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## Ex-Titan Long sets NFL as his goal

Rien Long's injury list following his car accident in January was lengthier than that of most NFL teams after a date with the Steelers:

Concussion, punctured lung, eight broken ribs, "filleted" pelvis, severed urethra, fractured C-6 vertebra.

The former Titans defensive lineman almost died twice, once in the hours immediately after his 2005 Mustang skidded off an on-ramp, rolled up an embankment and smashed into a rock wall (alcohol was not a factor, speed was), and again days later when his lungs began to fill with blood.

So it was a little bit surprising to see Long pumping iron and breezing through high-knee jogs at D1 Sports in Cool Springs earlier this week, continuing what's been a rapid rehabilitation under the care of Elite Sports Medicine.

## History of setbacks

Then again, we probably shouldn't be surprised when it comes to Long's recuperative powers or by the man's will.

Let's remember that, even before the horrendous car crash, Long was already trying to bounce back — from the torn Achilles tendon that sidelined him during the 2006 season, the staph infection that nearly took his leg afterward and the knee surgery that eventually cost him a roster spot with the Titans in 2007.

What, then, is the big deal about a half-dozen more operations? What's so hard about learning to walk again, which Long taught himself a few months ago?

"It was kind of like a Frankenstein walk at first — a little ugly, but I was walking," Long said. "After that, it was kind of like being a baby again, thinking I can take a few steps and then going and doing it."

He celebrated small accomplishments early on — his first time jogging, first time riding a bike, the first time he could balance on one leg and put on his underwear.

But in only a matter of weeks, Long has advanced to the point that he's running sprints, high-stepping through string ladders and benching 225 pounds multiple times.

He weighs 235 pounds right now but says he's well on his way to returning to the 300-pound level that helped him win the Outland Trophy at Washington State in 2002.

## Dreaming of comeback

His goal, of course, is another shot at the NFL, where Long piled up almost 100 tackles and nine sacks in two full seasons with the Titans. Standing on the sideline the other day and watching former teammates practice, he was reminded just how special that time was.

"I just want to put my name in the hat again," Long said. "It would be simple to call it quits, but that's just not in me."

Long says he's already spoken to Titans Coach Jeff Fisher in hopes of arranging a tryout in the coming months.

Should such an opportunity arise, expect Long to arrive at Baptist Sports Park driving the 1987 GMC pickup that replaced the smashed Mustang. It's much slower — and much bigger — than his previous ride.

Said Long: "Now if I come across a rock wall, I could probably go right through it or right over it."

He seems to be getting the better of that rock wall right now all by himself.

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