

Knee injury lands rookie Benintendi on DL

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

The Boston Red Sox placed rookie outfielder Andrew Benintendi on the 15-day disabled list on Thursday due to a sprained left knee.

Benintendi was injured during the seventh inning of Wednesday night's game against the Tampa Bay Rays.

"I feel like the more I walk on it, the better it feels," Benintendi told redsox.com on Thursday. "I'm going to just try and stay as positive as I can."

Benintendi had an MRI Thursday morning and will have more tests in Boston on Friday to help determine the severity of the injury.

"It's probably too early to tell right now," manager John Farrell told redsox.com. "We're hopeful that it's

not [the last we've seen of Benintendi this season]. We've just got to wait and see what comes out of this. Then depending on the findings, what is the safest thing for Andrew to get him back on the field? Optimistically, and I say that with all sincerity, it's still this year."

Benintendi is batting .324 in 68 at-bats since reaching the majors on Aug. 2. He has one homer and 10 RBIs in 21 games.

Boston recalled infielder Marco Hernandez from Triple-A Pawtucket to fill the roster spot. Hernandez was batting .309 with five homers and 29 RBIs at Pawtucket.

Hernandez has a .295 average in 44 at-bats with the Red Sox this season.

On Wednesday night, the Red Sox literally dropped

the ball on a potential third out twice on one play and the Rays walked off with a 4-3, 11-inning win.

"It was awesome," said Luke Maile, whose two-out double started the winning rally. "Even more fun than it looks on TV."

With two outs and runners at first and second, Kevin Kiermaier hit a ground ball to first base, but Travis Shaw's running flip to Heath Hembree (4-1) went off the reliever's glove for an error. The subsequent throw home was in time to get Maile, but catcher Sandy Leon couldn't hold onto the ball and the winning run scored.

"It's kind of a routine 3-1 play," Farrell said. "It ends up being the difference in



KIM KLEMENT | USA TODAY
Boston Red Sox left fielder Andrew Benintendi looks on from the bench before the game against the Tampa Bay Rays at Tropicana Field on Tuesday.

this one, but yeah, that's a routine play."

The Rays had been 3-57 this season when trailing

after seven innings, but they tied the score in the eighth on Evan Longoria's 30th home run of the season.

Before Longoria's 30th home run, Boston's David Ortiz got his 30th, becoming the oldest player in baseball history to reach 30 in a season. Ortiz, 40, also got to 100 RBIs with the home run, giving him 10 seasons of 30-plus home runs and 100-plus RBIs, the most ever for a Red Sox player.

Boston starter Rick Porcello was five outs from being the majors' first 18-game winner before Longoria took him deep. Longoria has four seasons with at least 30 home runs, breaking Carlos Pena's team record.

Porcello threw a career-high 123 pitches but was left with a no-decision. He allowed three runs on nine hits in 7 2/3 innings. He struck out eight without issuing a walk.

Pats acquire linebacker from Browns

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

The New England Patriots acquired linebacker Barkevious Mingo from the Cleveland Browns in exchange for a late-round pick in the 2017 draft.

Mingo was the sixth overall pick in the 2013 NFL draft but only had seven sacks over his first three seasons.

Cleveland, which traded the No. 2 overall pick in the 2016 draft to the Eagles to stockpile selections in the 2017 draft, receives New England's fifth-round pick next year.

The Browns declined to pick up Mingo's fifth-year option during the offseason, which assured Mingo would become a free agent following this season.

New England is looking to shore up its pass rush and decided it was willing to take a flyer on the 6-foot-4, 240-pound Mingo.

Mingo had just 18 tackles and didn't record a sack while playing in all 16 games last season.

Mingo played college football at LSU and departed for the NFL after his junior season.



KEN BLAZE | USA TODAY
Cleveland Browns outside linebacker Barkevious Mingo (top) tackles Atlanta Falcons running back Cyrus Gray during the second half at FirstEnergy Stadium recently.

Garoppolo adjusting

Quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo has started each of the Patriots first two preseason games this summer as he prepares to open the season with the first four starts of his professional career filling in for the suspended Tom Brady.

Bill Belichick made it clear the day before training camp opened that getting Garoppolo ready for the regular season opener in Arizona was the team's "priority."

But there is certainly an interesting dynamic at play this summer in Foxborough. The Patriots have been Brady's team for some 15

years. He's been around all summer and will be until his suspension sends him away for four weeks, beginning the week leading up to the opener.

So in some ways two quarterbacks are leading and taking the reins as the starter in New England, creating a strange working dynamic.

"It's a tough situation at times, but you can't worry about that too much," Garoppolo said. "It's one of those things where if you start worrying about that, then you can't focus on whatever it is — your reads, your checks, whatever it

may be. You just have to go about your business the same way you always have. I'm not trying to do something crazy and do something I've never done before, I'm trying to be myself and do what I do."

