

NFL

After surgery, Seattle's Joeckel ready for former team

By **TIM BOOTH**
Associated Press

RENTON, Wash. — Luke Joeckel thought he was done with knee troubles.

Issues with his left knee cost the former No. 2 overall pick most of the 2016 season, his last with Jacksonville. He was diligent and cautious in his recovery from the major knee procedure after signing with the Seattle Seahawks during the offseason in the hope of being completely healthy when the regular season started.

And despite all those precautions, just five games into his tenure with Seattle, Joeckel was back in surgery to have even more repairs done to his knee.

"I didn't expect to have another surgery in the middle

of the season but I'm glad I did," Joeckel said. "The knee feels better now than it did before it. I knew it would be tough coming back from everything I did to the knee last season. It was a little tougher than I thought. Now I feel good, ready to go and excited to build on it each week."

Joeckel will see his former team this week with the Seahawks travelling to Jacksonville for a matchup that has major importance for both teams. The Seahawks significantly improved their playoff hopes by knocking off Philadelphia last week and remaining one game behind in the NFC West, while the Jaguars are tied with



Joeckel

Tennessee on top of the AFC South. It wasn't that way when Joeckel was playing in Jacksonville. In the four seasons Joeckel was with the Jaguars, they won 15 total games. He was deemed a bust after being one of the top picks in the draft, yet struggling with injuries and performance during his time in Jacksonville.

"I enjoyed it. Jacksonville was a great place to live. We didn't win a lot of football games, but I enjoyed my time there. Good buddies I played with," Joeckel said. "I'm excited by the opportunity I have in Seattle and happy to be here."

Joeckel had surgery in early October as the Seahawks were going into their bye week. What was thought to be a short recovery ended up costing Joeckel five games, but was clearly a needed procedure. Joeckel said he felt the knee deteriorating with each game and trying to handle the load of playing.

"It just was getting worse each week," Joeckel said. "Coming back trying to get use to the load, picking up the load each week, trying to build on that my knee just felt more and more tore up a little bit."

He returned two weeks ago in Seattle's win over San Francisco and with a new left tackle next to him. The combo of Joeckel and Duane Brown at left tackle seems to have stabilized some of Seattle's

issues protecting quarterback Russell Wilson and provided some life to a running game that's been otherwise lackluster all season.

It'll be another major challenge for Seattle this week against Jacksonville's defense that's tops in the NFL in total defense, scoring defense and has recorded 45 sacks.

"They cause you all kinds of problems," Seattle coach Pete Carroll said.

SHEAD RETURNS: Cornerback DeShawn Sheard returned to practice on Wednesday after spending the entire season on the physically unable to perform list. Sheard has been out since suffering a major knee injury in last January's NFC divisional playoff game against Atlanta and has faced a couple of setbacks in his recovery.

After starting his career as an undrafted free agent, Sheard had developed into a starting cornerback opposite Richard Sherman prior to his injury. Seattle now has three weeks to decide whether to activate Sheard off PUP and add him to the active roster or place him on injured reserve for the season.

Sheard's return could be a boost for a secondary that has lost Sherman and safety Kam Chancellor for the season to injuries.

"I'm just ready to get out there and be able to help this team as much as possible, anywhere we need it," Sheard said. "I expect to earn my spot back, and I expect to earn my way back on the field. Nothing was ever given to me, that's what I know. So I have to go out and prove myself again."

NFL to look at video reviews for targeting

By **BARRY WILNER**
Associated Press

NEW YORK — The NFL will look into adding targeting as a specific category for video review.

Troy Vincent, the league's football operations chief, says it is on the agenda to discuss with the competition committee and the players' union after the season.

In responding to questions about helmet-to-helmet hits and players launching to make tackles, Vincent said Wednesday that the NFL has seen targeting reviews "work to a degree" in the college game.

"I think it is something that we have to consider," Vincent said. "We've seen that it has worked to a certain degree, it's clean. ... We think there have been some positives and we have talked to some of the conferences and the officials there, as well as with some student-athletes. It is a deterrent and something that we will consider; it is one of our agenda items to discuss during the offseason as we speak to the coaches and the competition committee."

