

Packers' Letroy Guion has faced drug, gun, battery charges

Legal issues have complicated defensive lineman's professional football career

By [Michael Cohen](#) and [John Diedrich](#) of the *Journal Sentinel*

In the hours after Letroy Guion was taken to a Florida jail on Feb. 3, after the odor of marijuana and plumes of smoke prompted a search of his 2015 Dodge Ram during a traffic stop for swerving across the centerline, after he was handcuffed for turning hostile as officers found a gun, three-quarters of a pound of pot and \$190,000 in cash, Guion's father stood outside the Starke Police Department.

Letroy Guion Sr. was greeted by two of the officers, who recognized him based on past dealings with the department. That included a string of seven cocaine convictions, most of them for dealing.

He asked the officers about the charges being brought against his son, a defensive lineman for the Green Bay Packers. They explained that Guion, 28, was facing two felonies for marijuana possession and a gun charge.

Guion Sr. laughed and, according to an arrest report, said: "Well, I'll be honest, every time he comes down he always brings the best weed you ever smoked in your life."

A Milwaukee Journal Sentinel review of more than 300 pages of court documents and police reports dating back six years, along with interviews of Florida attorneys, prosecutors and experts, show a high-profile athlete entangled by years of legal issues that at times have threatened his professional football career.

Before the drug and gun counts, Guion had been charged in criminal cases three times. This includes a stalking charge and pair of domestic violence incidents that resulted in three counts of battery, including one where Guion was charged with hitting the mother of his child in the jaw.

The charges were dropped in two of the criminal cases. Guion paid restitution in the third and avoided additional punishment.

For the February traffic stop, Guion ultimately pleaded no contest to possession of marijuana and paid a \$5,000 fine. The charge of having a gun while committing a felony was dropped and, based on the terms of a plea deal, Guion again avoided a conviction on his record.

Legal experts in Florida — as well as the Starke city attorney — say Guion received a break on the marijuana and gun charges given his history in the justice system.

A Starke police sergeant said in a deposition that informants told authorities Guion was involved in the drug trade and bankrolled dealers, some of whom were his relatives. The drugs sold included marijuana, cocaine and crack cocaine, according to Sgt. Jason Crosby's deposition in a forfeiture case involving Guion's truck and \$190,000.

Guion's attorney, Robert Rush, told the Journal Sentinel that Crosby's statements were untrue.

"There is absolutely no evidence to support that," Rush said. "That is false."

Packers coach Mike McCarthy expressed support for Guion shortly after his February arrest.

"He was an impactful personality and played good football for us," McCarthy said at the scouting combine in February. "I'm hopeful, if we get past this and the monitoring gives us the green light to go forward, I'd love to have Letroy back."

The Packers signed Guion, an unrestricted free agent, to a new one-year contract two months after his arrest. He was back on the field Oct. 4 against the San Francisco 49ers, after serving a three-game suspension imposed by the NFL, and resumed his role as a key defensive contributor for a franchise with Super Bowl aspirations.

The swirl of legal issues surrounding Guion raises questions about the thoroughness of the character review by the Packers and whether the team and the NFL missed or ignored a deeper record of run-ins with the law.

Guion, McCarthy and general manager Ted Thompson all declined to comment for this story through a team spokesman. Seth Katz, Guion's agent, also declined to be interviewed. A spokesman for the NFL said the league had no comment.

Guion is still trying to get back the confiscated \$190,000 and his truck, worth \$70,000, but a judge in a preliminary ruling said there was "strong evidence" the money was intended for drugs.

Experts on the legal system in Florida agree.

"If you find a guy with that much cash, that much marijuana and a gun under the seat — all those circumstances scream that is a drug dealer," said Stephen Crawford, a former state and federal prosecutor in Florida.

"I hope he learns his lesson here and this scares the hell out of him."

A rough upbringing

Late on Feb. 3, Officer Ashley Cisco of the Starke Police Department neared the end of an all-day shift and planned to stop at the Kangaroo Express convenience store before driving home.

As he traveled down Old Lawtey Road, which cuts through the town of fewer than 6,000 residents, Cisco saw a black truck slowly cross the double yellow line, then cross it again. He smelled marijuana, according to the arrest report, and saw smoke wafting from the vehicle.

"I seen him turn around and look at me," Cisco said in the deposition given in the forfeiture case. As to what he was thinking at the time, Cisco said, "Maybe he's trying to hide whatever he's got in there. Maybe he's going for a gun, you know, who knows?"

Guion, who would later say he was swerving to avoid potholes in the road, drove for nearly a mile before stopping, according to reports. Alone in the vehicle, he stuck his head out the window as Cisco approached and "asked me if I knew who he was," Cisco said in his deposition.