The backup-turned-fill-in starter made it clear, though, that Brady has done his best to help out his understudy.

"We have a ton of conversations, day in and day out. We're together 24/7, but he's been helpful this whole way," Garoppolo said. "Whether it's encouragement, helping me with little things here and there, he's

been nothing but helpful and I thank him for that."

Stork a no-show at Redskins' camp

ASHBURN, Virginia — The Washington Redskins still aren't sure when or if center Bryan Stork, acquired in a trade with the New England Patriots on Wednesday, will report for his physical, the mandatory next step to make the transaction official.

After a walkthrough practice held for military personnel at Joint Base Andrews in suburban Maryland, Redskins head coach Jay Gruden said there was no timeline for Stork to report and that he was "still talking to his agent."

Stork had started 21 games and played in 26 over the previous two seasons with the Patriots, but has sustained four documented concussions dating to his college career at Florida State and was not expected to win back his starting job. New England planned to release him Wednesday before the trade with Washington occurred.

Injuries played a part in Stork's departure from New England.

He started training camp idle because of a concussion, his fourth documented head injury in four years, dating to his college career at FSU.

Temperament might have played a role, too.

Stork was tossed out of a joint practice with the Chicago Bears last week, got the boot from coach Bill Belichick during a minicamp practice in June and drew a costly penalty for a head butt in the AFC Championship game against the Broncos.

Feistiness is not a prerequisite in Washington but general manager Scot McCloughan has said he prefers a certain edge to his offensive linemen.

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EAST RUTHERFORD, New Jersey — New York Giants wide receiver Victor Cruz is ready for his long-awaited football close-up this Saturday.

"I'm ready," Cruz said upon taking the podium, flashing a smile that fans have come to know and love. "It's been a long time coming. I had a good week of practice, everything feels great, so I'm just excited."

Oh sure, it's just a meaningless preseason game against the neighboring New York Jets, but for Cruz, the game formally known as the MetLife Bowl is much more than who earns the right to gain possession of the Snoopy Trophy that's given to the winner.

"This one is crossing so many hurdles, so many barriers, so many ups and downs that I had to face to get to this moment," Cruz said. "Now I'm just ready to relax and just go play some football again. To me this game is bigger than just a game."

Almost two years to the day since he first suffered a potentially career-ending knee injury in October 2014, Cruz has overcome one set-

back after another and is set to play in his first game Saturday against the Jets, the team that essentially helped launch his star back in 2010.

Head coach Ben McAdoo and the Giants have been pacing Cruz's return so as to avoid any more setbacks, such as what he suffered last summer when he tore his calf muscle. Although Cruz did strain his groin this summer, the team's training staff came up with a plan designed to pace his return to the field.

The plan worked.

"He got through a good practice on our Wednesday practice on Tuesday. Yesterday he got through a three-hour practice in good shape," McAdoo said. "When he first got out here this week, he showed a burst and showed some acceleration, he can put his foot in the ground. He had a really nice release on a slant, which reminded me of the Houston game a few years ago, so it is encouraging."

No one is more encouraged than Cruz, who has tried to stay patient while his body heals. Now that he has that opportunity, he can't help but be a little giddy.

"I feel like a rookie again. There will be butterflies, there will be anxiety. There has been for some time now."

University to determine fate of Notre Dame players

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

Notre Dame head coach Brian Kelly delayed making a call on his starting quarterback for the season opener at Texas, and university administration will have to make another significant decision — whether to punish the four players arrested last week.

Kelly said he would keep his comments to the team following last weekend's arrest "amongst the team," but he summarized his thoughts on the arrests of cornerback Ashton White, wide receiver Kevin Stepherson, running back Dexter Williams and linebacker Te'von Coney. All four practiced Wednesday.

"Like any other father, I think my first one was disappointment, and that disappointment kind of moved on to embarrassment to the university, and then I was mad as hell," Kelly said.

They were arrested on misdemeanor marijuana charges. Stepherson and Williams were charged with

possession of a handgun without a license, another misdemeanor.

"You have to be prepared as a college coach, unfortunately, to deal with some poor decisions," Kelly said.

Kelly dismissed the fifth player involved in the incident, fifth-year senior safety Max Redfield, from the team.

Senior cornerback Devon Butler was arrested Saturday in a separate incident and was not involved in practice. Kelly said he was not part of any football activities, because he faces a felony charge that would result in dismissal from Notre Dame. Butler pleaded not guilty Wednesday felony counts of resisting law enforcement and battery against a public safety official.

As for the competition between senior Malik Zaire and junior DeShone Kizer at quarterback could go right up until game day in Austin. Kelly said he will make the call as soon as he knows it's the right answer.

