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ON THE INSIDE



Grasmanis: Fond Memories Of Team, Fans

May 23, 2006

May 23 -- He was never about flash. Paul Grasmanis made it through 10 NFL seasons the hard way -- biting and scratching inside at defensive tackle, bleeding a lot, tackling punishment head on.

As far as unrestricted free agent additions go, Grasmanis was about as unheralded as they come when he joined the Eagles in 2000 and spent the next six seasons with the team.

Too often he was hurt, and in the end, the last injury he suffered, during that terrific comeback win in Kansas City last season, was the one that did him in.

Grasmanis officially retired on Tuesday and spoke late that night in glowing terms about the team and the city he loves.

"I can't say enough good things about the Eagles, the organization, or the city of Philadelphia," said Grasmanis, who called it a career after 10 seasons. "I loved being part of the team and being part of helping the Eagles turn things around. The mentality of the city -- how the fans are and how much the Eagles mean to them -- I'm not sure there is another city in the league like that.

"I couldn't have asked for more -- from a team that gave me a chance or from a city that loves the Eagles so much."



Paul Grasmanis was a gritty, effective DT for the Eagles

Bunkley.

Grasmanis, meanwhile, was ready to leave. He has already slimmed down to 240 pounds -- "I think I might do some underwear modeling," he joked -- and he's pondering next steps.

For now, the flood of memories of a 10-year career -- drafted by Chicago, a one-week stay in St. Louis, a season in Denver and then some very good times in Philadelphia -- are just a trickle.

When players leave, the reality sometimes comes at them slowly.

"It hit me a little bit during the (post-draft) mini-camp. I felt it a little bit then," he said. "You get used to knowing what time of the year it is and where you are supposed to be. But I know I'm making the right decision. The last injury put me over the edge. It's a no-brainer for me. I'm not going to be one of those guys who wonders if this is the right move. I know it is."

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So what's next? Grasmanis is an every-day Joe now, with a world of doors open after playing 10 seasons in the bigs. He has networked well, positioned himself well financially and is, at this very moment, loading up on yard work at this Tallahassee, FL home.

It's a good life. Ten seasons in the NFL creates a lot of opportunities for men who earned every second of their good fortune by simply working hard and doing things the right way. Grasmanis is accustomed to an honest day's work.

He plans to visit training camp -- "That is one thing I know right now I *won't* miss," he says -- and he wants to stay close to the team and, especially, to head coach Andy Reid.

"I have so many good things to say about Coach Reid. I can't tell you enough how much I think of him," said Grasmanis. "He gave me a chance. He took care of me and befriended me. I won't forget that. Gosh, he meant so much to my career and my life."

And that life now takes a new turn in the great unknown. It's an exciting time for Grasmanis, who has been urged by friends to enter the political arena in Florida.

"I don't know. Not yet," he says. "I'll know what the right decision is when it comes to me."

This decision is the right one. Grasmanis knows that. Ten seasons and more than 100 NFL games ... how many people can say they accomplished so much?

"Everything was so wonderful. I was blessed," he says. "I knew it then and I know it now. I want to be able to run around with my kids in a few years and at the rate I was going with the injuries, that wasn't going to happen. So it was time. My time in Philadelphia, it was the complete package. I loved it all. It was great being an Eagle."

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