

NFL OFFSEASON PREVIEW 2017



**A Look Back at The
2016 Offseason**

**New Contracts for
Members of Falcons
Core**

**Top NFL Free
Agents 2017**

**Cam & Carolina
Crash Back to Earth**

**680 The Fan's Carlos Medina aka "Front Office Los"
breaks down all 32 NFL teams with in-depth
analysis and research covering the
2017 offseason.**

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THE 2017 OFFSEASON

Here is Where Championships are Built

The Chance to Change Your Franchise

Welcome to the 2017 NFL Offseason. This is the point where every NFL team has the chance to significantly alter their upcoming season with shrewd moves in both free agency and the draft. Consider what some of the best team in 2016 were able to accomplish during this point in the season last year:

- The Super Bowl Champion New England Patriots traded a fourth round pick to the Chicago Bears in exchange for tight end Martellus Bennett and a sixth round draft choice. Bennett would serve as the important #2 tight end in New England and the eventual starter with the injury to Rob Gronkowski.
- The Atlanta Falcons signed Cleveland Browns center Alex Mack to a contract that made him one of the highest paid centers in the NFL. Mack rewarded the Falcons with an All-Pro season in which he was the perfect piece in creating a solid offensive line. The team also added receiver Mohamed Sanu from Cincinnati who ended up catching 59 passes and four touchdowns.
- The Oakland Raiders gave a one year deal to receiver Michael Crabtree as he attempted to return from injury. Crabtree rewarded the Raiders with a 1,003 receiving yard season and scored eight touchdowns. The Raiders made it a point to give Crabtree a four year deal during the season to maintain his services.
- The Dallas Cowboys used the fourth overall draft choice on the NFL's leading rusher in Ezekiel Elliott. The team followed that home run by landing their next franchise quarterback in Dak Prescott in the fourth round. Prescott would go on to win the NFL Offensive Rookie of The Year award.
- The Philadelphia Eagles traded a bundle of draft picks to Cleveland in order to select quarterback Carson Wentz with the second overall pick. After the unfortunate injury to Minnesota quarterback Teddy Bridgewater, the Eagles sent quarterback Sam Bradford to Minnesota in exchange for a first round pick.



TOP FREE AGENTS

2017 NFL Offseason

Who Will Make it to Free Agency...

The 2017 NFL Offseason currently features young playmakers on both the offensive and defensive sides of the football. There are several players who have already played under the franchise tag and have issued warnings that they will not look to do that again this upcoming season.

One such player is Kansas City safety Eric Berry. Berry had an outstanding season once again despite having to deal with cancer in 2015. Berry received the franchise tag for 2016 as the team was not yet ready to commit to him with a long term contract. Berry has already stated publicly that he will not play in 2017 on the tag again.

There are other players on this list who feature a 'buyer beware' tag next to their names. Le'Veon Bell is perhaps the best running back in the league but has had issues with NFL mandated suspensions. Cornerback AJ Bouye turned from a backup player into a shutdown corner overnight.



Free Agents

Le'Veon Bell - RB - Pittsburgh Steelers

Eric Berry - S - Kansas City Chiefs

Chandler Jones - DE/OLB - Arizona Cardinals

AJ Bouye - CB - Houston Texans

Kevin Zeitler - G - Cincinnati Bengals

Kawann Short - DT - Carolina Panthers

TJ Lang - G - Green Bay Packers

Melvin Ingram - DE/OLB - San Diego Chargers

Jason Pierre-Paul - DE - New York Giants

Trumaine Johnson - CB - LA Rams

Jonathan Cyprien - S - Jacksonville Jaguars

Calais Campbell - DL - Arizona Cardinals

Franchise Tag Projections:

QB - \$21.5M

DE - \$17M

OLB - \$14.6M

CB - \$14.3M

WR - \$15.7M

RB - \$12.2M

S - \$11M

TE - \$9.8M

RE-SIGNING THE CORE

Atlanta Falcons Offseason 2017

Big Deals for Big Time Players

The Atlanta Falcons have talked about publicly their desire to make two players this offseason into Falcons for a majority of their careers. Running back Devonta Freeman and cornerback Desmond Trufant are both core players for the team who are heading into the final years of their respective contracts.

Freeman's agent used the early portion of Super Bowl week to proclaim Freeman's need for a new contract. Based on his production over the last two seasons, Freeman is certainly deserving of a raise. Because Freeman has now completed three years in the NFL, he is now eligible for a contract renegotiation.

As for Trufant, his deal is different from Freeman's. As a former first round pick, Trufant signed a four year deal that included a fifth year option for the Falcons. Teams must decide after the first three years of the deal whether or not to activate the fifth year option. Since the Falcons picked up that fifth year option, Trufant is under contract in 2017 for \$8M dollars. That is equal to the sum he's been paid over his first four seasons.



The benefit for the Falcons extending new contracts to each player is that they can dictate the terms of the contract and how the cap dollars will be allocated over the deal. For example, if Trufant is offered a deal in which his bonus money will be \$15M than he's going to make at least \$7M more in 2017 than the \$8M he was scheduled to make. That's essentially how these deals get done. Teams will also guarantee at least the first two years of base salaries in the deal.

The trick of all of this is accurately gauging what the value of the player is vs. his peers. Devonta Freeman is a very good back in the NFL and has been wildly productive from scrimmage. Is he a 25 carry player each and every week? He certainly hasn't been thus far in his career. But he's better than your typical starter than reaches free agency.

Consider a player like running back Ryan Mathews. Back in 2015, the Chargers free agent running back received a three year deal worth \$11M. Freeman is the better player and worth more.

On the other end of the spectrum is the deal running back DeMarco Murray got from the Eagles in order to leave the Cowboys. Murray led the league in rushing and received a four year deal worth nearly \$25.5M. Last offseason Lamar Miller signed with the Texans after having a good year for the Dolphins. Miller received a 4 year deal worth \$26M. For Freeman, you can expect him to be in the range between \$6-7M per season. Let's call it 4 years at \$28M.

Desmond Trufant is in a different world as good NFL cornerbacks are paid significantly more than good NFL running backs. There are currently four NFL cornerbacks who have received an average of \$14M per season. Trufant is next in line with the rise in the salary cap. Expect a deal in the range of 4 years and \$56M.

NFC SOUTH 2017

TEAM BY TEAM PREVIEWS

The Falcons now rule a division recognized for quarterback play and Super Bowl participants.

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Atlanta Falcons
GM: Thomas Dimitroff
Coach: Dan Quinn
2016 Record: 11-5

Tampa Bay Buccaneers
GM: Jason Licht
Coach: Dirk Koetter
2016 Record: 9-7

New Orleans Saints
GM: Mickey Loomis
Coach: Sean Payton
2016 Record: 7-9

Carolina Panthers
GM: Dave Gettleman
Coach: Ron Rivera
2016 Record: 6-10

Atlanta Falcons
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 2nd
Def. Rank: 25th
PPD Rank: 2nd

Key Free Agents

- Chris Chester, G - Has started 32 games over the past two seasons in the Falcons zone blocking scheme. Chester is now 34 years old.
- Paul Worilow, LB - A former starter in Atlanta. Worilow can provide inside linebacker depth for a team with the ability to be a spot starter.
- Jacob Tamme, TE - Productive in during his two seasons in Atlanta before an injury ended his 2016 campaign.
- Jonathan Babineaux, DT - The 35 year old has been a quality piece in the Falcons defensive line rotation.
- Courtney Upshaw, DL - The former linebacker was used as a down lineman in the Atlanta defense. Upshaw was capable of causing a pass rush as a defensive tackle.

2016 Record: 11-5

Projected Cap Space: \$29 million



A Painful Offseason



For the second time in the history of the organization, the Atlanta Falcons reached the Super Bowl. For three quarters of the game, the Falcons looked like they had arrived as an NFL champion. But the final 17 minutes of that ball game with the Patriots changed everything.

Atlanta lost a 25 point lead and lost the game by a score of 34-28. What was supposed to be a coronation turned into a laundry lists of questions for the Falcons moving into 2017.

How will the team bounce back? Can a team bounce back from that kind of a defeat? How does a fanbase get over a loss like that? All of these questions didn't seem possible with the Falcons up 28-3.

Atlanta's coaching staff has changed with the loss of offensive coordinator Kyle Shanahan to the San Francisco 49ers. The Falcons have made changes at not just offensive coordinator with Steve Sarkisian coming in from Alabama, but also at defensive coordinator with the promotion of Marquand Manuel.

All of that change leads to more questions about how this team will look and perform in 2017.

The Falcons will look to improve on defense with a young core of quality players. The offense is led by the league MVP in quarterback Matt Ryan. But it's anyone's guess how the psychological trauma of that Super Bowl will change the team in 2017.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Tyson Jackson, DL: Atlanta has had to ride out the Jackson contract which has been excessive for a player who is not an impact defender. Jackson was on the field for just 29% of the Falcons defensive snaps during 2016. That simply is not enough production on the field for a cap hit of \$5.8M in 2017. Cap savings if cut: \$2.6M

(-image source si.com)

Tampa Bay
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 18th
Def. Rank: 23rd
PPD Rank: 24th

Key Free Agents

- Vincent Jackson, WR - The 34 year old Jackson has caught just 48 passes over the past two seasons. Jackson played in only five games in 2016.
- Joe Hawley, C - A 15 game starter and 29 game starter over the past two seasons, Hawley has established himself as a tone setter for Tampa.
- Jacquizz Rodgers, RB - Due to suspension of Doug Martin, Rodgers may have to be re-signed in order to protect themselves over the first three games of 2017.
- William Gholston, DE - Dependable run defender for Tampa. Typically provides a couple of sacks per season.
- Bradley McDougald, S - A solid but not spectacular safety who has started 31 games over the past two seasons in Tampa. Recorded 91 tackles in 2016.

2016 Record: 9-7

Projected Cap Space: \$84 million



A Prolific Young Combo



Tampa Bay spent a portion of 2016 as one of the hottest teams in the NFL. A five game winning streak running from November to December gave the team a shot at the NFL Playoffs in year one of coach Dirk Koetter's program.

Losing two of their final three games resulted in a 9-7 record and a foundation to move forward. Quarterback Jameis Winston took another step in his development in posting a winning record while tossing 28 touchdowns. Winston's progress in 2017 can be measured in the reduction of his turnovers.

Winston tossed 18 interceptions in 2016. Only Chargers quarterback Philip Rivers tossed more. Clearly, becoming a more disciplined playmaker is a goal for Winston.

One playmaker who's game is reaching All-Pro levels is receiver Mike Evans. Evans posted the quietest 1,300 receiving yard season in recent memory. His 96 catches were a career high as well. While the league has focused on players like Odell Beckham Jr. from the 2014 draft class, Evans continues to be his peer by every measure.

