

NFL

Jones' attorney says suspension unprecedented

Letter cites other players' punishment

WIRE REPORTS

NASHVILLE, TENN. • Since January 2000, Adam "Pacman" Jones' attorneys count at least 283 NFL players who have been arrested or charged for offenses ranging from drunken driving to domestic violence to weapons possession.

None was suspended a full season for personal conduct, a punishment Jones' attorneys say was "unprecedented in its severity."

That's part of the Titans cornerback's plea for leniency in a 24-page letter sent to the NFL and posted Monday on *The Tennessean* newspaper's Web site.

NFL spokesman Greg Aiello declined comment on the confidential document. Attorney Mark Trigg of Atlanta, who wrote the letter, confirmed it was authentic and had been sent to the NFL. But he declined to discuss the letter further, citing the confidentiality of the league's appeal process.

"We did not intend for the letter to be made public out of respect for the league and other players referenced in the letter, even though each of those arrests are a part of public record," he said.

The letter, dated May 1, was sent to the league's labor relations counsel. It does not include Jones' own five arrests since the Titans drafted him in April 2005, nor the 10 times he has been interviewed by police over the past two years.

Jones will meet with NFL commissioner Roger Goodell on Friday in New York to appeal.

Last month, the commis-

sioner suspended Jones for 2007 and Cincinnati receiver Chris Henry for eight games, warning both this was their last chance to salvage their careers.

The Titans have said Jones must change his behavior off the field before they let him return. They drafted safety Michael Griffin last month to help replace him in their secondary.

JAGS WAIVE CARROLL

JACKSONVILLE • The Jacksonville Jaguars waived cornerback Ahmad Carroll, two days after he was arrested on weapon and drug charges.

Carroll was questioned by Atlanta police early Saturday after he was identified as someone involved during a disturbance at a restaurant, authorities said.

Atlanta police spokesman officer James Polite said Carroll acknowledged he was carrying a 9mm pistol. Police then searched his car and found 11 pink tablets believed to be ecstasy.

He was arrested and charged with carrying a weapon without a license, possession of drugs and possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony.

Carroll, who is from Atlanta, was released Saturday on a \$7,000 bond.

Carroll signed with the Jags last October, a week after he was waived by Green Bay. He was a first-round draft pick by the Packers in 2004.

ELSEWHERE

STEELERS: A judge dismissed an assault charge against **Clayton Kershaw** after witnesses said he wasn't involved in a fight at a nightclub in March. After hearing from witnesses, Pittsburgh District Judge **Cathleen Bubash** dismissed a simple assault charge against Townsend at the end of a preliminary hearing.

OBIT: Former wide receiver **Tom Hutchinson**, who played on the 1964 Cleveland Browns team that won the NFL championship, has died. He was 65. Hutchinson died Saturday at the Taylor Regional Hospital in Campbellsville, Ky.



TIPS FOR EVERYONE: While reporting on the PGA of America's Free Lesson Month, the *Sun-Sentinel's* Randall Mell, right, finds out what can be expected during a 10-minute session with golf pro Don Renaud. **Staff photo/Susan Stocker**

Pros to diagnose swings

FREE LESSONS

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"The ultimate aim and hope is to get America playing golf," said Kevin Marrone, the South Florida PGA Section's executive director. "Growing the game is one of our missions and passions, and there's no question lessons lead to more people playing."

What can somebody signing up for a free lesson expect?

"I'm not going to try to undo too much," says Don Renaud, who teaches at All Golf at C.B. Smith Park in Pembroke Pines and also gives lessons at the Toski-Battersby Golf Learning Center in Coconut Creek. "I'm going to point out a problem I see, and I'm going to give you some drills to use to work on it."

Renaud, once a teaching professional at famed Oak Hill in Rochester, N.Y., says identi-

fying a flaw can be quick work with somebody who plays regularly, but more problematic with a beginner.

"For a beginner, 10 minutes isn't enough time, but I'll check grip, posture and alignment," Renaud said. "I'll give you a place to start so you're not swinging in the dark."

Renaud says he will assess grip, posture and alignment and also check out your club shafts.

"Fifty percent of the time, people aren't playing with the right shaft for their games," said Renaud, whose regular rate is \$80 per hour.

At the Good Start Golf School at Marina Lakes Golf Course in Delray Beach, Frank Clark's 10-minute free lesson includes a video swing analysis.

"We take a shot of a player's swing from the front and the back and pick out one prob-

lem, suggest a correction and have the player hit some balls to work on it," Clark said.

