

**Washington Post  
Charley Steiner Interview**

Will Hobson [Male Voice]: This is Will [phonetic].

Charley Steiner: Will, it's Charley Steiner returning your call. How are you doing?

Will Hobson: Good. Good, Charley. How are you?

Charley Steiner: Good.

Will Hobson: Are you announcing this season?

Charley Steiner: Yeah. Twelfth year with the Dodgers.

Will Hobson: So, are they playing today?

Charley Steiner: We have a game in about three hours. Six o'clock here at the ball park. Getting the computer out and cracking an adlib or two.

Will Hobson: Who do the Dodgers have today?

Charley Steiner: I'm sorry?

Will Hobson: Who do the Dodgers have today?

Charley Steiner: We are in San Diego. And then from here we'll go to San Francisco and then we'll get home, our opener is next Tuesday. Season is underway.

Will Hobson: Indeed it is. I'm a lifelong Phillies fan and their season started off the other day exactly as I would've expected.

Charley Steiner: Well, sadly the season ended on opening day for you guys.

Will Hobson: They might be a little bit better this year than they were last year but at least they've got a few young kids that are worth paying attention to like Franco and what have you.

Charley Steiner: It ain't pretty.

Will Hobson: Yeah. Well, I appreciate you calling back. So, what we're doing here is basically *The Post* doing I think the most accurate way to describe it is it's sort of a biographical examination of Donald Trump and we're going to be rolling out different stories that sort of tell the story of his life from beginning up through until present day.

So, one of the chapters I'm working on involves his various sporting interests. Obviously, the USFL was a central part of that.

Charley Steiner: That and boxing. I was around him when he was hosting the fights with Don King in Atlantic City.

Will Hobson: Oh, you were?

Charley Steiner: Oh yeah. We had a wonderful time together.

Will Hobson: Okay. All right. Well, first of, Charley, do you mind if I record this conversation for my note-taking purposes?

Charley Steiner: Sure. Please do.

Will Hobson: So, first of, with the USFL -- I mean, I watched the documentary and I read stories and you've made very clear your personal feelings about Donald. One thing I'm interested in -- I guess I'm primarily interested in anecdotes, something like descriptive stories, something where I can put Donald in a room doing something or describe how he conducted himself during a period of time. With that as a prompt, the first thing that popped in my mind when thinking about Donald with the USFL is conversationally was he a guy that sounded like someone who knew football, like knew the mechanics of the game?

Charley Steiner: He knew no more or no less than the average fan. And that is the long and the short of it. I remember when he wanted to hire Walt Michaels to be the head coach of the Generals, he called. At that point, he was "a Donald" not "the Donald." And so, we had a chat and I had known Walt in the past and I said, "Well, that doesn't seem like a very good marriage to me," and he asked why. I said, "Well, Walter, I believe, was from West Virginia." I said, "This is the coalminer's son being adopted by you. I'm not sure that that's a long-lasting relationship."

The one thing -- we talked a fair amount. I mean, I can't say more or less than any other owner that I've worked for in various teams but -- you've watched the stuff -- he just wanted attention in the worst way. What was fascinating as I look back

on it where he held the press conference to announce that he had purchased the team, where he held the press conference to announce the signing of Doug Flutie and so on, at the exact same place that he has been doing all his interviews and press conferences right there in the atrium of Trump Tower. So, in that regard, nothing has changed. And when he bought the team - - and again, this is nothing I haven't said before -- his whole idea was gaining attention for himself. He's in real estate; now all of a sudden by owning a football team he could gravitate toward the sports page. He'd already resided well on the real estate page. He had a fair amount of time on *Page Six*, maybe on a good day he'd get to the front page.

Will Hobson: Yeah. It's funny, there's a bio of Trump by a guy named Wayne Barrett and in his chapter about the USFL, he notes that Trump's first national magazine profile, his first bit on national TV were not for his real estate deal, it was because he was a USFL owner.

Charley Steiner: That's exactly right and that was part of the master plan. Again, in the 30-something years I have known him, his MO has not changed one iota. He was a real estate baron, a young one at that, who ironically Trump Tower went up the year that the USFL went into business, 1983. He wouldn't come into the league until a year later. And he came to realize that by owning a football team he could garner all those

attention and then metastasize to all over the newspaper. He was brilliant in that regard.

