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## **Any Majik for Chad?**

*Surgery may be beginning of end*

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Chad Pennington scrambles away from the question like it's an onrushing linebacker. "I'm doing well," the Jets quarterback replies, curtly, when quizzed about his surgically repaired shoulder after Sunday's uninspiring win over the Dolphins. "A hundred percent? I don't know that," coach Herman Edwards says about Pennington's shoulder.

Vague. Evasive. Just as the Jets were when Pennington originally injured the shoulder last season against the Bills before acknowledging at season's end that he had torn his rotator cuff. But the question isn't going away. With every wobbly pass Pennington throws, it will be asked:

Is his shoulder OK? Will it ever be OK?

The Jets say Pennington – who didn't exactly pack a rifle before getting hurt – missed too much preseason time recovering from surgery. That he's still working himself into game shape, still getting in sync with a new offensive scheme.

Then you hear Don Majkowski's story. Majkowski had rotator cuff surgery 15 years ago, a year removed from a Pro Bowl season quarterbacking the Packers. Five frustrating seasons later, Majkowski was finished – his arm out of throws.

"It never came back to what it was before," Majkowski says from his real estate office in Atlanta. "That's a fact."

That fact should give the Jets – who gave their fair-haired franchise quarterback \$64 million a year ago – the shakes. Because 15 years ago, the Packers felt the same way about their fair-haired franchise quarterback.

BEFORE BRETT FAVRE took over Titledown, Green Bay had the Majik Man. Majkowski, the cocky kid out of western New York by way of the University of Virginia, took over the floundering Packers in 1989 and led them to a 10-6 record.

He finished second to Joe Montana in the league MVP voting and got himself a \$1.5 million contract after an extended holdout. Then on Nov. 18, 1990, in a game against the Cardinals, Majkowski was chased down by linebacker Freddie Joe Nunn, who wrapped him up in a bearhug and drove him into the turf – shoulder first.

"It was kind of a burning, numbing pain," Majkowski says. "I couldn't lift my arm for about five minutes." When Majkowski regained movement in his arm, he could barely lift it above his head. Team doctors originally diagnosed the injury as a bruise. Majkowski rehabbed his shoulder for four weeks before stepping back on the practice field. Majkowski threw one pass, then crumpled to his knees in agony. Doctors discovered a 2-inch tear in one of the tendons in his rotator cuff. Surgery was in December.

"I was putting myself through hell trying to rehab that thing," Majkowski says. "I was (ticked)." And scared. Rotator cuff injuries are rare among quarterbacks, but they had ruined the careers of NFL quarterbacks Gary Danielson and Jim McMahon.

Majkowski was determined to be the exception. He spent the next four months – five hours a day – rehabbing his wounded wing. The first six weeks were spent just trying to regain movement in his arm – Majkowski's shoulder muscles had shriveled to nothing. Just extending his arm was a torture test – Majkowski had to numb his shoulder with ice for 20 minutes beforehand to get through the pain.

"There were a lot of tears. I couldn't even take a 1-pound dumbbell," Majkowski says. "There's many days that I thought I was never going to throw again."

The first football Majkowski was able to throw was a Nerf. But his shoulder gradually regained strength. Majkowski made his return at Packers minicamp in April 1991. There was pain, but he was able to throw. Majkowski had a strong preseason. The shoulder felt sound.

Only it wasn't right. Majkowski's release wasn't as compact. He wasn't holding his arm up at the proper angle at the release point. The velocity on his throws was down. "I used to be able to stand flat-footed and throw with no problem," Majkowski says. "I didn't have that ability to have that quick snap on my throws."

Majkowski developed scar tissue in his shoulder. When he tried compensating for the limited arm, he developed tendinitis in his elbow. By 1992, Majkowski had lost his starting job to Favre. He spent two years with the Colts and two with the Lions before quitting after the 1996 season.

The Majik was gone.

"I tried everything I did before," Majkowski says. "Not being able to get back to that level was really mentally frustrating."

MAJKOWSKI IS 41 now. His shoulder still barks at him occasionally, but it's well enough for him to play tennis, golf, even some flag football. In addition to his real estate career, Majkowski does broadcasting work for both the Packers and other football outlets. He's watched a lot of Pennington, both before and after his

injury.

"I don't know how he played, he must have been really sucking it up," Majkowski says. "He looks like he's throwing fine. He's got a different release, it's not a real quick release, it's real smooth."

Majkowski thinks Pennington can regain his pre-injury form. After all, sports medicine has improved plenty in 15 years. Majkowski even said he may have come back too quickly from surgery.

His biggest piece of advice for Pennington? "This isn't a broken bone that he can forget about once it heals. This is a lifetime injury. He'll have to ice that shoulder every day, perform those same, boring, strengthening exercises every day. "If he doesn't, it will weaken quick," Majkowski says.

And in the end, it might not even matter. Fifteen years ago, Majkowski felt his right arm could do anything. But once he went under the knife to fix his damaged shoulder, he realized there weren't many throws left in it. Majkowski doesn't know how many throws Chad Pennington has left in his right arm.

No one does.

