Obviously, he made the Pro Bowl this year. That's one of my goals for the future."

"We come from similar backgrounds, Ohio State, similar positions"

of the University of California-Berkeley was the strongest of the tight ends (27 repetitions). **Dustin Keller** of Purdue was the fastest tight end; running the 40-yard dash in 4.55 seconds. Guard **Jeremy Zuttah** of Rutgers was the only lineman to break five seconds in the 40, clocking in at 4.99.

Givens up in air

The football future of former Patriots wide receiver **David Givens** is very much in doubt. Givens, who signed a four-year, \$24 million deal with Tennessee after the 2005 season, has not played a down since suffering a serious left knee injury Nov. 12, 2006.

Givens, who tore his ACL and also damaged his meniscus, had his third surgery in January. Givens has a \$500,000 bonus payment due from the Titans March 1 and could be cut, which would end his Titans career after a total of just five games and eight catches for 104 yards.

"David is still in the middle of the rehab process. He has an especially difficult injury to overcome," said Titans coach **Jeff Fisher**. "Recently, he has had several more scopes."

"I'm hoping for David that at some point he can heal up and get back. Whether it's with us now or with somebody else, that remains to be seen."

Blank, Givens's agent, said that, knowing his client, he would try to continue his rehab in hopes of playing again.

Bears keep Grossman

Quarterback **Rex Grossman**, the Bears' Super Bowl starter a year ago, signed a one-year contract to stay with Chicago.

"We wanted him because we feel like he gives us the best opportunity to be the best team we can be going into this next season," general manager **Jerry Angelo** said.

Angelo added that Grossman will compete with **Kyle Orton** for the starting job.

Meanwhile, agent **Drew Rosenhaus** said he expects two clients with the Bears, wide receiver **Bernard Berrian** and linebacker **Lance Briggs**, to enter free agency rather than staying in Chicago.