

Local Punter Among Hopefuls For Ravens

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Former Broadneck High and University of Maryland standout Brooks Barnard will be among several punters trying out with the Baltimore Ravens today.

Baltimore is seeking a replacement for punter Dave Zastudil, who will be out three to four weeks with a separated left shoulder.

Barnard is among a handful of free agent punters being brought in by Ravens special teams coordinator Gary **Zauner**.

Veterans Mark Royals, Dan Stryzinski and Ken Walter also were mentioned as possibilities for Baltimore, which intends to sign a punter to participate in Sunday's home game against the Dallas Cowboys.

"We will bring in a number of punters," Baltimore head coach Brian Billick told the media yesterday. "One of Gary Zauner's strengths is he always has somebody in his back pocket. He and George Kokinis (director of pro personnel) will put their heads together and come up with the usual suspects."

Baltimore learned about Barnard from his agent, Chad Wiestling of Integrated Sports. Wiestling called the Ravens Sunday evening after learning of Zastudil's injury. **Zauner** watched tape of Barnard punting in preseason with the Chicago Bears before inviting him to tryout.

Barnard, who holds Maryland records for punting average in a game, season and career, has spent two years trying to hook on with an NFL franchise. The 6-foot-2, 188-pounder was in training camp with the Chicago Bears the last two preseasons and showed well before being waived in the final cutdown in favor of former All-Pro Brad Maynard.

Barnard had workouts with Detroit Lions and Green Bay Packers last season before signing as a free agent with the New England Patriots on Dec. 3, 2003 to replace struggling starter Ken Walter. He punted for the Patriots against the Miami Dolphins and performed well in less-than-ideal weather conditions.

Braving 25 mph winds and a swirling snowstorm, Barnard punted 10 times for an average of 36.5 yards. He executed a pooch punt that was downed at the 4-yard line and set up the game-winning touchdown.

However, Barnard was released the next week by head coach Bill Belichick, who reportedly resigned Walter because he was the favorite holder of placekicker Adam Vinatieri.

Chicago placed Barnard with the Rhein Fire of NFL Europe last spring and he spent the entire season as the team's starting punter. He averaged nearly 43 yards on 20 attempts in four exhibition games with the Bears this past summer.

Barnard attended a tryout with the Kansas City Chiefs last month and impressed head coach Dick Vermeil with his distance and hang time. However, the Chiefs did not need a punter after starter Steve Cheeks recovered from a minor injury.

Currently living in Owings Mills, Barnard has been punting and lifting weights daily at Broadneck High and the University of Maryland, his father said.

Following Zastudil's injury, Baltimore was forced to use backup quarterback Kordell Stewart as the punter.

A former high school punter, Stewart averaged 35.4 yards on five attempts.

"I love Kordell, but I don't want to see him back there punting a whole more more even though he did a great job for us," **Billick** said yesterday.