

February 1, 2002

## **SUPER BOWL XXXVI** **St. Louis Rams vs. New England Patriots**

An Interview With:

### **COMMISSIONER PAUL TAGLIABUE**

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: Good morning, and welcome to Super Bowl XXXVI.

If you're looking for the National Automobile Dealers convention, you're in the wrong place at the wrong time. So we would invite you to stay for some football. And we hope to have a great game.

There's a lot about this year's Super Bowl that's unique. Starting with the fact that the game was rescheduled, for the first time ever in our history. The past year, for all Americans, has been unlike any other, filled with unprecedented challenges and accomplishments.

For our league, the past year meant a season that was more than just great football. It was a season of remembering the people that our nation lost, honoring our heroes, and meeting new challenges together.

We in the NFL are proud of what we accomplished together with our fellow citizens. Like all persons, we stood united, we kept our priorities straight, and we came back strong: NFL fans and citizens throughout America did the same, and we salute them for their extraordinary resolve and achievements.

Throughout the league, we were more active than ever in our communities after the events of September 11, especially our players. We're very proud, to put it mildly, of the way our players conducted themselves after September 11, giving their time, money, leadership and other resources to the post-September 11 relief efforts, as did so many Americans.

Serving communities is, and has been for a long time, a priority for our teams and for our players. Literally, hundreds of players do outstanding work every year to assist people and to assist with good causes. We recognize the best of that work through our annual NFL Man of the Year Award, the Walter Payton Award, which is here to my left.

I'm very pleased to announce today that Pittsburgh Steelers running back, Jerome Bettis, is the 2001 winner of the Walter Payton Award as the NFL Man of the Year on and off the field.

Jerome, who is here today with his family, including his mother, reaches out to help others in so many ways, from assisting troubled children, to giving scholarships to upgrading facilities in the community for young people and addressing public health issues.

Jerome, would you and your family please stand and let's recognize Jerome Bettis. (Applause.)

I just shared with Jerome a memory that I met him when he was still at Notre Dame, and he was coming out in the draft. I met him at the Super Bowl. I walked away from the conversation with Jerome Bettis, and said, there's the type of player we want to have in the NFL for many years.

So keep it up, stay for a good, long time.

We know Jerome would rather be on the practice field today, and for him to be here with us to receive this award and to underscore the role that our players play in the community, I think is a great thing, and we know the Steelers and Jerome will be back working hard next year to be in the Super Bowl.

Jerome is just typical of all 1,800 NFL players in the sense that they are all elite athletes who start playing the game at the youth level, at the high school level, and then at the collegiate level. To encourage that kind of participation in football, we established a couple of years ago, with the Players Association, the NFL Youth Football Fund, and it was designed to enable us to work together with the players and the Players Association to invest in the future of the game.

To date, and this is as a result of the recent extension of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, the League and the Players Association have committed \$150 million to the Youth Football Fund, and to date we've made grants exceeding \$20 million for a variety of purposes. Among them: To help rebuild and restore football fields in every NFL city, over 80 fields to date; to develop and recognize coaches and administrators at the youth football level; to create more opportunity to kids, both boys and girls to play football; and to assist young players in their academics.

This coming year, we will continue to build on these programs. With academic support for high school football players, we will continue to grow our partnership with the College Football Foundation, National Football Foundations, Play It Smart Program. It's a very effective program providing academic advisors primarily to high

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school players in inner city high school football programs. Our goal here is to continue to invest in the College Football Foundation, and to invest several million dollars in these programs in the very near future.

Our second Youth Football Summit will be held this August in Canton, Ohio, in connection with the Hall of Fame weekend. We started this last year, and youth and high school coaches representing every state will be coming together again this summer for a series of seminars and events. We will continue to encourage leaders at the high school level, not just coaches, but teachers and administrators who support kids playing football.

And our National High School Football Coach of the Year is here today, and I would ask him to stand in just a minute. I want you to meet Sid Edwards.

Sid, would you stand? (Applause.)

Coach Edwards is from Redemptious High School (ph)in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. And Warrick Dunn of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers played for Coach Edwards in high school, and nominated Sid for this High School Coach of the Year Award. Warrick Dunn is also here. Like Jerome Bettis, Warrick is one of those NFL players who does a fabulous job on the field and off the field in the community. And I want to congratulate both Coach Edwards and Warrick for what they accomplish in football and in the community. Thanks very much.