Running back Doug Martin and his scenario will be the story of the offseason in Tampa until it is resolved. Martin is facing an NFL suspension after testing positive for performance enhancing drugs. The team could elect to cut him.

With limited depth at running back, the team is not in the business of giving Jameis Winston less to work with.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Doug Martin, RB: Due to his suspension for PED use, Tampa could choose to void Martin's 2017 guaranteed money. The team now has a choice to move on from Martin or lower the cap number that he currently counts against the cap. Cap savings if cut: \$5.7M

New Orleans
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 1st
Def. Rank: 27th
PPD Rank: 22nd

2016 Record: 7-9

Projected Cap Space: \$28 million



More Dollars for The D

Key Free Agents

- Jahri Evans, G - Set to turn 34 years old before the start of 2017. Evans has been a capable player at his age when he chooses to be.
- Tim Lelito, G - Seven game starter in 2016 after previously being used as a swing guard. Will be able to land a larger contract on the open market.
- Nick Fairley, DT - A 6.5 sack season in 2016 has Fairley looking for a sizable contract. Fairley's career season has him talking about staying in New Orleans. With the team's salary cap space, it'll be their choice whether or not to bring Fairley back.
- Roman Harper, S - The veteran in the Saints three safety defensive lineup. The 34 year old safety played in all 16 games and recorded 29 tackles.

The 2017 offseason for the New Orleans Saints doesn't look significantly different than most of their recent offseasons. Featuring an outstanding offense, the Saints have been trying to fix their defense since 2014.

With the New Orleans defense being amongst the worst in the NFL in recent years, the opportunity to compete for championships have diminished. The Saints defense was ranked fourth in 2013, the last season in which New Orleans reached the playoffs.

Since 2013 the Saints have posted three straight 7-9 seasons with defensive rankings of 31st, 31st and 27th. Fix the defense, and the Saints can compete for titles.

For the first time in years the Saints have plenty of cap space to address their issues. Previously the Saints would have to play games with their cap in order to become compliant with league rules. That will not be the case this time around.

That type of cap space can be used along with their draft picks to improve the pass rush opposite of Cam Jordan. Or perhaps rebuild their secondary that was ravaged by injuries in 2016.

The simple truth for New Orleans is that nearly any addition to their defense will be better than what they played with in 2016. If this team is to be a contender in the final years of Drew Brees' career, an improved defense will be the reason.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Jairus Byrd, FS: Solid but set to count \$11.7M against the New Orleans cap in 2017. The production doesn't fit the price point, but New Orleans may not have a choice but to bring Byrd back at his high cost. Cap savings if cut: \$3.7M

(-image source cbssports.com)

Carolina
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 19th
Def. Rank: 21st
PPD Rank: 25th

Key Free Agents

- **Kawann Short, DT** - The 2015 second All-Pro saw his sack numbers dip in 2015 but remains a very good player. Set to be paid a massive contract. Carolina protected themselves by drafting Short's replacement in 2016. Could still receive the franchise tag.
- **Charles Johnson, DE** - The 30 year old has taken less in the past to remain in Carolina.
- **Ted Ginn Jr., WR** - Has seen most of the success in his career as the deep target for Cam Newton. Has taken a bigger contract in the past before returning to Carolina.
- **Mario Addison, DE** - The 29 year old recorded a career high 9.5 sacks in 2016. Addison's past three seasons has proven that he can be a capable pass rusher as he's recorded 21 sacks over that time period.

2016 Record: 6-10

Projected Cap Space: \$62 million



A Cam-ical Regression

2015 NFL MVP Cam Newton spent that season laughing and dancing his way all over opposing NFL teams. An incredible season in 2015 seemed destined for a second act in 2016.

Instead, Carolina's competitors got the last laugh in 2016.

Newton and the Panthers came crashing back down to earth after their Super Bowl loss to the Denver Broncos. For Newton, one must wonder if his MVP season was the exception.

From 2011 to 2014, Newton tossed 82 touchdowns against 54 interceptions. In 2015 those numbers exploded to 35 touchdowns and just 10 interceptions. But in 2016, Newton return to his typical career

TD/INT rate. Newton had 19 touchdowns and 14 interceptions.

Carolina is now left to determine if the questionable play and various injuries to Newton were a result of his exciting yet hazardous style of play. Combine that with the severe concussion suffered by linebacker Luke Kuechly, leaves the team hoping for healthy and bounce back seasons in 2017.

The Panthers have plenty of cap space but do have a few of their own players who are set to reach free agency. Defensive tackle Kawann Short saw his own production slip in 2016 but still will command a massive deal.

Change is coming in Carolina. For several Panther veterans that won't be so funny.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Jonathan Stewart, RB: Stewart is set to turn 30 before the start of 2017 training camp. Stewart has been relatively healthy by his previous standard, having played in 13 games over each of the past two seasons. But after averaging just 3.8 yards per carry in 2016, Stewart's cap space could be used elsewhere. Cap savings if cut: \$4.7M

Mike Tolbert, FB: The 31 year old typically has been a versatile piece as a blocker, receiver and runner. But Tolbert was largely ineffective in 2016. Tolbert averaged just 3.3 yards per carry and caught just 10 passes. Cap savings if cut: \$1.5M

NFC EAST 2017

TEAM BY TEAM PREVIEWS

A pair of rookies led Dallas back to the top of the division.

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Dallas Cowboys
GM: Jerry Jones
Coach: Jason Garrett
2016 Record: 13-3

New York Giants
GM: Jerry Reese
Coach: Ben McAdoo
2016 Record: 11-5

Washington Redskins
GM: Scott McCloughan
Coach: Jay Gruden
2016 Record: 8-7-1

Philadelphia Eagles
VP Football: Howie Roseman
Coach: Doug Pederson
2016 Record: 7-9

Dallas
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 5th
Def. Rank: 14th
PPD Rank: 3rd

2016 Record: 13-3

Projected Cap Space: \$1 million over



A New Foundation

When a team earns the number one seed in their conference and then loses it's first playoff game you're supposed to consider the season a disappointment. But that isn't the case after August 25th of 2016.

That was the day in which Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo was hit from behind in Seattle, causing another serious back injury. Another 4-12 season like 2015 appeared to be on the horizon. Instead, the Dallas Cowboys discovered that rookie quarterback Dak Prescott was ready for this moment.

Prescott delivered a 13-3 season in which he posted a 104.9 QB rating with 23 touchdown passes and just four interceptions. Prescott ended his season

quarterbacking the NFC team in the Pro Bowl. It is simply an improbable story.

Couple that with the performance of rookie running back Ezekiel Elliott who led the NFL in rushing with 1,631 yards and 15 touchdown runs, Dallas suddenly has a new foundation of All-Pro talent to compete for a title with over the next decade.

With quarterback Tony Romo moving on, the Cowboys will not be able to enjoy the cap space until 2018. Dallas still needs to improve their pass rush which was just averaged by league standards in 2016.

Dallas has young pieces on both sides of the football. Adding a few more pieces in the NFL Draft should keep them in contention come 2017.

Key Free Agents

- Morris Claiborne, CB – Was having a Pro Bowl type of season before a groin injury knocked him out for the final nine games of the regular season. Played on a one year deal in 2016 and will probably have to take another one year deal to prove his health. Ability has never been a problem for Claiborne, availability has been his issue as a former top 10 pick.
- Ron Leary, LG – Started the final 12 games of the season after the team lost La'El Collins due to a foot injury. Leary started 47 games over his time in Dallas. Concerns over a degenerative knee was the reason Leary went undrafted. He has proven thus far that his knee is not an issue.
- Terrance Williams, WR – Caught 44 passes for 594 yards and four touchdowns in 2016. A solid #2 option during his time in Dallas.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Tony Romo, QB – Will be with another team in 2017. Dallas will have to determine which course of action will be best for their salary cap. Romo's 19.6M in dead money will either hit all of the cap at once (if traded) or Dallas could elect to split that dead money over 2017 and 2018 if they designate him as a June 1 release. Cap savings if cut: \$5.1M

Doug Free, RT: Dallas could choose to go with one of the younger tackles on their roster. Free is a quality player, and is 33 years old. Free has started 114 games over his career in Dallas. Cap savings if cut: \$5M

(-image source usatoday.com)

New York
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 25th
Def. Rank: 10th
PPD Rank: 12th

2016 Record: 11-5

Projected Cap Space: \$43 million



Where's the Offense?

Key Free Agents

- Jason Pierre-Paul, DE – Recorded seven sacks before missing the final month of the season with a sports hernia injury. Pierre-Paul is just 28 years old and looks to be recovered from the hand injury that marred his 2015 season. Will look to approach quarterback contract level on this deal.
- Jonathan Hankins, DT – A 16 game starter for the first time since 2014, Hankins recorded three sacks and played well in 2016. Hankins will turn 25 years old in 2017 after playing out his four year deal as a former 2nd round pick.
- Marshall Newhouse, RT – Started six games at right tackle. Would be a low price swing tackle for other teams in the league.
- Leon Hall, DB - Veteran cornerback who played safety in New York. Played through a benching, appearing in 12 games.

The Giants put together an 11-5 season before losing to the Packers in the opening round of the NFL Playoffs. While the season was a success in terms of returning New York to the playoffs, the team had offensive issues that ended their season.

The Giants failed to score 30 points in any game this season. That is not entirely indicative of an issue at quarterback as Eli Manning put together one of his typical seasons. The issues came from an offensive line that is in need of offseason attention.

The group upfront was unable to provide the team with a legitimate running game. The play from both the left and right tackles was shaky at best.

Former first round pick, left tackle Ereck Flowers, has given plenty of ammunition to those who felt he was drafted too highly. Right tackle Marshall Newhouse was equally poor.

The quality of the New York defense further highlights the problems with the offense. The Giants gave up the second fewest points in the NFL. Defensive end Jason Pierre-Paul and defensive tackle Jonathan Hankins are set to be free agents and will command sizable contracts.

New York will have to use the draft and free agency to fix their offensive front. Ignoring that issue will make scoring points challenging again in 2017.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Victor Cruz, WR – Set to count nearly \$10M against the cap after a 39 catch season in 2016. Cruz will have to take a pay cut in order to remain on the team in 2017. Cap savings if cut: \$6.6M

Rashad Jennings, RB – Jennings turns 32 before the start of training camp. After averaging just 3.3 yards per carry, the future of New York's running game appears to be rookie running back Paul Perkins. Cap savings if cut: \$2.5M

Washington
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 3rd
Def. Rank: 28th
PPD Rank 19th

Key Free Agents

- Kirk Cousins, QB – Another season in which Cousins gave Washington a chance to win and advance to the playoffs. Cousins passed for nearly 5,000 yards and connected with his receivers for 25 touchdowns in 2016. After receiving the franchise tag last offseason, the possibility exists that he will receive it once again. With a new coordinator in place there is no guarantee of the same success offensively in 2017.
- Pierre Garcon, WR – The reliable target has caught 332 passes over the past four seasons. Set to be 31 by the start of the 2017 season, Garcon caught 1,041 yards worth of passes in 2016.
- DeSean Jackson, WR – Set to become a free agent after posting a 1,005 yard season in 2016. Jackson's 17.9 yards per reception keeps him among the best deep threats in the NFL.

