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Patriots' Jersey Swap for Hernandez Fans Sets a Pricey Precedent

By [Kyle Stock](#) on July 01, 2013

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The New England Patriots didn't take long to part ways with tight end Aaron Hernandez, who was released by the team just 90 minutes after his [arrest last week on murder charges](#). Now fans are getting the chance to cast off their jerseys linked to the fallen star with an unusual trade-in deal at the Patriots Pro Shop. The team store will replace Hernandez's No. 81 uniform with a free jersey of comparable value this weekend.

Why's the club doing it? The kids, obviously. "We know that children love wearing their Patriots jerseys, but may not understand why parents don't want them wearing their Hernandez jerseys anymore," Patriots spokesman Stacey James said in a statement.

The plan has been lauded by much of Patriot Nation as "[classy](#)." And there are clear benefits to luring a crowd of merchandise-owning fans into the Patriots shop during the dead of summer—when the Red Sox are on a tear, no less—in the hopes that trade-in customers will buy other gear. This gives the official Pats store a chance to make an in-person sale on new jerseys for Tim Tebow, a proven power when it comes to [moving merchandise](#).

But a recall on jerseys tied to players in trouble with the law could be a costly precedent across the National Football League. Almost 30 NFL players have been arrested since the end of last season, on top of all the players who have run afoul of the law in the recent past. Imagine what would happen if jerseys for Baltimore Raven Ray Lewis, who was indicted on murder charges in 2000, could be traded in. Last season, [Lewis jerseys outsold every other player's](#) except Robert Griffin III and Peyton Manning.

How quickly would the costs stack up? In 2012, about [45 NFL players were arrested](#). Considering an average pro football career [is 3.2 years](#) (and not accounting for repeat arrests), that means somewhere between 5 percent and 9 percent of the total NFL roster at any given time has a less-than-pristine legal record. Sure, that's a rough calculation and most players in legal jeopardy of some kind aren't on the hook for murder charges. But considering the market for NFL merchandise is estimated at [more than \\$3 billion a year](#), it's safe to say teams would be sacrificing hundreds of millions of dollars if every franchise made the same call the Patriots did on Hernandez.

If the Pats want to get ruthless about making money on this ordeal, the franchise might not have to just take a loss on all the old No. 81s it collects this weekend. [It can flip them on EBay](#), where the bidding for Hernandez gear is still brisk. Yesterday, for example, a Hernandez jersey with a Super Bowl patch drummed up 56 bids and sold for \$284 on the auction website. In late April, a similar jersey sold for just \$26.

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