

Cheating scandal threatening Florida State

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) - An academic cheating scandal could leave Florida State without as many as 25 players for its Music City Bowl game against Kentucky on New Year's Eve, coach Bobby Bowden said recently.

It was the latest off-field blow to a once-proud program trying to regain its footing as a national power.

"We have some players not traveling for one reason and some for another, including those who are ineligible for the bowl because of academic issues," Bowden said in a statement released by the university.

"Kentucky would be a tough opponent when we are at full strength so clearly this will make things more difficult. Our staff is in the process of determining what adjustments we must make for the game."

Many of the players who

won't be going to Nashville could also be ruled ineligible for some games next season for their connection to a cheating scandal earlier this year.

Federal privacy laws prohibit the school from releasing names.

"We don't know what that number is going to end up being exactly, but we know that's a rough figure," assistant athletic director Rob Wilson said. "It's an issue where we're being extra cautious."

Bowden also said he would not use any players redshirted this season in the bowl game. The Seminoles (7-5) finished the regular season unranked for a third straight year.

Previously, Bowden had not answered questions on the scandal that resulted in one full-time academic adviser, Brenda Monk, and a

student tutor losing their jobs this summer.

Athletic director Dave Hart Jr., and several of his assistants also left in recent months, although those changes weren't directly related to the present investigation of academic wrongdoing by the school and NCAA.

The university reported its findings in a letter to the NCAA in September after a six-month investigation by the school revealed at least 23 athletes in various sports were interviewed in regard to

cheating on an online music history exam.

At least two football players already have been penalized for their involvement. Defensive end Kevin McNeil missed the season and wide receiver Joslin Shaw missed the first four games.

It was already a year where the program was distracted with off-field troubles.

Police used a Taser on linebacker Geno Hayes after a 2 a.m. altercation with officers outside a local night-

club in September. Fullback Joe Surratt was charged with a felony in the same incident.

Xavier Lee, who briefly won the starting quarterback job, was suspended for two games midway through the season, reportedly for academic reasons.

Although athletes from other sports at Florida State are involved in the academic wrongdoing, the football suspensions are the latest in a series of disappointments for Bowden, who signed a one-year extension last week to

coach his 33rd season next fall.

Bowden, 78, is working under a contractual arrangement where his successor, Jimbo Fisher, who will be at his side as offensive coordinator for up to three years.

Fisher, 42, was hired in January to replace Bowden's youngest son, Jeff, who was replaced after six unproductive years as his dad's offensive coordinator. Bowden then replaced the entire offensive staff after the 2006 season.

Falcons fined over messages to Vick

NEW YORK (AP) - Roddy White and four other Atlanta Falcons were fined by the NFL for violating uniform regulations with tributes to Michael Vick during last week's Monday night game.

Vick, Atlanta's suspended Pro Bowl quarterback, was sentenced to 23 months in prison on federal dogfighting charges the morning of Dec. 10. The Falcons played at home against New Orleans that night.

After scoring a touchdown, White revealed and displayed a "Free Mike Vick" tee-shirt under his jersey.

He, along with tight end Alge Crumpler and cornerbacks DeAngelo Hall and Chris Houston, were fined \$10,000 each. Crumpler, Hall and Houston all wore black eye-strips with written tributes to Vick, which the league called "displaying an unauthorized personal message."

Wide receiver Joe Horn was fined \$7,500 for pulling up White's jersey to show the black tee-shirt with handwritten white lettering. The fines were confirmed later by NFL spokesman Randall Liu.

Hall also had a poster of Vick on the field during pregame introductions.

The Falcons lost the game 34-14.



Atlanta Falcons' Joe Horn, left, and Michael Jenkins, right, help teammate Roddy White raise his jersey to display a message of support for suspended QB Michael Vick after scoring a touchdown in the second quarter of a football game against the New Orleans Saints in the Georgia Dome, last week in Atlanta. Vick is serving time for dogfighting.

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