2016 Record: 8-7-1

Projected Cap Space: \$67 million



Similar Questions in 2017

After winning the NFC East in 2015, Washington was in the precarious situation of having their quarterback reach free agency. Quarterback Kirk Cousins would ultimately have the franchise tag placed on him thereby ending his potential venture into NFL Free Agency.

Washington is again in perhaps an even more precarious situation as Cousins is set to become a free agent but this time without the benefit of having led his team to the NFL Playoffs. Cousins had a good season in which the offense was explosive but it failed to carry the team late in the season. Washington would lose four of the final six games to miss the playoffs.

Cousins has performed at a level that typically gets NFL quarterbacks paid in the neighborhood of \$20M per season. But as a former fourth round pick that does have some physical limitations, the team does not appear comfortable with offering up the massive quarterback contract.

Being franchise tagged again would make Cousins a \$24M cap hit in 2017. That type of contract eats into the considerable amount of cap space that Washington is set to have this offseason. Washington faces difficult decisions on not just who to add to their lagging defense, but which offensive pieces are deserving of late-in-career contracts. Making the right moves could lead the team back to the playoffs in 2017.

Targets for Release/Restructure

DeAngelo Hall, S – The veteran safety suffered his third serious injury over the past three seasons in 2016. Hall is recovering from a torn ACL in 2016, a turf toe injury in 2015 and an Achilles tendon tear in 2014. Cap savings if cut: \$4M

Ricky Jean Francois, DE – The 30 year old defensive end started just six games in Washington as a rotational player. Cap savings if cut: \$3M

(-image source huffingtonpost.com)

Philadelphia
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 22nd
Def. Rank: 13th
PPD Rank: 7th

2016 Record: 7-9

Projected Cap Space: \$12 million



Hitting on The Quarterback

Key Free Agents

- Bennie Logan, DT – Started 13 games in 2016, and has started 51 games over his four year career. A good run defender who recorded a career high 2.5 sacks last season.
- Nolan Carroll, CB – The 16 game starter defended 11 passes last season. Philadelphia is looking to reach a contract agreement with Carroll before he reaches free agency.
- Trey Burton, TE/WR (restricted) – A versatile piece who caught 37 passes in 2016. Just 25 years old, Burton has developed over his three years in Philadelphia. Burton looks to be an offensive piece for Carson Wentz moving forward.
- Stephen Tulloch, LB - Veteran linebacker who signed in Philadelphia after being released last summer by Detroit. Did not have the type of season that would warrant another contract.

Typically back-to-back 7-9 seasons in Philadelphia would have the fanbase in an angry panic, lusting for blood in the form of firings. But when you find a quarterback, everything is all good.

Rookie quarterback Carson Wentz turned the first season of coach Doug Peterson's program into a modest success. Wentz made all 16 starts and tossed 16 touchdown passes against 14 interceptions. While there were games when Wentz looked like a rookie from a small school, he also showed enough poise and ability to excite fans moving forward.

Philadelphia will go through some more transition this offseason. There are big name veterans who will either be released or who

will have to take paycuts in order to remain with the team. LT Jason Peters, LB Connor Barwin and RB Ryan Mathews are among those who's time with the team may have come to an end.

The focus will be on adding weapons around Wentz to help the young quarterback develop into a top-tier starter in the NFL. For all of the ability that Philadelphia displayed on defense, the offense was simply pedestrian. RB Darren Sproles was perhaps the best playmaker over the 2016 season, but he'll turn 34 this summer.

Look for speed to be added to this offense. Washington WR DeSean Jackson is rumored to return. Everything will be done to make sure Wentz is surrounded by talent.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Jason Peters, LT – The size of Peters' contract is problematic for a team in transition. Peters is set to count \$11.2M against the Philadelphia cap in 2016 and will be 35 years old for the 2017 season. A pay cut may keep him on the team. Cap savings if cut: \$10.2M

Connor Barwin, OLB – Another veteran looking at a pay cut, Barwin would like to stay in Philadelphia but is due to count \$8.3M against the cap. Barwin's sack totals have dropped in each of the last three seasons, recording just five sacks in 2016. Cap savings if cut: \$7.7M

(-image source si.com)

NFC NORTH 2017

TEAM BY TEAM PREVIEWS

The Packers are champions of the division again after a disappointing string of injuries to the Vikings.

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Green Bay Packers
GM: Ted Thompson
Coach: Mike McCarthy
2016 Record: 10-6

Detroit Lions
GM: Bob Quinn
Coach: Jim Caldwell
2016 Record: 9-7

Minnesota Vikings
GM: Rick Spielman
Coach: Mike Zimmer
2016 Record: 8-8

Chicago Bears
GM: Ryan Pace
Coach: John Fox
2016 Record: 3-13

**Green Bay
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 8th
Def. Rank: 22nd
PPD Rank: 9th**

Key Free Agents

- Eddie Lacy, RB - Missed the final 11 games of the season after requiring ankle surgery. Was having a solid season in averaging 5.1 yards per carry before injury.
- TJ Lang, G - Broke his foot in the NFC Title Game. Lang missed three games in 2016 with the same injury. Made the Pro Bowl for the first time in his career in 2016 as part of a very good pass blocking line in Green Bay.
- Nick Perry, OLB - The former first round pick had his best season in Green Bay recording 11 sacks. Played through a broken hand at the end of the season.
- Jared Cook, TE - Caught 30 passes after returning to health during the second half of 2016. Cook will be looking at another small contract for 2017.
- Micah Hyde, S - The versatile safety has played in both a traditional safety position and as a slot defender. Played cornerback at times with the injuries to the Green Bay secondary late in 2016.

2016 Record: 10-6

Projected Cap Space: \$35 million



In Need of Some Reinforcements



The Green Bay Packers reached the NFL Title Game in January of 2017 because of the excellence of quarterback Aaron Rodgers. But sometimes that's not enough.

Rodgers put together a second half of the season that could be described as legendary. After holding a record of 4-6 after 10 games, Rodgers put the Packers on his back and led them to eight straight victories before their playoff loss to Atlanta.

What is clear is that Green Bay needs to add some help for Rodgers moving forward. Typically franchise quarterbacks get a couple of opportunities to win a title. For Green Bay, the need to get younger and productive will be the key to getting a second title of Rodgers.

The championship Green Bay team who defeated Pittsburgh is now showing some age. Receiver Jordy Nelson will turn 32 years old before the start of training camp. Former pass rushing terror Clay Matthews will be 31. While there are other younger and talented players on the roster, Green Bay's core has reached their early 30's.

Green Bay needs a running back as Eddie Lacy is set to be a free agent after missing a majority of 2016. Perhaps a one year deal would get him back? Leading sacker Nick Perry is set to hit the market after a double-digit sack season.

Rodgers needs some help to get this done again. Getting younger will be a big key to the Packers offseason.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Clay Matthews, LB: Matthews has been a great teammate and important to setting the right tone within the Green Bay organization. Matthews played inside linebacker in past years when the defense did not have an athlete capable of doing so. Perhaps it was that punishment that has made Matthews an average player. Matthews recorded just five sacks in 2016, after a 2015 in which he recorded 6.5. That's heading in the wrong direction for a player who will be 31 in 2017. Matthews will count \$15.2M against the cap in 2017. Cap savings if cut: \$11.1M

Detroit
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 21st
Def. Rank: 18th
PPD Rank: 20th

2016 Record: 9-7

Projected Cap Space: \$46 million



Big Picture Success

Key Free Agents

- Reilly Reif, RT - Previously played LT and may look to be paid as such. The difference in a free agent contract as a RT vs a LT is several millions of dollars.
- Anquan Boldin, WR - The 36 year old may look at retirement despite a modest 2016. Recorded 67 catches and eight touchdowns as a 16 game starter.
- Larry Warford, G - Started 15 games in 2016 and has started 57 games over the past four seasons. Would be the more affordable option between Warford and Reiff.
- Josh Byner, LB - Stepped in for the injured DeAndre Levy and started eight games for Detroit.
- Devin Taylor, DE - The 27 year old has recorded 11.5 sacks over the past two seasons, including 4.5 in 2016. With the premium on pass rushers in the NFL, Taylor should score a solid contract in free agency.

The Detroit Lions returned to the NFL Playoffs after an absence in 2015. Typically that would represent a successful season. But sometimes the way your season ends can taint the overall picture.

Detroit found themselves with a 9-4 record after the first 13 games of the season. The Lions had a shot at securing the two seed in the NFC Playoffs and looked to be in great shape to win the NFC North.

After a hot Green Bay finish and a three game losing streak, Detroit missed out on winning the NFC North and went into the playoffs as a 9-7 wildcard team. The season would end with a loss in Seattle and a four game losing streak.

But as pointed out before, there were significant bright spots in 2016 that should have Lions fans optimistic for 2017.

Quarterback Matthew Stafford enjoyed the finest season of his career despite the retirement of receiver Calvin Johnson. Stafford was playing the best football of his career before a hand injury slowed his impressive play. Stafford spent 2016 spreading the football around all of his receivers and bringing his team back in the fourth quarter in multiple games.

Detroit has some improvement to make on defense before the team can take another step forward. Having a healthy Ziggy Ansah is a good place to start in having another successful season in 2017.

Targets for Release/Restructure

DeAndre Levy, LB: Levy has been unable to stay healthy over the past two seasons. After playing just one game in 2015, Levy only appeared in five games in 2016. The problem for Detroit excluding Levy's recent injuries is that they save a minimal amount if they cut him this offseason. Levy still has \$7.2M in guaranteed money remaining on his contract. He's set to count \$8.4M in 2017. Cap savings if cut: \$1.2M

Minnesota
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 28th
Def. Rank: 3rd
PPD Rank: 13th

Key Free Agents

- Matt Kalil, LT - Since being a Pro Bowler in 2012, Kalil has been inconsistent as a left tackle. Did not finish the 2016 season due to a hip injury. A boom or bust type of signing for a team in need of help at tackle.
- Andre Smith, RT - Signed a one year deal with Minnesota but was unable to finish the season due to injury. Smith's play has declined in each of his past three seasons.
- Captain Munneryn, CB - Reliable cornerback who has both a starter and nickel package corner. Munneryn's three seasons in Minnesota resulted in four interceptions.
- Cordarrelle Patterson, WR - Kick return specialist who remains as one of the best in the NFL. But Patterson provided more offensive punch for Minnesota in 2016 after catching 52 passes for 453 yards and two touchdowns. The 52 catches represent a career best for the former first round pick.

