

Heart problem stalls Teply's shot at NFL

Written by Jim Ecker

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Jay Teply impressed the Minnesota Vikings at a free-agent camp earlier this month and was going to be offered a contract, but first he had to pass a routine physical exam before the Vikings could sign him to an NFL deal.

That's where the problem started.

The team doctor in Minneapolis discovered that Teply has an irregular heartbeat, enough of a problem that the Vikings withdrew their offer. Teply, a 6-foot-7, 325-pound offensive lineman from Cedar Rapids, was stunned.

First the Vikings had told him on Sunday, May 6 that they were going to offer a contract, and then on Monday, May 7 he was told he had a heart problem and they couldn't sign him to a pro deal.

"Essentially your dream come true," he said of the original piece of good news. "And then you're in the doctor's office and something doesn't seem right, and then the doctor comes in and tells you we can't sign you.

"It kind of surprises you. You don't know what to think. That was probably the longest four-hour drive home I've ever had in my life."

Teply had undergone numerous physical exams at Xavier High School and the University of Northern Iowa, and none of those doctors found anything wrong with his heart. Thinking back, however, he realized something may have been wrong at times.

"I realized I may have experienced something in the past," he said. "My heart would race for a couple of beats and I would slow down.

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"Basically my heart beats irregularly. It doesn't beat at a constant rate. It skips a beat every once in awhile."

An irregular or arrhythmic heart beat can be caused by exercise. It also can be genetic, and Teply said one of his grandfathers may have had a similar problem. "Apparently I've had it my whole life and nobody has ever caught it," he said.

Teply is not ready to forget about a pro football career. He's seen his own cardiologist and had a battery of tests that showed he can play football without putting himself in danger.

"I've been cleared to play by my cardiologist," he said. "We're still waiting to hear back from the Vikings on whether they want me or not."

Teply said he plans to undergo a medical procedure to correct his irregular heartbeat, but is not sure of the timing. He's been assured the problem can be corrected. Now it's a question of finding a team that will give him a chance.

"We're just kind of sitting and waiting now," he said.

Teply helped Xavier win the Class 4A state football title in 2006 and was named a first team all-Missouri Valley Conference offensive tackle this past season at Northern Iowa. He was not selected in the NFL draft, but the Vikings invited him to a tryout and offered him a chance to make the team as a free agent.

He did well at the initial camp and showed the Vikings he can play left tackle and right tackle, a valuable commodity in the NFL. Now he just wants a chance to play, either with Minnesota or with another team.