

Predicting the Future of the NFL Quarterback Carousel

By: Austin Ragland

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Fresh off of the hype of the NFL Combine and nearing a month out from the 2019 NFL Draft, there are still lots of question marks at the quarterback position for many front offices around the league. Whether its moving on from a veteran, pursuing a rising free agent, or looking to hit the jackpot in the draft, teams have many options to consider in their search to fill their most important roster spot. With that being said, I will analyze the outlooks for the obvious franchises in the QB market, as well as a few dark horses who might make some noise as the new league year approaches.

Arizona Cardinals



With the 1st overall pick in the upcoming draft, a first round QB on roster selected at number 10 overall last year, and a new head coach, the Cardinals are perhaps the most intriguing team in the hunt for a Quarterback this offseason. On the one hand, the team spent their first selection of the 2018 Draft on UCLA's Josh Rosen and would like to see their recent investment pan out a little more before making a decision regarding moving in. Seemingly throwing a wrench in this narrative was the hiring of Kliff Kingsbury, who is reportedly enamored with Heisman Trophy winner Kyler Murray. In an interview from last year during his tenure at Texas Tech, Kingsbury actually stated that he would take Murray with the first pick of the draft before accepting the job in Arizona months later. Despite the promise and potential value many analysts believe Josh Rosen has displayed, it appears increasingly unlikely he will suit up for the Cardinals next year the way conversations have been trending. Approaching the Draft in April, the team's best interest will be to shop Rosen for a 2nd round or even late 1st round pick in an underwhelming Quarterback draft class. Although this value is far less than the 10th overall pick they spent to acquire him just a year ago, it is not worth going against the grain of the head coach who is no stranger to QB talent. After all, Kingsbury did coach Case Keenum, Johnny Manziel, Patrick Mahomes, and Baker Mayfield in college!

The Verdict: Draft Kyler Murray at No. 1 and Trade Josh Rosen

Carolina Panthers



An unlikely team on this list, the Panthers are caught in quite the bind with the unexpected injury of franchise QB Cam Newton likely holding him out of the entirety of next season. For this reason, the team will likely pursue a one-year bridge quarterback rental until their star returns healthy for the 2020 season. Though many will discard the team's playoff hopes for the upcoming season, the roster has many bright spots and should not simply discard next season completely. With one of the most explosive offensive weapons in the league in Christian McCaffrey and an established pass defense who ranked 3rd in the league in sacks last year, the team has the opportunity to potentially snag a wild card bid if they play their cards right. Looking forward, it is obvious that the team is committed to Cam Newton and needs nothing more than an experienced veteran to run the offense at a high level. Given their situation and the players at the position on the free agency market, the team should look no further than the services of former Louisville QB Teddy Bridgewater. This is an especially convenient fit for Carolina's offensive coordinator Norv Turner, who actually served as the OC for the Vikings from 2014-2016 during Bridgewater's stint with the team. One red flag that should be noted is that Teddy Bridgewater hasn't served as an NFL starting QB since leading the Vikings to a playoff berth in the 2015 season. In fact, he even put the team in position to take down the Legion of Boom Seattle Seahawks until Blair Walsh missed a chip shot 27-yard field goal at the end of the 4th quarter. Nonetheless, Teddy Bridgewater is a high upside risk coming off a year of backing up and learning from divisional rival and future Hall-of-Fame QB Drew Brees.

