An Interview With:

NFL COMMISSIONER PAUL TABLIABUE

BY BOB COSTAS FOR HBO

BOB COSTAS: It goes without saying that the **NFL** is by far **America's** most popular sports league. This has been another interesting and exciting season. Commissioner **Paul Tagliabue** has been overwhelmingly successful by any measure. But it's not often we get to deal with the league's issues, so let's dive right into that.

The league has more parity than any other pro sports league in **America**. Overall that has to be a good thing, but what do you say when someone says, you know what, the league is selling mediocrity.

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: I think the answer is pretty simple. The play on the field is superb. If you talk to players from the past, they say it's better than ever.

The main difference that I see from now and the past is that the margin of winning is tighter and tighter and that's what the fans love.

BOB COSTAS: So for you, its closeness of the games, almost as much as the records of the respective teams that's important.

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: It's the record of the teams and also the quality of the teams. In other words, these teams are very good football teams and they are just not one-year phenoms. They are coming back. Tennessee is coming back consistently, **St**. **Louis** is coming back, **Philadelphia** is coming back, **New England** is coming back. It's not an arbitrary system that is going to create new winners every year. It's tougher and tougher to compete.

BOB COSTAS: Is it fair to say that there may be many good teams, but we've seen the last of the great teams, because the economic system precludes the old **Steelers**, the old **Cowboys**?

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: I'm not sure that's even true. We still have to wait and see if that's true.

What it does preclude is winning over the course of two decades, such as **Bill Walsh** did with the 49ers where he was able to stockpile **Steve Young** on the bench; that's never going to happen again. You're never going to have Steve Young sitting on the bench behind Joe Montana in this system, but you will have very strong, very talented football teams. It's going to be harder and harder to do what the Redskins did for two decades under George Allen and Joe Gibbs. What Bill Walsh did through five Super Bowls. That's tougher, probably impossible.

BOB COSTAS: Instant replay: Leave it alone, reform it, fiddle with it, reform it, junk it?

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: Well, on this one I'm a pragmatist. We have to have 24 votes to have it; we have to have 24 teams to support it; and I think the system we have will be supported again by 24 teams because it strikes a balance between getting the big play right, having the opportunity to correct what the coach thinks is the big play or what's big in the final two minutes, but not interrupt the flow of the game unnecessarily. In the old system, we were doing that. We were slowing it down, we were taking the advantage away, and there were too many breaks. I think it will be passed again. Maybe some tweaking or fine tuning, but not a lot.

BOB COSTAS: I'm guessing you've seen this before, but for the amusement of our audience, let's roll Brian Billick right here:

(Brian Billick on tape: I quit. I give up. I've tried to be an advocate for Instant Replay. I've tried to do the company line. I've said the right things. Let's dump the whole f***ing thing. We have spent so much money on this thing, and it doesn't work. I've tried – league, I'm sorry – I've tried to hold the line. Dump it, get rid of it.)

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: Losing a football game, even winning a close game, is an emotional thing. You have this during the season all the time. Then people come to the league meeting in March and they have a very different attitude. You know Brian is one of the brightest people around; he's one of the most articulate people around. He's not one of the most patient people around. He needs to have a little more patience and recognize that no one in life is perfect. But I think when we get to March, he'll be analytical and less emotional.

BOB COSTAS: On the flip side of junking, some say, including our own **Cris Collinsworth**

say, expand it; use it on pass interference calls; use it on potential holding or off-sides; get everything right.

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: It will never happen. The reason we lost it at one point is that it was interrupting the flow of the game. The coaches began to realize that it was giving the defense an advantage, the advantage that the offense can get when it's on a drive that we don't interrupt with commercial breaks. The ability of the defense to adjust and come back with different schemes. It's not going to expand. If anything, it will stay like it is and it may just be tweaked a bit.

BOB COSTAS: When will the league adjust the overtime rule and how?

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: No one knows.

