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11-15-2021

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Recommended Citation

Goldman, Tara King, "Envisioning Russell Wilson's Return" (2021). *The Spectator Online*. 458.
<https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/spectator-online/458>

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Envisioning Russell Wilson's Return

Tara King Goldman, Author

Russell Wilson was spotted in an unfamiliar position—on the sidelines—missing the first game of his NFL career Sunday, Oct. 17. Wilson suffered a severe middle-finger injury (mallet finger and multiple fractures) on his right throwing hand during the Rams game Oct. 7. Although his time on injured reserve has ended, Wilson's rehabilitation process highlighted his work ethic, spirituality and use of visualization that will be on display when he returns.

The media first caught Wilson's new pregame envisioning routine when he went through drills, led imaginary huddles and executed plays before the Seahawks played the Steelers on Sunday Night Football.

Damon Huard, a former NFL quarterback and the director of community external relations for the Washington Huskies, believes that visualization gives athletes an edge.

"Today, they [pro sports athletes] spend a lot of money on sports psychiatrists and mental edge coaches," Huard said.

Indeed, Wilson is able to surround himself with a performance team and recently thanked those people working closely during his rehabilitation. A video that Wilson posted of him throwing for the first time after surgery shows how much his performance, team, spirituality and mindset were a part of his recovery.

Jordan Babineaux, a former Seahawks and Titans safety and adjunct professor at Seattle University, remarked that visualization involves creating a mental image of what we want to accomplish, and then that expectation becomes a manifestation in the future.

"And we can do that in any area of our lives—spirituality, health, finance, fitness, relationships, you name it," Babineaux said.

Babineaux believes Wilson's use of visualization and neutral mindset is the reason he holds the record for fourth-quarter comebacks in the NFL. Wilson has described his neutral mindset as focusing on the present, knowing the past and envisioning the future.

"Neutral thinking means removing yourself from the outcomes," Babineaux said.

An outcome fans can get excited about is Wilson being cleared to play by Dr. Steve Shin, the doctor who performed the surgery the day after his injury.

Stacy Rost, host of Jake and Stacy on 710 ESPN, noted that her co-host, Jake Heaps, who works with Wilson in the off-season, commented that Wilson is returning to practices this week at close to 100%.



Rachel Bentfield

Now that Wilson can return, everyone will be watching to see if he can still do the things he used to do pre-injury. Huard knows what it is like to come back from a hand injury and how it might play into the game plan.

"They might do more shotgun snaps and less underneath center," Huard said.

Considering the injury was just to one finger, Wilson will be coming back with a rested but conditioned body. Babineaux noted that Wilson's return will give a big boost to the Seahawks' chances of making a run to win a wild card playoff spot.

"One of his greatest attributes as a quarterback that makes him very unique is his ability to run," Babineaux said.

Rost emphasized that Wilson is likely to play his first game against a particularly tough Green Bay Packers team at Lambeau this weekend. The forecast looking ahead is looking cold, wet and a bit windy. The odds are stacked against him as the Seahawks are looking for their first victory in Green Bay since 1999.

"Anything can happen in the NFL. We saw so many upsets [last weekend] from teams that no one expected to win," Rost said.

Rost noted some keys to the Seahawks success in the second half of the season would be staying healthy, making improvements on both sides of the ball and opening the middle of the field more to take pressure off the deep targets. DK Metcalf and Tyler Lockett. Finally, Rost stressed that having Wilson back opens up Shane Waldron's playbook, thus diversifying the offense to help keep defenses guessing

"Ironically, the defense started out being the tough spot, but ... it is up to Seattle's biggest playmakers to step up," Rost added.

Huard emphasized that the Seahawks often play their best football at the end of the season. The second half of the Seahawks season schedule is lighter. With the NFL adding an extra wild card, it allows for seven playoff teams from each conference.

The intersection of Wilson's visualization and the future will be tested against Green Bay this weekend. Even with Wilson missing three games, he still has the best passer rating in the NFL at 125.3, with division rival Matthew Stafford behind him at 111.

The Seahawks are 6-3 coming off bye weeks ever since Russell Wilson became their starting quarterback. They have an 0-4 record on the road at Lambeau, but are 4-0 when playing them at home. Fans will not be neutral come game time as they watch Wilson execute his vision and lead what they hope is the Seahawks' run for a wild card spot.