

# Ricky Williams Takes A Late Hit

"They say 'Sing while you slave' and I just get bored—  
I ain't gonna work on Maggie's farm no more."

—Bob Dylan

As the football season got underway, CBS's "60 Minutes" did a story on Ricky Williams's return to the NFL. In case you're just joining us, Williams is a star running back who, in the summer of 2004, quit the Miami Dolphins after repeatedly testing positive for marijuana.

In an interview with Mike Wallace last fall, Williams acknowledged that public exposure of his marijuana use had been humiliating. Instead of playing football, he'd been studying Ayurvedic healing techniques in California ("using nature to put yourself in balance"), camping in Australia, reading a lot, searching for freedom and self-knowledge. He came across as a sincere, thoughtful hippie.

Mike Wallace predicted in that '04 segment that Williams would return to football because he'd need the money. Williams took the bet, but the viewer could sense that the odds favored Wallace because (1) the Dolphins were going to sue for breach of an \$8.5 million contract, (2) although Williams had been injured, he wasn't disabled, and (3) his love of the game was undiminished.

*The new segment consisted of Wallace gloating that money had prevailed.*

The new segment consisted of Wallace gloating that money had prevailed. It's hard to convey the note of contempt in Wallace's voice. "He told us with us some conviction that being free to focus on his mind and his body and his soul was worth much more to him than the millions he'd turned his back on," said Wallace, introducing the new segment.

More than half the footage was re-run from '04. It included all the shots of Ricky and fellow students in the lotus positions chanting "Om," and a lingering close-up of two white women massaging his broad black back with lotion while Wallace intoned:

"This massage, we learned, was just part of his training to become an holistic masseur. Ayurvedic healing techniques also included aromatherapy, music and special foods. And while he thoroughly enjoyed his sublime studies, he remained unapologetic for deserting his teammates and the fans, and destroying their season."

Wallace did not mention the fact that Williams had been made to carry the ball more than anyone else in the league in the seasons before he took off, or that his running style (putting his shoulder down and trying to run over tacklers instead of eluding them) was especially hard on the body, nor did he refer to Williams's recurring shoulder and knee injuries.

Footage was replayed in which Wallace quoted a *Sporting News* columnist putting down Williams: "Ricky has always been one of the most selfish, unpredictable, purposely bizarre and more than slightly off kilter athletes. He doesn't care how his behavior might affect anyone around him. It has always been about Ricky."

When Williams, who is authentically self-critical, said that some of the quote was accurate, Wallace made him read it aloud and identify the parts that were accurate. Williams went through this little ordeal, which was almost embarrassing to watch, and said: "He got the name right.. And I am unpredictable, but who

and what is supposed to be predictable?"

Next came reprised footage of Bob Marley and an exchange about marijuana.

WALLACE: He and his hero have something else in common. Bob Marley used hash.

WILLIAMS: He smoked a lot of marijuana, yeah.

WALLACE: And you have done the same.



"Sore Back" by Jacob Lawrence

WILLIAMS: I have done the same.

WALLACE: Could you pass an NFL drug test today?

WILLIAMS: No.

WALLACE: So you still smoke marijuana?

WILLIAMS: Mhmm.

WALLACE: Anything worse than that?

WILLIAMS: Worse? What do you mean by worse?

WALLACE: More addictive, more dangerous, conceivably.

WILLIAMS: Sometimes I have sweets. (Wallace looks confused) Sugar.

WALLACE: (sarcastic) Oh, yeah, I see.

WILLIAMS: Sometimes I'll have a glass of wine. But that's about it.

(Cut back to the now)

WALLACE: Well, he needed a big glass of it last January because during his studies he was shocked by some unexpected news. According to the fine print in his contract it turned out that he actually owed the Dolphins 8.6 million dollars for leaving before his contract was up. So suddenly he found himself deep in debt with only one way out. (footage of Williams scoring a touchdown in a pre-season game.) This pre-season touchdown marked Ricky's return to the Dolphins.

We flew down to Miami to see how he was really doing. He didn't want to sit down one-on-one. [It's likely that the Dolphins' front office made this decision.] Instead, we went to his weekly press conference, where I showed him the tape of a bet we'd made last year.

(Footage from '04)

WILLIAMS: Why do you think I'll play football again?

WALLACE: Because I think that you will want to have the freedom that you have now but you're gonna need more money to have the freedom that you now have.

(Cut to a press conference with Wallace in the front row and Williams at a podium alongside a screen on which the old tape has just been shown.)

