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COMMUNICATIONS

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**NFL DISCLOSES FINDINGS OF INVESTIGATION
INTO VIOLATIONS OF "BOUNTY RULE"**

A lengthy investigation by the NFL's security department has disclosed that between 22 and 27 defensive players on the New Orleans Saints, as well as at least one assistant coach, maintained a "bounty" program funded primarily by players in violation of NFL rules during the 2009, 2010 and 2011 seasons, the NFL announced today.

The league's investigation determined that this improper "Pay for Performance" program included "bounty" payments to players for inflicting injuries on opposing players that would result in them being removed from a game.

The findings – corroborated by multiple independent sources – have been presented to Commissioner Roger Goodell, who will determine the appropriate discipline for the violation.

"The payments here are particularly troubling because they involved not just payments for 'performance,' but also for injuring opposing players," Commissioner Goodell said. "The bounty rule promotes two key elements of NFL football: player safety and competitive integrity.

"It is our responsibility to protect player safety and the integrity of our game, and this type of conduct will not be tolerated. We have made significant progress in changing the culture with respect to player safety and we are not going to relent. We have more work to do and we will do it."

The players regularly contributed cash into a pool and received improper cash payments of two kinds from the pool based on their play in the previous week's game. Payments were made for plays such as interceptions and fumble recoveries, but the program also included "bounty" payments for "cart-offs" (meaning that the opposing player was carried off the field) and "knockouts" (meaning that the opposing player was not able to return to the game).

The investigation showed that the total amount of funds in the pool may have reached \$50,000 or more at its height during the 2009 playoffs. The program paid players \$1,500 for a "knockout" and \$1,000 for a "cart-off" with payouts doubling or tripling during the playoffs.

The investigation included the review of approximately 18,000 documents totaling more than 50,000 pages, interviews of a wide range of individuals and the use of outside forensic experts to verify the authenticity of key documents.

The NFL has a longstanding rule prohibiting "Non-Contract Bonuses." Non-contract bonuses violate both the NFL Constitution and By-Laws and the Collective Bargaining Agreement. Clubs are advised every year of this rule in a memo from the commissioner. Citing Sections 9.1(C)(8), and 9.3(F) and (G) of the Constitution and By-Laws, the memo for the 2011 season stated:

"No bonus or award may directly or indirectly be offered, promised, announced, or paid to a player for his or his team's performance against a particular team or opposing player or a particular group thereof. No bonuses or awards may be offered or paid for on field misconduct (for example, personal fouls to or injuries inflicted on opposing players)."

"Our investigation began in early 2010 when allegations were first made that Saints players had targeted opposing players, including Kurt Warner of the Cardinals and Brett Favre of the Vikings," Commissioner Goodell said. "Our security department interviewed numerous players and other individuals. At the time, those interviewed denied that any such program existed and the player that made the allegation retracted his earlier assertions. As a result, the allegations could not be proven. We recently received significant and credible new information and the investigation was re-opened during the latter part of the 2011 season."

The additional investigation established the following facts:

1. During the 2009, 2010 and 2011 seasons, the players and other participants involved used their own money to fund a "Pay for Performance" program. Players earned cash awards for plays such as interceptions or fumble recoveries. They also earned "bounty" payments for "cart-offs" and "knockouts." All such payments violate league rules for non-contract bonuses.
2. Players were willing and enthusiastic participants in the program, contributing regularly and at times pledging large amounts. Between 22 and 27 defensive players contributed funds to the pool over the course of three NFL seasons. In some cases, the amounts pledged were both significant and directed against a specific opposing player.
3. The bounty program was administered by defensive coordinator Gregg Williams with the knowledge of other defensive coaches. Funds were contributed on occasion by Williams.
4. Saints owner Tom Benson gave immediate and full cooperation to the investigators. The evidence conclusively established that Mr. Benson was not aware of the bounty program. When informed earlier this year of the new information, Mr. Benson advised league staff that he had directed his general manager, Mickey Loomis, to ensure that any bounty program be discontinued immediately. The evidence showed that Mr. Loomis did not carry out Mr. Benson's directions. Similarly, when the initial allegations were discussed with Mr. Loomis in 2010, he denied any knowledge of a bounty program and pledged that he would ensure that no such program was in place. There is no evidence that Mr. Loomis took any effective action to stop these practices.
5. Although head coach Sean Payton was not a direct participant in the funding or administration of the program, he was aware of the allegations, did not make any detailed inquiry or otherwise seek to learn the facts, and failed to stop the bounty program. He never instructed his assistant coaches or players that a bounty program was improper and could not continue.
6. There is no question that a bounty program violates long-standing league rules. Payments of this type – even for legitimate plays such as interceptions or fumble recoveries – are forbidden because they are inconsistent with the Collective Bargaining Agreement and well-accepted rules relating to NFL player contracts.

Commissioner Goodell has advised the Saints that he will hold further proceedings to determine the discipline to be assessed against individuals and the club. This will include conferring with the NFL Players Association and individual player leaders regarding appropriate discipline and remedial steps.

The discipline could include fines and suspensions and, in light of the competitive nature of the violation, forfeiture of draft choices. Any discipline may be appealed as provided for in the Constitution and By-Laws and Collective Bargaining Agreement. Any appeal would be heard and decided by the commissioner.

Commissioner Goodell also advised the Saints that he is retaining jurisdiction and reserving his authority to impose further discipline if additional information comes to his attention.

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