

Murrell, Fletcher Give ASU Eight In NFL

Written by Mike Flynn
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Former Appalachian State University defensive end Marques Murrell (Fayetteville, N.C./Jack Britt) and Jabari Fletcher (Atlanta, Ga./Grady) have upped the number of ex-Mountaineers in National Football League training camps to eight, as Murrell has rejoined the New England Patriots and Fletcher has signed as a rookie free agent with the Cleveland Browns.

Murrell originally joined with the Patriots during the 2010 offseason after three seasons with the New York Jets. He made the Patriots' 53-man roster coming out of training camp and recorded a tackle in New England's 2010 opener versus Cincinnati but was released by the team the following week. He has rejoined the three-time Super Bowl champions for his fifth NFL campaign.

In four pro seasons, Murrell has appeared in 27 games, making 22 tackles and forcing two fumbles. He helped the Jets advance to the AFC Championship game following the 2009 season.

Murrell was a two-time first-team All-American at Appalachian and forced a school-record 18 fumbles to go along with 36 sacks (second in school history) and 59 tackles for loss (third in school history).

Fletcher signed with the Browns this week following the conclusion of the NFL lockout that prevented rookie free agents from joining teams following in April as is traditional. He briefly played for the Canadian Football League's Montreal Alouettes this summer as the lockout dragged on.

Fletcher wrapped up his ASU career in December with 22 sacks and 44 tackles for loss, joining Murrell among the seven players in Appalachian history with at least 20 sacks and 40 tackles for loss.

The duo joins veterans Jason Hunter (Denver Broncos), Corey Lynch (Tampa Bay Buccaneers) and Armanti Edwards (Carolina Panthers) and 2011 draft picks Mark LeGree (Seattle Seahawks), Daniel Kilgore (San Francisco 49ers) and D.J. Smith (Green Bay Packers) as the eight former Mountaineers in the NFL ranks.

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Should at least seven of the eight make regular-season rosters this season, it would mark the most former Mountaineers to ever play in the NFL in the same non-strike year, surpassing the six that played in the league in 1992 and 2002. Eight former Apps played in NFL games in 1987 but some of those were as replacements during a players' strike.

In additional alumni news, former Appalachian defensive back Everett Withers was promoted to interim head coach at the University of North Carolina on Thursday. UNC picked Withers to lead the Tar Heels in 2011 after it fired head coach Butch Davis on Wednesday. Withers played for the Mountaineers from 1981-84, serving as ASU's team captain as a senior.