2016 Record: 8-8

Projected Cap Space: \$23 million



A Season Ruined by Injuries



It was a tough year in Minnesota. A season that featured a tough young defense and a promising quarterback ended with an 8-8 record and uncertainty under center.

The training camp injury to quarterback Teddy Bridgewater can not be overstated. Bridgewater's leg injury was so severe that it reportedly nearly cost him his leg. The Vikings quickly responded by trading a first round pick to Philadelphia in exchange for Sam Bradford.

What looked like a one year situation is now clearly going to last longer. Bridgewater is not expected to be capable of playing football until the 2018 season, if ever. So the team now moves forward with Sam Bradford who is currently in the final year

year of his contract. It is not hard to imagine that the Vikings may find themselves in an offensive rebuild sooner rather than later.

That rebuild will include running back Adrian Peterson. The soon-to-be 32 year old running back is set to be paid like an NFL quarterback. Minnesota holds a team option for Peterson worth \$18M, and it's hard to imagine that based on his recent injuries and production that he will see that sort of money. A return to Minnesota is a possibility, but it will not be for his current level of compensation.

After winning the division in 2015, Minnesota is left wonder what might have been and where they're going in 2017.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Adrian Peterson, RB: Set to turn 32 years old, Minnesota holds a club option that will pay Peterson \$18 million dollars for 2017. That's simply not going to happen given Peterson's 2016 season and recent injury. Peterson would have a chance to stay if a smaller contract with limited guaranteed money could be reached. Cap savings if cut: \$18M

Brandon Fusco, G: Fusco's play has not lived up to his reputation. Suffering another concussion also doesn't help his cause in Minnesota. Cap savings if cut: \$3.2M

(-image source si.com)

Chicago
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 15th
Def. Rank: 15th
PPD Rank: 28th

Key Free Agents

- **Alshon Jeffery, WR** - Caught 52 passes for 821 yards in 2016 despite missing four games due to a performance enhancing drug suspension. Played 2016 on the franchise tag. At just 27 years old, Jeffery will cost a considerable amount because of his potential.
- **Brian Hoyer, QB** - Provides a quality backup to any team he signs with. Missed the remainder of the 2016 season with a broken arm. Tossed six touchdowns and zero interceptions during his time on the field this past season.
- **Cornelius Washington, DE** - Recorded two sacks in 2016. The developmental defensive end needs to stay healthy if he's ever going to reach his potential.
- **Jonathan Banks, CB** - The former second round pick needs to get healthy before attempting to get his career back on track. Has the size and speed to be successful in Chicago's defense just as he was in Tampa's early in his career.

2016 Record: 3-13

Projected Cap Space: \$62 million



Looking For a Leader

The Chicago Bears finished in last place for the third consecutive season and the second straight under John Fox. But after riding out the guaranteed money on quarterback Jay Cutler's contract, the team is ready for a new leader.

Chicago enters this offseason with a tremendous amount of cap space and quality draft picks that should allow the front office to remake the core of the team. The Bears have the third overall draft pick and a desperate need for a new young quarterback.

But as personnel people continue to say about the 2017 NFL Draft, this certainly isn't like the 2016 NFL Draft. There is not a sure-fire consensus top five pick at quarterback in this draft. But that doesn't

mean some team won't reach for one.

Chicago finds themselves in that group of teams that has to come away with a quarterback capable of being a franchise-type player.

Perhaps that's Mitch Trubisky of North Carolina, or Deshaun Watson from Clemson. Maybe that's another player further down the board. Whoever it ends up being, the quarterback must be capable of restoring some hope and upward direction for the franchise.

Chicago has some quality pieces in place. Pernell McPhee, Danny Trevathan, Leonard Floyd and Jordan Howard provide a starting point to compete.

But a quarterback and leader are needed.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Jay Cutler, QB: Chicago is finally in position to move on from Jay Cutler without concern of serious cap issues being created by the move. Cutler's injury history and lack of success in recent years makes the move an easy one. In 2016, Chicago would have been hit with \$19M dollars in dead cap space had they cut Cutler. This year it's only \$2M. Cap savings when cut: \$14M.

Lamar Houston, LB: The injuries to Houston makes him far too pricey. If Houston will take a pay cut Chicago could bring him back. Cap savings if cut: \$5M.

NFC WEST 2017

TEAM BY TEAM PREVIEWS

Seattle regained the division title but may see their window for another title closing.

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Seattle Seahawks
GM: John Schneider
Coach: Pete Carroll
2016 Record: 10-5-1

Arizona Cardinals
GM: Steve Keim
Coach: Bruce Arians
2016 Record: 7-8-1

Los Angeles Rams
GM: Les Snead
Coach: Sean McVay
2016 Record: 4-12

San Francisco 49ers
GM: John Lynch
Coach: Kyle Shanahan
2016 Record: 2-14

Seattle
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 12th
Def. Rank: 5th
PPD Rank: 6th

2016 Record: 10-5-1

Projected Cap Space: \$38 million



Window Closed?



The Seattle Seahawks were eliminated in the divisional round of the NFL Playoffs by the Atlanta Falcons. On the surface, there is nothing alarming about losing on the road to a quality team like Atlanta. Winning three division titles in four seasons doesn't seem to be a cause for concern either.

But as you dig a little deeper into the Seahawks roster, you realize that the team's ability to score points has continued to fall. The team's defense has also seen the point totals for opponents continue to rise.

Seattle scored 354 points in 2016, their fewest for a season since 2011. The 292 points they gave up was also the most they've surrendered since 2011.

Age tends to be the great equalizer in the NFL. The problem becomes that injuries and increasing salaries of veteran players begins to strangle the team. Seattle has lost quality players in recent years and have had to replace them with bargain talent.

Seattle spent the fewest amount of cap dollars in the NFL on their offensive line. What they received from that minimal investment was inconsistency from week-to-week.

The core of this team is still young enough to compete at a high level. But the Seattle will have to find complimentary young pieces who can provide more dependable play. If they fail to do so, Seattle's window for championships will close.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Jimmy Graham, TE: Graham hasn't been targeted to the extent that he was early on in his career. His 65 catches for 923 yards and six touchdowns makes him an effective weapon, but Graham is set to count \$10 million against the cap. If Seattle stays out of free agency than Graham is safe. But if the team chooses to rebuild their lines, his cap space because important. Cap savings if cut: \$10M

Kam Chancellor, S: Set to be a free agent in 2018. Chancellor is due a new contract. Set to count \$8.1M against the cap, Chancellor could have his cap number dropped with a new deal.

Key Free Agents

- Luke Wilson, TE -
Could become the Seahawks #1 tight end if the Seahawks move Jimmy Graham for cap space. Wilson caught 15 passes in 2016.
- Steven Hauschka, K -
Had a difficult season having missed seven PATs. Hauschka led the NFL in PAT misses. Hauschka had been one of the best kickers in the NFL since 2011.
- Marcel Reese, FB -
Brought his physical nature to the Seattle run game after being released by Oakland. Reese will turn 32 years old before the start of 2017 training camp.
- Tony McDaniel, DT -
The 32 year old defensive tackle started 10 games in 2016 while playing in all 16 for Seattle. McDaniel has been important to Seattle as a space-eater who keeps their talented linebackers clean.

Arizona
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 9th
Def. Rank: 2nd
PPD Rank: 8th

2016 Record: 7-8-1

Projected Cap Space: \$39 million



Key Free Agents

- Chandler Jones, OLB – Recorded 11 sacks and is one of the premiere pass rushers that could potentially reach the free agent market. Jones has recorded 23.5 sacks over the past two seasons and will be just 27 years old when the 2017 season starts. Possibly could receive the franchise tag.
- Calais Campbell, DE – Campbell is set to turn 31 years old in 2017 as this represents his final big contract. Campbell recorded eight sacks in 2016 and is still a very good player. A contract in the area of 10+ million per year would be the standard for a player of Campbell's age and ability.
- Tony Jefferson, S – Had a Pro Bowl type of season in setting a career high in tackles. Jefferson also recorded two sacks and two forced fumbles in 2016. Should be in line a quality free agent contract.

One More Run Left?



The Arizona Cardinals are one of two teams at this point. They are either the team that won 34 games from 2013 to 2015 featuring a veteran offense and a playmaking defense. Or they're the 2016 version that went 7-8-1 while looking like a team who's age has caught up with it.

Reaching the NFC Title Game in January of 2016, Arizona had every reason to believe they were on the cusp of reaching the Super Bowl. But the team regressed in 2016 due in part to the struggles of the passing game. Quarterback Carson Palmer was sacked 40 times in 2016 at the age of 37 years old. The forever-productive receiver Larry Fitzgerald turns 34 before the start of the 2017 season. Even key free agents like

defensive end Calais Campbell will turn 31 before week one of the season kicks off. Arizona is a team that finds itself with age at key positions.

The team is not void of some young and talented pieces. Most notably is running back David Johnson, who rushed for 1,239 yards in 2016 while also accounting for over 2,000 yards from scrimmage. Johnson has proven to be equally dangerous out of the backfield as a receiver as he is as a runner.

Arizona's window hasn't fully closed. But there has to be legitimate concerns if this older group can put one more run together. Linebacker Chandler Jones needs a new deal as does safety Tony Jefferson. Their youth must be rewarded.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Larry Fitzgerald, WR – It will be Fitzgerald's choice if he chooses to play another season in 2017. Caught 107 passes in 2016 and is still effective, but will turn 34 years old before the start of the season. Cap savings: \$6M

Los Angeles
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 32nd
Def. Rank: 9th
PPD Rank: 31st

2016 Record: 4-12

Projected Cap Space: \$44 million



Questions for The Young QB



Key Free Agents

- Trumaine Johnson, CB
- Recorded one interception in 2016 after grabbing seven in 2015. Played last season under the franchise tag and has proven to be the best player amongst a mediocre group.
- Kenny Britt, WR - Had his best season as a Ram in 2016. Britt caught 68 passes for 1,002 yards and five touchdowns. The 28 year old receiver will command a solid contract. Whether he returns to LA will be determined by the schemes the new coaching staff decides to use.
- TJ McDonald, S - The 26 year old strong safety intercepted a career high two passes in 2016. McDonald with his age and physical ability is going to be one of the best free agent safeties on the open market if LA decides to not make a contract offer. Expect him to be sought after.

For a young quarterback to have success in the NFL it takes more than just his own abilities. His experience in running conventional offense is a factor, but just as important would be the offensive pieces around him and the capabilities of the coaching staff.

For quarterback Jared Goff in 2016, basically none of these factors were in his favor.

The 2016 first overall pick was protected by one of the worst offensive lines in all of football. The coaching staff was unable to develop Goff from a college spread quarterback into a promising capable NFL quarterback.

Into this situation walks new head football coach Sean McVay. The former Washington Redskins offensive coordinator led one of the most dynamic offenses in the NFL and turned quarterback Kirk Cousins into a player capable of landing the franchise tag.