Cisco did not recognize him and called for backup. Three additional officers arrived at the scene and all were familiar with Guion; two of them overlapped with Guion at Bradford High School.

Born into poverty in Starke, a city in northern Florida near Jacksonville, Guion grew up without a positive male influence. With his father in the drug trade and a stepfather who frequently used drugs, Guion told the Journal Sentinel in a 2014 interview that he assumed the role of patriarch by the age of 14 or 15.

He looked after his four siblings, divvied up chores to keep the house clean and, along with his mother, ran a household in which bills sometimes went unpaid and electricity sputtered. When necessary, he instilled discipline by raising his voice or issuing a spanking, he said.

"Growing up, I was the only one really doing something big sports-wise, so everybody looked up to me," Guion told the Journal Sentinel at the time. "They looked up to me to be something special in the family."

Guion rose to prominence on the football field, where he recorded 131 tackles (21 for loss), 12 sacks and 11 forced fumbles as a senior at Bradford. He was named first-team all-state and selected as the Gainesville Sun Player of the Year. Most importantly, he earned a scholarship to Florida State.

In Tallahassee, Guion appeared in 34 games and made 14 starts in three years. He tallied 66 tackles and 12 tackles for loss before entering the NFL draft after his junior year.

His decision to leave school early was influenced in part by his mother's financial strife; she was in danger of losing their house, Guion said.

Selected in the fifth round of the 2008 draft by the Minnesota Vikings, Guion, who stands 6 feet 3½ inches tall and weighs 325 pounds, spent the first six years of his career competing against the Packers in the NFC North. When the Vikings released him after the 2013 season, general manager Ted Thompson made the rare choice to acquire a veteran free agent.

Now in his eighth season, Guion is one of just five players on the Packers' roster to have appeared in a regular season game for another team. Two-thirds of the team is composed of players drafted by the Packers, which makes Guion an exception to Thompson's rule of relying mostly on homegrown talent.

A drug arrest in Florida

As the clock neared midnight in Starke, Cisco began a search of the truck.

His objective, according to the deposition, was to locate a gun Guion said was inside the vehicle. Cisco found a case underneath the front seat, and inside was a Tanfoglio Witness 9mm semiautomatic handgun. It was unloaded.

When officers at the scene ran the serial number, dispatchers said the gun was still listed as stolen, according to an arrest report.

Calling from Wisconsin, Guion had reported the gun stolen a few months earlier on the day before a game against the New England Patriots — a day the Packers practiced and made their final preparations.

Guion called the Bradford County Sheriff's Office and explained that the weapon had been left beneath the front seat of a truck in Florida before he traveled to Green Bay for training camp. The truck was later shipped to Wisconsin and had just arrived, but he reported the gun was missing.

Rush, the attorney for Guion, said the weapon was found in Florida a few days before the traffic stop and he simply hadn't called to close the case.

To this day, Starke police have the gun. A spokesman said Guion has not asked for it back.

As the officer continued searching the truck, Guion became "extremely uncooperative and hostile," according to the arrest report. He ignored repeated instructions from the officers to stay away from the truck and kept uttering variations of the same statement: "Hey man, my money is in there. Don't let him take my money."

Guion then rushed the vehicle and attempted to remove a black backpack from the front passenger seat. He was restrained and handcuffed for "officer safety," the report said.

The backpack, which was partially open, contained a large plastic bag holding two additional Ziploc bags, according to the report. Inside were 357 grams — or about three-quarters of a pound — of a "green leafy substance" that later tested positive for marijuana. Guion repeatedly referred to the bags as his "off-season stash," according to the depositions of two officers.

The location where Guion was stopped is known for drug trafficking, according to court records. Police had made more than 300 drug arrests in that area in the previous 20 months.

Besides the marijuana, officers found more than \$190,000 in a bank bag from Wells Fargo Bank, most of which was wrapped in \$2,000 quantities. Some of the wrappers had been ripped open so money could be removed, according to Crosby's deposition. In an affidavit, Guion said he had just cashed his paycheck from the Packers.

"The only thing I heard (Guion say) before they put him in the car was that it was his money," Crosby said, "and then, kind of like, 'You (know) who I am, why are you doing this — why you all got to do this.'"

After the arrest, Starke police seized the cash and Guion's truck, which they believed could be forfeited as part of a drug crime. A fight followed in court, with a judge recently denying Guion's motion to have the cash and truck returned.

"Both legitimate or illegitimate monies may be intended for use in the purchase of illegal drugs," wrote Phillip Pena, circuit judge for the eighth judicial district. "It is simply the possession of such a large amount of money, no matter what the source, along with the totality of the surrounding circumstances that is strong evidence that the currency was intended to be furnished in return for drugs and is not typical of a legitimate business transaction."

