

Soccer

Clint Dempsey back on pitch, feeling good again after heart scare

Associated Press

TUKWILA, Wash. — Seattle Sounders star Clint Dempsey said Tuesday the symptoms that eventually led him to being diagnosed with an irregular heartbeat first surfaced last February but it wasn't until late summer that it became serious enough to affect his ability to play.

Dempsey spoke to the media for the first time since he was diagnosed with the irregular heartbeat in August and his season was shut down. He was a spectator as the Sounders went on to win their first MLS Cup title and missed the beginning of World Cup qualifying for the United States.

"It was a heart issue. It's something that's difficult to kind of explain," Dempsey said. "But at the same time I'm not feeling those things anymore and I'm happy to be back playing."

Seattle Sounders forward Clint Dempsey kicks the ball, Monday, Feb. 13, 2017, during training in Tukwila, Wash.

AP Photo/Ted S. Warren



Dempsey said he first noticed symptoms last February during training camp and he spent the early part of the season trying to figure out what was happening. Dempsey said he felt good playing for the United States during the

Copa America last summer, but after returning from the competition started "feeling more stuff."

Dempsey was announced as being out Aug. 26 due to the irregular heartbeat, two days before Seattle faced rival Portland. He

never played again last season, although there was optimism in September that Dempsey might have a chance to return. He was ruled out for the season in late September after undergoing an undisclosed procedure.

"I was experiencing the same issues that forced me off to do the right thing and give my body the right rest and making sure that I would be better," Dempsey said. "That's what I had to do, I had to take the time off and now I'm not experiencing those issues anymore."

The 33-year-old remained guarded about any specifics regarding his heart condition saying, "I don't really want to go that much into it." But he has been cleared for a progressive increase in his workload.

Dempsey has been a full participant in practices and had stints of 30 and 45 minutes in preseason games in Arizona recently. That workload is expected to increase as the Sounders leave later this week for the final stage of their preseason training in South Carolina.

Dempsey estimated he's probably at 85 percent to 90 percent of his full fitness

level right now after starting a closely monitored exercise regime before training camp.

"I was able to consistently progress and work on my fitness and make sure everything was moving in the right direction," Dempsey said. "It started off slow and had to work my way up and still working up now but feeling like I'm finally getting close."

Dempsey is also hopeful of working his way back into consideration for the U.S. national team. Dempsey said he spoke with Bruce Arena late last year about everything that was going on.

"It would be great to get back in with the U.S. team but to do that I have to do well here and that's the main focus, is here with Seattle and making an impact on the field here," Dempsey said.

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