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# The Quick Rise and Fall of Deshaun Watson

Matt Price, Staff Reporter

Houston Texans quarterback, Deshaun Watson, is one of the elite talents in the National Football League (NFL), making him one of the most desired players available on the trade market. That was until many massage therapists filed civil lawsuits against Watson claiming sexual misconduct, sparking investigations by the NFL as well as the Houston Police Department. NFL media personnel spent the beginning of March covering Watson's trade wishes, analyzing which teams might have the capital to trade for him. However, just two weeks later, Watson's downfall began.

The day before the official start of the 2021-2022 NFL season, Tony Buzbee, a Houston lawyer, posted a photo of Watson on his personal Instagram page with a caption that states, "I am extremely proud to represent those who have no perceived power against those who have PERCEIVED power."

The post was vague, leaving much room for interpretation. However, despite the caption ending with, "This case we just filed against Watson isn't about money—it's about dignity and stopping behavior that should be stopped, NOW! Stay tuned for details," no one could have guessed that just 24 hours later, there would be three lawsuits filed against Watson.

By April 5, Buzbee announced that the number of civil lawsuits had reached 22. Two of the women publicly came forward to announce their complaints the next day, the other 20 remained anonymous. On the same day, the Texans organization sent an email to season ticket holders that addressed the allegations against Watson.

"We want to assure you that we take these allegations very seriously... While we await the conclusion of these investigations, we express our strong stance against any form of sexual assault," the email stated.

Shortly after, Watson's lawyer, Rusty Hardin, filed a motion for the victims to reveal their identities which was granted by the Harris County District Court on April 9. According to Aaron Reiss of The Athletic, the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure that Hardin cited for his motion are as followed.

"Texas Rules of Civil Procedure that don't allow civil lawsuits under a pseudonym. One requires plaintiffs to state their names if they are known. The other requires the defense to receive fair notice of claims. In sexual assault cases, state law only offers minors an exception to these rules," Reiss said.

As a result, twelve women's identities will be revealed, eliminatinating their anonymity and potentially exposing them to online hate, abuse and harassment. One of Watson's accusers had dropped her case as a result of security concerns since.

Over the last few weeks, Watson and his attorney Hardin have repeatedly denied any wrongdoing.



Kim Nucum

All the suits filed against Watson are civil suits and not criminal. Nevertheless, the victims may have chosen to pursue civil charges rather than criminal primarily to conceal their identity. Seattle University Professor Kelli Rodriguez Currie explained why the accusers may have taken civil action instead.

“In civil suits the victim has more control. In criminal suits, the victims don’t get to be the people who decide whether or not criminal suits happen. Those are the prosecutors. There could be a lot of reasons why a prosecutor decides whether or not to press charges criminally. Some of those reasons could be whether or not the victim wants to go on the record and help the prosecution, and if the victim doesn’t want to testify that makes it really difficult for the prosecutor to win a case,” Rodriguez said.

This is not the first time a high-profile athlete has been accused of sexual misconduct. The NFL has yet to take a stance on punishment as the cases are just entering trial. Based on past misconduct situations, the NFL is rather unlikely to make an example out of Watson.

First-year psychology major Matthew Holme does not think the NFL will set precedent with Watson’s misconduct.

“Nowadays it’s all about money and Watson is a young and really talented quarterback. If they were to make an example out of someone it would be a lesser quarterback. Since it is all about money, they are not going to do anything to Deshaun Watson which is the sad truth honestly,” Holme said.

With the NFL draft coming up this week, teams may still be interested in taking a risk on Watson even with the civil case looming. Professor Kelli Rodriguez Currie would not be surprised to see teams who have made questionable signings recently may take a risk on Watson.

“I think that some teams will take the approach where you know as long as you can throw the ball, as long as you can run plays and be a leader it’s fine and I think other teams are very wary of alienating fans and other players, by going out on a limb with somebody who might be a little bit of a public relations risk,” Rodriguez said.

With the cases set to go to trial by jury, the NFL and its fans continue to watch closely. It cannot be guaranteed that the trial will start and finish prior to the start of the next NFL season, and whether or not Watson is able to play will rest in the hands of commissioner, Roger Goodell.

Jackson Hampton, a mathematics major and senior at the University of Minnesota believes the NFL should suspend Watson sooner rather than later.

“I think he should be suspended for a while, especially if it turns out these allegations are true, since there are 20 plus people, I would assume at this point they are true. I think he should for sure be suspended for a long while,” Hampton said.

Hampton also noted that he thinks some teams might still want Watson on their team despite his accompanying baggage.

“If all these allegations are true and if I was a GM (General Manager), I wouldn’t want him on my team... But I am sure as we know with Tyreek Hill and Kareem Hunt, if you have talent, then the NFL will keep you in there. So I would assume that they keep him (Watson) at some point,” Hampton said.

The NFL continues to be relatively silent despite announcing an investigation into Watson in early March.