And again, the other thing was remember at that time it was Steinbrenner who owned the sports pages in New York. What George was very good at was the print medium. What Donald was really good at was the electronic medium. George didn't want to be in front of the camera as much. He just wanted to spread quotes to *The Post* and *The Daily News* when he thought it was advantageous. Donald, on the other hand, went straight for the cameras and his MO then was exactly his MO now. And he was really good at it. And what I remember vividly was the very first day that it was announced that he had purchased the team. They were the New Jersey Generals of the USFL. The day that he announced the purchase on 5th Avenue at Trump Tower, he called them the New York/New Jersey Generals, which came as news to everybody. Again, it was very typical of him. He was going to take it to whatever level he wanted to. And we kind of shrugged our shoulders, laughed a little bit, "Okay, fine. This is what we're getting into."

Will Hobson: So, let me take a step back real quick. So, you were the announcer for the Generals?

Charley Steiner: Right.

Will Hobson: Was it radio, TV?

Charley Steiner: Radio. I was there before he got there. Yeah, I was there for all three years. An oilman from Oklahoma, J. Walter Duncan owned the team the first year and then Donald bought it. So, Donald will often say, and it drives me crazy, that he was responsible for my career. Well, I was there before he was, I've done fairly well since he and I went separate ways, and I never received a dime of payment from him. I was paid by the radio station, WOR, that had the rights. And I ran into Donald over the winter at a restaurant in L.A., this was in January, it was January a year ago, and he was at this table with a bunch of folks that I knew. He gets up, he shakes my hand, and he tells everybody at the table not unlike what was said in the documentary that had it not been for him I'd have no career, to which I responded in front of the people he was saying all this about, "Donald, you didn't have a fucking thing to do with my career." And then, he pats me on the back and said, "You never thanked me either." And I said, "Because there was no fucking reason for me to thank you." So, even those little tiny anecdotes about him and just spreading what he perceives to be the truth, whether it is or not, those are the things then and 30-something years later, it hasn't changed. Nothing has changed.

Will Hobson: That happened last year in L.A.?

Charley Steiner: Yeah. At a restaurant, Craig's, with witnesses. I said, "You didn't have a fucking thing to do with my career." So, that's Donald. That's fine.

So, he buys the USFL team called The New Jersey Generals and within about 10 seconds, he said, "Football is meant to be played in the fall." Well, that's not what the league was. So, again, he changed the perception in his own mind of what the league is and was and changed the name of the team.

Will Hobson: So, you alluded to it a bit ago, what was his relationship like with Walt Michaels?

Charley Steiner: Oh, I can't say that it was good, bad, or indifferent. He just happened to be the coach. See, all the people around Donald, then as now were just puppets. They were puppets. I'll tell you what, Walt Michaels could've been Corey Lewandowski. They were all there for his amusement, which is why I suppose we didn't get along particularly well.

Will Hobson: Well, the reason I ask is because there are two anecdotes that I've seen in various media that I'm not sure if they happened or not. But one involves Donald like calling down to the sidelines to -- this is the last season, Flutie had broken his collarbone, I think. And then, there's an anecdote that Donald called down to order Flutie on to the field and Michaels wouldn't do it. Have you ever heard of that happening?

Charley Steiner: I don't know that to be true but it would not surprise me in the least.

I'll give you another Donald football field anecdote. This was either 1984 or 1985, and I can't remember which it was. We're playing in Jackson. It's the spring league and now it's late June and it's about 100 degrees down there with humidity to match, and the players are getting warmed up, working up a lather. And I see -- now it's funny to see him on stage with his father -- but Donald Jr. It's a football game. It's 100 degrees, humidity to match, and here is this little boy with blue socks to his knees, shorts, a sports jacket with a crest and bowtie, and I'm thinking, "I wouldn't want to be that kid." And Donald was like 39 years old then, he's a couple of years older than I am, three years older, and I'm thinking to myself, "Jesus, that poor kid has got -- and he's got [indiscernible] sports jacket, shorts, the socks, and bowtie, and it's 100 degrees. And so, now I see him on stage and now he's a big adviser. I said, "Oh man." And Donald was the first guy I ever met who had a crest, he had his own personal crest, and contemporaries of mine didn't have crests.

Will Hobson: How did he interact with the players? Did you ever witness him walking in the locker room?

