

## Doping Offer Of Reduced Bans Rejected By Essendon

A proposal by Australian Football League (AFL) has been rejected by [Essendon Bombers](#) that would have allowed players accused of doping to stand down voluntarily from club duties. This proposal would also have reduced any future bans on the accused players. The definitive six-month suspension would have seen Essendon players facing anti-doping sanctions to miss the last four games of the home-and-away season and finals but return in time for round one of 2015.

Recently, it was rumored that Essendon players were thinking about taking about "*insurance*" against future penalties imposed by anti-doping authorities. Under the discussed terms, 34 current and former Essendon players who are accused of using a banned peptide ([Thymosin Beta-4](#)) would start a self-imposed suspension after final match of the club for the season and remain away from the club until mid-January. The time served, under a provision within the World Anti-Doping Code, may be used to offset any ban that gets imposed against players at a future date when found guilty of a doping offence.

Essendon players, while being stood down, may be prohibited from training at the Tullamarine facility of the club but were allowed to train as a group off-site. This proposal was presented to the board of Essendon Bombers as having the in-principle support of the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority (ASADA) though it now becomes apparent that the anti-doping authority did not have idea of the discussion of AFL chief executive Gillon McLachlan with club president Paul Little.

Last Thursday, the Essendon board met at Melbourne's Hyatt Hotel and unanimously rejected the offer. In a carefully worded statement, club president Paul Little said he had met with McLachlan but denied that a deal like [Cronulla](#)-style was offered. Little remarked a number of things were discussed but no offer was put to the club concerning any arrangements about players making admissions in return for agreed sanctions. Little also said the Essendon Football Club board were fully briefed on these discussions and will continue to act and make decisions in the best interest of our players.

ASADA chief Ben McDevitt said it would be completely inappropriate and quite contemptuous to negotiate with Essendon before the legality of ASADA's investigation is ruled by the Federal Court.

AFLPA's acting chief executive Ian Prendergast reiterated that any decision over sanctions was up to the players. In a statement, Prendergast said the 34 players continue to be represented by the legal team consisting of David Grace QC, Ben Ihle, AFL Players Association lawyers Brett Murphy and Bernie Shinnars, and Tony Hargreaves. He also remarked the players' legal team is independent of the Essendon FC and is focused solely on protecting the best interests of the 34 players who have been issued show-cause Notices by ASADA and also said the 34 players are the ones who will ultimately decide how they wish to proceed in this matter.

In another development, Essendon coach James Hird returned to work after serving a 12-month ban imposed by AFL for failure on his part to prevent the ill-fated supplements regime of the club that was designed by sports scientist Stephen Dank.