

Washington Post Live  
Steve Ehrhart Interview

Kevin: AutoZone Liberty Bowl. This is Kevin.

Hobson: Hey, Steve Ehrhart, please.

Kevin: Who's calling, please?

Hobson: Say Will Hobson with the *Post*.

Kevin: Yeah, one moment, okay?

Hobson: Sure.

Ehrhart: Hello.

Hobson: Hey, Steve.

Ehrhart: Yes.

Hobson: Hey, it's Will Hobson.

Ehrhart: Hey, Will. How are you doing today?

Hobson: Good. So now is it still worth to chat?

Ehrhart: Yes. It's fine.

Hobson: Good.

Ehrhart: We have a little trouble hearing you there, so  
speak up clearly.

Hobson: Can you hear me now?

Ehrhart: Yeah, that's better.

Hobson: First off, do you mind for note-taking purposes,  
if I record this conversation?

Ehrhart: No. That's all right.

Hobson: Okay. So yeah, as I may have explained earlier, what we're doing basically or what we're attempting to do is sort of like a deep biographical examination of Donald Trump. We're going to try to roll this out in a series of stories that sort of tells the story of his life. There have been bios done before of him. Obviously, much had happened in his life in the last year and changed a bit I think how we view these previous events.

But what I'm looking for from you and from other folks I talk to is outside of filling in details - because a lot of this stuff has been in the media before - any scenery, any imagery, any descriptive details, anecdotes about Donald and stories involving him that come to mind. You know, stories you tell folks when they're asking you what was it like to be around Donald Trump back in the 1980s. I'll use that just as a general prompt. And then obviously our discussion is primary going to be about the USFL which is part of the chapter that I'm working on about Donald, his own personal sporting career and his various sporting interests. Does that all makes sense?

Ehrhart: Yeah. That would be fine.

Hobson: So first off, tell me a bit about yourself. What were you up to before the USFL?

Ehrhart: Well, I went to a small college, got on with college and played football and was lucky enough to get one of

these scholar athlete scholarships to go on to law school. I wasn't good enough time to play pro ball, the guys that where, I had to give up the scholarship. So I went to law school without a scholarship at the University of Colorado [phonetic]. I started coaching there and coached for about six years there while I was finishing my law degree.

Then I started representing players and coaches. I had a law practice in Boulder, Colorado - this was from '72 to '82. I'm representing a lot of NFL players, a couple of baseball players, and basketball players. The guys that were putting together the USFL in 1982 approached me about being the counsel to their competition committee which was putting together the outline of the league, the roles, and the player contracts. I could remember some early meetings when we were allocating the players, because we were starting from scratch. Then all the antitrust issues at that time about could you have a salary cap and all those kinds of things so that becomes important three years later. And so I did that in '83.

Then Chet Simmons, who had just left the presidency of ESPN, he'd also been the president of NBC Sports before he went over to ESPN, he convinced me to come to New York. And so in the '80s, the fall or maybe summer of '82, I went to New York and was there. Like I said, I was maybe the second employee after Chet Simmons. I served as counsel and director of

administration and executive director of the USFL in New York City there. Sports administration, sports law has been my background and then I'd get back to the specifics.

After the USFL, we went to the trial there. By that time, I had moved -- well, I'll stay with the USFL. Then we've already had some significant discussions in '84 about, you know, will there be a potential merger. And the then owner of the Memphis Showboats made me the veritable deal you can't refuse, and so I came to Memphis in late -- I guess within the summer of '84. So I was two years in New York running the league, and then in '84 I became president and part owner of the Memphis Showboats and put together the team in Memphis where we had Reggie White and a lot of good players, and we were stocking up to be a competitor to the NFL. We had 17 of our Memphis Showboats the year after we went down but went on to careers in the NFL. Five years later we had more players playing in the NFL and a lot of NFL teams had five years later. Of course the leader of the pack was Reggie White, to come back to the story there.

While I was in Memphis, I was on the executive committee of the league with Donald Trump. Donald and I were actually co-chairmen of the league. So not only in my role at the league office did I get to know Donald pretty well, but then as a competitor team in the '85 season. I was president of the

Showboats and of course he was absolutely active with the Generals. Then after the trial and that went down, I just stayed in Memphis. Bob Cousy talked me into becoming the -- I don't know if you remember it well. There was this 6-foot-4 and under basketball league called the World Basketball League where we thought we'd be like the middleweight boxers. So I was commissioner of that league from '88 to '91, I believe, or '92.

