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9B21C030

Negotiating A New Agreement (B): Robert Williams—Quarterback for the Metropolis Knights[[1]](#footnote-2)

Justin Patterson and Professor Ann Frost wrote this exercise solely to provide material for class discussion. The authors do not intend to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation. The authors may have disguised certain names and other identifying information to protect confidentiality.

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Background

You are Robert Williams, a second-year quarterback who was drafted in the third round to play for the Metropolis Knights. You had a stellar collegiate career and were expected to be one of the first quarterbacks selected in last year’s draft. Unfortunately, and to your surprise, you did not get taken until the third round, and this meant that you did not reap the financial benefits that a first-round pick usually gets.

In terms of issues for this year’s contract negotiations, you have some clear priorities: As someone who was a rookie last season and is still under a rookie contract, your primary concern is increasing the rookie wage scale; you believe its current level is patently ridiculous. You would also really like to abolish the fully funded rule. Luckily for you, your colleague Lawrence Bell, who is on the National Football League Players Association (NFLPA) bargaining team with you, feels similarly about the issue of the fully funded rule, so the two of you should be able to push hard to get this issue prioritized. Also, as a quarterback and therefore the leader of your team, you will likely be willing to make concessions on issues that do not benefit the majority of your teammates—for example, the commissioner’s role in discipline as well as the franchise tag.

KEY ISSUES

Drug Testing

As a quarterback and the de facto leader of your team, you have your fellow teammates’ interests in mind at the negotiating table, and you believe this means adjusting the current drug testing policy. You have seen the chronic pain that many of your teammates deal with on an ongoing basis, and so you are concerned about the potential for continued use of opioids, alcohol, and illegal substances to cope with this pain. Given what you have heard about the relatively risk-free pain relief afforded by cannabinoids, you think the league’s stance on the use of cannabis—especially cannabidiol-infused products—needs to change.

Expansion of the Regular Season

You are unsure how you feel about this issue, as you have only played one season in the league and have not experienced what years of the current 16-game National Football League (NFL) season does to the body. You are aware that most of your teammates think that the extra two games per season would significantly compromise their ability to play additional seasons down the line. With this in mind, you will listen to what your fellow NFLPA representatives have to say on this topic, as they have been in the league longer than you.

Commissioner Discipline

You have not had any disciplinary issues in your career—either in the NFL or during your college career. For this reason, this issue is not really that important to you, so you would be willing to make concessions here.

Fully Funded Rule

As a quarterback, the highest paid position in football, you would like this rule to be gone by the time you get out of your rookie contract to ensure that most of your salary is in guarantees. Under the current collective bargaining agreement (CBA), the majority of your next contract will be paid out in non-guarantees; this means that if you got hurt, you would not see much of the overall contract, as your pay would stop once you stopped playing, for example, because of an injury. Given how well your rookie season has gone, you know your next contract will be for a lot of money, so it is important to you that you get to see most of that money regardless of whether or not you get hurt. Thus, you want this rule abolished so that the owners can no longer hide behind the need to put future salary money into escrow and can simply pay more money from their already-healthy revenue streams.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Franchise Tag

Since you have never been franchise-tagged, you are not that concerned about this clause in the current CBA. However, you are also aware that, even though star quarterbacks traditionally do not get franchise-tagged as much as other players, this could eventually happen to you after your rookie contract expires. You would prefer to see the franchise tag abolished, but you still place a higher priority on other issues that you feel are more important.

Revenue Split

All players feel the same way about this issue: they do not believe that the current split (53 per cent of league revenue for owners, 47 per cent for players) is fair. Since the players are the reason the fans watch the sport, it makes sense to push for something like a 50/50 split.[[3]](#footnote-4)

Stadium Credits

The NFLPA will be open to the idea of stadium credits, but it will be important to determine a price for them. The majority of players feel that it would be acceptable to give up 2–5 per cent for stadium credits, as long as the revenue is more fairly split. All players are aware of how important this issue is to the owners and know that conceding to the owners here may allow the players to secure other financial concessions in return.[[4]](#footnote-5) The team you play on, the Metropolis Knights, went through a major stadium renovation last season. This means that you see the benefits of a larger, more modern facility for fans and players. Given the increased revenue that the new stadium is expected to generate, you definitely see the upside of stadium credits.

Rookie Wage Scale

As you have just finished your rookie season, you are very familiar with the rookie wage scale. In particular, you know how much it can constrain player earnings. Having just led your team to a Super Bowl championship, you are disappointed that you will not be eligible for a new and presumably much more lucrative contract until after your fourth year in the NFL. As a result, you have very strong opinions on this matter, and you place a high priority on seeing the rookie wage scale adjusted.

summary

You are comfortable with taking a work stoppage, similar to the one that occurred during the last round of collective bargaining. Unfortunately, you have sustained a serious injury in the off-season that will take eight months (the majority of the upcoming season) to fully heal. For this reason, you are okay with not coming to an agreement with the owners by the deadline, as this would give you more time to heal before the season starts. However, you are also aware that any work stoppage means that players will be without pay until a deal is reached. Because of this, if your bargaining team does not feel comfortable with the terms reached with the owners in this round of negotiations, you will have to persuade your peers of the importance of standing up to the owners. It is time the NFL became a player-friendly league, and you have a key role in ensuring that this occurs through the negotiation of this CBA.

The NFLPA representatives will have their first meeting with the NFL owners and start negotiating the new CBA shortly. You want the other members on the NFLPA bargaining team to see the importance of the issues you prioritize, and you will try to influence their views prior to that initial meeting.

1. The individuals and teams named in this exercise have been created solely for the purpose of this exercise; they are not affiliated with the National Football League in any way. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Dan Graziano, “2021 NFL CBA Negotiations: The Nine Biggest Looming Issues,” ESPN, July 3, 2019, accessed October 19, 2020, www.espn.com/nfl/story/\_/id/27103713/2021-nfl-cba-negotiations-nine-biggest-looming-issues. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Mike Florio, “Issue of Stadium Credits Hovers over CBA Talks,” NBC Sports, July 2, 2019, accessed October 10, 2020, https://profootballtalk.nbcsports.com/2019/07/02/issue-of-stadium-credits-hovers-over-cba-talks/. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)