



Letter sent to former players detailing NFL's proposal

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Posted By PFW staff

Panthers owner Jerry Richardson and Packers CEO Mark Murphy, both former NFL players, have sent a letter to all of the league's retired players detailing the league's mid-March proposal to the NFLPA. The union rejected the offer before decertifying into a trade association and filing an antitrust lawsuit against the NFL. The letter explains what benefits retired players would have received if the deal had been agreed upon.

The full of the letter is below:

Dear Retired Player:

On March 11, the NFL Players Association — which states that it represents players "past, present and future" — walked away from the bargaining table, announced it was giving up its status as a labor organization, and sued the NFL in Minnesota. As retired players who are members of the owners' bargaining committee, we have a unique perspective because we understand these issues from all sides. More importantly, we understand the challenges former players and their families face.

The union walked away from mediation, cutting off negotiations on an offer that was made by the clubs to avoid a work stoppage and that would have provided important improvements in retired player benefits. We know some former players have struggled financially. This was a real attempt to address those financial concerns. We are committed to making sure that when we reach a new agreement it better addresses the needs of our retirees. It's the fair thing to do. It's the right thing to do and it recognizes and respects your contributions to our game.

One of Commissioner Roger Goodell's highest priorities has been meeting with retirees, their families, and those who advocate on behalf of retired players. Leaders including Mike Ditka of Gridiron Greats, Bruce Laird of Fourth and Goal, and George Martin of NFL Alumni have met with NFL owners face-to-face to discuss issues affecting former players and their families. We have developed a constructive relationship with these men and others who promote the interests of retired players. Our bargaining proposals reflect the concerns we have heard, and we want to help.

George Martin was invited to speak to NFL owners at our recent league meeting in New Orleans. He again stressed the need for increased pensions and other improvements for retired players. George also reported to his board and chapter presidents that his subsequent meeting with the NFLPA-Retired Players Group in Florida did not go as well. In a letter to his board, he described the atmosphere as "*defiant, accusatory, and outright disrespectful.*"

It is important to us that you know the facts about what we offered the union. Among the elements of our March 11 proposal that would have improved benefits for former players are the following:

- ε A new pension supplement for retired players aged 55 or above. This supplement would give more than 2,000 retirees an immediate increase in pension payments averaging almost 60 percent.
- ε Improvements in the Disability Plans and the 88 Plan to ease the qualifications for disability benefits and increase the value of those benefits to qualifying retirees.
- ε Expanded career transition programs to assist former players in developing second careers, both in and out of football.
- ε A new rookie pay system that would re-allocate more than \$300 million per draft class to fund benefits for current and retired players.

These are significant offers that would have a measurable impact on the people who made football great. Sadly, the players' union wasn't listening.

Nobody, least of all Commissioner Goodell and the owners, is pleased that negotiations broke down and that a work stoppage has begun. But even though current players are locked out, the clubs will fully honor their commitments to you. You didn't cause this dispute, and you won't have to pay for it.

This means that despite various reports or comments to the contrary, there will be no reduction in any retiree benefit programs. We will continue to make all pension payments and contributions. If you are currently receiving post-career medical benefits, you will continue to do so. There will be no reduction in payments or coverage under the disability plans or the 88 Plan. And we will continue to accept applications from retired players for all benefit plans. We're serious about our commitment to you and we will keep our word.

For example, you asked for greater access to long-term health care, and so we recently instituted a new program to provide long-term care insurance for retirees. Because the union refused to participate, this insurance program is being funded entirely by NFL owners. Transamerica Life Insurance is now contacting retired players to solicit applications. Coverage may also be available to your spouse at a reduced premium.

Further, the NFL will maintain the benefits available through the NFL Player Care Plan. The plan provides joint replacement and assisted living benefits, a discount prescription drug card, neurological and spine treatment programs, a Medicare supplement program, and vested-inactive life insurance. We did this to improve your quality of life off the field because you gave so much on the field.

An independent organization primarily financed by the NFL owners, the Player Care Foundation (PCF) was established to improve the quality of life for former players through financial grants and research. PCF provides monetary grants to former players experiencing financial hardships, including grants to those who need assistance in paying for the costs of Player Care Plan programs such as joint replacement, spine treatment or neurological care. PCF also sponsors cardiovascular and prostate screening programs.

For information regarding any of the above retired player benefits, programs, and services, please call the NFL Player Benefits Department at 1-800-NFL-GOAL (1-800-635-4625).

We want you to be fully informed, and to know the facts. The NFL Players Association recently stated that NFL owners contribute nothing to the pensions of former players. (DeMaurice Smith on WFAN Radio in New York: "How much money do the NFL teams provide to the former player pensions? The answer is zero.") In fact, in the past 10 years alone the NFL owners have contributed \$2.7 billion to the funding of benefit plans for current and former players. On March 30, NFL owners paid almost \$180 million to fund pension, disability, medical and other benefits for the 2010 season.

Commissioner Goodell and the owners are prepared to resume collective bargaining immediately. The longer we wait, the more economically difficult it will be to reach an agreement. When we do resume negotiations — and we will — our top priorities for a new agreement will include the benefit improvements described in this letter. We do not know what the NFLPA may seek for current players, but we will not set aside your needs. Your voice needs to be heard, and we will listen.

Sincerely,

Mark Murphy	Jerry Richardson
President & CEO	Owner/Founder
Green Bay Packers	Carolina Panthers
(Washington Redskins 1977-84)	(Baltimore Colts 1959-60)