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NFL Media Teleconference

An interview with:

WARREN MOON

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen. **National Football League** would like to introduce 2006 **Hall of Fame** inductee **Warren Moon**. Thank you for being with us today. Let's open it up for questions.

Q. You had a lot of people in your career who had an influence on you. Is it an easy decision to pick Leigh Steinberg or did anybody else come close that you had to agonize over?

WARREN MOON: You know, when you play 23 years, you have a lot of people that kind of influence your career, are mentors to you, had confidence in you along the way, especially the trail that I took. It was really hard to find one person that was involved in every phase of my professional career. I thought about **Hugh Campbell**, who was my first professional coach in **Canada**, as well as my first professional coach in the **NFL**. I thought about **Don James**, my college coach, who really saw something in me as a major college player that a lot of other people didn't see. I thought about my kids doing it.

The person that really has been with me from the beginning from the time I came out of college all the way through my professional career was **Leigh Steinberg**. We became very close friends as well as business partners throughout that time. We continue to be great friends still. I thought he would be the appropriate guy.

But, yeah, wasn't an easy decision. I think he makes the most sense of everybody that I considered.

Q. When you got to the NFL in '84, at that point the scouts kind of admitted they didn't have it right in '78, you became the highest paid player in the league. Was there anything after that point that you still had to overcome to get to where you are today in the Hall of Fame?

WARREN MOON: I think whenever you come in with the type of fanfare that I did, making the amount of money that I did, people were looking I'm sure for me to make things happen immediately. I was aware enough to know that you can't do it alone. In football, it's the ultimate team sport. You have to have good people around you as a quarterback for things to happen.

We were in a rebuilding process in **Houston**. I knew it was going to take time before we got to that point where we could be the type of team, I could be the type of player that I knew I could be. I was very patient. But it was very difficult in those early years because I took a lot of criticism. That was probably the biggest thing I had to overcome coming back was getting the type of people around me, not only on the offensive side of the football, but also on the defensive side of the football, that could make up the type of team I knew we could eventually be.

Q. After the '85 season in Houston, I think you took quite a few hits, were sacked quite a bit. It wasn't a great year, coaching change. How much was your confidence shaken after that second season?

WARREN MOON: I don't think my confidence was shaken as much as I just knew I wasn't in a system that was taking advantage of my abilities. We were very limited in the things we did offensively. A lot of the reasons I took a lot of those sacks is because of different types of protections that we didn't have in our protection scheme. People were able to exploit that. We weren't able to really audible at the line of scrimmage, which hurts any quarterback, as far as if you have a bad play called in the huddle, you see what the defense has, you can't get out of it. I just felt like we weren't in the right offensive system.

I think once we made the changes offensively that next off-season to bring in the right people to run the type of offense that took advantage of my skills, we could get back on the right track. That finally happened.

I was very disappointed in that '85 season, no question about it, because I thought I had played decent as a rookie, but I went backwards in

my second year only because of the coaching change within that season and some of the things we were doing offensively.

Q. What does it mean to you to be the first undrafted player to be in the *Hall of Fame*?

WARREN MOON: It just makes me feel like I worked hard to get to where I am right now, that I took a very unconventional route to get to the *NFL* first, then kind of reestablished myself, had a pretty productive career. I just know that nothing was really given to me, that I really worked hard for it, as does every guy work hard in his career to get to this point. I think the way I did it was just a little bit different because of some of the other things I had to overcome that didn't have to do with football.

I'm very proud of the fact that I was -- not so much that I was undrafted, because I would have loved to have been drafted, but the things I was able to do considering I wasn't drafted and wasn't looked highly upon as an *NFL*-type player.

Q. Other than maybe doing the negotiations with *Houston* in '84, who in the *Oilers* organization was most responsible for you coming to the *NFL*?

WARREN MOON: I would say *Mike Holovak* initially, because he was the one who saw me up in *Canada* as he scouted the league. He really had glowing comments back to the organization about the type of player that I was.

Then *Ladd Herzeg*, the general manager at that time. He was pretty much the one running the football organization. He pulled a lot of those strings, had a lot of power. I'm sure *Mr. Bud Adams* had a play in it, too. Whenever you're going to pay a player that type of money, I'm sure the owner has a lot of say so in that. I think all three of those guys had a lot to do with me coming into the *NFL* and getting a chance to play.

But I'd say probably *Ladd Herzeg* was the guy that really made things happen because of the way he negotiated with my agent at that time and made things happen.

Q. Now that you are retired, what is your opinion about the *Bills* comeback in 1993?

WARREN MOON: It's no different now than it was then. Definitely not as disappointed as I was that particular day. I look back at that game all the time, of different things that either I could have done right or we could have did right as a

team that might have made the outcome a little bit different. It will always be one of those games that I will look back on and wish that things would have been a little bit different because I really felt like that team was good enough to win a *Super Bowl*. If we could have got past that particular Sunday, who knows what would have happened in the future.

