

Commissioner Paul Tagliabue
August 25, 2005

NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue attended the Carolina Panthers practice on Thursday. Following are his comments on several topics.

On why he was visiting Charlotte: It's just part of getting around to some training camps, which I try to do every preseason. I was up in New England this week. I was supposed to be in Atlanta yesterday and Carolina today. I had to cancel the Atlanta trip to go out to San Francisco for the memorial service the 49ers had for Thomas Herrion. I was able to come through here and say a few words to the players and coaches before heading back to New York. I can comment on anything other than whether the Panthers are going to win the Super Bowl.

On what he told the players: It was twofold. I thanked them for the great job that they do, not just on the field but off the field working in the community. So many of the players are real leaders, whether it's with youth sports or other youth programs or even programs for senior citizens or a variety of people. I like to encourage that and acknowledge the guys who are doing that. The second thing was to let them know that we expect them to be the best. Our goal is to be the number one sports league in the world. It's extremely competitive in the NFL in every way, shape and form on the field. If they're going to succeed, they've got to be the best, and they have a great opportunity to succeed because they (the Panthers) have a good organization and they've been there before and they can be there again. Just work hard and good luck.

On the NFL's position regarding the federal government possibly mandating drug testing programs for all pro sports leagues: I think that our program is very strong. I've said that many times. There are things we're trying to learn that maybe we can do better. Last year we announced a major financial commitment to additional research. There are tests we're looking at for some substances that currently there is no test for. We're hopeful that if and when Congress acts, that they'll legislate in a way that would say if you meet these certain federal standards with your collective bargaining agreement, then your program would continue as it is. If you don't meet those standards, then you'd have to step up and meet those standards. If there is to be legislation, we would hope it would be along those lines.

On what progress has been made for a test on human growth hormone: This is an area that gets very, very technical. I'm always leery of thinking that I'm a scientist when I'm not. There is a test that has been in the works. People have been looking at it for several years. Our scientific team has had meetings with other organizations that are trying to develop testing for some Olympic-related organizations. As I mentioned the other day, it was used on a limited basis in Athens at the Olympics in 2004. As to when it might be certified as reliable, I'd only be guessing. I know that's the question our people are looking at.

On if the testosterone test needs to be lowered from its current six to one ratio: That's been an issue for a decade or more. At what level can science give you a reliable answer in terms of relations of testosterone to epitestosterone? Over the years, the science has become more refined, so we and the Olympics and others have been able to lower the ratio, which we did again this year during the offseason.

On the League's investigation into players who obtained prescriptions from Dr. James Shortt in Columbia, SC: I've been getting periodic updates from our counsel. I think very shortly we'll have a final report from our counsel and investigative team. Hopefully, we can learn some lessons together with the Players Association from the report. I think one thing is clear already, based on what I have been presented with. No one within the Panthers organization was in any way, shape or form involved with any of these players who were playing outside the lines. Hopefully, I'll have the report by the beginning of the season, and then we can discuss it with the Players Association to see whether there are changes that we can make that would perhaps increase the penalties for players who might engage with others in a course of conduct that was designed to circumvent the program. Issues like that we have already started to talk about, and we'll talk about them more intensively after we get the final the final report.

On if any players will be suspended or disciplined for their involvement: Based on what I've heard to this point, it would be virtually impossible to have found that any player violated the program the way the program exists. Given the testing capabilities that are out there, I think the main goal has been to get reliable information and then to have any player who is still in the League subject to ongoing reasonable cause testing on a very comprehensive basis.

On if the steroid and human growth hormone problem is more widespread than previously thought: I don't see anything at this point to suggest that. It looks like it was an isolated endeavor by a physician, but I'd rather answer that in a definitive way after I see the final report.

On the state of the League: I think we're in a very strong position because of the talent in the League. There has been a lot of emphasis and discussion about the great, young players and the transition from the generation that was led by guys who are now in the Hall of Fame, the John Elways, the Dan Marinis, the Steve Youngs that we saw last month up in Canton and other players who were huge factors in the NFL from the mid to late 80's up until the end of 2000. Now, we've got this new generation of players. We can start with the quarterbacks, the Donovan McNabbs, the Michael Vicks, the Peyton Mannings, and your own Jake Delhomme. But it's just not the skill positions or the quarterback position. It's offensive and defensive linemen. Julius Peppers type players. Great athletes. I guess the Cowboys think they've got a linebacker who's the next Lawrence Taylor. As long as we have players like that who can play the game great and do positive things off the field and connect with the community, I think the state of the League is very strong. The NFC South division is kind of typical. We've had three teams from this division in the NFC Championship Game three years in a row: Atlanta, Carolina and Tampa Bay. If you look at every division, they don't have that track record but they have the potential for that kind of a thing. With Minnesota being as strong as it is, Green Bay hoping to see a Super Bowl before Brett Favre decides that he's going to hang it up, Detroit coming back strong with Steve Mariucci and Lovie Smith in Chicago. Every division is extremely competitive, and that's a great way to start the season.

On if the publicity of the Terrell Owens situation bothers him: I don't want to comment on any particular player. But I think the thing that troubles me and troubles people in the League is that we have 2,800 players, and they are all out here working extremely hard to be part of a team and to win as a team because this is the ultimate team sport. Then, so much attention gets showered on a few people who for one reason or another have a contract dispute or may be less mature than you would like them to be or are not getting the kind of advice maybe they should be getting. It's a distraction, and I think the biggest concern I have is it detracts from the other 2,800 guys who are working hard and playing as a team and expect to win as a team.

On progress toward extending the collective bargaining agreement: I saw Gene Upshaw earlier this week out in California, and we're going to be meeting again soon and stepping up our efforts. I think we both realize that there is an opportunity now in September and October before our League meeting in late October to really get beyond where we are now and work something out. It's going to be the number one priority, and it has been the number one priority for quite a few months as you know. It's going to even rise to a new level. I'm going to get some additional owners involved in the collective bargaining. In the past, that's been important to have me at the table but to have a few key owners who are leaders in this area also involved. We're going to do that, and hopefully, we'll get this thing done.

On if the owners are united or if there is still a gap between the large and small-market teams: I think to some extent on the internal revenue sharing and cost sharing issues we've been chasing our tail, because we don't know what the goal is with the Players Association. I've been saying for months that the two questions are linked together. The one that has to be clarified and resolved first is what's the deal with the Players Association, and then I think we'll have a target to shoot for and we'll get a consensus within the League to support that and reach that target.

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