



BRYNN ANDERSON/Associated Press file

**Atlanta Falcons first-round draft pick James Pearce Jr., speaks during a news conference, Friday, April 25, 2025, in Flowery Branch, Ga.**

# NFL suspends Falcons' Pearce Jr. 8 games

**BY MAURA CAREY**  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Atlanta Falcons edge rusher James Pearce Jr. will be suspended for the first eight games of the 2026 season for violating the league's personal conduct policy, the league announced Friday.

Pearce was arrested in February following a domestic dispute with his ex-girlfriend and WNBA player, Riquea Jackson. The incident took place in Doral, Florida.

Pearce's charges of aggravated battery with a deadly weapon, fleeing police and resisting arrest, and misdemeanor stalking could be dropped if he cooperates in a pretrial intervention program requiring random drug tests, distance from Jackson and staying out of legal trouble for one year.

Pearce will be available to participate in preseason games and all team activities until the suspension takes effect on Sunday, Aug. 30.

The second-year defensive end can be reinstated on Monday, Nov. 2, following Atlanta's Week 8 road game against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. The Falcons are set to play the Cincinnati Bengals in Madrid, Spain, the following week.

The Falcons' pass rush has taken a hit recently following Jalon Walker's season-ending ACL tear. The group is left with

Christian Harris, JD Bertrand, Samson Ebukam, Kendal Daniels and Bralen Trice. The Falcons also added Cameron Sample after Walker's injury.

Atlanta traded back to the No. 26 pick in the first round of the 2025 draft to select Pearce. The former Tennessee Volunteer has played a substantial role in transforming the Falcons' pass rush, leading the team with 10 1/2 sacks during his rookie season.

## OTHER SUSPENSIONS

Pearce was one of four suspensions the NFL handed out on Friday.

The NFL also suspended Commanders edge rusher Dorance Armstrong, Tennessee Titans safety Nazeeh Johnson and Buffalo Bills defensive tackle Phidarian Mathis.

Armstrong was suspended one game for violating the NFL's personal conduct policy. He will miss the Commanders season-opening game against Philadelphia on Sept. 13.

Armstrong opened training camp on the physically unable to perform list, but has since been activated to resume practicing. He was limited to playing seven games last season before tearing a knee ligament.

He's entering his ninth NFL season, and third with Washington.

Johnson was suspended six games for violating the league's policy on performance-enhancers. Mathis was issued a three-game suspension for violating the league's substances of abuse policy.

Under league rules, the players are allowed to practice and play with their respective teams through Aug. 30, when NFL teams are required to set their 53-player rosters.

Johnson is eligible to return for the Titans' home game against Cleveland on Oct. 25. Mathis can return for Buffalo's home game against New England on Oct. 4.

Johnson has three previous seasons of NFL experience, all with the Kansas City Chiefs, and signed with the Titans on July 27, just before the opening of training camp.

The 28-year-old had six starts in 29 NFL games with the Chiefs since being selected by Kansas City in the seventh round of the 2022 draft. A shoulder injury limited Johnson to appearing in just two games last season. He also missed the entire 2023 season with a torn ACL in his right knee.

The 28-year-old Mathis appeared in six games with the Bills last season. He spent his first three NFL seasons appearing in 23 games with Washington.



GENE J. PUSKAR/Associated Press

**Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Drew Allar (16) divers over Green Bay Packers linebacker Kristian Welch into the end zone for a touchdown in the second half of a preseason NFL football game in Pittsburgh on Thursday.**

# No clear early front-runner in the Steelers backup QB derby

**BY WILL GRAVES**  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

PITTSBURGH — If only Mike McCarthy graded on production, then Drew Allar would be in for smooth sailing when the Pittsburgh Steelers sit down to dissect their pre-season-opening win over Green Bay.

The rookie quarterback, however, is already well-versed in how his head coach's mind works. Yes, McCarthy was pleased after watching Allar throw for a pair of scores and run for another.

Yet the final product on a given play is only a piece of the puzzle. McCarthy is just as fixated on the process it takes to get there, which is why the 22-year-old Allar couldn't help but grin when asked about how his fundamentals are coming along, perhaps knowing the feedback he was going to receive in the aftermath.

"I'll probably get a minus grade on some of my footwork," Allar said. "It was kind of a crazy reverse out under center exchange. Other than that, I felt pretty good."

Just as importantly, he looked pretty good while leading three long scoring drives. The third-round pick was accurate while completing 10 of 13 passes. He frequently made the right decision on where to go with the ball and showcased his athleticism while diving over for a 3-yard touchdown run.

