

# Brown and Silver and Black?

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With the new league year approaching less than a week from today, the Steelers find themselves trying to move on from more than one superstar this offseason. Due to conflicts stemming between Antonio Brown and the Steeler's coaching staff at the end of last regular season, the front office has decided to move on from the All-Pro Wide Receiver. This move could be an especially impactful blow to an offense that is already losing RB Le'Veon Bell who is seeking to become to league's highest paid player at the position. Remaining stern as always, an organization who still refuses to put the team's logo sticker on both sides of their helmet did not break character to meet the extensive demands of their high-profile skill players.

After Antonio Brown's meeting with Pittsburgh's owner Art Rooney II last week concluding that the two parties would part ways, it hasn't exactly been easy to find a trade partner willing to do business. Seeking ample compensation, the Steelers are trying to receive a first or early round draft pick in return for one of the top 5 receivers in the NFL. On the surface, this price in itself seems more than fair to any franchise (whose name isn't the Patriots).

However, Brown's exuberant criticisms of former teammate Ben Roethlisberger and head coach Mike Tomlin have made some potential trade partners proceed with caution, ushering in concern about his larger than life personality. Furthermore, Antonio Brown wants to restructure his already expensive contract that made him the highest paid WR in the league, seeking even more money for his services than before. Building upon the trade partner's laundry list of concerns, it has been revealed Antonio Brown has a short list of teams he would consider playing for after shutting down the hopes of the Buffalo Bills who attempted to trade for him late last week. Lastly, denying the odds and going into his 10<sup>th</sup> season as a 6<sup>th</sup> round draft pick, Brown will be turning 31 years old this offseason.

Even as he's aged, the WR has shown no signs of slowing down recording his 6<sup>th</sup> straight 1000-yard season and leading the league with 15 receiving touchdowns last season. Brown has a long track record of consistency not only in his production but in his health, appearing in 94.5% of the Steeler's games since 2011. With the ability to pose as a high-volume slot threat, as well as a lethal vertical passing game threat lined up on the outside, any team with the assets and cap space should at the very least make an offer to land the generational talent. As the trade process has progressed however, the list of teams remaining in the sweepstakes to acquire Antonio Brown continues to shrink.

Of those teams recently crossed off the list are the Tennessee Titans, Washington Redskins, both of which have major question marks at the Quarterback position for next year. One factor that should be noted amongst Brown's demands for a potential landing spot is that he wants to be paired with a franchise who has a steady presence at QB to be throwing him the ball week in and week out. The Green Bay Packers seemed to be a perfect fit, finally pairing one of the NFL's most talented QBs with elite talent at the wideout position. This long-awaited help however will live on in the 'what if' scenarios as the Packers don't have enough salary cap space to take on Brown's contract and are no longer in contention to trade for him.

As many NFL fans scratch their heads in disbelief about the lack of suitors there are around the league for one of the league's best skill players, only one team is needed for Antonio Brown to write the next chapter in his illustrious career. Despite all of the criticism faced in his first year returning as Head Coach for the Oakland Raiders, Jon Gruden has a chance to provide clarity to all of the doubters if the team can send one of its draft picks to the Steelers in exchange for the rights to Antonio Brown. This will be a monumental move for the Raiders after Gruden left fans in shock after shipping off Khalil Mack and Amari Cooper early in his post as the team's coach. Making matters worse, both of the players traded away led their respective teams on runs to earn spots in the playoffs, something the Raiders wouldn't know much about.

(Finally) Turning the corner could be on the horizon for the Raiders as they look to reinvent themselves with the franchise's move to Las Vegas in 2020. Landing a big-time weapon like Antonio Brown could be the big jolt the team needs in its search for two-dimensional offensive production that was lost in the Bermuda triangle of 2016. More importantly, it could

provide a sense of direction and reassurance to a team and fan base rattled by draft busts and losing seasons for the last fifteen plus seasons.

On the topic of how well a big personality like Antonio Brown would fit on the Raiders, I'm not sure there would be a better locker room around the league to bring him into. First off, Coach Jon Gruden has raved about the impression Brown has left on him, citing that no player in the NFL has a better work ethic in practice around the league. As for his relationship with the Quarterback which is vital for any team, I'm sure Derek Carr would love nothing more than to team up with Antonio Brown and create a new spark in the passing game in order to prove his worthiness of the \$125 million contract extension he received a couple of offseasons ago. Additionally, the signing can establish a veteran presence for the young receiving corps to look up to and learn from and develop around.

At the end of the day, this move seems like a no brainer for a franchise and receiver both seeking to move on and move forward to a new city to reinvent their past successes. This is the big break that the Raiders have been waiting for since the deep playoff runs led by Rich Gannon in the early 2000s. Just one year in to his term as the highest paid head coach in the league, Jon Gruden stirs the mystery as to whether he's secretly a genius, or if he's just the luckiest man in the NFL. Either way, Antonio Brown to the Raiders seems like an ideal fit for both parties involved, and a move waiting to happen.