

NEW YORK GIANTS

# Justin Pugh's Giants future in limbo as he heads to injured reserve

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The good news for Justin Pugh: He does not need back surgery.

The bad news for the Giants' best offensive lineman: His season is over, and he is headed into free agency facing an uncertain future, and perhaps the end of his tenure here.

The Giants will place Pugh on injured reserve, meaning he will miss the final seven games of his contract year and eight in total. The decision was made after Pugh received a second opinion on his back from Los Angeles-based spine surgeon Dr. Robert Watkins. Watkins said Pugh just needs rest and rehabilitation, according to the Giants, but he will not be able to play again this year.

Pugh, the Giants' 2013 first-round pick, is expected to be one<sup>1</sup> of the top free agent linemen on the market in the spring. This injury, and his overall injury history, will fog his outlook a bit.



Pugh missed five games in 2016 with a knee injury and will hit the market having missed a combined 13 games in the last two seasons and 17 in the last four.

The injuries could cost him to some extent, but Pugh still stands to cash in given the dearth of quality linemen in the league. A bigger question is whether the Giants, who will be under the leadership of a new coach and general manager, will have any interest in re-signing the versatile linemen. And if so, will they have the cap space to win a bidding war?

Pugh proved his value for the Giants before the injury, going back and forth between left guard and right tackle due to injury and performance issues elsewhere on the line. Former general manager Jerry Reese declined to extend Pugh before he hit free agency, so Reese's successor may be forced to use the franchise tag in order to prevent Pugh from walking. The 2018 tag rate for linemen is expected to be about \$14.3 million, according to CBS Sports.

The Giants' offensive line has been a weak spot for years now. Rebuilding it will be a top priority going forward. Letting the best player of the group leave seems like a curious first step in the process, but that may be the reality the Giants face.



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