Q. Your father passed away at a very young age. I think the comment was made that you were to be the man of the house at a young age. What kind of effect did that have on you?

WARREN MOON: I think it had some positives as far as how responsible I was, the way I prepared for different things, the way I handled different situations. But I think on the other side, I think it made me grow up a little bit too fast and probably didn't have as much fun growing up as I probably could have just because I felt so much responsibility on my shoulders at such a young age.

I think there were positives and negatives to it. I think for the most part it really did help me deal with a lot of things I was going to have to deal with at a very young age that had to do with race and the stereotypes and the different things I had to deal with. I think if I was a little less mature, I probably would have maybe acted out a little bit more or maybe not handled things in such a mature manner if I wasn't kind of raised the way I was.

Q. In January you talked about going in the *Hall of Fame* as the first black quarterback. Now that you've had some time to think about it, what is the significance for you?

WARREN MOON: Well, what I really think it does, it just continues to legitimize the fact that even though I don't think that needs to be any more, that black quarterbacks can play this game at a very high level, and we kind of established or accomplished things at every level of football that there is, whether being the first to start a game, the first to get to a playoff game, the first to win a *Super Bowl*, and now I'm the first to get to the *Hall of Fame*, which is considered the pinnacle of professional football.

I think we've kind of done it at every particular level. There's nothing that ever can be said about the *African-American* quarterback and whether he belongs in the *NFL*, whether he

belongs in the *Hall of Fame*.

Q. How do you feel about being the model of other quarterbacks like *McNair*, *Culpepper* and *Vick*?

WARREN MOON: Well, I hope by the way I carried myself and the way I played my game, it had an impact on some of those young guys, just gave them more of an opportunity to play the position. I think the same was done for me as I came along. You look at *James Harris*, *Marlin Briscoe*, *Joe Gilliam*, guys like that that played before me, they gave me kind of the inspiration to show that I could play the game. Hopefully *Doug Williams*, myself, *Randall*, some of the guys that played during my era gave some of these guys who are playing today inspiration that they could play the game.

I think it's really helped. I think it's going to be up to them to continue to carry the baton and do a good job as players, not only on the field but off the field, the way you carry yourself. It just continues to give more guys opportunities to play the position.

Q. Was there any reluctance on your part to play in *Houston*, given the social climate at the time, playing in a southern city in the *NFL*, being an *African-American* quarterback? Wouldn't it have been easier to go to *Seattle* where you played your college ball?

WARREN MOON: Yeah, it was definitely discussed as far as where I was going to play, how I might be perceived down there. But if you know me, if you know how stubborn I am, if you know how I like challenges, I think then you understand it wasn't as big a deal to me. I knew what I was going to be dealing with going down there, just like I knew when I went away from *Los Angeles* to go up to *Seattle* to play coming out of junior college, that that was going to be a big challenge for me, too, because they had never had a starting black quarterback up there. I was going to a place where I knew absolutely no one. I was going to a program that was 2-9 and had racial problems before I got there under the *Jim Owens'* era. The two had similarities to me as far as a challenge going in, taking a program that wasn't doing well, and hopefully turning it around and becoming a successful program.

I think the similarities really intrigued me going down to *Houston* as well as having a comfort zone of a head coach that I had been with

before in *Canada* and had success with. I thought that comfort would help me.

Q. You were greeted like royalty when you came to *Houston*. Were you worried when they drafted *Jim Everett* that they were going to trade you?

WARREN MOON: I was a little concerned and I did ask about it. They told me they basically drafted him to use him as trade bait for someone else. All I could do is go by their word. But when you do draft a quarterback that high in the draft, you had a quarterback that just struggled the year before, it makes you kind of wonder.

But I knew they had put a lot of money into me two years before that. Normally you give a guy a little bit more time than that. I really wasn't sure, but I went along with their word. Fortunately, their word was good, that they did trade *Jim Everett* to the *Rams*. We got some great picks as well as some good football players, *Drew Hill* being one of those that I had a lot of success with as a receiver.

Q. Did you feel offended when you wanted to play in the *NFL* after playing in *Washington* and many people wanted you to change your position?

WARREN MOON: There's no question about it. I was hurt by the fact that I thought I had done enough in my college career to at least warrant getting drafted at a pretty good position in the draft, then getting an opportunity to play. Because there was so much opposition as far as me playing another position, possibly not getting drafted, it really concerned me. So that's one of the reasons I chose the *CFL* is because they were giving me an opportunity to play quarterback and they were going to give me an opportunity to play early.

I just wanted to keep playing football and keep developing. I really didn't care where it was. But there's no question I wanted to play in the *NFL* because that was my dream as a young kid and also my goal as a college football player.

Q. Can you recall some of the memories of going up against *Reggie White*?

WARREN MOON: Oh, no question about it. He was probably the most intimidating, the most physical football player that I played against. Three guys I always refer to as three of the top defensive players that I played against: *Reggie*

White, Lawrence Taylor and Bruce Smith. Those three guys, you always had to know where they were, you always had to concern your protection about where those guys were. You always had to either have a back on them or tight end or giving help to that offensive tackle on that side.