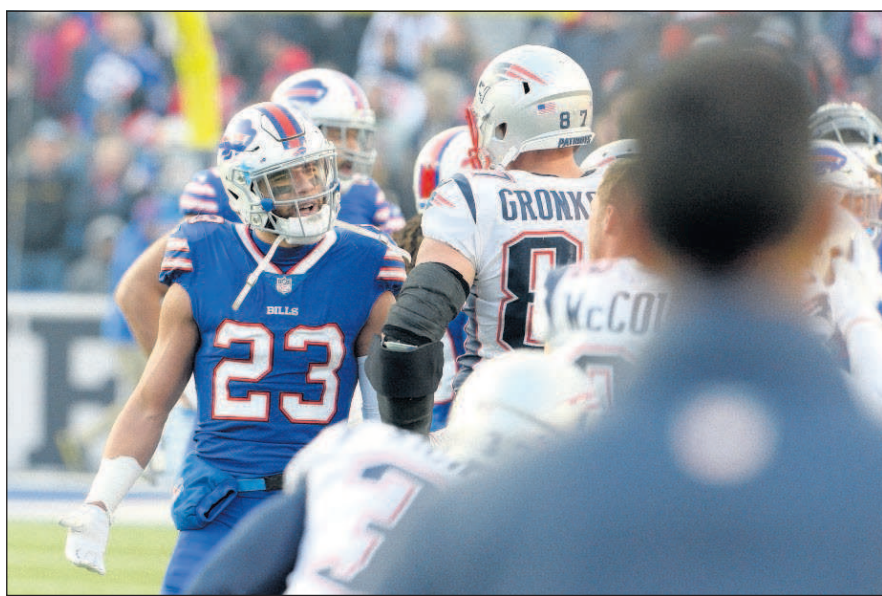
"It needs to be discussed because there are a lot of other ramifications that come along with that. It is on our agenda to be discussed beginning in February."

Bengals defensive end Carlos Dunlap wants no part of the college's targeting ejection system.

"I don't want to do all that. I think they go overboard in college with the ejections," he said. "You know some of them are football plays. If a kid gets ejected for that, I don't think that's right. But they don't have fines in college, so I don't know how you handle that one."

Vincent also noted that coaches, general managers, owners and players are adamant about not wanting players ejected from games unless there is no other option.

"We don't want to be in the business of ejecting players," Vincent said. "There are only 17 weeks and the philosophy is, if it gets out of control, we ask the referees to maintain control of the game, give them that flexibility. They have that flexibility, but we really emphasize let the players play, but if things begin to get out of control, you must maintain control of



AP Photo/Adrian Kraus
Buffalo Bills strong safety Micah Hyde (23) argues with New England Patriots tight end Rob Gronkowski (87) during the second half of an NFL football game, Sunday, Dec. 3, 2017, in Orchard Park, N.Y.

the game during that window."

There have been nine suspensions in 2017 for on-field acts. Ejections are much rarer, of course.

"We have had clear directives from the competition committee," Vincent said. "They asked us and the players to remove some of the helmet-to-helmet hits that we have seen, as well as some of the blindsiding blocks and other types of disparaging techniques and behaviors on the field."

"We have clear directive that this is not something that should be progressive, but that we strongly consider removing a player that is using these techniques that we want out of our game immediately."

The league also will consider adding a category for non-football acts that break the rules, such as Patriots tight end Rob Gronkowski's hit on Bills cornerback Tre'Davious White.

Gronkowski drew a one-game suspension under unnecessary roughness guidelines. White is in the league's concussion protocol.

"We've seen a few of these on occasion. It's something that Jon (Runyan, who handles some NFL disciplinary cases) has raised to myself, and he's actually raised to the appeals officers," Vincent said.

"He'll bring that up in February when we begin meeting with our

competition committee, our coaches' subcommittee and our GMs. We will also bring this up with the NFL Players Association, but it is something that we do need to review."

Asked about potential mixed messages the NFL could be sending when it suspends Steelers receiver JuJu Smith-Schuster and Bengals safety George Iloka one game apiece for egregious hits in Monday night's game, then changes Iloka's discipline to only a fine on appeal, Vincent insisted the appeals reviews have been "very consistent, fair and firm." He emphasized that appeals officers James Thrash and Derrick Brooks are employees of the league and the union.

