

The following letter and accompanying memo were sent to each NFL owner today by Commissioner Goodell.

Since becoming Commissioner, my focus has been on ensuring that the NFL is held in the highest regard by our fans, players, business partners, and public authorities. My commitment has always been to do what is right and to protect the integrity of the game, both now and long into the future.

Recently, we have addressed issues of respect – respect for co-workers, opponents, fans, game officials, and others. Whether in the context of workplace conduct, advancing policies of diversity and inclusion, or promoting professionalism in all we do, our mission has been to create and sustain model workplaces filled with people of character. Although the NFL is celebrated for what happens on the field, we must be equally vigilant in what we do off the field.

At times, however, and despite our best efforts, we fall short of our goals. We clearly did so in response to a recent incident of domestic violence. We allowed our standards to fall below where they should be and lost an important opportunity to emphasize our strong stance on a critical issue and the effective programs we have in place. My disciplinary decision led the public to question our sincerity, our commitment, and whether we understood the toll that domestic violence inflicts on so many families. I take responsibility both for the decision and for ensuring that our actions in the future properly reflect our values. I didn't get it right. Simply put, we have to do better. And we will.

The public response reinforced my belief that the NFL is held to a higher standard, and properly so. Much of the criticism stemmed from a fundamental recognition that the NFL is a leader, that we do stand for important values, and that we can project those values in ways that have a positive

impact beyond professional football. We embrace this role and the responsibility that comes with it. We will listen openly, engage our critics constructively, and seek continuous improvement in everything we do. We will use this opportunity to create a positive outcome by promoting policies of respect for women both within and outside of the workplace. We will work with nationally recognized experts to ensure that the NFL has a model policy on domestic violence and sexual assault. We will invest time and resources in training, programs and services that will become part of our culture. And we will increase the sanctions imposed on NFL personnel who violate our policies.

In the past few weeks, I have reviewed all aspects of our Personal Conduct Policy and met with a wide range of experts (several of whom we have been working with for some time), as well as with the NFLPA and many of you. Those discussions will continue. They have helped us to identify a number of steps that will better communicate our position and strengthen our policies on domestic violence and sexual assault.

**These steps are based on a clear, simple principle: domestic violence and sexual assault are wrong. They are illegal. They have no place in the NFL and are unacceptable in any way, under any circumstances. That has been and remains our policy.**

Many of you have done excellent work in this field, both personally and through the efforts of concerned players and your community relations and player engagement departments. Our goals are to prevent violence, impose appropriate discipline, provide professional support resources when appropriate, and publicly embrace a leadership role on this issue.

Consistent with that view, I have directed the

following actions to reinforce and enhance our policies:

First, we will continue our work with leading experts to expand the scope of our education on domestic violence and sexual assault for **all** NFL personnel – players and non-players. This will include enhanced training for entering players through the Rookie Symposium and Rookie Success Program, as well as new programs designed for veteran players and other NFL personnel. All NFL personnel – players and non-players – will receive information about available league resources and local support and advocacy groups in their community.

Second, our club Player Engagement Directors, Human Resource Executives, and other appropriate team personnel will undergo comprehensive training to help them understand and identify risk factors associated with domestic violence and sexual assault. Any person identified as being at risk will be afforded private, confidential assistance. Persons who decline this assistance will be held accountable for that decision in determining discipline for any subsequent act of domestic violence or sexual assault. This is a complicated matter and must be approached with care. We will work with experts to identify strategies based on the most reliable research, recognizing that violence can and does take different forms but generally involves a pattern of coercive behavior.

Third, we will ensure that the NFL LifeLine and NFL Total Wellness Program are staffed with personnel trained to provide prompt and confidential assistance to anyone at risk of domestic violence or sexual assault – whether as a victim or potential aggressor. Information regarding these resources will be furnished to all NFL personnel and their families. Our Player Engagement Directors and Human Resource Executives will meet with team spouses and significant others to ensure that they are aware of the resources available to

them as NFL family members, including the ability to seek confidential assistance through independent local resources, as well as through the club or the NFL Total Wellness Program. In this respect, we will utilize our existing, established telephone and on-line programs, and will communicate the full range of available services to all NFL personnel and their families.

Fourth, the outside groups we met with have emphasized that the NFL can play an important role in communities throughout the nation. Consistent with that advice, we will expand the educational components in our college, high school and youth football programs that address domestic violence and sexual assault. We will seek to create and promote programs that develop the character of the young men who play, coach or manage our game, emphasizing respect for women and appropriate ways to resolve conflicts. Outreach efforts embodied in these programs will help young people recognize, establish and maintain healthy relationships. In our earliest contact with young men, we can communicate our expectations, establish NFL standards of conduct, and stress the responsibility that all men have to adhere to those standards.

