

# New York Jets: 2014 Financial Scouting Report

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Date: January 1, 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 New York Jets and time permitting I will try to have a report for every team between now and the start of free agency in March.

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

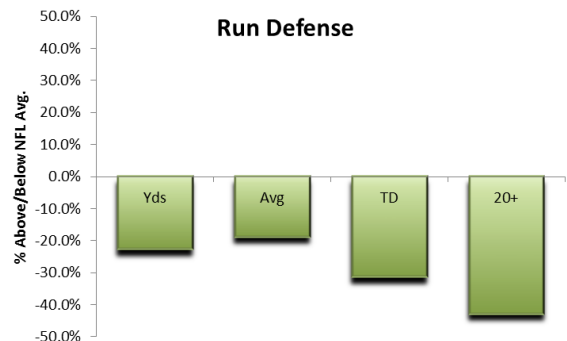
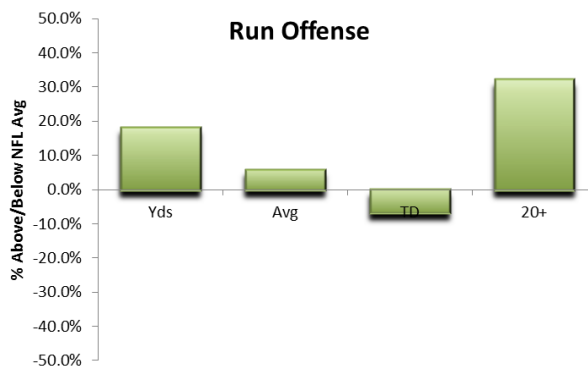
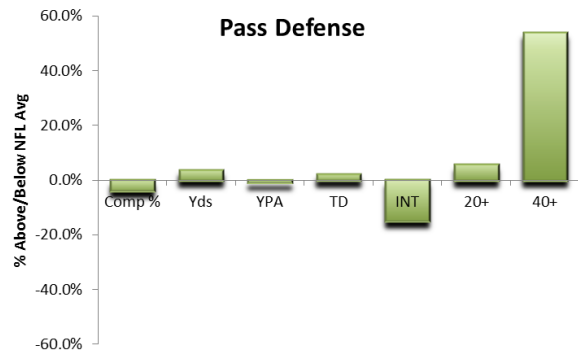
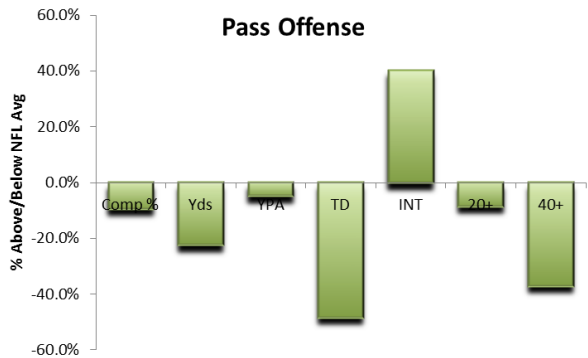
## Current Roster: January 1, 2014