"I just think they try to send a message more than anything," Steelers player representative Ramon Foster said. "They screwed it up. You say you're concerned over player safety, but you had a guy who blatantly had a helmet to helmet and didn't get suspended. You had a guy that just did a taunting and you try to justify it by suspending him. That's not player safety."

"Then you have another situation where a guy plows into another guy and you suspend him for one game. Why one game? Why not multiple games? Because the Steelers play the Patriots next week."

Goodell signs five-year contract extension

By **BARRY WILNER**
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Roger Goodell has signed a five-year contract extension to remain commissioner of the NFL through 2024.

A memo from the NFL's compensation committee to team owners and obtained Wednesday by The Associated Press confirms that Goodell and committee chairman Arthur Blank, owner of the Atlanta Falcons, have signed the extension.

That extension has been a source of controversy because Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones objected to the process.

All 32 owners approved in May the compensation committee's power to negotiate and sign a deal with Goodell, who replaced Paul Tagliabue in 2006.

Since then, the league's total revenues have more than doubled to \$14 billion.

A person familiar with the contract told The Associated Press it is worth almost \$200 million, with a base of \$40 million. But the deal is incentive-laden, the person added, speaking on condition of anonymity because the contract numbers are not made public.

Among those incentives are continued increases in revenues, stable or rising television ratings, a new labor agreement with the players — the NFL-NFL Players Association deal expires in 2021 — and how much the NFL gets in rights fees when it renews its broadcast contracts.

Goodell earned nearly \$32 million in 2015, the last year



Goodell

in which public records for the NFL are available.

"Our committee unanimously supports the contract and believes that it is fully consistent with 'market' compensation and the financial and other parameters outlined to the owners at our May 2017 meeting, as well as in the best interests of ownership," Blank wrote in the memo.

"We also have expressed in those conversations our strong and unani-

mous belief that we should proceed to sign the agreement now, consistent with the unanimous May resolution and to avoid further controversy surrounding this issue. We are pleased to report that there is a nearly unanimous consensus among the ownership in favor of signing the contract extension now."

That would not include Jones, whose objections surfaced publicly after his star running back, Ezekiel Elliott, ran out of legal options to appeal a six-game suspension handed down by Goodell under the NFL's personal conduct penalty.

Jones was not immediately available for comment.

The NFL's next owners meeting is in Dallas next Wednesday. Jones had hoped to delay the new deal with Goodell until then, when he could personally raise his concerns to other owners.

Also on the compensation committee are owners Clark Hunt of Kansas City, Robert Kraft of New England, John Mara of the New York Giants, Bob McNair of Houston and Art Rooney of Pittsburgh.

DUCKS: Cristobal, Leavitt top picks to fill Oregon's open head coach position

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Knight and Pat Kilkenny. Patterson, however, just signed an extension through 2022 that will pay him nearly \$5 million per year.

Last year, Oregon reportedly showed interest in Mississippi State coach Dan Mullen, Florida coach Jim McElwain and Ohio State defensive coordinator Greg Schiano. They probably aren't on Mullens' list this time: Mullen was hired at Florida last week after McElwain was fired in October when the Gators were 3-4. Tennessee was ready to hire Schiano last month before fans protested because he was on the staff at Penn State with former assistant coach Jerry Sandusky, who was convicted of sexually abusing children.

Here's a list of a few possible candidates for Mullens.

Oregon coordinators

Cristobal: Oregon's co-offensive coordinator and offensive line coach under Taggart, Cristobal was hired in 2007 as the second coach ever at Florida International, which started its football program in 2002. He went 27-47 in six seasons before the school fired him following a 3-9 record in

2012. In 2011, FIU won the Sun Belt title and went 8-5 the following year to reach bowl games in back-to-back seasons.

Cristobal spent four seasons as the offensive line coach at Alabama, helping the Crimson Tide win the national title in 2015 before Alabama lost to Clemson in last year's championship game.

Jim Leavitt: Taggart's first hire at Oregon as defensive coordinator, Leavitt helped the Ducks rank fourth in the Pac-12 in total defense (359.8 yards per game) and seventh in scoring defense (28.2 points per game) after they were 11th in both categories the previous year. He is expected to follow Taggart to FSU, but Mullens did not rule him out as a candidate Tuesday.

