



The NFL Free Agency, Trades and the Draft. Beware.

By Kerry Schmidt 03-11-2007

The NFL made the most radical changes to the way teams did business when in the late 80's, players won the right for free agency.

And of course, the multi-million dollar league had absolutely no friggin idea how to make that work

Well, at first, they simply threw money at the best players and the richest got the best. But they quickly discovered that many of the teams were losing money due to this free-for-all spending.

Thus, in 1994, the Salary Cap came into existence.

I won't begin to bore you with the detailed crap, but basically each year's salary cap is 63% of the leagues defined gross revenue divided by the 32 teams.

In 2001, that amount was \$67.4 million that each team could spend on salaries.

Due to greatly increased revenues, the salary cap for this year is \$109 million.

The only other worthless part of this you need to know is the "signing bonus."

Say a team signs a player to a 6-year contract for \$40 million. They can give him a 12 million guaranteed sign on bonus, up front. That means the 12 million is pro-rated over the entire 6 years, thus freeing up cap room.

The balance of the contract is usually back-ended, meaning said player may receive 2 million the first year, 4 the second, 6 the third and then much heavier amounts in the last 2-3 years. That is because they are likely to either trade said player rather than have to pay that, thus helping their cap, or let him become a free agent.

Unlike MLB and the NBA, NFL contracts, unlike the sign ons, are not guaranteed for the duration.

OK, enough boring junk.

This brings us to the free agency period, which began March 2 of this year, and will continue up until draft day (beyond if a player is not picked up).

In today's NFL, this is where the astute teams can fill their most urgent needs. Also, trades are often made this time of the year, again for teams to fill specific needs.

Then you have the draft, wherein all 32 teams engage in a total crap shoot, each hoping to get some player(s) that can help the team's needs immediately or in the near future.

For a good many years, the NFL has held the "Combine" in Indianapolis, wherein, in theory, all of the potential draft choices would strut their stuff for coaches and management.

But as the \$ got larger, a good many of the top rated players do not attend the combine; instead they hold their own tryouts, usually at their own college campus, after they have spent a lot of time training in just the main areas the teams look for in the combine: 40-yard time; 225 pound bench press (number of times); vertical jump; long jump and then they are given a bunch of stupid and extensive intelligence and psychological testing.

Now on their home turf, the players actually run around and do real football besides the above mentioned 4 categories.



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Of course, the coaches and management sound off on how terrible it is for any player to miss this combine, but that is a bunch of BS.

With the amount of \$ at stake for some of the top players, they can choose to show off on their own turf and at their own time.

There will always be the combine, but it is really becoming almost a waste of time (see players not attending.)

Thus, the coaches and management must work a lot more and go to many of the individual workouts.

Plus the 40 yard times, bench presses, jumping, etc, all they do is tell you which players are good at those things. It does not tell you necessarily if they can really play football. As one coach said, "Yea, I take note of those things, plus I interview them and do background checks, but I then rely on film, where they are actually playing against the other good players."

After all this BS, the coaches must make lists of who they want to draft, and do so according to their draft order.

It is fun to watch/listen to coaches play poker, not giving up anything about whom they will draft. Like other teams don't already know!

And of course, you can get some of the dumbest moves of all time during the draft.

Showing the draft is a crap shoot, a good number of first-round players were busts. For example, Brian Bosworth, Oklahoma LB of several years ago. Top draft choice, a "can't miss" player.

He was out of football in less that three years, yet he always will be remembered as a great highlight film. The one wherein Bo Jackson flat out ran over him, even stepped on his chest on his way to the end zone.

Bye, bye Bosworth.

Then there was offensive lineman Tony Manderich, shown on the cover of Sports Illustrated with the by line, "The greatest offensive lineman ever?"

He bounced around for 3-4 years, never amounting to much.

And perhaps the greatest f...up was QB Ryan Leaf. The big debate that year was which QB would go No. 1, Peyton Manning or Leaf. A majority of so called experts actually had Leaf ahead of Manning.