Player	Position	Age	Potential Starter	Remaining Contract	Cap Charge	Cash Salary	Cap Savings
Antonio Cromartie	CB	30	Y	1	\$14,980,000	\$9,500,000	\$9,500,000
Mark Sanchez	QB	28	Y	3	\$13,100,000	\$11,500,000	\$8,300,000
D'Brickshaw Ferguson	LT	31	Y	4	\$11,698,666	\$1,500,000	(\$1,312,670)
Santonio Holmes	WR	30	Y	2	\$10,750,000	\$9,500,000	\$8,250,000
Nick Mangold	C	30	Y	4	\$7,227,100	\$4,120,000	\$1,212,900
David Harris	ILB	30	Y	1	\$7,000,000	\$570,000	\$5,000,000
Dee Milliner	CB	23	Y	3	\$2,877,523	\$980,505	(\$7,481,560)
Quinton Coples	34DE	24	Y	2	\$2,400,763	\$1,190,254	(\$2,800,890)
Sheldon Richardson	DT	24	Y	3	\$2,285,000	\$862,000	(\$5,941,000)
Kyle Wilson	CB	27	N	1	\$2,262,400	\$1,165,000	\$1,165,000
Muhammad Wilkerson	34DE	25	Y	1	\$2,187,500	\$1,312,500	\$1,312,500
Mike Goodson	RB	27	N	2	\$1,983,333	\$1,650,000	\$1,316,666
Dawan Landry	S	31	Y	1	\$1,825,000	\$645,000	\$1,500,000
Chris Ivory	RB	26	Y	2	\$1,750,000	\$1,000,000	\$250,000
Antwan Barnes	34OLB	30	Y	1	\$1,500,000	\$1,200,000	\$900,000
Stephen Hill	WR	23	Y	2	\$1,285,185	\$818,394	\$351,603
Geno Smith	QB	24	Y	3	\$1,140,819	\$633,164	(\$967,146)
Benjamin Ijalana	T	25	N	1	\$926,658	\$926,658	\$926,658
Kenrick Ellis	DT	27	Y	1	\$797,500	\$685,000	\$685,000
Tanner Purdum	LS	28	Y	1	\$795,000	\$730,000	\$730,000
Demario Davis	ILB	25	Y	2	\$764,490	\$620,000	\$475,510
Bilal Powell	RB	26	Y	1	\$745,125	\$645,000	\$645,000
Jeremy Kerley	WR	26	Y	1	\$691,064	\$645,000	\$645,000
Brian Winters	G	23	Y	3	\$689,969	\$529,000	\$207,062
Alex Green	RB	26	N	1	\$652,500	\$652,500	\$652,500
Caleb Schlauderaff	OL	27	N	1	\$645,000	\$645,000	\$645,000
David Nelson	WR	27	N	1	\$645,000	\$5,000,000	\$645,000
Edmond Gates	WR	28	N	1	\$645,000	\$645,000	\$645,000
Greg Salas	WR	26	N	1	\$645,000	\$645,000	\$645,000
Josh Bush	S	25	N	2	\$596,055	\$570,000	\$543,945
Damon Harrison	DT	26	Y	1	\$572,334	\$7,700,000	\$570,000
Antonio Allen	S	26	Y	2	\$570,000	\$570,000	\$570,000
Jaiquawn Jarrett	S	25	N	1	\$570,000	\$570,000	\$570,000
Oday Aboushi	G	23	N	3	\$544,750	\$495,000	\$395,500
William Campbell	G	23	N	3	\$522,625	\$495,000	\$439,750
Tommy Bohanon	FB	24	Y	3	\$510,562	\$495,000	\$463,876
Ryan Quigley	P	24	Y	2	\$495,000	\$495,000	\$495,000
Chris Pantale	TE	24	N	2	\$495,000	\$495,000	\$495,000
Saalim Hakim	WR	24	N	2	\$495,000	\$495,000	\$495,000
Zach Sudfeld	TE	25	N	2	\$495,000	\$495,000	\$495,000
Troy Davis	ILB	23	N	2	\$495,000	\$495,000	\$495,000

# 2013 Performance Charts

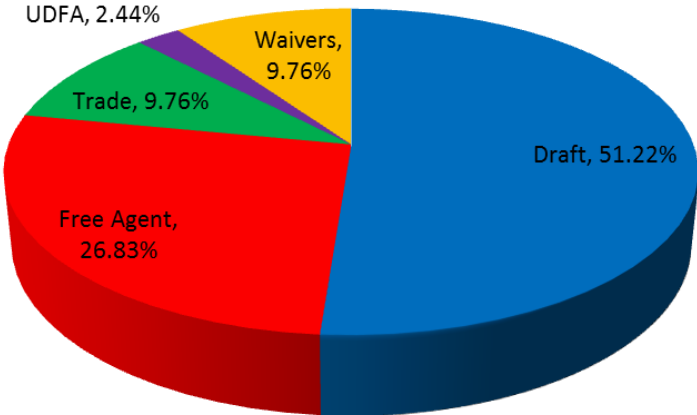


\* Efficiency rankings calculate points scored and allowed compared to their 2013 schedule. A negative ranking means they scored less or allowed more points than their opponents' average. A positive ranking means they scored more or allowed less than the opponents' average.

