

Breaking down Miami's Free Agents

Contributed by J.P.
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Greg Jennings vs. Mike Wallace. Dustin Keller vs. Jared Cook. Is Percy Harvin worth the trouble? All these questions will spark plenty of debate over the next few weeks, and rightfully so. While no Off Season in the immediate future will rival the importance of last year's, this Spring is vital to the future success of this franchise. Miami has a lot of early draft picks and a lot of cap room to spend on the free agents mentioned above. But just as important an aspect as those two, will be the third part of this Off Season; the one that precedes the rest. Miami has big time decisions to make on a number of key free agents. Free Agents that if retained might not necessarily accelerate the development of this team in the way that a signing of Mike Wallace does, but that if lost can significantly set the franchise back. Here is a breakdown of each pending Free Agent, as well as my prediction for whether they will be brought back or not.

Sean Smith, CB - There have been very few players on the Dolphins roster that have frustrated fans more consistently than Sean Smith has over the past 4 years. Smith has flashed plenty of talent throughout his career; in 2010 Pro Football Focus ranked Smith as the 9th best corner in football that season. In the first 8 games of last season, Sean was dominant, shutting down some of the most dynamic WR's in the game today in Larry Fitzgerald and AJ Green...Somehow though, Smith was ranked as the 76th most effective corner in the NFL by season's end. So has been the story of Smith throughout his career. He'll display dominance one week, and poor play the next. His swagger will be on full blast one series, and then his confidence at zero the next. One thing Smith has never been though, is a playmaker. Sean rarely gets his hands on footballs, and when he does they usually end up on the ground. Overall Sean is an inconsistent, but average starting corner who needs a specific scheme to flourish. We know this. The Dolphins know this. Sean Smith and his agent David Canter? According to recent reports regarding what they are demanding from the Dolphins, and what other CB-needy NFL teams are willing to spend, the two are expecting a minimum of 8 million per season, long term. The Dolphins aren't doing that. Period. Nor should they, he's not worth it. But you can't afford to lose Smith; the secondary cannot afford to take any more steps back. Retaining him is a must. Prediction: Miami uses the Franchise Tag on Smith. It keeps him in Miami for a relatively high cost (10 million), however it's a one year commitment, which for a team with 46 million in cap room currently, is not a big deal...Remember Miami giving Soliai 12.5 million to play 50% of the defensive snaps? Jake Long, LT - I bought Jake Long's jersey last year. If they replace him, it better be with Kyle Long of Oregon, and he better wear 77 (although Stephen Ross is too savvy to let that happen). Long is the most interesting free agent the Dolphins have. We all remember how dominant Long was in 2008 and 2009. Unfortunately I have two opinions on this (yes, both negative ones). 1) He's not close to the same player he was back then, even when he's "healthy." 2) Even if he was, is that really worth paying 10 million per year (the figure which he's reportedly demanding) for it? I don't think so. No Offensive Lineman is. Fact of the matter is that while OT is a vital position to have solidified, being anything more than solid is a luxury; a luxury that isn't worth highly investing in. Not that it matters, because Jake isn't that player anyway. Then again, similar to Smith, can you afford to let him walk? Finding a starting caliber OT won't be easy this Off Season. Assuming Miami wants to stay away from spending the 12th pick in the draft on one at all costs, the names available are scarce. The franchise tag is too heavy for Long at over 15 million (and I think they'll use it on Smith, as stated, anyway). And as easy as it is to say that Long isn't what he once was, and isn't worth a big contract (both true), it's going to be very difficult for Jeff Ireland to walk away from the player that started it all. Long was this front office's first draft pick; not only that, but the number 1 overall pick in the draft. The man they drafted ahead of Matt Ryan and an emerging Chris Long. Does sentimental value truly hold any significance in these types of negotiations? We'll find out. Prediction: Miami re-signs Long. I think he'll end up coming back under a deal with high incentives, but one that gives Miami protection in case Jake suffers more injuries and continues down the path that he's headed; which to be honest, is out of the league in 3 years.

