



# NFL OFFSEASON PREVIEW 2021

**Big Moves Can Make  
The Difference in  
2021**

**Free Agents 2021 for  
All 32 Teams**

**Who's Getting Cut  
This Offseason**

**The Falling Cap  
Situation**

**680 The Fan's Carlos Medina aka "Front Office Los"  
breaks down all 32 NFL teams with in-depth  
analysis and research covering the  
2021 offseason.**


**Follow Carlos Medina on Twitter @frontofficelos**

# THE 2021 OFFSEASON

Making The Moves

## Champions Are Made In The Offseason

Welcome to the 2021 NFL Offseason. This is the point where every NFL team has the chance to significantly alter their upcoming season with shrewd moves in both free agency and the draft. This offseason presents a special challenge with a reduced cap and no NFL combine. But big moves can still make the difference in a 2021 season.

- The Super Bowl Champion Tampa Bay Buccaneers added quarterback Tom Brady in free agency last offseason and ended up being the beneficiaries of what Brady brings to a football team. The season marked the 10th time Brady has taken a team to the Super Bowl.
- 
- The Buffalo Bills made a trade last offseason to land receiver Stefon Diggs from the Minnesota Vikings. Diggs went on to lead the NFL in receptions and receiving yards. The Minnesota Vikings used the pick they received to add future star receiver Justin Jefferson.
- The Los Angeles Rams were looking to add some pass rush help after the free agent departure of Dante Fowler. The team added former top 10 pick Leonard Floyd on a one-year deal for \$10 million dollars. Floyd recorded 10.5 sacks and helped lead one of the best pass rushing teams in the NFL.
- The Arizona Cardinals traded for receiver DeAndre Hopkins from the Houston Texans. Hopkins helped speed up the development of quarterback Kyler Murray, performing as the go-to receiver. Hopkins caught 115 passes for 1,407 yards and six touchdowns.
- 
- The San Francisco 49ers suffered through an injury-plagued season. But one of the team's bright spots was the play of left tackle Trent Williams. Williams was acquired from Washington for third and fifth round picks after sitting out the 2019 season. Williams once again showed he is one of the best left tackles in the league.
- A year after his football career nearly ended because of the circus atmosphere around him, receiver Antonio Brown ended the 2020 season as a champion after being added to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers offense. Brown was key in adding another speed element to the offense and caught a touchdown pass in the Super Bowl.

# TOP FREE AGENTS

2021 NFL Offseason

## A Different Type Of Free Agency...

The 2021 NFL Offseason will be unique in NFL salary cap history. For the first time in league history since the installation of the NFL salary cap, the league expects to lower the cap from the previous season due to a lack of revenue caused by pandemic fan attendance. Every year since 2010, the cap has gone up. This offseason teams will have to make their plans based on a reduction from the 2020 cap number.

The upcoming TV rights deals will cause the cap to rise significantly by as early as 2023. But for this offseason, teams who have built their teams on a rising cap will find it challenging to add talent while also holding onto their own. About 24 teams around the league will have to make cuts and get creative with their cap dollars in order to get under the 2021 cap number.



### Free Agents

**Dak Prescott - QB - Dallas Cowboys**

**Chris Godwin - WR - Tampa Bay Buccaneers**

**Allen Robinson - WR - Chicago Bears**

**Justin Simmons - S - Denver Broncos**

**Shaq Barrett - DE - Tampa Bay Buccaneers**

**Trent Williams - LT - San Francisco 49ers**

**Aaron Jones - RB - Green Bay Packers**

**Kenny Golladay - WR - Detroit Lions**

**Anthony Harris - S - Minnesota Vikings**

**Leonard Williams - DE - New York Giants**

**Brandon Scherff - G - Washington**

**Hunter Henry - TE - Los Angeles Chargers**



# NFC SOUTH 2021

## TEAM BY TEAM PREVIEWS

**The NFC South features the world champs and a ton of change at quarterback coming.**

**Follow Carlos Medina on Twitter @frontofficelos**



**New Orleans Saints**  
GM: Mickey Loomis  
Coach: Sean Payton  
2020 Record: 12-4

**Tampa Bay Buccaneers**  
GM: Jason Licht  
Coach: Bruce Arians  
2020 Record: 11-5

**Carolina Panthers**  
GM: Scott Fitterer  
Coach: Matt Rhule  
2020 Record: 5-11

**Atlanta Falcons**  
GM: Terry Fontenot  
Coach: Arthur Smith  
2020 Record: 4-12



**New Orleans**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 12th**  
**Def. Rank: 4th**

**2020 Record: 12-4**

**Projected Cap Space: \$99 million over**



## The End of The Era

### Key Free Agents

- Marcus Williams, S - Constantly around the football. The former second round pick has recorded 13 interceptions during his four seasons in New Orleans.
- Trey Hendrickson, DE - Exploded for 13.5 sacks in 2020 after posting a respectable season in 2019. Tied for second in sacks in the NFL. Will command a big multi-year deal in free agency.
- Jared Cook, TE - The veteran tight end caught 37 passes in 2020 but reached the end zone seven times. Turns 34 years old this April.
- Jameis Winston, QB - Winston might have the first opportunity to start for the Saints in the post Drew Brees era. But the Saints will need to make some serious cap moves to create the space needed if Winston develops a market for his services this

Recent seasons for the Saints have ended in heartbreak. Those heartbreaks led to iconic moments and rule changes in the NFL. However, this most recent heartbreak will only lead to the end of an amazing era.

Drew Brees will go down in the record books as one of the greatest quarterbacks to ever play the game. He certainly established over the last 20 years that the size of the quarterback has little to do with his ability to play at a high level.

As noted by Elias Sports Bureau, the Saints are the first team in NFL history to win 49 games over four seasons and not reach the Super Bowl. Teams led by great quarterbacks will often have multiple windows to win championships. This was certainly one for

the Saints as they set up their 2020 roster to take one last shot with this group. Due to the pandemic and lack of league revenue from empty stadiums, the Saints head into the offseason with the worst cap situation in the NFL. The team is currently more than \$90M over the projected salary cap.

Once the new cap number is established, the Saints will have a ton of moves to make including cuts and contract extensions. That has to occur before the team can even begin the process of figuring out who their next quarterback will be. Jameis Winston? Taysom Hill? We shall see.

This era of Saints football is over. Whether you root for or against them, it was truly great football that changed the league.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Kwon Alexander, LB: Went down in 2020 with a torn Achilles. The Saints significant cap issues make it very difficult to bring him back to the roster in 2021. Cap savings: \$13.4M

Drew Brees, QB: The expected retirement will help the Saints on the salary cap. The extensions Brees has signed in recent years does leave the Saints with some dead money to deal with. Cap savings: \$13.5M

(-image source cbssports.com)

**Tampa Bay**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 7th**  
**Def. Rank: 6th**

**2020 Record: 11-5**

**Projected Cap Space: \$28 million**



## A Seventh Championship

### Key Free Agents

- Chris Godwin, WR - A Pro Bowler in 2019, Godwin will be the best young receiver on the market in free agency. May be looking at the team using the franchise tag.
- Shaq Barrett, LB - Had eight sacks in 2020 after 19.5 in 2019. Was a nightmare to deal with during the Buccaneers playoff run as he got after quarterbacks.
- Leonard Fournette, RB - Found his role as the physical runner in the Buccaneers rushing attack. Scored in every playoff game.
- Antonio Brown, WR - Started to look like his old self as the 2020 season continued on. Caught 45 passes for 483 yards and four touchdowns.
- Lavonte David, LB - Tackling machine that has not slowed a bit with age.
- Ndamukong Suh, DT - Had his most sacks during a season since



The Tampa Bay Buccaneers are Super Bowl Champions for the second time in franchise history. In perhaps the most obvious move in free agent history, the Buccaneers added the quarterback who has won the most Super Bowls in NFL history and proceeded to win the Super Bowl. It's just that easy.

Of course it really isn't that easy. But the Buccaneers had the components on their roster that Brady realized would be key to winning big in the post season. The Buccaneers featured a top defense in 2019 and explosive offensive weapons. They just needed to reduce their turnovers in order to realize their potential. Tom Brady as a quarterback was perfect for that goal.

The Buccaneers can enjoy their epic run,

becoming the first team in NFL history to win the Super Bowl in their home stadium. But soon the attention will turn to getting ready for the 2021 season. That's just how quickly the offseason gets here in the league.

The Buccaneers are in a pretty good place financially to bring back their team nearly untouched for 2021. The team has \$28 million dollars in salary cap space to bring back their key components. Dynamic young receiver Chris Godwin is set to be a free agent as is pass rusher Shaq Barrett. The rest of the Buccaneers free agents should be easier financially to retain.

The Buccaneers are champions. They have Tom Brady for at least one more season. Which makes them contenders, it's that easy.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Cameron Brate, TE: Depending on who the Buccaneers choose to bring back out of their free agents, Brate looks like a player that you could sacrifice in order to open up more cap space. Brate caught 28 passes in 2020. Cap savings: \$6.5M

OJ Howard, TE: Howard's career trajectory looked good until 2020 when he was only available for four football games. Howard could still be looking at a contract extension in order to lower his cap number and provide him with long term stability.

**Carolina**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 21st**  
**Def. Rank: 18th**

**2020 Record: 5-11**

**Projected Cap Space: \$6 million**



## Working on a Turnaround

### Key Free Agents

- Russell Okung, LT - When he's healthy, Okung has provided quality tackle play. Okung has only been able to start 13 games over the past two seasons.
- Curtis Samuel, WR - Posted a career-high 77 catches for 851 yards. Finally realized his immense potential as a versatile weapon as a receiver and out of the backfield.
- Taylor Moton, RT - Consistent 16 game starter over the past three seasons. One of the more dependable right tackles in the NFL.
- John Miller, G - Started 14 games after signing a one-year deal. 74 game starter in the NFL, playing with three different franchises.
- Mike Davis, RB - Showed his value as a veteran backup who can start when needed. Rushed for over 600 yards in the absence of Christian McCaffrey.

It would make perfect sense if Panthers head coach Matt Rhule carried around a business card that read, "turnaround artist". That's what he's been able to do in every one of his stops in the coaching world.

The 2020 Panthers experienced the foundational season under Matt Rhule. Similar to what occurred at Temple and Baylor in their initial seasons under Rhule, the Panthers experienced a tough 5-11 season. But if history is an indicator, the turnaround is coming.

The Panthers used this season to get younger defensively and establish what they are going to be offensively. Using every draft pick on defense in their previous draft, the group was able to put together a respectable season.

The offense is now the area of focus in 2021. The Panthers played a physical brand of football that looked like Rhule's Temple squads of the past. In order to add that Baylor-type of explosion offensively, the Panthers will have to begin the search for the future at quarterback.

The Panthers have playmakers. What they need is a dynamic playmaker throwing the football. Teddy Bridgewater, signed to be the veteran starter until a young quarterback is ready, was the caretaker this young team needed. But now with a top 10 pick, the Panthers should be aggressive in identifying and selecting their next quarterback.