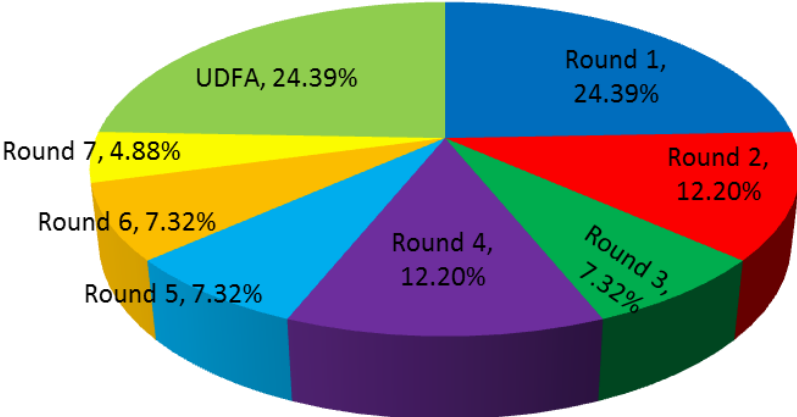


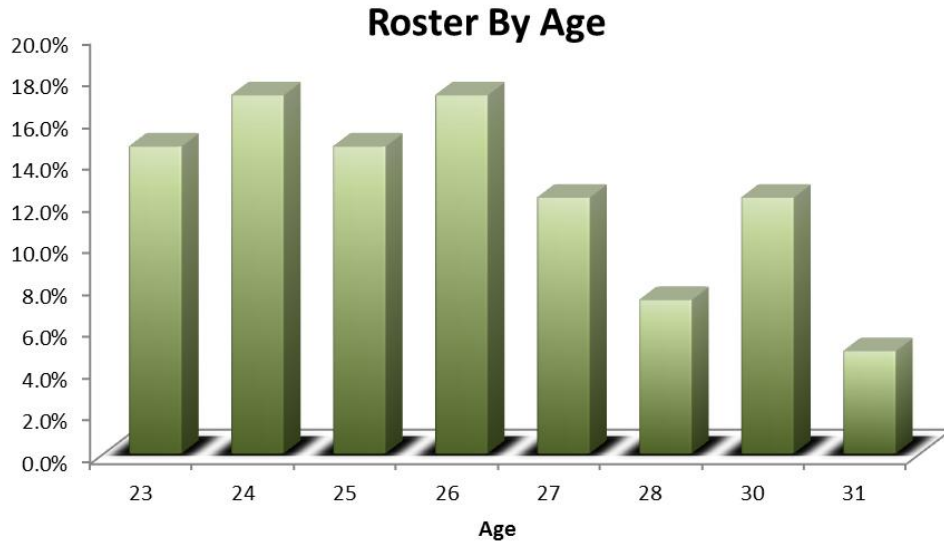
# Roster Overview

## Acquisition Strategy

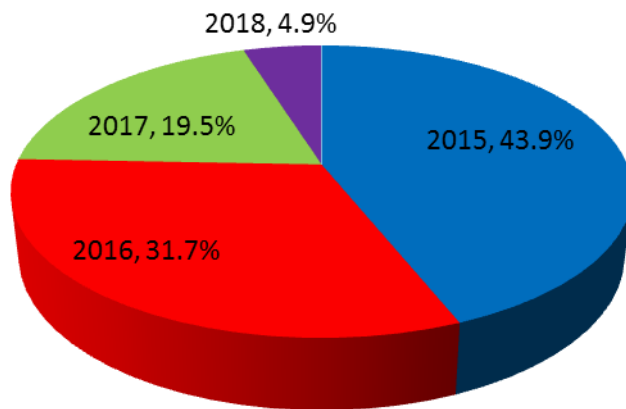


## Roster By Draft Round





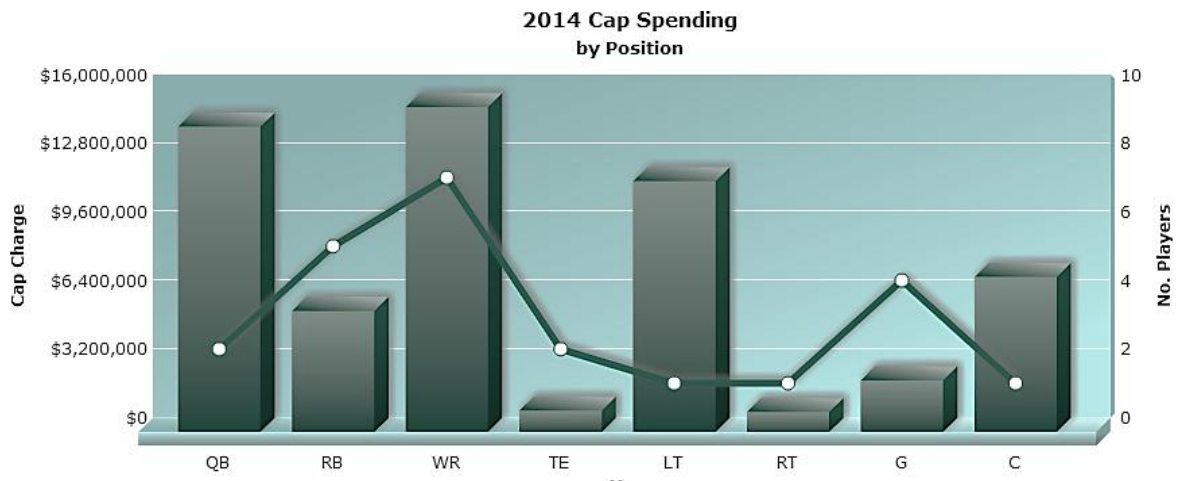
### Turnover: Free Agents By Year



## Salary Cap Overview



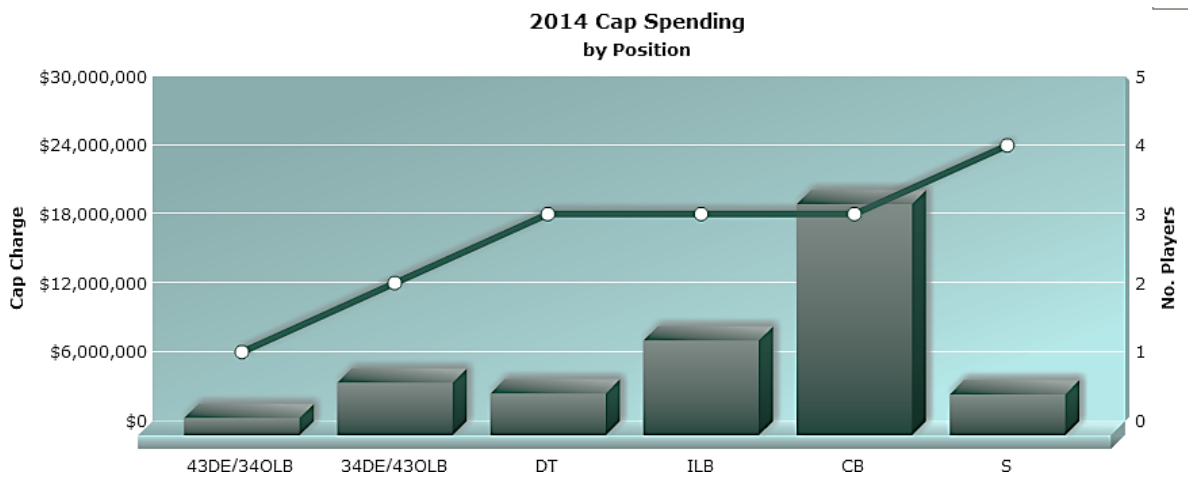
The New York Jets currently have about \$101 million committed to the 2014 Salary Cap for 41 players, not including futures contracts. The Jets have significantly more investments on offense than they do on defense in terms of salary cap charges. This is primarily due to the large contract extensions given to QB Mark Sanchez, WR Santonio Holmes, LT D’Brickashaw Ferguson, and C Nick Mangold in the 2010 to 2012 seasons. Those four players account for 71.7% of all offensive spending.



The Jets offense has typically been in the bottom of the NFL ranking 13<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, and 31<sup>st</sup> in points scored over the past three seasons. The Jets front office essentially committed to the belief that these four players would form the nucleus of an offense that could be supplemented with low cost free agents and low draft selections. Since drafting Mark Sanchez, the Jets have failed to spend a first round pick on an offensive player and have mainly drafted “projects” in the 2<sup>nd</sup> round and later, including their last two top offensive picks of QB Geno Smith and WR Stephen Hill. With Sanchez failing to develop into a quality NFL starter and Holmes being injured and ineffective for the last three years the offense bottomed out due to this approach.

The teams' salary cap has been further compromised by the high end commitments made to Ferguson and Mangold in light of the NFL trending towards a slight downgrading of salary commitments to the left tackle position and major downgrading of salary to the center position. This will lead to the Jets needing to lessen their spending at other positions to make up for the overspending on the two offensive linemen.