BOB COSTAS: Well, if you don't ...

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: You know, if we had wanted to push hard for a change last year, we probably could have gotten a change. But I wasn't convinced and the Competition Committee wasn't convinced that the changes that were on the table were the right changes.

BOB COSTAS: Let me suggest two possibilities. I'm sure you've heard them before. One would be at least one possession for each side. Then if neither scores on its first possession and the next team scores on what turns out to be two-out-of-three, okay, fine. At least each team has touched the ball once. Another possible suggestion is no field goals in overtime; if you're going to, even on the first possession, score a touchdown then defense and offense come in equally, but in the course of the game, if the defense stops you and you have to kick a field goal, that's at least a partial victory for the defense in some situations, but not in overtime.

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: We discussed all of that for about two months and some others – no coin toss in overtime. You play the fifth quarter like you play the first quarter or the third quarter. Possession continues without a coin toss in this case from the fourth to the fifth quarter. So that you reward on a continuous basis or you penalize on a continuous basis on what the offenses and defenses have been doing up to that point of the game. Like I said, we discussed it. Part of it is philosophical. Some people feel that you have as much chance to win on defense as you do on offense. **And** so when you get the offense and the defense on the field, it doesn't matter who gets the ball. There are greater risks in having the ball than not having the ball sometimes.

BOB COSTAS: I agree, if you eliminated the field goal.

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: But it starts with the kickoff. A good kickoff and a fumble on a return, good special teams play and you get the ball on the 14-yard line -- force a fumble on a kickoff and kick a field goal. That part of it is philosophical.

The other side of the philosophical divide is the guy who likes the offense, who says the football is not fair unless both offenses get on the field. So those are some of the debates we've had. The other level of the debate is about risk-taking and exciting. We had a lot of discussion of the Indianapolis-Denver game a year ago. When the Colts went into Denver no one thought they could beat the Broncos outdoors. On a snowy night. They kicked about a 50-yard field. If you changed the system and gave a second possession and take the field goal out if, that would not address that game. The Colts went for it all and they won. If the Broncos were to get a guaranteed possession after that field goal, the Colts would not have gone for it. It would have been a different game. Less exciting, fewer big plays. **You** know, there are new ideas coming on almost every time we have a discussion, and I think once we get there, we'll have considered all of the ideas and not just some of them.

BOB COSTAS: There was a lot of discussion this past summer about shortening the exhibition season and, in turn, making the regular season 18 games instead of 16. This would address a concern about rights fees, give the network more product, and they might not balk at the rights fee.

PAUL TAGLIABUE: We discussed and looked at it and there was some feeling that we should do that. When we looked at it more, there was a feeling that the number of games was right, but maybe we've done some things – including squad size in the preseason – which is encouraging games with the first units in there. Another thing is the injury factor…

BOB COSTAS: When a Michael Vick goes down in the preseason, it's just heartbreaking.

PAUL TAGLIABUE: Someone is going to go down at some point in a football game, whether it's the preseason or the regular season. The biggest concern on injuries is not the Michael Vick-type injury. It's the turf toe or the lesser injury that would keep a player out of the opening game. One of the ideas we'll look at is having a two-week break between the preseason and the regular season. There are some things concerning

preseason that we're going to examine. The consensus now is to keep it at four games. At the other end of the spectrum, in terms of rights fees, as you well know, whether you add quantity is really problematic. A lot of the sports with quantity on television don't have an audience. We have the fewest number of games and the biggest audiences. So that says something about quantity.

BOB COSTAS: If the exhibition season is tinkered with and there is an acknowledgment that these are not true games in any sense, shouldn't teams drop the policy connecting preseason tickets for the regular season package?

PAUL TAGLIABUE: Probably not. Because having fans in the stands is important. If you lose the revenue of the ticket package, you're going to increase the ticket prices for regular season games. At some point, you're looking at the aggregate price of preseason and regular season combined so I think it's six of one, half a dozen of the other. People recognize that fans are buying the preseason game and it has an effect on how they price their regular season tickets. So those dynamics would change, but I don't think you'd have a change in the overall economics.

