

Knights star Cory Paterson takes a punt on NFL trial

30/09/2008 10:33:00 PM

CORY Paterson's agent expects Knights officials will launch formal contract talks soon, but Newcastle's hopes of re-signing the representative forward could hinge on a trip he is making to the US this month.

Paterson is one of a long list of Knights first-graders coming off contract at the end of the 2009 season, along with Dan Tolar, Matt Hilder, Junior Sau, Akuila Uate, Richard Fa'aoso, Cameron Ciraldo, Luke MacDougall and Luke Walsh.

After making his senior representative debut last weekend for the Prime Minister's XIII against Papua New Guinea, Paterson returned to Newcastle on Monday night to begin his off-season break.

But the towering 21-year-old will have little time to kick back and relax during his month off.

On October 16 he leaves for the US on a holiday that will combine business and pleasure.

During his fortnight abroad, Paterson will travel with Cameron McGillivray, the director of Ozpunt, an Australian-based NFL scouting agency.

McGillivray said he had lined up four trials for Paterson at National Football League franchises Arizona Cardinals, San Diego Chargers, San Francisco 49ers and Oakland Raiders. The four clubs are specifically interested in Paterson's ability to place-kick an NFL ball 70 to 75 metres.

NFL clubs often have one specialist assigned to the role of kicking off, and Paterson's capacity for hoofing the ball dead over the end zone or high enough to gain "hang time" could land him a lucrative jackpot in the US.

Minimum wage in the NFL is \$US330,000 (\$408,000) more than double what Paterson is earning and McGillivray said it was conceivable he would eventually attract a bigger deal than that.

"There are guys over there whose only job is to walk on the field, take the kick-off, and walk off," he said.

"It may not sound very glamorous, but some of these guys are on [US] \$600,000 or \$700,000 a year, and it's not very taxing on the body. Some of them have prolonged careers and play until they're over 40."

McGillivray said Paterson would also showcase his skills as a goalkicker and punter, but kick-offs were his forte.

"In the NFL, if you can kick off through the back of the end zone, that is gold because the opposition can't score a touchdown from your kick-off," he said.

"Most of the kick-off specialists in the NFL can do that probably 20 per cent of the time. Cory can do that probably 70 or 80 per cent, so it does put him ahead of the rest. That's why the clubs over there are interested in having a look at him."

Paterson said yesterday that he would "just wait and see what happens" during his visit to the US and was treating it mainly as a holiday.

"Honestly, I'm not expecting too much out of it," he said. "If something does come up, I'll look at it, but I'm not going to put all my eggs into one basket with that because I still want to play footy here."

Paterson's manager, Steve Gillis, said he had held preliminary discussions with the Knights about extending his client's tenure and predicted that talks would "liven up before Christmas".

"At the moment no offer has been made, so until it is we're just sitting tight," Gillis said.

"I'll be surprised if the Knights don't do whatever they have to do to make a good offer and keep him.

"His preference would be to stay, but there is no doubt there would be enormous interest in him should he decide to test the market."

Gillis said he was keeping an open mind about Paterson's NFL trial.

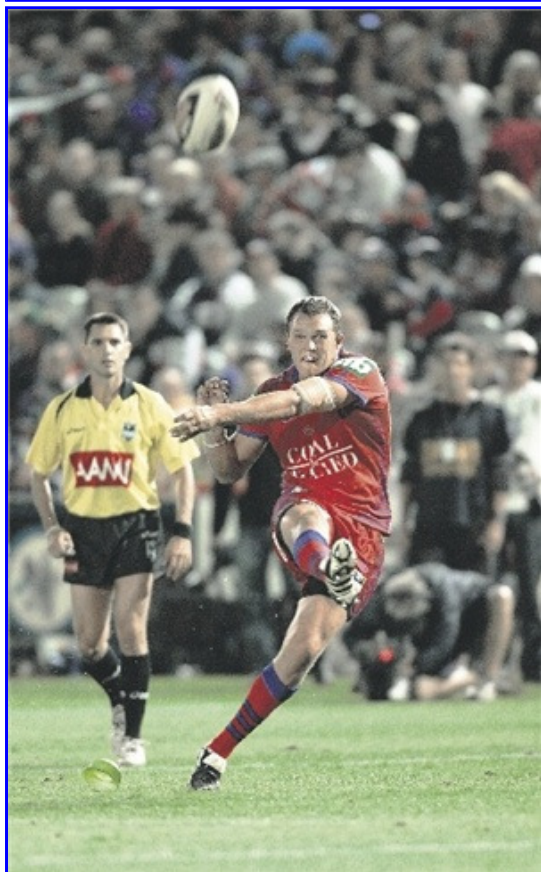
"It's an experiment. He's exploring something that's totally different. Never say never," Gillis said.

He said Knights management were aware of Paterson's intentions, although it is hard to imagine they would consider releasing him from the final year of his contract should an offer materialise.

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BIG BOOT: Cory Paterson shows his place-kicking form for the Knights.- Picture by Darren Pateman

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