McVay's first order of business will be putting together the type of offense that will allow Jared Goff to progress while also providing room for running back Todd Gurley. The offensive line is in need of a substantial overhaul.

Make no mistake, McVay is in LA to determine whether or not Jared Goff can play in the NFL. If he can, LA will feature one of the youngest and most fun offenses in the NFL. That will work in a town of stars.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Greg Robinson, LT: The 4th year left tackle was poor again in 2016. After being drafted second overall in 2014, Robinson has been unable to handle the responsibilities of playing left tackle in the NFL. LA has not picked up Robinson's fifth year option that is part of his rookie first round contract. That makes 2017 his walk year. There is a chance the team may try moving Robinson inside to guard, a position he played during his high school career.

San Francisco
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 31st
Def. Rank: 32nd
Def. Rank: 30th

Key Free Agents

- Jeremy Kerley, WR - Recorded 58 catches for 606 yards and three touchdowns to lead the team.
- Blaine Gabbert, QB - Made five starts in 2016 and threw five touchdowns against six interceptions. Gabbert was unable to duplicate his results from starting eight games in 2015.
- Shane Draughn, RB - Rushed for 196 yards and four touchdowns in 2016.
- Phil Dawson, K - Made 18 of 21 field goal opportunities in 2016. The 42 year old veteran kicker has kicked in San Francisco since 2013.
- Glenn Dorsey, DT - A seven game starter in 2016. Turns 32 years old in training camp this summer.
- Rod Streater, WR - Caught 18 passes and two touchdowns in 2016. Streater remains a veteran option for needy teams.

2016 Record: 2-14

Projected Cap Space: \$87 million



A New Regime With Familiar Names

It took just one year, but the Chip Kelly experiment in San Francisco came to an end after just one 2-14 season. Apparently the 49ers also realized that Kelly's reported issues in the building and little care for time of possession are detrimental to NFL success.

In steps a new head coach in Falcons offensive coordinator Kyle Shanahan and general manager John Lynch. Shanahan was given the power to pick who would help him manage his roster. Lynch takes over with both high draft picks and a ton of cap space.

The first order of business for Shanahan will be determining just who will be the quarterback of the future. San Francisco

thought to have had one in recent years in Colin Kaepernick. But his inability to throw the ball down the field with accuracy is not ideal for long term success in the NFL.

From his time in Atlanta, Shanahan will look to land a variety of offensive talent to work into his system. With the lack of offensive talent in San Francisco, it certainly will take time to put the right pieces in place. Shanahan reportedly received a six year deal with a longer rebuild in mind.

But first thing is first. San Francisco should have their pick of all of the quarterbacks in the draft. Most consider this to be a very shallow class in terms of quarterback talent, so it'll be on Shanahan to pick the one he truly believes will be best for him early.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Colin Kaepernick, QB: Whether or not new coach Kyle Shanahan wants to work with Kaepernick will determine if San Francisco keeps him on the roster. Kaepernick has an opt-in for the 2017 season, but the 49ers could save a considerable amount of cap dollars by parting ways. Cap savings if cut: \$16.9M

Ahmad Brooks, LB: The soon-to-be 33 year old linebacker was solid in 2016. The problem for Brooks is that his future of the team may be dependent on what type of defense the team decides to play moving forward. Cap saving if cut: \$7.8M

(-image source 49ers.com)

AFC SOUTH 2017

TEAM BY TEAM PREVIEWS

The Texans continue to search for a quarterback despite winning an evolving division.

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Houston Texans
GM: Rick Smith
Coach: Bill O'Brien
2016 Record: 9-7

Tennessee Titans
GM: Jon Robinson
Coach: Mike Mularkey
2016 Record: 9-7

Indianapolis Colts
GM: Chris Ballard
Coach: Chuck Pagano
2016 Record: 8-8

Jacksonville Jaguars
GM: Dave Caldwell
Coach: Doug Marrone
2016 Record: 3-13

Houston
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 29th
Def. Rank: 1st
PPD Rank: 26th

2016 Record: 9-7

Projected Cap Space: \$24 million



Still Looking for a QB

Key Free Agents

- AJ Bouye, CB - Perhaps the most improved player in the NFL in 2016. Bouye bet on himself with a one year deal and won. Looking at one of the better contracts for a cornerback in free agency.
- Shane Lechler, P - Still one of the better punters. Houston would like to bring him back if Lechler chooses to punt for another season. Will turn 41 years old during training camp.
- John Simon, LB - Has started 13 games over the past two seasons when needed. A contributor during his four year career on teams and when needed.
- Quintin Demps, S - A two year starter for Houston that has seen him start 26 games over the past two seasons. Intercepted six passes this past season.

The Houston Texans continue to have the same problem that has followed them from season to season under head coach Bill O'Brien. While Houston has won back-to-back division titles and 27 games over the past three seasons, they have had to do it without a franchise quarterback.

Using the term "franchise quarterback" means something different to each fan of the NFL. The version that applies to the Houston Texans is that they lack a quarterback that they're not openly looking to replace. Over the past three seasons Ryan Fitzpatrick, Brian Hoyer and Brock Osweiler have all had success but were not long term answers at the position.

You certainly can't fault the Texans for

trying to solve the quarterback issue. Last offseason the team gave Osweiler a deal that paid him an average of \$18M per season. That didn't work as Osweiler was benched during the season.

With a championship level defense, speculation will continue that the Texans are just a franchise quarterback away from competing for an AFC Championship. Could that level of need lead them to Tony Romo upon his release in Dallas?

The contract math makes signing another high-priced veteran option prohibitive. But at this point, the Texans have tried everything except a proven veteran quarterback. Even one with an extensive injury history may be worth the risk.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Brock Osweiler, QB: A signing that will impact the roster for the next two years even if Osweiler is off the roster. After losing his job as the starter in 2016, there are no guarantees that Osweiler will get another chance to be the starter in Houston in 2017. Counting \$19M dollars against the cap, Osweiler would have to be cut and designated as a June 1st release in order to spread out the cap hit over 2017 & 2018. Cap savings if cut: \$0

Tennessee
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 11th
Def. Rank: 20th
PPD Rank: 23rd

2016 Record: 9-7

Projected Cap Space: \$72 million



Powerfully Turning a Corner



For the first time since 2012, Tennessee can look to build on the momentum of a winning season. After winning 18 games from 2012-2015, the Titans rode a physical identity to a 9-7 record.

It shouldn't be a surprise that the Titans were one of the most physical football teams in the NFL. Head coach Mike Mularkey has featured downhill running attacks in his previous stops as a head coach and offensive coordinator. With a young quarterback and a pair of physical runners, Tennessee was able to stay in the playoff hunt until late in the season.

Before being lost to injury during the second to last game of the season, quarterback Marcus Mariota displayed the decision

making that made him the second overall draft pick in 2015. Mariota's decision making as a passer has been celebrated since his college football days. That decision making showed up in 2016 as he tossed 26 touchdowns against just nine interceptions.

Running back DeMarco Murray was once again productive in 2016 after a tough year in Chip Kelly's system in Philadelphia in 2015. Murray rushed for 1,287 yards, good enough for third in the NFL.

Similar to Dallas, Tennessee has invested in a big and talented offensive line that should be opening holes and punishing teams for years to come. If the Titans can make some defensive improvements this team can compete for the playoffs in 2017.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Harry Douglas, WR: Tennessee has a ton of cap space. But Douglas is set to count \$4.4M against the cap for a receiver who simply wasn't very productive in 2016. Douglas caught just 15 passes in 2016 and did not find the end zone. While Tennessee is a run-heavy team, you'd expect more production from a receiver on a veteran contract. Douglas will be 33 years old in 2017. Cap savings if cut: \$3.7M

Key Free Agents

- Kendall Wright, WR - After catching 94 passes in 2013, Wright's numbers have dropped every year since. Does not seem to be in the organization's plans moving forward.
- Chance Warmack, G - The former 10th overall pick missed most of the season with a finger injury. Has not been able to live up to his pre-draft status.
- Ben Schwenke, C - Rotational interior lineman after being a starting center. Has started 28 games in the NFL over his four year career.
- Karl Klug, DE - Rotational pass rusher who tore his Achilles to end his season. Recorded 1.5 sacks before the injury, and four in 2015 in his rotational pass rusher role.
- Byron Bell, RT - Unable to get on the field due to a broken leg during the 2016 offseason.

(-image source inquisitr.com)

Indianapolis
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 10th
Def. Rank: 30th
PPD Rank: 17th

2016 Record: 8-8

Projected Cap Space: \$58 million



Change at The Top

Key Free Agents

- Jack Doyle, TE - Doyle made the most of his fourth year in the league by catching 584 yards worth of passes and five touchdowns.
- Eric Walden, LB - The 31 year old has always been able to get to quarterbacks. But this season Walden recorded 11 sacks.
- Mike Adams, S - Team leader in tackles but will turn 36 years old before the start of 2017 training camp.
- Akeem Ayers, LB - The younger option at outside linebacker for Indianapolis. Recorded two sacks in 2016 and has now played on four teams over the past four seasons.
- Darius Butler, FS/CB - The 30 year old led the team in interceptions with three in 2016. Has continued to be a quality piece in what has been an aging defensive roster.

It is not overly harsh to say that the Indianapolis Colts have managed to waste the early portion of quarterback Andrew Luck's career. After opening his career with 33 wins over his first three seasons, Luck has been beaten up and started just 22 games over the past two seasons.

Indianapolis has had problems with drafting and developing talent around Luck. Ultimately the blame for those problems fell on former general manager Ryan Grigson. In steps new general manager Chris Ballard, who will be tasked with picking the talent to put the Colts back into contention.

While protecting Luck is a priority, fixing the defense is the most important factor in the Colts improvement. Indianapolis had

the 30th ranked defense in the NFL with a group of veterans that one would expect better production from. While some may return on conservative contracts, all bets are off considering that the new general manager has no connections to them.

The Colts offense was solid again in 2016 after taking a step back in 2015. The main question for that group will be the use of running back Frank Gore. Gore rushed for over 1,000 yards again in 2016 but is now set to turn 34 years old before the start of training camp.

Getting the defense going and making sure Luck stays healthy may be enough for the Colts to return to the playoffs. That would get Luck's career back on track.

Targets for Release/Restructure

D'Qwell Jackson, LB: Indianapolis will have a new general manager who will have to determine whether several veterans are progress stoppers to younger players on the roster. One such player who will be under that microscope is D'Qwell Jackson. Jackson will turn 34 years old in 2017 and is in the final year of his contract that will have him count \$5.75M against the salary cap. While the team has the cap space for that hit, that kind of salary doesn't sit on the bench while younger players play. Cap savings if cut: \$5.5M

Jacksonville
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 23rd
Def. Rank: 6th
PPD Rank: 27th

2016 Record: 3-13

Projected Cap Space: \$66 million



It Can Only Get Better?