The Verdict: Sign Teddy Bridgewater to a One-year deal until Cam Newton is healthy

Cincinnati Bengals



Not garnering much media attention, the Cincinnati Bengals have flown under the radar as the NFL's worst team over the last few years. Though many will scratch their heads at this notion and quickly defer the relegation to their neighbor Cleveland Browns, I will quickly debunk this myth. As sorry and pathetic their division rivals have been in recent memory, at the very least the Browns acquired draft capital year after year (despite whiffing on many of their draft picks). Holding the top pick of the draft year after year has finally allowed them to garner hope for the future, something the Bengals wouldn't know a thing about. Signaled in retaining long time Head Coach Marvin Lewis and winning no more than 7 games in the last 3 seasons, the team has proven to accept mediocrity for too long. Moving on from my tangent of chastise towards the franchise, I will expand upon how the team should handle its QB situation. First and foremost, the team must realize Andy Dalton is not the answer and release him in pursuit of a young replacement. Doing so will result in no dead cap hit, and free the team of his \$16 million in salary he is set to make in 2019. The next step would be to sift through the relatively unimpressive rookie QB class for a raw prospect like Daniel Jones from Duke, or even gamble on a gunslinger in Will Grier from West Virginia. If they don't have a guy they like with the number 11 pick in the draft, they could even inquire about potentially offering their 3rd or 2nd round pick to the Cardinals and try to land Josh Rosen at a discount price.

The Verdict: Move on from Dalton and sign a promising young prospect

Denver Broncos



Life after Peyton Manning has been a handful of swings and misses by General Manager John Elway and the Denver Broncos. The acquisition of Joe Flacco from the Ravens shows that the team is spiraling out of control in trying to finally settle on a franchise quarterback. This time last year, the team inked Case Keenum to a 2-year \$36 million deal after his career year and leading the Vikings to the NFC Championship game in 2018. Keenum went on to lead the Broncos to a 6-10 3rd place finish in the AFC West and didn't live up to the lofty standards of 2-time Super Bowl Champion QB John Elway. For this reason, it appears Keenum is on his way out the door after just one year in the Mile-High City. As the clock ticks until the team is on the clock in the Draft a little over a month from now, the rumors of the team's interest in Drew Lock have intensified. After officially meeting with the team and delivering a stellar performance at the NFL Combine last week, it is reported that management is very heavily considering taking the Missouri Quarterback with the 10th overall selection of the draft. Of course, they currently signed veteran Joe Flacco in February and he will likely hold the starting job atop the depth chart at least for the early part of the upcoming season regardless of their draft choice. This move appears to serve as more of a Band-Aid fix rather than a long-term solution given that 34-year old Flacco is entering his 12th season in the NFL. Scoring in the draft on Lock and allowing him to learn behind Flacco could turn the tides for Elway's poor fates in Quarterback roulette.

The Verdict: Move Keenum, Draft Lock and let him sit behind Flacco for a year

Jacksonville Jaguars



First and foremost, the team needs to cut ties with former 3rd overall pick Blake Bortles and accept defeat in their failed project. This will be a difficult pill to swallow due to his \$16.5 million salary cap hit even if the team chooses to release him. Furthermore, the Jaguars should take notes from the Seahawks and Broncos and not tread lightly on the fact that elite defenses have short shelf lives. It would be in the team's best interest not to waste the talents of stars such as Jalen Ramsey and Calais Campbell who are only one year removed from leading an offensively crutched team to the AFC Championship Game. As the new league year begins next Wednesday, it has been widely reported that the Jaguars are in line to sign Super Bowl LII MVP Nick Foles to a multi-year contract. Seeking to move forward in a new direction, this an understandable signing for an organization in their situation in a competitive AFC South Division. Now that it appears that the franchise has their mind made up on signing Foles, I will discuss how Tom Coughlin and the front office should go about the contract negotiation process. With the signing of Joe Flacco in Denver and many teams looking towards the draft for their next QB, there isn't exactly a large market of teams competing to sign Nick Foles. Another factor to consider is the recent spike of the quarterback market skewed upwards from massive extensions given last offseason to second tier arms such as Kirk Cousins and Derek Carr. The last thing the Jaguars want to do in this situation is lose a bidding war with themselves and overpay the veteran Foles like they did with their last QB in Bortles. A contract in the range of 3-years and \$56 million dollars (\$18.66 million per year) should be in the ballpark of a fair value.

