

N.F.L. Wants Players to Stay Out of Trouble

MIAMI (AP) - Saying "one incident is too many," NFL commissioner Roger Goodell wants players to stay out of trouble and will meet with them to figure out how to do that.

Though the league's black eye this season was the main topic of Goodell's first Super Bowl news conference, he also talked about concussions, insisting a player's health takes precedence over football issues. Referring to a spate of player arrests and the shooting death of Broncos cornerback Darrent Williams, Goodell said, "We have to do something about it. It's a mutually important issue." "We have to educate our players to the issues out there," he said Friday. "We are raised to a higher standard in the NFL. We must make sure the players are more accountable and our clubs are more accountable." Goodell and NFL players' union chief Gene Upshaw will meet with players "to gauge their perspective on what is really happening." In the past few months, nine Cincinnati Bengals players have been arrested. One player in Sunday's Super Bowl, Chicago Bears defensive tackle Tank Johnson, still faces weapons-related charges and needed permission from an Illinois judge just to travel to the title game against the Indianapolis Colts. "I don't see it happening in droves. I think it's just a few, but that's a few too many," said Goodell, who replaced Paul Tagliabue as commissioner in September. "We recognize some players don't do what we want them to do and when that happens, we have the means to deal with it." Responding to reports that former Patriots linebacker Ted Johnson was forced to practice with a concussion, Goodell praised team trainers and league doctors who deal with concussions and said, "I certainly hope that our coaches always are looking out for the medical well-being of the players." He said he needed more information on the Patriots' situation before commenting directly about it. "I don't see a conflict of interest with our trainers. I think they are out there for the welfare of the players," Goodell said. He commended the players for taking an active role in trying to eliminate use of illegal substances. Goodell also said not allowing players who are suspended under the drug policy to garner postseason awards is "a huge priority for us." San Diego linebacker Shawn Merriman made the All-Pro team, will play in the Pro Bowl and was considered a front-runner for Defensive Player of the Year despite sitting out four games for violating the substance policy. Several players, including Miami end Jason Taylor, who was voted the top defensive player, criticized Merriman receiving such honors. "Our players are the ones who stood up and said they don't want this in our game and that somebody who violates this doesn't deserve a Pro Bowl spot," Goodell said. He cited the hiring of Mike Tomlin as coach of the Steelers and the presence of Tony Dungy and Lovie Smith as head coaches in the Super Bowl as further proof the "Rooney Rule" on minority hirings is working. Steelers owner Dan Rooney wrote the rule that requires teams to interview minority candidates for off-field jobs. "I hope someday the Rooney Rule will not be necessary," Goodell said. "The clubs are benefiting and, of course, it's the right thing to do." On other issues, Goodell:-- expressed confidence that the league and union will continue to have labor peace; the collective bargaining agreement runs through 2010. Owners have an option of voiding the CBA in 2008 to possibly restructure the way they and the union do business in the salary-cap era.-- said the league is conducting its own investigation of urine or blood testing for human growth hormone.-- addressed complaints from retired players about their pensions, saying "we're very concerned to see one of our former players who made this game great have medical issues. We have to sit down and be creative. We need to address that directly with them."-- reiterated the league's opposition to gambling and "keeping a strong line between the NFL and sports betting. I don't think it is in the best interest of the NFL to have any association with sports betting."