

Seattle University

ScholarWorks @ SeattleU

The Spectator Online

Newspapers

11-16-2022

2022-11-16 Deshaun Watson's Controversial Return to Play Sparks Discussion

McKenna White
Seattle University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/spectator-online>

Recommended Citation

White, McKenna, "2022-11-16 Deshaun Watson's Controversial Return to Play Sparks Discussion" (2022).
The Spectator Online. 791.
<https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/spectator-online/791>

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Newspapers at ScholarWorks @ SeattleU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Spectator Online by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ SeattleU.



Deshaun Watson's Controversial Return to Play Sparks Discussion

McKenna White, News Editor

In the 13th game of the National Football League (NFL) season, controversial Cleveland Browns quarterback Deshaun Watson is slated to return to the football field. Watson's 2022-23 season debut comes after spending more than half the season out on suspension after 24 women came forward and accused him of sexual assault and misconduct.

The allegations against Watson came mainly from women who had worked as his masseuses, claiming that he pressured them into unwanted sexual contact during appointments. Watson dealt with 23 of the cases outside of court in confidential settlements, the last being a recent filing Oct. 13. While Watson is not currently facing any criminal charges, due to his breach of the NFL's personal conduct policy, he was dealt an 11-game suspension and a \$5 million fine.



Image courtesy Ben Hershey.

"It's been a hard year to be an NFL fan," First-Year Sports and Entertainment Management MBA student Harry Carey said. "It's disappointing to see your favorite league handle things that way."

In March, the Browns traded for Watson with the Houston Texans. During the 2020 season, the most recent in which he played, Watson had career highs in completion percentage (70.2%), passing yards (4,823) and touchdowns (33). His prowess on the field prompted the Browns to trade three first-round picks, one third-round pick and two fourth-round picks to add him to their roster. The five-year \$230 million guaranteed contract was negotiated in the midst of the allegations against him. Third-year Psychology major Matthew Holme feels that Watson's skills as a quarterback had a direct impact on his penalty, a phenomenon that has been seen previously.

"There have been a number of players like Kareem Hunt or Ray Lewis who have been accused of various crimes, and they ended up playing again," Holme said. "They were both stars in the league when they were accused."

In 2020, the NFL drafted a new Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). The CBA is an agreement between the NFL and the NFL Players Association, and the current CBA will be in effect through the 2030 season. Kallie Rodriguez Currie, advisory board chair to the MBA in sports entertainment management program, explained how the CBA affects player controversies.

"All of those suspension issues, regardless of the allegation, are governed and regulated by the Collective Bargaining Agreement," Currie said.

Under the terms of the most recent CBA, Watson's behavior breached the league's personal conduct policy, which states that a player must be formally charged with "a crime of violence, meaning that he is accused... of having engaged in a sexual assault by force or against a person who was incapable of giving consent." Rather than undergoing an extensive investigation by the NFL, Watson agreed to settle for a suspension and fine. Currie asserts that Watson's penalty is within the grounds of the current CBA's guidelines for infringements of the player conduct policy and is, in fact, more serious than it could have been. Originally, Sue L. Robinson, the former federal judge appointed by the NFL and NFL Players Association, suggested a six-game ban for the four cases included in the original discipline. The NFL appealed the ruling, seeking a yearlong suspension. The two sides compromised on an 11-game ban.

"If he had not agreed, the investigation would have continued. There probably would have been a more formal hearing, and the league would have issued a more formal penalty," Currie said. "The league did say that any future allegations, though, would be outside of that settlement."

Players look to get the most out of their contracts given that the average career length in the NFL is less than four years. While negotiating the CBA, this is something that is taken into consideration, especially on behalf of the Players Association. It is in the player's best interest to negotiate down and limit suspensions and fines in order to maximize profits. Currie thinks it's up to the fans to set new standards of conduct.

"The way we make our voices known is whether or not we choose to turn on the television. The money the franchises have, these salaries come from cable deals, merchandise sales and all the money that rolls around sports," Currie said. "If we want to make a statement about where they are putting their money, I think we need to vote with our wallet."

Since the first allegation against Watson emerged in March 2020, he has denied any wrongdoing. Despite the controversy surrounding his return to play, Watson will be joining the Browns on the football field, facing off against the Texans, his former team, Dec. 4.