Strategically the Jets have taken a very different approach on defense by filling the roster with high draft picks that have more than offset the spending that the Jets have done. Five potential starters on the 2014 Jets defense are all currently on lower cost rookie contracts, which is a prime reason why the Jets have just \$41.6 million committed to defense, but can still show adequate results. The Jets have two "albatross" contracts on defense, those of CB Antonio Cromartie and LB David Harris. Both players are entering the final year of four year contracts and combine for \$21.98 million of salary cap charges.





## Free Agents

The Jets have 17 unrestricted free agents from their 2013 roster:

Name	Position	2014 age	Cost Grade (10 scale)
Austin Howard	RT	27	★★★★★★
Nick Folk	K	30	★★★★★
Willie Colon	G	31	★★★★
Jeff Cumberland	TE	27	★★★
Calvin Pace	OLB	34	★★★
Leger Douzable	DT	28	★★★
Ed Reed	S	36	★★
David Garrard	QB	36	★
Kellen Winslow	TE	31	★
Josh Cribbs	WR	31	★
Vladimir Ducasse	G	27	★
Josh Mauga	ILB	27	★
Lex Hilliard	FB	30	★
Darius Reynaud	RB	30	★
Ellis Lankster	CB	28	★
Jermaine Cunningham	DE	26	★
Aaron Berry	CB	26	★

Most of these players would not be considered impact or highly desired free agents. Howard, the Jets starting Right Tackle, is the only player I would consider to be an above average salaried player for his position. He would likely be the only free agent that the team would go out of their way to keep as long as the cost is reasonable.

Leger Douzable played well for the Jets down the stretch and can be a strong rotational player in their defensive scheme. Currently he is a 20% snap player but he could get a chance for more playing time elsewhere. As long as another team does not make such an offer he should be retained on a low cost contract.