The PGA of America's free lessons come with no catch. There's no obligation to sign up for another lesson or to sit through any sales pitch. It's a 10-minute chance to get some free help and gauge whether future golf lessons are worth the investment of time and money.

"The majority of issues take place in the setup and address," Nelson said. "That's a fact, but it's amazing. I'll glance down a range and nobody will be laying down clubs to work on his alignment. To this day, Jack Nicklaus will do that."

Nelson said a great teacher doesn't have to break down an established player's swing and make him start from scratch.

"A great teacher can identify a swing flaw and then take a

fundamental and apply it to that specific player so he can repeat it," said Nelson, who teaches at a rate of \$45 per half hour.

Brian Gilchrist, head golf professional at Orangebrook Golf & Country Club in Hollywood, likes to crack that there's nothing that hitting 2,000 golf balls can't cure, but he'll tell you a lesson is more than a shortcut. It's a chance to test a pro's skill.

"There's a lot of wasted time spent on bad practice," said Gilchrist, one of two pros at Orangebrook giving free lessons this month. "A lot of players spend a lot of time working on the wrong things. You may find if a pro can help you out in 10 minutes, think what he could do in a half hour?"

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Learning to 'self-soothe' has been key to coping

MCNEIL

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the back seat, Austin White and Charly Devorss, met McNeil at the airport around 10 p.m. for the two-hour drive to Lee's home in Trenton, a town of about 6,000 in northwest Missouri.

McNeil was exhausted — he didn't sleep on the plane — and drifted off about an hour into the ride. The doctors told him he was lucky he was asleep when the truck started to skid; he didn't have time to tense up before the impact.

The truck spun on the eastbound lane into the median and overturned 2½ times. All four occupants were ejected: McNeil and Lee, who was driving, through the passenger window, White through the driver's window, Devorss through the broken driver's-side door.

When Missouri State Highway Patrol officers arrived, about 11 minutes after the accident, they found the truck upright, partially blocking the westbound lane. In the accident report, Cpl. Douglas Little was asked to circle the damaged areas on a diagram of the vehicle. He circled all 17 options.

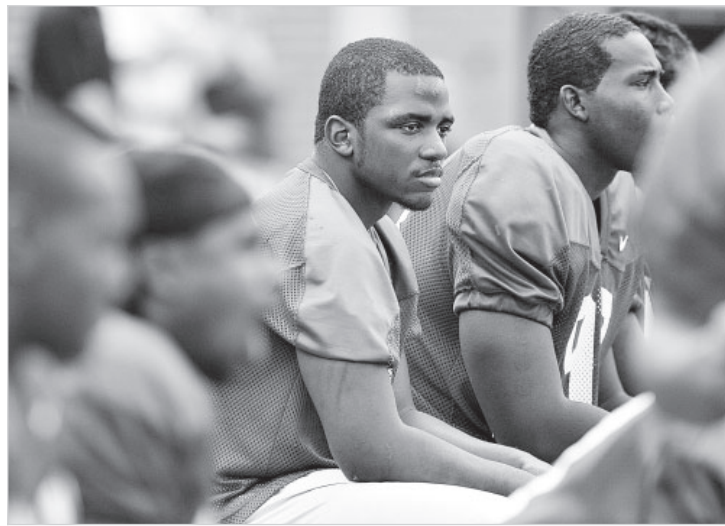
The officers found McNeil, Austin and Lee walking around on the side of the road. Devorss lay on an embankment; she was pronounced dead at the scene at 1:20 a.m.

That McNeil, 19, has been through worse helps explain his quiet demeanor two months after the accident.

"I basically taught myself how to self-soothe," he says. "That's what I call it, what I taught myself. Basically, I don't talk to anybody about my problems. I just take care of myself the best way I know how."

AN EARLY LOSS

When McNeil was 9, on Aug. 10, 1996, his 15-year-old broth-



EAGER TO RETURN: Kevin McNeil sat with teammates to watch FSU's April 14 scrimmage. He's still recovering from a March accident that left a young woman dead. **AP photo/Steve Cannon**

er, Reggie, was electrocuted while running a weed cutter through their grandparents' lawn.

Kevin was the first to find him.

Growing up, he had wanted to be like his only brother, a 6-foot-3, 283-pound high school defensive end who wore a size 18 shoe. Their mother couldn't envision Kevin playing football; he seemed too small.

But the sport turned out to be a source of discipline during high school when, his mother says, he had "a real bad attitude problem" — and now a reward on the horizon.

