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COMMUNICATIONS

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EIGHT INTERNATIONAL PLAYERS ADDED TO ROSTERS
FOR 2018 SEASON

Eight teams will carry an additional overseas player on their practice squads in 2018 as part of an expansion of the International Player Pathway program, the NFL announced today.

The program, instituted in 2017, aims to provide international athletes the opportunity to compete at the NFL level, improve their skills, and ultimately earn a spot on an NFL roster.

Alex Gray (Atlanta Falcons), Alex Jenkins (New Orleans Saints), Eric Nzeocha (Tampa Bay Buccaneers), and Efe Obada (Carolina Panthers), participants in 2017, will return to their NFC South teams for the upcoming season.

An additional four teams – the AFC North – will carry an overseas player on their roster until the end of the 2018 training camp. At that time, the players would be eligible for an international player practice squad exemption.

The Baltimore Ravens, Cincinnati Bengals, Cleveland Browns and Pittsburgh Steelers will each be given an exemption for an eleventh practice squad member – ineligible to be activated during the season – with two of the players selected coming from the UK and two from Germany. The AFC North was chosen to receive the international players in a random draw.

The players include Moritz Böhringer (Cincinnati Bengals), who was originally drafted in the sixth round by the Minnesota Vikings in 2016, German Football League player Christopher Ezeala (Baltimore Ravens), former British American Football League player Tigie Sankoh (Cleveland Browns) and former English professional rugby player Christian Scotland-Williamson (Pittsburgh Steelers).

For the past three months, the players have been training alongside NFL players and draft hopefuls in Florida, under the supervision of former NFLUK head of football Aden Durde, who was hired as the Atlanta Falcons defensive quality control coach after this season's program, along with IMG Academy coaches including running back coach Earnest Byner, offensive line coach Paul Dunn, defensive back coach Donnie Henderson and wide receiver coach Larry Kirksey.

The new players taking part in the 2018 International Player Pathway Program:

MORITZ BÖHRINGER, Tight End/Wide Receiver (Germany), Age: 24 – Cincinnati Bengals

Selected in the sixth round of the 2016 NFL Draft by the Minnesota Vikings, becoming the first player to be drafted directly from European football. Had previously been combining his

university studies with playing for the Schwäbisch Hall Unicorns in the German Football League. Spent the 2016 season on the Vikings practice squad.

CHRISTOPHER EZEALA, Fullback (Germany), Age: 22 – Baltimore Ravens

Played as a fullback and linebacker in the German Football League for the Ingolstadt Dukes, having begun playing the sport for the Munich Rangers and Allgäu Comets. Has focused on the fullback position, saying: “My coaches told me that while there are many linebackers like me in the NFL, there is no fullback that is so athletic and fast, so they are trying to create a new type of player with me.”

TIGIE SANKOH, Defensive Back (UK), Age: 21 – Cleveland Browns

Played amateur football throughout his teenage years and attended the American Football Academy at Filton College in Bristol, England. Went on to represent the London Warriors in the British American Football League.

CHRISTIAN SCOTLAND-WILLIAMSON, Tight End (UK), Age: 24 – Pittsburgh Steelers

Converted to American football early in 2018 after a professional rugby career in England, where he played for the Worcester Warriors in the English Premiership. Playing as a second-row forward, he was known in rugby for his physicality and tackling ability and came to international prominence when a tackle in a game against London Wasps was shared widely on the Internet. He graduated from Loughborough University, one of the UK’s leading sports institutions, with a degree in economics.

The returning participants from the 2017 International Player Pathway Program:

ALEX GRAY, Tight End (UK), Age: 27 – Atlanta Falcons

Born and raised in Bishop Auckland, England, Gray captained England's rugby teams at Under-16, Under-18, Under-20 and International Sevens levels and played for Newcastle Falcons and London Irish. He was named in the original extended Great Britain Sevens squad for the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio, before suffering an injury. He signed for Yorkshire Carnegie for the 2016-17 rugby season and decided to convert to American football.

ALEX JENKINS, Defensive End (UK), Age: 25 – New Orleans Saints

Born and raised in Bath, England, he began playing football at the Bath City Academy and for the Bristol Aztecs, earning a spot on the Great Britain youth team. Having been selected to participate in an all-star high school camp in Virginia, he earned a scholarship to play college football at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Texas. He was a three-year starter as defensive end at UIW, posting 3.5 sacks in his senior year.

ERIC NZEOCHA, Linebacker (Germany), Age: 25 – Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Nzeocha began playing football for the Franken Knights youth team in Neusitz, Germany, and was selected for the German national junior team. He played three years at the University of Wyoming, switching from tight end to linebacker before the 2015 season. His brother, Mark, is a linebacker for the Dallas Cowboys.

EFE OBADA, Defensive End (UK), Age: 26 – Carolina Panthers

Raised in London after arriving from the Netherlands at age 10, Obada signed as a free agent for the Dallas Cowboys in 2015 after playing only five games of amateur football with the

London Warriors. He played in the preseason for the Cowboys and spent part of the 2015 season on the club's practice squad. He has since had spells on the rosters of the Kansas City Chiefs and Atlanta Falcons.

NFL Draft weekend culminated an exciting time for another international NFL hopeful, offensive lineman **JORDAN MAILATA**. The Samoan-born Australian professional rugby league player for the South Sydney Rabbitohs was drafted in the seventh round by the Philadelphia Eagles (thereby making him ineligible for the International Player Pathway Program this season). Converted to football full-time early in 2018, the 6-8, 350-pounder has impressed NFL scouts at various workouts with his strength, footwork and athleticism, and will now continue his football journey with the Eagles.