

Nick Easton working way back after neck surgery, hopes to re-sign with Vikings

By [Chris Tomasson / St. Paul Pioneer Press](#) on Oct 2, 2018 at 9:01 p.m.

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Minnesota Vikings center Nick Easton (62) against the Buffalo Bills at New Era Field in Orchard Park, N.Y., on Aug. 10, 2017. Minnesota beats Buffalo 17 to 10. Timothy T. Ludwig / USA TODAY Sports

EAGAN, Minn. — Nick Easton hopes he hasn't played his last game for the Vikings.

Easton, the starting left guard in 2017, was lost for the season after August surgery to repair a herniated disk in his neck. Easton is in line to become an unrestricted free agent next March, and he wants to re-sign with Minnesota.

"Of course," he said.

Nearly two months from his Aug. 9 surgery, Easton is rehabbing in the Twin Cities and said he's doing well. He's still not sure exactly how his injury occurred.

Easton practiced with the Vikings on Aug. 3 and was ready to play in the team's night scrimmage at TCO Performance Center the next day. But he felt soreness in his upper back and neck, and the Vikings wanted to get it checked out.

"It basically wasn't a one-event injury," he said. "It was an accumulation, so I couldn't tell you exactly how it happened."

Easton had his medical records evaluated by Dr. Jack Kelley, an orthopedic specialist in New Haven, Conn., and was surprised by what he heard.

"That's something you don't want to hear, especially in a sensitive area of your body," he said.

Easton had surgery in Los Angeles by a team led by Dr. Robert Watkins, a spine specialist.

"It's unfortunate to miss out on the season," Easton said. "I wish I could be out there with my guys. ... But I'm happy with how things are moving along. We've got a good rehab program here that's basically put on by the surgeon I saw in California. It's slow but it's steady."

Easton suffered a fractured right ankle in Week 16 in Green Bay last December and missed the final regular-season game and two playoff games. He was able to return for spring drills.

Easton had been playing center in training camp in place of Pat Elflein, who was out with shoulder and ankle problems but has returned. The plan had been for Easton to return to left guard, where he became the starter in 2017, his third season in Minnesota.

When Easton was playing center, Tom Compton took over at left guard. He has remained in that role.

Undrafted out of Harvard in 2015 and traded by San Francisco to Minnesota in October 2015, Easton became an unrestricted free agent after last season. He signed a one-year, \$2.914 million deal last spring and had been hopeful of getting a contract extension before this season.

Easton is now likely bound for free agency. It remains to be seen how his neck injury might affect contract negotiations.

"I guess we'll find out," he said. "I mean, I've never had to become an unrestricted free agent coming off an injury before, so we'll see what comes out of it."

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