

NFL Football Player with Grade 3 Torn ligament in Ankle

Be sure of it, Dwight Freeney will play

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FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. – Dwight Freeney’s ankle hurts. At this time of the year whose doesn’t? According to the Indianapolis Colts, their Pro Bowl defensive end has a grade 3 ankle injury, which, according to someone in possession of a license to practice medicine, means he has a torn ligament in his ankle. In theory, that would mean Freeney will not play in Super Bowl XLIV on Sunday, but do not be fooled. When teams start talking about the severity of someone’s mysterious injury before a big game, you can be sure of one thing – he’s playing. The Colts were talking last night as if Freeney was on life support rather than spending his idle time inside a hyperbaric chamber. According to coach Jim Caldwell and a half-dozen of his players, who spoke at a brief media session after their plane landed in Fort Lauderdale, they are preparing diligently for life without Dwight. “I’m praying for him,” defensive tackle Daniel Muir said. It’s not on the schedule, but a novena will be held at the Colts’ hotel before today’s media session at Sun Life Stadium in Miami. Surely someone is sitting shiva for the passing of the Colts’ chances against the Saints, for all is lost. After all, Freeney’s ankle is a) sprained, b) torn to shreds, c) crushed to pumice, or d) none of the above. Whatever the condition of Freeney’s ankle, the likelihood it will prevent him from playing Sunday is not “probable.” Did not Terrell Owens play in a Super Bowl against the Patriots [team stats] with a broken leg and have nine catches? To quote Bill Belichick , “I’m no doctor,” but last time I thought about it, a torn ankle ligament didn’t strike me as something as daunting as a broken leg. “He’s day-to-day,” Caldwell said. Well, aren’t we all? “If he can’t go it’s the old mantra,” Caldwell continued. “Next man up. Certainly he’s been a quick healer, but he hasn’t been practicing, and if he hasn’t been practicing, we prepare as if he won’t play.” This is a Christian man of faith talking there, proving once again that somewhere buried in the Bible’s 1,000-plus pages is special dispensation from fibbing for football coaches. What is ironic is that the injury report was created by former NFL commissioner Bert Bell after an attempt was made to fix the 1946 championship game between the Giants and Bears. Bell suspended two Giants players, Frank Filchock and Merle Hapes, believing they had been approached by gamblers. The following year Bell instituted the injury report in an effort to eliminate inside information being sold to gamblers. Since then the league has consistently said the purpose of the injury report is to protect the integrity of the game. Considering the way it has been misused in recent years by teams like the Colts and Patriots, it might be protecting something, but integrity isn’t it. Freeney reportedly has spent considerable time in a hyperbaric chamber in Miami. It is a device that increases the pressure of oxygen in body tissue to promote rapid healing

NFL Football Player with Sprained Right Ankle

Going hyperbaric: Testing Freeney's system

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MIAMI — If you put me side by side with Dwight Freeney, I'm not going to win in many categories. For a day, however, I'll give you the one where I trumped him: Hyperbaric chambers. As part of the **rehabilitation of his sprained right ankle**, the **COLTS' DEFENSIVE END** spends time in a hyperbaric chamber, where increased air pressure increases the oxygen in his system and can help speed recovery. What better participatory journalism piece this week than to test it out? With the help of ESPN resident physical therapist Stephania Bell and the fine folks at University of Miami Hospital, I spent 25 minutes breathing 100 percent oxygen at two times normal atmospheric pressure. If I did it more, maybe 90 minutes 10 different times, I might feel younger and my metabolism would speed up, my experts said. Growing a full head of hair would be much less likely. Should Freeney play and play well Sunday, he could become the hyperbaric chamber poster boy. "I think there are definitely pro [athletes] that are using it with success," said Dr. Magaly Rodriguez, a surgeon at the hospital's wound care center who oversaw my treatment. But such use is "off protocol." There are only 13 official medical uses for the chamber, to treat things such as carbon monoxide poisoning, compromised skin grafts or diabetic foot ulcers. Though I contemplated spraining an ankle for the team and did bang my shin on a media center chair as I packed up for the hospital, I entered the chamber a healthy person. And for a healthy person, Rodriguez said time in a hyperbaric chamber can have anti-aging and body cleansing results. Before my visit with Rodriguez and nurse/hyperbaric coordinator Angelina Meza-Suarez, I asked Freeney for details of his hyperbaric chamber use. I thought I'd have tight space issues — I nearly had a panic attack in a narrow staircase at Notre Dame (the Cathedral in Paris, not the school in South Bend, Ind.). Colts linebacker Gary Brackett increased my concern when he told me he didn't do hyperbaric chambers because he's claustrophobic. "If you're claustrophobic, you probably need to stay away from it," Freeney told me. "It just kind of feels like you're in an incubator ... I take my laptop in, just sit it up on my chest, maybe watch a little film, zone out, fall asleep, wake up, do a little Internet search. And that's great for the circulation." Great, I thought, I'll write a blog entry on my laptop inside the chamber, turn on Pandora and film the video for this piece. Distractions would help me handle it. But for the trip into the Sechrist 3200 Monoplace Chamber, I needed to be in a gown, take no metal with me and be flat on my back. Uh-oh. My chamber is a futuristic glass tube or canister, a coffin without corners and a great deal more circulation. Cost: \$35,000 to \$38,000. It's sold only to hospitals, and a doctor must be present when it's in use. According to Rodriguez, the sort of zip-up, blow-up chamber Freeney's using if he's taking a laptop with him uses regular air, which is 21 percent oxygen, not 100 percent oxygen like I got. He's probably at about 1.3 atmospheres worth of pressure; I was in 2, the equivalent of 34 feet below sea level. I changed into the gown and Meza-Suarez measured my blood sugar before putting electrodes on me. With a photographer and a videographer in tow, a claustrophobic incident would a) be highly embarrassing and b) not make for much of a story. With those fears as motivation, I took deep breaths, laid down, got a pep talk and felt the bed roll into the chamber. Meza-Suarez closed the door behind me and I didn't look back, because that thing looked like the door on a mini bank vault. But I calmed quickly. Air streamed in, making the sound you may hear standing by a large vent. The one thing I was supposed to notice was the pressure in my ears, and I needed to be conscious of swallowing or yawning to pop them. But they bothered me only a little, right at the end. Meza-Suarez talked to me via phone, checking in often. With the video camera light and the photographer hovering, I was a little self conscious. (Watching the video now, I am more so. I'm typically animated, but coming out of that tube I couldn't have had a worse monotone performance. Or more chins.) It got pretty cold in there, even under a thick blanket. The tight space wasn't an issue. There was elbow room on both sides and the top was far away from the tip of my nose. An open MRI I once had on a broken elbow was a far, far worse experience. I could have fallen asleep, and short nap would have come in handy. As Rodriguez and Meza-Suarez promised, I wound up feeling tired from the experience. But if I was committing to this long term, considering I might go in a 41-year-old and come out 36, and that my metabolism could convert to that of a young Parisian modal, the yawning wouldn't be a hassle at all