

***New Orleans Saints Owner Tom Benson &
NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue
Wednesday, January 11, 2006***

Opening Statements:

Mr. Benson: “Good afternoon everyone. It is certainly a beautiful day to be here with you and it is very exciting. As you can see by the sign we have up here that the Saints come marching in and that is what we are going to continue to do. We are looking forward to a very exciting season. As you know we are in the process of trying to hire a new coach. We visited with some of the potential coaches already and we have a few more to go and we will all be very proud of our football team as time goes on here and we are looking for a great season. I would now like to introduce the Commissioner Paul Tagliabue and then we will talk some more.”

Mr. Tagliabue: “Good afternoon. As you know we are here for I think our fourth visit in the state and I think this is the most important by far because the Saints are back. The facility will be opening officially I guess a week from today. The General Manager Mickey Loomis told me some players have already been here working out. LeCharles Bentley was here today and I think this in many, many ways is a real turning point in the recovery and the rebuilding effort and the Saints contribution to all of this. We had terrific meeting last night and again this morning with about three dozen representatives of the business community and some of the not for profit sector such as the Audubon Institute, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, representatives of the Governor and of the Superdome. We are working on a playbook and a game plan to come out of the box real strong with great support as we seek to play all of the eight regular season home games in the Superdome for the 2006 season. It has been a very hectic couple of days with meetings and they will be even more hectic as we start following up and executing on the game plan. As Mr. Benson said we will be glad to take any questions.”

Q: How confident are you that the Saints will be able to play all of their games here next year?

Mr. Tagliabue: There were meeting this morning that Mr. Benson were in and I think there is growing confidence. Certainly it was a point that we discussed in some depth this morning and our assumption at the moment is that will be what we are doing.”

Q: Can you see differences in the city each time you have come?

Mr. Tagliabue: “Yes. My first two visits were in Baton Rouge and this is my second visit here in New Orleans, the last one was December 5th and I think it is palpable. The difference are very clear, certainly downtown it was extremely noticeable. We had dinner with the business group last night at Galatoire's and we have been reading about other restaurants and thing opening up and Entergy coming back. In talking to some of the real estate people about the plans that Foot Locker has and other retailers have. I think it is very clearly gaining momentum.”

Q: Commissioner, When will the NFL and the Saints be ready to commit to New Orleans past 2006?

Mr. Tagliabue: “I think Mr. Benson has already committed beyond 2006. He has made it clear that this is not just a one offer for one year season that this is a multi-year effort. It is going to have to be a mutual partnership and that we are going to have to develop bench marks and we have been discussing that with the business community. The way I look at it is simple. There is a period of engagement here to make sure everyone is working together with a shared set of goals and then if those goals can be achieved you just keep taking further and further steps. I think the commitment is unequivocal and the players I think will be coming back with a real positive attitude. We are striving to have some of the Saints players with us in Detroit at the Super Bowl. I think so many of those players have done great things on the field this year giving them the opportunity to come to the Super Bowl and speak on behalf of the Saints and the new effort that will be launched with the new coach and coming back to the winning side of the ledger. Helping to rebuild the community will be a really positive thing. We are going to leave no stone unturned and we expect to be back here in February and the ensuing months for more events.”

Q: Can you talk about where the preseason games may be played?

Mr. Tagliabue: Mr. Benson can speak on that. He has been exploring with his own organization the idea of playing two preseason games here in Louisiana perhaps elsewhere in other parts of the state. Tom why don't you speak to the preseason?

Mr. Benson: “As you can see there the Commissioner and I are still talking about the preseason. They set the schedule but I have given them some good ideas and I think some of them they really like. The big idea is that we play our preseason games some place here in Louisiana and that is the key. We want to not only play all of your regular games, which we expect to play in the Superdome, but we will play our preseason games some place in Louisiana. That is going to take some work on everybody's part and for the NFL to get involved. I also asked him if he can do that to put us on national television for those games so that it really shows what we are trying to do back here in Louisiana. Maybe that will help us even bring some more people back and we can have more fans than we even have now and more businesses.”

Q: Mr. Benson can you comment on the long term commitment to New Orleans?

Mr. Benson: “I have committed forever as long as the community commits to me and that is all we are asking. We are here. We are here and we are committed now let's go forward from there.”

Q: Do you think the Saints schedule will be back loaded with home games or will it look like a regular schedule?

Mr. Tagliabue: “I think it will be more or less a regular schedule. If you look at NFL playing schedules the first thing that becomes important is when is the bye week? We are working on some alternative arrangements for the bye week and then if it is front end loaded or back end loaded is driven by a lot of things and it varies from team to team and it varies from year to year. I don’t think it will be anything dramatically out of the ordinary. We will pay good attention to the availability of the Superdome and the mix of the divisional opponents and the non divisional opponents which will be the NFC East and AFC North.”

Q: If the Superdome is not ready. Will you play games in Baton Rouge or San Antonio?