Key Free Agents

- Prince Amukamara, CB
- The former first round pick played in 14 games, starting 12 for Jacksonville. Played at a high level and has earned more than a one year deal.
- Jonathan Cyprien, S -
A four year starter has had his struggles in the past but played well in 2016. Recorded a career high 96 tackles and defended four passes.
- Luke Joeckel, G - The former second overall draft pick had to move inside to left guard rather than playing left tackle. Still wants to play left tackle and be paid accordingly. Knee injury ended 2016 as his ACL, MCL and lateral meniscus were reportedly damaged.
- Tyson Alualu, DL - The former first round pick is always available and is versatile. Alualu is just not spectacular. Recorded 2.5 sacks in 2016.

The rule of thumb in the NFL is that a new general manager gets the opportunity to hire two head coaches. There are always exceptions to this rule for those that show wild incompetence, but that's basically what is considered standard practice for the industry.

With that in mind, general manager David Caldwell is now on the hotseat. Caldwell's first hire was head coach Gus Bradley. Blame it on poor players, injuries, the lack of a quarterback...whichever. Bradley went 14-48 during his four seasons in Jacksonville.

In steps former Jaguars interim coach and Buffalo Bills coach Doug Marrone. Marrone's 16-18 record in the NFL would

represent vast improvement from what Jacksonville has experienced under Bradley.

The Jaguars are not without talent. Receivers Allen Robinson and Allen Hurns form one of the better young combos in the league. 2016 first round pick Jalen Ramsey is a good player at cornerback. Defensive tackle Malik Jackson proved to be worth the massive contract that he signed last offseason in moving from Denver to Jacksonville.

Jacksonville's development still hinges on the play of quarterback Blake Bortles. After posting a 35 touchdown pass season in 2015, Bortles tossed just 23 in 2016. Bortles has played average football for most of his career. For this team to jump forward, Bortles needs to be considerably better.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Jared Odrick, DE: The 29 year old finished the season on injured reserve with a shoulder injury that will require a few months to heal. While productive in 2016, the new coaching staff and front office personnel will have to decide if his \$2M dollar roster bonus and \$8.5M cap hit is worth it for a player that may be taking time away from younger players. Jacksonville will have until March 13th to decide on Odrick. Cap savings if cut: \$8.5M

AFC EAST 2017

TEAM BY TEAM PREVIEWS

The Patriots are champs again in a division without a serious challenger

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**New England Patriots
Coach: Bill Belichick
2016 Record: 14-2**

**Miami Dolphins
GM: Dennis Hickey
Coach: Adam Gase
2016 Record: 10-6**

**Buffalo Bills
GM: Doug Whaley
Coach: Sean McDermott
2016 Record: 7-9**

**New York Jets
GM: Mike Maccagnan
Coach: Todd Bowles
2016 Record: 5-11**

New England
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 4th
Def. Rank: 8th
PPD Rank: 1st

2016 Record: 14-2

Projected Cap Space: \$60 million



Champions Again

Key Free Agents

- Dont'a Hightower, LB - The 26 year old has been a five year starter for New England since being drafted out of Alabama. Hightower has never started 16 games in the course of a season.
- LeGarrette Blount, RB - The NFL's touchdown scoring leader put the ball in the endzone 18 times in 2016. Blount added over 1,100 rushing yards as well.
- Martellus Bennett, TE - The athletic tight end provided a quality second option and replacement in the lineup after Rob Gronkowski's latest injury. Bennett had the highest percentage of catches on targets of any Patriot.
- Jabaal Sheard, DE - Recorded five sacks in 2016. Also recorded eight sacks in 2015 as a situational pass rusher. Just 28 years old by start of training camp.

The "Blitz for Six" is now officially part of the New England Patriots lexicon. That is part of the reward for quarterback Tom Brady and coach Bill Belichick winning their fifth Super Bowl by defeating the Atlanta Falcons.

In very Patriots fashion, it's now about moving on and figuring out how to win that sixth title for the franchise.

You could forgive the Patriots if they decided to savor this title for a little longer than the other ones. Tom Brady and the team opened the year with a four game suspension for his role in Deflategate. The team went 14-1 once Brady returned to lead what would be the league's best combination of offense and defense.

The 2017 offseason will be much more intriguing for the Patriots than those in recent memory. The team decided to trade linebackers Jamie Collins and Chandler Jones in the past year once their contract demands became more than the team was comfortable committing to.

This time around several important players are set to reach free agency. New England has more than enough cap space to secure the services of any player they choose. But part of what makes the Patriots culture work is the ability to keep a large part of the roster hungry for success. That means paying a limited amount of people.

It's not like anyone can make an argument against that plan. It's worked five times.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Shea McClellin, LB: The Patriots took a shot on the former first round draft choice by giving him a three year contract last offseason. McClellin made four starts and recorded just one sack in 2016. While New England doesn't have any cap issues that make cutting McClellin absolutely necessary, they're also not in the business of having an unproductive player making quality money on the roster. Consider that another way the Patriots do their business. Cap savings if cut: \$1.5M

Miami

2017 Offseason

Off. Rank: 24th

Def. Rank: 29th

PPD Rank: 24th

Key Free Agents

- Jordan Cameron, TE - Has been unable to stay healthy due to a history of concussions. May be looking at retirement. Played in just three games in 2016.
- Kenny Stills, WR - Deep threat receiver who made 42 catches for 726 yards and nine touchdowns. Should be in the market for a quality #2 receiver contract.
- Dion Sims, TE - Caught 26 passes for 256 yards and four touchdowns. Has been productive as a backup tight end.
- Michael Thomas, S - The soon-to-be 27 year old safety has proven to be a solid player on defense and can help on special teams. Has started 21 games over the past two seasons.
- Andre Branch, DE - Recorded 5.5 sacks in 2016 to finish second on the team.

2016 Record: 10-6

Projected Cap Space: \$37 million



Gase to The Playoffs



The first season for Miami head coach Adam Gase proved to be a success. While the Dolphins were unable to advance out of the wildcard round of the NFL Playoffs, the fact that the 38 year old coach got them there was an accomplishment. One that is hopefully going to be copied around the NFL.

Gase guided Miami to their first 10 win season in eight years and had them in their first playoff game over that time. Perhaps just as important to the organization, Gase worked with quarterback Ryan Tannehill to produce one of his best seasons to date. Tannehill posted career highs in completion percentage, yards per attempt and QB rating. His late season injury virtually assured a

quick playoff exit.

In this copy cat league, other franchises took notice of Miami and have jumped back on board in hiring the young offensive mastermind. San Francisco hired the 37 year old Kyle Shanahan from Atlanta. The LA Rams went even younger by adding the 31 year old Sean McVay from Washington.

Miami was one of two playoff teams in 2016 who had a negative point differential on the season. So it will be on Adam Gase and his staff to prove that last season wasn't a one hit wonder. The team ranked in the middle of the league in most every category of importance. Taking another step in 2017 will be about improvement on both sides of the ball.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Mario Williams, DE: Set to count \$10.5M against the cap in 2017 after recording just 1.5 sacks in 2016. Williams' health only allowed him to start in five games and play in a total of 13 games. When it comes to Mario Williams, NFL math doesn't work for him in a production-to-pay standpoint. Cap savings if cut: \$8.5M

(-image mypalmbeachpost.com)

Buffalo
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 16th
Def. Rank: 19th
PPD. Rank: 10th

2016 Record: 7-9

Projected Cap Space: \$29 million



A New Coach and Direction...Again

Key Free Agents

- Stephon Gilmore, CB - Looking at a franchise tag if Gilmore continues to balk at solid but not spectacular contract packages. Reportedly turned down a deal worth 10.5M per season. Looking for \$14M per year reportedly.
- Zach Brown, LB - Had an amazing season, recording 149 tackles and four sacks in 2016. After signing a one year deal last year, is in line for a large contract offer. Brown is 27 years old.
- Robert Woods, WR - A solid #2 option at receiver. Caught 51 passes for 613 yards in 2016. Woods caught 203 passes over his four years in Buffalo.
- Jordan Mills, RT - A 16 game starter again in his second year in Buffalo. Mills is a 26 year old who has now started 50 games in his NFL career between Chicago and Buffalo.

Back-to-back third places finishes in the AFC East will make you question a lot of things about your franchise. For Buffalo, that started with the firing of head coach Rex Ryan after a 15-17 record and the hiring of Sean McDermott from Carolina.

The changes in Buffalo will not end there. The team has already spoken with quarterback Tyrod Taylor about restructuring his current contract. That is not a proposition that Taylor has reportedly been interested in. Taylor is set to count nearly \$16M dollars against the Bills cap.

The problem for team management is whether or not an interesting young quarterback is worth that price when he has

yet to prove he can be a consistent winner. Taylor has thrown 37 touchdowns and just 12 interceptions as the Bills starter but that hasn't led to being a factor late in the season as of yet.

Taylor will turn 28 this August. If the Bills choose not to pay him, some other team will. He's been good enough to be a potential answer for another team.

There are more contractual issues than just Taylor's. Cornerback Stephon Gilmore wants to be paid amongst the highest paid cornerbacks in the league. But his performance in 2016 didn't merit such.

We'll see how this new direction and plan pans out in Buffalo.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Tyrod Taylor, QB: Buffalo has until March 11th to pick up the option on Taylor's contract. If they choose to pick up the contract, Taylor will count \$15.9M against the cap in 2017. If the team chooses to go in a different direction, Taylor will become a free agent. Cap savings if option passed on: \$13.1M

Dan Carpenter, K: Due to make nearly \$3M dollars in 2017, Carpenter made 19 of 25 field goal opportunities in 2016. Carpenter also missed five extra points. Cap savings if cut: \$2.4M

New York
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 26th
Def. Rank: 11th
PPD Rank: 29th

2016 Record: 5-11

Projected Cap Space: 6 million over



Still Trying for a QB

Key Free Agents

- Benjamin Ijalana, LT - Started at left tackle in place of Ryan Clady when he went down. Would represent a viable option if New York decides to cut Ryan Clady from the team.
- Ryan Fitzpatrick, QB - The 34 year old quarterback will return to capable backup duty for another team in the NFL. Fitzpatrick received his payday in 2016 but was also benched.
- Geno Smith, QB - May end up as an option for New York given that the other quarterbacks remaining on the roster have significantly less experience.
- Bruce Carter, LB - Played in 13 games and started one for New York. Provides young veteran depth for any team in the NFL. Has experienced in 3-4 and 4-3 defenses.

Since 2009 the New York Jets franchise has placed an emphasis on quarterback play and good defense. What resulted since then was two appearances in the AFC Title Game. But in recent years the quarterback play, along with the defense has been lacking.

Don't be fooled by the 2015 season. That season was the first under head coach Todd Bowles in which the team barely missed the playoffs with a 10-6 record. The defense that season was blessed by the unpredictable nature of turnovers.

