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## Dad: Family, Florida State failed Jameis Winston

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*(Photo: Mike Ewen/Democrat)*

**HUEYTOWN, Ala.** — A week after Florida State's Jameis Winston had been cited for leaving a supermarket without paying for crab legs,

the quarterback sent a lengthy text message to his father.

In short, he told Antonor Winston he was fine and ready to return to the baseball team after being banned for four days.

*"I know what doesn't kill you makes you stronger actually being suspended was the best days of my life!"*

*"When I get older we gone laugh at this petty stuff IM GOOD that's all that matters ignore minor comments or people that ain't livin MY life"*

Winston's citation for leaving a Tallahassee, Fla., Publix on April 29 without paying for \$32 of crab legs and crawfish was the latest off-field issue for the Hueytown native.

None is more serious than the alleged sexual assault for which Winston was not charged. But as the NFL draft concluded this weekend and the attention inevitably turns to next year's class, for which the 20-year-old Heisman Trophy winner will be eligible to enter, questions about such incidents and character will increase.

Winston's supermarket episode almost immediately became the butt of jokes. An Alabama grocery store advertised "Jameis Winston King Crab Legs" the day after a press conference that included multiple questions about whether the QB also took butter. Stetson fans held up crab legs in its game against FSU on Tuesday. And Taiwanese animators created a video showing Winston using Heisman moves to elude security officers on Segways.

Those close to the quarterback say the citation, for which he has performed 20 hours of community service, is the honest mistake of a college kid adjusting to the intense spotlight. If he wasn't aware of its glare, he should be now, they say.

"We hope so," Antonor Winston tells USA TODAY Sports. "Not only him. I think it should show the university and us, I think we probably kind of dropped the ball on that a little bit."

What would you say to Jameis Winston?

Florida State declined to make Winston available for an interview about the incident, but after it was reported he released a statement through his attorney, Tim Jansen, in which he accepted responsibility for a "moment of youthful ignorance."

Speaking from his home, where four of Winston's football trophies sit on the floor and photos and framed newspaper clippings cover the walls of the living room, Antonor Winston says he feels comfortable with his son's blunder. His only advice would be that Jameis Winston should have called the store when he realized he'd forgotten to pay. But he also says he is working with the school on how to manage his son's notoriety.

"He's supposed to have somebody around him 24/7," says Antonor Winston. "He a Heisman Trophy winner so (he's) definitely not supposed to be by (himself)."

Since Winston won the Heisman in December, FSU has provided additional security on athletics trips and road baseball games, athletic director Stan Wilcox said in a statement to USA TODAY Sports.

"We are committed to doing everything in our power within NCAA rules to provide Jameis Winston with the resources he needs to thrive as a student and an athlete," said Wilcox. "We will continue to work with Jameis and his family to make them aware of all the support services the university has to offer."

Antonor Winston says few have experienced what his son is going through — winning the Heisman and a national championship as a freshman.

He mentions Texas A&M's Johnny Manziel, who was the first player to win the trophy as a freshman when he captured the award in 2012. Manziel, who was drafted No. 22 overall by the Cleveland Browns on Thursday, opted to take all of his classes online in the spring of 2013 after winning the Heisman because the attention became too much.

Florida's Tim Tebow won two national championships and claimed the Heisman between them during his sophomore season.

Both schools provided additional personnel for those quarterbacks at athletics-related events, including going between practice fields and the stadiums, because of crowds and autograph seekers.

"It's just a different standard for (Jameis) and Johnny (Manziel)," says Antonor Winston. "He's just got to endure, just make better decisions and he's just got to endure that."

## **NFL MICROSCOPE**

The added scrutiny means even the smallest missteps will become front-page headlines for Winston.

While the sexual assault allegation will cause the most concern, NFL personnel executives have other incidents to question.

In July 2012, police were called to a Burger King after an employee complained of Winston stealing soda. In November of that year, he was questioned after windows were broken at an apartment complex in a BB gun battle.

Winston was not charged in either incident, both of which came to light after the alleged sexual assault went public in November 2013.

"Nobody would have ever heard of that at all," Antonor Winston says.

Although Winston was not charged for the alleged sexual assault, which happened in Dec. 2012, it was national news for nearly a month as the state attorney's office conducted its investigation after a Tallahassee police investigation sat dormant for nine months.

In March, the woman who alleged Winston raped her filed a complaint with the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, which opened a Title IX investigation last month into how the school handles complaints of sexual assault.

Antonor Winston did not indicate when his son would leave for the NFL. Whenever Jameis Winston enters the draft, he can expect a thorough vetting. That due diligence includes re-examining the sexual assault allegation and shoplifting citation, speaking with former

coaches and contacting people in Winston's hometown, says former Dallas Cowboys personnel guru Gil Brandt.

"If I go off what I read, yeah, it will impact his status," Brandt says. "Is all of this true or not, I don't know."

NFL executives won't rely on news media reports, which friends and family say have blown Winston's off-field incidents out of proportion.

"At most positions you will overlook a lot of little things," says Russ Lande, a former NFL scout with the St. Louis Rams and an analyst at GM Jr. Scouting. "At quarterback, you're definitely going to take a closer look.

"The fact that they grilled Manziel this much, I'm sure they're going to grill Winston just the same."

### **'DO A BETTER JOB'**

Even in Winston's hometown, news of the shoplifting citation was met with a collective groan. To former coaches, teammates and classmates, it's the small mistake of a college kid but one Winston should be careful to avoid.

"I think some of the things that have happened are regular day-to-day life for the average student at Florida State," says Otis Leverette, a former NFL player who trained Winston in high school, "but their life is being viewed on a \$10 microscope and his is being viewed on a \$3 million microscope."

Says Richard Rabb, a high school teammate of Winston's: "I know a lot of people look at that like, he's doing all these bad things and he's not being a good role model. But I'm 19 and he's 20. I look at it like he's a kid. He's gonna make mistakes."

Rabb, who says he visited Winston during a series against Virginia in late April, says agreeing to the civil citation was the smart move, allowing Winston to put the incident behind him.

"It doesn't matter about the details and how it really went down," says

Rabb. "In the public eye, they see you stealing crab legs. That's not a good look."

A sign congratulating Winston on his Heisman victory greets visitors to Hueytown High School, and the school has plans to retire his No. 8 jersey this summer. Mark Stephens, who is currently Hueytown's head coach and athletic director and was an assistant coach when Winston was a student, announced those plans before Winston was cited last month.

"If I were speaking to Jameis, I would tell him that you gotta do a better job with that stuff and realize that it don't matter where you are, what you do," says Stephens. "Every step you take, someone's watching you and unfortunately not everyone wants you to be successful."

If the 233-word text to his father is any indication, Winston is now acutely aware of that. He told his father in the four days he was suspended he got to spend some time with kids, workout and go to church. He wrote:

*"God did that for a reason u accepted my punishment now everythang is over.*

*"I live for success and greatness and I ain't gone stop doing that so everythang good."*

**Contributing: Jim Corbett, USA Today**

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