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9B21C032

Negotiating A New Agreement (D): Mike Donaldson—Safety, Blue Mountain Goats[[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 Mike Donaldson, now playing in your 10th season as a safety, currently with the Blue Mountain Goats. You have been in the league considerably longer than the other two representatives from the National Football League Players Association (NFLPA), Lawrence Bell and Robert Williams. Prior to your current team though, you have played on four different teams over the course of your career. Your career has been long by National Football League (NFL) standards, but it has been fairly lacklustre. You have not seen the same career success as Bell and Williams, and this gives you a different perspective on the issues that you believe matter most. You have never been an all-star-calibre player but have been viewed as easily replaceable. In fact, over time you have repeatedly been replaced by much cheaper rookies, and you have had to move around a lot during the course of your career. For this reason, you would like to see the rookie wage scale adjusted upward so that rookies are not such cheap replacements for players like you. You are also going to prioritize ensuring that the current drug-use policies are changed and that commissioner discipline is dramatically altered.

KEY ISSUES

Drug Testing

You have been in the league for 10 seasons, and you have faced your fair share of injuries. Although relatively injury-free this season, you are dealing with chronic back pain from past injuries. You have used prescription painkillers in the past, but you are concerned about using them over the long term. Given recent changes in both Major League Baseball’s and the National Hockey League’s approaches to the use of cannabis, you see a potential upside in being able to use cannabidiol oil to manage your pain.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Expansion of the Regular Season

As a 10-year veteran, you have played longer than any of the others representing the NFLPA in this negotiation. You can see that you are nearing the end of your career, and you really do not want to add any more games to the season. Each additional season you can play will make you that much better off financially in your post-game life.

Commissioner Discipline

Unfortunately, you faced the wrath of the commissioner when you received an eight-game suspension for an off-field offence—an altercation with a nightclub security guard—in 2016. The incident was in the off-season, which you considered your own personal time. Having to pay for it with an eight-game suspension seemed ludicrous to you then and now. You strongly believe that a suspension for this incident was totally unwarranted. However, the commissioner saw differently, and it cost you half your salary that year. As a result of this treatment, you feel that the current method for handling disciplinary issues is wrong and needs to be substantially altered. Instead of the commissioner having full control, you believe that it would be better to strike a panel of former players and executives to oversee punishment for on- and off-field offences.

Fully Funded Rule

As an average player in the NFL, you do not really have strong feelings about the fully funded rule. Even if it were abolished, most of your salary would not be in guarantees anyway. Since you relate more to players whose positions are similar to your own, and you know that they would also prefer to see other issues prioritized, you are willing to make concessions on this matter in order to get other priorities met.

Franchise Tag

You have never experienced the franchise tag, and this has led you to believe that you would rather have other issues take priority. You would be willing to concede on this particular issue.

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 these. 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 split is more fairly allocated. All players are aware of the importance of this issue to the owners and know that conceding to the owners here may allow them to secure other financial concessions in return.[[4]](#footnote-5) You have bounced from team to team over the course of your career and have seen stadium credits used multiple times. Thus, you have played in stadiums before and after renovations, and this has allowed you to see the benefits of updated facilities in terms of game attendance and increased revenues.

Rookie Wage Scale

Being an average, veteran player in the NFL means you that have experienced first-hand the effects of the current rookie wage scale. Since the rookie salaries are incredibly low, you have been replaced by rookies multiple times over the course of your 10-year career and have struggled to find a permanent home. This has caused you to place a high priority on remedying this issue by raising the rookie wage scale.

summary

You do not want to face a work stoppage like the one that occurred in the last round of collective bargaining. Any work stoppage means that players would be without pay until a deal was reached. There is also a risk of negative publicity if a deal is not made in a timely manner. However, as a representative of the NFLPA, you know that you have to be firm when needed but also willing to make concessions throughout the negotiations. This means that, although you would not do so happily, you are willing to strike if the owners refuse to make concessions on the issues that matter most to the players. It is time that the NFL became a player-friendly league, and you have a key role in ensuring that this occurs through the negotiation of this collective bargaining agreement (CBA).

The NFLPA representatives and NFL owners will have their first meeting to 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. Anthony Witrado, “MLB’s New Marijuana Policy Could Spark Change in NFL and NBA Policy,” *Forbes*, December 16, 2019, accessed October 13, 2020, www.forbes.com/sites/anthonywitrado/2019/12/16/mlbs-new-marijuana-policy-could-spark-change-in-nfl-and-nba-policy/#729adec142a1. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Dan Graziano, “2021 NFL CBA Negotiations: The Nine Biggest Looming Issues,” ESPN, July 3, 2019, accessed October 23, 2020, www.espn.com/nfl/story/\_/id/27103713/2021-nfl-cba-negotiations-nine-biggest-looming-issues. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Mike Florio, “Issue of Stadium Credits Hovers over CBA Talks,” NBC Sports, July 2, 2019, accessed September 16, 2020, https://profootballtalk.nbcsports.com/2019/07/02/issue-of-stadium-credits-hovers-over-cba-talks/. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)