In 2015 the Jets took the ball away from their opponents 30 times. In 2014 they had just 13 takeaways, so it was quite the anomaly. In 2016, they were back to just 14 takeaways.

The truth about the Jets defense is that it's been in the bottom half of the league since 2011. 2015 was merely the exception.

As for quarterback play, one has to admit that the Jets have tried everything. This past offseason the team gave quarterback Ryan Fitzpatrick a one-year \$12M dollar deal after a holdout. He was eventually benched for poor play in 2016.

The Jets have tried the draft as well. Since 2013, the team has used two second round picks and a third on Geno Smith, Christian Hackenberg and Bryce Petty. Tajh Boyd was a late round dart throw as well.

The Jets hold the 6th pick overall in the draft. Anyone who can throw or play D may apply.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Ryan Clady, LT: New York holds a club option on Clady's contract. Given his injury in 2016, Clady will have a difficult time having that option picked up. Clady is due a roster bonus in February that will determine if he remains on the team. Cap savings if cut: \$10M

Brandon Marshall, WR: Turning 33 in March, Marshall is coming off a poor season by his high standards. Marshall caught 59 passes for 788 yards and three touchdowns. Marshall is set to count \$7.5M against the cap in 2017, with no guaranteed money left on his contract. Cap savings if cut: \$7.5M

(-image source espn.com)

AFC NORTH 2017

TEAM BY TEAM PREVIEWS

The Steelers fought through injuries to take back the division in 2016.

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Pittsburgh Steelers
GM: Kevin Colbert
Coach: Mike Tomlin
2016 Record: 11-5

Baltimore Ravens
GM: Ozzie Newsome
Coach: John Harbaugh
2016 Record: 8-8

Cincinnati Bengals
GM: Mike Brown
Coach: Marvin Lewis
2016 Record: 6-9-1

Cleveland Browns
GM: Sashi Brown
Coach: Hue Jackson
2016 Record: 1-15

Pittsburgh
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 7th
Def. Rank: 12th
PPD Rank: 5th

2016 Record: 11-5

Projected Cap Space: \$43 million



Big Decisions to be Made



The Pittsburgh Steelers were good enough in 2016 to reach the AFC Title Game despite a midseason injury to quarterback Ben Roethlisberger that cost him two starts.

But there are reportedly bigger issues under the surface in Pittsburgh. Roethlisberger referred to his team as “undisciplined and not accountable” after suffering a four game losing streak in November. Roethlisberger followed that up by saying that the AFC Title Game was, “almost too big for some of the young guys.”

Big Ben has openly questioned whether or not he will play in 2017. The amount of money left on his contract would lead many to believe that his statements are more indicative of what he thinks of the coaching

staff rather than actual thoughts of retirement. The drama in Pittsburgh is very un-Pittsburgh like.

One huge decision that looms over team management is what to do with running back Le’Veon Bell? Bell has established himself as arguably the NFL’s best running back. But his history of NFL suspensions makes him a very difficult player to invest long term in. If Bell is hit with the franchise tag, will he be mature enough to handle that accordingly?

Pittsburgh is one of the best teams in football. But there was something strange going on behind the scenes in 2016. If that’s resolved they can win it all in 2017.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Arthur Moats, LB: Moats salary for 2017 is not too large if he’s a starter for Pittsburgh. But while he played in all 16 games in 2016, Moats was only a five game starter. If the Steelers let their other free agent linebackers move on, Moats is fine. But if they choose to bring back one or two, Moats role as an expensive backup would put him in jeopardy of making the team. Cap savings if cut: \$2.2M

Key Free Agents

- Le’Veon Bell, RB - One of the best running backs in the league rushed for 1,268 yards and seven touchdowns. Bell’s history of suspensions makes investing in him a concern. A candidate for the franchise tag.
- Lawrence Timmons, LB - Timmons turns 31 this offseason, but has been productive in each of the last five seasons. Timmons recorded 114 tackles in 2016 along with 2.5 sacks and two interceptions.
- DeAngelo Williams, RB - Super valuable as a backup who can carry the load if need be. Williams will be 34 this offseason though.
- Jarvis Jones, LB - The former first round pick has not been a factor off the edge over the course of his career. Jones has never recorded more than two sacks in any of his four NFL seasons.

Baltimore
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 17th
Def. Rank: 7th
PPD Rank: 15th

2016 Record: 8-8

Projected Cap Space: \$18 million



Searching for Consistency

Key Free Agents

- Brandon Williams, DT - The sturdy run defended recorded 51 tackles in 2016 and chipped in one sack. One of the better free agents in the class of 2017 after completing his four year deal in Baltimore.
- Rick Wagner, RT - The four year veteran has started 47 games over his career, including being a three year starter since 2014. Baltimore has lost several starters on the offensive line over the past few offseasons and need to change this course of action.
- Kamar Aiken, WR - After catching 75 passes in 2015, Aiken was reportedly frustrated by his lack of use in 2016. Aiken is a free agent coming off of a 29 catch season. His touchdown numbers fell as well from five in 2015 to just one in 2016.

In 2016 the Baltimore Ravens got off to the kind of September start that typically ensures them of a playoff run. Baltimore started the season 3-0, but there was something inside the numbers that told the truth about the team.

Of the teams to start 3-0 in the NFL in 2016, the Ravens had the smallest point differential of those teams. Baltimore was a +13 at that point in the season. Some teams can play tight games like that all season long and still reach the playoffs (see Detroit Lions 2016) but many have the law of averages catch up.

That's what happened to the Ravens as their three game winning streak to open the season was followed by a four game losing

streak. The team lost those four games by just a combined 18 points.

The defense in Baltimore was still solid as they once again ranked amongst the league's best. There may not have been a better defensive free agent signing for 2016 than safety Eric Weddle, who picked off four passes and returned to Pro Bowl status.

It was the inconsistency of the offense again in 2016 that plagued Baltimore. Quarterback Joe Flacco tossed 20 touchdown passes along with 15 interceptions.

Since the start of the 2012 season, you simply don't know which Flacco you're going to get. He's capable of winning a Super Bowl or playing frustrating football.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Mike Wallace, WR: Wallace caught 72 passes for 1,017 yards and four touchdowns in 2016. The decision comes down to whether or not Baltimore can release Wallace and sign him to a contract that won't have him counting \$8M against the salary cap. Baltimore could choose to cut Wallace before his roster bonus kicks in, then sign him to a new deal. Cap savings if cut: \$5.75M

Shareece Wright, CB: Was poor in 2016. Wright's \$5.3M dollar cap hit in 2017 makes his release likely. Cap savings if cut: \$4.4M

Cincinnati Bengals
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 13th
Def. Rank: 17th
PPD Rank: 16th

2016 Record: 6-9-1

Projected Cap Space: \$47 million



Status Quo



One can not envy the position that Bengals owner Mike Brown finds himself in each offseason.

Sure, having enough money to be an NFL owner would be great. But it's still a business that has to be run with your consumers in mind.

So each offseason Brown has to weigh the possibility of falling back into NFL mediocrity if he were to make a change at head coach. Marvin Lewis is now 118-103-3 during his time in Cincinnati. He's also 0-7 in the playoffs.

But from 1992 to 2002 before Lewis became head coach, the Bengals were 52-124. So chalk 2016 up to injuries and bad luck.

The biggest difference from the Bengals 12-4 season of 2015 to their 6-9-1 performance in 2016 was a lack of explosive plays. The offense dealt with injuries to receiver AJ Green and tight end Tyler Eifert. Those two playmakers combined to miss 20 starts.

What resulted was a team that had difficulty scoring and scoring quickly. In 2015, the Bengals were 5th in the NFL in points per play. That ranking fell to 25th in 2016 as the team took more plays to score fewer points. Again, playmakers were needed.

Cincinnati has the cap space to re-sign any of their veterans or add another piece or two. If Marvin Lewis' track record holds one can expect a playoff season in 2017. But also another playoff loss.

Key Free Agents

- Andrew Whitworth, LT - The 35 year old tackle is playing at a Pro Bowl level and is certainly deserving of a quality contract. The question is how long and how much guaranteed money will be included in the deal.
- Dre Kirkpatrick, CB - Recorded three interceptions in 2016 and nine over his five years in Cincinnati. Kirkpatrick has made 29 starts over the past two seasons.
- Kevin Zeitler, G - Will be the top guard on the market now that Green Bay's TJ Lang has suffered another broken foot. Zeitler figures to get a contract in the neighborhood of 9-10M per season.
- Domata Peko, DT - Peko has been the epitome of dependable for his 11 seasons in Cincinnati. Peko is now 32, and has made 156 starts over his career.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Adam Jones, CB: The once legally-troubled cornerback has largely turned his life around during his time in Cincinnati. But an arrest this offseason calls into question what should be done with the 33 year old cornerback. Jones is set to count \$7.6M against the salary cap in 2017. That is not bad for a starting cornerback in the league. But it may be too much if the team chooses to commit to a younger option. Cap savings if cut: \$6.3M

(-image source theinquirist.com)

Cleveland
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 30th
Def. Rank: 31st
PPD Rank: 32nd

2016 Record: 1-15

Projected Cap Space: \$110 million



Still Looking for a QB

Key Free Agents

- Jamie Collins, LB - Cleveland is looking to get Collins signed to a sizable contract extension. Collins has been looking for a contract in the range of \$12M per season.
- Terrelle Pryor, WR - Considered a project at receiver, Pryor has turned into a downfield threat with his size and ability to take the ball away from defenders. Pryor caught 77 passes for 1,007 yards and four touchdowns in 2016. Pryor will be just 28 before the start of training camp.
- Stephen Paea, DE/DT - The former 2nd round pick has been unable to regain his form that he showed early on during his career.
- Austin Pasztor, G - Pasztor started every game at right tackle until injuries forced the team to move him inside. Probably a better fit as a physical guard moving forward.

It feels like the same preview gets written each year with the Cleveland Browns. There's typically a change of management, perhaps coaching and a constant cycle of players moving on to other teams where they become far more productive.

This year is different in that the current regime is sticking with their plan which began last offseason. Some have called the organization, "Moneyball in the NFL" in reference to the Oakland A's system. While the jury is still out on whether advanced analytics can help save the Browns, one can make the argument that it didn't help last offseason.

Cleveland sat with the second overall pick in the NFL Draft last offseason before

dealing that pick to Philadelphia. One of the ideas of Moneyball is to draft talent in which future success is easier to project. With Carson Wentz set to be the second overall pick, the Browns decided drafting a small school player was more risky than drafting a productive player who played better competition.

This is why Cleveland is Cleveland.

