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NFL general counsel memo to owners on Ray Rice ruling

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Following Friday's ruling in the [Ray Rice](#) appeal, NFL general counsel Jeff Pash sent a memo to club owners and presidents. NFL Media Insider Ian Rapoport obtained the full memo Saturday:

Earlier today, retired federal judge Barbara Jones issued her decision in the appeal filed by the NFLPA from the indefinite suspension imposed on [Ray Rice](#). Judge Jones vacated the indefinite suspension, finding that Mr. Rice did not mislead the Commissioner in describing his actions toward Janay Palmer, who was his fiancée. The decision turned on whether Mr. Rice told the Commissioner that he "hit" Miss Palmer (rather than that he "slapped" her) and whether he claimed that she "knocked herself out" by striking her head in the elevator. Judge Jones found that when he met with the Commissioner last June, Mr. Rice sufficiently described his conduct and that his description was not misleading when compared to the later release of the videotape from inside the hotel elevator.

No part of Judge Jones's decision questions the Commissioner's honesty or integrity, nor his good faith consideration of the issue when he imposed the indefinite suspension on Mr. Rice. Nor is there any suggestion that the Commissioner had seen the video from inside the elevator before it became public, or knew of the contents of the video.

Judge Jones's decision ends the disciplinary proceedings relating to [Ray Rice](#). He remains free to sign with a contract and is eligible to participate without restriction upon signing a contract. The decision has no bearing on the current work on a revised Personal Conduct Policy, nor on the initiatives announced by the Commissioner on August 28 regarding domestic violence and sexual assault. Similarly, the decision is limited to [Ray Rice](#) and should have no effect on any other pending or prospective disciplinary matters.

The Commissioner has already taken numerous steps to ensure that the unique issues addressed in the [Ray Rice](#) matter are not presented again. First, he has substantially enhanced the league's investigative resources by engaging outside professionals with experience in domestic violence and sexual assault matters. This will help to ensure that disciplinary decisions are based on a more complete factual record, and that the record is developed with the active participation of persons with deep knowledge of these subjects.

Second, the Commissioner has announced significantly enhanced discipline for violations of the Personal Conduct Policy that involve domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and similar offenses. As Judge Jones noted in her decision, the initial discipline imposed on [Ray Rice](#) was based on the Commissioner's desire to be consistent and fair, as well as the weight he placed on the decisions of the New Jersey prosecutors. However, as she notes, had the Commissioner decided to impose an indefinite suspension at the outset, it would have been very difficult for her or any appeal officer to have overturned that decision. With a new baseline discipline of a six-game suspension without pay, adjusted for aggravating or mitigating factors, there should no longer be any question that the league is addressing these types of misconduct with the seriousness they deserve.

Third, we have engaged as advisors individuals with specialized experience in both specific offenses and the prosecution of those offenses. This will allow the Commissioner a better opportunity to evaluate and weigh evidence developed by investigators; to give appropriate but not undue deference to decisions by local police and prosecutors; and to ensure that the process of discipline is both fair to players and other employees, and properly balances considerations of rehabilitation, services to victims, and punishment.

Based on these and other steps, we are confident that the issues addressed by Judge Jones will not be part of future disciplinary decisions of the Commissioner. We will of course review the decision in detail to identify any other aspects that can be addressed within the comprehensive revision of the Personal Conduct Policy that is now underway. This revised Policy will include significant elements regarding independent investigations, more precise definition of the standards of conduct expected of everyone in the NFL, ongoing programs of prevention and education, and greater participation of experts in assessing issues surrounding law enforcement, clinical and therapeutic matters, and discipline. This revised policy will be a key subject of discussion at the December 10 league meeting. We look forward to discussing these issues with you then, and would be pleased to respond to any questions in the meantime.

We have issued the following public statements: "We respect Judge Jones's decision to reinstate [Ray Rice](#) from his indefinite suspension for violating the league's Personal Conduct Policy in an incident of domestic violence. [Ray Rice](#) is a free agent and has been eligible to be signed by an NFL team since he was released by the [Ravens](#). Based on Judge Jones's decision, he will be eligible to play upon signing a new contract. Judge Jones's ruling underscores the urgency of our work to develop and implement a clear, fair and comprehensive new personal conduct policy. We expect this policy to be completed and announced in the weeks ahead. Our focus is on consistently enforcing an improved policy going forward."