If they get the quarterback situation correct, the turnaround will really be fully underway.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Stephen Weatherly, DE: Signed last offseason as an evolving pass rusher who was improving. Unfortunately, Weatherly did not record a single sack in 2020. His cap figure is pretty expensive for a player who doesn't get quarterbacks on the ground. Cap savings: \$5.9M

Teddy Bridgewater, QB: The veteran quarterback was signed as a "bridge" to the quarterback of the future. After a benching late in the season, Bridgewater could easily be moved off the roster in the interest of a rookie or another veteran option. Cap savings: \$20M



**Atlanta Falcons**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 18th**  
**Def. Rank: 29th**

2020 Record: 4-12

Projected Cap Space: \$32 million over



## Hitting Rock Bottom

### Key Free Agents

- Keanu Neal, S - Had a bounce back season after missing the better part of two seasons with knee and Achilles injuries. Physical run player who recorded 100 tackles in 2020.
- Alex Mack, C - The six-time Pro Bowler is looking at a possible retirement.
- Brian Hill, RB - Became the Falcons most useful running back due to Todd Gurley's lingering knee issues. Recorded 465 yards rushing with an impressive 4.7 yards per carry average.
- Damontae Kazee, S - Was only able to play in four games due to injury. Intercepted 10 passes over the previous two seasons.
- Youngbwoe Koo, K - The 2020 Pro Bowl kicker made 37 of 39 kicks after making the team on a one year deal. Will likely

The make or break season that faced former Falcons coach Dan Quinn and former Falcons general manager Thomas Dimitroff started with an 0-5 start to the season and an early season dismissal of the tandem that had helped the Falcons reach Super Bowl LI.

The Falcons have used the 2021 offseason to try and change the lingering reputation from that Super Bowl loss. The Falcons have found ways to give up big leads in recent years, and that mentality of "here we go again" had permeated the fanbase. Most every link to that period is now gone.

New coach Arthur Smith, previously the OC of the Titans, and new team GM Terry Fontenot are now tasked with changing the

team's current reputation. Fontenot, previously an executive with the New Orleans Saints, will be tasked with finding the types of players who have the mental makeup to establish a new identity for the team.

The team still has some ties to that Super Bowl debacle. Quarterback Matt Ryan and receiver Julio Jones have the types of contracts that make moving them this offseason less than ideal. For Ryan, returning to a style off offense from 2016 and 2017 should serve him well.

The Falcons do hold the 4th overall pick in the upcoming draft and there are a number of possible franchise quarterbacks in this draft. A big change looks to be coming.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Allen Bailey, DE: The veteran played as a rotational pass rusher. The Falcons will need to make several moves in order to get under the salary cap for 2021. One of those moves will be moving on from Bailey and realizing his savings. Cap savings: \$4.5M

James Carpenter, G: The 13 game starter was a trust worthy starter at times during the 2020 season. With the Falcons running more zone run concepts in 2021, the team will look to part ways and find a player who is a better fit at the guard position. Cap savings: \$4M

# NFC EAST 2021



**Washington Redskins**  
GM: Martin Mayhew  
Coach: Ron Rivera  
2020 Record: 7-9

**New York Giants**  
GM: Dave Gettleman  
Coach: Joe Judge  
2020 Record: 6-10

**Dallas Cowboys**  
GM: Jerry Jones  
Coach: Mike McCarthy  
2020 Record: 6-10

**Philadelphia Eagles**  
VP Football: Howie  
Roseman  
Coach: Nick Sirianni  
2020 Record: 4-11-1

## TEAM BY TEAM PREVIEWS

**The Washington Football Team were the best of the worst division in the NFL.**

**Follow Carlos Medina on Twitter @frontofficelos**



**Washington**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 30th**  
**Def. Rank: 2nd**

**2020 Record: 7-9**

**Projected Cap Space: \$40 million**



## The Best of The Worst



### Key Free Agents

- Brandon Scherff, G – The four-time Pro Bowl guard played on the franchise tag in 2020 and is still seeking the biggest contract for a guard in the NFL.
- Ryan Kerrigan, OLB – The 32 year old pass rusher is looking to start in 2021 after recording 5.5 sacks in 2020 as a rotational player.
- Ronald Darby, CB – Played in all 16 games and was solid in coverage and in run support. Should have an opportunity at a small deal in free agency or back in DC.
- Tyler Heinicke, QB – The darling of the playoffs has earned a contract as a backup quarterback in the league. Washington has the financial resources to bring back and possibly have him contend for the job in 2021.
- Dustin Hopkins, K – Hit a career low 79.4% of his field goal opportunities in 2020. The veteran has been typically reliable over the course of his

The Washington Football Team finished 2020 as the champions of the NFC East. Nevermind that the division was the worst in football, what the team had to deal with makes for a memorable season.

New head coach Ron Rivera made the announcement back in August that he had been diagnosed with cancer in a lymph node. Rivera decided that he would coach while being treated during the season. The result was a gritty team that didn't make excuses. How could they when the coach was fighting cancer?

A 7-9 season landed them in the playoffs and despite a quick exit at the hands of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, there are aspects of the team that should excite the fans.

With the 2nd ranked defense in the NFL, Washington has one of the best front sevens in the NFL with young and dynamic players across the line of scrimmage. While rookie defensive end Chase Young grabbed the headlines, Montez Sweat led the team with nine sacks.

The aspect of the team fans are most concerned about comes from trying to find a quarterback. The team has been unable to use the draft or the trade market to secure a future signal caller for 2021 and moving forward. While Taylor Heinicke had an inspiring playoff start, there is a reason he was out of the league earlier this season.

The WFT are champs. Now they need to find a franchise quarterback in order to compete.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Alex Smith, QB – The Washington Football Team survived one of the worst cap situations in the NFL when Smith was seriously injured in 2018. The team could not move on from Smith until 2021 at the earliest without a sizable amount of dead money hitting the camp. Cap savings: \$13.6M

Jonathan Allen, DL – Allen is set to enter his fifth year option season and count more than \$10M against the cap. His production and draft position makes him an obvious candidate for a new contract extension and a lower cap number in 2021.

(-image source huffingtonpost.com)

**New York**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 31st**  
**Def. Rank: 12th**

**2020 Record: 6-10**

**Projected Cap Space: \$10 million over**



## Where is The Trend Heading?

### Key Free Agents

- Leonard Williams, DE – Realized his potential in 2021 by posting a career high in tackles and sacks with 50 and 11.5. After trading for Williams, the Giants seemed committed to trying to retain him either with a second consecutive franchise tag or before free agency.
- Dalvin Tomlinson, DT – One of the most consistent run stoppers in the NFL, Tomlinson does not seem to show the wear and tear that other run stoppers show by missing games.
- Cameron Fleming, T – The swing tackle has been making his living in the league as substitute who can handle the left or right side. Neither are handled at a starter performance level.
- Austin Johnson, DT – A rotational player who earned snaps with the defense in 2020. With the expenditures on the defensive line in 2021, Johnson should reach free agency and be a veteran option for another team's rotation.

The 2020 season for the New York Giants was the first under new coach Joe Judge. The team found themselves alive for the playoffs on the final weekend of the season despite a 6-10 final record. But you have to wonder about the direction of this football team.

The Giants were considerably better defensively in 2020 than they were in 2019. But the team took a step back in terms of offensive production in 2020. The loss of running back Saquon Barkley can certainly be to blame, but the overall play of second year quarterback Daniel Jones leaves a lot to be pondered.

Jones was responsible for 16 total turnovers in 2020, amongst the leaders in the category.

Jones regressed in passer rating, yardage, and sacks taken. The 2021 season is going to be about determining the future of Daniel Jones. His future development, or potential regression will determine just which direction this entire program is heading.

The Giants have some major contributors to retain as free agency approaches. Leonard Williams, the Giants sack leader in 2020, is set to reach free agency again for a second straight offseason. This time around Leonard can seriously ask for and challenge the 20 million per year dollar mark.

The 2020 Giants were better than the team that proceeded them. If the 2021 version seeks to be better, it will have to start this offseason and under center.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Golden Tate, WR – Had his lowest season of production since 2011. Tate turns 33 years old in 2021 and carries one of the biggest cap charges on a team looking to get younger. Cap savings: \$6.1M

Kevin Zeitler, G – Zeitler's play has fallen off in recent seasons as the pressures he's given up on the quarterback have increased over the past three seasons. Zeitler is compensated as a top three player on the team in 2021. Cap savings: \$12M



**Dallas**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 14th**  
**Def. Rank: 23rd**

**2020 Record: 6-10**

**Projected Cap Space: \$10 million**



## A Lost Season

### Key Free Agents

- Dak Prescott, QB – Finished the season on injured reserved with a broken ankle. The team wants to sign Prescott to a longer deal, Prescott is seeking fewer years.
- Aldon Smith, DE – Came back after years out of the league to record five sacks. Faded as the year went on.
- Andy Dalton, QB – Used the season to establish himself as a serviceable starter in the NFL once again. Kept the team in the playoff picture until the final weekend of the season.
- Chidobe Awuzie, CB – Former second round pick who was unavailable during the season due to injury and was below average when on the field.
- Xavier Woods, S – 15 game starter who failed to make an interception for the first season in his career in 2020. Performs better as a box safety playing

The maiden voyage for Mike McCarthy's Dallas Cowboys ended with a 6-10 season, a franchise quarterback lost to injury and the worst season of defensive football in franchise history. Considering the restrictions placed on the team's preparation during a pandemic, one should have realized this type of season had a chance of happening.

The injury to quarterback Dak Prescott brought to an end any real chance of winning the division. But a 3-1 close to the season gave the team a chance on the final weekend of the season to sneak into the playoffs. The team then quickly moved to remove Mike Nolan as defensive coordinator and hired former Falcons head coach Dan Quinn to replace him.

A simplified version of defense that allow them to post top 10 ranked defenses in recent years. As for the Cowboys offense, there is a lot to be optimistic about.

Last year's first round pick CeeDee Lamb proved to be a future star at receiver. The offensive line was hit with major injuries across the board and the quarterback position featured four different starters. With all that, the Cowboys still managed to post solid offensive numbers. After being the top ranked offense in football in 2019, expect the group to get back to that type of output in 2021.

The Prescott contract will once again garner most of the offseason attention. But the defense will tell the story in 2021.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Tyron Smith, LT – The health of Smith will determine if this move has to be made this offseason. Smith was only able to make two starts in 2020 and has missed 12 starts over the previous four seasons. Cap savings: \$5.2M

Jaylon Smith, LB – The team's leading tackler had a poor season. The scheme change returning to the 2019 defense could help put Smith back on a better trajectory. Cap savings: \$7.2M (post June 1st), \$400k in 2021.

(-image source usatoday.com)

**Philadelphia**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 24th**  
**Def. Rank: 19th**

**2020 Record: 4-11-1**

**Projected Cap Space: \$80 million over**

### Key Free Agents

- Jason Peters, T – The veteran and possible Hall of Famer returned to help the team's offensive line. Started the season at guard before moving back to his regular left tackle position. Looking to retire unless the price is right.
- Jalen Mills, S – Mills is not an above average player but he is without a doubt a solid piece and a team guy. Mills filled in at cornerback when injuries and poor play struck the team in 2020. Might have found a home as a safety with coverage skills.
- Nate Gerry, LB – Had set himself up for a possible contract extension after 2019, but injuries and questionable play in 2020 ended that quest.
- Cre'Von LeBlanc, CB – A slot cornerback who was very good in the playoffs a season ago. Another player who would typically be retained, but the Eagles cap situation makes bringing these types of players much more difficult this offseason.