WILLIAMS: All right. That is the reason why I came back.

WALLACE: (triumphant): You came back for money!

WILLIAMS: No, not for money, for freedom.

WALLACE: (Grunting as if he'd been hit, but still sarcastic) Ah!

WILLIAMS: For freedom!

WALLACE: (voice over, as narrator): But freedom can be complicated. To get free from his debt to the Dolphins meant he was no longer free from football. (At the press conference) Have you enjoyed giving up your freedom to work under the regulations of the very structured NFL?

WILLIAMS: Well, I realized that my concept of freedom at the time was a little bit off. My concept of freedom now —I was sitting at home last night and I was thinking if there was anywhere else in the world I would rather be and anything I would rather be doing and there was nothing. I've gotten to a point where I realize that happiness doesn't come from the outside.

Wallace (as narrator): Ricky said that what he discovered in his year away from football was that true freedom comes from within.

WILLIAMS: Everything that there is to gain I have inside of myself. There's nothing I can get from going anywhere or doing anything. And the process of coming to work every day and working through whatever football —whatever life brings me, just gives me more and more freedom and strengthens my desire to be free.

WALLACE: You've said that making a new commitment to the Dolphins means that you've surrendered. Surrendered what?

WILLIAMS: Surrendered my will.

WALLACE: Surrendered your what?

WILLIAMS: Surrendered my will. In the team meeting room in big letters on the back it says "Get out of yourself and get into the team."

WALLACE: You've said that you love football but that you're not having fun here. What does that mean?

WILLIAMS: Well, you look across from fun and you see work. I think there's fun as a result of hard work. So, it's not fun by itself but if you work hard then you get to the fun.

WALLACE: You look like a happy fella.

WILLIAMS: Do my best. There's nothing to not be happy about.

WALLACE: What about money?

WILLIAMS: What about money?

WALLACE: How broke are you?

WILLIAMS: I have no idea.

WALLACE: What do you mean you have no idea?

WILLIAMS: The way I live my life, if I have a place to stay and I have food on the table then I'm not broke.

WALLACE: I understand you're down to two hundred and thirty thousand bucks. [A rich man's definition of "broke."]

WILLIAMS: I really cannot tell you how much money I have.

WALLACE: But doesn't Leigh Steinberg, your agent, tell you about that?

WILLIAMS: No. I don't talk to Leigh about money.

Wallace: You don't talk to your agent about money. What do you talk to your agent about?

WILLIAMS: We talk about life. We talk a little philosophy. We talk about books. It's a different kind of relationship.

"My loyalty is to the truth, not to consistency."

—Ricky Williams

WALLACE: (dripping with sarcasm) Sure. (Then as narrator) His agent is trying to get him a new contract hoping to erase the eight million dollar debt. But you can bet that Ricky would owe millions more if he walked off again or if he failed another drug test. (To Williams at the press conference) You still smokin' marijuana occasionally?

WILLIAMS: No, I can't do that anymore. (Nervous laughter in room.) I get tested twice a week.

WALLACE: Twice a week.

WILLIAMS: Twice a week.

WALLACE: Do you miss it?

WILLIAMS: No.

(So ended the drug talk. Marijuana? No BFD.)

WALLACE: His teammates and his fans, for the most part, have welcomed him back. Last year Williams had told us he saw no reason to apologize to them for ruining their season. But when he returned he was quick to change his mind.

WILLIAMS: I was being more understanding of their point of view, and not being so selfish. My concept of the truth expands on a daily basis. My loyalty is to the truth, not to consistency.

Wallace (narrating): And as for paying off our bet that he would play football again. (To Williams) So, what's it gonna be?

WILLIAMS: Lunch or dinner? Well, I work, so it'll have to be dinner. I have a job now.

WALLACE: (wrapping up back at the studio, to the audience): The fact is, somehow you've just got to love this guy —his innocence, his candor. And when he begins to play for real again in just a couple of weeks, we'll get a chance to see if this former Heisman trophy winner from Texas can put it all back together.

**Can I get a Witness?**

It's very easy to say you love someone in a big, abstract way while continuing to treat them disrespectfully in the nitty gritty. A few weeks after Wallace's second piece on Williams we got to see Martin Scorsese's Bob Dylan documentary. The way Dylan (in his mid-20s) responded to inane, insulting questions from interviewers seemed a lot like the way Ricky Williams responded to Mike Wallace —right down to a non-verbal gesture of looking off to the side, as if to an imaginary witness who might provide a reality check.



JACOB LAWRENCE: OLYMPIC GAMES