Mr. Tagliabue: “We are assuming that they are going to be in the Superdome.”

Q: Mr. Benson what are your impressions of the progress the city has made so far to this point?

Mr. Tagliabue: “If you want to go back to September 2nd when we had to move into San Antonio and today it is like night and day and I think that is great. Visiting with the business community I think that they feel like they are coming back in all segments from what we can see and what they are telling us. That is really excellent. I think that the feeling is very good and ninety-nine percent of the business people feel like we are right on that threshold and we are going to keep going. The Saints are a big part of that.”

Q: Why was there a four month period before there was a commitment to New Orleans?

Mr. Benson: “We were already set for 2005 and we couldn’t do anything about that anymore and now we are getting ready for 2006. We are bringing in players and as you know we need a new coach so there wasn’t anything we could do before now.”

Mr. Tagliabue: “I don’t think it was a very long period of time. There were a heck-of-a-lot of other business who are still in the process of trying to reach conclusions on many of the same subjects that Mr. Benson has reached conclusions on. Including availability of housing for your employees and availability of services for their families so I don’t except the idea that is was that long. To me it was a pretty tight timeline.”

Q: Mr. Benson have you meet with Mickey Loomis and given him any guidelines on what you are looking for out of your new coach?

Mr. Benson: “Mickey and I have a really good working relationship and I have a lot of confidence in him. He knows what we are looking for. We are looking for a leader that can bring us a winning football team and I think he is doing a great job with the process and certainly I am visiting with these people just to get a feel and he will make the final decision with some input from me.”

Q: When do you think the Saints schedule will be announced?

Mr. Tagliabue: “We had said that we would maybe announce something as early as this month. We have gone over several different alternatives with Tom and Rita and the rest of the staff. There is not a lot of pressure there frankly because we have several different alternatives and they could all work. We are looking at starting the season possibly having an event in New Orleans that would be part of our kickoff event like last year when we kicked off in New England and we had events in Detroit and Los Angeles. This year we would expect to continue to tradition of that Thursday night game being in the city of the Super Bowl champion, whoever that might be, and then maybe in conjunction with that have an event in Miami which is where next years Super Bowl would be and an event in New Orleans to kick off the season, get people in the spirit of football and music and then open with a regular season game in the Superdome. We are talking about a lot of moving parts but the parameters of the schedule we pretty much understand.”

Mr. Benson: “Again, I am trying to get more national coverage for us by being on national television.”

Q: Mr. Benson has your perception of the situation changed since you have been back in the city over the past few days?

Mr. Benson: “I have lived here along time and I was looking at a magazine story I had just happened to find in this move and it showed when I bought the club and at that time right on the front page there I was and I talked about it wasn’t that I was in love with football, it was the fact that I was in love with New Orleans Louisiana. That is the reason I bought this team in 1985 and that is true today.”

Q: Can you talk about the effort to possibly bringing a Super Bowl to New Orleans?

Mr. Tagliabue: “The talks are continuing. It is part of the step at a time process and obviously we had some good conversations this morning with Steve Perry and others in the business community about the hospitality industry and the plans for the convention business to be back where it was and the future of the hotel sector. All of those things are part and parcel of any conversation you would have about the Super Bowl. “

Q: What types of bench marks are you talking about?

Mr. Tagliabue: “The way I look at this situation is sort of two fold. Necessity is the mother of invention so there are needs in this area now that are extraordinary. Extraordinary times produce extraordinary challenges. Extraordinary challenges require extraordinary responses so we are trying to see what it is that would represent a reasonable level of support. How that can evolve over time. We know we are dealing with a recovery and rebuilding process. We trying to get a sense of what is realistic and reasonable and as Mr. Benson has already suggested what our national business partners will do as part of that process at the league level and what local business will do. So that

is one point. The other point is things have to be done that you previously didn't think about. Previously we didn't think about a kickoff concert in New Orleans as part of the opening primetime game, now we are thinking about it. We are thinking about a New Years Eve game here. Our final game of your season next year is December 31, Sunday December 31, so we are thinking about a new years eve game which is part of that new years eve in New Orleans, which in term will be linked to the Sugar Bowl, three or four days later. We are thinking about things that we have not thought about before in terms of the New Orleans Saints and the National Football League. If we can make some of those ideas become a reality then we are hitting the benchmarks. If some of those things prove to be impossible to do in year one, than we have a different set of things to consider."

Q: Is that part of your out of the box thinking that you mentioned in Baton Rouge a few weeks ago and are there more things we should expect to hear?

Mr. Tagliabue: "I am sure there will be. There will be things that I will be surprised to think about. I thought about two or three at four o'clock in the morning but I have to talk to Apple about them because they involve itunes and the Saints Go Marching In and Al Hirt but that is for the next press conference."

Mr. Benson: "You guys need to know too that the Commissioner and I are talking nearly every day and going over all of these things which you are hearing part of it right now and every option and everything that can work out."