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Surgery for Taylor and a Big Question

By FRANK LITSKY

Lawrence Taylor underwent surgery yesterday to repair his ruptured right Achilles' tendon. Now he must decide whether, at age 33, he will retire, as he had planned all season, or endure heavy-duty rehabilitation and play pro football again. People close to him are not sure what he will do.

Taylor was injured Sunday during the Giants' 27-7 victory over the Green Bay Packers. He is the premier outside linebacker in football history and perhaps the best defensive player ever, and in his 12 seasons with the Giants he has overcome all kinds of injuries. But none has been as serious as this tear of the long tendon that attaches the ankle to the calf.

Dr. Russell Warren, the Giants' orthopedic surgeon, performed the operation at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York. A statement from the Giants said the surgery lasted about 1 hour 15 minutes. The tendon, completely torn about 1 1/4 inches above the heel, was sewn together while Taylor received a local anesthetic.

"The surgery went well," the statement said. Taylor will probably remain in the hospital today and perhaps tonight to be sure the wound is healing and that he keeps his weight off the leg. The lower leg will be placed in a plaster cast for four or five days to keep the swelling down. Then, for two weeks, Taylor will wear a two-section cast with straps that allow movement. Three or four weeks after that, he will be fitted for a brace to limit motion in the leg. He is scheduled to wear the brace for eight to 10 weeks, and if his mobility progresses he will be allowed to do light running in February or March.

Steve Rosner, Taylor's business agent, visited Taylor in the recovery room and said Taylor was in pain, although his spirits were good. "When you have a guy who has willed away almost every injury he's ever had," Rosner said, "it's tough to see him laid up like this. It affected me and I think it affected him."

Rosner said Taylor's private room was laden with flowers, baskets of fruit, telegrams, cards and faxes, many of these goodwill gestures from strangers. He said Randall Cunningham, the Philadelphia Eagles' quarterback, had sent flowers to Taylor's Bergen County home.

Hospital security was heavy, and incoming telephone calls went to the hospital switchboard and not to Taylor's room. Rosner said the only ones in the room with him were Taylor's wife, Linda, and a nurse.

"The only question the nurse asked," Rosner said, "was whether he would play football next year. He just smiled. When she left the room, we both laughed. It's bad enough that everyone else is asking the question, and now the nurse wants to know."

Knock, Knock, Knock

On Sunday, Taylor had visits at home from Bill Parcells, the Giants' former coach, and Harry Carson, the retired linebacker. There were telephone calls from Wellington Mara, the Giants' co-owner; Bill Belichick, the Giants' former defensive coordinator and now the Cleveland Browns' head coach, and Maurice Carthon, and Mark Bavaro, former teammates on the Giants. Rosner was there and talked with Taylor about the future, but he said nothing was decided.

"Will he retire?" Rosner said. "If you asked me Saturday, I would have said yes. Now I believe he has a thinking process to go through about his future on the field."

No one seems sure what Taylor will do. Not Rosner, nor Beasley Reece, Taylor's close friend and former teammate, nor Joe Courrege, his agent, nor George Young, the Giants' general manager, nor Taylor himself.

Reece, now a sports broadcaster for WVIT-TV in Hartford, spoke by telephone with Taylor for a half-hour Sunday night. "I've thought about everything," Taylor told him. "I'm more concerned about recovering. As for the future, I'm not in the process of deciding that right now."

Spirits Are Good

Reece said Taylor was happy and upbeat.

"I think I heard a crack in his retirement armor," Reece said. "He's going to take a look at the healing process, and if he heals well my guess is that he's coming back. I don't think he wants to allow his last image to be laid out on a golf cart at Giants Stadium. But he said he was not near making a decision."

Courrege, speaking from his Houston office, said he thought that if Taylor could play again, he would. Young said Taylor had never talked to him about retirement. Taylor is earning \$1.45 million in this, the final year of a three-year, \$4.5-million contract.

Through the years, many athletes have torn Achilles' tendons. Dominique Wilkins, the marquee player for the Atlanta Hawks of the National Basketball Association, underwent surgery on his right Achilles' tendon in January. He resumed practice in July and started playing at full speed when training camp began a month ago. In the Hawks' two games this season, he has averaged 31.5 points.

Don't Be Deceived

"I've had to work harder coming to camp than I ever had to work before," he said. "The right leg is now stronger than the left one. Anyone who thinks I can't be as good as ever now at 32 is in for a big surprise."

Gregg Brents is a 41-year-old vice president of a New York consulting company and also a professional platform tennis player. He tore his left Achilles' tendon in March, and **Dr. Jacob Rozbruch**, the chief of orthopedic surgery at Beth Israel Medical Center North in New York, operated in April. In July, Brents played tennis with 50 percent movement, and in August he returned to platform tennis, with its severe stop-and-go movements. He has reached the finals of the first two professional tournaments this season.

"I have a 10-inch zigzag scar down the back of the leg," he said. "It looks vicious, but I have no pain and full mobility."