The Jets will have to make decisions on Folk, Colon, Pace, and Cumberland as their mid tier free agents. Folk had worked for the last two years on a minimum salary benefit contract but should now have raised his stock to around an average salary for a kicker, which would be in the ballpark of \$1.6 million a season. The Jets will have to weigh his career consistency compared to exceptional 2013 season and determine if it is worth investing an extra \$1 million on the position.

Colon and Pace were both starters for the team on one year contracts. Pace is coming off a career high in sacks with 10, but he is not considered a top tier pass rusher. At 34 he might be looking at contracts given to players like John Abraham (around \$2.3 million) as a reasonable expectation, but he has never

been that type of dynamic player. The Jets could very likely consider him as a starter next season, but should balk at anything much more than a minimum contract.

Colon was also a starter and remained healthy for 16 games, the first time he has done that in two years, though he did tear his bicep in the final game of the season. Colon fared better in pass protection than run blocking and penalties were an issue with him all season. He may be looking for more job security than another one year contract worth \$1.2 million that he took in 2013. The Jets can bump the salary a little, but can not be involved in a multiple year contract.

Cumberland is a fill in player that can put up some statistics in the passing game which could be enough to fool a team into giving him more playing time and money. For a team with either a blocking tight end in place or a team that wants a backup to a pass catcher Cumberland can fill a role because he can have big games from time to time receiving. But, he is not a starter nor can he be used as anything but a receiver. The Jets will have to decide if that type of player is what they need.

The lower end decisions will come on Kellen Winslow, Ed Reed, and Ellis Lankster. Winslow could serve as a complementary role with Cumberland since neither can block but both can catch the ball. Winslow is always a risk to last a season and worth nothing more than a minimum salary deal, but if the Jets have no plans to target a Tight End in the draft or free agency he should come back. Reed is a favorite of the head coach but has to be willing to play on a minimum salary deal if he is to return. Reed could opt for retirement.

In addition to the above the Jets have four restricted free agents:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>2014 Age</b>	<b>Proj. Tender</b>
<b>Isaiah Trufant</b>	CB	32	None
<b>Darrin Walls</b>	CB	26	None
<b>Garrett McIntyre</b>	OLB	28	None
<b>Nick Bellore</b>	ILB	25	None

Mcintyre and Walls are the only two players who played a role in the defense, playing around 20% of the teams' defensive snaps. However, the Right of First Refusal tender would carry with it a cost of \$1.359 million, which would be too much for either player. Such tenders are not guaranteed and are often given for the sake of negotiating a lower cost contract that contains some guarantees, but I would not view either player as worth more than the minimum salary.

## Potential Salary Cap Cuts

Releasing Cromartie will save the Jets \$9.5 million in both cash and salary cap and is almost a certainty. While Cromartie has indicated that he would like to remain a Jet, his play in 2013 was poor and the team will likely have an easier time negotiating a new contract with him after having terminated his current contract and allowing him to explore what will likely be limited options around the NFL. Because he has just one year remaining under contract there is no future acceleration associated with releasing him, so the Jets really receive no benefit to waiting until the final hour to maintain exclusive negotiating rights. Cromartie has a \$5 million roster bonus due on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the League Year so a decision must be made before that.

Moving on from Holmes would seem to be one of the most likely releases in the entire NFL. The Jets have paid Holmes \$24 million dollars from 2011 to 2013 to produce just over 90 receptions in total and he is considered the catalyst for destroying what had been considered one of the best locker rooms in the NFL. Holmes was extremely slow to recover from injuries in 2013 and there was some feeling as if he was milking injuries to protect his body for free agency, however the lack of practice time made his connection with his QB non-existent and his numbers ultimately suffered. Though he has publically stated he wants to remain a Jet, his options outside of New York may be next to nothing at this point. There is an extra \$1.25 million of acceleration associated with releasing so if the Jets are considering bringing him back they would be better off reworking his contract than releasing him and then re-signing him on a minimum salary benefit deal. Most likely his career is over as a Jet. The Jets will create \$8.25 million in cap room by releasing Holmes.

Sanchez presents a more interesting situation for the Jets than Holmes and Cromartie. Sanchez was going to be the starter in 2013 if not for an injury suffered in a meaningless game and his replacement did not take the ball and run with it. The Jets have major question marks at the position and with a mid first round draft pick may not be able to find a suitable replacement in the draft. At the least New York needs to bring in a viable alternative to Smith, and unless they make a play for a Jay Cutler or Matt Schaub, Sanchez may be the best solution.

The Jets have until March 25<sup>th</sup> to work out a new deal with Sanchez, at which point \$2 million of his salary becomes guaranteed through the payment of a roster bonus. The going rate for a player like Sanchez on the open market would likely be between \$3 and \$4 million and Sanchez would want to find a situation where he can at least compete for a starting job, which is something the Jets could offer him. If the Jets wanted to push the issue they could pay him the \$2 million and threaten to hold his rights through September if he fails to take a large paycut. If Sanchez is available in September the market will shrink for his services and so will his salary. A similar scenario played out when Matt Leinart was a late release by the Arizona Cardinals.

