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Proposed Deal Between Sam Bradford and Eagles' Fans

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This most recent quarterback mess kicked off when the Eagles traded up to the second overall pick in the NFL draft. No mystery surrounded this move. The Eagles were looking for a quarterback. Bradford, who thought he was the guy, didn’t like that. Now Bradford is missing voluntary training sessions and ignoring communications. As a contract law professor, my first thought was that a resolution to the mess could be found in the contract between Bradford and the Eagles, somewhere in the 326 page Collective Bargaining Agreement between the NFL Players Association and the NFL.

It’s not. To be sure, the CBA requires players, teams and their agents to negotiate in good faith. Maybe Bradford thinks the Eagles told him what he wanted to hear about being the starting quarterback, all while they planned to grab some top talent from the draft to groom for the job.

Unfortunately, that’s not a great legal argument for Bradford. The Eagles agreed to a $35 million, two-year contract to a quarterback who didn’t get his team close to winning the abysmal NFC East. Even the best quarterback, which Bradford is not, knows that his team is going to be working on getting the strongest talent it can at every position.

Nor do the Eagles and their fans have the right under the contract to demand Bradford get himself to these early practices. The CBA says players can’t be required to attend nor can they even be told that there will be negative consequences for not participating.

But this doesn’t mean there can’t be an agreement directly between Bradford and the fans. Bradford expected he would be given time and opportunity to be a franchise quarterback. Maybe he had no right to expect it, and shouldn’t have expected it, but he did anyway. He wanted to be the Eagles’ present and its future — and that’s not such a bad thing. We tend to focus on the fact that he’s been paid tens of millions of dollars for playing not very many games and not incredibly well, but he saw in the Eagles his chance to be what he was supposed to be when he was the first draft pick in 2010.

I know that technically this would be a second or even third “second chance,” we already gave him a shot at redeeming himself last season and he’s being paid a fortune for the next two. We’ve done our part. That’s a fair point and a reasonable position and I may even agree with it, but what does it get us? Does it get us out of this quarterback mess? It doesn’t, which is why I’m proposing this side deal between fans and Bradford.

Sam doesn’t have to show up and play his hardest, best football until the June 7 mini-camp, just like we fans don’t have to give him a do-over. But I hope he does start showing up and working his tail off and if he does then we should keep our part of the bargain and give him another chance. And if he doesn’t, we’ve got this kid with a heck of an arm from North Dakota State who still hasn’t burned through his first chance with us.

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