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NFL ANNOUNCES MANAGEMENT DISCIPLINE IN NEW ORLEANS SAINTS ‘BOUNTY’ MATTER

Commissioner Roger Goodell notified the New Orleans Saints today of the discipline that will be imposed on team management for violations of the NFL's long-standing “bounty” rule that endangered player safety over a three-year period.

Discipline for individual players involved in the Saints' prohibited program continues to be under review with the NFL Players Association and will be addressed by Commissioner Goodell at a later date. The program included “bounty” payments for “knock-outs” and “cart-offs,” plays on which an opposing player was forced to leave the game. At times, the bounties even targeted specific players by name.

The NFL's extensive investigation established the existence of an active bounty program on the Saints during the 2009, 2010, and 2011 seasons in violation of league rules, a deliberate effort to conceal the program's existence from league investigators, and a clear determination to maintain the program despite express direction from Saints ownership that it stop as well as ongoing inquiries from the league office.

“We are all accountable and responsible for player health and safety and the integrity of the game,” Commissioner Goodell said. “We will not tolerate conduct or a culture that undermines those priorities. No one is above the game or the rules that govern it. Respect for the game and the people who participate in it will not be compromised.”

“A combination of elements made this matter particularly unusual and egregious,” Commissioner Goodell continued. “When there is targeting of players for injury and cash rewards over a three-year period, the involvement of the coaching staff, and three years of denials and willful disrespect of the rules, a strong and lasting message must be sent that such conduct is totally unacceptable and has no place in the game.”

Following the March 2 announcement of the NFL's initial findings, the league office conducted further investigation, including Commissioner Goodell meeting with many of the key individuals involved, sometimes on multiple occasions. The commissioner also discussed the matter with the leadership of the NFL Players Association and individual players.

Based on the record, Commissioner Goodell has imposed the following discipline on Saints management:

- The **New Orleans Saints** are fined \$500,000. In addition, because the violation involves a competitive rule, the Saints will forfeit their selections in the second round of the 2012 and 2013 NFL drafts.
- Saints Head Coach **Sean Payton** is suspended without pay for the 2012 NFL season, effective April 1.
- Saints General Manager **Mickey Loomis** is suspended without pay for the first eight regular-season games of the 2012 season.
- Former Saints (and current St. Louis Rams) defensive coordinator **Gregg Williams** is suspended indefinitely from the NFL, effective immediately. Commissioner Goodell will review Coach Williams' status at the conclusion of the 2012 season and consider whether to reinstate him, and, if so, on what

terms. Commissioner Goodell said he will give close attention to the extent to which Coach Williams cooperates with the NFL in any further proceedings.

- Saints assistant Head Coach **Joe Vitt** is suspended without pay for the first six regular-season games of the 2012 season.
- The Saints and the individuals disciplined today are expected to participate in efforts led by the league office to develop programs that will instruct players and coaches at all levels of the game on the need for respect for the game and those who participate in it, on principles of fair play, safety and sportsmanship, and to ensure that bounties will not be part of football at any level.

Commissioner Goodell stated that the actions of the individuals disciplined today violated league rules and constituted conduct detrimental to the league and players. He said the existence of a pay-for-performance/bounty program undermined the integrity of the game. The violations were compounded by the failure of Coach Payton to supervise the players and coaches and his affirmative decision starting in 2010 (a) not to inquire into the facts concerning the pay-for-performance/bounty program even though he was aware of the league's inquiries both in 2010 and 2012; (b) to falsely deny that the program existed; (c) to encourage the false denials by instructing assistants to "make sure our ducks are in a row;" and (d) to ignore instructions from the league office and club ownership to ensure that no such program existed.

"Beyond the clear and continuing violations of league rules, and lying to investigators, the bounty program is squarely contrary to the league's most important initiatives – enhancing player health and safety and protecting the integrity of the game," Commissioner Goodell said. "Let me be clear. There is no place in the NFL for deliberately seeking to injure another player, let alone offering a reward for doing so. Any form of bounty is incompatible with our commitment to create a culture of sportsmanship, fairness, and safety. Programs of this kind have no place in our game and we are determined that bounties will no longer be a part of the NFL."

A 2007 amendment to the NFL Constitution and By-Laws obligated coaches and supervisory employees "to communicate openly and candidly with the principal owner and/or his designated representative; to ensure that club ownership is informed on a complete and timely basis of all matters affecting the club's operations; and to avoid actions that undermine or damage the club's reputation or operating success." The obligation to supervise the coaching staff and players is also expressly set forth in the employment agreement signed by Coach Payton.

Commissioner Goodell said he will separately address potential sanctions for players and others with documented involvement in the bounty program.

"While I will not address player conduct at this time, I am profoundly troubled by the fact that players – including leaders among the defensive players – embraced this program so enthusiastically and participated with what appears to have been a deliberate lack of concern for the well-being of their fellow players," Commissioner Goodell said. "While all club personnel are expected to play to win, they must not let the quest for victory so cloud their judgment that they willingly and willfully target their opponents and engage in unsafe and prohibited conduct intended to injure players."

While NFL staff has interviewed people in connection with public allegations of bounty programs at other clubs, no evidence was established showing that the programs at other clubs involved targeting opposing players or rewarding players for injuring an opponent. Commissioner Goodell emphasized that if additional information is brought to his attention that discloses bounties offered for injuring specific opposing players, he will revisit the matter to consider additional discipline.