And then since I was from Colorado, the governor of Colorado asked me to put together the expansion application for the National League in baseball and so I did that, perhaps commuting back because that was my home area and sports law. So I was the first president of the Colorado Rockies for a few years. But I sold my stock in the Rockies, so shortly thereafter, because I had always promised the guys in Memphis we'd try and get into the NFL. The NFL had their expansion efforts there in the early '90s, I guess it was '93 or '94 in there but unfortunately we came in third to Jacksonville and Charlotte. So that's how smart I was. I sold my stock in the Rockies to try and put together what we never got in Memphis.

But then the Liberty Bowl, the college football game, given that's me or not I'm happy to do it. I mean, I'm doing the Liberty Bowl for the last 24 years running as executive director of the Liberty Bowl. But also during that period of time Ebersol from NBC had asked me to put together -- we had the XFL

team in Memphis, so we tried the Canadian Football League team in Memphis when the Canadian league was expanding. So the bottom line is the sports law. I had a career in football, basketball, and baseball. So I'm just old. So that's the nutshell of my sports background.

Hobson: How old are you now, if you don't mind me asking?

Ehrhart: Oh, I'm 68. And actually that gets back to whatever I was going to say about Trump, with that background I've been in Major League owners' meetings and dealt with every level of -- David Stern was one of my mentors when we were pretty both young lawyers there coming up. He was outside counsel of the NBA, and I was counsel when we were starting the USFL. We went to Washington and testified about the importation of distant signals which nobody knew what the hell that meant back 33 years ago, but certainly cable television became a big deal later.

So I've been exposed to basically the cross section of sports and the cross section of our delivery level from the NFL to Major League baseball to the NBA. Donald is probably the most driven and competitive in attempting to be the best at whatever he tries to do. He probably has as much energy as anybody, you know. Again, we can talk about the directions of that sometimes. But he was obviously one of the most active, if

not the most active owner in one of our members. He did not come into the league until the second year. That's a misnomer.

A lot of people thought that he signed Herschel. No. That was done by Walter Duncan and myself when I went down on behalf of the league. It was Walter's money when we put that together. Donald thereafter though, he did sign the Doug Flutie deal. It was engineered by Donald and then by Dom [phonetic].

Hobson: I'll interrupt real quick. I just want to make sure I understand. So in '82 to '84 you worked for the league, in the administration.

Ehrhart: That's correct.

Hobson: And then in '84 you went to go work in the front office. You went to become president and part owner of the Memphis Showboats?

Ehrhart: That's correct.

Hobson: As someone in the league's administration, why are you involved in brokering the Herschel Walker deal?

Ehrhart: We were just getting started. How old are you, by chance?

Hobson: I'm 32.

Ehrhart: I asked that to know if you can remember some of those days. But after the season of what would have been the fall of the '82 season, Herschel was the king of the world then - Heisman Trophy winner and just lifted a car up. He upstaged

everybody. So actually Herschel called me in the league's office. I think it was in January 2nd or 3rd. It was immediately after the Sugar Bowl. I think that's when they played in that year. There's a lot of background being there that I later learned, but I said to Herschel, we're a new league. Of course a lot of people by that time were talking about the New York franchise and the comparisons that 20 years earlier Joe Namath had signed with the New York Titans which became the Jets in the AFL back in the '60s.

So I had told Herschel, I said, "Well, Herschel, you're still eligible. You still got a year to go." He later then got his family and his lawyer called and said, no, he's just absolutely determined he wants to come out. He had an injury to his hand and he'd already won the Heisman and his family. I think maybe by that time he was already 21 or 22 and Cindy and he were living together, and so he wanted to get on with his life. So they had pushed the deal, they, I mean Herschel and his family and his lawyer saying that the Spencer Haywood case from the NBA gave the right to anybody to earn their living. And the NFL had their restrictive rule saying that they would not sign a player until they used up his eligibility.

But we were the new guys on the block and so they said they were coming out and wanted to play. I went down with that one name and then I got Walter Duncan the key owner, he's in New



Yorker. If he was going to come into our league, we wanted him to be in New York City and then obviously meeting the New York market for that. So they never saw there's a long -- you don't probably want to hear. There's a long story about it. I was down in Atlanta. I'm visiting with him the. And then over in Athens, Georgia where he was living, of course, where the University of Georgia is in. I met with him, and he changed his mind for a short period of time. But later, because the Georgia folks were pressuring him to stay one more year -- he's a great solid guy. I mean he's had his problems. He had some mental issues that you probably knew. But he's a very smart, good, solid guy. So we backed off.