Turning to Sunday's game. It's a match that's rich in glamour and in symbolism. The "Greatest Show on Turf," some have dubbed the Rams, versus our Red, White and Blue Patriots. Middle America, which epitomizes America's values, versus the birth place of America's values. The Patriots and the Rams have achieved so much this season in very different ways. Each team has its own history for this season, and its own points of emphasis. But both are on an eight- game winning streak, which is an extraordinary accomplishment given the competitive balance we have in our league. And the Rams have an opportunity to secure a special place in NFL history with the possibility of two Super Bowls in three years.

We appreciate the interest of our fans throughout America, the support they gave to us, to our players, to our teams, and to each other during this unprecedented season.

We thank all of you in the media for your interest and support of the league.

And as is the custom, I'll take the first question from Dave Goldberg of the Associated Press.

*Q. I want to ask a general question about instant replay. In the AFC title game, both teams used their challenges up early, and I think in all cases or maybe in three out of four the challenges were upheld. It left them without anything later. Is there some way you would look at instant replay to give a team a challenge back if it was successful, or any other modifications to the system that you might encourage the Competition Committee to look at?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: All of those ideas have been discussed in the past. And in terms of getting challenges back, if you have a successful challenge, that's really been rejected already.

The reason for that is that we do not want to have an undue number of breaks in the games for replay. We don't want to protract the game. There was some criticism, I know, in the media about how that particular game was protracted already.

My guess is that we'll have a lot of suggestions for improvements that individual teams will have, but the likelihood is that I don't see a consensus of 24 clubs around any substantial changes to the replay system. I think it's working well. It's working as it was conceived, and the ultimate safeguard is that replay is unlimited in the final two minutes when the official comes in. And my guess would be the consensus would still be around the current system; although, there would be a lot of ideas discussed.

*Q. I have a question, two questions, really. First of all, comment on the Saints and the State's negotiations, where they stand, if you have any concerns. And secondly, the security issue, are you confident everything is in place, and nothing is going to go off -- it will go off without a hitch?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: On the Saints first, we feel good about where things are between the team and the State. My sense from having been here in November and again this week is the package is a balanced package. It was seen that way in the legislature; so that we're expecting that the legislature will go forward and take what is a very important step to approve the package.

On security, again, I feel very confident. And that confidence grows in part from the terrific job that our own people did and our own teams did

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during the season with very much stepped-up commitments to security. But it also grows from the involvement of the Secret Service and the FBI and the designation of this event as a special National Security Event.

I was able to tour the other day the Secret Service command center and get a very thorough briefing from the agent in charge. I have a very high degree of confidence that the security for this game will not only be unprecedented, but will be world class, and very, very effective.

*Q. On the same subject, have there been any credible threats to the game that you know of? And No. 2, is this going to be standard operating procedure for future Super Bowls?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: On the first part, we have no credible threats, or none that have been brought to my attention. And we do have both an understanding and assurances from the FBI and the Secret Service that if there were such threats, they would be brought to our attention. So the answer to that is no.

In terms of the future, I think that very much enhanced security and major investments in security will be part of our standard operating procedures in the National Football League, both during the regular season and during the post-season, and indeed, during the off-season.

Our belief, which all of the owners share, is that we in the private sector have an obligation and a responsibility to take direction from the President and from the Federal government, from governors, and they're clearly telling us that part of our responsibility is to invest in security; so we will do that in one form or another. Whether it's a precise mirror image of what we have this weekend, that would be something that would be discussed in the coming months as we plan toward the game in San Diego.

*Q. The last two times the NFL expanded, had you made an effort to encourage women to bid on the teams, and moving forward, would it be a priority for the league to encourage more women to buy into the teams when they become available, like the Falcons were recently?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: Well, you know, I guess whatever you're going to bid on, it takes money to bid. And it also takes interest.

So we've made it clear to all kinds of groups that we want very high-quality ownership. We want stable ownership committed to the community, preferably with some roots in the community. So I would say whether that's women, African Americans or other minorities, the

fundamental question comes down not to the opportunity; it comes down to both the interest and the wherewithal. And we've spoken to any number of people who have had the wherewithal to be interested in owning NFL teams or participating in ownership groups, but they haven't had the interest. Conversely, we've spoken to people that have had the interest, but not had the wherewithal.

