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WILLIE WILLIAMS

Canes recruit is out of jail

Carol City's Willie Williams leaves jail on a \$2,500 bond. Under house arrest, Williams must wear an electronic monitor and can leave the house only for court appearances and school.

BY NOAH BIERMAN and MANNY NAVARRO
nbierman@herald.com

Prized University of Miami football recruit Willie Williams got a judge's permission to leave jail Friday so he can finish high school while his legal issues move through the court system.

Williams' classmates -- decked in football jerseys and new customized "Free Willie" T-shirts -- flooded the seventh-floor hallway of the Broward County courthouse. Teachers from Carol City High testified about his popularity and good grades. Carol City principal Albert Payne and football coach Walt Frazier, who says he only recently learned about Williams' lengthy arrest record, watched approvingly.

Williams, in a dark green jail suit, smiled at family members when Broward Circuit Judge Michael Kaplan said he could leave jail on a \$2,500 bond. Kaplan could have kept the 19-year-old in jail without bond until he makes an ultimate ruling on whether Williams violated probation in a series of incidents that occurred during a recruiting trip.

Williams' case, combined with recruiting scandals around the country, has raised new questions about the lavish treatment and continual second chances bestowed on coveted high school athletes. Williams was on a recruiting trip to Gainesville when he was accused of hugging a woman against her will and discharging a fire extinguisher up and down a hotel hallway.

Charges filed in Gainesville led Broward prosecutors to charge him with violating probation he received 18 months ago when he pleaded no contest to smashing the window of a Pembroke Pines stereo store and grabbing \$3,800 in equipment.

JUDGE'S DECISION

Kaplan said he is concerned about Williams' behavior once he's released from jail, but decided to put him on house arrest because his legal proceedings might drag on and hurt his chances of finishing high school. Kaplan said he does not consider Williams a risk of flight.

While on house arrest, Williams will wear an electronic monitor. He will be allowed to leave his home only for court appearances and school.

The standout linebacker has committed to playing for UM next season and is among the nation's top high school prospects. Revelations about past and recent arrests have threatened to derail his promising football career. UM officials said earlier this week the school would "delay the processing" of Williams' application. Spokesman Mark Pray said Friday afternoon the school still was monitoring the situation.

Defense attorneys Paul Lazarus and Brad Cohen told Kaplan they did not intend to make excuses for Williams' past. But they did point out that the death of his father when he was 14, followed by a serious car crash, preceded several of his juvenile arrests.

Prosecutor Thomas Crowder opposed releasing Williams from jail, noting that he faces as many as 15 years in prison if convicted of the Gainesville charges and violating his probation. He cautioned against treating the incidents as harmless pranks.

WRONG IMPRESSION