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I can tackle, too ... Sam Thaiday shows his power against the North Queensland Cowboys.

Photo: Getty Images

Sam's linebacker offer

Adrian Prosenko | February 1, 2009

BEN GRAHAM is about to become the first Australian to play in the Super Bowl. Sam Thaiday wants to be the next.

Brisbane Broncos star Thaiday has revealed his desire to test himself in American football after Australian-based talent scouts approached his management about a potential code switch.

The development will shock the Broncos, who had opened talks with Thaiday's management in the hope of extending the Queensland forward's stay at Red Hill beyond 2009.

Representatives from Ozpunt - the organisation working with Newcastle forward Cory Paterson and former Sydney Swan Nick Davis - contacted Thaiday's management late last week after ear-marking the 23-year-old as a potential NFL linebacker. The parties are expected to meet in coming weeks.

Thaiday, off contract at the end of this season, said he would "seriously consider" making the switch to the American game.

"I'd love to go over there," Thaiday told *The Sun-Herald*. "It would be a great experience, getting to train and play with such great players.

"Seeing the States is also on my to-do list, I'd love to see America, everyone with their big cars and gangster chains.

"It's another level above NRL. You watch it on TV and realise how big it is over there in the States, all the way from high school and college into the professional NFL league.

"It's amazing the crowds they get and the hype around it.

"It would be good to go over there and it's another option."

Australians are the flavour of the month in the US. Arizona Cardinals punter Graham will become the first local to play in the NFL's showpiece event, the Super Bowl, tomorrow morning (AEDT).

The former Geelong captain is one of four Australians to play in the NFL this season, alongside former Collingwood forward Sav Rocca (Philadelphia), Dallas Cowboys superboot Mat McBriar and Jacksonville's Cameron Stephenson.

Three Aussies - Colin Ridgway, Colin Scotts and Darren Bennett - have previously played in the NFL. All of those players have an AFL background and were scouted for their ability to boot the ball as a gridiron punter or kicker.

However, Bennett believes the next generation of Australians will be scouted from the NRL or rugby union ranks and selected to fill field positions.

"Aussie Rules presents players who naturally kick the football, but I think there's a lot of rugby union and league players that have the body type to be able to make the transition to a tight end or a running back or a linebacker," Graham told *The Sun-Herald*.

Graham cautioned it was not simply a case of turning up and having millions of dollars thrown at you, pointing to the difficulties Sydney Roosters forward Willie Mason had in impressing NFL talent scouts during try-outs.

"[The challenge is] they haven't grown up with the sport and don't understand the fine nature of each position to be able to just walk in," Graham said.

"I was privy to bringing Willie Mason to work out at the Jets. Even though Willie is a supreme athlete, it showed he didn't understand the game well enough to deliver a good workout. The scouts saw him and expected him to deliver something they see every day, but he's not used to the movements or playing in that position. He looked more like a project than just a walk-up start."

Thaiday, however, said he would welcome the challenge of mixing it with the big boppers earning millions in the US.

"I love tackling big boys here, the Willie Masons and the Carl Webbs, because it's such a challenge, they're bigger than me and they're hard to tackle," he said.

"That's something I love, I like the confrontation and getting in to do the hard stuff.

"I could probably handle [the NFL players], but I'd have to wait and see how big they are.

"I'm still only young. If my body holds up, maybe I could give it a crack over there for a couple of years.

"I'm more than willing to seriously consider a stint over there."

Swans star Barry Hall knocked back a similar approach to pursue American football last year, while new Broncos recruit Israel Folau recently admitted that he was "definitely interested" in NFL opportunities.

Ozpunt's Paul Shepherd said NFL clubs had broadened their scope in the search for Australian talent.

"We've had direction from NFL clubs to find some guys to play in the field - guys from league and union - rather than just punters," he said.

"Based on his aggressiveness and ability to tackle, Sam looks like he'd make a good linebacker. We'd be happy to meet up with him and put him through some drills."

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