BOB COSTAS: Maurice Clarett now challenging the NFL's eligibility rule that a player cannot come into the league until three years after his high school class graduates. Why is the league so adamant about maintaining that rule?

PAUL TAGLAIBUE: Two things. The main one is that we're convinced that very few players are going to succeed in the NFL at an earlier point in time. It's the nature of the game, the physical aspect of the game. This rule really helps players mature and avoids players making premature judgments. Even under the current system, in the early years when we had a lot of players opting for early eligibility after their three years, there was a big dropout rate. There is very little opportunity in our society to go back and get a second chance. You can't go back to college football. Most of all, it's for the players. The other thing is that we think it draws a sound line between the college game and the NFL. College football is a great institution in America. They have issues that they need to address and we don't want to add one more issue for them.

BOB COSTAS: The sceptic might say the NFL is most concerned with not affecting its relationship with college football serving as a farm system for it.

PAUL TAGLIABUE: I think that is ancient history. We have our league in Europe. We're developing players; we are into player development. The old idea that we're totally dependent on the colleges for that purpose is something from an early decade. I guess you could call it an anachronism, if you wanted to use a big word.

BOB COSTAS: You're a lawyer. From a legal standpoint, would the league be well advised to liberalize the rules so that there are various ways for a player to come in – maybe it's two years of competitive football, maybe it's age 20, so it isn't just one way to quality. So you'd blunt the possibility of other legal challenges.

PAUL TAGLIABUE: I used to practice law. I'm not a lawyer now. It reminds me of the Ten Commandments, "Thou Shall Not Steal." The lawyer could say "Thou Shall Not Steal, Pilfer, Rob" and so on. Once you make it complicated, you'll have more inequities than you do currently.

BOB COSTAS: Is it worth it to fight Maurice Clarett all the way down the line and run the risk, whether you agree with the decision or not, that you lose the decision and the rule is overturned, or is it in your best interest to find a way to accommodate Maurice Clarett while leaving the rule intact? Because his representatives, as long as his interests are satisfied, they don't care if the rule stands.

PAUL TAGLIABUE: I think at a certain point you have to stand for what you think is right. You have to run a business on a principled basis. I always say, it's very important to try to reach a consensus, but it's just as important to avoid compromise when you're compromising something you think is right and important. That's where we are on this issue. We think it's important, we think it's right, we think it's the best balance that can be struck and we'll defend it and see what happens.

BOB COSTAS: Minority hiring. How would you grade the league's progress?

PAUL TAGLIABUE: We're making progress. I still don't' think we're where we need to be. That's because of a lot of things. If you're taking about coaches, you have one set of factors. If you're talking about the front office and player personnel – non-coaching positions in football and non-football – you have another set of factors. We're trying to do things on both fronts to create deeper pools of qualified candidates. In the case of the head coaching positions, we're forcing the teams to consider that deep pool of diverse candidates. In a sense, the policy on coaching is designed to bring to the coaching hiring process what the Draft does for us in playing talent. Every year you have to look at new talent and every year it's kind of shoved in your face on a diverse basis and you've got to choose from the most-qualified

people. This policy we have on head coaching hiring is similar in a sense that you just can't go back to where you've been. You have to look at new, young people. There are many examples of new, young coaches, minority as well as not minority, adding to the quality to the league.

BOB COSTAS: No reasonable person would argue with the intent of the new rule that says you must interview a minority candidate, at least one, before you make a decision on a head coach. But in practice, many people who share the same objectives you have, say this is going to lead to sham situations. Jerry Jones knows he wants Bill Parcells, he interviews a minority candidate in a perfunctory fashion, he hires Bill Parcells. Matt Millen doesn't go to that trouble because he knows he wants Steve Mariucci and the Lions have to pay a hefty fine.