Because Sanchez was inactive the entire season working out a contract where minimal money counts on the salary cap would be an easy workaround for both sides. The Jets could structure a contract with multiple tiers of NLTBEs to reward him in the event he plays well while also protecting themselves in the

event he fails to win the starting job. Releasing him saves the team \$8.3 million in salary cap but they could create similar savings via the restructure.

RB Mike Goodson caused a great deal of offseason public relations nightmares for the Jets due to his arrest just months after being signed to a contract. Goodson would miss almost all of training camp, spend four weeks on the suspended list, and then suffer a season ending injury. His release saves just over \$1.3 million. The only reason for the Jets to consider holding onto Goodson would be that if his legal situation resulted in jail time they would recover signing bonus money already paid. Once released the Jets give up their claim to that money. Goodson can forfeit \$333,333 for each season missed.

Two players to watch closely are WR Stephen Hill and CB Kyle Wilson. Hill, in his two years in the NFL, has been a bust. He has had trouble with routes, catching the football, and staying healthy. Teams are often willing to give a receiver three years, but if the Jets could get a reasonable draft pick back for him they may consider the option. Hill was benched late in 2013 and seems to have fallen out of favor with the coaching staff for his lack of development.

Wilson should earn an escalator in his contract that increases his salary to slightly over \$3 million which may be a bit steep for a player whose upside is nothing more than a nickel corner. The Jets could opt for a low cost extension or an outright release of the former first round pick. Nothing is guaranteed in his contract so they could wait things out with him since salary cap space would not appear to be tight.

## 2014 NFL Draft

The Jets will have eight selections in the upcoming NFL Draft, not including compensatory draft selections which will be awarded late this winter. Those picks include seven of the Jets own draft picks as well as a conditional 3<sup>rd</sup> round pick for CB Darrelle Revis. If Revis is no longer on the Buccaneers roster at the start of the 2014 League Year than the pick will fall to a 4<sup>th</sup> round selection.

Round	Pick	Salary Cap
1	18	\$1,556,955
2	17	\$683,156
3	5	\$591,023
3	16	\$569,719
4	15	\$532,725
5	14	\$467,825
6	19	\$445,966
7	18	\$434,212

The 2014 salary cap cost of the Jets rookie class should be \$5,281,581. 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, \$1,921,581. That is the minimum amount of cap space that the Jets will need on hand to sign their rookie class in the summer.

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. The Jets lost four players who made in excess of \$3 million each in 2013 and another two low cost players. The Jets only signed two low cost players so they will likely receive four compensatory selections. Their highest qualifying player is LaRon Landry which should result in a 4<sup>th</sup> round pick.

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 Jets will expect to find starters with their first two picks in the draft. Over the last ten years the predominant position available around the 18<sup>th</sup> pick in the first round (number 16 through 20) is the Defensive End/Outside Linebacker position. Of the 50 picks made in that spot 32% have ended up projecting to rush the passer in some capacity. The next highest positions would be Cornerback (20%) followed by Offensive Tackle (10%). Their zone of round two has found 20% Cornerbacks, 10% Defensive Tackles, and 10% Wide Receivers and 10% Running Backs.

While we can not project who the Jets will take there is a strong probability that the board will be filled with defensive linemen and cornerbacks. Because the Jets have heavily invested in Defense in the past few drafts it is possible that they will avoid defense entirely. That said if the Jets are not active in free agency when it comes to finding another outside pass rusher or cornerback it may say something about a group of players they have focused on and strongly believe will be available on draft day.

## Salary Cap Space

Assuming a salary cap limit of \$126.3 million for the 2014 League Year and carryover of \$1.5 million from 2013 the Jets will go into the 2014 NFL season with about \$18 million in cap space. With the releases of Holmes and Cromartie likely and Sanchez probable that number will climb to about \$43 million by the start of free agency. After earmarking a few million for rookies and likely planning on holding \$8-10 million in emergency reserves for the season, the Jets should have a spending budget in the vicinity of \$30 million. That should be 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> highest in the NFL.

## Extension Candidates

Internally the Jets should only be looking to use some of that money to extend one player- DE Muhammad Wilkerson. Wilkerson, a first round draft pick in 2011, is extension eligible in 2014. Wilkerson played at an extremely high level in 2013 and is arguably the second rated 34 Defensive End in the NFL, behind only JJ Watt of the Houston Texans. Wilkerson will likely be looking for a contract in the range of \$11 million a season. The Jets can lessen his salary cap hits long term by extending him in 2014. Publically the Jets have stated that they do not want to do early extensions so they could fear precedent being set, but he is an exceptional player.