So to me, it's something that the marketplace resolves much more so than anything we can do. We cannot create asset value in the pockets of individuals in America, except in their own league and players and owners. We create asset value for our players, as well as for others in the league, but not outside the league.

*Q. Can you talk about the message the NFL may be sending to America through the patriotic halftime and pregame, et cetera. And secondly, there have been rumors going around that the President might be attending the game. Will he be here? I'm sure you have a ticket for him if he wants to be here.*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: On the second one. President Bush will not be able to attend the game. His office advised us of that earlier this week. His father, former President Bush, will be here and will be tossing the coin, along with Roger Staubach to kick off the game. And Roger will be accompanying former President Bush in the coin toss, because, among other things, he's a Naval Academy graduate, a Veteran in Vietnam, and also was the MVP of the Super Bowl played here 30 years ago, when the Dallas Cowboys beat the Miami Dolphins in the Superdome.

Roger Staubach and former President Bush will be here. Current President Bush will not be here.

The message we want to send in the game. I think the most important thing we want to do is to be true to our own values in football, which we believe are values that are reflected and are brought to bear much more broadly in our society. We don't want to do anything that's artificial. So when I refer to the values of our game that are reflected in society, I mean among other things: Perseverance, a preparedness to deal with adversity. Our game is all about adversity and overcoming adversity and sticking with a game plan. It's about team work.

So we think there are many values in our game that are important to our society at large today. We're dealing with adversity. We've got to be in it for the long haul. We can't be in it for the

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first quarter and not stay through the last quarter.

So that, I think, is the main thing we're trying to do. And we're trying to strike a balance between the importance of our game, which is the culmination of our season, and other priorities that the nation has. I think that will be very well reflected in both the pregame and the telecast of the game, as well as the Halftime Show.

*Q. In the NFL's return to this facility once again for a Super Bowl, there's been quite a bit of discussion about whether the Superdome can have legs in the coming years. Some argue about a new stadium. The Charlotte Hornets that are coming into this market, the competition factor that will be created there.*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: I think it is an issue, not just in New Orleans and in Louisiana, but in a number of markets. We've talked about this before. There's been such an expansion of sport, and in some of those instances, the premise of expansion was that it would be a one-team market. Basically, that was our premise in Jacksonville, just to take one example. And the tremendous interest in football in Florida, and the fans over there supported the Jaguars well.

The NBA did the same in certain instances, and obviously they have teams in markets which are one-team markets, Sacramento, Salt Lake City and others.

So there is an issue, I think generally in the sports world about oversaturation; and how it plays out here I don't know, but we'll be interested in watching it.

In terms of the Superdome, I think the bigger question about future Super Bowls in New Orleans, they've been a great Super Bowl host city. I think the bigger issue is we have a bigger number of cities and states competing for Super Bowls. And the idea that there would be a limited number of Super Bowl locations, focusing perhaps on Miami, New Orleans, and southern California, I think it's passe in our league. And, of course, we're opening up for discussion with the membership the question of having some Super Bowls in open-air stadiums in northern cities such as New York and the nation's capitol. I think that's going to be the issue going forward would be the number of Super Bowl candidate cities.

The bigger context is the increasing number of cities, which is reflected in where we will be playing the game in the next coming years, including Houston and Detroit.

*Q. A question about the flexibility in the Monday Night Football schedule. This year the*

*Patriots was not on Monday Night Football. Bears weren't on Monday night. I think a few years ago, the Rams in their resurgent season were not on Monday Night Football. Can you in the league step in and create more flexibility to get these teams on Monday night in their years that they're having a Cinderella-type year?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: We've been discussing that internally, and also with the networks.

The key thing to bear in mind is that Monday night is just one of four opportunities for fans to see NFL games. We have a tremendous audience for sports on Sunday afternoon. And there CBS and FOX are our carriers. We also have the lion's share of our games on Sundays.

So we will be exploring and bringing to a conclusion in the next coming weeks some thinking about how we could possibly have some flexible scheduling that would help each of the networks, including Monday Night Football, but not exclusively Monday Night Football.

I think, personally, and I think many people in television share the judgment, but the issues we face on Monday night are not so much the quality of the game as they are the fractionalization of the audience, the explosion of channels in the last decade and the explosion of viewer choices, which is sometimes called the wilderness of choice on television, which is a much more direct factor in terms of our audience size on Monday night than it is Sunday, when our product is concentrated on NFL football.