And then later, about a week or two later, he called me back and said of one of his assistant coaches, he just doesn't want to come back and play another year in college. He wants to make a living. By that time, we've kind of worked out the contract. It would have been one of the highest paid contracts in pro football at that time, and it included -- actually Walter had given him a 25 percent interest in an oil well because Walter was an Oklahoma oilman. So Herschel wanted a deal. That was a long story.

Since I had been a player's lawyer before, I kind of knew what was going on in the world. At that time there were a couple who were coming out of the player's strike, and I think

four or five of the player representatives in the NFL at the time were my clients. When I left my law practice to go to New York to start the league, I turned them over to my firm. I didn't represent them anymore, but my firm -- since I knew those guys.

And so there was a lot of interactions during that period of the fall of '82, about the league and players who want to get an opportunity. There was a strike that lasted two months and shortened the season of '82, so that's why I was involved with Herschel. Part of my duties was trying to bring talent into the league. And we did a pretty good job that first year. We had some pretty darn good players the first year, and then certainly into the second and third year we had some outstanding players.

Hobson: One thing I want to clear up is, I've seen it reported elsewhere that Donald initially bought like an interest in the Generals and then backed out. And that's when --

Ehrhart: No. The actual facts were that he had an interest, you see, when the league was being pulled together. I mean it was a process that -- and a fellow named Dave Dickson - he had passed away since - Dave had gone around the country visiting with, you know. He would basically look up people who had interest in sports, guys like for example Randy Vataha who was the player that played in Stanford. He was up in Boston.

He had some contacts with his business partner, and that's how that got started for the Boston ownership.

And so Donald, I guess he had decided not at that time. But I guess his reputation was that he was an energetic young guy that was interested in sports, and so were his competitors. So they had met with Donald in the early days of the league which would have been in maybe late '81 and into '82, probably early in '82. But when the league was put together and finalized in the summer of '82, Donald had declined. He did not ever buy anything, but he came to some meetings and expressed some interest. He had later told me when he did a year later decided to come into the league, he said I was just not ready to jump in; I wanted to see how the league did the first year and so on. But he was an observer, I guess, but he never did.

Some people said he had bought an interest or he was interested. I mean I think he came to some meetings and expressed some interest, but he never signed up for anything and he never put any money in at that time. It wasn't until after our first year that the league was over, so that would have been -- we finished there in the summer of '83, and we got some pretty darn good success. The Generals were certainly, you know, they had achieved the recognition in the New York market.

And so that's when Donald came in and did a purchase of the Generals' franchise from Walter Duncan. So he had some meetings

with Walter, and that was negotiated there. Since I was the executive director of the league, I had to be involved in approving it - from the transfer of one ownership to another. That's when I first really got to know Donald, going through the paperwork and him purchasing the team there in the off-season after our first year.

Hobson: What are your first memories of Donald during that time period?

Ehrhart: He was absolutely -- and that's why I keep using this, I felt that he was hugely energetic and focused on any project he was working on, because my memories of those times was he would be calling basically every single day. We had a lot of diverse pretty strong owners at that time. We had Alfred Taubman, who was king of the shopping centers who owned Michigan, and of course Walter there owning New Jersey. We got Myles Tanenbaum and his real estate group in Philadelphia. We had a lot of pretty good, very solid folks at the time, but Donald probably topped everybody because he had such a focus - and I guess that shows through even today - that he wanted to know everything about it. He was engaged I guess maybe is the right word, more so than probably a very few owners. I mean they have different styles. I'm comparing him to some of the guys in Major League Baseball, like a Jerry Reinsdorf who have different styles and personalities. Jerry Reinsdorf and Eddie

Einhorn, they knew everything about the Chicago White Sox in the day-to-day.

Donald was the same way in the way he approached it. And I'd say I don't know whether he slept much because he was always involved. He wanted to know every player and every deal. So that was my first impression there. He very much wanted to be absolutely involved. I guess I would say this in a complimentary way, he had the personality and the charisma - I guess personality is the right word - to take over every room that he would ever come into. He has had that kind of powerful persona. Even then when he was 37 years old or something and he didn't know that much about football, but he certainly got into it in a big way and he understood the New York market, the mass market. I guess that applies today that he understood New York.

