

**NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue in San Antonio, TX
December 30, 2005**

Opening Remarks: Good afternoon, we had a series of meetings starting off this morning with the Saints staff, office staff and others. Then I met with the players and had about a ninety-minute session with them and had kind of a similar meeting with the coaches and I think it was a very positive thing to do. We covered a lot of ground and in the last fifteen years I have had many, many meetings with players and teams around the league and this was sort of typical. There were a lot of good questions and a lot of good discussion. In a broader perspective, I really think it is important for everyone here to understand how much we and the NFL, and I know I speak for all the owners, appreciate what his entire community has done under very, very difficult circumstances for the league and for a big part of the country in supporting the Saints and helping the Saints and the NFL get through this season and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and all of the tragic consequences. Everybody from the fans to the mayor to other elected officials and the business community have been pretty outstanding and we very much appreciate and are very grateful for what they did. We had some meetings three or four years ago with then Mayor Garza and he had spent a considerable amount of time at these meeting talking to me about San Antonio and the Alamodome and underscoring what is obvious as I talk to more people in this region that the whole region continues to grow, continues to expand. There is a lot of economic vitality here obviously with the Toyota facility and AT&T ad other companies centering so many of there activities here. It is a growing and a changing market. I had the chance to meet last night with former Mayor Cisneros and we talked about some of the same things. Over the years I have known people like Larry Mays who was running Clear Channel and other local companies and had a pretty good understanding of how the area is growing and what it represents. Needless to say we have also been aware of the NBA success here, the Final Four and so many other events. I guess the sense I have is that if we ever get around to considering expansion in the NFL that San Antonio would be on anyone’s short list. As you well now we don’t currently have expansion under consideration but at some point the likelihood is the league would get to those kinds of issues.

Q: Will there be any Saints home games played in San Antonio in 2006?

Tagliabue: No, I think that still need to be addressed. The one decision that Mr. Benson has made is to center their practice and training back at the Saints facility in New Orleans. It is a world class, first class facility. We have a lot of subjects still to deal with including the location of the games. Every effort is going to be made to play as many games as we can in the Superdome but based on the information we have now it is too early to say if all the games will be there or in that matter in Louisiana.

Q: When you set the Saints schedule, will you leave the home sites open ended depending on if the Superdome is ready or not?

Tagliabue: No, we have already worked out a frame work for a playing schedule for the Saints and we know who the opponents are already because that is part of a formula. We know what games need to be played at home and which games need to be played away because that is part of the formula. What we have tried to do is balance the divisional games against the non divisional games. There are some very attractive non divisional games next year against AFC North teams: Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Baltimore and Cleveland. Equally attractive games at home against Washington and Philadelphia and so we have tried to allocate those games across the schedule so that however the location of the games might work out there will be attractive opponents. I think the key thing is that last year the team had a lot of travel which began in the preseason when by the luck of the draw they had preseason games in New England and Oakland, you can’t travel much further than that to play preseason games from New Orleans or San Antonio. Next year they will not have that, we are making efforts with other clubs to ensure that preseason travel will be minimal. The way the road games work out under the formula their road game travel should be about half of what it was this year during the regular season no matter what the final mix of games might be in terms of location.

Q: What are your thoughts on the 2007 season? Is this just an interim year?

Tagliabue: Some of the players did raise the question and we are going to have another new set of plans for 2007 and I said that it was not a one year experiment. I said our goal was to make it a multi year effort, but I also said a lot of things have yet to be accomplished before we can be certain that it is a multi year effort. That is apparent in the whole rebuilding process. There’s so many things that seem to be chicken and egg decisions. We can only do this if that’s done. This business can only come back if that’s done and that if that business comes it’s going to have positive difference, so it’s a complicated situation that I think is one of the reasons as they say we are so appreciative of the support that we got here and also that’s not only for the team, but for the displaced persons. I remember like it was yesterday, the night of September 1, when the team is playing in Oakland and I was watching CNN and I saw the mayor come on and hear him talk about his determination, whatever anyone else did at any level of government to commit the city of San Antonio to take displaced persons and give them a home. It was a great thing that helped out a lot of people. It was one of the most decisive and wringing things at a time when the most devastating were in confusion and underprivilege.

