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January 13, 2015

Mr. Eric Winston  
President, Executive Committee - Players Representatives  
Executive Committee Members and Player Representatives  
NFL Players Association  
1133 20<sup>th</sup> Street NW  
Washington, DC 20036

**Re: NFLPA Executive Director Election  
(Submission of Official Platform)**

Dear Mr. Winston,  
Members of the Executive Committee, and esteemed Player Representatives:

Following my correspondence to you of January 5<sup>th</sup> announcing my candidacy for the position of NFLPA Executive Director, it was brought to my attention that the Executive Committee and individual Player Representatives would like a written copy of my official platform as part of due diligence, before anyone decides on whether or not to endorse me for inclusion on the final ballot/vote in March. Because Sean Gilbert, the other candidate challenging the current NFLPA Executive Director DeMaurice Smith, has not only submitted his official platform but released it publicly, I have been advised by numerous current players to do likewise. I have been reluctant to do so, preferring to give my presentation in person in Washington D.C., and let the Executive Committee decide whether or not I should merit final consideration at the March meeting in Hawaii. Nevertheless, in the interest of good faith and transparency, I attach my platform hereto.

It has been made clear to me that all communications between myself and any of the Player Representatives or Executive Committee members, as well as the substance of same, is to be kept strictly confidential and I will, of course, adhere to this. However, since Sean Gilbert's platform was released to the public, I would like a copy of my platform to be viewed not only by Player Representatives, but all NFL players, in the hopes that there will be a collective understanding of why it is I have been asked to run, and why I have agreed to do so. In that regard, I am asking for my platform to be disseminated to all current players.

I have been referred to as a "long shot" for selection as a replacement for DeMaurice Smith, but I can think of a few individuals who were called "long shots" and given no real chance for election, before surprising everyone and coming out of nowhere to supplant the incumbent. For starters, we can

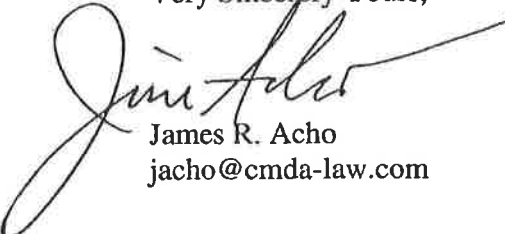
look at our own President Obama, who, whatever you may think of him politically, ascended to that position after many said he lacked the experience and necessary backing to even garner a nomination, much less win the election. History will show otherwise. In addition, in 1971, Ed Garvey, a relatively unknown 32-year old attorney whose only real experience was representing tight end John Mackey, was elected to the position of NFLPA Executive Director. He led the NFLPA into the "new age" of professional football. Again, irrespective of any former player opinions of Garvey, the point is he was able to overcome his relative obscurity to prove his mettle and gain the support of enough players that they elected him. I have far more experience to this point than Garvey did when he was elected. Being a native Detroit, I would be remiss if I did not mention that two men in their early 30's who were relative unknowns at the time, Walter Ruther and James R. Hoffa, went on to lead the two most powerful unions in America at the time, the UAW and the Teamsters Union.

Admittedly, I was not an NFL All Pro like Sean Gilbert, nor do I have the political connections of DeMaurice Smith, but I ask that you not measure a man's abilities by using playing statistics and political connections as the barometer, and instead look to my track record of having represented retired (and current) NFL players, and having made serious inroads in the areas of improved benefits for retirees. I have experience in collective bargaining, the grievance and arbitration process(es), to great success. I am a proven, tenacious negotiator.

As mentioned in my initial correspondence, I am endorsed by the NFL Alumni Association's Director Tom Nowatzke. I am similarly endorsed by Gridiron Greats Assistance Fund's President Shannon Jordan. I have placed a great degree of emphasis on what I have done for retired players vis-à-vis healthcare benefits, but it has been pointed out to me by multiple current NFL players that I need to place more emphasis on what I can do for current players, and in that regard, I have reached out to many players this past week, asking what concerns today's players have, and what they would like to see the Executive Director's office do for them. I think my platform addresses much of this.

