

NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue
Sunday, October 30, 2005

Opening Statement: *We are extremely pleased to be here in Tiger Stadium for the first Saints game back in Louisiana since the tragic events of late August and early September. The Saints are Louisiana's team's team, have been since the mid 60's when my predecessor Pete Rozelle made New Orleans Louisiana's team. Our focus continues to be on having the Saints in Louisiana and today's game and hopefully the upcoming games at LSU will be part of that effort and that commitment to Louisiana. We are also focused in a preliminary way on plans for the 2006 season. Our assumption is that there will have to be some kind of interim arrangement for the Saints' playing schedule next year. Whether that will be similar to this year or different to this year is yet to be determined. The backdrop of course is something that we are well aware of. Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita so devastated Southern Louisiana including New Orleans and the efforts of Louisiana and other states in this region, particularly New Orleans and other cities to rebuild, to rebuild in a way which is not just a replica of the past, but better than ever and that's our approach with the Saints as part of that overall effort. We are trying to develop or review a new model for the Saints to operate in a rebuilt Louisiana and rebuilt New Orleans and part of that would be that the Saints would represent the entire state of Louisiana, much as the Packers represent the state of Wisconsin and the Kansas City Chiefs represent big chunks of Missouri and Kansas. Those were some of the things we discussed this morning in our meeting with representatives of the Superdome Authority. Most important was our meeting with the governor and my meeting with the mayor and Mr. Benson was here with governor Blanco earlier. We had a busy schedule last night to attend the North Texas game and we were able to see the Tiger crowd support LSU as they seek to win their conference title and go into the postseason and today we know many of the Saints fans here will be joined by other fans supporting the Saints. I'll be glad to take your questions.*

Q: *Do your interim plans for next year involve San Antonio or has that been ruled out and has Mr. Benson expressed the desire to play in San Antonio all of next year?*

A: *The question is whether our interim plans next year would include San Antonio or whether that's been ruled in or ruled out, I don't know the answer to that. We're trying to be realistic and deal with not only the facilities issues, but with what I call the human issues, the recovery and rebuilding issues in this part of the nation and so we'll look at all alternatives. I think what we need to do is realize the people of this region and the businesses in this region and the governmental agencies in this region have so many priorities, that the rebuilding the Saints and recommitting the Saints to Louisiana is just one of those many priorities and we'll have to be open minded. Certainly we appreciate very much what San Antonio has done for the Saints and the NFL. We hear about what the fans over there have done, but it's a little too early in the planning process to say whether that might be the same or different in 2006.*

Q: *As part of the plan of keeping the Saints in the state, do you see that as them playing in New Orleans or in another part of the state such as Baton Rouge?*

A: *The question is referred to the Saints representing the State of Louisiana if that includes them playing in New Orleans or playing elsewhere. It included New Orleans certainly. I say the same in representing the state, because each team in the NFL is franchised to represent a specific community. Teams are not franchised as free agents to run around the country and play wherever they want to play and under our league bylaws it takes a vote of the league and it has to be a minimum of three fourths of the owners to approve any change in the area a team represents. So, that's kind of the framework when I say the Saints represent Louisiana and New Orleans. In terms of the makeup of the games next year, certainly one of the goals will be to bring the Superdome back to playing quality as early as possible, but to do that in the context where other activities going on, other organizations are engaged, whether they be businesses or youth football organizations, school organizations going back online, so if there are games in the Superdome next year, the community feels that it's timely among the community's priorities, individual families priorities to go out and attend those games. Like I said, it's more about the overall recover and rebuilding of the area than it is just about facilities, that's part of the mix. We need to realize that there has been a tremendous human toll here and for the NFL and the Saints to come back in the proper way, that human toll has to be recognized and taken into account.*

Q: *Has there been any suggestion that a long term deal between the Saints and the State could be happening?*

A: *My feeling there is my own understanding of our needs as a league and my own sense of the Saints' needs and when I told the governor what I discussed, the mayor and Mr. Benson is that in my job as the commissioner, the business model for the Saints needs to be changed. It needs to be expanded. The Saints have done some of that before and done it well in Mississippi and in other parts of Louisiana and I think that a look has to be taken at the lease arrangements, the master agreement arrangements. From my perspective, they were flawed. That's not too say that they were too favorable for one side or the other. They just were not well thought through or well structured, so that has to be addressed. For all of those things to be part of what we are looking at here with the opportunity to make something better than ever. Necessity is the mother of invention. In some ways that's trite, but that's real. The other thing that comes as trite, but real is a friend in need is a friend indeed, so we've got to look at this through the eye of what's taken place and the human toll and the overall priorities of this state and this region and not just on the basis of what occurred in the past.*

Q: *How strong is the commitment of the league to the city of New Orleans?*

A: *Very strong.*

Q: *How strong do you feel Tom Benson's commitment is?*

A: *Mr. Benson was here today. He's very supportive of what I'm doing. He's going to join with me in these activities and we're going to be going forward and working*

together, working together with the governor and other officials here and with the business community. The governments don't buy tickets for football games. The people do, the business community does and we need to work with all those elements of this community and recognize their priorities as we work to make the Saints better than ever.