Q: Can you discuss the concern of some of the fans and business community that San Antonio has been snubbed in the process?

Tagliabue: I think it’s unfortunate. I have nothing whatsoever against San Antonio. I have said before I had several good meetings with then mayor Garza talking about the growth in the area, talking about the interest in the NFL, which of course I had spoken with mayor Cisneros going back 15 years or so to the late 1980’s and early 1990’s when I

became commissioner. I think the unfortunate part is that in the context of being for a loyal commitment to Louisiana some people have construed that as being against San Antonio. That’s not the case. Maybe that’s inevitable if you’re for something and other people think you’re against something else. Here I think that there are two outstanding communities that we’ve been trying to strike a balance between the both of them.

Q: Can you discuss the recommendation of the owners’ New Orleans Advisory Committee?

Tagliabue: We had input on the Owners Advisory Committee both as a committee and individually. We had a conference call with the committee. I think it was the Tuesday before Christmas, whatever date that would be on the 20th and we told the owners then that it seemed like the sensible next step was to give the players the ability to take advantage of the facility in New Orleans and during the offseason. Mr. Benson told me earlier that was his feeling and our owners felt that to be a very positive step.

Q: Did you ever have to talk Mr. Benson out of discussing relocation with San Antonio?

Tagliabue: No, I’m sure that like everybody else, Mr. Benson’s been dealing with things that no one has ever had to deal with so, he’s been looking at alternatives, trying to make sure that he’s looking at all alternatives thinking of all the pros and cons both short term and long term, but when he came to see me on that same day in New York on a Tuesday, he said that he felt that FEMA was about to clear the facility to release it back to the team, the National Guard doing the same, the quality of facility would give some certainty to the players and their families and would be a positive thing to do and a correct next step. The owners felt the same way.

Q: Who made the decision?

Tagliabue: He (Mr. Benson) made the decision. Our input was mostly limited to the visit that we made to New Orleans, I think it was on December 5th when we visited the facility and then I guess in terms of the timing, I felt that it was important for the players to know before they were home what that decision would be and I also felt it was important for them to be able to ask me questions and visit with me and not to have a meeting here that continued a lot of uncertainties for the players and then to send a memo out in the next two to three weeks. To some degree the most input that I could identify coming from me was maybe the timing to address the players face to face before they play their final game.

Q: Were you aware about the discord amongst the players?

Tagliabue: Yes, I read that I’m sure as much as anybody did.

Q: Did you give it any validity and did you feel like you were being made out to be a scapegoat?

Tagliabue: No, I can understand their point of view especially with the benefit of hindsight. I thought it was very important on the first of September, second of September to visit with the players in Carolina. I suggested that to Mr. Benson and to Coach Haslett. The felt, coach felt that with all of the things that the players had gone through, coming back from Oakland, coming here and not being able to go home that he appreciated the offer, but that it could be a distraction and so he suggested that I send him a letter which he read to the players and then coming off that victory when they beat Carolina that weekend, and a lot of people including Sports Illustrated were positioning Carolina as the Super Bowl pick, I took comfort. Deuce McAllister scored two touchdowns and they beat the team that was in the minds of many going to be the best team in the NFL this year, so maybe we fell into a little lackadaisical, though everything was normal when underneath it we’re dealing with some very abnormal circumstances. Then McAllister got hurt, other people got hurt.

Q: A lot of people are wondering if New Orleans can support a team based on the ticket sales at Tiger Stadium. Do you think New Orleans as it stands now can support a team again?

Tagliabue: We think that it can, but that’s not a slam dunk. That’s an issue. The ticket sales need to be evaluated against the backdrop of the lifting of the television blackout. We thought it was very important given what those citizens had been through that they be able to see all of those games at LSU on television, so we had that blackout and I think that’s a big factor in the ticket sales over there. Next year, we’ll have some type of a more normal blackout policy.