Charley Steiner: He would come in, he'd do the high-five and all that stuff, then again the players were just his



puppets. The players liked to see him because this way they didn't have to deal with the media. He did it for them. So, yeah, he'd pat them on the back, good job. One thing, to give him his due, he paid them a lot of money, he treated them and us well, but that was the price of doing business with Trump, all the other stuff. But frankly the players rather enjoyed the fact that he sucked up all the oxygen in the room. He came in -- you know, Herschel Walker didn't want to talk to these folks, Flutie didn't, neither does Brian Sipe or all the other guys. Donald walked in and "Thank goodness, Donald will take care of the heavy work for us today." And he loved it.

Will Hobson: So, describe to me what he was doing during games? I assume there's an owner's box that he was sitting in?

Charley Steiner: Yeah, he had an owner's box and he would -- I don't remember that he went to all the road games but he was at most of them and he would be in the owner's box. Again, I didn't see him because I was working when he was working. And then he would inevitably want to come in and talk on our post-game show. What was I supposed to say, "Get the hell out of here"? He came in. I kept it as short and sweet as possible, and then the obligation check part went on the sheet and we moved on. But again, the whole idea for all of this for Donald was the attention. So, there was a pre-game show, a post-game show, a press conference, walking into the clubhouse, the locker

room, nothing has changed. I've said this a million times, if you cut and paste GOP and USFL, it's the exact same story. He doesn't care if the league goes down, if it went down with him, and I'm not sure he cares much if the GOP goes down with him either. [Cross-talking].

Will Hobson: One thing that struck me --

Charley Steiner: [Cross-talking] the magical egotistical tour.

Will Hobson: As a sports fan though, it's funny, the one thing that struck me that's interesting about this, his USFL time period, is that particularly as I read the clips of like his first three to six months when he advised the team and he throws money at Shula, Brian Sipe, signs Gary Barbaro, throws money at LT -- I have to think he was royally pissing off all the NFL owners.

Charley Steiner: Well, he's pissing everybody off. It wasn't just the USFL. It was the NFL, everybody. I mean, he just changed the game, the game of how the game was being played. This is a league that at some point was ready to go in competition head to head with the NFL but they weren't ready yet but he didn't care. Again, he bought a New Jersey USFL franchise basically as a real estate investment that he thought, hoped, and expected would become a New York NFL franchise. So,

a \$9 million investment would someday be worth billions. That was the game plan.

Will Hobson: Were you at either of those press conferences -- were you at any of those press events in Trump Tower relating to the Generals?

Charley Steiner: Sure.

Will Hobson: Which ones.

Charley Steiner: I guess at all of them.

Will Hobson: Can you just sort of paint a picture for me what -- particularly when he announced he was buying or he had bought, I assume he's in the atrium there.

Charley Steiner: Yeah. Every interview or press conference you have seen over the past year and a half, it was exactly the same place, the exact same feel, the only difference was he didn't come down on an escalator. But I remember, Howard Cosell was there. I mean, it became a big deal because he knew all the highfalutin folks in New York. And again, in the beginning we're thinking to ourselves, USFL, I'm relatively young at this point in my career, he's going to be the Steinbrenner of football and this might be a fairly pleasant ride. And it was for a while and then all of a sudden -- you know, it was like drinking a couple of shots of tequila, feeling pretty good then all of a sudden you get a little woozy.

But yeah, the one thing about it it wasn't like some press conference somewhere where there was a bridge table and some banner behind him. It was Trump Tower and this is the USFL and it was going to be big. And it was. But there was always a great showbiz enormity about those press conferences. And again, he couldn't get that selling a high-rise building. But again it all became symmetrical for him. So, the football fed off the real estate, the real estate then fed off the casinos. I mean, there he's an unparalleled genius. It's just the road that he takes that raises questions.

Will Hobson: If Trump is the villain that killed the USFL, who were the victims here? Who were the people who lost their jobs? I assume [cross-talking].

Charley Steiner: Everybody who worked in the league. Players -- forget about the other owners because they, I assume, could absorb the loss. But it was a wonderful time and I think if you talk to anybody who was involved in the league -- players, coaches, media -- it was a wonderful time because we were all smiling anarchists. We had the two-point conversion, we had replay, we did all the stuff that the NFL could not and would not do. And then to see all of that come to an end because, as they said to Mike Tollin in the movie, it was a nice lawsuit. And that's when whatever feeling I had for him completely disappeared. Lawsuit. He had all these players who

were just dreaming of the opportunity to play professional football, much less the NFL, and they were just cast aside, and all of the folks -- whether it was the trainers, the locker room people, these were jobs that disappeared on a nice lawsuit. And I've never been able personally to square with that. And he didn't care much.