PAUL TAGLIABUE: Those are two hypotheticals and that is not what happened in either case. In Jerry Jones's case, he started talking to Bill Parcells before we even had the policy. He then called me up and said, 'Look, I'm considering Bill Parcells. I'm not there yet. I'd like to talk to Dennis Green. I've invited him to Dallas for an interview. Dennis is on his way from Connecticut to California and would rather do it on the phone. Would that be ok in this instance since it's more convenient for Dennis?' We spoke to Dennis who said it was ok. We are not going to allow that in the future because we want face-to-face interviews. In the case of Matt Millen, a lot has been made of how he supposedly invited this person and that person and so on. When I reviewed it, there was not that kind of intense effort to get over some of the obstacles. People will want to know where they stand. The bottom line, if you get stiffed in the interview process, that is going to be exculpatory. It's going to be a bona fide basis. What I found in the case of Matt Millen is that he didn't have a plan; he went way down one path and was unable to follow through with the minority aspect.

BOB COSTAS: Just for clarity. His claim was since the minority candidates knew they had no real shot because they knew Mariucci was his guy, for good reason, they backed off.

PAUL TAGLIABUE: Everyone can be somebody's guy for some reason that someone thinks is good. That's not the policy. Matt made the commitment to interview minorities. The way you've got to executive on the commitment is to hold your decision making until you get multiple candidates in the door. It's the same thing we do when hiring people in our organization. It's the same thing teams do when they are trying to figure out who is going to be the starting player coming out of training camp. You say, 'Costas, you've got a good shot of playing. So does Smith, so you're going to have to compete during training camp on a competitive basis.' That's the process you're required to do with coaches, which he didn't do.

BOB COSTAS: Gambling. What percentage of the league's popularity do you attribute to gambling?

PAUL TAGLIABUE: I have no way of knowing. I grew up in the New York area and I know in those days when I was a kid, there were people who were playing the numbers. I never knew what the numbers were, but I know a lot of people were playing – the Final Four in basketball, the World Series in baseball. All I know is that we have a terrific fan following and it doesn't seem to have to do with anything except the close games and who is winning.

BOB COSTAS: The outcome of the game isn't in doubt. The outcome of many people's bets is in doubt right until the end. That's the beauty of it, from one perspective.

PAUL TAGLIABUE: You tell me. I'm not the expert in this area.

BOB COSTAS: Would you ban gambling if you could?

PAUL TAGLIABUE: I think so.

BOB COSTAS: If you could just ban it, you would?

PAUL TAGLIABUE: We took that position in Congress and succeeded in banning it from 49 states, in terms of state-sponsored gambling. In 1992, when we had the opportunity to have it banned in 49 states, we got it done. We couldn't succeed in Las Vegas because Las Vegas is grandfathered. So that's pretty good.

BOB COSTAS: That's legalized gambling. But let's suppose with a wave of the wand, you could eliminate all illegal gambling and any benefit that accrues from the NFL. You'd do it?

PAUL TAGLIABUE: I can only tell you what we did. When we had the opportunity to have it banned in 49 states, we did. So we're strong on the position with the gambling industry.

BOB COSTAS: By almost all accounts, the **NFL** drug policy is a pretty good one, maybe better than pretty good, but no system is perfect. How widespread do you think the use of performance enhancing drugs is in the **NFL**?

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: I don't think it's very widespread at all. I think that our testing program is very well designed: It's year-round; it's random; unannounced.

The challenges, what we've seen with **THG**,

how many new compounds are out there, how many existing compounds can be modified slightly to become a new compound that doesn't get caught by an existing test, I don't know that we know the answer yet. I don't think we've done enough testing for **THG**. And I've talked to our drug advisors about whether there are additional things we can do to stay ahead of the creative people are who are trying to beat the system. So I think it's going to be after the season when we really have enough data to know if THG is seriously affecting our sport or not.

