

# Miami Dolphins: 2014 Financial Scouting Report

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Date: January 6, 2014

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## Introduction

Welcome to one of the newest additions to the Over the Cap website: the offseason Financial Scouting Report, which should help serve as a guide to a teams' offseason planning for the 2014 season. This report focuses on the Miami Dolphins and time permitting I will try to have a report for every team between now and the start of free agency in March. Please note that this was written before Jeff Ireland was fired as GM of the Dolphins. If you would like copies of other reports that are available please either e-mail me or visit the site [overthecap.com](http://overthecap.com)

The Report Contains:

- Current Roster Overview
- 2013 Team Performances Compared to NFL Averages
- Roster Breakdown Charts
- Salary Cap Outlook
- Unrestricted and Restricted Free Agents
- Potential Salary Cap Cuts
- NFL Draft Selection Costs and Historical Positions Selected
- Salary Cap Space
- Extension Candidates
- Positions of Need and Possible Free Agent Targets

Any names listed as potential targets in free agency are my own opinions and do not reflect any "inside information" reflecting plans of various teams. It is simply opinion formed based on player availability and my perception of team needs. Player cost estimates are based on potential comparable players within the market.

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Thank you for the continued support.

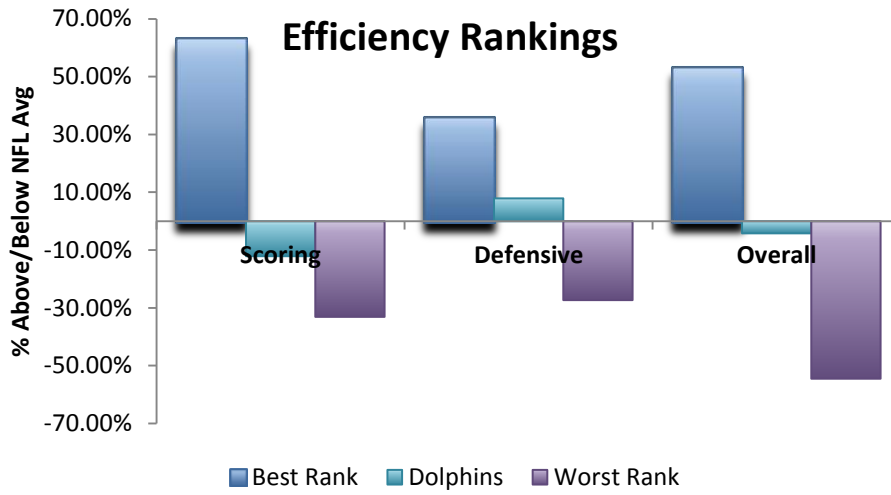
Sincerely,

Jason Fitzgerald

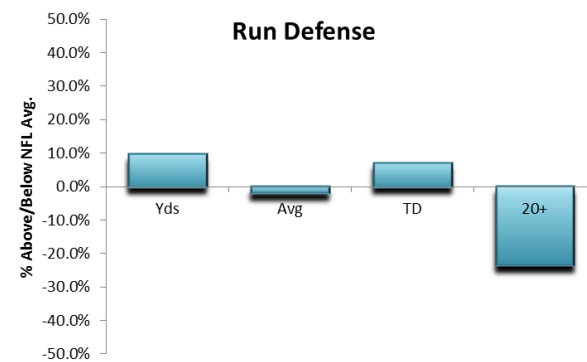
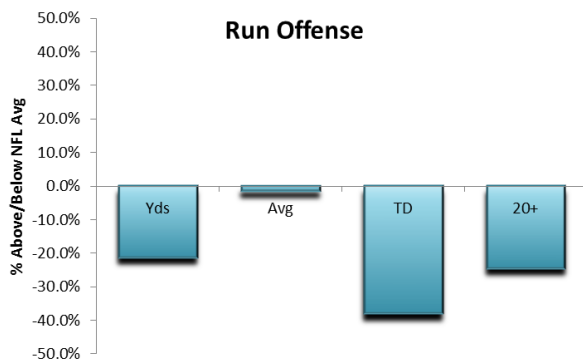
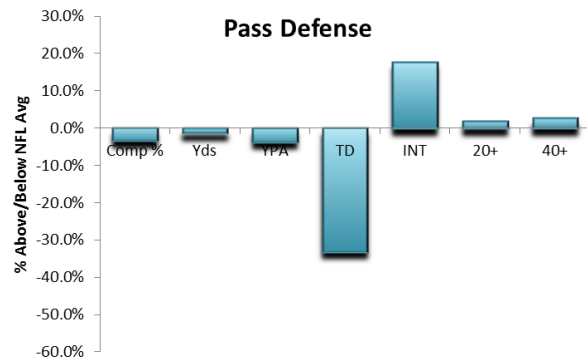
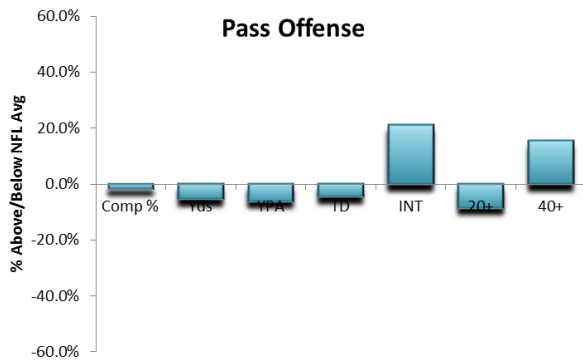
## Current Roster: January 7, 2014

