

Bullying becomes a problem for one NFL team

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.06.13

Word Count **639**



Tackle Jonathan Martin (right) in his stance before the ball is snapped during a Miami Dolphins practice at the Dolphins training facility at NSU in Davie, Florida, on July 23, 2013. Richie Incognito is behind him on the left. Photo: Joe Rimkus Jr./Miami Herald/MCT

DAVIE, Fla. – Richie Incognito and Jonathan Martin played on the offensive line for the Miami Dolphins. They were teammates. But that did not mean the football players got along.

People who know Martin say that Incognito [bullied](https://www.newsela.com/?tag=bullying) the younger player. Dolphins coach Joe Philbin suspended Incognito from the team.

The story shows that bullying may be more than just a problem in schools. It could affect adults where they work, too.

Incognito sent threatening text messages to his teammate, two people familiar with the situation said Monday. The messages were also racist, they said.

The people spoke to The Associated Press. They did not want their names used.

The Joke's Not Funny

Martin left the team a week ago because of emotional problems. The last straw was apparently a joke at his expense.

Incognito is known for dirty play on the field.

The team and NFL are investigating the bullying allegations. Philbin said Dolphins owner Stephen Ross asked Commissioner Roger Goodell for help. The players union is also looking into the matter.

Agents for the two players didn't answer requests for comment. Martin is with his family in Los Angeles for counseling. He stormed out of the team's training headquarters on Oct. 28. Media reports said he was the victim of a joke during a team meal.

The 319-pound Incognito, a ninth-year pro, is white. The 312-pound Martin, who is in his second NFL season, is black. For much of the season, they've played side by side.

The Dolphins beat Cincinnati on Thursday. Then they had three days off. The Martin story grew. They returned to practice Monday. Nearly 100 reporters and cameramen were in their locker room.

Some Defend Incognito

Teammates praised both Incognito and Martin. They said they felt bad both players were absent. But they also said it was time to get on with business.

Receiver Mike Wallace said Incognito was intense but a good teammate. Newcomer Bryant McKinnie agreed.

"When I got here, he was a guy who had everybody laughing and told jokes," said McKinnie. He is also a lineman and joined the team two weeks ago. "I didn't really see the side being portrayed right now."

Rough treatment of young players has a long history in sports. Still, Incognito's treatment of Martin raised questions. Should coaches or teammates have stopped it?

"It's not a thin line. It's pretty obvious stuff that shouldn't be crossed," Tennessee Titans cornerback Jason McCourty said.

Dirty Play On The Field

Darnell Dockett plays for the Arizona Cardinals. He said he was glad the Dolphins took action against Incognito.

"Especially when you try to bully a guy. That's so classless," Dockett said. "His whole makeup is to play dirty and hurt guys. Everybody knows that. I just don't understand how he got away with it for so long. I think the NFL really needs to buckle down on it now, because it's bigger than trying to hurt other guys. You're trying to hurt guys on your team mentally, which sometimes can actually be worse than hurting someone physically."

Incognito has long been known as one of the NFL's dirtiest players.

"There's certain people out there who are just punks, and he wants to be that kind of guy," said Lawrence Jackson. He used to play defensive end for the Seattle Seahawks and Detroit Lions.

However, there have been fewer complaints since Incognito joined the Dolphins in 2010.

Last year he was voted by the league's players into the Pro Bowl for the first time. The Pro Bowl is for the league's best players. He was the co-winner of the Dolphins' Good Guy Award. That award is given to the team's most cooperative player by the local media. Dolphins coaches often praised his leadership. This year he was voted by teammates to be a member of the Dolphins' player council.

Quiz

- 1 Which of these sentences from the introduction [paragraphs 1-5] provides details as to how Incognito bullied Martin?
- (A) Richie Incognito and Jonathan Martin played on the offensive line for the Miami Dolphins.
 - (B) People who know Martin say that Incognito bullied the younger player.
 - (C) The story shows that bullying may be more than just a problem in schools.
 - (D) Incognito sent threatening text messages to his teammate, two people familiar with the situation said Monday.

- 2 Select the paragraph from the section "Dirty Play On The Field" that shows a positive side to Incognito.

- 3 Read this paragraph from the section "The Joke's Not Funny."

Martin left the team a week ago because of emotional problems. The last straw was apparently a joke at his expense.

Adding which of these sentences at the end of the paragraph would help explain the meaning of the phrase "emotional problems"?

- (A) No one is quite certain of what the joke was or whether other people were involved.
- (B) Martin's feelings were so hurt by the continued bullying that he felt he had to leave.
- (C) Martin was worried that he might get injured or attacked if the jokes continued to get worse.
- (D) The joke may have involved something rude, such as dumping Martin's tray of food on the floor.

4 Read this sentence from the section "Some Defend Incognito."

Still, Incognito's treatment of Martin raised questions.

Which of the following sentences uses the word "raise" in the same way it is used in the sentence above?

- (A) I hope I get a raise for all my dedicated work this year.
- (B) Johnathan helped raise William to his feet after he tripped over his desk.
- (C) Don't mention the mystery, or it might raise dangerous ideas in his mind.
- (D) I tried to raise the fence this past weekend, but a storm kept me from working outside.

Answer Key

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Paragraph 21:

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