Fallout from drug case

Guion's criminal case wound up before Assistant State Attorney Bruce Helling, who said in an interview with the Journal Sentinel that the large amount of marijuana gave him options when deciding how to charge Guion.

The quantity alone was enough evidence to issue a delivery charge, Helling said.

Rush, the attorney for Guion, denied that his client was selling drugs or had the intent to distribute.

"The marijuana was in one bag," Rush said. "It wasn't broken up, it wasn't weighed out for sale. There were no indicators whatsoever of any kind that this was anything but marijuana for personal use."

Because both simple possession and a delivery charge are the same class of felony under Florida law, Helling chose to issue the lesser charge of possession of 20 grams or more. He also charged Guion with possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony.

The absence of a violent act in connection with the arrest meant that Guion, charged with a drug offense for the first time, would not face jail time under Florida law, Helling said.

But Helling said it was important to hold Guion accountable given his history in the court system, which already included two battery cases. One of the cases was dropped, the other resulted in little punishment. He also had at least a dozen traffic tickets.

"When it seems an individual gets that kind of luck," Helling said, "at some point that has to end."

At the very least, Helling believed probation was appropriate.

Guion's attorney disagreed and went directly to Helling's boss, William Cervone, the state attorney for the district. Cervone overruled Helling and negotiated the terms of a plea deal that did not include probation.

"That was something this office agreed to," Helling said of the outcome. "It was not my choice. Let's just leave it like that."

The plea deal included an agreement that Rush could seek a "withheld adjudication" for his client — a legal option available in only a few states, but common in Florida. It means no conviction is officially entered on the offender's record, but the case does not disappear entirely. The crime can be considered later if the individual is involved in another criminal case.

Cervone said it was not unusual for him to work directly with a defense attorney and did not recall a conflict with Helling, his subordinate.

Cervone did not agree to everything proposed by Rush, who wanted the case dismissed or treated as another deferred prosecution. Cervone was dissuaded from offering such a deal because of the previous battery counts against Guion.

"My focus was I am not dropping, diverting and I am not reducing this case," Cervone said. "He didn't get any special treatment."

Guion, who pleaded no contest to felony drug possession, paid a fine of \$5,000 plus court costs, the maximum amount allowed under the law.

Dan Sikes, the city attorney for Starke, said prosecutors never consulted with police or city officials about the case, which he felt was unusual given the public interest surrounding Guion.

"There are a lot of arguments that could be made and were not," Sikes said. "He got a good deal, a very good deal.

"This was treated as a first offense, but it was not a first offense."

Domestic violence allegations

For years, Starke police had responded to domestic violence allegations between Guion and Krystal Troutman, the mother of his daughter. The repetitive nature of the altercations was noted in police reports.

The domestic disputes occurred between 2011 and 2013, when Guion was a member of the Minnesota Vikings. They went unreported and unnoticed just before an unsightly stretch in which public outcry over domestic violence incidents began to engulf the NFL.

They included Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice getting caught punching his fiancée in the face on a hotel surveillance video, Carolina Panthers defensive end Greg Hardy being found guilty of assaulting a woman and Adrian Peterson, Guion's teammate with the Vikings, being arrested for abusing his young son.

In the most serious incident, an officer from the Starke Police Department was dispatched to the Pine Forest Apartments on the afternoon of Feb. 16, 2013, in response to a battery call.

Troutman claimed Guion had been calling her throughout the day making verbal threats, and at 4:35 p.m. he showed up outside her apartment complex revving the engine of his car.

Troutman and her boyfriend at the time, Martius Holland, confronted Guion in the parking lot. Guion pushed Troutman to the ground. She got back to her feet, according to the report, and Guion struck her in the jaw.

Guion punched Holland in the back of the head, causing him to fall face first to the ground. Guion, according to the report, then got into his car and drove off.

Holland's attorney, Jesse Smith, told the Journal Sentinel it was "essentially one surprise punch" that leveled his client. The police report says Holland was observed with cuts and scrapes to his forehead, hand and wrist.

Guion's attorney disputed that account.

"I believe the evidence was that there was a mutual fight, that (Guion) was not the aggressor," said Rush. "When you've got somebody who is in a prominent position, somebody who has money, people will make up allegations against you."

A resident of the apartment complex who saw the incident told authorities that Guion pushed Troutman and punched Holland, according to the report.

Guion was charged with two counts of misdemeanor battery. He received a deferred prosecution of six months and was ordered to pay nearly \$5,000 in restitution for the medical bills of Holland.

Under a deferred prosecution, the charges would be dismissed if Guion avoided trouble with the law for six months, which he did.

The first battery charge Guion faced stemmed from an altercation on Jan. 28, 2012, when he was accused of punching his cousin Jermaine Carter in the side of the head, according to a police report.