Player	Position	Age	Potential Starter	Remaining Contract	Cap Charge	Cash Salary	Cap Savings
Mike Wallace	WR	28	Y	4	\$17,250,000	\$15,050,000	(\$6,550,000)
Dannell Ellerbe	ILB	29	Y	4	\$7,425,000	\$6,025,000	(\$4,175,000)
Cameron Wake	43DE	32	Y	3	\$7,285,000	\$5,885,000	(\$2,735,000)
Philip Wheeler	43OLB	30	Y	4	\$6,400,000	\$5,000,000	(\$4,200,000)
Brian Hartline	WR	28	Y	4	\$6,210,000	\$4,810,000	(\$4,175,000)
Matt Moore	QB	30	N	1	\$5,500,000	\$4,000,000	\$4,000,000
Dimitri Patterson	CB	31	N	1	\$5,400,000	\$5,400,000	\$5,400,000
Dion Jordan	43DE	24	N	3	\$4,675,522	\$1,340,104	(\$12,156,358)
Brandon Gibson	WR	27	Y	2	\$3,735,000	\$2,735,000	\$1,735,000
Reshad Jones	S	26	Y	4	\$3,610,000	\$2,610,000	(\$9,760,000)
Brandon Fields	P	30	Y	3	\$3,586,116	\$3,191,116	\$2,401,116
Ryan Tannehill	QB	26	Y	2	\$3,455,046	\$1,541,682	(\$4,058,397)
Mike Pouncey	C	25	Y	1	\$2,946,267	\$1,637,685	\$0
Koa Misi	43OLB	27	Y	4	\$2,328,000	\$1,750,000	\$16,000
Jared Odrick	DT	27	N	1	\$2,004,873	\$865,000	\$865,000
Nate Garner	G	29	Y	2	\$1,791,666	\$1,625,000	\$1,458,332
Jonathan Martin	RT	25	N	2	\$1,304,800	\$824,933	\$345,066
Jason Trusnik	43OLB	30	N	1	\$1,071,668	\$905,000	\$905,000
Daniel Thomas	RB	27	N	1	\$1,029,756	\$816,321	\$816,321
John Denney	LS	36	Y	3	\$975,087	\$875,087	\$675,087
Jamar Taylor	CB	24	N	3	\$824,125	\$569,825	(\$488,600)
Olivier Vernon	43DE	24	Y	2	\$759,520	\$600,000	\$440,480
Michael Egnew	TE	25	N	2	\$742,239	\$595,000	\$447,761
David Arkin	G	27	N	1	\$725,000	\$725,000	\$725,000
Lamar Miller	RB	23	Y	2	\$691,500	\$570,000	\$448,500
Charles Clay	TE	25	Y	1	\$673,000	\$645,000	\$645,000
Dallas Thomas	G	25		3	\$671,594	\$520,000	\$216,812
Jimmy Wilson	CB	28	N	1	\$656,475	\$645,000	\$645,000
Jalil Brown	CB	27	N	1	\$645,000	\$645,000	\$645,000
Will Davis	CB	24	N	3	\$630,300	\$500,000	\$239,400
Jelani Jenkins	43OLB	22	N	3	\$613,172	\$495,000	\$258,656
Dion Sims	TE	23	N	3	\$611,888	\$495,000	\$261,224
Rishard Matthews	WR	25	N	2	\$583,403	\$570,000	\$556,597
Derrick Shelby	43DE	25	N	1	\$573,334	\$570,000	\$570,000
Marcus Thigpen	RB	28	N	1	\$572,500	\$570,000	\$570,000
Mike Gillislee	RB	24	N	3	\$535,700	\$495,000	\$413,600
Caleb Sturgis	K	25	Y	3	\$531,140	\$495,000	\$422,720
Don Jones	S	24	N	3	\$506,474	\$495,000	\$472,052
A.J. Francis	DT	24	N	1	\$495,000	\$495,000	\$495,000
Jordan Kovacs	S	24	N	1	\$495,000	\$495,000	\$495,000
Michael Thomas	CB	25	N	1	\$495,000	\$495,000	\$495,000
Sam Brenner	C	24	N	1	\$495,000	\$495,000	\$495,000

