

# NFL suspends six players for doping violations

NEW YORK (AP)—Unless the courts intervene, the Minnesota Vikings will have to make their stretch run at the NFC North title without their two stalwart defensive tackles.

Kevin and Pat Williams, who have anchored a Minnesota defense ranked second in the NFL against the run, were among six players suspended by the league on Tuesday for violating the league's anti-doping policy. New Orleans Saints Deuce McAllister, Charles Grant and Will Smith also were suspended along with Bryan Pittman, the Houston Texans' long snapper.

All six were punished for using a diuretic, which can serve as a masking agent for steroids.

The punishment means all six will miss the end of the regular season, an especially harsh blow to Minnesota, which relies heavily on the Williamses in its run defense.

Angelo Wright, the agent for Pat Williams, said he planned to file a motion in federal court in the next 24 hours, presumably to put off his client's suspension. Tom Condon, the agent for Kevin Williams, said he hadn't yet determined what course of action to take.



Pat Williams

A seventh player identified in reports that began surfacing in late October, Atlanta's Grady Jackson, was not suspended. NFL spokesman Greg Aiello said Jeff Pash, the league's chief counsel, had asked for additional information.

If a player's team makes the playoffs, the player will be eligible to return to the active roster on Dec. 29.

The suspensions of Pat and Kevin Williams, who are not related, may prove to be the most critical.

The Vikings lead Chicago by a game in the NFC North with four games left, in large part because the Williamses

are considered the NFL's best defensive tackle combination.

Last Sunday, they led a goal-line stand that kept Chicago from taking a 14-3 second-quarter lead in Minneapolis. On the first play after the Bears were stopped, the Vikings'

Gus Frerotte threw a 99-yard touchdown pass to Bernard Berrian, giving Minnesota a 10-7 lead it never lost—a 14-point swing.

"In response to this afternoon's ruling, the Minnesota Vikings are very disappointed in the National Football League's suspension of Kevin and Pat Williams," the team said in a statement. "At the appropriate time, we will have further comment."

Adolpho Birch, the NFL's vice president of law and labor policy, would not disclose during a conference call when the players tested positive.

Asked why it took until the final four games of the regular season to hand down the suspensions, Birch said it was "a function of a lot of factors."

"I think if you ask most coaches, every game is important. I don't think they'd differentiate between the first and the last," Birch said. "We do have things in place to get them done as quickly as possible. But we had to deal with the number of players involved and adjust travel schedules. We have to fit it around the players' ability to attend."

David Cornwell, the lawyer for Pittman and the three Saints, called the decisions "inconsistent with the objectives of the steroid policy."

"Deuce, Will, and Charles did not try to enhance their performance with steroids, nor did they knowingly expose themselves to the adverse health risks of a diuretic," Cornwell said in an e-mail. "They took a weight loss supplement that they had every reason to believe was safe."

In their appeals, some players said the banned substance Bumetanide was not listed as an ingredient in StarCaps, an over-the-counter weight-loss pill.

In fact, Jackson filed suit against StarCaps in Alameda County Superior Court in California last month, seeking restitution for any lost salary and damages for "false advertising and unfair business practices."



Deuce McAllister

But in issuing the suspensions, the league reiterated the section of its policy that reads:

"You and you alone are responsible for what goes into your body. Claiming that you used only legally available nutritional supplements will not help you in an appeal... Even if they are bought over-the-counter from a known establishment, there is currently no way to be sure that they contain the ingredients listed on the packaging or have not been tainted with prohibited substances..."

"If you take these prod-

ucts, you do so AT YOUR OWN RISK! For your own health and success in the league, we strongly encourage you to avoid the use of supplements altogether, or at the very least to be extremely careful about what you choose to take."

The NFL also said it sent two notifications about StarCaps on Dec. 19, 2006 — one to NFL club presidents, general managers and head athletic trainers and the second to NFLPA executive Stacy Robinson, who oversees the steroid policy for the union. That letter, according to the league, advised that

StarCaps had been added to the list of prohibited dietary supplement companies.

Asked if the NFL would review its policy on diuretics, Birch said the policy is reviewed every year.

"I suspect the players' association may want to look specifically at diuretics or some other issues. We'd be happy to do that with them if appropriate," he said. "I do think it's good policy. It works well. It has different aspects to it, but we will certainly listen with an open mind and if it's appropriate to make change, make changes."

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