Carter told authorities he and Guion were arguing over a woman. Carter did not cooperate with prosecutors, however, and a charge of misdemeanor battery was dropped.

The fight with Carter followed a year in which the Starke Police Department filed reports for incidents involving Guion and Troutman three times. On two of those occasions in 2011, Guion was listed as a victim.

Authorities responded to a battery call in May 2011, when police reports say Troutman brought their daughter to Guion's residence. Troutman attacked Guion's girlfriend, the report said, and then bit Guion and hit him in the face as he attempted to break up the fight. Guion suffered cuts to his lip and finger, while Troutman claimed Guion gave her a bloody lip and bit her face.

Troutman threatened Guion the following summer, in July 2012, with a photograph she said showed Guion smoking marijuana, according to a text conversation obtained from the Bradford County Sheriff's Office. A subsequent text message from Guion's phone said the photo was three years old and that in the picture he was smoking K2, a synthetic marijuana that at the time was legal.

Another incident with Troutman surfaced one year later when Guion was charged with stalking for the transmission of harassing text messages. The messages, reviewed by Starke police, were directed at both Troutman and Holland.

Of the many expletive-laced messages, one ended with Guion saying "and when I'm done with my profession you better be looking."

Holland did not respond to multiple interview requests by the Journal Sentinel.

The stalking charge against Guion was later dismissed due to insufficient evidence.

Moving forward

Guion returned home to Starke after the Packers' loss to Seattle in the NFC Championship Game in January.

When he swerved down Old Lawtey Road, catching the attention of an officer who would later arrest him, it was two days after the Super Bowl.

The arrest threatened Guion's future with the Packers. In his first season with the team, Guion had started all 16 games in place of lineman B.J. Raji, who suffered a torn biceps during the exhibition season, and recorded 32 tackles and 3.5 sacks. In the NFC Championship Game, Guion recorded four tackles and registered a half sack.

"I'm really glad we have him," defensive coordinator Dom Capers had said part way through that season. "Big guys who have some quickness and movement are hard to find."

Guion appears to be well-liked inside the Packers' locker room and teammates praise his work ethic and passion for the game. A number of them reached out to Guion after his arrest, including defensive end Mike Daniels.

When discussing Guion's football ability, Daniels labeled him a "big, mean and physical" player in the trenches. Another defensive end, Datone Jones, commented on Guion's work ethic.

"He loves football," Jones said. "We're always in the weight room doing extra arms, extra core. He's running after practice. We're all in there together. He had that time to hibernate (during his suspension) and came back ready."

One week after Guion paid the fine and court costs associated with the plea deal in the drug case, he signed a new one-year contract worth \$2.75 million with \$400,000 in guaranteed money.

For the price of \$6,236, Guion came out of the courtroom with no conviction and returned to a team considered by many to be Super Bowl favorites.

Had the arrest not occurred, some believe Guion could have signed a multiyear deal worth as much as \$5 million or \$6 million per year. His attorney argues this served as an added penalty.

"All of this was swirling around while he was in negotiations," Rush said, "and I think it really affected his marketability dramatically."

And Guion is still facing legal troubles in Florida on multiple fronts.

Holland filed a civil suit against Guion last year, claiming he continues to experience pain from Guion's punch that sent him to the emergency room. Holland will likely need reconstructive surgery to address a fracture in his face, said his attorney, Smith.

The lawsuit seeks to recoup more than \$53,000 in actual damages and nearly \$6,000 in fees and costs.

Meanwhile, Guion's fight continues over the seizure of his 2015 Dodge Ram truck and \$190,000 in cash.

City officials in Starke argue the money and vehicle should be forfeited because Guion was carrying marijuana. The case remains open after a judge denied a motion from Guion's attorney for summary judgment.

Rush said Guion went through counseling for marijuana use but did not know whether it was requested by the Packers. He also was unsure whether the Packers were aware of the allegations of domestic violence incidents involving Guion. All three counts of battery, plus the additional count of stalking, happened when Guion played for the Vikings.

After serving a three-game suspension from the NFL for his drug arrest, Guion took the field on Oct. 4 and helped the Packers defeat the 49ers, needing only half the game to reclaim his starting spot in the base defense. Through three games, Guion has made seven tackles and played nearly 60% of snaps in the most recent win over the San Diego Chargers.

"He's definitely been a presence in there for us," McCarthy said. "So I think he's kind of left off, jumped right back in there. I've liked the way he's played."

Much has changed for Guion since the NFC Championship Game in January, yet the organization that backed him hardly seemed to waver.

"It's big to have the Packers supporting me, being behind me the whole time," Guion said last month after his three-game suspension ended. "It gives you confidence and gives you a peace of mind that you can stay focused on the task at hand."

Winning football games.