Reggie White could take a game and change it by himself. He was one of the few defensive players that could do that because of the amount of attention you had to give to him. One of the nicest guys you ever want to meet off the field, but one of the most physically intimidating players that you ever want to see on the field.

Q. It's often said that quarterbacks are measured by their championships. How significant do you think the CFL years, those titles, were in helping you get into the Hall of Fame?

WARREN MOON: I think they definitely played a part because it showed that I did have championship abilities in me. But I think the consistency that I had in the **NFL** as far as being able to get to the playoffs many, many times in a row, it showed consistency that I could win.

Now, the championship, yeah, that takes you to the next level. Sometimes guys get a championship and they're considered maybe a little bit better than what they are. But I think consistency and productivity are just as important. No question about it, championships are what you play the game for. I definitely played it for that. I would have loved to have won at least one. It's a team game and you have to have the right team in order to win the whole thing.

It's unfortunate that I didn't get that. That was one of the goals I set for myself. But I accomplished and surpassed so many other things that I never thought I would accomplish in my career.

Q. Without guys like Haywood Jeffries, Ernest Givens, are we sitting here talking with Warren Moon?

WARREN MOON: I hope so. I would hope anybody -- not anybody that I had around, but I would hope they would have good receivers if those guys weren't there. There's no question you have to have good players around you to be a good quarterback. I've always said that. A quarterback is only as good as the people that surround him.

I think we worked hand-in-hand. I think there's things I did to make those guys better and vice versa. That's the way quarterback-receiver combinations work in this game. I would think it would be no different with these guys.

Q. The fact that you're in the Hall of Fame now, does that make up for not winning a championship or are you always going to have a void?

WARREN MOON: I don't think it will ever take the place of not winning a **Super Bowl** because it's a team game, it's a team award, winning a championship. The **Hall of Fame** to me is more of an individual award within a team game. I think the two are very different. I think this validates me as an individual player getting to the **Hall of Fame**, but I think not having that championship ring will be something I'll always wish I had at this particular level only because that's the main reason you play this game.

Q. Are you going to continue doing broadcasting?

WARREN MOON: I would like to. I really enjoy it. I think it's a lot of fun. I think it gives me a chance to talk about the game, a game that I played a long time. It just keeps me close to it. Football has been a part of my life since I was 10 years old. I just can't see myself not being involved in it in some form or fashion. I think broadcasting gives me a chance to do that, but it also gives me a chance to do other things where I'm not just pigeonholed into being just a football person.

Q. Do you find it interesting two of the guys in your class are Aikman and Madden, two fellow broadcasters?

WARREN MOON: Right. That's kind of a natural transition for a lot of guys, to go into broadcasting after their playing days are over, only because we do have so much knowledge of the game. I think people want to hear from guys that actually played the game. If you have a way of communicating that to people, you usually can be pretty successful in this business. If you have the work ethic that you carry on the football field into your profession as a broadcaster, I think you can have success.

Q. Which of the teams you played on in

the NFL was the best and why?

WARREN MOON: There's a couple of teams I played on in **Houston** that were probably the best. I think it was just because of the balance. I think the team we had maybe in '92 or '91, it was one of the top defensive teams in the league as well as we had one of the top offenses. We had a punter that was an all-pro punter in **Greg Montgomery**, a very good place kicker in **Al Del Greco**, and a very good offense and a very good defense. I think those two teams are probably two of the best I ever played with from a pure talent standpoint.

Q. Do you mean the '93 team?

WARREN MOON: Yeah, '93 and '92. The team that came to **Buffalo** and played that day was a very good defensive team. We were ranked very well in the league defensively. We just had the collapse in the second half defensively. We played well all year long on defense.

Q. Have you ever been to Canton for the enshrinement ceremonies? What do you anticipate your emotions to be like that day?

WARREN MOON: It's been a while since I've been there because I played in two **Hall of Fame** games, one with **Houston** and also one with **Seattle** I think it was. It's really hard to say because when you're looking back and seeing other guys say their speeches, you don't even imagine yourself being up there on that stage as a player because you almost look at these guys as surreal, **Hall of Fame** players. Like, wow, these guys are the best that ever played the game. It would be sure be great to be that way one day. Here I am one of those guys now.

It's hard to measure what my emotions are going to be. I know what my emotions were when they first told me that I was selected. They were very, very high emotions for me, especially a guy who is not real emotional. I wept like a little baby when I was told.

I don't know how I'm going to react once I actually get up there on the stage, but I know how I did when I first found the news. I'm sure it will be an emotional day for me, but I'm going to try my best to keep things in check.

Q. Didn't you almost ride off the road on your way to the press conference?

WARREN MOON: Didn't almost drive off the road, but my wife did take the wheel for me

because I was overcome with emotion. We never got out of control or anything like that, but she did take the wheel and steer the car for a little bit until I got myself back together.

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