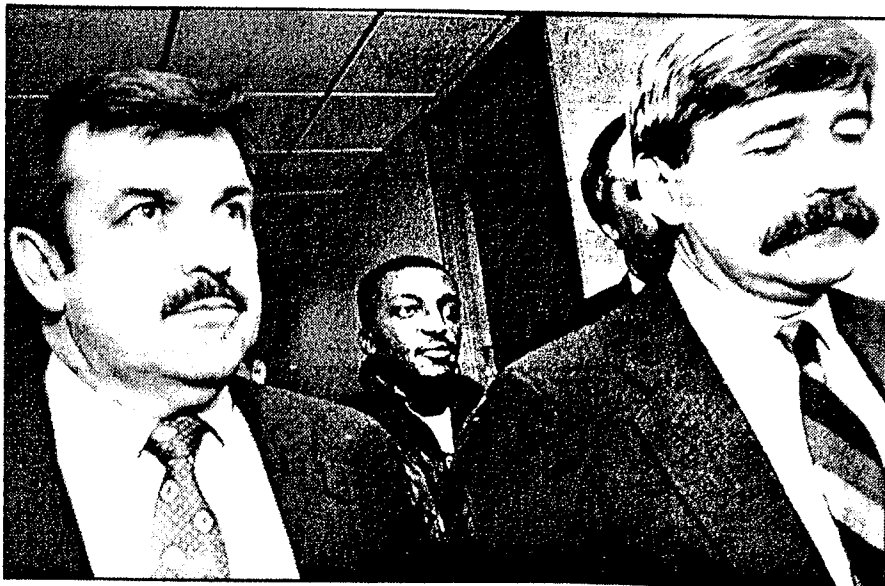


David Peoples of Winter Park stays ahead in Hawaii, B-2

Sports

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

Donald Igwebuike (center) is escorted to court by federal marshals.

Grand jury indicts Vikings' Igwebuike

By Tim Povtak

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

Minnesota Vikings kicker Donald Igwebuike was indicted Friday by a federal grand jury in Tampa that charged him and two other men with conspiring to import an estimated \$1 million worth of heroin.

Igwebuike, who was one of the NFL's most consistent kickers the previous five seasons with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, surrendered in Minneapolis, where he was released on \$50,000 bond.

He is scheduled to appear at 10 a.m. Wednesday in Tampa before federal magistrate Thomas Wilson to answer the charges.

Lee Barrett, an attorney from Orlando who

will be defending Igwebuike, said his client will plead not guilty to all charges. He has been charged with conspiracy to import, conspiracy to distribute and importation of heroin. If convicted, he could face up to 120 years in prison and \$6 million in fines.

"We fully expect Donald to be vindicated," Barrett said.

Igwebuike (pronounced ig-way-BWEE-kay) will not be with the Vikings on Sunday when they play the Detroit Lions. Last week the Vikings signed Fuad Reveiz, a former kicker for the Miami Dolphins.

Vikings team officials would not comment on the indictment, but released a one-sentence statement. "The Minnesota Vikings

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Minnesota gives Iggy some time off

IGGY from B-1

have excused Donald Igwebuike for a sufficient period of time to allow him to handle personal matters."

A spokesman for the NFL said league officials would have no comment beyond their statement, which concurred with the Vikings' action.

"... The league believes this is an appropriate action under the circumstances," he said.

The NFL has no rule dealing with a player under indictment. Ricky Sanders of the Washington Redskins currently is under indictment for aggravated assault, and he has continued to play.

U.S. Attorney Robert Genzman, during a news conference in Tampa on Friday, refused to provide specifics of Igwebuike's alleged involvement, but he said the case involved 296 grams of heroin — 10½ ounces — from Nigeria that had an estimated street value of \$1 million.

The other two men, already in custody and charged in the case, Maduwuba Ibekwe and Ibezim Ofedu, also are from Nigeria.

Igwebuike became linked to the case when federal prosecutors obtained tape recordings of a phone conversation in which the importation of heroin allegedly was discussed.

Ibekwe, a taxi driver and substitute teacher in Hillsborough County, was arrested Oct. 12 at Orlando International Airport, where a personal search by a customs inspector allegedly resulted in the discovery of the heroin.

The pellets of heroin were wrapped in electrical tape, covered with feces and wrapped in a paper towel, an arrest report said. He allegedly passed more packets of heroin, which he had swallowed, in the next two days. He is being held without bond in the Hillsborough County Jail.

Ofedu, according to court records, was arrested when he accepted the heroin from an undercover agent for the U.S. Customs Service.