The Verdict: Sign Nick Foles to a multi-year deal but don't overpay

Miami Dolphins



The Miami Dolphins have been searching for Dan Marino's replacement for the last two decades without any real success. Aside from sprinkling in a couple of playoff appearances during that span, the team has failed to find a quarterback to lift the team to a level enabling them to compete against longtime dynasty and division rival New England Patriots. Fellow Aggie Ryan Tannehill has accrued more collective success than any other QB for the Dolphins over the last 20 years, however it is time for the team to move on to new endeavors. Missing 21 games over the course of the last 2 seasons including all of 2017 due to injuries, Tannehill hasn't exactly been available for the team either. Between his mediocre numbers and health concerns, now is the best time to move forward for the team. This will not be easy as the rookie draft class doesn't feature the depth of recent years, and the team doesn't have enough cap space to sign just anyone off the market. Although Fins fans are tired of the team's losing ways of recent history, they shouldn't expect much of a change in 2019 as the team will likely opt for a transition year under new Head Coach Brian Flores and his staff. For the time being, Miami should roll the dice on an experienced veteran like a Tyrod Taylor if the money is right or opt for an older guy like Ryan Fitzpatrick if they want a cheaper option. Tyrod Taylor is a proven starter and good decision maker with the football who led the Buffalo Bills to a playoff berth in 2017, and still has some quality years left in the tank to provide to this team.

The Verdict: Move on from Tannehill and sign Tyrod Taylor to a short-term deal

New York Giants



Drafting Dwayne Haskins at number 6 overall in April should be a no-brainer for the New York Football Giants. Plagued with years of wasting the talents of All-Pro WR Odell Beckham Jr, the time is now for the Giants to draft Eli Manning's successor. With young talents Saquon Barkley (who I believe will become the best RB in the NFL) and Sterling Shepard, this roster possesses the weapons to become a top 10 offense in the league in the near future. With Eli Manning on the books for \$23 million next year, it looks like he won't be going anywhere at least for the 2019 season. Reading this might deflate the spirits of any Giants fans imagining another year of Eli, however this isn't necessarily the worst situation to be in. I am a firm believer in sitting rookie QBs as far into the season or even the entire season if the situation permits doing so, and I'm sure Andy Reid and Patrick Mahomes would agree. Fans of college football are aware that Haskins only ever started 14 games in college, and one of the biggest criticisms of his player profile is lack of experience. Being patient and allowing him to sit and learn Pat Shurmur's offense behind Eli Manning for a year could pay dividends in seasons to come. In his lone season at Ohio State, Haskins lit up the college football world leading the FBS with a staggering 50 TD passes, breaking the Big 10 record held by none other than Drew Brees. Bringing in a big-time arm in Haskins to get the ball to some of the game's best playmakers is the best move for New York going into the next chapter of their franchise.

The Verdict: Draft Dwayne Haskins at 6 and let him sit behind Eli for a year

Oakland Raiders



The Jon Gruden regime started off in controversial fashion after he quickly shipped off All-Pro Defensive End Khalil Mack to the Chicago Bears, and Pro Bowler Amari Cooper to the Dallas Cowboys. It should be noted that the team did gain 3 future first round draft picks via their trades, however none of them appear that they will end up in the top 20 picks (besides their own). Adding to the chaos, the team offered Gruden who has been in the Monday Night Football announcer's booth the last several years a hefty \$100 million contract, making him by far the highest paid coach in the league. This investment however didn't necessarily translate to wins, as the team struggled on their way to a 4-12 finish at the bottom of the AFC West. Compounding on the team's unremarkable trajectory, the play of QB Derek Carr has been subpar since suffering a broken leg in week 16 of the 2016 season. After inking him to a 5-year \$125 million deal in 2017, Carr has failed to throw for more than 22 TDs or win more than 6 games in a season. These lackluster results have led to mixed reports around the organization pursuing a new signal caller for the offense as they look to move to the Sin City in 2020. One of the most common names coming out of the Raiders camp is Kyler Murray, who some speculate Jon Gruden would like to take with the 4th pick of the draft. With recent developments coming out last week revealing the Cardinals are increasingly likely to use the number one overall pick on the Heisman winner, Murray may already off the board by the time the Raiders are on the clock. Looking towards the near future of the franchise, it would make the most sense to hold on to Derek Carr due to all of the money they owe from his gargantuan contract extension, and to instead opt for a defensive player to fill one of their many roster holes in a great DL draft class.