Not bad for his first game action since last fall, when his final year at Penn State ended prematurely with a left ankle injury.

"I feel like the first rushing touchdown I had was the first hit I've had

in, I don't know how long, but since mid-October," Allar said. "I feel like that kind of got the physical part out of the way. I feel like going against our defense every day in practice really helped me mentally prepare for the game."

Allar wasn't the only student of McCarthy's "quarterback school" who aced their first test. Will Howard, playing for the first time since leading Ohio State to the College Football Playoff championship in early 2025, had no issues running the two-minute offense. He connected with tight end Robert Tonyan frequently and didn't panic during a fourth down call near midfield that required him to roll to his left, where he flipped the ball to wide receiver Ben Skowronek for a first down.

The result was great, sure. So was the jolt of confidence felt when Howard heard the play call.

"You're, like, man, 'Coach is throwing the ball on fourth-and-1, and he's putting the ball in my hands,'" he said. "That feels great. I knew they were going to really trigger on that run. I think Aaron (Rodgers) had a little input on getting that play out there, and I appreciate him for that."

Rodgers, watching from the sideline with a headset on, promised to crack some dad jokes to keep the mood light. The reality is he spent most of the night serving as an experienced resource for Allar, Howard, and Mason Rudolph, as no clear front-runner to win the quarterback derby to serve as Rodgers' backup emerged.

McCarthy appears to be

in no hurry to make any sort of decision. Rudolph got the start and settled in after some shaky play by the first-team offensive line early. He consistently found rookie wide receiver Germie Bernard and did his best to keep plays alive to give the young play-makers around him time to get open.

"Not to be a broken record, I've been talking about it pretty much since the spring ... I really like the room," McCarthy said. "I think it's a really good quarterback room, and I thought they played that way tonight."

The guys behind center weren't the only ones who stood out. Tonyan, who caught 11 touchdown passes from Rodgers when both were in Green Bay in 2020, finished with four receptions for 61 yards. Bernard caught four passes for 51 yards, and rookie Kaden Wetjen showed his elusiveness on a 74-yard catch-and-run and later pulled in a touchdown pass from Allar.

Sure, it was just an exhibition game, and both sides were more focused on getting through it healthy than on coming up with some elaborate game plan. The scheming will come later.

The preseason opener was mostly just a progress report. Plenty of work remains, but for a first-year coaching staff trying to lay a foundation and for three quarterbacks trying to prove their worth, it was a promising start.

"We have a lot to clean up, but the passing game ... I know the numbers were pretty good," McCarthy said. "I liked the way our quarterbacks ran the offense, and that's a big thing."

# Timberwolves will retire Garnett's jersey after their Feb. 28 game vs. the Celtics

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MINNEAPOLIS — The Minnesota Timberwolves will retire Hall of Fame forward Kevin Garnett's No. 21 jersey after their game against the Boston Celtics this season.

The team announced Friday that the ceremony will take place following the Feb. 28 game at Target Center against the Celtics, who retired Garnett's jersey in 2022.

Garnett will become just the second player in the 37-year history of the fran-

chise to have his number retired, following the late Malik Sealy, a close friend and teammate of Garnett's who died in a car crash in 2000.

Garnett had a falling out with former Timberwolves owner Glen Taylor, but the club under new ownership made amends and hired him last year as a team ambassador. He made his first appearance at Target Center in April during the Minnesota's final game of the 2025-26 regular season.

Garnett won the NBA MVP award for the 2003-04

season while leading the Timberwolves to the Western Conference finals. After playing the first 12 years of his career for Minnesota, he was traded to the Celtics in 2007 and won an NBA title with them in his first year. He returned to Minnesota in 2015 and played his last of 21 seasons in the league there.

Garnett is the all-time Timberwolves leader in numerous statistical categories, including points, rebounds, blocks, assists and steals.

## ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS

Hardin County Board of Health is requesting Lump Sum bids for their Addition and Renovation Project located at 580 Westport Road in Elizabethtown, Kentucky. Bids are due at the Lincoln Trail District Health Department located at 108 New Glendale Road in Elizabethtown, Kentucky in Meeting Room B and in care of Lisa Pollok on Thursday, August 27, 2026 at 2:00 PM EST/ 1:00 PM CST. Bids will be opened in the Meeting Room and read aloud. Note that this project is Tax Exempt and Bidders ARE NOT to include taxes in their Bids. Scope of Work consists of, but is not limited to the following:

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Plans and Specifications are also available for review at the following locations:

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