

NFL players approve labor deal, including 17-game season

By **Barry Wilner**
The Associated Press

By a close vote, with some 500 union members not participating, NFL players approved a new labor agreement with the league. It features a 17-game regular season, higher salaries, increased roster sizes and larger pensions for current and former players.

The deal, which runs through the 2030 season, was accepted by the 32 team owners last month. The NFL Players Association’s membership spent the last week voting on the 439-page document after its executive board narrowly rejected it by a 6-5 vote, and the player representatives voted 17-14 in favor, with one abstention.

Clearly, there was some strong player opposition to this collective bargaining agreement, though. Many stars, including Aaron Rodgers, Russell Wilson, J.J. Watt and Todd Gurley, spoke out against it. The total vote, among the nearly 2,500 union members who participated, was 1,019-959. Ratification required a simple majority — results were announced Sunday — and there could be lasting resentment among union members, given how close the vote was.

“Can’t believe we agreed to that lol,” Colts tight end Eric Ebron tweeted. “We can only play this game for so long and y’all didn’t want everything we could get out of it? ... 2030 y’all do better.”

Ravens corner-back Marlon Humphrey expressed displeasure about the turnout for voting.

“Around 500 players didn’t even vote on the new CBA ...,” he tweeted. “It’s good and bad to this deal. I could see why anyone would vote either way. I just think it’s amazing guys don’t even care.”

Almost immediately, players were urging unity, particularly in the face of the criticism from within



Photo by Chris Carlson/AP file photo

In a Thursday, Jan. 30, 2020 file photo, Eric Winston, president of the NFL Players Association, speaks at the annual state of the NFLPA press conference, in Miami Beach, Florida. NFL players have approved a new labor agreement with the league that features a 17-game regular season, higher salaries, increased roster sizes and larger pensions for current and former players.

their ranks about approving the deal.

“The democratic process has played itself out,” tweeted Eagles safety Malcolm Jenkins, one of the most influential voices in the union. “We must be committed to unifying our current and former members. While I don’t agree with the decision because of its negative impacts on some current and former players, I do respect our process and will push forward accordingly.”

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, not surprisingly, praised the players’ acceptance of the new CBA.

“We are pleased that the players have voted to ratify the proposed new CBA, which will provide substantial benefits to all current and retired players, increase jobs, ensure continued progress on player safety, and give our fans more and better football,” Goodell said in a statement. “We appreciate the tireless efforts of the members of the Management Council Executive Committee and the NFLPA leadership, both of whom devoted nearly a year to detailed, good faith negotiations to reach this comprehensive, transformative agreement.”

After discussions with the union during the day,

the NFL sent a memo to all teams Sunday night that the league will open the 2020 NFL business season on Wednesday, as sched-

uled, with free agency and trades. A delay had been considered a possibility given league restrictions on travel as a safeguard against the new coronavirus.

There was no immediate word on timing and potential format changes for the draft, scheduled for Las Vegas from April 23-25, something that was also expected to be discussed by the NFL and NFLPA.

A 17-game schedule won’t happen before the 2021 season. The mechanics for an uneven number of games — neutral sites or which teams get nine home games — will be worked out in the interim.

Extending the season was a nonissue with the players in 2011, when the current 10-year deal was finalized after a 4 1/2

month lockout. It has upset many of them as it will become a reality in another season or so.

Jaguars receiver Chris Conley posted his objections to a variety of items.

“Players voted for a 17-game season,” he said on Instagram. “No extra bye week. A disproportionate pay increase that will be less than promised because of the growth of the league’s revenue. No resolved player restrictions or tags. Added mandatory fines for hold outs that take an accrued season from veteran players. On top of that this CBA cut benefits for some players in shaky medical condition. The worst part is that 500 people didn’t vote. We look like a weak union to the owners and for this reason they will continue to try to

low ball and take advantage of players rights.”

NFLPA Executive Director DeMaurice Smith explained the ins and outs of negotiating the new deal after the voting had concluded Saturday night.

“The current proposal contains increases across almost every category of wages, hours, working conditions and benefits for former and current players,” he said. “Like any contested negotiation ... the proposal also reflects trades with the counterparty which have to be carefully weighed and assessed across the entirety of the deal. Please be confident that I hear those of you who have expressed their perspective that these gains are not enough when weighed against, for example, adding another game.”

NFL says draft will proceed as scheduled

By **Barry Wilner**
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — The NFL will proceed with its draft but without public events next month in Las Vegas. It’s not yet clear, however, if the draft itself will be held in the city.

Commissioner Roger Goodell said Monday the draft will take place April 23-25 as scheduled, but under a modified format still being developed. The draft will be televised regardless of its venue or format.

“In consideration of current information related to COVID-19 and guidance from medical experts such as the CDC, and in coordination with public authorities in Nevada and the city of Las Vegas, the NFL will modify its plans” the league said in a statement.

The NFL says it is exploring “innovative options” for how the process will be handled and will provide that information as it becomes available.

“This decision reflects our foremost priority: the health and safety of all fans and citizens,” Goodell said.

“While this outcome is disappointing both to the NFL and to the Las Vegas community, we look forward to partnering with the Raiders, the city of Las Vegas and the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority for a future NFL draft as well as evaluating opportunities for other major NFL events in Las Vegas in the future, including the Super Bowl.”

Next year’s draft is scheduled for Cleveland, and the 2022 draft has not been awarded, though Los Angeles has been consid-

ered the favorite. Kansas City has the 2023 draft.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia.

The vast majority of people recover from the new virus. According to the World Health Organization, people with mild illness recover in about two weeks, while those with more severe illness may take three to six weeks to recover.

The extravaganza the NFL planned for Las Vegas included closing down a portion of the Strip and using Caesars Palace and the lake in front of the Bellagio hotel. It would have had a large fan viewing zone for the proceedings and for concerts.

There also would have been the NFL Draft Experience where fans would participate in interactive games, view the Vince Lombardi Trophy, attend autograph sessions with NFL players and former players.

The NFL began moving the draft around in 2015, going to Chicago for two years, then Philadelphia, then Dallas and Nashville. Most of the league’s cities, particularly those that won’t likely host a Super Bowl, have shown interest in having it.

As for next month, nothing is certain. A good guess would be that teams will make their selections remotely from their cities, and a central studio might be used for the television presentations.

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