The other possible candidate would be David Harris who will be entering the final year of his contract, but with the league getting faster Harris' value has probably decreased from its peak in 2010. His true value probably is closer to the \$5 million a year range than the \$9 million he currently makes. The least he may settle for is in the ballpark of \$7 million per year which I feel is too pricey for an extension and it is better to have him play out the season.

## Free Agent Positions of Interest

### Wide Receiver

The Jets number one priority in the offseason should be to rebuild a receiving corps that has been among the most underwhelming in the NFL. The Jets leading receivers by snap count were Hill, Jeremy Kerley, and David Nelson. Of those three only Kerley would be considered a starting quality player for most football teams. Other players under contract to the team are Holmes, Clyde Gates, and Greg Salas. The Jets can not afford to miss at this position in free agency which should mean passing on question mark players. Those players would be Hakeem Nicks (ineffective last few years/attitude issues), Eric Decker (could be stat compiler on loaded offense), and Kenny Britt (injury/attitude), though Britt's price tag could be so low that his upside makes it worth the contract.

Free agency will probably not provide the team with top level talent but they should be able to at least get two number two type targets to bring some added stability to the offense. Two veteran players that could be considered are Anquan Boldin and Jerricho Cotchery. Both are professional players who will give effort for 16 games. Age is going to be an issue and both spend significant time running in the slot, specifically Cotchery, which could make them less attractive to New York due to the presence of Kerley, but both could be considerations on short term deals.

Seattle's Golden Tate had a breakout season and GM John Idzik should be familiar with him from his days in Seattle. The Seahawks salary cap situation could be tight in 2014 and they have already committed to Percy Harvin so Tate will likely entertain offers. James Jones and Jacoby Jones could also be players that the team could flirt with. The interesting one might be Jeremy Maclin of the Eagles who is familiar with the offensive system but coming off injury. Maclin is a talented player but how his injury weighs into the decision making process is something few can really project. If healthy he is probably the safest bet of the group.

## Guard

The team could be in the market for two new starting Guards depending on what the team feels about the development of Brian Winters. For most of the season Winters was a turnstile in the passing game and not helpful in the running game. A veteran name that the team could consider is Travelle Wharton if the Panthers are unable to retain him. Wharton had a tremendous bounce back season in 2013 following a year on IR with the Bengals. Wharton will be 33 so a long term investment would be a poor decision, but if he can be had on a one or two year contract he could be worth signing.

Jon Asamoah started 12 games for the Chiefs and could be a reasonable insurance policy in the event Colon was to rapidly decline or fall to injury. He played well for Kansas City once he was the starter. Richie Incognito will also be a free agent but will come with a great deal of media scrutiny due to the accused hazing of Dolphins tackle Jonathan Martin. Incognito would bring a nasty attitude to the line, which the Jets are missing, but the PR could be too much. Ryan has dealt with players in bad situations before but this is a bit more unique.

## Quarterback

While most people will agree that the Jets need a veteran player to take the job if Smith plays poorly there are limited options available. In free agency the names that the team would be looking at are Chad Henne, Josh Freeman, Josh McCown, and Colt McCoy, none of whom are going to be true viable options to push a player in camp. Freeman might be the closest but he is damaged goods following last season and a team will need a year just to rebuild him up.

The Jets should watch the releases carefully at this position as there may be more upside there than free agency. Viking QB Matt Cassel can void his contract and even if he fails to do so may be released by a new coaching staff. Matt Schaub would be a more expensive option once released by Houston but is a starting caliber player. Dallas' salary cap situation could lead to the release of Kyle Orton, though injury to Tony Romo makes that less likely. These players are a better group for the Jets situation than the free agent grouping. Cassel and Orton would likely cost in the \$4 million per year range while Schaub could earn between \$7 and \$8 million.

## Outside Linebacker

The Jets are still in need of players who can provide that consistent rush that they are lacking. Quinton Coples is proving to be a good pass rusher on one side but finding a complement on the other side would set the long term future of the defense. Because Coples will play for cheap for two more seasons the Jets can afford to hit free agency for a rusher if they choose.

The best available player will be the Redskins Brian Orakpo if they fail to agree to a contract extension before his contract voids and he hits free agency. He is a terrific all around player that would excel in this defense though it would be a surprise if the Redskins don't re-sign him. Another young option is Jason Worilds of the Steelers. There is more risk with him in that prior to this season he was not a good player and his emergence this year somewhat of a surprise. He could come with a big "buyer beware" tag. The best veteran option will be Anthony Spencer who recorded 11 sacks in 2012 but was injured in 2013. He

was coached by Rex's brother Rob in Dallas, so Ryan could have some additional insight into Spencer's abilities.

