



# Dielman returns to Chargers

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SAN DIEGO -- Kris Dielman was at dinner with Matt Hasselbeck and some other Seattle players Friday night when he got a text message from his agent that a fat free agent contract with the Seahawks was all but ready to be signed.

Something didn't feel right, though. On top of that, fullback Lorenzo Neal kept calling, imploring Dielman to re-sign with the San Diego Chargers.

After a sleepless night in Seattle, Dielman signed a six-year deal with the Chargers worth \$39 million, with \$17 million guaranteed in the first two years.

With that, one of the most sought-after offensive linemen was off the market and the line that blocked so well for NFL MVP LaDainian Tomlinson remained intact.

"This morning my agent called me with some good news," said Dielman, the left guard. "I told him, 'Get me out of here, man. Get me home, back to sunny San Diego.'"

Dielman had flown to Seattle on Friday on a private jet provided by the Seahawks. He returned in a coach seat on Alaska Airlines.

The deal came together quickly Saturday morning in talks between Dielman's agent, Mike McCartney and the Chargers, who had said keeping Dielman was their top priority in free agency.

Dielman didn't want to leave, but his agent and the Chargers hadn't spoken since November, so he had to test the market.

"San Diego gave me my chance," Dielman said. "They gave me every opportunity to stay here when I was coming up through the ranks. I gave them every opportunity and they stepped up."

Dielman said loyalty was more important than money.

"Money's nice, but if you're not happy, if you're miserable, it ain't really worth it, in my opinion. I'm happy. San Diego's happy. Money ain't a factor. It never really was, either," he said.

General manager A.J. Smith called it a "big, big signing," adding that the Chargers wouldn't have been able to do the deal if the money gap was too big.

"Obviously, he's making a statement that it's not all about money, as long as he's comfortable with it," said Smith, who added that Dielman's work ethic is unmatched. "I knew he was that kind of guy, but you don't know the results until it's done."

Dielman said the Seahawks players took him to Qwest Field "and they walked me through their tunnel. That was an emotional game when we played there last year. It didn't feel right. It wasn't clicking real well. It turned out for the best, man."

The Chargers rallied to beat the Seahawks 20-17 in the final minute on Dec. 24.

Pro Bowl center Nick Hardwick said he was "pumped up, man," after getting a call from Dielman.

"I thought he was gone," Hardwick said. "I didn't think we were going to get him back. He called me and said, 'Are you ready to make a run at the Super Bowl?' He was pretty excited."

The Chargers' negotiator, Ed McGuire, said in a statement that team president Dean Spanos "wasn't going to let Kris get away and he didn't. Dean knows how valuable Kris is to our team in so many different ways. He stepped up and made it happen."

Dielman joined the Chargers in 2003 as an undrafted defensive lineman from Indiana. He was converted to guard in his rookie season and became a starter early in the 2005 season. He has quickly blossomed into a top offensive lineman.

"It's a great story for any young player," new coach Norv Turner said. "Kris comes in here as a defensive lineman and three years later he's a Pro Bowl alternate. It's just a great example of if you set your mind to it and you're determined, great things can happen."

Along with Eric Steinbach, who left Cincinnati and signed with Cleveland, Dielman was considered one of the two top guards on the market. Leonard Davis of Arizona is thought to be the premier tackle.

Dielman's reputation was enhanced by the MVP performance of Tomlinson, who set league records with 31 touchdowns and 186 points. He also won his first rushing title with 1,815 yards.

Coach Marty Schottenheimer, who was fired Feb. 12 despite the team going an NFL-best 14-2, described the Chargers' line last season as "snarly."

Dielman certainly added to that image.

"He's the enforcer," Hardwick said. "He's our intimidator. No one really wants to mess with him too much. We're glad to have him back."

With the Seahawks, Dielman could have blocked for Shaun Alexander, the 2005 NFL MVP.

But he said it would have been hard leaving Tomlinson behind.

"Shaun Alexander, we all know he's a great running back, but L.T.'s my guy, man," Dielman said. "I want to be his left guard for as long as I can. Two years for me wasn't enough. Now I've got him for six more, so let's roll, baby."