Will Hobson: So, I'm curious, I assume you're familiar with Steve Erhardt.

Charley Steiner: Sure.

Will Hobson: He seems like a pretty strong-ish Trump defender. I talked to him earlier today and he makes the case that the league -- Trump didn't kill the league. He just accelerated the death maybe and changed the cause of death.

Charley Steiner: Well, again, did we die by poison or shot by a gun? And who administered the poison or who shot the gun? He was dead solid perfect in the middle of all of that. I mean, he didn't do it himself but he had willing co-conspirators, the other owners who hoped that they might be able to win this lawsuit, which they did, but nobody expected them to get \$3.76. So, I'm sorry but he was the Pied Piper and sadly John Bassett was the only guy who could stand up to him but he was fighting brain cancer as he was fighting Trump.

Will Hobson: So, if I'm looking back at the USFL and I'm trying to think of like pivotal moments post Trump's

involvement, like a scene to describe, the press conference obviously, there's the trial itself, is there anything in between there that you're aware of? Was there like an owners' meeting with a pivotal standoff between Trump and Bassett or an important vote?

Charley Steiner: That was always ongoing. I don't believe there was any [audio glitch]. I'm sure there was. I was not privy to it. But for most of us, we had a pretty good idea of who was on the right side of history and who wasn't. And as Bassett got increasingly ill, the league had no shot. The undoing for the league, they expanded too early and so the owners in the first year got some quick cash, then they brought in franchises that had no business being in the league, and so they tried to absorb some of the losses. "All right. We're going to the fall and we'll try to absorb the losses by going to court and basically the NFL underwriting our losses, absorbing a few of our teams and make a shitload of money." They got \$3.76.

Will Hobson: What would happen if the USFL had won that case? I should say, what would happen if they won a large judgment?

Charley Steiner: I think what would've happened Donald would have had his NFL team in New York and he would have dropped the New Jersey logo and change it entirely to New York in a New York minute. And I still think that -- what people

forget also is that in 1987 the NFL went on strike and everybody knew that there was a strike coming. So, if again they had just been patient for a couple of years, one of two things would've happened. One, there would've been an exodus of NFL players to the USFL on its own, or two, there would never have been a strike. So, Trump played right into the NFL's hands and our league, the USFL, is saying, "Wait a second. What's the hurry?"

Will Hobson: How would the USFL's continued existence have prevented a strike?

Charley Steiner: I think the USFL eventually -- again, that's really the ultimate hypothetical [sounds like]. It was a fun league to be in, a fun league to be involved with, and this playing in the spring was actually kind of fun. Now, whether or not it could've sustained over the long haul, that is purely conjecture. But I guess the thing that has always rubbed me the wrong way about all of this is they didn't have to do it that quickly. And again, going back to '87 when there was that strike, one of two things would've happened: One, there would've been an exodus of NFL players to the USFL, or two, there would never have been a strike and they would have had to absorb a couple of teams whether they wanted to or not. So, it was a high-stakes poker game and Trump lost and he took a lot of folks with him.

Will Hobson: Are there any other particular memories about his USFL days we haven't talked about that you think I should know or anything particularly that sticks out in your mind?

Charley Steiner: You know, clearly he was different than all of the other owners because he was Donald J. Trump. But again, he was "a Donald" then, not "the Donald" but he started to master his Trumpiness. Again, I don't see any difference between this guy except the hair is a little oranger [sounds like] than it was but there's no difference. His MO is exactly the same. The league didn't matter to him.

Will Hobson: Did he ever talk about his own personal playing career?

Charley Steiner: No, not with me.

Will Hobson: So, when he came on to like post-game shows, what would he be talking about?

Charley Steiner: Oh, he'd talk about how great his team was, how about that tackle by Gary Barbaro with four seconds left in the second quarter. Whatever. It was innocuous, meaningless, and again, it was just like talking to a fan. He just wanted to be in there.

Will Hobson: Who was his like consigliere? Who were the people who helped him -- who was he bouncing ideas off of before he signed Doug Flutie or --



Charley Steiner: I guess the same people he talks to about his defensive and the wall and all that, pretty much himself. And McVay was one and who was the other guy -- Jim Gould. Gould and McVay were their guys.

Will Hobson: I thought McVay was with Tampa?