## 2013 Performance Charts

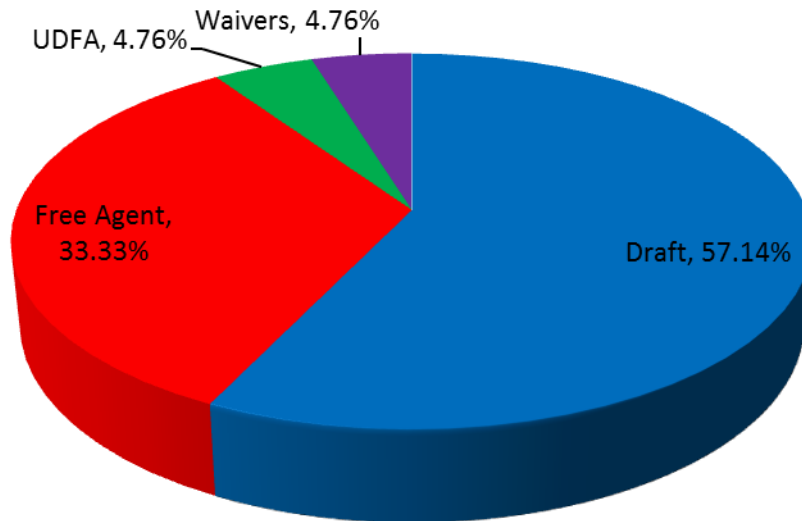


\* Efficiency rankings calculate points scored and allowed compared to their 2013 schedule. A negative ranking means they scored less or allowed more points than their opponents' average. A positive ranking means they scored more or allowed less than the opponents' average.

