

NHL PRE-SEASON

AROUND THE LEAGUE

Jets' Byfuglien faces four charges in Minnesota

MIKE MCINTYRE
WINNIPEG FREE PRESS
WINNIPEG

Winnipeg Jets defenceman Dustin Byfuglien displayed a host of symptoms that led a police expert to believe he was high on drugs following his arrest last month in Minnesota.

Documents released Tuesday and obtained by the Winnipeg Free Press provide new insight into the circumstances of the high-profile incident that has led to a U.S. prosecutor finally endorsing four criminal charges against Byfuglien.

A police drug recognition expert was called in to examine Byfuglien, 26, after he was spot-checked during the evening of Aug. 31 while boating on Lake Minnetonka because he didn't have proper lights on the craft.

"Mr. Byfuglien's speech was slurred, he was unsteady on his feet, his eyes were bloodshot and watery and he smelled of a consumed alcoholic beverage," deputy Ben Bierbaum

of the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office water patrol division wrote in a police arrest report. "Mr. Byfuglien was unable to successfully perform field sobriety tests as requested."

Sources told the Free Press he had just finished eating dinner at a dockside restaurant with his girlfriend, a business associate and another woman, where he's said to have had two or three glasses of wine.

Police were puzzled after Byfuglien agreed to a breathalyzer test — and passed with flying colours. He registered just .03, which is well below the legal limit of .08. But police weren't finished.

"Based on his observations, deputy Bierbaum formed the opinion that Mr. Byfuglien was under the influence and placed Mr. Byfuglien under arrest," the police report states.

Byfuglien was taken back to the police detachment where the drug expert began analyzing him.

"Mr. Byfuglien stated that he had taken a muscle relaxer earlier that day, but that he could not remember the name of the muscle relaxer,"

said the police report. "Mr. Byfuglien stated that he takes a 'handful' of supplements from 16 or 17 different bottles every day and that he does not know the names of the supplements."

Byfuglien then refused to give a blood or urine sample, which is an automatic offence by law. The charge of refusing a blood or urine test carries a maximum one year jail sentence, while the other charges of boating while intoxicated, failing to display proper lights and failing to provide enough flotation devices for himself and three other passengers on the boat carry a maximum of 90 days behind bars.

Byfuglien is free without any bail conditions and is scheduled for his first court appearance on Oct. 21. His lawyer is able to appear on his behalf.

Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff, said the organization takes the allegations seriously.

"While we will continue to support him in this situation, we understand the severity of the charges involved

in this case. We will continue to monitor the situation closely and, until the continuing legal process is completed, we will have no further comment," he said in a statement.

Based on the advice of his lawyer, Byfuglien has previously declined to comment about what happened.

Byfuglien could face sanctions from the NHL. If he is charged, doctors

from the NHL Players' Association and the league would automatically conduct an assessment to determine whether he would be placed in the NHLPA's substance abuse and behaviour health program.

Substance abuse is a sensitive issue in the NHL after the deaths of two players in the off-season, former Minnesota

Wild tough guy Derek Boogaard and Jets forward Rick Rypien.

Byfuglien led all NHL defencemen last year in goals and helped guide the Chicago Blackhawks to the 2010 Stanley Cup before being traded to the Atlanta Thrashers in late June 2010. The Thrashers relocated to Winnipeg in the off-season.



Dustin Byfuglien