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Missouri football's Ealy defends Aldon Smith after DUI arrest



Indianapolis Colts quarterback Andrew Luck, No. 12, throws a pass as San Francisco 49ers linebacker Aldon Smith, No. 99, moves in to stop him in the first half an NFL football game in San Francisco on Sunday. ; BEN MARGOT/The Associated Press

By [Alexander Smith](#)

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COLUMBIA — Aldon Smith had practice Friday morning, but he was not going to make it on time.

The San Francisco 49ers defensive end and former Missouri star was sitting in his truck pressing the accelerator at 7 a.m., but the vehicle wasn't moving. His blood-alcohol content was 0.15, almost twice California's legal driving limit, and he had crashed into a tree in someone's yard. Marijuana

was also found on the scene.

News of Smith's run-in with the law reached Missouri coaches and players Friday. Head coach Gary Pinkel thought this development could end up being a positive experience for Smith, who was also arrested on suspicion of DUI in January 2012 and was stabbed at his own party in July of the same year.

"Our prayers are with him, and I'll offer myself to talk to him anytime, like I do all my players," said Pinkel, who mentioned that he texted Smith on Monday morning. "The main thing about this is it can be turned into a real positive. That's the approach that I think he'll take."

Pinkel was arrested for a DUI offense in 2011.

Tigers defensive end Kony Ealy remains good friends with Smith, who left Missouri after the 2010 season. On Monday, Ealy said that media attention over the past few days has been unfair.

"It's hard to see him just get ridiculed like that from outside media," Ealy said. "People that don't know him just judge him. You don't know what actually happened. Anything could have happened."

"It's kind of hard because he is a brother to me. The only reason everybody's mad at him or saying negative things about him is because of what the media is putting out there and everybody goes with the media."

Peter King of MMQB.si.com reported that the 24-year-old Smith was arrested, jailed, bailed out and then brought to practice that afternoon. On Sunday, he played every defensive snap in a 27-7 loss against the Indianapolis Colts.

According to Matt Maiocco of CSNBayArea.com, Smith's locker was empty afterward.

"I am taking a leave of absence to address my health," Smith said through the 49ers. "I am sorry that I have affected my team, my family and the organization. I will do everything in my power to handle this situation the best way possible."

Despite Smith's prior issues with the law, Ealy adamantly defended Smith's character.

“It’s probably just a misunderstanding,” Ealy said. “I talked to Aldon a couple times. It’s not affecting his game at all. When he goes out there and makes sacks, when he goes out there and makes TFLs (tackles for loss), everybody’s still going to love him.”

Tigers quarterback James Franklin was also skeptical that he was getting the full story about Smith’s arrest but acknowledged that the issues at hand — drunk driving, drug possession and rehab — are not to be taken lightly.

“It’s always tough when you don’t have a direct source or you’re not talking to him, so I try not to believe everything,” Franklin said. “But obviously, a subject like this, it’s not like they’re just making it up. So I just hope he’s doing OK.”

Whether or not Smith plays Thursday in St. Louis is up in the air. NFL teams are not allowed to suspend players for substance-abuse issues; that’s the league’s job. And the league will not be able to make a decision until Smith’s court date in November.

In the meantime, the 49ers have two options — force Smith to sit out (and pay him more than \$200,000 in salary for each contest), or let him play.

On Sunday night, the team tweeted that Smith is out “indefinitely” and did not provide a timetable for his return.

“You look at any player who is 22 or 23 years old and has had tremendous success, that’s difficult to handle,” Pinkel said. “He’s not the first one who’s ever struggled with those things. Won’t be the last.”

Ealy remains convinced that, despite the charges, everything would turn out OK for his mentor.

“Everybody sees you as this guy on a pedestal, but really, you’re kind of like a victim,” Ealy said. “Because everybody idolizes you and ... one false move, and no matter if it’s your fault or not, it’s still your fault. Aldon’s a strong guy. He’s gonna bounce back. He’s doing whatever they’re making him do. He’s got to be more careful; he’s got to be more leery of where he’s at.

“My heart goes out to him. He knows I’m behind him 110 percent. I know when he gets back to football, everything else will be erased.”