## Fixing The Quarterback

For the first 13 games of the 2017 season Eagles quarterback Carson Wentz was the best player in football. Wentz was leading a title contender, and had already accumulated 33 touchdown passes against just seven interceptions.

Three seasons, a knee injury and a Super Bowl victory later, the Eagles are now reportedly looking to trade Carson Wentz. Sometimes things move just that fast in the NFL.

Super Bowl winning coach Doug Pederson is out. Nick Sirianni comes over from Indianapolis to try and get this proud franchise back on track. It's going to start with what the Eagles figuring out their quarterback situation moving forward. For now this team appears to be in the hands of

quarterback Jalen Hurts.

Hurts, the 2020 second round pick, will get the first opportunity to fix the locker room issues created by Carson Wentz and a coaching staff that seemed to be just as big of a player in creating the drama. Hurts in 2020 went 1-3 in his four starts and completed just 52% of his passes.

The Eagles needed to get younger two years ago but decided to give their veterans another shot at the playoffs and winning the Super Bowl. Their weapons offensively and their offensively need attention in the 2021 draft. With their cap situation, the Eagles won't be getting much help in free agency.

The fans in Philadelphia expect results and expect is fast. The cast of the 2017 seasons is already out the door.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Alshon Jeffery, WR – The veteran receiver is set to count \$18M against the cap after starting just two games and catching just six passes during the 2020 season. Given the cap space issues in Philadelphia, this will be an easy cut. Cap savings: \$7.9M

DeSean Jackson, WR – Has posted back-to-back career low seasons in catches and yards. Has had trouble staying healthy as he reaches his mid-thirties. Cap savings: \$7.9M

(-image source si.com)

# NFC NORTH 2021



**Green Bay Packers**  
GM: Brian Gutekunst  
Coach: Matt LaFleur  
2020 Record: 13-3

**Chicago Bears**  
GM: Ryan Pace  
Coach: Matt Nagy  
2020 Record: 8-8

**Minnesota Vikings**  
GM: Rick Spielman  
Coach: Mike Zimmer  
2020 Record: 7-9

**Detroit Lions**  
GM: Brad Holmes  
Coach: Dan Campbell  
2020 Record: 5-11

## TEAM BY TEAM PREVIEWS

**The Packers remain the class of the division.**

**Follow Carlos Medina on Twitter @frontofficelos**



## Green Bay 2021 Offseason Off. Rank: 5th Def. Rank: 9th

2020 Record: 13-3

Projected Cap Space: \$24 million over



### That's Now Four



When the Packers 2019 season came to an end at the hands of the San Francisco 49ers in the NFC championship game, it marked the third time in six seasons that the Packers had reached that game and had missed out on reaching the Super Bowl.

The 2020 Packers season was ended by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in the NFC championship game at Lambeau Field. That's now four times in seven seasons that the Packers have failed to reach the Super Bowl. It has become an unfortunate streak for a proud franchise.

The Packers got an incredible season from quarterback Aaron Rodgers. Rodgers is the likely league MVP and delivered one of his best seasons in a Hall of Fame career. But one has to wonder just how much better

Rodgers could be late in the season if the team made further investments in offensive weapons. Receiver Davante Adams was his typical brilliant-self. Running back Aaron Jones was outstanding.

But the what-if game has to happen when you realize that the Packers have never used a first round pick on an offensive weapon with Rodgers under center. The organization drafted quarterback Jordan Love in the first round last year as the eventual replacement for Rodgers.

The front office will have it's work cut out for them. Many of the offensive options Aaron Rodgers worked with are set to become free agents.

The Packers would love another shot at the NFC title. Eventually it may work out.

#### Key Free Agents

- Aaron Jones, RB - 1,100 yard rusher who has excelled in the Matt LeFleur offense with his rushing and pass catching ability. Just turned 26 years old.
- Kevin King, CB - Has had difficulty staying healthy during his career. His NFC Championship game performance makes it pretty easy for the franchise to move on.
- Robert Tonyan, TE (RFA) - Broke out in 2020 catching 586 yards worth of passes and 11 touchdowns. The team will have to make him a qualifying offer to maintain his rights and draft pick compensation.
- Allen Lazard, WR - A serviceable veteran receiver who has provided a downfield home-run hitting option.
- Corey Linsley, C - Had an excellent season as both a pass and run blocker. Was named first team All-Pro in 2020 and will command the largest center contract in the NFL.
- Jamaal Williams, RB - Has averaged over four yards per carry in 2019 and 2020. A physical player who can play well in a variety of roles. Potential starter.

### Targets for Release/Restructure

Preston Smith, OLB: After busting out in 2019 with a 12 sack season, Smith reverted back to his 2018 sack numbers with just four on the season. Considering the other players the Packers would like to retain, this move would open up space to retain more productive talent. Cap savings: \$8M

Christian Kirksey, LB: Missed five games in 2020 and did not play to the level of his cap figure for 2021. Cap savings: \$5.6M

(-image source usatoday.com)

**Chicago**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 26th**  
**Def. Rank: 11th**

**2020 Record: 8-8**

**Projected Cap Space: \$1 million over**



## Running it Back?

### Key Free Agents

- Mitchell Trubisky, QB - The Bears went 6-3 with Trubisky under center and led the team to the NFC Playoffs. But his play is still lackluster in comparison to other younger dynamic quarterbacks in the league.
- Allen Robinson, WR - Has now posted back-to-back 1,000 receiving seasons and enters free agency as one of the top names on the board. Will turn 28 by the start of training camp this summer.
- Cordarrelle Patterson, WR/RB - Unique playmaker who remains one of the better return men in the league. Worked out of the backfield as a running back this season as well for the Bears.
- Roy Robertson-Harris, DE - Showed promise early in his career as a rotational defensive end. Did not record a sack in 2020 after dealing with a shoulder injury.
- Pat O'Donnell, P - Veteran punter was league average this season. What he will cost in free agency will determine if he takes another deal to return to Chicago, the only team he's ever punted for.

The Chicago Bears were a playoff team in 2020 despite an 8-8 record. The team has already decided that both head coach Matt Nagy and the front office will return intact. As for on the field, that looks to be a different matter.

The Bears have a former top draft pick at quarterback who is set to be a free agent. After declining to pick up Mitchell Trubisky's fifth-year option, 2020 was setup to be a make or break season for the young signal caller. Trubisky delivered a 6-3 starting record, but his play is always going to be scrutinized given the success of fellow 2017 draftees Patrick Mahomes and Deshaun Watson.

The Bears offense needs to improve. That's the simple goal of this offseason. But how the team goes about reaching that

improvement will be the big challenge. Do the Bears bring back Trubisky and hope he continues to grow from his 2020 campaign? Do they try to land another veteran quarterback via trade or free agency? Or do they start over with a draft pick? Any and all ideas for offensive improvement are on the table.

The defense continues to be the strength of the team and that does not figure to change. The Bears continue to be one of the very rare teams in the NFL who spend nearly double the salary cap dollars on their defense in compared to their offense.

The Bears are going to lose some offensive weapons. But they have invested draft picks into their offensive line and pass catchers. Just who will be the quarterback getting those pass catchers the ball will be the intrigue of the offseason.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

**Charles Leno, LT:** After 94 start the Bears may look to upgrade both of their tackle positions. The Bears may find themselves in the position of having to save cap space in order to retain some of their younger talent. Cap savings: \$6.2M

**Jimmy Graham, TE:** Played 59% of the total snaps in 2020. After drafting a young tight end in Cole Kmet, the Bears could save themselves considerable cap space by going with a younger player who picked up more and more snaps as the season continued on. Cap savings: \$7M

**Minnesota**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 4th**  
**Def. Rank: 27th**

**2020 Record: 7-9**

**Projected Cap Space: \$18 million over**



## Growing a Defense

### Key Free Agents

- Anthony Harris, S - His play took a massive leap backwards from playing on the franchise tag to be allowed to leave in free agency this off-season. Harris failed to intercept a pass in 2020 after recording six in 2019.
- Eric Wilson, LB - 16 game starter who stepped in and led the Vikings in tackles. Demonstrated that he can be a versatile stat stuffer with sacks and forced fumbles as well.
- Todd Davis, LB - A spot starter who produced and continues to provide solid play on special teams. Would be a low cost option for a team looking to have a possible starter.
- Ameer Abdullah, RB - The former second round pick can be a factor out of the backfield in the passing game.
- Chad Beebe (RFA), WR - Caught 20 passes and two touchdowns. Has proven to be a capable backup receiver who can be a cheap option for the Vikings or another team moving forward.

The 2020 Minnesota Vikings new they were in for some challenges before the season began. They were replacing their offensive coordinator, installing a new version of offense and trying to take younger players on defense and get them the experience they needed after several veterans had left the team.

Some of these challenges turned into triumphs. The Vikings offense led by Gary Kubiak became one of the most explosive units in the NFL. Featuring running back Dalvin Cook, the wide zone concepts and play action passing game led to outstanding seasons for quarterback Kirk Cousins and rookie receiver Justin Jefferson. Offensively, the Vikings are set to be good again in 2021.

Defense is another matter for the Vikings. The team had to overhaul their secondary due to age and free agency and the 2020 version ended up as one of the worst units in the NFL. For a defensive minded coach like Mike Zimmer, don't expect another season like that in 2021.

Zimmer has openly talked about the team increasing their pass rush in free agency and perhaps in the NFL Draft. Getting after the quarterback is the easiest way to improve a struggling pass defense. The Vikings hold the 14th pick in the draft and should be able to target a defensive player that can help.

If the 2021 version of the Vikings can be explosive with a quality defense, then making a playoff push will be possible.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Kyle Dudolph, TE: Caught 28 passes in 2020, his lowest since 2014. The 31 year old has a younger option on the roster and the Vikings are in need of some cap relief with the lowering of the cap for 2021. Cap savings: \$5.1M

Harrison Smith, S: Enters the final year of his contract in 2021 and has continued to be one of the best safeties in the NFL. A contract extension would allow the Vikings to lower Smith's cap figure in 2021 and create some available space.



**Detroit**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 20th**  
**Def. Rank: 32nd**

**2020 Record: 5-11**

**Projected Cap Space: \$7 million**



## Starting it Over Again

### Key Free Agents

- **Kenny Golladay, WR** - Only appeared in five games in 2020 due to injury. Golladay had previously posted back-to-back 1,000 yard seasons in 2018 and 2019. Caught 11 touchdowns in 2019.
- **Marvin Jones, WR** - Caught 76 passes for nearly 1,000 yards in 2020. Has consistently posted quality seasons when healthy. Dependable veteran receiver.
- **Romeo Okwara, DE** - Bounced back from a disappointing 2019 to post a career high 10 sacks in 2020. Set to cash in on a season of causing pressure off the edge.
- **Everson Griffin, DE** - Recorded 3.5 sacks during his time in Detroit after moving on from Dallas. Veteran pass rusher that can be part of a rotation of pass rushers.
- **Adrian Peterson, RB** - Rushed for 607 yards and seven touchdowns during the season. Had spurts of very good play and spurts of looking like an older running back. Will be working on one year deals moving forward.