The Verdict: Keep Derek Carr and draft for Defense

Tampa Bay Buccaneers



The NFC South features some of the game's most successful Quarterbacks outside of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Two (almost three) of the division's teams have made it to the Super Bowl in the last 4 years, however the Bucs have been far from it. Former first overall draft pick Jameis Winston hasn't got to eat very many W's since his notable pregame motivational gesture before a game at the Superdome. Adding pressure to his situation, Winston has also struggled with some off-the-field issues, earning a 3-game suspension to kick off the 2018 regular season. Besides the unexpected explosion of Fitzmagic while Jameis Winston was suspended early last season, the QB position could best be described as lacking as they've failed to find a proven winner. In fact, the team has barely been able to hold its head above water since 2011, as the team has finished last in the NFC South 7 of the 8 seasons since then. Finding himself on the hot seat going in to the offseason, head coach Dirk Koetter is a proven offensive mind and playcaller who has a tough decision to make in his QB room going in to 2019. In a year with only two A-list QB prospects, the Buccaneers will most likely wait until the second or even third day to take a quarterback in the 2nd-4th round. Of these prospects, one name that has been thrown around as a draft target is Ryan Finley. To that claim, I will quickly ask Buccaneers fans (if they even exist) what happened the last time the team took a gamble on a tall raw quarterback project out of NC State? Any follower of the team can settle on the fact that Mike Glennon was a flop, and Ryan Finley looks like a watered-down version of that. As a counter, I would suggest taking a close look at Auburn's Jared Stidham instead. After transferring from Baylor, he transformed their system into a two-dimensional offense and showed stunning flashes of arm talent. At the end of the day, a day two QB probably isn't going to be the cure, but this is their best option for now.

The Verdict: Hold onto Winston, but take a chance on a high upside middle-round QB

Washington Redskins



One season removed from being on the throwing end of the Minnesota Miracle, NFL journeyman Case Keenum finds himself on his third different roster in 2 offseasons. Though the league year won't truly begin until March 13, the Redskins have agreed in principle to a trade with the Denver Broncos to acquire Keenum, as well as his \$18 million lump sum salary. Simple math goes to show that the team's payroll will designate over \$41 million in the 2019 season on the quarterback position (pending any changes). With that being said, the Redskins are officially the biggest loser in the entire league at the position, simply because they are knowingly paying more than any other team in the league for below average to mediocre quarterbacking. Part of this stems from the unfortunate situation that is Alex Smith's potentially career ending Theismann-esque injury, and the \$20 million guaranteed salary (irrespective to injury). Even with this huge blow to the leg (literally), the team had several cheaper bridge QB options than Case Keenum. Furthermore, paying a premium for only slightly better output is especially ill-advised considering the makeup of the rest of the Redskins roster. Lacking any true superstars and very few guys even considered household names, it wasn't as if the Redskins were going to make much noise in the NFC East even with Alex Smith. This move to the majority polished NFL fans appears to be a very expensive ticket to end at 7-9. Maybe this judgement is a little cynical due to the circumstances likely demoting my childhood hero Colt McCoy back to the bench, but even then, it's not like having him as the starter was the worst thing that could've happened. Fans with no hope in his capabilities would at least be rewarded with a top 5 draft pick if they were proven to be right.

The Verdict: Bad trade, should've pursued a cheaper option like Josh Rosen (rookie deal)