Because I had only moved there and lived there for a little over a year at that time that you had to be on the back page of the papers there. You had to be competitive with the Mets, and the Yankees, and the Knicks, and that kind of thing. So he came into the league with a savoir faire or whatever, the right swagger or an ability to energize; whereas, Walter Duncan was a quiet understated older gentleman from Oklahoma that I think at that time probably was 65 years old. Donald comes in. He's a 37-year-old swashbuckler, you know, he had to be a force in the New York market.

Hobson: Did he mention that -- because he had made overtures about trying to buy a sports team before. What I'm curious about is I'm wondering if he ever actually tried to buy an NFL team. Because it's long been a kind of rumor that he would have bought an NFL team, but the league wouldn't let him buy in. There are possible reasons there being that the NFL has had a pretty dim view of people who have a gambling interest, and by that time he would have been starting to venture into Atlantic City. He also had a reputation of being a kind of litigious guy which the NFL and its owners have never been very fond of.

Ehrhart: My knowledge was that he was interested, but I don't think it ever -- to my knowledge, again it may have been something that I didn't know about, that I don't recall anything other than just talk and some 30,000-foot discussion. I don't know that there was ever like a deep negotiation, but I could be wrong on that. But I don't know.

And again, Donald was not that well-known to the NFL. Again, I think he was more than 46, although he was 37 then in that year. And he was new to sports. He just had opened his first project there in New York. I believe it was the Grand Hyatt. And then Trump Tower was just getting opened. I think he really didn't -- because when he was trying to get his first gaming license, the New Jersey Gaming Commission interviewed me

because I was one of the guys - I don't know - I was listed as a reference. So they just dug it out, but I remember.

So I don't think prior to him buying the Generals in '83 there was more than maybe just passing interest or talk about it. There's no question, you're right, that he was motivated to want to be involved in sports ownership. And I know that he had had a relationship, a good one, with Steinbrenner and he would go to the Yankees' opening games and things like that.

Hobson: How did you know that? Did he just talk about that?

Ehrhart: I think I went to a game with him at the Yankee Stadium at one of the games. He and George were visiting, so yeah. And I think, in my observation, again, Trump is such a multifaceted guy to so many people. I'm not trying to say I know it all, but I remember going to a Yankees' game with him and he was visiting with Steinbrenner. But that was my take on him. It was that he was very motivated about sports ownership. But I don't know that he had any serious negotiations, and I don't know whether he was in a position to be -- of course NFL teams were not that expensive in those days.

Hobson: When he decided in '83 that he wanted to buy back in, did he just like called you up one day in the summer?

Ehrhart: No. I don't think it went to me initially. I think he got together with Walter Duncan, and then he and Walter

-- Walter was a grand gentleman. He was just trying to fly back and forth from Oklahoma to New York and he just said after the first year -- and of course it was a big strain, the whole -- I remember being with Walter, signing Herschel. We were sitting through the night, during and we worked it out, all the ups and downs. And Walter just said, you know, I'm not sure I'm cut out to be an owner in New York City. If Walter could own the team in Oklahoma City, he would have been wonderful or something, but it was just not a good match.

So I think Walter had indicated that he was -- and I think Walter had met Donald maybe early in those -- when I was mentioning earlier about when they had some initial meetings, when Donald was initially interested but never followed up. Whereas Walter did follow up and became an owner of the initial group of 12. They had a knowledge of each other, so I think Donald and Walter just got together and worked out their deal. Of course, they had their lawyers and all that kind of stuff. That's when it got to our desks in the league's office.

Hobson: There had been some disputes over how much Donald actually paid for the Generals. Do you know how much it actually was?

Ehrhart: Well, yeah, I do. Tell me what you've got. I'm not sure whether I'm supposed --



Hobson: I've seen numbers from \$5 million, to \$9 million, to \$1 million. I've seen everything between \$1 million and \$9 million.

Ehrhart: Well, halfway in between there is just about right. The reason I'm deflecting it a little bit, I'm not trying to be coy, is that there were some staged payments over time that never came to pass after the trial. At that time we were selling an expansion franchise. After the first year we sold six expansion franchises at \$6.25 million, and it was a \$3 million down stroke with three years of a million each. So I know it was more than -- you see Donald obviously -- Walter had a valuable franchise in New York City. For example, DeBartolo paid the \$6.25 million for the Pittsburgh franchise and the guys in Jacksonville, you know, expanded by 16 there in the second year. So it was certainly north of the \$6.25 million. And I know Donald, because some of the payments were not there for filing, but that was a private transaction between Donald and Walter.