BOB COSTAS: But penalize retroactively for **THG**; that issue is out there in limbo now.

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: It's being discussed. I think we will have penalties for any use of the drug, whether it's prospective or retrospective, if the indication is that it was a clear conscious effort to use a drug. Now, whether they are suspensions or heavy fines; that's a subject for discussion.

But we've consistently taken the position: If someone knowingly reaches out to something where the likelihood is very high that it's a prohibitive substance and they are trying to beat the system on a technicality, that subjects the player to discipline.

On the other hand, if somebody used something thinking it was **Alice B. Toklas cookies** --

BOB COSTAS: Nice reference, **Commissioner**. I like it.

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: -- and it turned out to be a steroid, that's going to be viewed differently. So within those two points on the spectrum…as Gene Upshaw said, we'll continue to have a very rigorous policy that would include discipline.

BOB COSTAS: Obviously, from this point forward, THG is on the same list as any other banned substance.

PAUL TAGLIABUE: Yes. And what we do going back with THG or other compounds that they've created, that is something we're still looking at.

BOB COSTAS: The ESPN series "**Playmakers**," which dramatizes and exaggerates the seamier side of pro football. There was a report that you picked up the phone and called **Michael Eisner**, who runs **Disney**, **ESPN's** parent company, to express your concerns. Is that true?

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: Yes.

BOB COSTAS: What was your concern? What did you tell him?

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: My concern was the show was one-dimensional and traded in racial stereotypes, and I didn't think that was either appropriate for **ESPN** or right for our players and I don't think racial stereotypes are too constructive in a society where race has been an issue. I know our players well enough to know that we have lots of different types in the NFL. We have some individuals, like Donovan McNabb and Derrick Brooks, who are on the board of trustees at their respective alma maters; we have other players who have issues. But I didn't think the show showed the entire spectrum and I really thought that the stereotypes as far as drug use and spousal abuse was really unbalanced on that show.

BOB COSTAS: You would not deny that these things exist. Your problem is that it was too concentrated…

PAUL TAGLIABUE: It was one-dimensional and it was trading off on a racial stereotypes. Which at the other end of the spectrum when Rush Limbaugh made his comments, some people thought he was trying to trade in racial stereotypes in terms of affirmative action and so on. I thought it wasn't a balanced show and if they wanted to do a balanced show that was realistic, fine. But this wasn't balanced.

BOB COSTAS: What did **Eisner** say in response?

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: He said that his people had told him that there were things that had gone on 20 years ago, shows that had been out there and this was not a heck of a lot different. And I said basically on that, I think society's expectations as to the standards that athletes meet are higher today than they were 20 years ago when it comes to what we expect of our role models for kids. The standards today are much higher. We spend about $30 million a year on programs to make our players understand their responsibilities to the public, and that includes the kids and the parents who perceive these athletes as role models. Like it or not, they have to understand they are role models for a lot of people. And so whatever might have been okay 30 years ago, whether it was **Animal House** or anything else, I didn't feel was okay today. We had to meet a higher standard.

BOB COSTAS: By the standards of cable television, "**Playmakers"** was a hit. ESPN now says it is not sure they will send it back into production. If they do continue, would it jeopardize their standing with the **NFL** next time the **TV** contract comes up?

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: Certainly I think we would take it into account to the extent we

could. But we don't view ourselves as the ultimate censor. I don't view myself as a 14th century **Pope** in terms of what people have access to. I made my views known. I hope they consider them. If they don't, it will be their editorial judgment, but life will go on.

BOB COSTAS: Deion **Sanders** said on **CBS** that **Playmakers** was the closest thing to reality that he had seen.

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: Deion says a lot of things which are unique to **Deion's** reality.

. BOB COSTAS: I can't dispute that.

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: There are 1,800 players in the **league**. We start out with 2,600 in training camp, but over the course of the decade, we have about 10,000 or 15,000. Deion has one opinion; **LT** has another opinion. I talk to all of the players at all points on the spectrum and that was the basis of what I said to **Michael Eisner**.

