

PRESS RELEASE FACTS AND GUIDELINES FOR FINAL DRAFT, QUIZ FORMAT

There are several categories of press releases. The most common are informational and promotional.

While less common, the most demanding are press releases related to crises involving governments, organizations, companies or celebrities. Crisis management or “damage control” press releases are increasingly common.

In large part, this stems from greater media scrutiny and social media pervasiveness. Smart phones and TMZ document all manner of wrongdoing or unsavory behavior, making it difficult to conceal.

Maintaining a positive public image is important because it usually means increased revenue. Consumers want to buy from companies they like and trust. Fan support is crucial to artists’ and athletes’ financial success. Politicians viewed favorably tend to get elected and re-elected.

You are the public relations director for the Portland, Oregon Lumberjacks, a National Football League team. Of course, this team does not exist, but for class purposes, we will treat it as an actual team.

The Lumberjacks have been playing just 12 years, and the team won the Super Bowl two years ago. They are powerhouse in the NFL West. Drafted four years ago, quarterback Jeff Brandywine is the key to the recent team’s success. He is among the sports top three quarterbacks.

So, it came as a shock when he was arrested at his Portland home four days ago, after he allegedly assaulted neighbors.

Portland Police Department officers booked him on suspicion of aggravated assault, and he was released a few hours later after posting a \$150,000 bond.

After his release, Brandywine granted two interviews to two local TV stations in which he claimed his neighbors, later identified as Phil and Saul Freeman, threatened him with bodily harm before he struck them.

“These guys are always having loud parties all night,” Brandywine said in one interview. “Maybe I should have called the cops, but I figured I could work it out, neighbor-to-neighbor. It wasn’t all that late, but I got the feeling this was

going to be another all-night thing. So, I went to their place, and the noise was out of control—electronic music full-blast.

“I asked if they could bring down the volume or, even better, end the damn thing. I need my rest. Well, we got into some heated words, and then they grabbed bats. They both did. That’s when I hit ‘em. “

The men suffered facial lacerations. One sustained rib fractures and a skull fracture. Another had his nose and jaw broken. Brandywine was uninjured.

You and other team officials met with Brandywine immediately after his release to determine what happened.

He told you the same thing as was said in the interview. It was agreed that Brandywine should make no comment, yet he granted the interviews without authorization the very next day.

Other media reports, quoting unnamed neighbors, characterized Brandywine as a neighborhood troublemaker.

The neighbors, saying they wished to remain anonymous because they feared the athlete, said he had his own raucous parties. A bachelor, he purportedly had threatened local adolescents for walking on his lawn or skateboarding in front of his home.

His parties featured loud, live music that lasted all night, according to neighbors.

Before and after the interview, you distributed two press releases to the media that the team would above all let the legal process play out and that Brandywine would continue to play.

The releases also said that the team owner and management supported their quarterback and were satisfied he provided a truthful account of what happened.

Late yesterday, the Portland police chief and the Multnomah County district attorney met with team officials to brief them on their investigation and advise them of an announcement to be made tomorrow.

Brandywine, said the officials, had been verbally harassing the Freemans because they are a gay married couple. For the past few weeks he had shouted homophobic insults and once threatened to harm them if they did not move.

At about 6 p.m. when the assault occurred, the Freemans had a few friends over. Music was playing at a normal sound level, and guests were drinking wine.

Brandywine at the same time had a barbeque party which several teammates attended.

The quarterback, said the officials, appeared to be intoxicated when he called on the Freemans.

He was belligerent and said he was “tired of these fag festivals.” Brandywine went on to say, “I hate queers, and I especially hate having them next door. So, plan on moving. I’m ready to hurt you really bad if you don’t.”

When the Freemans asked him to leave, he allegedly punched and kicked the couple as guests looked on in horror.

After that, Brandywine returned home and told some of his teammates about what occurred. It’s not known how they reacted.

Brandywine would now face the additional charge of making terroristic threats and would need to surrender to authorities for booking.

The team owner and management meet and decide they have now have a full-blown crisis on their hands.

It is decided that Brandywine would be indefinitely suspended with pay.

Not for public disclosure, it is agreed that even if he is exonerated Brandywine will be cut from the team. But management wants to allow him and his legal team time to formally respond to the accusations. The team members who were at the Brandywine home will be disciplined for not informing management of what occurred.

You have been directed to write a press release that makes the following points:

*The Lumberjacks will not allow team members to go unpunished for unlawful acts. Such punishment is in addition to whatever the legal system deems appropriate.

*Members of the Lumberjack family know that all their actions on the field and off should always reflect positively on themselves and the team.

*The team does not permit homophobic behavior or remarks. Members who engage in either will be dismissed.

*The Lumberjacks have always been constructive members of the Portland community, and nothing will change that. The team is deeply supportive of racial, ethnic, religious and sexual identity diversity.

*While the team has supported Jeff Brandywine, new and troubling information has become known. Team owner Gavin Stockton and Victor Cruz, the general manager, have determined that Mr. Brandywine was not entirely truthful or forthcoming in his accounts of what led to his arrest. He may, in fact, have been the aggressor in the violent attack on his neighbors.

*Effective immediately, Jeff Brandywine is suspended from the team with pay. His suspension is indefinite and reflects the seriousness of the allegations he faces.

*His status will change depending on the outcome of the continuing legal process and eventual resolution of this case.

*Several team members, who will not be named now, apparently were aware of the true nature of Jeff's actions and failed to inform management of what they knew. Should this prove to be true, they will face severe sanctions.

*Considering these disturbing events, the Lumberjack leadership will initiate an internal investigation into the incident.

*The team will fully cooperate with National Football League officials in any investigation they wish to conduct. In fact, the league has already been in touch with the team.

You have this statement from Stockton, which can be partially used or included in its entirety.

"We are saddened and troubled to learn that a member of our team may have acted in a manner that is wholly unacceptable to the Lumberjacks. Jeff, of course, has been the key to our football success, so his suspension is not a decision we took lightly.

"I have spoken with him, and he understands and accepts the actions we have just announced. On behalf of the organization I wish for the best possible outcome. To our loyal and stellar fans, I ask for your forgiveness and understanding. "

You are to write a press release of 325-375 words. Use your own words, except for Stockton quotes.

Before you write, decide what the lead should say, What about the second and third paragraphs?

The best way to compose the release is to cover no more than two points per paragraph. Attempting to cover more than that, will not only exceed paragraph word limit, you will confuse readers.

Don't use the "we" or first-person voice. Instead, write as though you were not part of the controversy.

Assume your readers—reporters—know at least a little about Brandywine.

Note that some of the information is not designated for release. It's simply context.

Use as much of the background as you deem necessary to produce a clear and persuasive message. That message, at its most basic level, is that the Lumberjacks are punishing their star player and others may be in for some woodshedding as well.

Remember as bad as things look for Brandywine, he's not been convicted of any crime. The team brass is unhappy with him because he was not truthful and may have in fact broken the law. That's as far as you can go.

Don't lose sight of the fact that your purpose is to be reasonably candid and reassure fans, the media and public in general of the team's sincere desire to handle this controversy professionally and ethically.

Be sure to use the press release format. **The header and contact and team information are not part of the assigned word count.**

Team Information: The Lumberjacks are the youngest of the NFL teams. It has from the start enjoyed solid and enthusiastic fan support. The team is considered among the most lucrative of all professional sports teams in the United States.

