

Five potential major players on NFL free agent market

WHEN NFL Free Agency gets underway on March 9, expect there to be a splash in the market.

Several teams have the money to change the faces of their respective franchises, as well as the league in general, with potential blockbuster moves.

• *Here's a look at five potential, major players on the NFL free agent market:*

1. New England Patriots

The Patriots have eight players on the Top 101 list and \$61.9 million in cap space to replace those snaps.

Bill Belichick trades with abandon and could be active as a buyer (Brandin Cooks) and as a seller, with Jimmy Garoppolo.

The Patriots are known for going after Phase 2 free agents but the team isn't

afraid to spend big dollars occasionally on players who catch Belichick's eye, Roosevelt Colvin, Adalio Thomas and Rodney Harrison included.

Belichick is still more likely to hold tight in the first hours of free agency before diving in with a plethora of moves this season, hoping to find value. The team has too many vacancies and too much confidence orchestrating trades to stay quiet this month.

2. Jacksonville Jaguars

The organisation has spent heavily in free agency since owner Shad Khan arrived in 2011, with little tangible progress to show for it in the standings.

GM Dave Caldwell stressed at the combine that the team can't be "careless" with its money, but he is under pressure to win now or

SPORTING MISCHIEF & MAYHEM

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lose his job later. That heat and a surplus of cap space (\$71 million) could lead to a busy month.

3. Tennessee Titans

The Titans know they need to get more receiving help around quarterback Marcus Mariota and have been connected to big receivers like Alshon Jeffery and Brandin Cooks.

The secondary needs a huge overhaul and the team has more than \$60 million to spend. GM Jon Robinson

showed last season with his draft trades and acquisition of veteran running back DeMarco Murray, and in a swap with the Eagles, that he's not afraid to be aggressive.

4. San Francisco 49ers

Niners fans are fired up already. This grand experiment, pairing coach Kyle Shanahan and rookie GM John Lynch, could get weird fast. Lynch said "it's liberating" to have no quarterbacks on the roster,

which must make perusing the rest of this barren lineup feel like running naked through a field of "monkey tamarind."

"Don't worry. We are going to acquire one," the 49ers have told teams about their quarterback hunt, according to NFL Network Insider Ian Rapoport, who asked Lynch where he felt the 49ers are strongest.

Lynch cited their lines on both sides of the ball, especially after picking up early free agent defensive tackle. This roster needs essentially everything else, except for a starting running back.

The Niners have a big budget so don't expect Lynch and Shanahan's six-year contracts to make them slow-jam this rebuild.

5. Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Bucs GM Jason Licht and

coach Dirk Koetter haven't hidden their desire for offensive upgrades.

DeSean Jackson is one of the most persistent pre-free agency rumours, and the Bucs also could be in play for Adrian Peterson. The feeling that this roster is on the cusp is a false one.

This team has just as many depth-chart holes as when Raheem Morris was roaming the sidelines. I suspect Licht knows he needs help and will be ready to spend.

Until next week, go hard or go home!

• *Naughty presents 'Mischief and Mayhem in da AM' from 6am to 10am, Monday to Friday and 'The Press Box' sports talk show on Sunday from 10am to 1pm, on KISS FM 96.1. Comments and questions to naughty@tribunemedia.net*

FINAL TRIALS FOR CARIFTA SWIMMING CHAMPIONSHIPS START THIS FRIDAY

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WITH the Bahamas Swimming Federation getting ready to host the 2017 CARIFTA Swimming Championships, president Algebron Cargill said they are confident they will field the best team to regain the title over the Easter holiday weekend.

While CARIFTA is scheduled for April 15, Cargill said the BSF would select its 36-member team on Sunday following the final trials scheduled to start 6pm Friday and 9am Saturday at the Betty Kelly-Kenning National Swim Complex.

"Our goal is to win CARIFTA

at home and we will select our swim team as well as open water swimming and water polo teams," Cargill said. "Our goal is to win swimming and open water swimming, so our swimmers are focused on that.

"The trials this weekend will be very competitive, especially the boys' and girls' 15-and-over divisions. They will be our most competitive divisions."

After winning the title for two consecutive years in 2014-15, the Bahamas lost out to Guadeloupe last year in Martinique, but Cargill said they are working hard on keeping the title here at home.

"CARIFTA is a preparatory meet for us for the Youth Commonwealth Games when we hope

to field a strong team for that also," said Cargill of the games that will also be hosted here in July by the Bahamas Olympic Committee.

"CARIFTA is obviously a lot of work with a lot of volunteers involved, but we have Youth Commonwealth and CCCAN as the age group meets that we are participating in, so we definitely want to do well in all of them."

With the performances turned in so far from the swimmers in the various meets leading up to the trials, Cargill said they should only have a team of competitors who would have made the qualifying standards.

"We should have no difficulties filling the team with only qualifi-

ers this weekend," he said. "The team will be announced Sunday night and we are looking forward to that progress."