BOB COSTAS: Some of these things may happen, relatively speaking, in isolation, but you see **LT** and what he talked about on **"60 Minutes;"** you see **Warren Sapp** go off on a tirade, which is not a criminal activity, but does not reflect well on the league. There have been criminal charges, serious criminal charges against some players, domestic violence, drug use, whatever it may be, in the mix.

COMMISSIONER TAGLIABUE: It's in our society, in the neighborhoods where these kids come from. You go into an **NFL** locker room and it's hard to find a player who didn't lose a brother or a sister in a shooting in an urban ghetto. That's where they are coming from. We get our athletes from society. We don't go out to Mars and pick these guys up from outer space. So we have players, some from from relatively privileged backgrounds. Jay Fiedler went to Dartmouth, other guys went to Harvard. I don't know what their early childhood backgrounds were; they come from pretty good schools. We have other players who come from pretty tough backgrounds. Our challenge is to help them all understand once they are an **NFL** player they nave a much broader responsibilities to themselves, to their family, to their team and to the l**eague** and to the fans. We try to deal with them on all points of the spectrum. We've got some stiff policies in terms of substance abuse and suspension. But it's a combination of trying to help people rise to meet a higher standard, which has been affected in part by Title IX and participation in women's sports, just a lot of societal changes that we have in terms of what we expect from athletes. Then when a player is troubled, you try to find out why he's troubled, and then help him.

BOB COSTAS: How do you personally feel about the tone of showboating, vulgarity, crassness, that's permeated all sports and therefore, including the NFL.

PAUL TAGLIABUE: I think we do very well by those standards. Some things you see you say it is a little self-centered or arrogant. You've heard people say that you go in the end zone and drop the ball to the ground, like Barry Sanders, because he was always there, act like he'd been there before. Some people act like when they make a tackle, it's the first one they've made in their life, so I don't view that as a big issue. The big issue I have is taunting or humiliating or provoking the opponent. I saw some numbers recently – we prohibit taunting because it leads to fights. It escalates. It's an 'in your face' tactic. Seven years ago, we had over 100 fines for fighting. Last year, we had no fights, we didn't fine a single player for fighting. We haven't fined a single player for fighting after 11 weeks this year. We haven't had a single fight on the field that was fineable. The taunting policy is achieving its purpose. The rest of it is fun, it's emotional, it is to some extent in your face, but as long as it's not orchestrated and designed to tell your opponent he choked, we'll live with it.

BOB COSTAS: Does the league walk a fine line because part of your audience is in your generation or mine, and what we might find unattractive might be appealing to a certain portion of the audience. Deion Sanders and Warren Sapp are on NFL programming on TV, there are NFL-sanctioned video games that have 'in your face' behavior in them. Is this a juggling act and is there a danger that you wind up on the wrong side of the line?

PAUL TAGLIABUE: We walk about 50 fine lines in terms of our audience. You start with our 32 different teams that are competitive, so what one fan thinks is fine; the other fan thinks it's insulting. What the Giants fan thinks is great, the Redskins fans think is tacky when the Giants are playing the Redskins. We have a mass audience. We have over 100 million people watching NFL games every weekend. That includes a very wide spectrum and it's becoming wider all the time, as we get Hispanic fans coming to our games, Asian fans, more women, and older people. We have the spectrum of the eight-year-old kids and the 88-year-old fans who remember Sammy Baugh. We try to have a balance. The biggest thing we try to do is keep the focus on two things. Football, which

is our game. We don't want some ancillary entertainment to overwhelm the game. Secondly, the role of the players in the community. And that's the reason we're so into youth football and youth sports.

BOB COSTAS: The home market rule seems like an antiquated rule on TV. I'm watching Kansas City and Green Bay earlier this year. I happen to be in New York. I invested three hours in watching this very exciting game. As the game is going to overtime, I'm advised that we will have to switch to the Jets game because of the home rule. Now KC and Green Bay are in overtime at Lambeau. Not only am I not watching the kickoff, I'm watching the announcers on CBS set up the game. It could make you pull your hair out.