As it turns out, the Jim Caldwell days for the Detroit Lions really were the salad days over the recent history for the franchise. The Matt Patricia era in Detroit is now over after three lackluster seasons. Coach Dan Campbell, you're the next one up!

The upcoming direction for the Lions will depend on just what the incoming coaching staff decides to do at the quarterback position. Veteran quarterback Matthew Stafford continues to be a talented player and one of the toughest passers in the league. But holding the 7th overall pick, the Lions will perhaps be in range to start over at the position and rebuild this program from the foundational level.

New coach Dan Campbell represents the recent trend of hiring younger coaches with

offensive experience as their emphasis. Campbell, the former tight end with the Giants, Cowboys, Lions and Saints was a gritty player who has taken that mentality to his new career.

And gritty is something the Lions truly need. The franchise has not won a playoff game since 1992 and has spent the last three seasons as the doormat of the division. The team doesn't have much salary cap space, so it will be up to Dan Campbell to change the team's mentality without the ability to bring in a lot of his own free agents.

The Detroit Lions are in need of a major change of direction. Another restart. Hopefully this one ends up significantly better than the last change of direction that the franchise attempted.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

**Matthew Stafford, QB:** If the Lions enter into a full rebuild then a trade to move Stafford on the roster would make sense to another team seeking a talented veteran. Stafford threw 26 touchdowns in 2020 against ten interceptions. Will be 33 years old by the start of training camp 2021. **(1-31-21: Stafford traded to Lions)** Cap savings: \$14M

**Desmond Trufant, CB:** Managed to only play in six games in 2020. Trufant has now reached the other end of 30 years old and is now going to be working on one year deals for teams looking for a veteran spot starter. Cap savings: \$6.5M

(-image source cdnewsday.com)



# NFC WEST 2021

**Seattle Seahawks**  
GM: John Schneider  
Coach: Pete Carroll  
2020 Record: 12-4

**Los Angeles Rams**  
GM: Les Snead  
Coach: Sean McVay  
2020 Record: 10-6

**Arizona Cardinals**  
GM: Steve Keim  
Coach: Kliff Kingsbury  
2020 Record: 8-8

**San Francisco 49ers**  
GM: John Lynch  
Coach: Kyle Shanahan  
2020 Record: 6-10

## TEAM BY TEAM PREVIEWS

**The NFC West was reclaimed by the Seahawks and remains one of the best divisions in the NFL.**

**Follow Carlos Medina on Twitter @frontofficelos**



**Seattle**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 17th**  
**Def. Rank: 22nd**

**2020 Record: 12-4**

**Projected Cap Space: \$15 million**



## A Different Team Entirely

### Key Free Agents

- KJ Wright, LB - Another productive season in 2020, recording 86 tackles. Played well in his new role as a strong side linebacker. Wright has played his entire ten year career with the Seahawks.
- Greg Olsen, TE - Caught 24 passes during his season in Seattle. Turning 36 years old this spring, Olsen will have opportunities to work on TV this fall.
- Chris Carson, RB - Struggled with injuries in 2020 and only managed 681 yards over 12 games played. Still averaged 4.8 yards per carry. Rushed for over 1,000 yards in 2018 and 2019.
- Shaquill Griffin, CB - A 2019 Pro Bowler, Griffin is a good cornerback who is just a few ticks below the best cornerbacks in the NFL. Intercepted three passes in 2020. Should be able to command a deal in the \$13-14M per season range.

There was a time when the Seattle Seahawks were a defensive-oriented football team that was difficult to score against. The “Legion of Boom” was one of the best nicknames in recent memory.

But the Seahawks are no longer anywhere close to that type of team. The Seahawks were ranked 31st against the pass in 2020 as their were portions of the season where the offense had to carry the team.

Maybe that will always be the plan moving forward as quarterback Russell Wilson was once again his typical brilliant self. Wilson threw 40 touchdown passes against just 13 interceptions this past season. The idea of “let Russ cook” will remains a team emphasis as the Seahawks now move on to a new offensive coordinator in 2021.

Despite being a wildcard round loser, the Seahawks did put together a 12-4 season and won the toughest division in the NFC. While this is a different type of team than their conference championship seasons, it is still a very formidable one. Posting a 7-1 home record without the 12’s in attendance shows just how talented of a group they are.

The Seahawks have needs on their offensive line, at linebacker and in their secondary. After making the massive trade for safety Jamal Adams, the Seahawks will lack first and third round picks in the upcoming draft. Every bit of improvement will fall on general manager John Schneider to find talent in the second round and the later rounds.

The Seahawks are nearly back on top. Contending in 2021 is going to happen.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Carlos Dunlap, DE: This contract could truly go in several different directions. The Seahawks have the cap space to retain Dunlap, and could possibly give him a small extension if they want to lower his cap number. Or the team could choose to move on entirely from the 32 year old pass rusher who they acquired via trade during the 2020 season. Cap savings: \$14.1M

Jamal Adams, S: Set to play under his fifth year option in 2021. After the premium picks the Seahawks gave up to land Adams, a large contract extension will be in the works this offseason.

**Los Angeles**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 11th**  
**Def. Rank: 1st**

**2020 Record: 10-6**

**Projected Cap Space: \$21 million over**



## A Big Change Coming?

### Key Free Agents

- Leonard Floyd, OLB - Realized his potential recording a career-high 10.5 sacks in 2021. The former top 10 pick played on a one-year deal in 2020 and will look to sign an expensive deal moving forward.
- Morgan Fox, DT - The former undrafted rookie free agent put together an impressive contract season recording 6.5 sacks and eight tackles for loss.
- Troy Hill, CB - The "other" cornerback on the Rams defense. Had a spectacular season opposite of Jalen Ramsey as Hill drew many of the targets from opposing offenses. Recording three interceptions, taking back two for touchdowns.
- Josh Reynolds, WR - Became the third receiving option in the Rams offense in 2020. Recorded 52 catches for 618 yards and two touchdowns. Should be able to land a quality contract in 2021.

Since 2017 when Rams head coach Sean McVay joined the team and inherited quarterback Jared Goff, the Rams are 43-21 including multiple playoff seasons and an appearance in the Super Bowl. That kind of success normally leads to running it back and keeping the group together for another season. But that's where things get weird for these Rams.

Rams general manager Les Snead has yet to commit to quarterback Jared Goff for the 2021 season. Sean McVay has referred to Goff as the Rams quarterback, "right now". Goff took a step back in 2020, throwing 20 touchdowns against 13 interceptions and also losing four fumbles. Despite having a monstrous contract, the Rams don't seem to be fully committed to Goff as the long term quarterback in LA.

Moving on from Goff would require some salary cap acrobatics that would make a Cirque Du Soleil acrobat squeamish. Even if a great option to move on presented itself, Goff will cost the team \$22M in cap dollars to move on from him at a minimum. The Rams would have to make multiple complicated moves to open up the space. As some divorce attorneys have advised, "it's cheaper to keep her".

*(Note 1-31-21) The Rams have traded quarterback Jared Goff to the Detroit Lions in exchange for quarterback Matthew Stafford and picks. Because of the timing of the move, the Rams will indeed eat \$22M in dead cap dollars in order to change the direction at quarterback. The big change talked about previously in this space actually did happen.*

## Targets for Release/Restructure

**Jared Goff, QB:** Any move involving Jared Goff would seemingly challenging considering the remaining guaranteed dollars on his contract. Goff is set to count more than \$34M against the 2021 cap.

**Aaron Donald, DT:** Showing no signs of slowing down, converting Aaron Donald's base salary into bonus money would be one of the easiest ways for the Rams to take a significant chunk out of their salary cap deficit. The Rams do have a few candidates for this maneuver. Cap savings: \$14.1M



**Arizona**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 6th**  
**Def. Rank: 13th**

**2020 Record: 8-8**

**Projected Cap Space: \$7 million**



## A Growing Force

### Key Free Agents

- Patrick Peterson, CB – No longer one of the best cornerbacks in the game, Peterson's game is still good enough to be an ideal second corner on a contending team. Should command a shorter contract.
- Haasan Reddick, OLB – The Cardinals decided to decline the 5th year option on Reddick's contract. Reddick exploded for 12.5 sacks in 2020 and I now looking at a possible franchise tag as he reaches free agency at 26 years old.
- Kenyan Drake, RB – Set another career high in rushing yards in 2020 after posting a 955 rushing yardage season. Also was a factor out of the backfield with 25 catches. A veteran back with return ability.
- De'Vondre Campbell, OLB – Just a good linebacker who's been productive throughout his entire career in the NFL. Recorded 99 tackles in 2020 and made all 16 starts. Still just 27 years old as he enters free agency again.

The Cardinals opened the season with a 6-3 record and had one of the most dynamic weapons in the NFL in quarterback Kyler Murray. New receiver DeAndre Hopkins had just caught a Hail Mary to beat the Bills and lead every sports show in the country. It looked as if the Cardinals had fully arrived.

The Cardinals would finish the season on a 2-5 run that would leave them just outside of the playoffs. 2020 became a learning experience for a team finding their way in the NFL. Kyler Murray was awesome, but injuries during the final seven weeks of the season showed how the team has to be smart about using his incredible running ability.

The Kliff Kingsbury offense delivered in 2020 as the head coach delivered one of the league's top offenses. With Murray healthy,

the Cardinals had the NFL's top offense. A goal for 2021 will be adding pieces along the offensive line and in the backfield that can keep Murray clean and healthy. The team looked night and day different when Murray was healthy and than not healthy.

The defense is going to have some challenges moving forward. Haasan Reddick, once considered a first round bust, figured it out in his fourth NFL season and recorded 12.5 sacks. Because the Cardinals chose not to pick up his fifth year option, Reddick is now set to score a big contract in free agency or with a franchise tag. Cornerback Patrick Peterson, now no longer a top player at his position is also set to reach free agency.

The Cardinals are growing towards contention. Quarterback health is key in 2021.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Robert Alford, CB – Has been unable to stay healthy during his time in Arizona. Alford has not been able to play in a regular season game since 2018. Suffering two consecutive season ending injuries makes him an easy release. Cap savings: \$7.5M

Devon Kennard, OLB – Only made four starts in Arizona after signing a quality contract last offseason. Recorded three sacks in 2020. The Cardinals will have to decide whether to gamble nearly \$8M in cap space on his 2021 season. Cap savings: \$4.2M

(-image source centriotimescom)

**San Francisco**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 15th**  
**Def. Rank: 5th**

**2020 Record: 6-10**

**Projected Cap Space: \$15 million**



## A Season of Injuries

### Key Free Agents

- Trent Williams, LT - Despite his age, Williams is one of the best free agents available this offseason. After skipping 2019 in a contract dispute, Williams looked fresh and was able to protect his quarterback and move opposing players in the run game in 2020.
- Richard Sherman, CB - The five-time Pro Bowler is no longer elite but is still a very good veteran to have on the roster as a starter. Could easily slide into another cover-three defensive scheme and play quality football for another football team.
- Solomon Thomas, DE - Will probably always be considered a draft bust after being a top three pick and having limited impact. Has dealt with injury and missed most of 2020. At his best he's been a dependable run defender. Just 25 years old as training camp opens this summer.