Sunday is a magnet for television viewers. I think that's the context in which we have to look at flexible scheduling. If we do come up with something, it's not going to be a cure-all.

*Q. My question concerns Super Bowl tickets. In light of evidence that a number of brokers are getting large blocks of tickets as third parties and deals with teams, do you have any concerns or solutions to the fact that fans, be they season ticketholders or the general public having less and less access to Super Bowl tickets at face value?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: I don't have any concerns in terms of brokers and things like that. We've looked at those issues very carefully, both at the league level and at the team level on many occasions; and what's being done is not only fair, but intelligent and sound.

In terms of fan access, the problem is that we have 125 million or more people that want to watch the Super Bowl game. Most of them will do

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it on television. We have tremendous demands for tickets that far exceed the capacity of our stadiums. So we allocate the tickets. There are many constituencies within the league, players, teams, networks, other outside partners, all of whom have some stake in getting tickets to the Super Bowl. So when you start with 32 teams, add players, add television partners and other important partners, you're dividing by a very big divisor. If you divide 80,000 by 50, you start with a small fraction for any particular contingency. That's really the challenge, and we just try to manage that as best we can.

But I don't have any concerns. And I think that the steps we've taken in recent years to make sure that there's no inappropriate scalping, for the most part have been pretty effective. Although, once a ticket is in the stream of commerce, we haven't yet found the hologram that enables us to trace the ticket to the ultimate user.

*Q. It's been reported recently that the networks are using hundreds of millions of dollars on the NFL. How much does that concern you and do you think it impacts the long term health of the league?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: We are halfway through our eight-year television contracts now. We know what the network revenues have been, generally, at the network level and at the owned-and-operated affiliate level. And I guess I could say confidently that up to this point most of the networks have been profitable on their NFL television contracts for the last four years. I can also say, as you know, that the last four years prior to the beginning of the recession, and prior to September 11, were record-setting years in terms of the expansion of private sector investment in advertising. So we've been through the most unprecedented boom in television and in entertainment.

Now we're in the midst of two things. No. 1, we're in the midst of a recession, which some people think is about to reach its trough and the economy is going to firm up and grow. And secondly, we're at a point in time where our rights fees escalate significantly in the next four years. So, do we have big concerns? No. Are we in discussions with the networks about the future of their place with the NFL and television? Yes. Very much so. We're working closely with them, talking about the future, not just in terms of the economics, but in terms of emerging technologies that can bring new and better services to the fans.

So I'm reasonably optimistic that we'll get through the current recession pretty well, and that

we'll be able to work with the networks to deliver tremendous value in the future. I think the key thing for us is that our programming still stands far and away above all other sports programming at the pinnacle of television in terms of the size of our audience, the diversity of audience strength and the demographics.

So we have some concerns, but they're balanced with a good deal of optimism and confidence.

*Q. How concerned is the league about the Phoenix market, a potential member of the Super Bowl rotation, whether there have been endless delays in getting the stadium built, and there seems to be dwindling interest in some of the smallest game day crowds?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: I guess you've asked two different questions. One is about the stadium, and we're well aware of the debate that's going on with the new stadium. But it's our expectation that will be resolved and they'll go forward with construction of the new stadium.

And I think that plus the way the team has the potential to perform, hopefully will bring more fans to the stadium. And generally we have a good feeling about the future of the Arizona Cardinals franchise, both with respect to the stadium and the team led by Jake Plumber and others.

It's a cyclical business, and I guess Arizona is one state in the cycle. We have some confidence they'll be moving forward both on the stadium front and with the team to make the attendance much more robust.

*Q. Early indications are that the talent pool that will be available for the Texans in the Expansion Draft will be different significantly from the talent pool that was available quality-wise for Cleveland. Many teams have come out and said they're exposing players based on their ability to solve some of their own salary cap problems. Are you comfortable with that and the message that it may send to fans; that their teams aren't necessarily protecting their best players; they're using it more as a budget situation solver?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: You know, I don't think that -- I don't agree with a lot of the premise in your question; so it's hard to answer the question. And I don't know what you mean about the talent pool for the Texans being different than the talent pool for other expansion teams. I don't know whether that means it's better or worse.

But anyway, we recognized in shaping the

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final expansion plan for the Texans, that certain plans today were different than when we stocked Cleveland and Carolina and Jacksonville. So, yes, it is different.