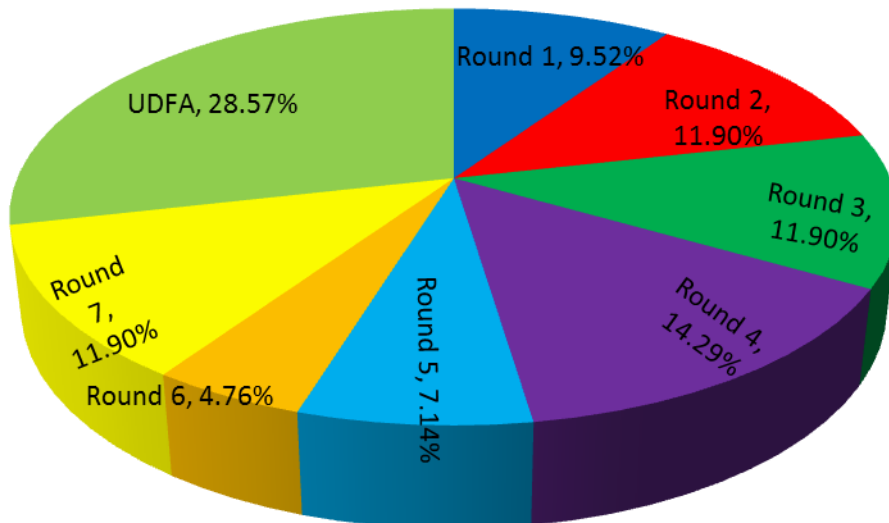


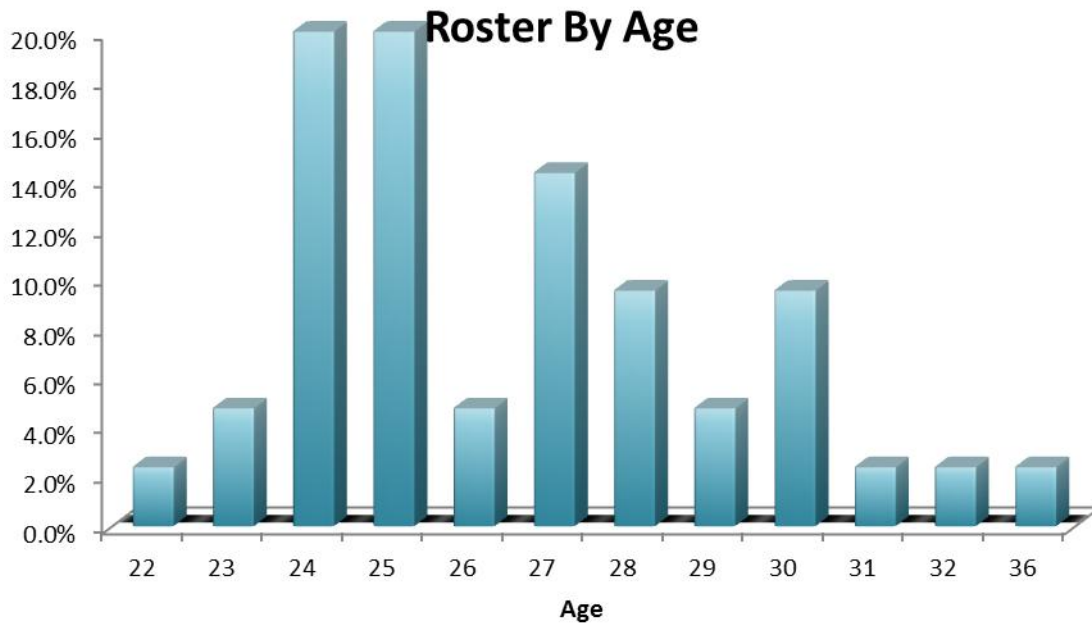
## Roster Overview

### Acquisition Strategy

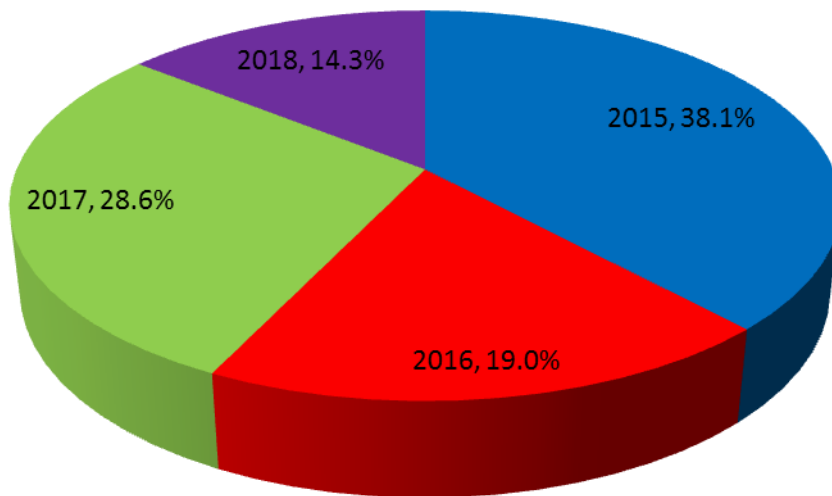


### Roster By Draft Round





### Turnover: Free Agents By Year



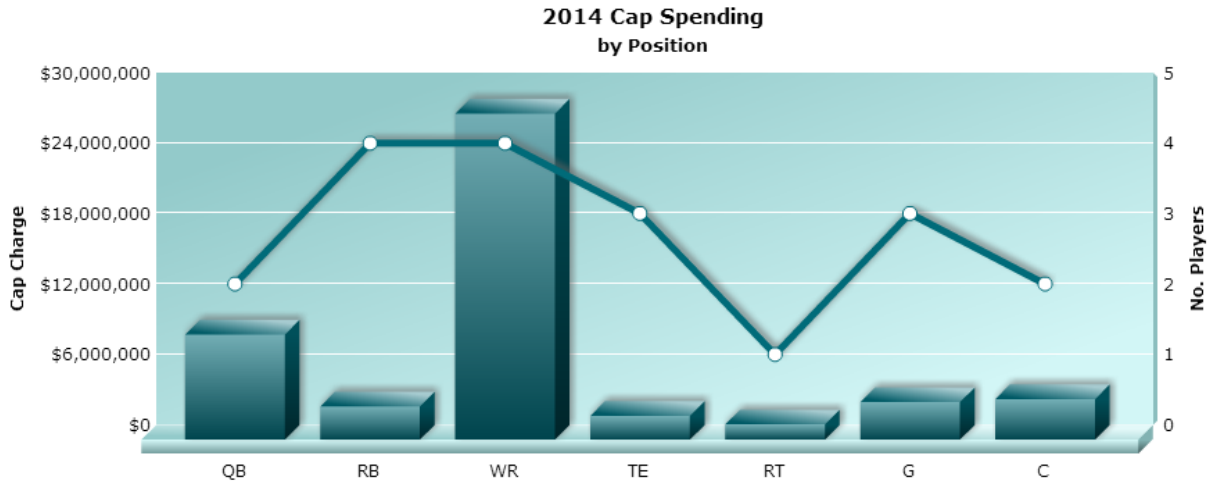
## Salary Cap Overview



Despite a much publicized spending spree in 2013, the Dolphins are still underinvested on both offense and defense as they enter the 2014 League Year. This is more or less the result of poor decision making with the draft from 2006 through 2009. Only 9.5% of the Dolphins roster is a former first round draft pick and all four are still on their rookie contracts. The number one picks from 2006 to 2009 are either on other NFL teams or out of the NFL. Even going a step further, not one player drafted in the first three rounds by the team during that stretch is currently playing on the Dolphins.

