

**Commissioner Tagliabue – Press Conference
New Orleans
April 6, 2006**

PT: Thank you, Rita, and thank you all for being here. I think that the opening of the Saints season is going to be a great combination of substance and symbol. Rita already referred to the substance; the tremendous accomplishment of your community in bringing the Superdome back for the Saints 2006 regular season schedule. But the symbolism is also important because what's obvious to me is that the team, the city of New Orleans and the entire Gulf Coast region are working together as one, and that one organization – the team, the city and the region – have all the same great qualities in common; teamwork, confidence, work ethic, resilience, and above all, everybody in this area is a winner. Rita referred to Coach Payton and his attitude and to her grandfather Tom Benson and I can tell you that when I visited with them last week at our league meeting in Orlando that was the message that I took away from them -- that the team, the city and the region are one and that they mirror each other in terms of their values and their determination to recover and rebuild.

It's my great pleasure to announce the playing schedule for the Saints. You all know that we had committed to have the opening game in the Superdome on the weekend of September 24th, the third regular season week of our season, and we're very pleased to announce that game will be a nationally televised game. It will be a Monday Night football game on Monday, September 25, with the Falcons as the opponent, as we had announced earlier. It will be televised nationally on Monday Night Football by ESPN. As Rita said, the game will cap a series of events that will symbolize the rededication of the Superdome and the renaissance of the Superdome. The first game of the new New Orleans Saints will be very, very exciting. The overall schedule includes home games in October on October 8 and October 15 against the Buccaneers and the Eagles. I think when you look at the entire schedule you'll see three things leap out. Number one is that the Saints are competing with a strong team in a tough division. They have really outstanding match-ups against teams from two other tough divisions – the AFC North, including the Steelers and the Bengals, and the NFC East, which has potentially four outstanding teams in Dallas, New York, Philadelphia and Washington. I think it's a very exciting schedule, but the most exciting thing is the reopening of the dome and what that symbolizes both in terms of substance and symbol for this region and for its recovery. We'll be glad to take questions on any subjects relating to the Saints, the reopening of the Superdome and the playing schedule.

Q: Are you concerned that your successor will have the same strong feelings about New Orleans and the Saints.

PT: I think it's an institutional commitment. It's not just Paul Tagliabue. It's the ownership of the other 32 teams, it's the ownership of the Saints, and it's an understanding that football teams are at their best when they are working in the community, working with the community, and this is a unique opportunity for everybody

in the National Football League and with the New Orleans Saints to work together, so I think it will continue no matter who the new commissioner is.

Q: How would you characterize the business support since you began this process?

PT: I think it's been very, very strong and I think the formation of the business council was really a masterful thing and a very positive thing for the business leadership to do. But that having been said, there is still a lot of work to do. I know the Saints have been working very hard on season ticket sales or ticket sales generally and they feel positive in that area. We feel like today is another major step with the announcement of the schedule and then when we come with the draft and then we start focusing on the new talent – the Drew Brees', the Michael Bennett's and others – combined with the existing talent – Deuce McAllister, Joe Horn and others -- that the momentum will keep building. But we still have a good ways to go to accomplish all of the goals we do have both for the team and the integration and the role of the team and the players in the community. We're going to be working on a lot of additional events.

Q: Can a game like this become a rallying point for the community?

PT: I think so. Especially if we do what Rita just mentioned, which is to tie the Saints to the community and have the Saints come marching in with the right music and all of the other historical and cultural elements and I think that would include youth football as part of the tradition of this area. We have so many great players who came from Louisiana and the New Orleans area in the league. And of course we need to recognize that just a year ago there was tragedy here. That will be taken into account as well. But I think we can look back and hopefully people will recognize that there is reason to be positive and to recognize that out of tragedy can come great achievements, vision and hope for the future.

Q: Any thought as to when New Orleans might get back into the Super Bowl rotation?

PT: I've mentioned before that we're going to start looking at future Super Bowls at upcoming league meetings this year, but we don't have anything specific, no. One of the things that we've talked about in connection with the reopening of the dome and that celebration on that weekend in September would be to perhaps bring some elements from the Pro Football Hall of Fame here that would recall the great players who played in Super Bowl games in the Superdome or at Tulane Stadium and recall some of that great history of this stadium and this city as well.

RE: The New Year's Eve game at home.

PT: The New Year's Eve game will be against the Carolina Panthers and I know that both teams will hope that they have clinched the division already at that time, but it promises to be a very important match-up. It will be on December 31 and the Sugar Bowl is just a

few days later, so we'll be working together with the Saints, with the city and others to try and make that a very special occasion as well.

Q: How long have you been wearing the Fleur de Lis?

PT: I've had various versions of it, but this was given to me this morning by Jimmy Coleman, who many of you know, and Tommy Coleman – no longer with Steven Perry, who is one of the co-chairs of the business council, but Jimmy said it was better than some of the other ones that I've been wearing, that it was a double Fleur de Lis I think and it represents both the city and the Saints.

RE: The challenge.

PT: I've said before that we have confidence. I can't calibrate my levels of confidence -- confidence is confidence. If we all work hard as a team we believe that this can work for the long term, but it's going to take a tremendous team effort. The preseason games in Shreveport and Jackson are an important part of the outreach by the Saints to the entire region. The Shreveport game is nationally televised. The Jackson game will involve Peyton Manning and we're going to be over there tonight with Archie and others to keep emphasizing the importance of the Saints representing the entire region and that will include Baton Rouge, we're going to be over there too, making certain that everyone understands that the city has been hit so hard it takes the entire region to make it work. If we can all do that together than we're confident about the future.

RE: A new stadium.

PT: I have no opinion on the matter. We're talking about the Superdome, not a new stadium. As Rita said, getting this stadium back both in terms of substance and symbol is a tremendous accomplishment. Everyone deserves the credit – public officials, Doug Thorton and his team, architects, engineers and construction workers – this is a pressure-packed, tough thing to get done on this kind of a timeline and our hats our off to the people up there doing the rough. Someone said it's about 10 acres and most of it has to be done by hand, so there are hundreds if not thousands of people who get the credit for reopening on the weekend of September 24-25.

###