As the confetti drops and a Super Bowl champion is crowned, there is always that other team that walks off the field and starts planning how to get back to that game. The list of teams that fall wildly short is long and distinguished.

The latest to endure the pain of the year after was the 2020 San Francisco 49ers. To label 2020 with the word, "pain" is all too obvious. Because perhaps no team in the NFL dealt with as many significant injuries to the team as the 49ers.

The list of players who missed time with injury included quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo, tight end George Kittle, running backs Raheem Mostert and Tevin Coleman, receiver Deebo Samuel, defensive ends Dee Ford and Nick Bosa, and finally cornerback

Richard Sherman. In all, 30 players on the roster missed at least a game due to injury.

The question for the 2021 49ers is whether or not a healthy version of the team can rejoin those NFC teams in contention. Coach Kyle Shanahan is well regarded as a coach who can get the very best out of every player in his offense. But he needs to have those players available on game day.

It will be fascinating to watch if the team chooses to bring back Jimmy Garoppolo at the quarterback position. While Garoppolo has won games in the NFL, he has left fans wanting to see more explosive plays. Garoppolo is under contract for 2021, but the team can save a ton by moving on.

The 49ers desire health for 2021. That's it.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Jimmy Garoppolo, QB: The 49ers could look to make a change at quarterback this offseason if they feel a better option for the offense is made available. Garoppolo might be the most disrespected quarterback in NFL history who carries a 24-8 career record and has taken his team to a Super Bowl. Cap savings: \$23.4M

Weston Richburg, C: Like many other 49ers in 2020, Richburg was unable to get on the field due to injury. Richburg was unable to finish the 2019 season due to injury as well. A cheaper option could provide some cap relief for the 49ers. Cap savings: \$3.4M

(-image source 49ers.com)

# AFC SOUTH 2021

## TEAM BY TEAM PREVIEWS

**The Titans and Colts have separated themselves while the Texans and Jaguars are starting over.**

**Follow Carlos Medina on Twitter @frontofficelos**



**Tennessee Titans**  
GM: Jon Robinson  
Coach: Mike Vrabel  
2020 Record: 11-5

**Indianapolis Colts**  
GM: Chris Ballard  
Coach: Frank Reich  
2020 Record: 11-5

**Houston Texans**  
GM: Nick Caserio  
Coach: David Culley  
2020 Record: 4-12

**Jacksonville Jaguars**  
GM: Trent Baalke  
Coach: Urban Meyer  
2020 Record: 1-15



## Tennessee

### 2021 Offseason

Off. Rank: 3rd

Def. Rank: 28th

2020 Record: 11-5

Projected Cap Space: \$7 million



## Building a Bully

### Key Free Agents

- Corey Davis, WR - The Titans declined to pickup Davis' fifth year option so Davis now reaches free agency after his best season. Caught 65 passes for 984 yards and five touchdowns.
- Jadeveon Clowney, DE - Recorded zero sacks in 2020. Now has just three sacks over the past two NFL seasons. Has yet to have a double-digit sack season during his career. Will not be able to seek the \$18-20M he was previously seeking as a free agent the last two offseasons.
- Jonnu Smith, TE - Had a career year in 2020 catching 41 passes for 448 yards and eight touchdowns. Was a key player in the Titans two tight end sets.
- DaQuan Jones, DT - One of the most underrated players on the Titans roster. A tough run defender who can give you something in the passing game.

The Tennessee Titans followed up their surprising 2019 season and playoff run with another step forward in 2020. While the team didn't reach the AFC Championship Game again, they did put together an 11-5 season and established themselves as a regular contender in the AFC.

The Titans gave quarterback Ryan Tannehill a four-year \$118 million dollar contract last offseason after his surprising season. Tannehill tossed 33 touchdown passes and just seven interceptions as the fifth highest rated passer in the NFL.

The formula is simple in Nashville. The Titans bully their opponents with a physical run game and a downfield play action passing attack. Now that former offensive coordinator Arthur Smith has moved on to

Atlanta to be their head coach, there's little doubt that the Titans will continue to play with this style offensively.

What's the next step for the Titans? Find a pass rush. The Titans tried to add a pass rush with defensive ends Jadeveon Clowney and Vic Beasley Jr. Neither player was able to record a sack for the Titans in 2020. Beasley Jr. was eventually released and moved on to Las Vegas. Finding a pass rush will give the defense a legitimate shot at a Super Bowl. The Titans had just 19 sacks as a team last year, ranking 29th overall in the league.

The Tennessee Titans are getting close in the AFC. But they have to be able to deal with the quarterbacks who stand in front of them. Lamar Jackson, Josh Allen and Patrick Mahomes need to be sacked to be beaten.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Adam Humphries, WR: Injuries have kept him unavailable on a regular basis. Has been active for 19 of 32 regular season games. Cap savings \$4.4M

Isaiah Wilson, RT: The 2020 first round pick played just four snaps during the season. Wilson had a DUI arrest just before the start of the season, had two different trips to the covid list and was suspended by the team for a violation of team rules. Another incident this spring would probably lead to Wilson's release. \$5.3M added in dead cap space.

**Indianapolis**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 10th**  
**Def. Rank: 8th**

**2020 Record: 11-5**

**Projected Cap Space: \$60 million**



## The Next Quarterback

### Key Free Agents

- Jacoby Brissett, QB - A 12-20 record as a starter, Brissett can start for your team in an injury situation. Completed nearly 61% of his passes in 2019.
- T.Y. Hilton, WR - No longer a consistent threat in the offense. Hilton is still a productive piece who caught 56 passes for 762 yards and five touchdowns in 2020. Still a good receiver.
- Justin Houston, DE - Recorded eight sacks in 2020 and can still pressure the passer on a regular basis. The 32 year old can be part of a rotation moving forward.
- Denico Autry, DE - Played outside rather than defensive tackle and recorded 7.5 sacks. Will command a mid-level contract in free agency.
- Malik Hooker, S - The former first round pick simply has not been able to stay healthy during his career. Missed 14 games this past season.

The Frank Reich era has been one of success despite volatility at the most important of all positions in the game. Coach Reich has had to start three different players at quarterback over his first three seasons and has still been able to post a record of 48-28. That's how good Reich has been.

The Indianapolis Colts find themselves in a daunting position that they have become familiar and perhaps comfortable with. Quarterback Philip Rivers has retired and backup Jacoby Brissett is set to reach free agency, so once again the Colts have to find a starter at quarterback for 2021.

The Colts have the advantage of having one of the most balanced teams in all of the NFL. The Colts have a brilliant offensive head coach, a top offensive line, a good

young defense and a ton of cap space. If there was any team who could lure a free agent quarterback or present a quality landing spot in trade it is the Colts. Just who is going to play quarterback in 2021 is the mysterious question.

The Colts hold the 21st overall pick in the opening round of the NFL Draft. That's a spot that will not allow the Colts to access the top quarterback talent in the draft. But that is a pick that could allow them to land a veteran starter who needs a new address. The Mitchell Trubiskys and Jimmy Garoppolos of the world won't get anyone excited, but Reich is a coach who won a Super Bowl with a backup quarterback.

The Colts are a good football team. A playoff football team. They just need a quarterback, again.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Darius Leonard, LB: Scheduled to make \$1.4M in 2021, Leonard will be a free agent in 2022. Has proven over his first three seasons to be on of the best linebackers in the NFL. Leonard is set to receive a contract extension that locks him in as a Colt over the next five to six seasons.

Braden Smith, G: One of the best guards in the NFL and is part of perhaps the best interior offensive line in the NFL. Smith is set to make \$1.4M in 2020, and just like Darius Leonard is set to cash in big. The abundance of cap space for the Colts this offseason will go to several of their own young studs.

(-image source harriers.com)

**Houston**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 13th**  
**Def. Rank: 30th**

**2020 Record: 4-12**

**Projected Cap Space: \$20 million over**



## An Incredible Mess

### Key Free Agents

- Will Fuller, WR - Missed time with a PED suspension in 2020. Caught 53 passes for 879 yards and eight touchdowns over his 11 games.
- Gareon Conley, CB - Missed the entire season with an ankle injury. The former first round pick should be looking at a one-year deal to maximize his value next offseason.
- Tyrell Adams, LB - Recorded 125 tackles for the Texans, the second best total on the team. Had a career year.
- Vernon Hargreaves, CB - Played a ton in 2020 due to injuries in the Texans secondary. Should get another one-year contract.
- AJ McCarron, QB - The uncertainty at the quarterback position for the Texans may mean McCarron has more value to the Texans than any other team in the NFL.

The 2020 Houston Texans were a surprising 4-12 on the season after going to the playoffs in back-to-back seasons. A 4-12 record would typically be a huge problem, but that's just the start of the mess that the Texans have come.

Franchise quarterback and NFL star player Deshaun Watson wants out. Watson was reportedly led to believe that he would be involved in the future direction of the franchise by having a say in the new general manager and head coaching hire. Neither occurred.

What has seemingly bubble to the surface is that former and current Texans players believe that the franchise is broken and it will waste your career if you play there. The Texans have been a winning organization

who have had playoff seasons in four of the last six seasons. Something here just stinks.

There have been stories told about the atmosphere created by Texans executive VP Jack Easterby. If those stories are true one could understand that players within believe they are part of a sinking ship. Deshaun Watson just may have the clout to get off the ship.

That remains to be seen. The Texans brass are adamant in public and in private that they do not plan to trade Watson. There have been zero reports of legitimate trade proposals. What we're all getting ready to see is a nasty attempt by a star player to divorce his team.

Watson is a 25 year old star. He reportedly won't play for the Texans. It's going to be a wild mess to watch.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

David Johnson, RB: Rushed for just 691 yards and missed four games due to injury. Did have an impressive 4.7 yards per carry average. Will count over eight million dollars against the cap in 2021. Cap savings: \$6.7M

Duke Johnson, RB: Rushed for less than 300 yards in 2020. Did not play much of a consistent role in the Texans offense. Cap savings: \$5M



**Jacksonville**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 28th**  
**Def. Rank: 31st**

**2020 Record: 1-15**

**Projected Cap Space: \$75 million**



## Starting Over with a Star

### Key Free Agents

- Keelan Cole, WR - The kick returner has developed into a dependable receiver who caught 55 passes in 2020 and five touchdowns.
- Dawuane Smoot, DE - Has put up quality pass rush numbers over the past two seasons recording 11.5 sacks. Former third round draft pick.
- Cam Robinson, LT - A starter at left tackle since arriving in Jacksonville. Has only missed time in 2018 when he dealt with an ACL tear.
- Abry Jones, DT - A consistent piece on the defensive line was only available for a career-low five games in 2020.
- Chris Conley, WR - Caught 40 passes for 471 yards and two touchdowns. Has been a consistent third receiver during his NFL career in Kansas City and in Jacksonville. 28 years old.