But we also think it's just as strong and it's fair and equivalent to what those other teams had. For one thing, while there are fewer unrestricted free agents probably today than there were at some times in the past, because teams are investing and keeping their own good players, there are also some players being released where they've had unrealistic spiked contracts in relation to their talent. We're trying to address that issue of unrealistic spiked contracts generally and not just in the context of expansion.

So I think the veteran players available to Houston, in short, will be equivalent to what was available to the other expansion teams.

In terms of the draft, again, I think that we've taken into account the fact that we have 32 teams drafting now, not 28 or 30, as we did at some of the earlier points in expansion. And we're prepared to revisit the issue of the Texans access to the drafted players in future years, depending upon their won-loss record.

So I think stocking of the Texans is very sound and the prospects for the team are as good as the prospects were for Carolina, Jacksonville and Cleveland.

*Q. I want to go back to that question about Super Bowl tickets. You said your policies are fair, intelligent and sound. The long article in the New Orleans paper seemed to indicate that NFL owners are using those tickets in deals with travel agencies to make money, charging premiere prices. Do you think that article was accurate, are they doing that or not doing that; and if they are, what is your opinion of it?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: I tried to read the article. I've tried to read a lot of articles this week. I think the article had some anecdotal comments in there that are probably accurate. But I think it kind of confuses the notion of scalping with the notion of running the business in a perfectly appropriate way.

Scalping is a fairly specific thing. It's either selling tickets at the site of an event, which is frequently prohibited as a crowd control measure, because you don't want hawkers pushing people and selling counterfeit tickets and so forth. That's one aspect of scalping. And scalping is prohibited at the site of most sporting events, because you don't want counterfeits when there's an opportunity -- when there's not a chance for the fan to do something about the scalped ticket.

The person who is presenting the sporting event has the right to fix the price to the event; so that's our prerogative. We keep the prices relatively low, compared to some other mega events. But if a team wants to have travel packages or if a team wants to create relationships with local businesses that are good for the team, and ultimately good for the fans, that's their prerogative to do it. It's not scalping, it just recognizes the value of an association with a NFL team -- an association with the team, including tickets.

So some of it is accurate. Maybe a good deal of it is accurate. I have no way to check out all the anecdotes. I think there's some misunderstanding as far as what's fair and appropriate and what's not.

*Q. Could you talk about the growth of the Super Bowl from Game I, that didn't sell out to where it is today? And as a follow-up to that question, every business wants to grow their product, but this game is already the single largest sporting event in the world. Has it become more of an issue of maintenance than growth?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: I don't think so. I think that, as I said earlier, when I answered the question about the themes for this year's game, and what it is we're trying to represent, we don't want to do anything that's artificial, and that applies to the Super Bowl, itself. As long as the focus remains on having great teams in the game and competing, as these two outstanding teams will do on Sunday to win the title and the National Football League Championship, I think that's the key thing.

As we add elements to the weekend, it's mostly because of other things we're trying to accomplish that will be important to the future of the game, such as the emphasis today on youth football. That's very important to the future of our game. It's very important to the future, I think, and our owners think and the players think, to kids in America, to have role models that participate in sports.

We've added those elements. We added international elements. I announced a new relationship with FC Barcelona and the NFL and Catalonia in Spain, and also a new partnership in Osaka Japan for an American Bowl game next summer. A lot of things I added that are ancillary, but they're important; they reflect the growth of the game. We've got many more charity events and opportunities for people to invest in the community here.

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I was with Steve Young the other day, who on behalf of Sun Microsystems, is investing in our youth education town here in New Orleans. We have other groups rebuilding homes in the community.

So a lot of things have been added, but it's still a football game. And I think the things that have been added complement what our teams do on a year-round basis, and are ultimately really good for the game. If we get beyond that, then we'll be going in the wrong direction, but I don't think we're there at this point.

*Q. My question deals with preseason games. In talking with a lot of the players, and I'm sure Jerome and Warrick would attest to this, the players think there are too many preseason games. Season ticketholders have to buy these preseason games; is there any thought, aside from the financial game, of reducing the number of preseason games?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: There was serious consideration by that of the Competition Committee, but there's no sentiment to change our preseason scheduling of four preseason games, and 16 regular season games. I'm sure Jerome and Warrick and other players, who have proven themselves over many seasons feel that they don't need as many preseason games as they have. But the coaches take that into account by withholding them in some of the games.