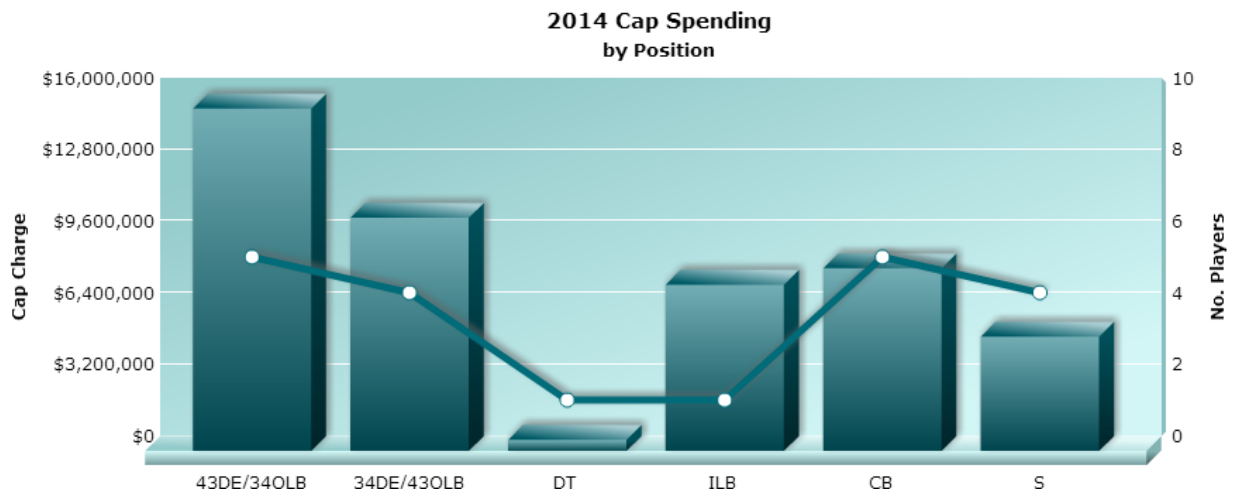
In terms of positional spending the Dolphins only have one premier offensive paid player, WR Mike Wallace. Wallace was a disappointment in his first season as a Dolphin finishing with just 930 yards and five touchdowns, despite being the 4<sup>th</sup> highest paid receiver in the NFL. The teams' next two highest cap charges on offense belong to secondary receiver Brian Hartline and backup QB Matt Moore. Eventually that will change when C Mike Pouncey and QB Ryan Tannehill eventually move to veteran contracts, but there is not a lot of top line proven talent on the Dolphins roster and almost all of their salary cap dollars are being spent on receivers.

This showed in 2013 when the Dolphins finished the season well below average in offensive efficiency and could not score points in their final two games, which saw them missing out on the playoffs again. All told only 37% of the Dolphins offense had been drafted in the first three rounds of the draft and four of those seven players are not real starting quality players. Most of the teams money is invested in wide receivers so an influx of talent in the future may be something that the Dolphins need to focus on finding.



The Dolphins have spent a bit more on defense with DE Cameron Wake, S Reshad Jones, and LB Phillip Wheeler all in the top 10 in spending at this position and LB Dannell Ellerbe just outside the top 10. Miami has balanced their spending across the board on defense to try to create a solid, but perhaps unspectacular defense.

Similar to the offense there is little in the way of former first round talent with just DT Jared Odrick and DE Dion Jordan being first round players. The defense was clearly the stronger unit last season and in almost every category was above average, but four of the teams' best players are free agents and may no longer be in Miami in 2014.





## Free Agents

The Dolphins have 13 unrestricted free agents from their 2013 roster:

Name	Position	2014 age	Cost Grade (10 scale)
Randy Starks	DT	31	★★★★★★★
Brent Grimes	CB	31	★★★★★★★
Chris Clemons	S	29	★★★★★
Paul Soliai	DT	31	★★★★
John Jerry	G	28	★★★★
Nolan Carroll	CB	27	★★★★
Richie Incognito	G	31	★★
Dustin Keller	TE	30	★★
Tyson Clabo	RT	33	★★
Bryant McKinnie	LT	35	★
Christopher Owens	CB	28	★
Austin Spitler	OLB	28	★
Marlon Moore	WR	27	★

Miami will face a massive list of free agents that they will need to decide upon as they formulate their offseason strategy. Of their 13 free agents, 9 were starters and a 10<sup>th</sup>, TE Dustin Keller, was expected to start for the team in 2013. It is a big decision for the Dolphins front office if they want to try to keep a team together, specifically on defense where the players are of higher quality, that has failed to get over the hump in the last five seasons. The team was really built with 2013 in mind and a window to begin to tear it apart in 2014 as evidenced by so many shorter term contracts.

