

London Media Conference Call – NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell

January 16, 2007

Commissioner Goodell: We're very excited to announce we will be playing our first regular season game outside of North America in London this fall and as you all know this is in response to the great interest in the NFL around the world.

BBC Radio - Why was London chosen ahead of other potential host cities?

Commissioner Goodell: There were a variety of reasons. First of all, we have a great history of NFL football in London. The British fans have been great fans of NFL football for several years and London is a tremendous international city. We have a great relationship with the City of London and that was another important factor. But it was primarily because of the fan base and the fact we have such tremendous fans in London. We're responding to that interest in our game. We have tremendous television partners in London that have shown a great deal of interest in us and we have also had a great deal of support from public officials. The Mayor of London has shown a great deal of interest in hosting this game.

The Guardian – Has a stadium decision been made and will it come down to the best financial offer?

Commissioner Goodell: One of the most positive things out of this entire process has been the enthusiasm we have received from other cities and even within the cities, such as London with multiple sites. This is another indication of the potential of this series that these sites are so interested in hosting this game. They recognise the value this will bring to their cities and the people in their cities.

And we've also been very surprised, in one sense, by the interest from our own clubs in playing and participating in this series. We have had a tremendous amount of interest from them and they all want to participate and it has actually been an issue for us to decide which teams are going to be fortunate enough to play.

Mark Waller: It won't only be a financial consideration. We're obviously looking primarily at the infrastructure and facilities at the two venues and how they can accommodate not only the game itself but also the supporting requirements. Moving two NFL teams over for a regular season game is an incredibly strong and tough logistical challenge and that is our primary focus.

Secondarily, we will be looking at both stadia in terms of their readiness as both have undergone significant construction work recently and it's important for us to understand the state of readiness with both stadiums. And finally there will be a financial consideration but I would say that is the least of the three considerations we will be taking into account.

The Guardian – it has been reported the decision that it is Wembley has already been made. Can you comment on that?

Mark Waller: It's not true.

The Daily Telegraph – Can you tell us how much influence the fact that Premiership clubs are now owned by two NFL owners – Randy Lerner and the Glazer family – how much that influenced this decision to come to the UK?

Commissioner Goodell: It's a good question but it did not have any influence on this process. Neither of those owners has weighed in on a preference. We're obviously aware of their ownership interest but we did not take that into consideration.

Associated Press – Have you decided what teams are coming. If not, what is the process for choosing the teams?

Commissioner Goodell: The first priority with respect to the teams is to make sure we select two teams that will generate the most enthusiasm for our fans in London and the broader United Kingdom. I mentioned earlier we have had a tremendous amount of interest from our clubs in participating. That was somewhat unexpected when we first pursued this strategy but it has been extraordinary to see the reaction from the clubs and those host cities who want to have their city represented here. I would hope we will be able to announce this by the Super Bowl and we are confident we will have two very popular and outstanding football teams to represent the NFL.

Associated Press – What is the time frame for playing the game?

Commissioner Goodell: We do not have a definitive date but we would expect the game to be played in the late-September to mid-October time period.

The Times – When will a decision be made regarding the stadium?

Commissioner Goodell: I think probably at the same time as when we announce the two teams. If, for some reason, a conclusion is reached before then we would make that announcement but otherwise we're only three weeks away from when we expect to make a final determination on the two clubs.

The Guardian – The prospect of Wembley would be attractive – is the only thing holding back a decision on Wembley the timescale on the completion of the stadium?

Commissioner Goodell: We have a long history with Wembley Stadium but we also have a history with Twickenham and other facilities in the area. From our standpoint we have great opportunities regarding the facilities we have in London.

Mark Waller: I don't think it's just readiness. It's also assessing the infrastructure, training facilities, hotel accommodation around the two stadiums and ensuring the logistics of the game will work. So it's not just stadium readiness. We have been given very clear guarantees by both stadiums that they will be ready.