The flip side of the coin is really the driving thing, which is with our current system, with young players being critical in many positions on NFL squads, and with the rotation and churn of players that occurs with free agency, most coaches and I think most organizations, the Steelers, certainly, and Tampa Bay among them, feel that we need those four preseason games, to get player evaluation done, to develop young playing talent, to give veteran players who are moving the opportunity to play as a unit with their teammates, and to start the season with a real high quality of play. I don't see a change in that particular area.

*Q. Now that your alliance with FC Barcelona is a fact, will you consider doing something similarly in Mexico?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: At the moment, the partnership with FC Barcelona is, from our perspective, focused on NFL Europe League. And the teams we have in that league in Europe, including the Barcelona Dragons. And from FC Barcelona's standpoint, their interest is in part in bringing their team here to the States to

play some games at some NFL stadiums, among other things.

But since the focus of the relationship is NFL Europe for us, at this time I don't see us expanding that to Mexico. I see us continuing to pay very strong attention to our fans in Mexico, growing our programs down there for youth participation in sports, continuing to play American Bowl games in the future. I think that's important for our fans in Mexico, as well as Latino fans in the United States, including Mexicans. But I don't see the FC Barcelona relationship as a precedent outside the context of the NFL Europe league, at least at this time.

*Q. The Korey Stringer tragedy. You've been reexamining training camp policies. What, if anything, has been examined, perhaps, that might go in the next training camp? Although, I know Gene Upshaw said 20 years ago he thought the conditions were probably worse than when he played. But what, if anything, has been done?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: Well, the first thing is that when we reviewed what the teams were doing in training camp, we came away with a very good feeling that there was a very high standard of care being followed by all of the teams, and that that had grown out of discussions that our NFL Physicians Society had had, and the NFL Trainers Society had had in recent years; so that the issue of training camp conditions, including heat, had been focused on and handled well by the teams.

Despite that, we've spent -- and I say "we." I mean the League and the Players Association together, have spent a good deal of time since last summer talking to outside experts, physicians and others who deal with extreme heat conditions and high levels of exertion in extreme heat, including experts from the Department of Defense, we are scheduling at the Combine in Indianapolis some further sessions that Gene Upshaw and I, and Harold Henderson from the Management Council, that will attend with the teams and trainers. And we're going to bring all of these efforts together at our League Meeting in March, where I think we will have some recommendations for the teams, which of necessity will only be a framework. Because teams, say, in Florida and in Arizona, the Cardinals, have different circumstances in training camp than, say, the Buffalo bills.

So there's got to be quite a bit of variation, both because of the different climatic particular conditions, as well as the way clubs run their training camps. But we will have

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recommendations and be able to talk about them at our annual meeting in March.

*Q. What's the status of the possible Super Bowl in New York and Washington? And, also, does the New York Super Bowl depend on the proposed new stadium on the West Side?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: I guess the status is sort of at two levels. I've asked our Super Bowl Advisory Committee to take a hard look in the next month or six weeks at the possibility of playing Super Bowls in open-air stadiums in northern cities, which, as you know, we haven't done to this point. And that would focus initially, at least, on New York and the nation's capitol.

Secondly, in both places there is very strong interest in the business community, as well as in the political leadership sector in having those games, which I think is very important, because this has to be something that we drive in partnership with businesses, with fans, with radio and television, and not just expect to partner with government, alone. So there is that interest.

In New York our premise is that the game could be played at Giants Stadium. It is not contingent on a stadium being built on the West Side. And we've had some discussions with representatives of the Stadium Authority in New Jersey who have told us that they understand that Giants Stadium is approaching 30 years of age, and that renovations and improvements have to be made. But that's down the road.

The basic thing we're initially looking at is to be sure the game can be handled well in those types of cities.

*Q. There's a growing sentiment in the Arizona legislature that the Cardinals and Arizona State should share a stadium. What is the position of sharing a stadium and splitting the revenues? And the stadium has become a big mess in Arizona; is the NFL taking any active role in helping that along?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: I know we have some big messes around this league. I didn't know we had one in Arizona.

On the Arizona piece of it I'll have to beg off. Roger Goodell, who is our chief operating officer, I know has been in close touch with Bill Bidwell and Mike Bidwell and others, talking about the status of the stadium in Arizona. And maybe you can talk to him later.