PAUL TAGLIABUE: We have liberalized these policies in recent years. The biggest change is moving the kickoff of the late games to 4:15 and trying to keep the pace of the early games fast so we don't have too many overlaps. We've also given the networks greater ability to stay with games or move from game to game. It is something we'll fine tune. Can you get it perfect? We have two different networks and contractual commitments. It requires the agreement of both networks.

BOB COSTAS: You've got new technologies as well – split screen, streaming video.

PAUL TAGLIABUE: If you have the capability to do that. You'd have to get the networks to agree, CBS picking up a FOX feed and so on.

BOB COSTAS: It's frustrating. I'm sure even Jets fans were frustrated, missing that overtime game.

PAUL TAGLIABUE: Maybe the Green Bay example can be up there with "Heidi."

BOB COSTAS: What about flexible scheduling for Monday Night Football. The league is so unpredictable now that what looks like a good December game in September when the season starts turns out to be a dog and it's the one and only game ABC has and they are big contributors of the league's coffers and they say, 'hey, let us pick and chose a little bit' as the season unfolds.

PAUL TAGLIABUE: I think we've got to look beyond the idea of flexibility and the scheduling when it comes to the Monday night game. We need to look very seriously at whether we put more than one game in that primetime window. The first question is how close to the game do you make the decision. That is going to unsettle a lot of fans' plans. The real issue is less about flexibility and more about whether we put two games in the prime-time window and then have the flexibility even within the game to change the scope of the telecast. That is what we're looking at and what we'll discuss with ABC and with the other networks. I don't think that flexible scheduling is much of a solution. Last year, in the middle of the season, we did an experiment. We said, ok suppose we had flexible scheduling for the rest of the season. Let's figure out now, with 10 weeks to go, what games we'd put in primetime for the last six weeks. We were worse off than where we started. The Jets did a turnaround and close with a rush. The Patriots closed with a rush. We were making decisions in the 10th week of the season and they were no better than the decisions we made in March.

BOB COSTAS: The NFL is king on television, but for a long time now, it hasn't had a team in the Number Two market, Los Angeles. How long can this go on?

PAUL TAGALIBUE: Not very long. Southern California, California in general, has been a great place for football. Whether it's been the Rams and Raiders in Los Angeles, the Raiders in Oakland, high school football, college football. We all know what USC and UCLA and many, many other schools mean to football. De La Salle at the high school level. The Rose Bowl. We're working hard now on three different stadium projects. We're really in depth with each of the communities that will have those stadiums. At some point, maybe as early as next year, we hope to make additional decisions on one or more of those paths, and I think we'll be in LA in the foreseeable future.

BOB COSTAS: The big question is – How will you be in LA? There is talk of the Chargers trying to get out of their lease and go up the road. There are rumblings out of Indianapolis that the Colts might be eying Los Angeles. But from a league standpoint, an expansion team would seem to make more economic sense because of the entrance fee is very large.

PAUL TAGLIABUE: An expansion team makes sense from a number of perspectives. First of all, you can stock it and give it its own new definition, such as we did with the Texans in Houston. Our expansion teams have been very competitive in the last decade, especially in the case of Jacksonville and Carolina. So, there are arguments for that. We are working hard with the city of San Diego. I've met there with representatives of the city. I've met with the mayor of Indianapolis. We want our teams to stay where they are. But that decision is really more for the

future. We've got to get a stadium that really is worthy of football and Los Angeles in order for it to be successful. In a market where there is a lot of entertainment, a lot of leisure time activity, we know we have got to go in there and do it right.

BOB COSTAS: When a team claims it has to have a state-of-the-art stadium in order to quote 'be competitive,' how is that a credible claim when the network share of money alone exceeds the salary cap?