Twenty five teams have already confirmed their participation in the CARIFTA Games. They include the following:

Antigua & Barbuda, Aruba, Barbados, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Curacao, Dominica, French Guyana, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Martinique, Netherland Antilles, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Maarten, St Martin, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Surinam, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos and the US Virgin Islands.

This will mark the fourth time

that the Bahamas has hosted CARIFTA, which was held for the first time in Kingston, Jamaica in 1999. It first came to the Bahamas in 2001 and returned in 2004 and 2012.

During the Barracuda Swim Club's Atlantic Medical Invitation over the weekend (see results on page 4), in at least 35 events, swimmers attained the qualifying standards for CARIFTA, which left coach Travano McPhee predicting that the trials will be very competitive this weekend. The swim club also hosted an 11-member team from the Turks and Caicos Islands, who made their maiden international voyage as they look to qualify for CARIFTA for the first time.



BAHAMAS VISIT: Surf Side Ocean Academy Aquatic Club members, from the Turks and Caicos Islands, are preparing to make their debut in this year's CARIFTA Swim Championships in Nassau.

TURKS & CAICOS SWIM CLUB ON THEIR MARKS FOR CARIFTA GAMES DEBUT

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THEY don't have a 25 or 50-metre swimming pool in the Turks and Caicos Islands, but that doesn't deprive the Surf Side Ocean Academy Aquatic Club from preparing their swimmers to make their debut in the 2017 CARIFTA Swim Championships.

The club, with an 11-member team, was in town for their maiden international voyage over the weekend to participate in the Barracuda Swim Club/Atlantic Medical Invitation.

The goal was to get their swimmers familiarised with swimming in the 50-metre pool in anticipation of returning for the CARIFTA Games over the Easter holiday weekend.

"We don't have any 25 or 50 metre pool at home. The closest we have is an

18-metre pool that we train and get our times in, but it's not a very convenient or official pool," said club's head coach Jennifer Martel.

"We don't have any diving boards or any pools that is built to accommodate our training because they are too shallow. So we train very hard with what we have, training at the hotel pools and an elementary school pool. That is the closest that we get to a proper one, but it's only 18-metres long and only four very small lanes."

Bringing the Surf Side Ocean Academy to compete here in the Betty Kelly Swim Complex is like a track club taking a team to compete in their first indoor meet in the United States.

But despite their deficiencies, one of their swimmers Jade Grandsire won the girls' 8-and-under high point trophy with 128 points. There were also a few swimmers who attained the Turks and Caicos Is-

lands' qualifying standards for CARIFTA.

"Incredible," was how Martel summed up their team performance. "We're so proud of them. All of them swum personal bests, some of them took 10-15 seconds of their longer races and none of them got disqualified, which is very huge because we were worried about them competing in the 50m pool for the first time. "We also saw some of them swim CARIFTA qualifying times, which is huge, competing at their first international meet. We hope to be back here in about a month to compete again at CARIFTA."

Martel said if the opportunity presents itself, they would love to come back and compete in another meet before CARIFTA so that their swimmers can lower their times.

"Unfortunately, I will have to be teaching some swimming lessons after tak-

ing the weekend off to be here this weekend," Martel said. "So if they come, they will have to come with some parents if that's the case."

Martel said originally they only had 10 competitors scheduled to compete, but after one of the sisters saw the pool, she asked if she could swim as well and the Barracuda Swim Club accommodated her.

"This is a fantastic 50-metre pool," Martel said. "Everyone has been so hospitable from host to timers to the other swim clubs to the swimmers, everyone has been so kind and warm. It was such a wonderful experience."

Having got a taste of what to expect here, Martel said they can't wait for CARIFTA.

"We're hoping that when we come back, they will swim their personal best," Martel said. "We had two swimmers, who ain't here, who already qualified and

we have high hopes for the other swimmers who qualified this weekend.

"We are just hoping that the swimmers will continue to turn in best times and work their way up to the point where they can compete with the other kids at CARIFTA, even if they are at the lower level of the competition."

As the only swim club on the island for a number of years, Martel said their swimmers only saw each other as they competed.

"We had nothing to gauge off," she said. "I've been constantly telling the parents that their kids are terrific, but you don't know how fast they are. So coming here was a great eye opener for the kids and the parents to see that their swimmers have a lot of potential."

And with the formation of a new swim club in the Turks and Caicos Islands, Martel said they will have

some competition to look forward to racing against.

Hopefully, they will be able to combine their resources and return to the Bahamas to compete in more meets as one team, although they still represent their own clubs.

"There are so many incredible swimmers here, so it was amazing to watch them," Martel said. "We were able to watch them so that we can see what we need to do to get to that level. "Even though they have the potential, they have seen what the competition is like here, so it has given them the boost to train a little harder and work towards the swimmers that are here."

In their first meet here, all of the swimmers had at least one spectator in the stands cheering for them - either a parent or sibling - which, according to Martel, made the trip that much more special.