Leavitt was hired to start South Florida's program at the FCS level from 1997-2000 before the Bulls moved to FBS in 2001. He went 95-57 in 13 seasons with five bowl appearances but was fired in 2010 after being accused of hitting a player. Leavitt sued the school and received \$2.75 million.

The ex-Ducks

Jeff Tedford: Oregon's offensive coordinator during the Jov Harrington era from

1998-2001, Tedford moved to Cal, where he became the winningest coach in school history with 82 victories from 2002-12. After Fresno State went 1-11 last year, Tedford returned to his alma mater — where he was offensive coordinator before coming to Oregon — and led the Bulldogs to a 9-4 record, including 7-1 mark in conference play to reach the Mountain West Conference title game.

Justin Wilcox: The Junction City native and former Oregon defensive back went 5-7 at Cal this season in his first season as a head coach at any level. He also is a former defensive coordinator at Washington and USC, among other schools. One of the practice fields at Oregon is named after his family; both his father, Dave, and brother, Josh, also starred for the Ducks.

Another coordinator

Beau Baldwin: Baldwin completed his first season as offensive coordinator at California after going 85-32 in nine seasons as head coach at Eastern Washington, including an FCS national title in 2010.

He coached quarterback Vernon Adams Jr. for three seasons at Oregon in 2015. Also, it seems unlikely that

Oregon would hire a coach who was reportedly passed up by Oregon State.

Group of 5 coaches

Bryan Harsin: Hiring the Boise State coach would add some interest to the Las Vegas Bowl where the Ducks will face the Broncos. Harsin seems likely to get a Power 5 job soon after going 41-12 in four seasons as coach.

He led Boise State to the MWC title for the second time this year with a 7-1 record in conference, going 10-3 overall and defeating Fresno State in last week's conference championship game.

Mike Norvell: Former Arizona State offensive coordinator from 2012-15 took Memphis to the American Athletic Association title game in his second year before losing to Central Florida, 62-55, in double overtime. Has gone 20-7 in two seasons with the Tigers, including a 7-1 conference record this season.

Lane Kiffin: After Florida Atlantic went 3-9 last season, Kiffin was hired and led the Owls to a 10-3 mark and Conference USA championship. He spent the previous three seasons as offensive coordinator at Alabama, reaching the CFP championship game twice, including a

national title in 2015.

Attention and controversy seems to follow the 42-year-old who coached the Oakland Raiders before taking over programs at Tennessee and USC, but Kiffin seems certain to be moving up to a bigger program soon.

Chad Morris: Former offensive coordinator at Tulsa and Clemson just finished his third season as head coach at SMU, which went 7-5 after going 1-11 the year before he arrived. Several online sites, however, reported Morris was hired by Arkansas late Tuesday night.

Fallen stars

Kevin Sumlin: Sumlin went 51-26 in six seasons at Texas A&M before being fired last month after the Aggies finished 7-5. In his first season, Texas A&M went 11-2 and Johnny Manziel won the Heisman Trophy, but the Aggies never finished above .500 in Southeastern Conference play during his final five seasons.

Sumlin's first coaching job came as a graduate assistant at Washington State in 1989, but he has spent the last 17 seasons coaching in Texas or Oklahoma. Considering Taggart fled to Florida after one season, Mullens may not want to bring in another

coach who could leave for a southern school if he finds success with the Ducks.

Butch Jones: Jones became one of the nation's top coaching candidates after going 19-6 at Cincinnati in 2011-12. Colorado wanted Jones before he chose Tennessee, which fired him after a 4-6 start this season. He won nine games the previous two seasons with the Volunteers and went 34-27 in five years on the job. Tennessee went winless in the SEC this year.

Bret Bielema: Another coach who had plenty of success in the past but recently joined the unemployment line after going 4-8 at Arkansas. Bielema went 29-34 in five seasons with the Razorbacks, including an 11-29 record in the SEC. He won 68 games in seven seasons as coach at Wisconsin from 2006-12 and led the Badgers to three straight Rose Bowls, including a 45-38 loss to Oregon in the 2012 game.

Les Miles: Somebody is going to hire Miles, who won the national title at LSU in 2008 and was national coach of the year in 2011 when the Tigers lost to Alabama in the championship game. He went 114-34 in 12 seasons with the Tigers.