Miami has had an interesting approach to the Defensive Tackle position with Randy Starks and Paul Soliai. If they decide to extend both players to lucrative contracts it will have been a misfire in their approach. If they get them on the cheap or move forward without them then what they did made some sense. The Dolphins have made a number of mistakes in their approach to the Defensive Tackle position. The Dolphins opted to use the franchise tag on Starks this past season which should indicate that they have plans to move on from the player in the future. Starks however had a fantastic season and will be looking for a deal certainly in the \$7-\$8 million a year range. That may be a bit high for a player who is 31, but Miami could have signed him last season to a similar deal and started the contract a year early for cap purposes. Franchising him a second season would put the price over \$10 million, an excessive amount for the position.

They made the franchise tag mistake with Soliai back in 2011 when they inexplicably made him a franchise player rather than working on a long term extension. When they finally came to an agreement on a two year contract in 2012 it was for essentially the same price they paid him to play just one year on the franchise tag. Again they made the decision to not lock him up long term leaving them with a tough decision on a 31 year old player who should be looking to earn around \$5.5 million again.

Miami is banking on the fact that both players may be compromised because of their age in finding a lucrative deal outside of Miami, but with the Dolphins having no alternatives both players should have some leverage in negotiations. Because Soliai is going to be cheaper I would venture that it is more likely that he stays in Miami than Starks. Starks should wait to see what Soliai signs for if that is the case because if Miami does agree to a contract worth \$5 million+ then there is no reason for Starks to settle for less than \$7 million. If both players agree to deals lower than this than Miami made the right decisions by pushing contract decisions off until both players passed the age of 30.

Miami signed CB Brent Grimes to a one year deal and he exceeded all expectations for the team and was one of the best corners in the NFL. He is also making the turn into his 30's, but should be able to cash in regardless. The first strike in contracts came last week when the Bears extended 31 year old Tim Jennings to the tune of \$5.6 million a year. Jennings is an inferior player to Grimes. Grimes will likely get a 4 year contract and I'd guess he can push it to between \$7 and \$8 million a year with no problems. The Dolphins could instead franchise Grimes, but the franchise tag for a cornerback is well over \$10 million.

S Chris Clemons could fall victim to a huge number of top tier Safeties hitting the market this year and simply pick up whatever money is left over or it could increase his price tag if the market goes crazy. The Dolphins already spent big on S Reshad Jones and that could play a role in their decision here. Clemons should be comparable to Glover Quin of the Lions who signed last year for \$4.7 million.

If Grimes goes then the Dolphins will definitely need to keep CB Nolan Carroll. Carroll is coming off a career high with three interceptions and has to be looking at the \$4.75 million a year earned by the Colts Greg Toler as something to reach for. \$5.5 million was too much for the Dolphins and Sean Smith last season though they were willing to absorb Dmitri Patterson's contract for similar numbers on a one year basis so it is hard to gauge at what point Miami feels a number two corner is too expensive.

Four of Miami's five starting offensive linemen are all free agents this year. The easiest decision will be on G Richie Incognito whose rift with T Jonathan Martin saw Incognito suspended for the season. Despite the support of his teammates the initial PR fallout was so bad that Incognito won't be welcomed back to Miami and perhaps anywhere in the NFL.

The Dolphins took a chance on Tyson Clabo to play Right Tackle and he can be effective as a pass protector. His deal was for just \$3.5 million in 2013 and Miami should look to see if they can improve before welcoming him back. His price tag should be a bit lower than that figure all things considered, but they will need to have him test free agency before he would likely just accept a new contract for less money.

LT Bryant McKinnie was brought in via trade to try to fix a bad position. McKinnie had his moments but overall did not play well and there are always questions about his desire. Miami renegotiated his contract to eliminate his 2014 season, essentially letting him become a free agent. Whether this was done for motivational purposes or to hope for a 7<sup>th</sup> round compensatory selection in 2015 is up for debate, but it does not seem there would be much interest in bringing him back.

G John Jerry is very consistent in that he can usually keep the QB upright but can't do much else. He was in the final year of his rookie contract in 2013 and I would think is the most likely to come back in 2014 due to a combination of age and familiarity with the coaching staff. Jerry should not cost much. He could opt to take a one year contract and hope to earn more the following season, but if that would seem to only be an option if Miami does not re-sign him. Ramon Foster signed for \$1.83 million a year with Pittsburgh last season and that would seem to be a reasonable offer for Jerry.

The only other decision will be with Keller. Keller suffered a devastating knee injury this year so his price tag is going to plummet. He will probably be looking at a deal similar to the one Fred Davis took in Washington for about \$2.5 million with some incentives. At that price it could be worth taking another chance on Keller. If healthy Keller can provide a good target in the passing game.

In addition to the above the Dolphins have three restricted free agents:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>2014 age</b>	<b>Proj. Tender</b>
<b>Danny Watkins</b>	G	30	None
<b>RJ Stanford</b>	CB	26	None
<b>Will Yeatman</b>	T	26	None

None of the Dolphins' RFAs would be likely to be tendered by the Dolphins.

