



Faneca inks \$40M deal with Jets

Veteran guard becomes NFL's highest-paid O-lineman

Posted: Saturday March 1, 2008 6:48PM; Updated: Saturday March 1, 2008 7:23PM

NEW YORK (AP) -- The New York Jets and Pro Bowl left guard Alan Faneca agreed to terms on a five-year, \$40 million contract Saturday, making the former Pittsburgh player the highest-paid offensive lineman in the NFL.

Agent Rick Smith told *The Associated Press* on Saturday that the 31-year-old Faneca planned to fly to New York on Sunday, take a physical and officially sign the deal Monday. After making nearly \$4.4 million in salary and bonuses last season, Faneca got a huge deal that Smith said includes \$21 million in guarantees.

A Jets spokesman declined comment on the signing of the seven-time Pro Bowl selection, considered perhaps the league's best left guard.

Faneca chose New York over San Francisco and St. Louis, all teams that had losing records last season and need help on their offensive lines.

"When he examined the situations, Alan felt this team would make the biggest impact," Smith said.

New York sorely needed a standout left guard after trading Pete Kendall to Washington following a bitter contract dispute before last season. They plugged in the since-released Adrien Clarke, who was ineffective while starting the first 14 games and was benched the last two weeks.

Faneca will step in between left tackle D'Brickashaw Ferguson and center Nick Mangold to give the Jets a terrific left side. Ferguson and Mangold thrived as rookies with Kendall, but struggled at times without his veteran influence last season.

"Alan can't wait to work with those guys," Smith said. "He likes to take young guys under his wing and help them develop."

Faneca's presence will surely improve the Jets' rushing game, which struggled despite having Thomas Jones. New York ranked 26th in the league last season in total yards and 19th in rushing yards per game.

"Alan is really looking forward to being a New York Jet," Smith said.

Faneca, a five-time All-Pro who was Pittsburgh's first-round pick in 1998, experienced a similar situation to Kendall last summer. Known as "Red" because of his long, flowing red hair, Faneca was unhappy before last season because he thought the Steelers misled him during contract talks last winter when he was looking for a new deal.

Meanwhile, guards such as Leonard Davis, Kris Dielman, Derrick Dockery and Eric Steinbach all signed big deals last offseason that were worth at least \$6 million.

Faneca, who helped Jerome Bettis and Willie Parker rush for 1,000 yards during his tenure, was critical of ownership when he reported for minicamp last May and even announced then: "This will be my last year as a Pittsburgh Steeler."

As it turned out, Faneca was right, and he couldn't be happier now.

"He can finally put that black cloud that was hanging over him last season behind him," Smith said.

The Jets have been active in the two days since the free agency period began. In addition to signing Faneca, they acquired three-time Pro Bowl defensive tackle Kris Jenkins from Carolina, traded linebacker Jonathan Vilma to New Orleans for a draft pick, signed defensive tackle Sione Pouha to a contract extension and signed fullback Stacy Tutt to an exclusive-rights contract.