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9B21C034

Negotiating A New Agreement (F): Lawrence Bell—Running back for the Gotham Rogues[[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 Lawrence Bell, a six-year veteran National Football League (NFL) player playing for the Gotham Rogues. You have been on this team since you were drafted, and you had been happy with the way things were going until the team began to franchise-tag you each year. Since you are the only running back and one of two all-stars representing the NFL Players Association (NFLPA) in this collective bargaining agreement (CBA) negotiation, you are primarily interested in ensuring that the franchise tag and fully funded rule are both abolished and that an 18-game regular season does not become a reality. However, since you are aware that the average NFL career is very short, you know that players must work together in negotiations to ensure that all issues are addressed. Even though the three issues mentioned above are your own priorities, you recognize the importance of all the issues on the table. For this reason, you are willing to make concessions to get the best deal possible for the majority of players.

KEY ISSUES

Drug Testing

As a running back, you play one of the most physically demanding positions in football and take repeated hits in your role,[[2]](#footnote-3) and you desperately want to be able to use cannabidiol oils for pain management. Throughout your career, you have been plagued with multiple injuries, and team doctors have always attempted to prescribe the painkiller Toradol. Toradol is an anti-inflammatory drug that can be used to relieve severe short-term pain without being addictive, but it comes with a high risk of internal bleeding and kidney problems when used for extended periods.[[3]](#footnote-4) Because of these risks, players have been shying away from this drug in recent years. Instead, you and many other players would much prefer to use cannabis products, which are seen to be more natural and beneficial, and to have fewer associated risks.

Expansion of the Regular Season

For you, this issue is almost non-negotiable, as increasing the season by two games means that the length of the average career would drop from 3.3 to 2.8 years. This may not seem like a dramatic or meaningful difference, but it is. Players must play three years in the NFL to be eligible for the post-career pension and benefit plans,[[4]](#footnote-5) so the change from a 3.3-year average to a 2.8-year average would mean that many players would no longer complete their third years and would therefore lose out on significant post-career benefits.

Commissioner Discipline

You are willing to make concessions on this issue, as you have never had any discipline-related issues and therefore have never had to interact with the commissioner. You are also aware that the vast majority of players are in a similar situation, which means that they would rather see other issues prioritized.

Fully Funded Rule

Since you are a running back—playing a position that experiences some of the most severe impacts and therefore faces an extremely high rate of injury—you will be pushing for this rule to be abolished.[[5]](#footnote-6) If it is abolished, you and all other players in the NFL will get more guaranteed money in future NFL contracts.

Franchise Tag

You have had the franchise tag applied to you twice in the last two seasons, and this has prevented you from being able to test the free agent market. Had you been able to enter the market as a free agent, you likely would have been able to become the highest-paid running back in the NFL. After going through the franchise-tag process, you are aware of how unfair it is for the players, and this is why you will be a vocal advocate for abolishing the practice in this round of contract negotiations.

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.[[6]](#footnote-7)

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. Players are aware of the importance of this issue to the owners, and they know that conceding to the owners here might allow the players to secure other financial concessions in return.[[7]](#footnote-8)

Rookie Wage Scale

Since you are out of your rookie contract, you are not as concerned about this issue as you are about some of the other issues on the table. However, you are also aware that the current rookie wage scale has negative implications for veteran players, as rookie players now have significantly cheaper contracts than veterans. As you head into the latter part of your career, the current rookie wage scale could eventually affect your ability to find a team if rookies remain such cheap substitutes for you. You would really like to see the rookie wage scale adjusted upward.

summary

You do not want to face a work stoppage like the one that occurred during the last round of collective bargaining. Any work stoppage means that players would be without pay until a deal is 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 prepared to make concessions throughout the negotiations. This means that, although you will not do so happily, you are willing to strike if the owners refuse to make concessions on the issues that matter the most to the players. 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 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. Taylor Kubota, “The Science of Football: Which Positions Take the Hardest Hits?,” Live Science, June 3, 2016, accessed October 10, 2020, www.livescience.com/54972-which-football-positions-take-hardest-hits.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. “Toradol Tablet,” WebMD, accessed October 10, 2020, www.webmd.com/drugs/2/drug-57954/toradol-oral/details. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Zach Bimney, “Should NFL Players Actually Want an 18-Game Season? Surprisingly, Maybe,” Football Outsiders, August 23, 2019, accessed September 18, 2020, www.footballoutsiders.com/stat-analysis/2019/should-nfl-players-actually-want-18-game-season. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Kubota, op. cit. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Dan Graziano, “2021 NFL CBA Negotiations: The Nine Biggest Looming Issues,” ESPN, July 3, 2019, accessed October 1, 2020, www.espn.com/nfl/story/\_/id/27103713/2021-nfl-cba-negotiations-nine-biggest-looming-issues. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. 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-8)