Proving that storylines can happen anywhere in the NFL, you now have Jacksonville as the city with one of the most interesting experiments happening in the league. And it's an experiment that is not void of star power.

Legendary college football coach Urban Meyer is now trying his hand at the NFL. The coach who's won national championships at Florida and Ohio State is taking on the challenge of coaching professional athletes. Meyer has long been recognized for his attention to detail and his offensive schemes. Now he gets a new toy to work with.

Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence is the best quarterback prospect to enter the

NFL Draft since 2012 when Andrew Luck was the top overall pick. Lawrence will certainly be the pick in Jacksonville and will be foundational piece from which Meyer can build his program.

The job in Jacksonville was always going to be sought after as the top pick would lead to Trevor Lawrence, but the amount of cap space committed to 2021 allows a coach to shape the roster in nearly any way they see fit. Urban Meyer and new General Manager Trent Baalke will have a league-high \$75 million cap dollars to add to the roster.

The last time the Jaguars were relevant in the NFL was January 21st of 2018 when they played the Patriots in the AFC Conference Championship. They are now relevant again.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Tyler Eifert, TE: Caught 36 passes in 2020 and is now just an offensive contributor rather than a regular starter. Hard to imagine him being a \$6M player in 2021 with a new coach and GM in town. Cap savings: \$4.9M

(-image source cbsbaltimore.com)

# AFC EAST 2021



**Buffalo Bills**  
GM: Brandon Beane  
Coach: Sean McDermott  
2020 Record: 13-3

**Miami Dolphins**  
GM: Chris Grier  
Coach: Brian Flores  
2020 Record: 10-6

**New England Patriots**  
Coach: Bill Belichick  
2020 Record: 7-9

**New York Jets**  
GM: Joe Douglas  
Coach: Robert Saleh  
2020 Record: 2-14

## TEAM BY TEAM PREVIEWS

**There is finally a new king of the AFC East.**

**Follow Carlos Medina on Twitter @frontofficelos**

## Buffalo

### 2021 Offseason

Off. Rank: 2nd

Def. Rank: 14th

2020 Record: 13-3

Projected Cap Space: \$3 million

#### Key Free Agents

- Matt Milano, LB - Dealt with injuries in 2020 but is a quality linebacker who recorded 101 tackles when healthy in 2019. Expected to command a sizable contract on the open market.
- Daryl Williams, RT - Had an outstanding 2020, bouncing back from the disappointments of his previous two seasons in Carolina. Just now entering into his prime at 28 years old. Will command a big contract at right tackle. Bills may not be able to make a quality offer.
- Josh Norman, CB - Had a quality season for the Bills and offers starting quality play. Will be an intriguing piece for contending teams looking for that one last piece to help their secondary.
- TJ Yeldon, RB - The former second round pick has been a non-factor during his two seasons in Buffalo. Has proven to be a receiving option out of the backfield during his career.



## A Star Emerges

The 2020 Buffalo Bills took another step forward by getting back to the playoffs and winning advancing for the first time since 1993. Though the season ended in the AFC championship game, the emergence of Josh Allen at quarterback is a franchise changer.

Posting a 13-3 season, Josh Allen has reached the status of “top five quarterbacks” in the NFL. Allen’s game and accuracy made a nearly unheard of leap in 2020 as his passing accuracy jumped from 58.8% to 69.2%. Allen tossed 37 touchdown passes this past season and found the end zone eight times on the ground.

With the quarterback position secured for now and the future, it is understandable that Bills fans and the organization are now dreaming big. Offensively, Stefon Diggs

was the best receiver in football and receiver Cole Beasley was dynamic out of the slot. Adding another outside playmaker would help close the gap between the Bills and the offensively explosive Kansas City Chiefs. That may seem like aiming too high, but that’s the world the Bills now live in.

The Bills recorded 38 sacks last season and would love to add another pass rusher to get to that 40 sack number that many contenders achieve defensively. There is also a need for the Bills to develop a more consistent rushing attack, ranking just 20th in rushing yards per game.

The Bills are now serious contenders in the AFC. They are now set to be that team that rules the AFC East. History has shown that can lead to big things come late January.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

John Brown, WR: Started eight games in 2020, dealing with various injuries. Still a player who can get downfield but not a player that should command \$10M dollars in cap space for 2021. Cap savings: \$8M

Vernon Butler, DT: Struggled to make an impact in the passing game after having a career year in 2019. Scheduled to make nearly \$8M dollars for a player who didn’t record a sack in 2020. Cap savings: \$6.8M



## Miami

### 2021 Offseason

Off. Rank: 22nd

Def. Rank: 20th

2020 Record: 10-6

Projected Cap Space: \$25 million

#### Key Free Agents

- Matt Breida, RB - The former 49er had very little impact on the Dolphins offense. Did not play the final games of the season despite being active.
- Ryan Fitzpatrick, QB - Led the Dolphins to a 4-3 record as a starter in 2020. Backup quarterback who has seen it all in the NFL. Will be up to him if he wants to play again in 2021.
- Ted Karras, C - 16 game starter who had a solid season in the middle of the line for the Dolphins. Has made 31 starts over the past two seasons.
- Davon Godchaux, DT - Injury limited him to only five games in 2020. Was not able to build off his big 2019 season where he recorded 75 tackles and two sacks.
- Vince Biegel, LB - A torn Achilles ended Biegel's season after being picked up as a restricted free agent. Will take a one-year deal and build back some value.



## The Successful Rebuild

In 2019 the Miami Dolphins had the look of an NFL team who was committed a massive and prolonged rebuild. The team began to move any and all pieces that had trade value in exchange for draft picks. A year later, the Dolphins were fighting to make the playoffs.

The team traded safety Minkah Fitzpatrick, left tackle Laremy Tunsil, receiver Kenny Stills and running back Kenyan Drake leading up to and during the 2019 season. Those picks would lead to a team that was ready to make a jump in 2020. Head coach Brian Flores laid the foundation in 2019, 2020 featured the fruits of that labor.

The Dolphins are now a tough and gritty team who plays smart football. When viewing their overall numbers, they don't

rate amongst the league leaders in offense or defense. But with the third best turnover differential in the NFL, the Dolphins were able to win 10 games in 2020. The basic adage of taking care of the football while taking it away worked as it always does.

So what happens now? The Dolphins had nine starts to see what they have in quarterback Tua Tagovailoa. Despite publicly committing to Tagovailoa, he will have to take the next step in the downfield passing game to secure his position as franchise quarterback moving forward.

The Dolphins hold two first round picks, 18th overall and third overall from the Houston Texans. The opportunity to make another jump is there, as the rebuild continues to be a successful one.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Emmanuel Ogbah, DE: Ogbah recognized his potential in 2020 by accumulating nine sacks in 12 starts. Ogbah is set to count \$7.5M dollars against the cap and could see that number change to something more cap friendly with a contract extension.

New England  
2021 Offseason  
Off. Rank: 27th  
Def. Rank: 15th

2020 Record: 7-9

Projected Cap Space: \$58 million



## The Run Was Really Over

### Key Free Agents

- David Andrews, C - A team captain with the Patriots. Has started 69 games over five seasons in the NFL. Has shown that he can play any style of football, whether as a run-heavy or pass-heavy team.
- Cam Newton, QB - Was 7-8 starting in 2020. Did not put up any statistics of note and will be looking to serve as a bridge starter or backup QB in 2021.
- James White, RB - His numbers fell as the Patriots played with a physical running style rather than throwing the football around. One of the better receiving backs in the NFL.
- Lawrence Guy, DT - A tough piece of the Patriots defense that is difficult to move in the run game. Continues to be the most dependable player on the Patriots defensive line. Has started 60 games over the last four seasons in New England

For two decades you could not question any move the New England Patriots made. You could question their draft picks, you could call them “cheaters”, you could say that they played against the worst division in the NFL. But you ultimately had to admit that they were constantly ahead of the rest of the NFL in terms of championship consistency.

That has finally come to an end.

The Patriots and their relationship with former quarterback Tom Brady fell apart during the 2019 season. Brady spent much of 2019 asking for more offensive weapons to work with. Those requests ultimately went unfulfilled. Brady headed to Tampa in free agency where he had the weapons to make a Super Bowl Run. Meanwhile the Patriots struggled to move the football offensively.

The Patriots did suffer from a bevy of covid-related opt outs. The defense should be better in 2021 and return to their status as a top group in the NFL. What happens offensively is really going to determine if they can return to contention in the AFC East.

The Cam Newton experiment was just okay. Newton played to his contract and kept the team competitive. But the Patriots need to find their next franchise quarterback. Other dynasties have experienced the pain of looking for the next guy after the Hall Of Famer leaves the program. It was a long time from John Elway to Peyton Manning for example.

The Patriots now have to move from Tom Brady to...we shall see. Finding the next one will allow a new run to begin. As of 2020, the Patriots 20 season run really did end.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Julian Edelman, WR: Made just one start in 2020 and was only able to appear in six games during the season. Will be 35 years old this spring. May look to play just one more season. Cap savings: \$3.5M

**New York**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 32nd**  
**Def. Rank: 24th**

**2020 Record: 2-14**

**Projected Cap Space: \$62 million**



## Starting Over Again?

### Key Free Agents

- Marcus Maye, S - Had an impressive 2020 season and established himself as one of the better coverage safeties in the NFL. Will be a sought after piece by pass defense-needy NFL teams in free agency.
- Brian Poole, CB - His career continues to be a series of good followed by poor play seasons. Poole was only able to play in nine games in 2020 after performing well in 2019.
- Jordan Jenkins, OLB - His career appeared ready to take off in 2020 after seasons of eight and seven sacks in 2019 and 2018. Jenkins was only able to record two sacks in 2020 and was banged up with injuries.
- Breshard Perriman, WR - Continued his tour of the NFL playing for his fourth team in five seasons. Did record 30 catches for 505 yards and three touchdowns in 2020.

The New York Jets begin this offseason with their third head coach in four seasons. Robert Saleh comes over from running the defense in San Francisco to now looking to get the wheels back on this franchise.

Saleh will be tasked with determining whether the Jets will need a change of direction or a complete rebuild. Much of that will be determined by what the team does with the second overall pick.

The team's previous coach, Adam Gase, was hired to develop young quarterback Sam Darnold. That clearly did not work out. Darnold, previously the third overall pick from 2018, has shown promise but took a step back in his play in 2020. But Darnold's offense lacked reliable weapons and at just 23 years old, the "most Jets thing ever"

would be seeing the young signal caller become a stud quarterback elsewhere. The Jets may be better off drafting help for Darnold and giving him a legitimate chance to prove that he can or can't be a starting NFL quarterback.

The Jets are one of the few teams in the NFL with a significant amount of cap space. One can only imagine that Robert Saleh will want to make sure that the defense gets back to a level that can compliment a younger offense. The pass rush will see some cap dollars allocated to it along with the secondary at the cornerback position.