On colleges and NFL teams sharing stadiums, the Steelers have just started, in the new Heinz Field and in a new practice facility which is shared with Pittsburgh; and I know that Dan

Rooney is sitting over here, feels that it's a very successful partnership, and based on what I've seen, I feel the same way. It's a way of bringing some of the investment of a NFL team and a stadium and a stadium together with public investment and having dual uses, for the NFL and a major university in a community.

So I think, and I feel that Dan agrees, that that is a model that could be extended to other NFL cities. There has been discussion in Minnesota of that. I've been in Minnesota and spoken with both the governor and the leaders of the university system and members of the legislature about whether that model might work in Minnesota, just to take one example.

*Q. How concerned are you with the fact that in the East Coast time zone, many of the Monday Night Football games are going well past midnight. One went as late as 1:00 a.m., and would starting them earlier, 20, 30, 45 minutes earlier solve any of the problems that you mentioned earlier about the fractionalization of the audience, and retaining younger viewers?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: I doubt it. Let me explain what I mean.

There are a lot of different views about how late Monday Night Football starts on the East Coast and how late it ends. The problem is kind of inherent in the fact that we have three time zones in the United States; 9:00 Eastern is 6:00 Pacific. And so -- and it's 9:00 Eastern is 8:00 Central.

What we found when we experimented with the change in the start time of Monday Night Football is that I think we had a modest increase in viewership in the Eastern time zone. We had a very dramatic falloff in the Central time zone, which we didn't anticipate, and we had a dramatic falloff in the Pacific time zone, which we did anticipate.

So others may disagree, but I personally don't feel that's the big issue. The big issue is that television has grown from a three network universe in the 60s and 70s to a 50- to 60-channel universe of basic services in most markets to a 200- to 500-channel universe if you have satellite TV or digital cable. That's the fractionalization of the audience. And I don't think that's linked to the 9:00 kickoff.

*Q. Several hefty fines were handed out to players this year who had particularly egregious offenses against the opposition. They had the Dan Neil and the Damien Robinson fines. First of all, as much as players are making, are fines a deterrent and is there a possibility -- is it feasible to*

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*suspend players for egregious offenses?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: It is possible to suspend players. We have suspended some players in the last couple of years. I know we've suspended some players for hitting officials. I don't recall offhand whether we've suspended any for violations relating to another player.

Our policy, traditionally, and it continues to be the policy, is to try to deter misconduct without taking a player out of the game. In other words, without suspending players, because we only play 16 regular season games, and a one-game suspension in the NFL would be the equivalent of a ten-game suspension in baseball, if you consider the proportionate number of games.

Historically, we've tried to deter misconduct without suspensions, but we have suspended.

We feel, and I think that the Players Association and the players feel that fines are an effective deterrent because the fine is coupled with some very direct instruction and direction to the coaching staff and to the player about what is expected of the staff and the player. So, for example, this year when we fined a player quite heavily in the beginning of the season for hitting a quarterback who was out of the play, I brought the player into New York, along with one of his coaches, and with our director of officiating, we sat together for an hour or more and went over the rules and emphasized how to play the game.

So I think when you put the fine together with those types of efforts, it is effective -- and educational. Our players are not malevolent and are not out there to injure other players. In some cases, it's just a lack of understanding of specific rules, which sometimes differ from the college rules. And we had the fine recently of Hugh Douglas for hitting the Bears quarterback. We have a rule which is different from the rule at all other levels of football. In our game, when there's a change of possession, the quarterback is off-limits unless he unequivocally engages himself as a defender on the change of possession. That was the rule under which we fined Hugh Douglas and Gerard Warren at the beginning of the season. That's not the college or high school rule. We have learned if we clarify things with the teams, the players for the most part played within the rules.

*Q. You addressed earlier expansion in Houston, of course, this year. Los Angeles has a great tradition of football, obviously. It's a great TV market, as you know, and is a very lucrative opportunity. Are you first of all disappointed that Los Angeles has not panned out. And second of*

*all, what is the future of a Los Angeles franchise football?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: We know that we have many, many thousands of passionate NFL fans in the greater Los Angeles area. They still are big supporters of our game. Our television audience there reflects that strong interest. We have many great players from that area. We've had great teams there.

So we want to leave no stone unturned to respond to that interest in the NFL, in Los Angeles. We appreciate the interest and we want to respond to it.

Exactly how we do that is something that we've been working on. We were disappointed that we were not able to solve it in the last decade, and we will continue to go forward and try to respond to that interest. It's a great area for football at all levels, and at some point, we need to be there.

