

Commissioner Tagliabue
New Orleans Press Conference
February 14, 2006

Opening Remarks

Good afternoon. First of all, I want to thank everybody for being here today, for supporting the Saints today, for supporting the Saints over many years and supporting the Saints in the months, years and decades ahead. It was about two months ago that we were in this building dreaming about the future, and none of us knew on that day – December 5 – what to do exactly. But Mr. Benson made the decision in late December to bring the Saints back home, for the Saints to come marching back into New Orleans. And so now we are here in this building, looking about 10,000 degrees different than it looked on September 5. It's full of people; it's full of hope; it's full of vision. And the dream about coming back is becoming a reality.

I always say that football, NFL teams, and the NFL are about two things: football and community. And both of those are here today. Coach (Sean) Payton is here to represent the football side and you're here as football fans. But you are also here as representatives of your communities throughout this region. And going forward, this is going to be a great project marrying football and community.

I've been involved in the National Football League for 37 years, going back to 1969. Some of you remember that's when Joe Namath was the quarterback who won the Super Bowl. Others will remember that you read that in a history book someplace because you were not yet born. Some of you will remember that in those days that they played the Super Bowl in Tulane Stadium before there was a Superdome. But for that 37-year period and for a few years before that, I've been an avid follower of the Saints. Some of you know and knew Hale Boggs and Lindy Boggs, well their son Tommy Boggs was a classmate of mine in college – that goes back to 1958. So this region has always had a special place in my life, my heart and in my professional career as representative of the National Football League. So it is with that backdrop that we are all here today.

I think we all understand that the last year has been the worst in natural disasters, the worst in tragedy, but out of those tragic circumstances can come a wonderful future where we all face extraordinary challenges. But with extraordinary challenges come extraordinary opportunities, and with extraordinary opportunities come extraordinary achievements. There are terrific fans here, terrific citizens throughout the region, and a terrific organization. I guess the message I would like to leave with you is one that I just discussed a couple of minutes ago with Coach Payton: with your energy, his energy and his staff's energy, with your vision and his vision, with all of you prepared to reach high, the future of the Saints is going to be great. But he won't be satisfied, you won't be satisfied, Mr. Benson and his organization won't be satisfied until you are playing in that Super Bowl game and not just hosting one in the Superdome. So let's go get it. Thank you.

PT: Good afternoon, this has been a fun event here with Coach (Sean) Payton talking to some of the team's supporters and fans and it was nice for me to have another chance to visit with them and talk about his vision for the future of the Saints. Based on everything that I know about him and the conversation I've had with him in the past couple of weeks, I think he's going to be a terrific leader, not just on the football field, but in the community as well. We were very

pleased this morning to have our third breakfast meeting with leaders of the business community and most importantly of all to be able to announce the formation of the business council to support the Saints. We think this is really a landmark step in the process of having the Saints be a factor along with the business community and the public and the recovery and the rebuilding of this region, so we're pleased to be here. We look forward to being back shortly for more events in the weeks and months ahead to announcing the Saints playing schedule in the weeks ahead.

Q: Can you discuss the process and Mr. Benson's comments in terms of a commitment to 2010?

PT: We are here on a multiyear basis and we're trying to do everything we can to make it work.

Q: Will the first game of the season at the Superdome against the Atlanta Falcons be nationally televised?

PT: It's something we're working on in terms of national television of the Falcons game. One of the issues is whether it would be a Sunday game or a Monday night game, but we're looking at that as a definite possibility.

Q: Mr. Benson had previously announced a desire to keep the home preseason games in state? Can you give an update on that?

PT: Preseason games, we're working on that. Certainly the goal is to keep the games in state and I think we'll be announcing the preseason opponents and the regular season opponents very shortly.

Q: What is your definition of "making it work"?

PT: I mean making it work. Having a team that's viable, can be sustained for the long term without inappropriate subsidies and be supported within the community.

Q: Can you discuss the 20 million dollar loan to the Superdome and can you discuss if there have been any other discussions about any further plan with the NFL in terms of loans or grants to help the team?

PT: No, it's a 20 million dollar commitment that is designed for a very specific purpose to try to put the Superdome authority in a position to get the work going quickly and I was very pleased to learn this morning that progress is being made in terms of getting all the construction arrangements in place and securing the bigger piece of the financing for the restoration and renovation. That is all critical and that was good news that I heard this morning. It raises the prospect that that building will be ready to play in this September.

Q: In President Bush's last news conference President Bush voiced concern that the region had still not come up with a plan that the federal government would be comfortable with. Having been here several times, are you seeing a lot of progress as far as an overall recovery plan?