Strike threat real; players fed up with Goodell

BY IRA MILLER
THE SPORTS XCHANGE

At least one team's player rep went on record this week warning NFL players to begin preparing for a strike **COMMENTARY** — even though the league's current Collective Bargaining Agreement does not expire for nearly five years.

Can there be a clearer vote of no confidence in the leadership of commissioner Roger Goodell?

Goodell has spent the last few years lurching from one crisis to another, from Ray Rice to Adrian Peterson, from steroids to supplements, from under-inflated footballs to over-inflated egos, and still, too often, we do not know what the penalty is for a particular act, or even if there is one, until after the fact.

There have been ample signs that the leadership of the NFL Players Association is at odds, to put it mildly, with Goodell over his handling of player discipline. The suggestion has been made, repeatedly, that he ought to recuse himself from that particular task and turn it over to a neutral party who is not beholden to the owners who sign his check.

The suggestion has been consistently ignored, and the latest result is the warning from Steelers guard Ramon Foster, the team's player rep. Foster went public after two

teammates were suspended because of substance abuse issues, but what he said was that "there are bigger issues than pot."

Recalling the lockout after the 2010 season that led to the current CBA, which players believe is slanted in favor of the owners, Foster said the players have to "hit (the owners) in the pocket" in the next negotiations.

"Money always talks," he said. "For us to do that, we have to save on our end. We can't be just blowing money and not realize what's coming, especially with guys coming into the league now."

Of course, the problem with telling players in 2016 to prepare for a lockout or strike in 2021 is that most of the 2016 players will be out of the league by then, given that the average career length is less than four years.

Nonetheless, Foster predicted a labor dispute was brewing, adding, "They've hired certain people on their legal team, the NFL has, and we have to be the type of players and union that's not borrowing money from banks and stuff like that to survive a lockout, a strike."

"That can't happen this time around. We have to be smarter this time around because there are a lot of things we're going to be fighting for, and a lot of things they are going to want and we're going to want, too."

The question, however, as

always, is whether the players can remain unified over a demand to force the commissioner to relinquish some of his power when history tells us his power affects only a very small percentage of the players in the league. In the past, the players have given up on that demand in return for some other accommodation, and we're a long way away from finding out if the issue of player discipline has grown in importance enough for the players to unify over it.

Perhaps what is most remarkable about all of this, however, is how with the money continuing to pour through the NFL at record levels, with salaries and television revenue rising, with the game's popularity continuing to reach record levels, there remains this undercurrent of distrust and dislike between the people who play the game and the people who run the game.

You could never hope to hold out Goodell's predecessor, Paul Tagliabue, as the ideal commissioner — not with the drip of revelations about concussions, among other things — but Tagliabue never engendered the distrust among the workers that Goodell does.

One prime reason for that is because Tagliabue forged a close alliance with the late Hall of Fame guard Gene Upshaw, the head of the players union, and the two men had each other's trust, and the backing of their constituents.

Goodell has not formed any kind of a partnership with DeMaurice Smith, who succeeded Upshaw as the players union head.

Now, and this is just amateur psychology talking here, maybe there's an explanation for this dichotomy.

Tagliabue never really sought the NFL commissionership. He just happened to be available when a group of newer owners got into a snit because a group of older owners tried to force Jim Finks, a long-time team executive, down their throats as the successor to Pete Rozelle. He already had a high-profile spot as the league's lead attorney, and probably would have been content remaining in that role. In other words, he had no ego tied up in the job and so he was more interested in building bridges to the players than flexing his muscle.

On the other hand, Goodell is an NFL lifer, and the commissioner's gig represents the apex of his dreams.

He has said more than once his key goal is to protect the NFL's shield, the league logo, and it's clear he regards that shield as the province of the owners, with the players simply transient employees.

His actions have made it clear, repeatedly, that the power of the office is important to him, and thus he has set an early red line for the next negotiation with the players.

Red Sox

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"They hit a couple balls hard, hit a couple balls where we weren't," Pomeranz said. "Good places by them. That's that."

Pomeranz had 11 strikeouts in six-plus innings but fell to 10-10 on the year.

GAME NOTES: Red Sox OF Andrew Benintendi was placed on the 15-day disabled list after suffering a left knee sprain in the seventh inning of Wednesday's game. Manager John Farrell said he is hopeful that Ben-

intendi can return before the end of the season but the outfielder is scheduled to have an MRI exam to determine the severity. ... Rays INF Tim Beckham missed his second consecutive game with a sore left hamstring. ... The Red Sox recalled INF Marco Hernandez from Triple-A Pawtucket. ... Rays INF Richie Shaffer was optioned to Triple-A Durham and RHP Tyler Sturdevant was recalled in a corresponding move. ... Red Sox LHP Eduardo Rodriguez (hamstring) threw a bullpen session Thursday and is expected to start Sunday against the Royals.