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The Ricky Williams Saga...An Unfinished Narrative

by Brandon Pasker

The career of Ricky Williams has been a roller coaster

Erricky Lynne Williams Jr was born May 21, 1977 in San Diego, California. His parents separated when he was only six years old. Williams attended Patrick Henry High School and played primarily baseball and football.

Ricky was then drafted in the 8th round of the 1995 baseball amateur draft by the Philadelphia Phillies out of high school. He played four years with the Class "A" level Batavia Muckdogs. After his four year stint with Batavia Williams was then taken in the Rule 5 draft by the Montreal Expos in 1998. His rights, however, were eventually sold to the Texas Rangers.

Ricky's college career is a historic one. As most of us who have not been living in a shell or under a bridge for the last 10 years know, Ricky played at the University of Texas at Austin. He became the career rushing leader in NCAA Division I-A history by rushing for 6,279 yards in 1998. Ricky Williams was on his way to becoming a top pick in the NFL Draft.

Sure enough in 1999 the New Orleans Saints and coach Mike Ditka took Williams with the number five overall pick. The Saints were so eager to get Williams that then New Orleans head coach coach Mike Ditka traded all of the Saints 1999 draft picks to move up and get Williams. All of their draft picks. Every one. This would be the first time that one player would be chosen by a particular team in the NFL draft. This spurred the infamous bride and groom cover of ESPN the magazine which featured coach Ditka dressed up as a sharp handsome groom and Ricky as, well, the bride in a lavish gown. Williams spent three years in New Orleans. During his time there he rushed for 3,129 yards with 16 TD's while averaging 3.8 yards a carry. A big move for Williams,

however, was on the way.

In 2001 the New Orleans Saints, who went into the season with high hopes, finished with a 7-9 record. The coach who took a chance on Ricky in the 1999 draft was fired. Williams was unsure if he would still be a part of the Saints franchise.

At the same time, in Miami, second year head coach Dave Wannstedt needs help in the backfield. Then it happens; a new chapter begins in the Ricky Williams saga. Williams is traded to the Miami Dolphins for a first round draft pick in 2002 and a conditional draft pick in 2003. He is officially a Miami Dolphin.

The hype is extensive and everyone has high hopes for Ricky. He lives up to it. In his first year in Miami he leads the NFL with 1,853 rushing yards. He is named to the All-Pro team and is in Hawaii playing in his first Pro-Bowl.

He had a slight drop-off next year rushing for 1,375 yards while averaging only 3.5 yards a carry. Still a noteworthy season for any running back. With two seasons under his belt Ricky is flourishing as a Dolphin. Little does everyone know that the Ricky Williams saga is about to take a huge twist.

BOOM. May 14th, 2004. It is announced that Ricky Williams has tested positive for marijuana in December 2003 and is facing a $650,000 fine and a four game suspension for

violating the substance-abuse policy. Before training camp began in Davie, Florida in 2004, Ricky Williams announced his retirement from the National Football League.

According to the New York Post, "Errick Lynne Williams said he first felt the effects of marijuana during his senior year at the University of Texas. He had smoked before, maybe a dozen times at parties, but said he never felt high until one night after a breakup, when his mild depression lifted in a cloud of smoke."

He then went off on his own. He left to find himself. He studied Ayurveda, which is an ancient Indian system of holistic medicine, began doing yoga and also dabbled with massage therapy. He needed to find himself. He needed to rid himself of the habit that hampered his career and image.

The next chapter began on July 24th, 2005. Williams announced that he would be returning the the NFL and playing for the Miami Dolphins once again. He agreed to take a four game suspension and pay back a percentage of his signing bonus. He saw limited action on the field in 2003. He started three games but still managed to rack up 743 yards with 6 TD's while averaging 4.4 yard a touch. Despite a promising season Williams made another foolish mistake.

On February 20th, 2006 the NFL announced that Williams had again violated the substance-abuse policy. On April 25th, 2006 he was suspended for the entire 2006 NFL

season for testing positive for a drug "other than marijuana". It is believed that it may have direct correlations with the herbal medicines that he was involved with while studying Ayurveda. Ricky decided that instead of sitting out another year of football he would take his talents elsewhere.

On May 28th, 2006 Ricky Williams became the highest paid player in Canadian Football League history. He agreed to play the 2006 season with the Toronto Argonauts under the condition he returned to the Miami Dolphins in 2007. Ricky complied.

He returned to the Miami Dolphins. In October 2007 commissioner Roger Goodell reinstated Williams into the NFL. He agreed to strict weekly drug testing. He played only one game in 2007; on Monday Night against the Pittsburgh Steelers. On Rickys sixth run of the night Steelers linebacker Lawrence Timmons stepped on his right shoulder, tearing his pectoral muscle. He would be out for the remainder of the season.

He came back in 2008. His body had a year of rest. He looked big. He looked fast. He ran for 659 yards. He had 4 TD's. He averaged 4.1 yards a carry. He even upheaved the Miami Dolphins 2005 number one overall pick Ronnie Brown for the starting tailback position early in the season for two games and for one game midway through the season. He had his fair share of struggles, particularly early in the season, but had above average games against New

England, Seattle, Houston, St Louis and in the final game of the season against the New York Jets.

He looked fast on the field. He hit holes hard. He looked like the old Ricky Williams. The pre "Marijuana addicted" Ricky Williams.

Today it is August 6th 2009. Ricky Williams is still a part of this Miami Dolphins team. He is part of a running back tandem that is considered by many the top tandem in the National Football League. He looks strong at camp. He looks fast. He looks like the old Ricky Williams.

It will be seen on opening day and through the 2009 season if Ricky can truly leave the kind of stamp he wants to leave on the game. The real legacy he wants to leave. At this point it would be as one of the most talented backs to ever play the game. A man who had a problem, realized his problem, overcame his problem and succeeded in becoming the player he knew he was capable of. The man he knew he was capable of.

It seems as though the addiction with marijuana that plagued Ricky in past years is behind him. It seems as though his focus is football. It seems as though he has found other outlets to take out his stress. If this quote from the New York Times holds true, look for Ricky Williams to be a key part to the best running back tandem in the National Football League in 2009.

"Since I've become famous for it, I'm amazed at how many people ask me to smoke," Williams said. "For me to move on with my career, this has to be behind me. I don't want to keep being reminded of it on a daily basis."

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