Charley Steiner: But then he came up in the last year, if I recall. And Gould was another guy -- these were all -- they came in with Donald. Again, I and those of us who've been involved with the team were -- these were newcomers, okay, this is the new management, "Hi. How are you doing?" and that was it. And much like his spokesmen and consiglieres today, they were in Donald's camp and they spoke Donald talk.

Will Hobson: Getting over to his boxing interest, I actually have a little bit of reading to do on that tonight -- I mean, are there just general things or memories --

Charley Steiner: Again, everything was a big show. Everything took place in Atlantic City. Everything from the Trump Castle, Trump Plaza banner, those were the Tyson-King years. And the other thing I've said forever which is so ironic over the past couple of years now, there's not a whole lot of difference between Don King and Don Trump. Each will speak the truth and when he does it, it's a pleasant coincidence, they're the loudest guys in the room, they get off on being a bully, King's hair goes north and south, Trump's hair goes east and

west, and every day is a bad hair day. But they were the same guy. They were promoters. And you sat there and you listened, you shook your head, you shrugged your shoulders and you moved on. But they were the same guy.

That was the thing that was so ironic. You had one guy who graduated the streets of Cleveland and the other guy I heard somewhere went to the Wharton School. They were the same guy. Very quick on their feet, they said what was in their head at that moment, and in the boxing business you could get away with it. In the presidential business, it's not quite that easy.

Will Hobson: So, who else should I talk to?

Charley Steiner: For which?

Will Hobson: Both.

Charley Steiner: USFL --

Will Hobson: So, I'd be -- with the USFL I'd be interested in folks specifically who would've had a lot of face time with Donald during that time period.

Charley Steiner: Who would've had face time with Donald?

Will Hobson: So, I should talk with Gould, I think.

Charley Steiner: Yeah. Gould, for sure. He'll defend him. He was a Donald guy. I'll tell you, Kevin MacConnell who was the PR guy for the Generals and Gary Croke -- C-R-O-K-E -- those were the two young PR guys at that time. Where they are now, I don't know, but I know that they're both still around. I think

Kevin is either an SID or PR guy at Rutgers, I think, and then Gary Croke, his father, Ed Croke, was a long-time PR guy at the Giants. Again, what Gary is doing, I don't know. Who else -- sadly Bryan Burwell, who became a good friend of mine covered the Generals, and then he went to St. Louis passed, away a year ago and he would've been terrific for you. Brian Sipe is a very bright guy. I think he was out here in San Diego on real estate stuff. I'm sure he could give you -- again, he's a really intelligent fellow. He could give you some stuff.

Boxing, who's still around? Up in Philadelphia, Bernie Fernandez, a boxing writer, he was there then. Who else?

Will Hobson: He was at *The Daily News*?

Charley Steiner: I'm sorry?

Will Hobson: He was at *The Daily News*, wasn't he?

Charley Steiner: Yeah. I'm trying to think who was doing the announcing for Showtime then. Let me think about that one. I hadn't given that one no thought.

Will Hobson: It's probably the same guy, [indiscernible] like Lampley?

Charley Steiner: I don't know that Lampley -- you can't lose. I'm sure Jim's got something there. I'm just trying to think specifically who would've been those -- there is a woman named Laurie Berlin [phonetic] who was doing PR in New Jersey at that time. Let's see if I could [indiscernible] a second. She

has done media relations stuff for years and she was involved around that time.

Will Hobson: I mean, the extent of Donald's involvement with boxing was basically promoting and arranging fights that benefited his casinos, right?

Charley Steiner: Absolutely. Yes. And that's what it was. And everything with Trump Plaza, Trump Castle, Trump something or other, under those banners all the fights were held.

Will Hobson: But didn't he develop like a pretty close friendship with Tyson?

Charley Steiner: Depending on your definition of friendship and close, yes. You listen to Donald and he's got friends in North Dakota. So, is it close? What kind of friendship or relationship -- I don't know. I mean, he was there, Tyson was at that time when he was becoming filthy rich and terribly vulnerable. Sounds familiar?

Will Hobson: All right. Well, I'll let them look up all these people you mentioned and if --

Charley Steiner: If I can think of some names, I'll send them to you.

Will Hobson: Okay. And if there any follow-up questions that come to mind, I'll give you a shout back. We don't have

firm timeline on publication yet but I think it'll be a little bit. And Charley, I really appreciate your time.

Charley Steiner: Thanks for calling.

Will Hobson: No problem. Have a good one.

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