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RODGERS' CHARITY WORK TO AVERT SUSPENSION?

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DAVIE -- Before Dolphins linebacker Derrick Rodgers accepts a plea for an aggravated battery charge from a July incident, his attorney will meet with the NFL and ask for leniency.

Ed O'Donnell is expected to meet with representatives from Commissioner Paul Tagliabue's office Saturday. He is hoping Rodgers' charitable efforts do not go unnoticed and that his client is not suspended for one game. Rodgers is one of the most active Dolphins in charitable affairs.

"From the beginning we've tried to work around a suspension," O'Donnell said. "We've told the league of all the good things Derrick has done, and we're hoping Derrick maybe could be treated in a different way. Not a special way, but if he's a bad guy, then he gets a game suspension. That's fine. But what does being a good guy get you? We're trying to work on that, and I wouldn't feel right if we didn't at least try."

Assistant State Attorney Herbert E. Walker III spoke to league officials this month.

"I don't have any personal objection to the NFL not suspending him, and I conveyed that to the NFL," Walker said. "But at the same time I don't feel it's the purview of the state attorney's office to dictate to the NFL how it polices its players."

Rodgers faces a one-game suspension under the league's personal conduct policy if he pleads guilty to the aggravated battery charge. In addition to aggravated battery, he faces charges of simple battery, simple assault, resisting arrest with violence and violation of a domestic violence injunction. The maximum prison time he faces is 21 years.

A court hearing is scheduled for Dec. 6, and if he does not accept the plea a trial is scheduled for Dec. 16. O'Donnell could ask for another continuance, but he indicated a plea agreement is close.

Rodgers was arrested after allegedly hitting William Peguero over the head with a metal chair at Lario's Restaurant on South Beach. He had confronted Peguero, who was with Rodgers' wife, Kareff, at the time. Peguero needed three stitches to close a cut on his head.

According to the league's conduct policy, any player "convicted of or admitting to a criminal violation (including a plea to a lesser included offense; a plea of nolo contendere or no contest; or the acceptance of a diversionary program, deferred adjudication, disposition of supervision, or

similar arrangement) will be subject to discipline as determined by the Commissioner. Such discipline may include a fine, suspension without pay and/or banishment from the League."

Rodgers could face a fine if he accepts the plea, but it's more likely he would be suspended. What isn't clear is whether a suspension would be upheld this season or next season. After the NFL's findings, Rodgers would have the right to appeal.

Rodgers declined to comment through a team spokesman.

The NFL will not comment on the case until it is settled.

Rodgers has been offered a plea that includes three years' probation, which could be reduced to 18 months if he stays out of trouble, and no jail time. Rodgers also would have to enter a domestic batterers program for 26 weeks, perform 100 hours of community service and donate \$500 to a domestic violence shelter. He also would have to stay away from Peguero, apologize to him and pay his medical bills. Peguero is in the process of a civil case against Rodgers.