I remain available to all of you should you have any questions. I eagerly anticipate your response, and I remain,

Very Sincerely Yours,



James R. Acho  
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## PLATFORM

### I. DEMANDS

#### **A. Long-Term Healthcare Benefits For All Retired Players, Including Retroactive Inclusion Of Pre-1993 Players And Their Spouses**

The plight of retired players, especially pre-1993 players, stemming from physical and cognitive issues related to their playing career is well-chronicled and I don't need to regurgitate it here; one would need to be living under a rock to be unaware of this issue. The healthcare benefits bargained for between the NFL and NFLPA currently provide full medical coverage to a post-1993 former for 5 years from the date of retirement. Upon expiration of those benefits, an HRA will then cover enough for the former player's COBRA premium, generally for 12-18 months. Then, it is said, the former player will have the option of continuing in the healthcare plan by merely paying a \$600 premium. This is where things get dicey. I am told by multiple recently-retired players that yes, you pay the \$600 (\$1200 if with spouse) premium, but you are also on the hook for the deductible (80/20) and hefty co-pays and if you undergo surgery or have an extended hospital stay, the medical bills can and have bankrupted many former players. The retiree has to hope he is covered by one of the various reimbursement plans -- one of which is ironically named for Gene Upshaw, which I find ironic because it was my experience that he did little to look out for the interests of former players, especially those in his era. I digress. If you are denied reimbursement, you may be simply SOL.

I just spoke to a former NFL All Pro (late 1970s/early 1980s) this week, who had ankle replacement on January 3 of this year. He applied for assistance and was denied. Luckily for him he is only on the hook for \$19,800 and will hopefully be able to pay for it, but what if he could not? What if he developed a staph infection, had a two month hospital stay and when he got out, has a \$1,200,000 bill to contend with? That can and has bankrupted former players and I am not even getting into cognitive issues, irrespective of the class action settlement and the 88 Fund (which is a great vehicle) and various other plans that may or may not reimburse a player.

The Solution: Full Blue Cross/Blue Shield for former players and their spouses until qualifying for Medicare (typically age 65). This would also mean retroactively including all former players pre-1993. What we are talking about is essentially the 1972-1993 era. Players prior to 1972 would have already qualified for Medicare and now gap or supplemental coverage is paid for by the league. My solution eliminates the necessity of players having to go, hat in hand, asking for a handout. As one Hall of Famer told me recently of the process of asking for assistance, "I felt like an ashamed kid again, waiting with my mother in line for government cheese...I shouldn't have to beg." This is akin to league welfare and it is unnecessary and demeaning.

#### **B. Elimination of OTAs\***

Organized Team Activities (OTAs) are an unnecessary nuisance in today's day and age of digital technology where every player has a smartphone, an iPad (or in the NFL's case, a

Microsoft Surface), communicates by email, and stays in extraordinary physical shape year-round. Once upon a time, players took full-time jobs in the offseason, generally did not stay in shape, and may have had a revised playbook mailed to them, in hopes that they would glance at it prior to training camp. Those days are gone, and so too should OTAs be.

\*Rookie Minicamp will remain.

### **C. Mandatory 100% Spending Of The Salary Cap**

No NFL teams will be allowed to sandbag as teams in MLB routinely do. Any amount under the cap for any given year that goes unspent will be disbursed to the NFLPA Institute which I will create. (See III(C)). This will incentivize maximum spending on salaries.

### **D. Limitation On Rookie Contract Years**

Rookies will be granted RFA status upon conclusion of their third season. The rookie cap will remain in effect.

### **E. Salary Increase For Practice Squad Players**

Salaries for practice squad players is currently \$6,300 per week, or \$100,800, assuming a player remains on the practice squad for an entire season. The salary shall be bumped from \$6,300 to \$10,000 per week, or \$160,000 salary for the season.

### **F. Decrease In Union Dues For Those Under Rookie Contract Or Veteran's Minimum Deal**

It is not fair that a player making, say, \$7,000,000 per season, pays the same dues amount as a player earning a rookie minimum of \$425,000. The dues will be scaled but a pro-rated percentage will go to what will be the newly-created NFLPA Institute which I address under III(C).

