

**Commissioner Tagliabue Press Conference  
Gillette Stadium, Foxboro, MA  
August 22, 2005**

**PT:** I thanked them for the tremendous job that they do, not just on the field, but off the field, in the community. The success of the team on the field is very well known to everybody and it's been accomplished in a time and an era when the NFL is more competitive at every level than it's ever been in terms of winning football and winning championships. So those accomplishments are well known to everybody. This organization has had a practice and policy of going after players and acquiring players who are high quality football players, but with great character and with a commitment to represent the organization and the fans and the league in the community in a way that's stellar. And I thanked the players for that.

Obviously, after the death of Thomas Herrion on Saturday night following the 49ers-Broncos game, this is a time of mourning for us in the NFL. It's a time we have to be reflective and try to sort out what happened and carry on in a way that's sensible but that takes account of a tragedy and we've been doing that and working closely with the medical authorities and team physicians to see if the cause of this player's death can be ascertained. At this point we don't have any answers. I will be glad to take questions on any subject and offer you my perspective.

Question: Have you talked to the 49ers and as a league, will you do something in memory of Thomas Herrion?

**PT:** Yes, I spoke at length yesterday with John York, who is the owner of the 49ers and I spent quite a bit of time on the phone with our staff and getting medical information. So most of what we were discussing yesterday was trying to determine what had happened and identifying those things that the team would have to do in terms of counseling for players that might need counseling. We learned after Korey Stringer's death that teams have to deal with those kinds of situations with expert advice in some instances. So that's what we talked about yesterday. In terms of plans for this coming weekend, we'll be discussing that when I get back to New York later this afternoon.

Question: I'm wondering what the NFL at some point will do about dealing with HGH. There is no test available for it, but as Dr. James Short said on the Bob Costas show on HBO, he's had a number of players that have used it. How will you try to combat something that there is no plausible test for yet?

**PT:** Well, first of all, there is a test being developed for HGH. It was experimented with at the Athens Olympics. We have had a team of medical advisors studying the test – there are actually two different types of tests that have been developed, and assuming one of those tests is certified ultimately as reliable, then we, in all likelihood, will test for HGH. There are other issues with HGH. First of all, it's not clear that it's a particularly effective performance enhancer. Those issues are being studied as well. But if there is a test developed that's reliable, then we'll test.

Question: Do you have a timetable with the people you're working with?

**PT:** No. There have been meetings I think at least annually if not more often with the World Anti-Doping Agency people and others. And the last information that I had was that the test still had to be studied to determine whether it was reliable or unreliable.

Question: Is it possible or even worth it financially for sports leagues to try to be proactive and maybe have some of these doctors or scientists on staff to try to stay ahead of the curve. It seems like everything with steroids or these drug issues is playing catch up?

**PT:** I don't accept that at all. We were the first ones to develop a steroid test. We developed it before the federal government developed it. We funded the development of testing in the early to mid '90s. A year ago we gave another million dollars to a new lab to be created at the University of Utah. We've been the most proactive organization, sports league certainly, in the whole area of steroid testing. We've been at it for 20 years. We've funded research. We're continuing to fund research. Most of the rest of society is playing catch up with us not only in terms of testing but in terms of determining what can be abused and how it can test for. We spend over \$10 million a year on our anti-substance abuse program so I don't think that's playing catch up. We're very proactive. Believe me.

Question: I apologize. What I meant was the development of new performance enhancers?

**PT:** Well some of them are old. I mean testosterone is not new. It's just a very complicated test for science to come to grips with in a reliable way to determine the relationship with testosterone and epitestosterone. So that's just a scientific complexity there. Human growth hormone is not new. But human growth hormone has been discussed for at least 10 years, including at the Congressional hearings. As I said earlier, the question whether human growth hormone is an effective performance enhancer is an issue, but it's not new. Things like THG and other designer steroids are new, but the issue is not new. People have known that you could take chemical compounds and re-jigger them and come up with things for which tests were not effective. So I don't think we're dealing with a lot of new issues in terms of the underlying fundamentals. But you just have to continue to be proactive. I'm sure you know we were the first ones to deal effectively with ephedra. We were out front on andro along with the Olympic Committee. So I think you just have to keep doing those kinds of things.

Question: Was there any trepidation about taking MNF off a network broadcast?

**PT:** We really didn't take it off network television. We just switched the night of the week and switched the network. But there is no migration of games from broadcast television to subscriber-supported television. It's just a swap of nights and a swap of networks. But our commitment to broadcast television is as strong as it's ever been and the same policies that we've had for Sunday night football in terms of carrying the game

on the broadcast affiliates in the two cities of the participating teams will continue with ESPN on Monday night. So really there is no change terms of the scale of our commitment to broadcast television. What really has changed is that as viewer habits have changed, we think it would be more effective and we're reaching a larger audience net net by having a broadcast package on Sunday night and a cable package on Monday night. It's more in tune with where the viewers are likely to be. So if anything, we'll have a bigger audience for NFL television.

