



Roger Goodell must be pissed. But then again so are a lot of agents. In the annals of NFL free agency, which really aren't all that far reaching anyway, this is easily the most pedestrian, indeed most boring, free agency period on record. Put it this way, when the most exciting story in all of free agency starts and ends with a fax machine (a fax machine!), then it may be time to rethink the whole approach.

Goodell is pissed because in NFL World, there isn't supposed to be this kind of down period. The whole point of creating a preseason, a regular season, a playoff season, a scouting combine, a free agency season, a draft season, and then off season workout season is precisely to advance the perception that the NFL is always in season. The NFL Network is a 24-hour a day, seven day a week operation and it needs programming like the plant in Little Shop of Horrors needed humans. The appetite is insatiable and yet all effort must be expended to quench it, sanity be damned.

But Goodell, in a rare act of self-sabotage, snuffed out any possibility of an active NFL free agency season when he put both the Washington Redskins and the Dallas Cowboys, and by extension their impetuous, maniacal owners on the sidelines for acting all petulant and maniacal during 2010's uncapped season. By loading up salary in that year (and then getting nothing but dead money and no Super Bowls for the effort) despite the strong and probably illegally collusive suggestion that they not do that, the Redskins and Cowboys were fined millions in salary cap hits, effectively putting them out of business during this off season. And a million player agents cried and the rest of the world paid attention to something else, like the wife of Florida Gulf Coast's basketball coach and Aaron Craft's hovering right foot.

Because the two biggest, free spending franchises have basically sat out free agency, agents are finding suckers in short supply. Daniel Snyder and Jerry Jones usually use free agency as a way of measuring their manhood, at least since actual manhood measuring was outlawed by Paul Tagliabue at the 2004 Winter Meetings after an unfortunate incident involving a bottle of

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Written by {ga=gdbenz}

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Captain Morgan and an electronic tape measure. In their view, big always trumped quality and so they spent themselves silly so many times that they made George Steinbrenner look like an absolute model of restraint by comparison.

But without their participation this year, free agency has been boring with most teams following the example long established by Bill Belichick and the New England Patriots—let the market come to them. Even now, the free agent market is still flush with inventory as one owner after another sees how far they can drive down the price of free agents.

Cleveland's own Josh Cribbs may be the poster child for this year's free agency class. Not only has there been virtually no competition for his services, but the only team that's even thinking about signing him, the Arizona Cardinals, said to check back in the next several weeks to see how that knee has healed. Meanwhile absolutely no other team has jumped into the fray. It's almost as if Cribbs couldn't get signed if agreed to work for incentives only.

Behind Cribbs are literally dozens of other similarly situated free agents. Most of them aren't brand names but some of them are. They either are players that once were something but are old and/or banged up (you know, free agents that, if this were baseball, are exactly the kind favored by the Cleveland Indians) or younger players who for a variety of reasons didn't pan out with their original teams.

In any case, this new found restraint within the NFL was brought about mostly, and perhaps unintentionally, by Goodell. As a result, most teams are still in decent shape with respect to their salary caps while agents who were counting on big commissions to finance that new Porsche are finding that they may have to settle for a Nissan.

It's not what Goodell had in mind when he decided to punish Snyder and Jones for acting like Snyder and Jones.

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Phil Dawson
@phil_dawson_4



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