## **II. CONCESSIONS**

There needs to be an incentive for the NFL to come to the table before the expiration of the Collective Bargaining Agreement in four and a half years. The following will be offered as concessions in exchange for the NFL meeting the aforementioned demands:

### **A. 18 Game Season**

I have pushed for an 18 game season as an incentive to bargain since 2010, and an interview substantiating that was posted on Yardbarker at that time. This is not a novel idea recently proffered by anyone, contrary to popular opinion. My proposal has always come with the caveat that it would be quid pro quo, with an overhaul of the long-term healthcare plan. But upon information and belief, the overwhelming majority of NFL owners want an 18 game season. More revenue means just that. It is a viable enticement to bring the NFL to the table.

**1. Four preseason games will remain intact**

It has been suggested by some that in exchange for an 18 game regular season, two preseason games should be eliminated. I do not agree, for the very simple reason that owners overwhelmingly want 4 games and to eliminate two would affect revenues. That is a quick way to end any discussion with the league.

**2. Training camp will begin a week earlier**

Players will report to training camp a week earlier than currently slated for non-padded, no-contact practices that are merely for conditioning and related activities. This of course would only be acceptable if OTAs were eliminated.

**III. IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMS FOR THE GREATER GOOD**

**A. An Independent, Impartial, In-House Assistance Board for Retirees In Need**

We will bring an existing, viable assistance entity (likely the Gridiron Greats Assistance Fund) in-house and let them oversee reimbursement and distribution of funds to players in need. I recognize there are various plans existing and there is a benefits board currently, but their track record, and my personal experience tells me that needs to be changed with a different approach.

**B. Creation Of The NFLPA Institute For Minority Coaching And Front Office Development**

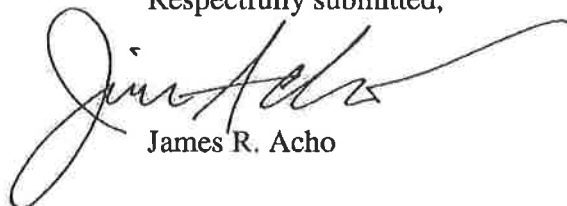
The dearth of black head coaches in the NFL is concerning but at the collegiate level it is utterly appalling. In 2015, for there to be such a woeful lack of head coaches of color in a game dominated by black athletes is unacceptable. The Rooney Rule is noble, and the NFL's Bill Walsh Minority Program also well-intended. But how much good have either done? The stated motto through the NFL is "Give a man a fish, he eats for a day. Teach a man to fish and he eats for a lifetime." Well, years later I don't see too many guys eating fish. What I see are coaches getting interviews that are nothing more than window dressing. I hear whispers from executives that there is a "lack of qualified candidates." (Nobody will say this publicly ever again after what happened to Al Campanis.) But this means something is broken or amiss. I am not one for quotas, nor affirmative action plans -- they often end up in the promotion of underqualified people at the detriment of other, more qualified people simply on the basis of race. That is not right. But education and training is the true benchmark of buttressing and establishing a qualified candidate for any job, and football is no different.

I propose the creation of the NFLPA Institute, a two year intense program, where 50 minority college graduates will be selected to eat, sleep, and breathe not just the game, but everything from how to interview for a job, public speaking, film study, Xs and Os, mastering current technology and information processing, scouting, security, marketing, general accounting

principles, public relations, etc. We will hire former NFL and college head coaches, NFL scouts, player personnel people, GMs and marketing execs who will teach all of the courses. This will be a 2 year full-time program and those selected will receive a \$24,000 annual stipend, with the NFLPA paying for housing, and food. It will be tantamount to a Master's Degree and those who graduate from the program will be ready to take on at least an entry-level coaching or front-office position with an NFL team or major college program. We will have a job placement assistance program in furtherance of the effort. This will be paid for out of prorated union dues. If necessary, I will fund it out of my own pocket, but something must be done to address this issue.

In closing let me say that I am not looking to be your friend, and I am not even much of an NFL fan anymore. I do not golf, fish, hunt, ski, play fantasy sports, video games or cards. What I do is protect the interests of employees, and I assure you I will do just that for all NFL players, current and former. I possess the necessary integrity, intellect, and bulldog tenacity required of your Director, and I believe I am the right choice to replace DeMaurice Smith, should you determine that step is necessary. I remain available to discuss my platform and address any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Acho", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

James R. Acho