The Jets made the mistake that their division rivals did not. They were not ready to compete after the fall of the Patriots. They are now left to determine a new direction.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

George Fant, LT: Has been an average player at his position. If the Jets choose to use their second overall pick on the offensive line, Fant could flip to right tackle or be moved off the roster. Has not been a \$9M a year player. Cap savings: \$7.3M

Henry Anderson, DE: Recorded a half-sack in 2020. After posting a seven sack season in 2018, Anderson has been a massive disappointment. Nothing more than a rotational pass rusher and certainly not worth his larger cap hit in 2021. Cap savings: \$8.2M



# AFC NORTH 2021

## TEAM BY TEAM PREVIEWS

**The Steelers are back on top of perhaps the toughest division in the NFL.**

**Follow Carlos Medina on Twitter @frontofficelos**



**Pittsburgh Steelers**  
GM: Kevin Colbert  
Coach: Mike Tomlin  
2020 Record: 12-4

**Baltimore Ravens**  
GM: Eric DeCosta  
Coach: John Harbaugh  
2020 Record: 11-5

**Cleveland Browns**  
GM: Andrew Berry  
Coach: Kevin Stefanski  
2020 Record: 11-5

**Cincinnati Bengals**  
GM: Mike Brown  
Coach: Zac Taylor  
2020 Record: 4-11-1

Pittsburgh  
2021 Offseason  
Off. Rank: 25th  
Def. Rank: 3rd

2020 Record: 12-4

Projected Cap Space: \$21 million over



## One More Before The Rebuild



### Key Free Agents

- Bud Dupree, OLB - Recorded eight sacks in 2020 before injury ended his season five games early. A torn ACL may lessen his value in free agency, but his skills will be in demand.
- JuJu Smith-Schuster, WR - Caught 97 passes for 831 yards and nine touchdowns in 2020. Given the Steelers history of paying receivers, he should reach free agency.
- Al Villanueva, LT - A cornerstone of the Steelers line for years, Villanueva will be ushered out as part of the youth movement on the Steelers line in hopes of creating better run play.
- Cameron Sutton, CB - The former third round pick played his way into a bigger contract after having his best season. Has appeared in 47 games over the past three seasons in Pittsburgh as a dependable player.

One could say that the Pittsburgh Steelers played two different seasons in 2020. There were the 11-0 Steelers, who were beating playoff teams on their way to establishing themselves as the only true challenger to the Kansas City Chiefs.

Then there was that other Steelers season in 2020. That Steelers team went 1-4 over the final five games of the season and proceeded to exit the playoffs in the opening round by falling behind the Cleveland Browns 28-0. Two completely different seasons for the Steelers indeed.

There is clearly change going on in the AFC North. While the Steelers remain a defensive stalwart with more than enough offense to win games, the rest of the division has gotten

young and problematic for these Steelers. With young quarterbacks throughout the division, the Steelers are having to manage the end of Ben Roethlisberger's Hall of Fame career.

Big Ben looked every bit of his age during the final weeks of the season. As the Steelers offense continued to be unable to threaten downfield while also being unable to establish a respectable running game.

Like other talented teams, the Steelers are going to lose talent this offseason. But the focus of this offseason is going to be about getting younger on the offensive line and creating a better running attack. That was the Steelers will only have to be a team with one season and one identity in 2021.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

**Ben Roethlisberger, QB:** Set to count more than \$40M against the Steelers cap in 2021, Roethlisberger has indicated that he will work with the Steelers to lower his cap number as he prepares for his 18th and perhaps final season. With a base salary of \$4M, Roethlisberger can help create some. Cap savings: \$3M

**David DeCastro, G:** DeCastro started off the 2020 season playing among the best guards in the league. His play over the final 12 games showed a player in decline. Turns 32 years old this spring. Cap savings: \$8.7M

Baltimore  
2021 Offseason  
Off. Rank: 19th  
Def. Rank: 7th

2020 Record: 11-5

Projected Cap Space: \$24 million



## The Next Offensive Step

### Key Free Agents

- Yannick Ngakoue, DE - Had quite the tour of the NFL in 2020. Franchised by the Jaguars, Ngakoue was traded twice to Minnesota and then to Baltimore. Recorded eight sacks in 2020, matching his 2019 performance.
- Matt Judon, OLB - Dependable linebacker who consistently gets to the quarterback. Judon has recorded 30.5 sacks over the past four seasons. Played under the franchise tag in 2020.
- Gus Edwards, RB (RFA) - Durable running back who scored six times and rushed for five yards a carry in 2020. Will require a qualifying offer to secure his services in Baltimore.
- Mark Ingram, RB - An ankle injury and positive covid test pushed Ingram into a backup role with the team. A workhorse back who should get a shot elsewhere in 2021.

The Baltimore Ravens have one of the most fascinating challenges of any NFL team this offseason. Led by a former league MVP, the Ravens are a team that constantly wins football games. Quarterback Lamar Jackson is now 30-7 as a starter. But the challenge for the Ravens remains how to improve the offense, and is Jackson the problem?

The Ravens had the number one scoring offense in the NFL in 2019. They ranked seventh in 2020. This is not a situation in which the Ravens are loaded defensively and are inept offensively. But in a league where the passing game drives points, the Ravens are playing old school football. It works, but only to a point.

That point is when the Ravens fall behind

and the offensive is forced into opening up the passing game. The narrative that Lamar Jackson and the Ravens can't win when falling behind was broken by the playoff win against the Tennessee Titans. But the fans and the organization realize it is the team's primary problem.

The Ravens front office is going to take the next step in this progression. The plan will be to add larger playmakers on the outside who can win the 50-50 throws and help Lamar Jackson out. Adding those types of players will either unlock more of Jackson's potential, or expose a hole in his game.

The Ravens are going to win in 2021. That's nearly a given. How they win in 2021 will be the fascinating part.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Lamar Jackson, QB: With three seasons of NFL service time complete, Jackson is now eligible for a contract extension. Jackson is extremely affordable over the next two seasons, but an extension would allow the Ravens to have cap certainty over a five year period. The question becomes how much of an extension should Jackson command? Despite his record in games where his team falls behind, Jackson is 30-7 as an NFL starter. If the point is to win football games, than Jackson does what is required of the highest paid quarterbacks in the NFL.



Cleveland  
2021 Offseason  
Off. Rank: 16th  
Def. Rank: 17th

2020 Record: 11-5

Projected Cap Space: \$24 million



## Finally Getting it Right



The Cleveland Browns changed again...and this time they got it right. Really right.

The Browns under first year head coach Kevin Stefanski were one of the more entertaining groups to watch in the NFL. Blending a power run game with aggressive play action, the Browns went 11-5 and ousted the Pittsburgh Steelers from the playoffs. Not bad for a debut season.

2020 for the Browns was a season that validated that they could get things right. Quarterback Baker Mayfield, a winner in college, proved that he could take a team and advance in the playoffs. Offensive weapons like running backs Nick Chubb, Kareem Hunt, and receiver Jarvis Landry all proved they could deliver for a program that

had not experienced success in many years. 2021 is now about the encore. How will the Browns follow it up?

For starters, the Browns have various areas that they need to improve on. Their play in coverage would be first and foremost. While injuries and outbreaks limited the availability of players such as cornerback Denzel Ward, overall the safety play in Cleveland is an area for improvement. The linebacker position is another area where the Browns will have to get players who are capable of defending the modern passing game.

The Browns are fun again. They should emerge over the next year as the primary challenger for the AFC North division title. That would be quite the encore.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Adrian Clayborn, DE: Recorded 3.5 sacks during the 2020 season. Clayborn is not a cap issue in terms of price unless the Browns want to get younger at the position or extend the contracts of some of their younger talent. Clayborn turns 33 this season. Cap savings: \$3M

Odell Beckham Jr, WR: The Browns are a run-first play action passing team. The success of the offense starts with the ability for their running backs to control the game. With that understood, having two receivers with a need for the football can be problematic. Landry creates more savings, but he's also healthier. Cap savings: \$3M

### Key Free Agents

- Olivier Vernon, OLB - Was having his best season as a Brown with nine sacks before going down with a ruptured Achillies. A terrible injury for a pass rusher. Will have to take a small deal or rehab the injury for most of 2021.
- Terrence Mitchell, CB - Played a ton of snaps due to injuries at the position. Has established himself as a quality third cornerback, which is now basically a starter in the NFL.
- Karl Joseph, S - His career of making big plays and giving up big plays continued in Cleveland. A perfect example of a boom-or-bust safety.
- BJ Goodson, LB - A 14 game starter for the Browns who recorded 91 tackles in 2020. A solid run play linebacker who may have found a home in this division and in this role.

(-image source washingtontimes.com)

Cincinnati Bengals  
2021 Offseason  
Off. Rank: 29th  
Def. Rank: 26th

2020 Record: 4-11-1

Projected Cap Space: \$34 million



## Hope and Disappointment

### Key Free Agents

- Aj Green, WR - Has already posted his goodbye to the city on social media. Green was relegated to the roll of a third receiver often in the Bengals offense. Caught 47 passes for 523 yards and two touchdowns in 2020.
- Williams Jackson III, CB - A four-year veteran who has made 48 starts over 59 games in the NFL. Had a solid season and was the Bengals best cornerback. Arriving in the league at 25, Jackson is now 29 years old.
- Carl Lawson, DE - Recorded 5.5 sacks to lead the Bengals in that category comfortably. Turning 26 years old, Lawson can be a quality veteran pass rusher as part of a deeper rotation.
- Mackensie Alexander, CB - Ten game starter, played on a one-year contract and was solid enough to get another deal with the Bengals.

Over the first 11 weeks of the 2020 season, rookie quarterback Joe Burrow was set to smash rookie passing records and easily be named the NFL rookie of the year. The NFL can be a cruel business, where once there was hope there became disappointment and uncertainty.

Suffering a devastating knee injury that included a tear of his ACL and MCL, Joe Burrow ended his rookie campaign having completed 65% of his passes for 13 touchdowns and just five interceptions. His 2,688 yards were more than respectable, putting him 6th overall in yards passing per game. Now the Bengals are forced to wait to see just how long it will be before Joe Burrow can look like Joe Burrow again.

Defensively the Bengals were as bad as it gets when it comes to getting quarterbacks on the ground. Recording just 17 sacks as a team, the group ranked dead-last in the NFL. Leading sacker Carl Lawson recorded 5.5 sacks on the season. No one else on the team had more than two, and with Lawson set to reach free agency the defense needs a lot of help in this department.

Free agent addition cornerback Trae Waynes has yet to have an impact on the team after tearing a pectoral muscle. The rest of the Bengals cornerbacks may not be a factor in 2021 as they are set to reach free agency. This is a total rebuild that started last season.