The organization gets a do-over this offseason as they are loaded with cap space, draft picks and in position to draft a young quarterback. The Browns hold the 1st and 12th overall picks and a total of five picks in the top 90. There is simply no excuse to not get a quarterback this time around.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Josh McCown, QB: The 37 year old veteran quarterback will play another season if he chooses to. But McCown has reportedly been debating on whether or not to take a job in coaching. Cleveland has enough money to sign and retain anyone they choose to, so this move wouldn't be about saving cap space. It is entirely up to McCown if he wants to go through everything he needs to in order to play in another NFL season. Cap savings if cut: \$4.4M

AFC WEST 2017

TEAM BY TEAM PREVIEWS

The AFC West turned out to be the most competitive division in football in 2016. Including one great young team.

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Kansas City Chiefs
GM: John Dorsey
Coach: Andy Reid
2016 Record: 12-4

Oakland Raiders
GM: Reggie McKenzie
Coach: Jack Del Rio
2016 Record: 12-4

Denver Broncos
VP of Ops: John Elway
Coach: Vance Joseph
2016 Record: 9-7

San Diego Chargers
GM: Tom Telesco
Coach: Anthony Lynn
2016 Record: 5-11

Kansas City
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 20th
Def. Rank: 24th
PPD Rank: 4th

Key Free Agents

- Eric Berry, S - After receiving the franchise tag in 2016, Berry had a fantastic season that included tying a career high for interceptions and winning a game with an intercepted two point conversion attempt. Berry will command the biggest safety contract on the market which would approach 12-13M per season.
- Dontari Poe, DT - A big athlete who controls the interior of opposing offensive lines. Poe has not been the pass rushing force over the past two seasons that he was in 2013 and 2014. But his ability to affect a game still makes him a big ticket item in free agency.
- Kendell Reyes, DT - A midseason pickup who provided depth for Kansas City. Has not regained his form from 2013 to 2015 in San Diego. Will look at a small contract in 2017.

2016 Record: 12-4

Projected Cap Space: \$3 million



Stuck Being Really Good

The 2016 Kansas City Chiefs had another terrific season. The team won the best division in football with a 12-4 record and grabbed the #2 seed in the AFC Playoffs. Despite a division round playoff loss to Pittsburgh, you would think season would largely be a success.

But that's the problem with where the Chiefs are these days. Since 2013, the team has posted records off 11-5, 9-7, 11-5 and 12-4. Despite that success, the Chiefs have been unable to win a playoff game.

Under head coach Andy Reid, the Chiefs have seemingly made a run each season that causes people around the league to consider them as a playoff contender. But each season has ended in eventual

disappointment. Painful and frustrating disappointment.

Some of the blame has found it's way to quarterback Alex Smith. Smith is a solid quarterback who doesn't make many mistakes but also doesn't make a ton of plays in the passing game. During 2016, Smith tossed 15 touchdowns against eight interceptions. Since 2013, Smith has maxed out at a 23 touchdown pass season.

Kansas City does have some decisions to be made because of their cap situation. Long time running back Jamaal Charles will not be back at his current contract.

The Chiefs will be really good in 2017. Again. And that can be disappointing.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Jamaal Charles, RB: The injuries have become a regular occurrence for the once fantastic running back. Charles is 30 years old and is set to count \$7M against the salary cap in 2017. Because of his inability to be available and their current cap situation, Kansas City won't bring Charles back at that number. Cap savings if cut: \$7M

Nick Foles, QB: Foles was given a contract in 2016 that would allow him to be the starter if Alex Smith faltered. That did not happen, so keeping Foles as a backup quarterback for more than \$10 million dollars is not going to happen. Cap savings if cut: \$10.7M

(-image source dallasnews.com)

Oakland
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 6th
Def. Rank: 26th
PPD Rank: 14th

Key Free Agents

- Latavius Murray, RB -
The 1,000 yard back in 2015 rushed for 788 yards in 2016 but scored 12 touchdowns. Murray is a good running back and is deserving of a contract as such. But with other young running backs on the roster, he may be allowed to test the market.
- Malcolm Smith, LB -
Recorded a 103 tackle season in his second year in Oakland. Smith played for \$3M dollars last season and will certainly look for a raise in free agency.
- Andre Holmes, WR -
Has not been used as much over the past two seasons but has still found the end zone as a red zone target. Holmes has caught seven touchdowns over the past two seasons. Holmes caught 47 passes in 2014, but just 14 in 2015 and 2016.

2016 Record: 12-4

Projected Cap Space: \$49 million



Disappointing End to a Magical Season



On Christmas Eve of 2016, the Oakland Raiders had clearly established themselves as the primary danger to the New England Patriots. Sitting on a 11-3 record, the Raiders would move to 12-3 but lose quarterback Derek Carr to injury.

Despite the injury that led to Oakland's season ending in the wild card round of the NFL Playoffs, the Raiders have established their core as one of the best young teams in the NFL. Quarterback Derek Carr and linebacker Khalil Mack are two of the best players at their positions and will be just 26 years old in 2017.

The next step for Oakland is to improve their defensive side of the football. While there is talent, the team must improve at

drafting and developing their own defensive talent. Many of the current defensive players surrounding Khalil Mack were signed from other teams around the league in free agency.

Oakland does have some decisions to make on their own roster. Running back Latavius Murray is set to be a free agent and while he was productive in finding the end zone in 2016, the team may set a limit on the size of contract to give a 700 yard rusher.

One of the strengths of the team will also need some attention this offseason as the offensive line could use some attention. Left tackle Donald Penn turns 34 this offseason.

For Oakland, the good times are here again. They should be here to stay for awhile.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Dan Williams, DT: Has been just okay since landing in Oakland as a free agent in 2015. Williams is set to count \$4.5M against the cap in 2016. That is not a wild amount but younger players on the roster may make Williams expendable. Cap savings if cut: \$4.5M

Austin Howard, RT: The weak link in the Oakland offensive line, Howard regressed in 2016. Howard is set to count \$6.4M against the cap in 2017. Cap savings if cut: \$3.6M

Denver
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 27th
Def. Rank: 4th
PPD Rank: 11th

Key Free Agents

- DeMarcus Ware, LB - Recorded four sacks in 2016, it will be up to Ware if he wants to play in 2017. Ware will turn 35 as training camp gets underway. Best used as a situational pass rusher due to injuries over the past several seasons.
- Sylvester Williams, DT - Interior run player who has started 31 games over the past two seasons. Denver is expected to let Williams hit the open market and let the league set his value.
- Shaquil Webster, LB - The backup linebacker has played in 32 games over the past two seasons including six starts. After recording 5.5 sacks in 2015, Webster recorded 1.5 in 2016.
- Kayvon Webster, CB - A former third round pick who has played in 54 games during his four years in Denver.

2016 Record: 9-7

Projected Cap Space: \$38 million



A Pivotal Off Season

The Denver Broncos entered 2016 as the defending Super Bowl champions and a team with a new quarterback. Trevor Siemian had won the job in training camp and had become a favorite of team GM John Elway.

Siemian got the team off to a 3-0 start before being knocked out of the fourth game of the season. While Siemian would return not long after, the Broncos season would end with a whimper losing four of five games to finish with a 9-7 record.

Denver now stands as a team with one of the best defenses in the league but looking for more consistency on offense. While quarterback play will always get the attention, the play of the Broncos offensive

line left a lot to be desired. Denver had issues along the offensive line for most of the season and has to make choices on what to do at both tackle positions.

The Denver running game, which has been a point of pride in recent years, fell off in 2016. Broncos running backs as a group averaged just 3.6 yards per carry. Promising rookie Devontae Booker got an opportunity after CJ Anderson was lost to injury but managed to fumble the football four times in just 174 carries.

With Denver's defense, the offense isn't require to score a ton of points. But if the Broncos don't fix their offensive line issues, it will be another year in which points and yards are tough to come by.

Targets for Release/Restructure

Russell Okung, LT: Denver holds a club option that will fully guarantee his salaries for 2017 and 2018. The problem for Okung is that his inconsistent play in 2016 makes his \$11.7M cap hit in 2017 problematic. If Denver picks up the option, Okung will account for \$23M in cap space over the next two seasons. Cap savings if cut: \$11.7M

Donald Stephenson, RT: If Denver can find a better option, Stephenson's place on the team becomes available. The team has until March 13th to decide whether or not to keep Stephenson on the roster. Cap savings if cut: \$3M

Los Angeles
2017 Offseason
Off. Rank: 14th
Def. Rank: 16th
PPD Rank: 18th

Key Free Agents

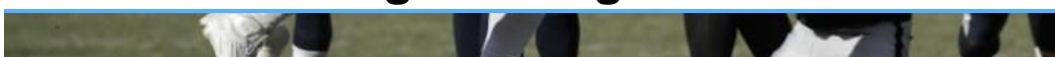
- **Melvin Ingram, LB** - The linebacker will not be cheap as he has become a dependable pass rusher. Ingram has recorded 18.5 sacks over the past two seasons and will be just 28 in 2017.
- **Manti Te'o, LB** - Has had trouble staying healthy over his four NFL seasons. Missed 13 games in 2016 due to Achilles tendon injury.
- **Danny Woodhead, RB** - The 32 year old versatile back missed 14 games due to injury. Has proven to be a solid runner, but a better receiver out of the backfield during his career.
- **Jahleel Addae, S** - The hard hitting safety missed half of the season due to a broken collarbone. Addae has not been able to make it through a full season healthy since 2013. Health is the only factor keeping him from being a top safety.

2016 Record: 5-11

Projected Cap Space: \$25 million



Young Building Blocks



The San Diego Chargers are no more. The team that moved from Los Angeles to San Diego for the 1961 season has decided to return from where they came. Call it the result of modern day economics in the NFL.

After three straight non-playoff seasons, the Chargers decided to move on from Mike McCoy and hire former Buffalo Bills interim head coach Anthony Lynn. Lynn now finds himself in a situation where his team is moving to a market that may not want them and handling an accomplished but aging quarterback.

Quarterback Philip Rivers posted his worst QB rating since 2007 and tossed the most interceptions of his career for a season in

2016. The 35 year old Rivers is in need of more protection along his offensive line and for his playmakers on the outside to stay healthy in 2017.

Despite the 5-11 record, there were definite bright spots for 2017. Running back Melvin Gordon, the team's 2015 first round pick proved to be much more effective in 2016 scoring 10 touchdowns on the ground and adding two more through the air. Joey Bosa, the team's first round pick in 2016, recorded 10.5 sacks despite missing most of training camp.

In the toughest division in the NFL, it's going to take some more building through the draft to get the Chargers back into playoff contention.

Targets for Release/Restructure

King Dunlap, LT: A 12 game starter in 2016, Dunlap is set to count \$8.3M against the cap in 2017. That's not a large amount for a starting left tackle in the NFL, but the position is in desperate need of an upgrade. Cap savings if cut: \$5.1M

Orlando Franklin, G: Has been consistently available, but did not enjoy a very good season in 2016. Franklin is set to count \$7.6M against the cap. But the team is looking at an overhaul of the interior of the offensive line. Cap savings if cut: \$2.8M

(-image source mighty1090.com)