PAUL TAGLIABUE: Is that really true? It's close, but the key thing in part is the facilities, the ability in any given year to structure the kind of bonuses needed in this type of system that are paid in cash to keep a Peyton Manning under contract. To keep a Duante Culpepper under contract. Those are challenges under this system. Over time, everyone is going to spend the same amount of money. But in order to keep a team together, you have to have cash; you have to have the resources to keep the team together, to sign your key players when their contracts are coming up. For teams like Minnesota and Indianapolis, that can be a problem. It's something we address in a lot of different ways, with the Players Association, with revenue sharing. It gets to be complicated, but hopefully it works.

BOB COSTAS: In some cases, the NFL is in a unique position because it can offer an economic bonus to a community in the form of Super Bowls. So that separates it from other leagues. This question is pertinent in the NFL as well as other sports. What is the logical justification for publicly funded stadiums when there are other pressing community needs and when the players and owners in all sports are doing well?

PAUL TAGLIABUE: I think it's two-fold. Number one, it's up to the community to decide what its priorities are. Many communities have concluded that an investment in a stadium and a major league team is a tremendous asset, both tangible and intangible. Most of the cases where we have publicly funded stadiums in the last decade, it's been submitted in a referendum and it's approved by the vote. It's not all, but most. Secondly, we've been picking up increasingly the cost of building stadiums, and we're using television revenue to build stadiums. It's been about $750 million that we've committed to stadium construction so it's a pretty significant portion in most cases and it's helped us get stadiums in places like Philadelphia or Chicago and close the gap. In the case of the New England, it was built with private funds from the Patriots and the league. That was done in Carolina as well. So there is a mix today depending on the situation in different communities. The last thing is, I don't think anyone could show there is any correlation between spending on a stadium and not spending on other public needs. I would agree to the contrary. I think when communities are focused on investment and infrastructure and have that kind of mindset, they invest simultaneously in athletic facilities. Whether it's football stadiums, swimming pools, public schools and so forth, it has to with one's willingness and capability to invest in infrastructures. Some states are wealthier by reason of industry or geography than other states. There are a lot of factors. But if you go back over time, I think it's hard to demonstrate that we weren't able to do this because we put our money into a baseball or football stadium.

BOB COSTAS: The NFL prevailed against Al Davis in the most recent of his innumerable lawsuits against the NFL, although he's presently appealing it. From where you sit, would the NFL be better off without Al Davis?

PAUL TAGLIABUE: It's the old hypothetical. Al Davis has been in football for 40 years, more than that. He's had some great football teams, he's made some contributions. I think he's done some things that have been very negative to the overall interests of the league. Last year they were in the Super Bowl. This year they are not. That's where we are.

BOB COSTAS: You're 63 years old. You've had a tremendously successfully tenure as Commissioner. How much longer do you think you'll be the Commissioner?

PAUL TAGLIABUE: I don't know. I don't have any intention of retiring. I'm still challenged; I'm still enjoying what I'm doing. I'm still working hard. In the next week or so, I'm going to be in Denver, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Atlanta, Orlando, then I'm going to Germany to talk to the mayor of two or three cities over there about our European League. As long as I can function like that, I'll be prepared to do this job.

BOB COSTAS: And there is no question you are there, good health permitting, through 2005, when the next Collective Bargaining Agreement comes up and the next network television contracts come up?

PAUL TAGLIABUE: We're already talking to the union about an extension to the CBA. I think a big part of our success in recent years has been to look ahead with some vision, set some high goals, think about expansion, think about new ways of doing things. Certainly the salary cap and free agency is a very different system than what we had

in the 70s and 80s in terms of allocating players. And we're looking ahead now. As I said, we're talking to the networks about the future of television, talking to the union about continuing the collective bargaining agreement. As long as I've got the ability to do that, I'll be around.

BOB COSTAS: Paul, thank you very much.

PAUL TAGLIABUE: Thank you.