The rebuild started right with Joe Burrow. The franchise just needs to get him back.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Geno Atkins, DT: Had trouble staying on the field due to a shoulder injury. Atkins was only available to appear in eight games and had little impact. Has long been one of the best community-oriented players for the Bengals. Cap savings \$9.5M

Giovani Bernard, RB: With Joe Mixon firmly installed as the top Bengals running back, Bernard was not the complimentary piece one would look for. Bernard rushed for just 3.4 yards per carry after averaging 3.2 yards per carry in 2019. Cap savings \$4.1M

(-image source theinquirist.com)



# AFC WEST 2021

**Kansas City Chiefs**  
GM: Brett Veach  
Coach: Andy Reid  
2020 Record: 14-2

**Las Vegas Raiders**  
GM: Mike Mayok  
Coach: Jon Gruden  
2020 Record: 8-8

**Los Angeles Chargers**  
GM: Tom Telesco  
Coach: Brandon Staley  
2020 Record: 7-9

**Denver Broncos**  
GM: George Paton  
Coach: Vic Fangio  
2020 Record: 5-11

## TEAM BY TEAM PREVIEWS

**The Chiefs remain as AFC Conference champions as they fully own the AFC West.**

**Follow Carlos Medina on Twitter @frontofficelos**



**Kansas City**  
**2021 Offseason**  
**Off. Rank: 1st**  
**Def. Rank: 16th**

**2020 Record: 14-2**

**Projected Cap Space: \$16 million over**



## Just Short of History

### Key Free Agents

- Sammy Watkins, WR - Had just 28 catches for 421 yards and two touchdowns in 2020. Watkins could be looking at retirement after reportedly considering that last offseason.
- Bashaud Breeland, CB - Bet on himself in 2020 as he wanted to prove his worth in the NFL. Was the Chiefs best cornerback and had a quality season. Did miss four games due to a substance abuse suspension.
- Alex Okafor, DE - Will be looking for another quality contract after taking a pay cut for the 2020 season. Productive when he's healthy and on the field.
- Daniel Sorensen, S - Recorded 91 tackles in 2020 and was part of the Chiefs three safety package. A dependable veteran player who the Chiefs probably can't afford to keep.
- Austin Reiter, C - Has started 28 games for the Chiefs over the past two seasons.

The 2019 defending champion Kansas City Chiefs were one game from being the first team since 2004 to win back-to-back Super Bowls. But when the best of today at quarterback meets the best of all-time, sometimes you don't get to make history.

Tom Brady is a champion again as he and the Buccaneers pass rush made life miserable for Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs offense. After being a nearly unbeatable team for more than a year in the NFL, the Chiefs looked very beatable in losing Super Bowl LV 31-9.

But the Chiefs still have Patrick Mahomes and as long as he's healthy the team has a chance to win the Super Bowl each and every season. The Chiefs have already been installed by the Las Vegas casinos as the

favorite to win next year's Super Bowl. It's tough to imagine them falling off in 2021.

The Chiefs do have work to do this offseason as the team is a little over the NFL salary cap and they need to work on retaining some of their talent. The Chiefs also need to get younger and notably cheaper in some key spots. The offensive line, which injuries clearly exposed it during the Super Bowl, needs an infusion of younger talent. The team could also look to add some talent at cornerback and safety as they have veterans set to reach free agency.

Tom Brady holds the record for the youngest quarterback to win multiple Super Bowls at the age of 26. Patrick Mahomes attempted to beat this record in 2020. He will now have a chance to equal it in 2021.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Tyrann Mathieu, S: Mathieu enters the final year of his deal and will be difficult to keep after 2021. Mathieu performance warrants that he make the team, but the Chiefs cap situation may force them to make room in order to retain talent. It's really a matter of whether it's worth keeping Mathieu for one more season or more players for more years. Cap savings: \$14.8M

Las Vegas  
2021 Offseason  
Off. Rank: 8th  
Def. Rank: 25th

2020 Record: 8-8

Projected Cap Space: \$17 million over



## Time to Deliver



### Key Free Agents

- Nelson Agholor, WR - Had an explosive 2020 season in which he displayed his homerun play potential. Caught 48 passes for 896 yards, a whopping 18.7 yards per catch average. Caught eight touchdowns.
- Johnathan Hankins, DT - Plays a dependable brand of football, 32 game starter over the past two seasons.
- Vic Beasley, DE - The former league leader in sacks from 2016 spent the season with the Titans and the Raiders. Beasley doesn't like football.
- Nicholas Morrow, LB - Started 11 games in 2020 and recorded 78 tackles and three sacks during the season. An intriguing player who entered the league as an undrafted rookie free agent.
- Takk McKinley, DE - Has had issues with his shoulders since college and have continued in the NFL.

The Las Vegas Raiders were a 6-3 football team in 2020 that included early season wins against the Saints and the Chiefs. They looked poised to once again be a playoff team.

Then the second half of the season arrived and the Raiders went into a dive that had Raiders fans thinking of 2019. The previous season the Raiders were 6-4 before defensive issues doomed them to a 1-5 finish. This time around those same defensive issues handed them a 2-5 finish to the 2020 season.

For a coach who reportedly makes \$10M per season, it's time to deliver. While the Raiders organization has seemingly put much of this situation on quarterback Derek

Carr, he should be sharing that pressure with Gruden. Gruden is now 114-110 as a head coach in the NFL, and just 64-80 since winning the Super Bowl in 2002. If that's what \$10M per season gets you than championship coaching must be wildly expensive.

The Raiders have reportedly been looking to trade quarterback Derek Carr and move on to their next signal caller. But the numbers say this is a defensive problem in Las Vegas. The Raiders ranked 25th overall in total defense and their late season slides have been evidence of their inability to stop people.

Fix the defense, you fix the Raiders. But sometimes deflecting the blame is a useful tactic in the NFL.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Tyrell Williams, WR: 2020 was to be a make-or-break season for Williams given his contract status for 2021. Williams tore his labrum and was unable to rehab the injury before requiring season-ending surgery. Cap savings: \$11.6M

Lamaricus Joyner, CB/S: Simply has not played well enough during his two seasons with the Raiders to justify his 2021 cap number. Set to count more than \$11M against the cap and has not produced at that level. Cap savings: \$8.7M

(-image source raiders.com)

Los Angeles  
2021 Offseason  
Off. Rank: 9th  
Def. Rank: 10th

2020 Record: 7-9

Projected Cap Space: \$22 million



## A New Offensive Leader



A 7-9 season is typically one that leads to much frustration within an NFL organization. You find yourself thinking about every close loss, every blown lead, every little play you didn't make. It's a different 7-9 season for the Chargers though.

Yes all of those close losses hurt the Chargers. But they got the big picture move right. The Chargers used the sixth overall selection to draft quarterback Justin Herbert to eventually lead the program. After an early season freak injury to starter Tyrod Taylor, Herbert stepped in to lead the team. 4,000 passing yards and 31 touchdown passes later, Herbert was named the NFL's Rookie of The Year.

The Chargers should be a good football team in 2021. They feature an offense and a defense that each carry a top-10 ranking. New coach Brandon Staley will be tasked with winning the games that the 2020 version of the team could not. The Chargers lost three games in 2020 in which they held at least a 17 point lead.

So what's next? Now that the quarterback question is solved this team needs to be about protecting Herbert and giving him weapons. The offensive line is an area of concern as a multitude of veterans are set to reach free agency. Assigning resources to guards and tackles would be ideal.

If the Chargers get this right, those 7-9 seasons will be gone for about a decade.

### Key Free Agents

- Melvin Ingram, DE - Spent the season dealing with injuries that cost him nine games. Was unable to record a sack for the first time during his career. Had recorded 24.5 sacks over the previous three seasons.
- Hunter Henry, TE - Caught 60 passes for 613 yards and four touchdowns in 2020 while playing on the franchise tag. Should command a bigger contract.
- Forrest Lamp, G - Proved he could make it through a season healthy in 2020 for the first time in his career. Played above average football.
- Rayshawn Jenkins, S - Blossomed in 2020 recording 80 tackles, two interceptions and a sack. Jenkins proved he could be a piece that can move all around the defense and be productive in whatever role he's asked to play.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Trai Turner, G: Had a disappointing debut season in LA as Turner missed seven games and was not good in the games he did play in. It will be up to the Chargers front office if they want to gamble big cap dollars on Turner bouncing back. Cap savings: \$11.2M

Casey Hayward, CB: Another Charger who is typically a good player but injuries kept him from playing at his typical level. The now 31 year old Hayward enters the final year of his deal in 2021 and the team could go with a cheaper option. Cap savings: \$9.7M

(-image source mighty1090.com)



Denver  
2021 Offseason  
Off. Rank: 23rd  
Def. Rank: 21st

2020 Record: 5-11

Projected Cap Space: \$16 million



## An Offensive Identity Needed

### Key Free Agents

- Justin Simmons, FS - The best player in the Broncos secondary and one of the best overall safeties in the NFL. Should command the biggest contract for a safety come March.
- Tim Patrick, WR (RFA) - 15 game starter who has taken on the role of the #2 receiver in the Broncos offense. Caught 51 passes for 742 yards and six touchdowns in 2020. Will require a qualifying offer to retain his services.
- Phillip Lindsay, RB (RFA) - Rushed for 1,000 yards in each of his first two NFL seasons. Missed five games in 2020 and lost carries. Still recorded 4.3 yards per carry on average.
- Shelby Harris, DE - Has established himself as a dependable veteran player with some sack capabilities. Played on a one-year deal in 2020.

The Denver Broncos should be a better football team than their 2020 record. The team continues to put a respectable defense on the field and now boasts several Pro Bowl players on that side of the football. Where the Broncos couldn't struggle is establishing just what they are going to be offensively.

Quarterback Drew Lock has looked like an average young quarterback over his first two NFL seasons. The problem is that young quarterbacks are performing at a much higher level now than they traditionally had in the past. While Lock threw 16 touchdown passes against 15 interceptions, the division rival Chargers have their own young starter in rookie Justin Herbert who threw for over

4,000 yards while recording 31 touchdown passes against just 10 interceptions. So the clock on young quarterbacks is ticking faster than it ever has before in the history of the league.

Denver holds the ninth overall pick in the upcoming NFL Draft. The team reportedly would not include Drew Lock in a trade to Detroit for Matt Stafford. But that doesn't mean the team is fully committed to him. What the Broncos choose to do in this draft will be the true indicator of their commitment level.

The Broncos should be a better football team. But they need an offensive identity and a quarterback who they can experience success with.

## Targets for Release/Restructure

Von Miller, OLB: The 32 year old linebacker carries the biggest cap charge of any Bronco in 2021. Recorded his fewest sacks in a season since 2013 when he missed seven games due to injury. Miller is still productive in that he recorded eight sacks in 2020, but he's set to cost more than \$22M against the cap. Cap savings: \$18M

Jurrell Casey, DT: The veteran defensive tackle was only able to appear in three games in 2020 due to injury. Casey, who was traded to the Broncos for a seventh round pick, will have to play at a greatly reduced base salary to stay in Denver. Cap savings: \$11.8M

# *About the Author*

---

Carlos Medina has worked in the sports talk radio industry since 2001 as a Producer, Host and News Reporter. A graduate of Texas Wesleyan University and The University of Alabama, he has covered NFL assignments in both the Dallas and Atlanta markets. Carlos is a dedicated fan of the game and a student of NFL organizational success. He has also served as a media consultant for Atlanta-based NFL Combine training facilities teaching future NFL draftees about the business and media aspects of the NFL. His work can be heard weekdays on Sports Radio 680 The Fan in Atlanta, GA. He lives in Cumming, GA with his wife and two daughters.



*Follow him on Twitter @frontofficelos*