Fifth, we recognize that domestic violence and sexual assault are broad social issues, affecting millions of people. We want our public role to be both constructive and effective. In the coming months, we will explore meaningful ways to incorporate domestic violence and sexual assault awareness and prevention into our public service work. We will do this with the assistance of responsible outside organizations and the potential participation of current and former players, coaches and families who have been affected and are willing to speak out. Actions we take in this respect will be sensitive, thoughtful and will recognize the positive role models and high character presented by so many men in the NFL.

Finally, and consistent with our Personal Conduct Policy, our own response to domestic violence or sexual assault incidents by NFL personnel will include new elements of evaluation, treatment and family support, as well as enhanced discipline. We will address these issues fairly and thoughtfully, respecting the rights of all involved and giving proper deference to law enforcement and the courts. If someone is charged with domestic violence or sexual assault, there will be a mandatory evaluation and, where professionally indicated, counseling or other specialized services. Effective immediately, violations of the Personal Conduct Policy regarding assault, battery, domestic violence or sexual assault that involve physical force will be subject to a suspension without pay of six games for a first offense, with consideration given to mitigating factors, as well as a longer suspension when circumstances warrant. Among the circumstances that would merit a more severe penalty would be a prior incident before joining the NFL, or violence involving a weapon, choking, repeated striking, or when the act is committed against a pregnant woman or in the presence of a child. A second offense will result in banishment from the NFL; while an individual may petition for reinstatement after one year, there will be no presumption or assurance that the petition will be granted. These disciplinary standards will apply to all NFL personnel.

With very few exceptions, NFL personnel conduct themselves in an exemplary way. But even one case of domestic violence or sexual assault is unacceptable. The reality is that domestic violence and sexual assault are often hidden crimes, ones that are under-reported and under-acknowledged. The steps we are taking will reinforce our commitment to address this issue constructively.

In addition to focusing on domestic violence and sexual assault, we will continue to maintain strong policies regarding

weapons offenses. We are similarly working to strengthen our response to impaired driving. We have sought – unsuccessfully – for several years to obtain the NFLPA’s agreement to more stringent discipline for DUI, including mandatory deactivation for the game immediately following an arrest and a minimum two-game suspension for a first violation of law. We will continue to press our position on this issue in the hope of securing the union’s agreement.

There are three steps that each club should take promptly: first, post and distribute the attached “Memorandum to All NFL Personnel” to every player under contract to your club; second, ensure that your head coach reviews the information in that notice with his staff and with all your players; and third, share this letter and the attached Memorandum with *all* members of your organization, including your team president, General Manager, Human Resources Executive, Security Director, and Player Engagement Director.

In the coming weeks, we will contact all clubs on further steps to be taken in support of these initiatives. I am grateful for the thoughtful advice received from so many of you and for the support that I know you will give to this important work.

## **MEMORANDUM TO ALL NFL PERSONNEL**

**Domestic violence and sexual assault are wrong. They are illegal. They are never acceptable and have no place in the NFL under any circumstances.**

Our Personal Conduct Policy has long made clear that domestic violence and sexual assault are unacceptable. We clearly

must do a better job of addressing these incidents in the NFL. And we will.

Earlier today, I sent NFL owners a letter that identified specific actions we will take to improve our response to domestic violence and sexual assault. Those actions include the following:

- n All NFL Personnel will participate in new and enhanced educational programs on domestic violence and sexual assault. We will also increase our outreach to college and youth football programs.

- n Families will receive detailed information about available services and resources, both through the club and independent of the club. These resources and services will be available to employees and their families on a confidential basis.

- n Violations of the Personal Conduct Policy regarding assault, battery, domestic violence and sexual assault that involve physical force will be subject to enhanced discipline. A first offense will be subject to a suspension of six weeks without pay. Mitigating circumstances will be considered, and more severe discipline will be imposed if there are aggravating circumstances such as the presence or use of a weapon, choking, repeated striking, or when the act is committed against a pregnant woman or in the presence of a child. A second offense will result in banishment from the league; an offender may petition for reinstatement after one year but there is no assurance that the petition will be granted. These disciplinary consequences apply to all NFL personnel.

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If you believe that you or someone you know may be at risk of domestic violence or other misconduct, we strongly encourage you to seek assistance through your club's director of player engagement, human resources department, the NFL LifeLine or an independent local domestic violence resource. Help is available and can prevent potentially tragic incidents.

ROGER GOODELL

COMMISSIONER