

Cards' Tillman enlists in Army

\$1 million contract offer no match for safety's patriotism

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Cardinals safety Pat Tillman left a \$1 million contract offer on the table and enlisted in the Army, Cardinals head coach Dave McGinnis revealed Thursday.

INSIDE The enigmatic Tillman, who starred at Arizona State University as a linebacker and beat the odds by converting to safety in a four-year career in the NFL, was not available for comment. He told McGinnis on Wednesday that he wanted to avoid a media frenzy certain to follow his unusual career change.

Those close to Tillman, 25, said the seeds of his decision may have been sown in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Tillman watched news coverage of the attacks from the Cardinals' Tempe training complex.

"The importance of football ranks zero compared to what happened," Tillman said while staring at the screen. "When you compare it ... we're worthless. We're actors."

Now, a little more than eight months later, Tillman — who enlisted with his younger brother Kevin — has shown where football ranked in his life.

Depending on his testing and qualifications, he will earn anywhere from \$1,022.70 a month as a private E-1 to \$1,443.60 as a private E-4, said Nancy Hutchinson, public affairs officer for the U.S. Army recruiting battalion in Phoenix.

But money wasn't the issue, McGinnis said.

"This is very serious with

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Pat, very personal with him," McGinnis said. "I honor that, the integrity of that. This is not a snap decision he made just yesterday. He feels very strongly about it, deeply convicted about it."

"I admire Pat's determination to make a commitment to his country," said team owner Bill Bidwill.

Tillman, who will have a three-year commitment with the Army, has already left the Valley, team officials said.

He spent two hours talking with McGinnis about the decision Wednesday and another half-hour with Bidwill. Tillman's plan, said McGinnis and Tillman's agent, Frank Bauer, is to eventually join the Rangers, a highly trained light infantry force used in

conventional and special operations.

Hutchinson said Tillman requested the Army not publicize his decision. Because of that, she said, the Army cannot divulge where and when Tillman will go through his nine weeks of basic training. She did confirm that Tillman and his brother enlisted through an East Valley recruiting office.

Tillman returned from his honeymoon in Bora Bora on Monday. Tuesday he broke the news to Bauer.

"I was hoping he was using this as a negotiation ploy, but that's not Patty," Bauer said, laughing.

Tillman told Bauer that while he still loved football, waiting to join the Army after a football career wasn't an option

ABOUT THE RANGERS

The 75th Ranger Regiment is a flexible, highly trained and rapidly deployable light infantry force with specialized skills that enable it to be employed against a variety of conventional and Special Operations targets. Ranger selection is competitive. Candidates must pass a stringent orientation course before selection to Ranger School.

because he would be too old for the Rangers by then. Tillman did tell Bauer he wanted to play in the NFL again when his tour was over.

By then, however, Tillman will be 28, middle age by NFL

standards. As it was, Tillman was in danger of losing his starting job to a bigger, faster, younger Adrian Wilson this season.

Tillman has always thrived on beating the odds, however. The San Jose, Calif., native was ignored by nearby Stanford before coming to Arizona State and starring for the Sun Devils as a linebacker.

After graduating summa cum laude in 3½ years, Tillman was an afterthought seventh-round draft pick by Arizona in 1998 and had to be converted to safety. Told by most that he was too small and too slow, Tillman eventually earned a starting role.

McGinnis said Tillman had not told any of his teammates as of Wednesday. Kwamie Lassiter, who started alongside

Tillman last season at free safety, said he wondered if the news was true when he first heard a reporter's voicemail message on Thursday.

But Lassiter also admitted that more than any other player, the quirky Tillman would be the one to leave pro football for the military.

"Pat needs challenges," Lassiter said. "The NFL was one. They told him he was too small, and he showed them he wasn't. This is just another challenge."

McGinnis had held a spot on the roster for Tillman through the offseason, despite Tillman's reluctance to sign. That did give McGinnis pause, though, and the coach wondered if Tillman was thinking about walking away. Bauer said Tillman had urged him to "go

slow" when the free-agent period had started, because the player wasn't sure what he wanted to do.

Former ASU coach Bruce Snyder said he was surprised, but not shocked.

"If someone would have called me today to tell me one of my former players was going to do something like this, the only guy I would have said is Pat," Snyder said.

Bauer said he wasn't completely shocked, either. Just last summer, Bauer said, Tillman turned down a five-year, \$9 million offer with St. Louis to stay with the Cardinals and sign a one-year, \$512,000 contract.

"Nothing really surprises me with Pat," Bauer said. "If he says he's going to go track down bin Laden, he will."