"Can't wait," McNeil says of his return to the field, contradicting the notion that tragedy makes life's other obsessions seem trivial.

"That was maybe the hardest thing I went through," he says of his brother's death. "But this has been really an emotional and physical wreck, as you can see."

Actually, while there's a scar on his forehead and a plastic boot on his left foot, where he fractured the fifth metatarsal in the accident, you would never know he's an emotional wreck.

Two days after the accident, on a Sunday, he flew back through Jacksonville to visit his mom. Although McNeil spent his last three years of high school in Kingsland, Ga., at Camden County High, his mother has moved back to Fernandina Beach, where the family used to reside.

McNeil wound up spending the rest of his spring break in Tallahassee, where he had surgery on his foot. When FSU's spring practice started a week later, he was on the sideline on crutches. He should be running this summer, then back to full contact by two-a-days in August.

SOMEONE TO LEAN ON

McNeil would've opened practice at the top of the depth chart at left end, further evidence of his rapid ascent since arriving on campus. Because of a paperwork backlog at the NCAA Clearinghouse last fall, McNeil missed the first three weeks of the season before he was declared eligible. By the end of the season, he had started twice. His showing in off-season mat drills appeared to indicate he finally had caught

up, and then some.

Then came the wreck. McNeil's coaches told him not to worry about football, and they offered him all the resources they could think of: counseling through FSU's student services, the team chaplain, their own open doors. He was told that any time he wanted to talk, there would be someone to listen.

He turned down all of them. Since the accident, he has spoken on a near-daily basis with Lee, and that's about it. He doesn't want his mother to worry too much about him, so he has tried not to lean on her.

With Lee, though, things are different.

"My big problem was I knew I was going to be OK because I've been through worse," he says. "But her — I didn't want her to carry that burden on her shoulder like she was the cause of everything."

Propping up his friend is the best way McNeil could think to help himself. She called the last week of spring practice to say she finally was returning to school, which was a relief for McNeil. Next month, he'll fly to Missouri to see her graduate from high school.

He is startled by the suggestion, in all of this, that he sounds mature.

"I see myself as different," he says. "That's the only way I can explain it, just different."

Patty McNeil, Kevin's mother, missed the first call from the hospital at 3 a.m. She was notified when the doctors tried again at 5 a.m. She wanted to get right on an airplane, but when she learned Devorss had died, she told relatives they would have to go in her place. They knew how she felt about losing a child.

"I also know learning about life and death that God doesn't put any more on you than you can bear," she says. "I said, 'God is not going to make it to the point where I won't be able

to handle this.' I just believe so hard in that now."

"I just think about losing Reggie; I think possibly I could have lost Kevin. God knows I couldn't have been able to handle that. He just spared me from all that."

Kevin was her youngest child, but when he became her only son — she also has a 22-year-old daughter — he became her baby even more. When she dropped off Kevin at FSU nearly a year ago, every one of his coaches urged her to stop smothering him.

"Coach Haggins, Coach Andrews, Coach Allen," she says, laughing, running through the defensive staff. "Everybody. 'Kill the umbilical cord, get on I-10, go on back home, we got this.'"

Their message didn't resonate at the time.

"I understand now," she says. "It took me this year after the accident to understand that I really have to let go and let Kevin become a man."

Listening to her, it is a little easier to imagine what McNeil is thinking as he "self-soothes." He has grown into his mother's faith, praying every day since the accident. And he is growing up, too.

"You know, it's the old saying: If it don't kill you, it'll make you tougher," says Jody Allen, FSU's defensive ends coach. "I hope that's the case with him, and thus far I think it probably has been."

"But you still hate for him to

have to hurt like he's hurt with all the different situations."

A VISIBLE CHANGE

For the most part, McNeil's teammates have been hesitant to ask about what happened. They don't know how to combine curiosity with concern in a tactful way. Family, though, always notices change — he has "totally, totally changed," his mother says.

She visited for FSU's spring game last month, even though Kevin spent it standing on the sideline. After the spring game, Patty wanted to take him grocery shopping and wash his clothes, like she always does.

He wouldn't let her. And he wants her to stop calling him her baby in front of his friends.

"They already think I'm spoiled," he told her.

"But you are spoiled," she said. "But I don't want everybody to know it."

He's also told her he realizes now that God has a plan for him. It may include, of all things, deep wounds. He tells her now he realizes he's "blessed." It is the exact opposite lesson anyone could imagine for a teenager who has been trailed by misfortune.

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