Orakpo should be the most expensive of the group and likely get above that \$11million a season mark. He can attempt to push for Clay Matthews money (\$13.2 million a season), but should fall short of that level and move closer to the Tamba Hali \$11.5 million per year mark. Worlids should fall closer to the Paul Kruger level of the market around \$8 million per season. Spencer is harder to judge because of age and injury. He would probably be looking at an incentivized contract with a base value in the \$7 million range similar to Cliff Avril and Chris Clemons of the Seattle Seahawks.

### **Inside Linebacker**

For the last three seasons the Jets linebackers have been targeted over and over in the passing game. Demario Davis consistently grades as one of the worst coverage players at the position and Harris is also well below average. The Jets could target either Karlos Dansby or Daryl Smith to replace Davis. Both are solid veterans whose price tags should be reasonable. With Harris entering the final year of his contract the Jets could view this as a situation where they can get two to three years out of a veteran player and replace Harris with a young body in 2015.

Both players played for low amounts in 2013, with Dansby needing to prove he could be more of a difference maker than he was in Miami and Smith looking to prove he could play for 16 games following injury. Both could try to push into the \$7 million range, which was the amount received by Dannel Ellerbe and Sean Lee, but with both over the age of 30 their price tags should be closer to the \$5.5 million a year range that Derrick Johnson and London Fletcher have played for.

### **Cornerback**

Assuming the Jets do not keep Cromartie there will be no shortage of talent available in free agency. The Jets project Milliner to be their top cornerback so finding a second tier corner might be a focus of free agency. The Jets may wait and see how the market begins to shape up before they make their move. Last year players who were expecting to get large contracts had to settle for one year contracts worth around \$5 million or take low cost three and four year deals with moderate guarantees.

If that trend continues the Jets could try to jump in on players such as Aqib Talib or Brent Grimes. The player to watch in all of this is the Titans' Alterraun Verner who will be the prize of the free agent class. It is also possible that Richard Sherman and Patrick Peterson could sign extensions in February that give the league an idea of what the dollars will be like at the position. The Jets could view Talib and Grimes as important players simply because it also weakens a division rival if they sign them. Talib has injury concerns and has never played 16 games so any contract he signs needs to be incentive laden. If neither is franchised they would probably earn in the \$7-\$8 million a year range unless there is a big increase in the market which could push them higher. Grimes is the better player and should cost more even though he will be 31

If the price tag on those players is too high the next tier of cornerback will be Tarell Brown, Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie, Sam Shields, and Vontae Davis, though Davis had an excellent 2013 year in



Indianapolis that could boost his value further. Captain Munnerlyn of the Panthers might also be of interest as a lower cost alternative. Davis' salary will likely creep higher than the others but this range of player I would grade closer to the \$6.5 million and less range. Davis would be the guy that might earn more.

There should also be no shortage of players who have been released from their contracts, though they would have to provide a significant upgrade over Cromartie to consider as a second corner. More likely the released route would be a third coverage player that is a bit of a reclamation project. Possible releases would be Asante Samuel, Dmitri Patterson, Derek Cox, and Cortland Finnegan. Samuel is the only one from that list that the team would be confident could still play. This list of players should not earn more than \$3 million a season and would likely be one year contracts.

## Safety

The Jets ended the 2013 season starting Safeties released by the Jaguars and Texans, two of the three worst teams in the NFL, so clearly it is a position where they can improve. The Jets have lacked that athletic safety with range since they traded Kerry Rhodes to the Arizona Cardinals in 2010. When the Jets had Darrelle Revis the need for help was not as critical, but without Revis the position becomes more important to the team.

The two biggest names are Jairus Byrd of the Bills and TJ Ward of the Browns. Byrd was franchised last season by the Bills and while the Bills say they want to retain him the relationship between the two sides would seem icy. If they do Franchise him a second time that would essentially block the Jets as the Bills would not negotiate a trade with a division rival. Byrd has 22 interceptions in five years and would perfectly with what the Jets do.

Ward is a bit more of a run defender and all around player than Byrd. He is also a Franchise candidate but I do believe the Browns would trade him to a team like the Jets if the price was right. Donte Whitner would be the third rated available Safety and fit into a similar mold as Ward. He is a solid all around player. San Francisco could have a hard time fitting Whitner within their salary cap so he could see free agency in March. Other names to consider might be Antoine Bethea and Chris Clemons.

Byrd, Ward, and Whitner will all attempt to surpass the \$8.25 million a year earned by Dashon Goldson and the lowest anyone would go would be the \$7 million a year received by Reshad Jones and Kam Chancellor. Byrd should have the greatest chance of surpassing Goldson in March. Whitner is not as big of a name as the other two and might come in closer to the low range of the estimates. The others would probably be closer to the LaRon Landry and William Moore contracts at \$6 million per year. It would be surprising if the Jets did not come away with a Safety in March.