Question: Could you comment on Robert Kraft and what you've witnessed from afar with the Patriots and also what you've seen in those closed door meetings from a league perspective and his impact there?

**PT:** Well I don't have to comment from afar. This will be my 37<sup>th</sup> season of involvement with the NFL in one way or another and that includes I think three different ownership groups before Mr. Kraft and his family owned the team. I think what they've done is nothing short of remarkable. They have, from day one, emphasized that the team was going to be a tremendous representative of the community and were going to have players who understood that their commitments were not just to be outstanding football players but outstanding contributors in the community. And then on top of that, they've produced a winner, as I said earlier, in the most competitive era in our sport's history. They've managed to win three of four Super Bowls; they've managed to have a track record that is as strong as any in any professional sport. So those two things, from my perspective, are the most important. I frequently say that the twin pillars of our sport, the twin pillars of the NFL success, are football and community. And the Kraft family has hit the nail on the head with both of those in quite an extraordinary way.

Question: With the Packers, Cowboys and now the Patriots, is it good for the league to have a team that everybody has to shoot for?

**PT:** You know we used to call those dynasties and there's a school of thought led by Tex Schramm and Al Davis that said dynasties were great. Don Shula used to say they were great. That may be because they were dynasties. I think balance is needed. I think the history of pro sports, especially pro football, shows that if you have weak sisters, that if you have weak links in the chain that you are going to have Sundays that don't matter. You want every Sunday to matter. You want every one of those 16 games to be a big event and a competitive event. And I think that's what we have now. I said to the players that their accomplishment is extraordinary in winning three of four Super Bowls. But they know as well as anybody that a bounce of the ball here or a missed tackle there or a tackle that was made by grabbing a guy's jersey, those are the small margins of victory. If you go back and look at Buffalo getting to the AFC Championship four times and see what it would have taken for them to win one or two Super Bowls, it's a pretty thin margin. That doesn't detract from the accomplishment. I think what it does say is that while we've had teams with repeat success – the Patriots being clearly foremost in that respect – we have a tremendously competitive league with very few if any weak sisters right now.

Question: The number of holdouts and contract strife throughout the league ... does it hint for a greater concern at your office as something that is broken and might need to be fixed?

**PT:** I don't think it hints of a greater concern. We had six out of 2,800 players that were holdouts under contract, which is as low or lower than it normally is. I think what we see, which is of concern to me, is players getting poor advice from their advisors. That is troubling. What we saw this year, I think, underscored some players taking bad advice when they had contract commitments that were entered into when they were free agents and some of that seems to be driven by the way agents get paid. Those are issues, but the number of holdouts was no higher than what I expect going into any season.

Question: I know you visit different training camps, but I'm curious if your visit here is at all connected to the labor situation and brainstorming ideas with Robert Kraft, who has been on both sides of it with a low revenues stadium and now may be on the other side? And also comment on where things stand with the labor situation?

**PT:** Right now, we're in discussions with the Players Association. They've made some demands that I think are a stretch to put it mildly in terms of the current league economics. Some of their demands don't recognize the increase in investment that goes into stadiums like Gillette Stadium or the increased operating cost that are reflected in a facility such as the Patriots have here. In other areas, some of their demands overlook the cost of generating revenue. But as a league, we have far and away the most successful system. We're the first professional sports league in the history of the world that has player payroll in excess of \$100 million per team. Our player payrolls per team dwarf the other three major professional sports in the United States by significant multiples. So I think we need to focus on the soundness of what we do have and fine tune it and get a deal done because everyone is benefiting, starting with the players and the fans and those are two critically important constituencies.

Question: A lot has been said about Herrion being obese by public standards but not by NFL standards, which could be said of a majority of offensive linemen. Is that a concern?

**PT:** I think every team has tremendous medical talent, and also at the league level we're doing more than we've ever done. We have had for some time a committee which involves team physicians as well as outsiders on cardiovascular health. So we're looking at that. But I saw some numbers just recently indicating that 10 years ago we had 400-plus players in the 290-pound range and upward and from a statistical standpoint, there doesn't seem to be much of a change. But we do recognize that we have athletes that are fitter than most people in society, bigger than most people in society and doing things that are different and more demanding than many people in society, put aside the military and firemen and others. But we're very well aware of that and we're staying ahead of the curve in terms of understanding how big they should be, what kinds of characteristics they should be able to display, what kinds of performance levels they should be able to achieve and so on.