Well as we know, the Colts took Manning No.1, and San Diego took Leaf No. 2.

You can safely say Manning did OK.

Leaf took his \$10 million signing bonus, lasted about 2 years, cussed out teammates and coaches and his most famous quote was, "F..k 'em all. I got my 10 million, and that is all I need."

There are many others, but you get the idea of what a crap shoot this is.

The thousands of hours coaches and management put into this, and, well, take a chance.

Remember, four QB's were drafted in 1979 before a guy named Joe Montana.

This brings us to some of the other "All time worst trades."

Remember, these trades and decisions are made by highly paid GM's, coaches and owners.



Most say the No. 1 screw up was the trade by Minnesota for Herschel Walker from the Dallas Cowboys. The Vikings said, “We feel Walker will be the missing piece to put us into the Super Bowl.”

They never won a playoff and Walker was gone in 2/12 uneventful years.

For Walker, the brilliant Vikings gave up 5 players and 12 draft choices!

A couple of the players became ALL-Pros and two of the draft choices were Emmitt Smith and Safety Darren Woodson.

In just two years, Jimmy Johnson used those trades for more trades and built a dynasty, winning three Super Bowls in four years.

A close second was Mike Ditka’s draft of Ricky Williams. Not only did he give up the Saints’ entire draft (8 players), he announced weeks prior to the draft what he was going to do! Talk about playing it close to the vest.

ESPN Magazine even had Williams in a wedding dress with Ditka’s arm around him.

I was covering the Saints at that time, and I can tell you, the press was roasting Ditka.

Trying to talk to Williams was a joke. He would sit on the floor, helmet on with the darkened visor over his face and mumble.

He was a head case, loved Mary Jane, and last seen he was “smoking” up in the Canadian League somewhere.

Another whopper was in the 1984 draft. The Colts drafted John Elway, but he said he would not play for them, and he had leverage: The Yankees were offering him a million dollar contract to pitch for them.

Thus, Baltimore traded him to Denver for QB Mark Hermann, offensive tackle Chris Hinton and a first round pick, which became guard Ron Stills.

We know that Elway was pretty successful.

Hinton played 13 years, including being selected All-Pro five times, and Solt played for 13 years, nothing special.

One has to put an asterisk next to this one, since Elway, essentially, held a gun to their head and was able to force the deal.

Some are starting to question the Eli Manning/Giants – Phillip Rivers/San Diego deal. Manning refused to play for SD and the two teams switched.

To date, Rivers seems a bit ahead, but Eli does have the pedigree.

Then you had the Tampa Bay Bucs.

Back in the 80’s they were the only team worse than the Saints. They actually lost an NFL record 17 games in a row, including an 0-14 season. Even the Saints never did that. In 1985, they traded back-up QB Steve Young to the 49’ers for a 3rd round draft pick. I don’t even know who that pick turned out to be, but Young was probably the greatest “back-up” QB of all time, and when Montana retired, Young kept the Niners’ juggernaught going strong.

The last example – although there are many, many others, was in 2001.

Atlanta traded the rights to San Diego for RB LaDanian Tomlanson for the chance to draft Michael Vick.

At the beginning, it seemed it was equal, but Vick’s halo has been greatly diminished as of late, and Tomlanson was last year’s MVP.

You get the idea.



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

Coaches and managers making millions of dollars deciding to pay their choice of players millions of dollars, and often they make the wrong choices. If the player(s) don't work out, they are gone, along with at least some of the team's millions, and, in some cases, the coaches and managers are also then gone, with most of the owner's money.

At times it's just like going to Vegas.

Crazy business.

Final unrelated, but "best excuse" of the week.

Detroit Pistons' guard Lindsey Hunter was suspended for 10 games last week positive for phentermine, a substance banned under the steroid rule.

His explanation? He said it was one of his wife's pills. He said, "We do that at our house. If I've got a head cold, I might grab one of her pills.

I wonder if he's growing boobies yet.