## Potential Salary Cap Cuts

With a high number of free agents and players who are just in the second year of contract extensions, Miami does not have a large number of players who will be cut for cap purposes. We'll examine a few of the underperforming players that have been discussed, but for the most part Miami will not be very active at the start of the waiver period.

The lone likely cut is CB Dimitri Patterson. Patterson will count for \$5.4 million in cash and cap charges this year and only played in about 25% of the defensive snaps for Miami last season. It was surprising that Miami did not release him before the season in 2013 and it would be more stunning if he lasted through 2014. They could approach him about a salary reduction and a chance of increasing playing time if they do not re-sign both of the cornerbacks, but a cut makes the most sense.

LT Jonathan Martin left the team in 2013 after accusing Incognito of bullying and it seems clear than Martin will not return to the Dolphins under any circumstances. Because of the situation Miami had no choice but to pay Martin last year, but will not do so if he refuses to report. Cutting Martin only saves the team \$345,066 in cap room, which is not even enough to sign another player, so they will first try to trade Martin to another team and get something in return. Miami could also play hardball and begin the process of reclaiming signing bonus money if he fails to honor his contract in 2014, but the PR fallout would be huge so he'll probably be released right before the start of the offseason workout program.

Much has been made of the less than stellar play of LB's Phillip Wheeler and Dannell Ellerbe, but both players have large guarantees in their contracts that make them difficult to release. Guaranteed money immediately accelerates onto the salary cap so the Dolphins would not even get much in the way of relief by using the June 1 designation.

Ellerbe has his entire \$6 million base salary guaranteed from the Dolphins for 2014. If they release him as a June 1 cut that \$6 million remains in the 2014 season and his cap charge would only drop by \$25,000. He would also carry a \$4.2 million cap hit the following season. If they release him in March the Dolphins would lose \$4.175 million in room. In both cases the team would have to cut him a \$6 million check to go away making it very unlikely.

Wheeler's contract is similar with a \$5 million base guarantee. Cutting him outright costs the team \$4.2 million in cap room and waiting until June 1 would save no cap dollars in 2014 and still leave the team with \$4.2 million in charges in 2015. Regardless of being overpaid or not Miami should not consider releasing him from his contract.

## 2014 NFL Draft

The Dolphins will begin the draft with the 19<sup>th</sup> pick of the first round and continue moving up one selection spot per round until the 7<sup>th</sup> round in which they will go back to 19<sup>th</sup>. The Dolphins did make a conditional trade with the Ravens for McKinnie, though the conditions of the trade are unknown. It is unlikely that it would result in more than a 7<sup>th</sup> round selection and if it was tied into both playing time and playoffs than it will have cost them nothing.

Round	Pick	Salary Cap
1	19	\$1,532,436
2	18	\$764,200
3	17	\$567,844
4	16	\$531,300
5	15	\$467,825
6	14	\$446,450
7	19	\$433,988

The 2014 salary cap cost of the Dolphins rookie class should be \$4,744,043. However, each draft pick will be replacing a player already factoring in to the top 51 equation, so the net cost of the whole class will be, at the most, \$1,804,043.

Compensatory selections are received following the completion of the 3rd, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> rounds of the draft. The round received is dependent upon the quality of free agent lost in 2013 versus the quality of free agent gained in 2014. While the Dolphins did lose some notable players to free agency, such as Jake Long, Sean Smith, and Anthony Fasano, they counteracted that with massive amounts of free agent signings. It is doubtful that the Dolphins will receive any compensatory picks in the 2014 NFL draft.

The following table lists the cost for each 2014 compensatory draft pick.

Round	Salary Cap
3	\$546,504
4	\$495,146
5	\$456,140
6	\$439,670
7	\$431,474

While every draft is unique there are certain patterns that usually emerge over time. The Dolphins will expect to find starters with their first two picks in the draft. Over the last ten years the predominant position available around the 19th pick in the first round (number 17 through 21) is the DE/OLB position which accounts for 22% of all selections. The next closest positions would be Offensive Tackle and Cornerback at 14% each. Considering Miami's potential needs they would be happy if those latter two positions were on the board.

With the 48<sup>th</sup> through 52<sup>nd</sup> picks in the draft the most popular picks are Linebacker (14%), Cornerback (14%), Running Back (12%), and Wide Receiver (12%). With the exception of receiver the Dolphins should welcome the opportunity to draft any of these positions.

## Salary Cap Space

Assuming a salary cap limit of \$126.3 million for the 2014 League Year and carryover of \$17.6 million from 2013 the Dolphins will go into the 2014 NFL season with a healthy \$30 million to spend on free agents. That number could be reduced by any amount of salary escalator that is earned by DE Cameron Wake. Wake could raise his salary by \$5 million in 2014, though I don't know the specific number of sacks needed to trigger that escalator. If he earns the full amount it should be offset by the release of Dimitri Patterson.

