

# Tillman stuck in contract limbo

## Safety still remains unsigned as market for free agents cools

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TRIBUNE

The calendar creeps toward the end of May and the Arizona Cardinals have conducted the bulk of their offseason business with their own free agents.

The Cards re-signed tackle Anthony Clement to a long-term deal and convinced franchised safety Kwamie Lassiter to come in for his one-year tender offer. They basically let other free agents like running back Michael Pittman and



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Cardinals safety Pat Tillman, left, missed 4½ games last season with an ankle injury.

cornerback Corey Chavous walk away, knowing they wanted more money than the Cards wanted to give.

Other free agents, like linebacker Zack Walz and tight end Terry Hardy, were told they wouldn't be offered contracts.

Yet one man remains in limbo — safety Pat Tillman.

Unsigned, unrestricted and apparently unwanted by most

of the league, Tillman has left a contract offer from the Cards sitting to the side.

Tillman, who missed the Cards' most recent minicamps because he was getting married, could not be reached Monday. He left the country Sunday for his honeymoon. Tillman's agent, Frank Bauer, has not returned multiple phone messages left

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throughout the offseason. It isn't a great time to be a free-agent safety, however.

"There's simply an overload at the position," Bauer told ESPN.com. "It just seemed like there were a lot of safeties in the (free agent) market to begin with. Then we had a lot more released before March 1. Plus it was a big year for safeties in the draft. And now we could have a few more cut after June 1, I guess.

"The supply outdistances the demand by a pretty good margin, and that makes it a buyer's market. But right now, no one is even buying."



Pat Tillman declined an offer sheet last year from the St. Louis Rams.

Tillman had a chance to secure his future last offseason as a restricted free agent, but he declined to sign an offer sheet with St. Louis, reportedly worth \$9 million over five years. The Cards would have had an option to match the contract. At the time, Bauer said Tillman wanted the chance to become an unrestricted free agent.

But a couple of factors

during the 2001 season hurt Tillman's value. He missed 4½ games with an ankle injury, after admittedly getting off to a slow start.

More importantly, the Cards had their hopes realized with third-round draft pick Adrian Wilson, a possible star in the making, who at 6-foot-3 is four inches taller than Tillman and much faster.

Tillman acknowledged late last season that Wilson was an impressive player. Even if Tillman were to return, chances are Wilson would start alongside Lassiter at safety and Tillman would be relegated to nickel packages and special teams.

It has fueled speculation, including from inside the Cardinals' organization, that Tillman may just walk away from the game if he isn't happy with his offers.

This is a man, after all, who told the Tribune while he was at Arizona State he would make \$1 million by the time he was 30 — not counting money he would make in the NFL.

"I hope some people want me around. I'd love to play here, but you don't know what's going to happen," Tillman said in December, the day after the season ended. "(In 2000), I was coming off a good year. This year, it was fine, but not great. I don't know what offers are going to be presented to me."