*Q. As you know, Super Bowl XXXVI is the final game that Pat Summerall and John Madden will call. Can you talk about the impact that team has had on the NFL over the past 20 seasons, and also Pat's impact on the league over the past 50 years?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: Well, Pat is a gem and has had an unprecedented affect, just one of the very few people that have the kind of impact on our game that Pat Summerall has had. One of those people, oddly enough, may be his good friend, Frank Gifford, who had a similar career of making a great contribution as a player, and then going on for, in Pat's case, 50 years of total service, including in the broadcasting booth.

So I think it's -- and I told Pat this last weekend, we've talked about it on and off for the past year, his legacy is phenomenal. And we wanted to continue his involvement in the NFL in some way, whether that's in a network role with FOX or whether that's with NFL Films or in some other area. He's a very young, I think, 71, and we've had conversations that recognize both tremendous contributions he's made and the fact that we want to keep that going.

*Q. The conspiracy theorists in Oakland look at the suspension of, say, Darrell Russell and when other guys are in the substance abuse program, and say, hey, look, they're picking on this team again. Do you think the substance abuse efforts are working and do you think it's a little unfair to lose a guy for 11 months?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: Yes, I think

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they are working. And no, I don't think it's unfair for a team to lose a player for a year or more. That's our policy.

It was bargained with the Players Association, the 11-month or more suspension only comes into play when there have been repeat violations. And it's important to bear in mind that a repeat violation does not necessarily mean repeat abuse of substance. It could mean failure to comply with the terms of the program. That's the policy. It's collectively bargained, and it's administered in a very careful and balanced way; so I think that's fair.

The other issue we've had is losing the player late in the season, but that's also the policy. And that was not just the Raiders. The Bears lost a player late in the season. And to try to make those judgments on an ad hoc basis could get you into unfairness.

The policy is whenever the review process comes to conclusion, and if there's an amplification of the violation, then the discipline is imposed.

*Q. I don't know if you're aware of the comments made by Gene Upshaw yesterday, he spent time defending comments of Randy Moss; that he basically played when he wanted to. As not only Commissioner, but a long-time fan of the game, how did you construe those comments and are they of concern to you?*

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: Gene and I talked about that yesterday morning, and we've talked about it a lot since Randy made his comments. And I've also talked to Dennis Green about it and Red McCombs and others.

I think Randy Moss has to be evaluated on what he does on the field, and less so on what he says about what he does on the field. Whether his remarks were temperate or whether they were driven by some other motivation, neither Gene nor anybody else can tell.

So Randy, I think, has shown that he is a phenomenal player. Some people feel that he's phenomenal when the ball is being thrown to him, and less phenomenal when the primary receiver is someone else. But that's a judgment football people have to make, not me. I think Randy Moss is a great competitor, and he deserves to be judged on the basis of what he does on the field.

The attitude that, "Well, I can play as hard as I can play," I'm not referring to Randy Moss. I'm referring to the broader question of guaranteed contracts, incentive contracts, and motivation to play the game at the level that's expected by NFL fans is something that we've discussed a lot over the past decade as we've moved into free agency,

and as we've moved into mega-million-dollar contracts with a lot of guaranteed money. There are many people on both sides of the table, owners and representatives of the players, alike, who understand that we need to have a system where the motivation to play the game is not impaired by guaranteed money or by collective bargaining provisions.

And to this point, we feel that our players are as highly motivated, and then some, as any group of players in sport. And probably it's from two things: No. 1, to play this game, you have to be a fierce competitor, and our players are fierce competitors. And they also have a lot of pride. To get where they are, they cannot be anything but that.

And secondly, and I think Gene probably talked about this, because I know he talks to me about it a lot, this is a game that you can't play at half-speed. If you do, the risk of injury accelerates. And to use the colloquial, you're likely to get your ass handed to you, so you have to play this game all out. And we think that the players do that.

These two teams here Sunday reflect the tremendous competitiveness in the NFL at every point in the season. The Patriots are here this year in the Super Bowl. But probably just as memorable from Mr. Kraft and his players, the game they played last year late in the season, I think in Buffalo, where not a lot depended on the outcome; yet, it was a tremendous football game and was fought down to the last minute, I think even into overtime. That's the hallmark of our game and the players are entitled to be proud of it.

Thank you very much for being here. We think it is going to be a great game. And we'll know on Sunday night who wins. Thanks again.

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