Randy Starks, DT - Starks got overpaid big time by Miami 5 years ago, when they signed him to a 21 million dollar deal despite being very unproven on the field, and troubled off it. The deal ended up being Parcells best decision (in my opinion) however. Starks has exceeded his contract, and will now look for a new one. The problem here is that Starks is past his prime, or will soon be, entering his 10th season in the NFL at 29 years old, and plays a position that Miami has talent and depth at, and one which isn't a premium in today's game. With that said, Starks is a very good player inside, and you'd hate to see the Dolphins take away from the strength of this team. Judging by all reports, it seems the Dolphins and Starks are talking and they should reach an agreement to keep Randy in Miami without too many problems. Prediction: Miami re-signs Starks. I'd look for a 4 year deal worth 6-7 million per season.

Reggie Bush, RB - Reggie is another interesting Free Agent. On the one hand, Bush is clearly one of the leaders on this team and a very positive influence in the locker room. He's also a quality player, whose been the only consistent playmaker the Dolphins have had over the past two seasons offensively. He also won't be overly expensive to re-sign. On the other hand, the Dolphins have a very viable replacement on the roster in Lamar Miller (potentially). Reggie is also entering his 8th season and doesn't fit the West Coach, zone stretch blocking scheme that the Dolphins want to run. Prediction: Miami let's Reggie walk. I think Bush has played his last down in Miami. It was a fun two year's Reggie.

Brian Hartline, WR - Brian is arguably Miami's most important Free Agent. The team lacks serious talent and depth at WR, has a young QB it needs to give weapons, and Hartline has established himself in Miami. I see absolutely no reason why Hartline should even be allowed to test the Free Agent market. He might not be a number 1 WR, and yes, the Dolphins do need to "upgrade" from Hartline in that role. However Hartline is currently a vitally important piece to Miami's offense, and must be brought back. Prediction: Miami re-signs Hartline. Whether or not they sign a big time FA, expect Hartline to be brought back, and paid a decent amount. I'm looking for 4-5 years, 5 million per season.

Chris Clemons, FS - Chris may not seem like a big time Free Agent, but to Miami he is. Chris is a solid starter at FS, and with so many other priorities this Off Season and the current lack of depth in the secondary already, you can't afford to lose

him. Prediction: Miami re-signs Clemons. This is an easy one for me. I see a 4 year deal worth about 3 million per year for Clemons. Tony McDaniel, DT - Make no mistake about it; Tony T-Mac McDaniel is an absolute stud, and I've loved having him in Miami for the past couple of seasons. McDaniel played through a variety of injuries last season, and still contributed nicely. He's a very solid piece inside. However, Miami has plenty of that already, and are expected to kick Odrick inside to DT (why he was outside in the first place is anybody's guess). Prediction: Miami let's McDaniel walk. I think McDaniel will look for a more significant opportunity (both in terms of playing time and compensation) elsewhere. Matt Moore, QB - Not nearly enough people are talking about Matt Moore. One of the strengths the Dolphins have right now is stability and depth at the QB position. Moore is the league's best back-up, and has established himself in that role in Miami. With a young QB and young QB coach, I think bringing back Moore would be a huge benefit to Miami. With that said, the QB market (in both Free Agency and the draft) lacks talent this year. Moore could very well be the best 2013 potential starter of any QB available this Off Season. That could prompt Moore to pursue a starting job and more money elsewhere. Prediction: Miami let's Moore walk. I think Matt will sign to compete for a starting job somewhere, and probably win that starting job. Anthony Fasano, TE - It's unbelievable that after 5 years Fasano is still the best Miami has done at TE...by far. Fasano in his heyday was an average starter, excelling in both pass protection and run blocking, while providing a dependable target in the passing game. Fasano isn't too far removed from his best seasons in the Dolphins, but I think they are behind him. Regardless, I want to move on from Fasano. All he is, is an excuse to not invest highly in an athletic TE. With what's available this Off Season, I think Miami has to pursue other options aggressively. From Fasano's standpoint, between any acquisition and Charles Clay, Anthony would realize his role as a nearly-exclusive blocking TE. I don't think he's at the stage in his career where he's ready for that yet. Prediction: Miami let's Fasano walk. Nate Garner, OG/OT - I think the Dolphins bring back Garner. He's quality depth at guard, right tackle, and has even played center in the Pre Season. He's a cheap player to re-sign, and there's no reason why they shouldn't exercise that opportunity. Prediction: Miami re-signs Garner. I'd look for a 2-3 year deal worth about 2 million per season.

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