While \$30 million is certainly a significant amount, if the Dolphins choose to re-sign many of their free agents before the start of Free Agency that \$30 million figure will shrink rapidly. Miami could create more cap room by restructuring the contract of WR Mike Wallace. Wallace has a \$17.25 million cap hit in 2014, most of which consists of base salary. If they converted the maximum amount of base salary to a prorated bonus, the team would create about \$10.7 million in additional cap room.

The danger in that move is that the Dolphins would then be committing to Wallace through the 2015 season. As things currently stand with his contract, Wallace could potentially be released or pushed into a paycut in 2015. The team would lose that flexibility in a restructure. So the Dolphins will need to weigh the pros and cons of that move before making that decision.

## Extension Candidates

38% of Miami's current roster will be some form of free agent in 2015, leaving them with a number of possible extension candidates, however recent history has shown Miami really does not extend their players early and instead waits until the season has begun before they start to make such roster moves.

The player most likely to be extended would be DE Jared Odrick. Odrick is a good rotational player that started to show a little more promise as a pass rusher in 2014. He has not had a breakout season yet so his price should not be too high. Jason Jones signed for just under \$3.2 million a year with Detroit and William Hayes just under \$3.5 million with the Rams and Odrick would likely compare favorably with those players. If he did have a big season he could earn much more in free agency. If Miami wants him to be in their rotation for the next three to four years extending him is a smart choice, but if they are happy with Wake and Dion Jordan as getting most of the snaps then Odrick will play the year out and look for a new home elsewhere.

## Free Agent Positions of Interest

### Left Tackle

If there was one decision that Miami could have back from 2013 it would be the decision they made to not trade for Brandon Albert of the Chiefs. The Chiefs were reportedly looking for a high number 2<sup>nd</sup> round draft pick which Miami balked on. The position hurt the Dolphins all year and remains a big position of need for them in 2014.

Albert will be a free agent in 2014, assuming the Chiefs don't apply the franchise tag for a second time, which would seem unlikely, and should be the Dolphins top target in free agency if available. The two sides had supposedly agreed on terms last year so compensation should not be a major hangup. Albert would probably be looking to earn in the \$9 million per year range.

If Albert is unavailable the Dolphins could look at Jordan Gross of the Panthers, whose contract will void following the season. Gross will be 34 years old in 2014 so he would likely be a one year stopgap player, which might fit in with the Dolphins strategies. Gross played last season for \$5.5 million and Miami will need to come in over that to get him away from Carolina, who may also look to re-sign him.

If neither player comes to Miami, Anthony Collins of the Bengals could be an option. He is just 28 and has more upside than the other players but also has more risk since he is much more unproven in a full time role. Collins is a swing tackle so he could play both positions which could make him more intriguing to Miami especially if they sign him to play Right Tackle with possible escalators to play the left side.

### Right Tackle

I would anticipate the Dolphins exploring this position before returning back to Tyson Clabo. Besides Collins, who was mentioned above, there are a few players that Miami could consider. One could be Austin Howard of the division rival New York Jets and another Zach Strief of the New Orleans Saints. Howard would be a younger option, but like Clabo may not provide that run block effort that the team is

lacking. Strief has played in a much different system and should be one of the higher paid Right Tackles in the league.

## **Guard**

With Incognito out the Dolphins need to find a starting Guard to play one of the two positions for the upcoming season. Free agency is not great for this position in 2014, but there are some names that the team could consider. If the stuck with a one year window plan looking at Travelle Wharton might be a good option. He'll be 33 but he played extremely well this past season. The Chiefs' Jon Asamoah could probably step in and be a low cost solution that could develop into a steady starter for the next three years.

## **Running Back**

I think it is safe to say that the Dolphins run game scares nobody right now and they would be happy to find a better set of options than what they currently have. Last season the Dolphins chose not to keep Reggie Bush so that probably indicates that Miami would like to keep the dollars at the position less than \$4 million a season. I doubt the team would be interested in Knowshon Moreno or Ben Tate, who should both earn more than that, or Maurice Jones-Drew who is little more than a name at this point.

Miami will probably look at both the draft and the low tier of free agents in hopes of simply finding a professional runner with some experience. Rashard Mendenall and Michael Bush should both be available and may fit a role with the Dolphins. If the Falcons released Steven Jackson and he came cheaply he might be the type of player the team could look at to pair with a younger player.

## **Defensive Tackle**

This is only a need if the Dolphins choose to not re-sign their two free agents. If they fail to re-sign both players I would think they would go the lower cost veteran route and look at players like Kevin Williams of the Vikings or deeper discount players like Pat Sims and Vance Walker. All these players might be agreeable to one year contracts. Jason Hatcher will look for two or three seasons but he had a monster year in Dallas and could prove to be a lower cost alternative to re-signing Starks.