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Turley may benefit from Welbourn retiring from Chiefs

By Len Pasquarelli
ESPN.com

Less than a week into his return from a two-year hiatus, [Kyle Turley](#) hasn't yet secured the starting right offensive tackle job with the [Kansas City Chiefs](#). But he is certainly skyrocketing up the depth chart.

His ascent was aided Thursday by the abrupt announcement from seven-year veteran [John Welbourn](#) that he has decided to retire. The Chiefs' starter at right tackle for the final nine games last season, Welbourn was expected to vie with Turley and returning veterans [Jordan Black](#) and [Kevin Sampson](#) for the No. 1 spot in 2006.

Welbourn, 30, had three seasons remaining on his contract, at base salaries of \$1.4 million (for 2006), \$1.7 million (2007) and \$2 million (2008). The veteran blocker is close to completing work on his graduate degree in education and plans to enroll in law school.

"I've been playing football for 16 years and it's a little scary to think I won't be playing anymore," said Welbourn. "But at the same time, it's exciting to think I'll be starting a whole new chapter in my life."

In seven seasons, the first five of which were spent with the [Philadelphia Eagles](#), the former University of California star appeared in 78 games and started 75 of them. He started in all but one of his 22 appearances with the Chiefs in 2004-2005, but was slowed by a knee injury in his first season in Kansas City and then missed the first four games last year because of a violation of the league's steroid policy.

The Chiefs acquired Welbourn from Philadelphia in 2004 for third- and fifth-round draft choices.

The sudden loss of Welbourn, whose best position might have actually been guard, leaves Turley as the favorite to secure the starting job. Turley, a seven-year veteran, signed a two-year contract with the Chiefs on Monday after missing the past two seasons because of severe back problems.

Kansas City officials were not pleased with the performance at right tackle in 2005 from any of the players who lined up there, and that prompted them to pursue Turley, who originally had planned to return to the NFL as a tight end, a position he had never played before. But the Chiefs convinced Turley that he might return to his old form at tackle, especially playing on one of the NFL's premier blocking units.

His experience seems to give Turley a decided advantage over Black and Sampson entering

training camp.

Whether he can recapture the skills that once made him a premier strong-side tackle might be a function of how Turley deals with the weight he lost during his two seasons away from the game. His typical playing weight was 309 pounds, but it is believed Turley dropped 40-50 pounds to relieve some of the stress on his back. He might actually have to gain some weight back to be effective again.

In his early workouts this week, however, Turley apparently has performed well.

The former San Diego State star was released by the Rams in June 2005 after he failed a team-administered physical examination. Turley missed the entire 2004 season when his back problem flared during training camp and he was placed on injured reserve. Turley has been treated for more than two years now by Dr. Robert Watkins, a renowned Los Angeles back specialist who performed surgery on a herniated disc in March 2004. Turley reinjured his back four months later and eschewed a second surgery, preferring instead to go through a long rehabilitation that included shedding considerable weight.

His last game action came Jan. 10, 2004, when the Rams lost to the [Carolina Panthers](#) in double overtime of a divisional round playoff contest. Turley played in all 16 regular-season games in 2003. Over six years, Turley appeared in 95 regular-season games, all of them as a starter.

The seventh overall player selected in the 1998 draft, Turley played six seasons with the [New Orleans Saints](#), and then was traded to the Rams in the spring of 2003.

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