Associated Press – What other cities were considered and how close were they to getting it?

Mark Waller: We eliminated Toronto because they are hosting the Grey Cup game there and we agreed with the CFL that we would not play there.

Commissioner Goodell: We also looked at Mexico City and looked at various cities in Germany as potential hosts for the game.

Mark Waller: Dusseldorf and Hamburg specifically were interested in Germany.

Associated Press – Would they have a chance for hosting a game next year?

Mark Waller: Absolutely and there's now a separate process that will now kick off for selecting the venues for the period from 2008 to 2011 – the remaining four years of the series.

Commissioner Goodell: I would like to reinforce the commitment the NFL ownership made last fall when they approved this resolution, which was to play a series of regular season games overseas. This was not considered a one-off strategy. This is a new strategy that the NFL feels will benefit the league overall in its international development and as a response to our continuing fan interest around the world. The commitment of the ownership was for a series of games so we expect to be playing in a variety of cities over the next several years and we would hope the momentum will build as each of those games goes on and we have greater success every time we play. We think playing in London assures us of having a tremendous event for our first game outside of North America.

The Daily Telegraph – You say teams have responded with enthusiasm but can you give us an idea how this is going down with the fans?

Commissioner Goodell: That's a very good question and one we were certain to evaluate. As you know, we did play a regular season game in Mexico a year ago and had a positive reaction from both the teams participating and the fan base. It's an issue for us because we only play eight regular season games and two preseason games, not including any post-season games the team may qualify to host. But we want to make sure we are sensitive to our fan base because there are a limited number of NFL games. On the other hand, that's what makes it so unique and special for our fans in London. They're getting to experience a regular season game which has never been done before and we think that will be received very well not only there, but we think that our fans here will like the idea and respond favorably to the idea they are playing in London. This is great not only for the fans but also for the city to showcase the fact that they have an NFL franchise and will be seen on a global basis as a world-class city themselves.

The Daily Express – I wonder given the news of David Beckham going to MLS last week whether this can be seen as the NFL’s fightback globally?

Commissioner Goodell: Absolutely not. We have been in the planning of this for several months so this has nothing to do with that.

First Down Newspaper – How exciting is this international game for you in your first year in office?

Commissioner Goodell: This is one of the early initiatives I took on when I became commissioner because I believe in the growth of our sport internationally. I believe we have a tremendous following from a fan perspective around the world and we thought this was a strategy that would help us develop our game internationally. This was an important initiative for me and the league. This is an indication of where I put it as a priority for the NFL going forward.

LBC – Do you feel any threat in the future from soccer in light of David Beckham’s move?

Commissioner Goodell: No, I don’t. We understand the popularity of soccer as a global game. We think we’re a very different game. We don’t look at it as competition. We look at it as people believing American football is a great entertainment product. It is clearly one of the greatest sports in the world and we’re excited about continuing our strategy to bring our game to more fans. We’re not focusing on other people’s strategies or moves.

The Sun – You mention putting together a strategy for 2008-2011... if this game in London is a success can you guarantee London further games in the future or has it automatically got to go somewhere else after 2007?

Commissioner Goodell: We are confident this game is going to be a great success in London and I think that success will be a foundation to encourage us to play more games in London going forward. From our perspective, success in London will spur even greater interest around the world in playing NFL regular season games. There is great competition and interest and as we have great fans in London I would presume we would be back there sometime. I don’t know what the time period would be. I presume that with the success we will have there this fall we will be back on some type of regular basis.

Associated Press – Reports about Giants-Dolphins – are they a possibility?

Commissioner Goodell: They are two of many teams that have expressed an interest in the game and we’re going to evaluate that over the next couple of weeks and try to determine what the best matchup for our fans will be. It’s open to all 32 teams and we’re continually surprised and enthusiastic about the number of clubs and cities that have expressed an interest in representing the NFL in an international game.

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