The findings in the league's investigation, corroborated by multiple independent sources, conclusively established the following:

1. The Saints defensive team operated a pay-for-performance/bounty program, primarily funded by players, during the 2009, 2010, and 2011 seasons. Under that program, players regularly made cash "donations" to a pool, and were "fined" for mental errors, loafing, penalties, and the like. At least one assistant coach (defensive coordinator Gregg Williams) also occasionally contributed to the pool. There is no evidence that any club money was contributed to the program.

2. Payments were made for plays such as interceptions or fumble recoveries. All such payments are against league rules. Payments also were made for plays on which opposing players were injured. In addition, specific players were sometimes targeted. The investigation showed bounties being placed on four quarterbacks of opposing teams – Brett Favre, Cam Newton, Aaron Rodgers, and Kurt Warner. Multiple sources have confirmed that several players pledged funds toward bounties on specific opposing players, with defensive captain Jonathan Vilma offering \$10,000 to any player who knocked Brett Favre out of the NFC Championship Game in 2010.

3. Coach Williams acknowledged that he designed and implemented the program with the assistance of certain defensive players. He said that he did so after being told by Saints Head Coach Sean Payton that his assignment was to make the defense “nasty.” Coach Williams described his role as overseeing record keeping, defining payout amounts, deciding on who received payouts, and distributing envelopes with cash to players who “earned” rewards.

4. In each of the 2009-2011 seasons, the Saints were one of the top five teams in the league in roughing the passer penalties. In 2009 and 2011, the Saints were also in the top five teams in unnecessary roughness penalties; in 2010, the Saints ranked sixth in the category. In the January 16, 2010 divisional playoff game against the Arizona Cardinals, Saints defensive players were assessed \$15,000 in fines for fouls committed against opposing players. The following week, in the NFC Championship Game against the Minnesota Vikings, Saints defensive players were assessed \$30,000 in fines for four separate illegal hits, several of which were directed against quarterback Brett Favre.

5. Coach Williams now acknowledges that when he was first questioned about this matter in early 2010 he intentionally misled NFL investigators and made no effort to stop the program after he became aware of the league’s investigation.

6. Coach Williams further confirmed that the program continued during the 2010 and 2011 seasons, and that he occasionally contributed funds to the pool in each of those seasons.

7. Assistant Head Coach/Defense Joe Vitt acknowledged that he was aware of the program in 2009-2011. He admitted that, when interviewed in 2010, he “fabricated the truth” to NFL investigators and denied that any pay-for-performance or bounty program existed at the Saints.

8. Coach Vitt said one of his primary roles was to monitor the activity of Coach Williams. This was based on the direction of Coach Payton, who apparently had less than full confidence in Coach Williams. Despite Coach Vitt’s knowledge of the bounty program, his understanding of the terms “knock-out” and “cart-off,” his witnessing Coach Williams handing out envelopes that he believed to contain cash, and his acknowledgement that the defensive meeting preceding the 2010 NFC Championship Game may have “got out of hand” with respect to Brett Favre, Coach Vitt claimed he never advised either Coach Payton or General Manager Mickey Loomis of the “pay-for-performance/bounty” program.

9. A summary prepared following a Saints preseason game included the statement, “1 Cart-off – Crank up the John Deer (sic) Tractor” in reference to a hit on an opposing player. Similar statements are reflected in prepared documents or slides in connection with other games in multiple seasons. A review of the game films confirms that opposing players were injured on the plays identified in the documents.

10. When interviewed in 2012, Sean Payton claimed to be entirely unaware of the program, a claim contradicted by others. Further, prior to the Saints’ opening game in 2011, Coach Payton received an email from a close associate that stated in part, “PS Greg Williams put me down for \$5000 on Rogers (sic).” When shown the email during the course of the investigation, Coach Payton stated that it referred to a “bounty” on Green Bay quarterback Aaron Rodgers.

11. In early 2010, Mr. Loomis advised Coach Payton that the league office was investigating allegations concerning a bounty program. Coach Payton said that he met with his top two defensive assistants, Coach Williams and Coach Vitt, in advance of the interview with league investigators and told them, “Let’s make sure our ducks are in a row.” Remarkably, Coach Payton claimed that he never inquired of Coach Williams and Coach Vitt as to what happened in the interviews, never asked them if a “pay-for-performance” or bounty program was in fact in place, and never gave any instructions to discontinue such a program.

12. In January 2012, prior to the Saints' first playoff game of the 2011 season, Coach Payton was advised by Mr. Loomis that the league office had reopened the investigation. Coach Payton made a cursory inquiry but took no action to ensure that any bounty program was discontinued.

13. General Manager Mickey Loomis was not present at meetings of the Saints defense at which bounties were discussed and was not aware of bounties being placed on specific players. Mr. Loomis became aware of the allegations regarding a bounty program no later than February 2010 when he was notified of the investigation into the allegations during a meeting with NFL Executive Vice President-Football Operations Ray Anderson. He was directed to ensure that any such program ceased immediately. By his own admission, Mr. Loomis did not do enough to determine if a pay-for-performance/bounty program existed or to end any such program that did exist.

14. Saints owner Tom Benson notified Mr. Loomis in January 2012 prior to the team's participation in the playoffs that the league's investigation had been reopened. Mr. Benson reiterated his position that a bounty program was unacceptable and instructed Mr. Loomis to ensure that if a bounty program existed at the Saints it would stop immediately. By his own admission, Mr. Loomis responded to this direction by making only cursory inquiries of Coaches Payton and Williams. He never issued instructions to end the bounty program to either the coaching staff or the players.

15. There is no evidence that Saints ownership had any knowledge of the pay-for-performance or bounty program. There is no evidence that any club funds were used for the program. Ownership made clear that it disapproved of the program, gave prompt and clear direction that it stop, and gave full and immediate cooperation to league investigators.

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