PT: You can't compare what I say to what the president says. I focus on football. He's focused on the nation. We are committed to be here. We are working as hard as we can to make it successful. As I said earlier, the really positive thing is the support we are getting from the

leadership and the business community, interest from the fans, you in the media. I think that our operations here, the Saints operations here can be a positive. Hopefully those operations with league support can be a magnet for other businesses, other people to commit to the recovery and rebuilding in this area. The 20 million dollar commitment we made to the Superdome is an investment in infrastructure, public infrastructure, which is important, so hopefully we're doing our little piece, but the nicest thing about it is that we're getting tremendous local support.

Q: What are you asking for from those business leaders?

PT: I put it to them very simply that for the team to be viable, we need to develop deeper revenue sources in the private sector. Some of them will be buying suites. Many of them have expressed interest in ticket purchasing arrangements, where if the tickets could be used by employees of these companies and families of employees, friends and neighbors of employees. A lot of it will focus on giving people the opportunity to see the Saints play in person and to build some special events, whether they be musical events or youth football events around the kickoff of the season or around Saints games.

Q: Could you discuss the marketing help that this region is giving the Saints as far as redefining this market given the fact of the decline in population in the New Orleans area has resulted in increased population in outlying areas?

PT: It goes back to efforts we've been making for the past half dozen years with the Saints, to view the team as an asset and an entertainment attraction for the entire gulf coast region. We're going to be meeting tomorrow morning in Mississippi with some businesspeople and with governor (Haley) Barbour. I would expect in future trips we'll be up in Baton Rouge and elsewhere, so I think it's important for the whole region to pull together on a region wide basis and make things work, make the team successful and make the recovery successful on a region wide basis.

Q: Could a Super Bowl be a part of the recovery?

PT: It could be.

Q: You discussed the subsidies with the state and your displeasure with that. The Saints say they're committed to the contract, but given what the state has suffered economically, fearing they can't make the payment. What kind of concessions could the league or team make if they can't make that payment?

PT: I'm not going to speculate on that now. I did say as you mentioned in Baton Rouge on the 29th and 30th of October, I thought long term for the future there should be a better business model and I think this support we're getting from this business council, the formation of which we announced this morning is a positive step in that type of revised business model.

Q: This is your fifth trip to Louisiana. Why is it important for you to come down personally as opposed to delegating?

PT: I'm a firm believer that the only way you can lead is to put your feet on the ground and lead and you can't lead if you're sitting behind your desk 1,000 miles away.

Q: Did you base the Saints Business Council off of the formation of other similar groups with NFL teams?

PT: Many teams have very successful business community support and not for profit organizations working with the teams on community endeavors through the United Way and other activities that energize the community and create positive impact for the team. Certainly we have that in many NFL cities, so we try to draw on that through experience.

Q: In discussing your upcoming visit with governor Barbour, do you feel people in that state have discretionary income available to support the Saints despite the devastation there?

PT: We recognize in some cases people's means have been wiped out and devastated and in other cases, they obviously have many bigger priorities, but to the extent that they can get energized and enthusiastic about some relaxation and some sports, I said before some youth sports around Saints games, hopefully this can be a positive thing as people make their way back to feeling positive.

Q: Can you talk about the timetable for when discussions could happen for New Orleans hosting a Super Bowl?

PT: I would be speculating if I commented.

Q: Is the Saints' ticket pricing strategy a goodwill gesture?

PT: You really should talk to the Saints about that. I'm not really familiar with all the details. I know with the ticket pricing and the ticket structure within the dome, I know they've been working very hard to take account of the economic distress in the area and put thousands of tickets within reach of fans. Other individuals and businesses said that they would give serious consideration to contributing to funds that would help fans buy tickets on a discounted basis. I think there are going to be a lot of out of the box thinking that can be very positive in bringing people together?

Q: Can you discuss if Mr. Benson's mind has changed about the situation in New Orleans?

PT: I don't know whether his mind changed or not. I know he's here. I know he's very strong and committed. I know he's working very hard and I think it's very, very positive.

Q: Has the business community said that they've seen more of a commitment from the team?

PT: Yes, we had our first meetings in early December. We had other meetings on January 11. We had meetings today. I think that a lot of the uncertainty about the future has been cleared up and as I said many times, when you're in the midst of a natural disaster and human tragedy, sometimes it's hard to see any light at the end of the tunnel, but now we're at the point where people are no longer cursing at darkness. They're lighting the candles and doing positive things and that's true of the Saints and the entire community.

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