Q: *Is the league in a position to temporarily help Tom Benson with the finances of the Saints?*

A: *Is the league in a position on a temporary basis to help the Saints financially. I would say yes.*

Q: *You said that was a possibility?*

A: *That's something we're talking with the owners about. I appointed an owners committee a couple of weeks ago. We've already made arrangements internally to help the Saints financially in terms of how we're dealing with visiting team receipts and things like that.*

Q: *Is there a timetable for when you want to make any of these decisions?*

A: *It depends on what decision you're talking about. We got a lot of decisions to make. The state has a lot of decisions to make. The federal government has a lot of decisions to make. The city of New Orleans has got decisions to make. We're going to have timelines. We're trying to adjust the timelines to how they're built into the Superdome lease and they may require some lease amendments. We're trying to adjust those timelines to take into account the reality of the situation we're dealing with.*

Q: *What are some of the flaws of the Superdome lease?*

A: *For the moment, I would just say they are flaws. I can elaborate on some other occasion.*

Q: *Has LSU been a good host to the Saints?*

A: *I think that Louisiana State University and its trustees and its athletic department, the chancellor, have all been tremendously supportive. The reason for that I think is apparent. This is a state pulling together, a state using all of its resources to address issues and so the athletic department and chancellor and others here who are very helpful in arranging these games, the first of which we're playing today. They've made it clear, the governor's made it clear that the games at LSU for next year are part of the mix, that will work, that would be available. We just have to figure out how to do that in the most successful way.*

Q: *What is the response to the Lieutenant Governor's assertion that the Saints could be pulled out of Louisiana at this time?*

A: *I'm not big into images. I'm into reality. I think the reality is that the NFL has been a very responsible business organization for many generations, the owners pride themselves in being positive contributors to their communities. We understand very well what the extraordinary demands are in the current situation. We expect to do a good job keeping up that responsibility.*

Q: *Could a situation occur where the team plays a couple games a year in Baton Rouge like when the Packers played a couple games a year in Milwaukee?*

A: *That is conceivable. That's certainly one of the alternatives that you have to look at long term, but I'm good at looking at a lot of alternatives. We are here dealing with a clean slate. No sports league has ever had to deal with the issues that we're dealing with. The NBA's going to have to deal with some of them, so I told our people, think outside the box.*

Q: *Do you have an opinion on a refurbished Superdome or if the time for a new stadium in New Orleans has arrived?*

A: *I don't have an opinion.*

Q: *Can you discuss reports this week about the team moving to Los Angeles if the situation in Louisiana doesn't work out?*

A: *Yes, I think the reports this week about the long term landing spot being Los Angeles were nonsensical. L.A.'s been the landing spot for the Indianapolis Colts, the Arizona Cardinals, the Seattle Seahawks, the Minnesota Vikings and any other number of teams. The last time I looked, they were all operating in their communities. L.A. is off the radar screen. If I gave stock to all the nonsensical things that are written about the NFL, I'd have to work 26 hours a day and I don't.*

I think that speculation is easy, reality is difficult and we're dealing with reality here and we're making every effort to keep the Saints as Louisiana's team.

Q: *How strongly can you assure New Orleans that the Saints will be here in a couple years?*

A: *I think we can be pretty emphatic, as I said before, that the Saints will be playing some type of an interim schedule. Beyond that, I think I said it already, we're a smaller part of a much bigger puzzle. We will have to work within the growing framework of rebuilding this area, this state, this region and we're committed to do that and leave no stone unturned. People who over promise and under deliver, I don't have great admiration for. People who under promise and over deliver, I admire.*

Q: *Can you discuss what parties were at which of your meetings?*

A: *I met with the governor and Mr. Benson together yes, we spoke together. We made a few remarks to a few elected officials, business leaders and leaders of other not for profit organizations in Louisiana. Then I met with the governor and her staff and I also met with the governor and the mayor at the same time.*

Q: *Why did you create a New Orleans committee staffed by owners?*

A: *The question is why I appointed a New Orleans advisory committee of owners. It's to get their input and to give us the ability to have some well organized, serious discussions, among a well informed group of owners. It's the type of thing I do on a lot of issues. I selected people who I think run very strong organizations. I think people that understand that the National Football League and teams are best when they are community assets with deep roots in the community and they understand the context through which the NFL has become successful and will continue to be successful. I value the advice of those owners. Dan Rooney is obviously and the Rooney family have a track record for understanding the NFL's place in America. The other seven owners on the committee, Lamar Hunt and others have a similar track record of understanding, so I think they can give me some very good advice. At some point, they will be meeting with Mr. Benson. At other points, they might be meeting with representatives of New Orleans and the State of Louisiana. I don't have any pride of authorship and I think eight or nine heads are better than one.*

Q: *Have you discouraged Mr. Benson from talking to other teams, particularly San Antonio?*

A: *Have I discouraged Mr. Benson from talking to other cities, specifically San Antonio? Under our league policies, owners are not supposed to be talking about relocating their team during the season. There are a very specific set of guidelines on that and the policy was negotiated with the U.S. Conference of mayors. My assumption is that every owner's complying with the policy.*

Q: *Have you considered changing the Saints to a more regional name?*

A: *That's something we've been discussing going forward, but we have the Minnesota Vikings. We have other teams that carry the name of the state. We have the New England Patriots, which carry the name of a region. We've already discussed that going back three, four or five years when the Saints, given the broad support they've had in Mississippi, whether there deserves to be something in the name of the team that signifies the representation of the gulf coast region and those are issues that will be revisited.*

Q: *Have you asked Mr. Benson to not invoke his act of God clause one month from now?*

A: *We've had quite a few discussions this morning about act of God clauses. We're going to be addressing those further with the Superdome authority and with the Saints.*