Hobson: This is something that I think has been a counterpoint to this also. Would you say when Donald - the best that you understand him - would you say when Donald bought in '83 that it was always his intention, I'm going to buy this team so that I can get an NFL team at a USFL price? We'll eventually

move the league to the fall. They're going to have to merge with us and I'll own the only NFL team in New York City.

Ehrhart: No, I do not believe that that was his -- I think he expressed very early on that he felt the best opportunity for success was to be in the traditional time of the year in the fall. But I don't think until much later did there become talk of trying to get an NFL team, because basically I was going through a lot of the same situation myself because Memphis was a city that had aspirations for major football. Memphis had been through the World Football League back in the '70s, and they had signings to get more fields. So Memphis had a history of that.

But I think there's no question that had we been able to succeed and build the USFL into a competitive league, that was obviously his goal. He wanted to play. He felt that it had to be at the highest level, that it had to be competitive and be perceived, especially in the New York market, as an equal with the NFL. But that did not necessarily mean to get in because there was a period of time there when we were succeeding at an unbelievable rate. For three straight years we signed the Heisman Trophy winner. We had television ratings that were better than Major League Baseball which is really who we were competing against.

So when he first started -- and he was learning the business at that time, I mean, he certainly was just interested

in sports. He is obviously a very smart guy and very creative. So I think only late when we got through into the trial, were any of us was thinking that there would be a potential merger or something like that. But that was in the context of the time that 20 years earlier there had been a merger between the AFL and the NFL. But I don't think that there was any indication of trying to -- I mean people in retrospect went back and we all turned and looked at ourselves, but I was certainly going through some of those same things. But I think when he got it in the league, he felt that it could be elevated even more than it was and that we could be competitive with the AFL, and I think our goal - put us all in a lie detector - well, we had an opportunity to be just as good.

Cable television was just getting started. We were the only pro league on ESPN at the time. Nobody really knew the huge value that ESPN was going to be, getting on the fast forward a little bit. But our biggest mistake would be when people blame it on Trump that we'd go down. It's not really that. It's that we just didn't keep playing. Because once we had moved to the fall, we had ESPN contracts and the NFL couldn't get into cable television because that would have been an antitrust. They've just been drilled with the antitrust verdict that would have prevented them from going in there and trying to - they've already have been found to have violated

that and they had to come in and try to squeeze us out of the ESPN position. So had we continued to play, we could have been on an equal par with the NFL.

So I think that was the goal of certainly Donald coming in. He didn't want to be small time, and I think that shows through in everything he's done in his whole life. He used to tell me, and here's a little -- now you stirred my memory. When things are said, I remember walking through this. One day I remember walking from Trump Tower to the Grand Hyatt with him, you know, in front of his building. He reached out and grabbed a piece of trash. He made sure it was absolutely the cleanest and the best. And that's when he said he was so focused on being the absolute first class. One little tidbit he said there, he argued, you either got to be the very best in whatever you do or you're going to be down with the mass producers. He was very proud of the Trump Tower.

So you either got to be the absolute best to make money and be successful or you're going to be down at McDonald's serving the mass 15 cents burgers. And so I've always remembered that as he's gone through his life, you know, everything. Whether it's Mar-a-Lago, whether it's his golf course, it's got to be the best golf course, or his club, or his hotel. That's one thing that I think has been a byword of his career - the Plaza

Hotel, those kinds of things. And he's always shot for the moon, so to speak.

So I think it was, to the rest of the owners in the league, some of the owners originally think, well, we'll just be this nice little spring league. It was an eye-opener for me going to New York, as I know you can't really put a minor league team in New York City and survive. And so I understood what Donald was talking about that you've got to be perceived as the top of the line. People aren't going to come to a double-A baseball game in the middle of Manhattan, and so he understood that part. That's what started some of the conflict within the league, because his mission was to make the league absolutely the best it can be. I think he's trying to do that in all his endeavors, and sometimes not every idea has worked.

I know for sure that he was not trying to think we could get into the NFL because we were such competitors with the NFL there. Donald loved trying to sign -- you look at the stories of him signing Taylor away from the -- you know, and Gary Barbaro. So he absolutely wanted to compete at the highest level, and compete against the NFL.

Hobson: When he bought in, was there any big press conference announcing his purchase of the Generals?

Ehrhart: Oh, yeah. Yeah, there was -- as I recall, I could be wrong, but I'm almost positive it was at Trump Tower.

And then he had a number of very high level press events. We were pretty hot then, remember. At the end of that first year, we had great success with the playoff game in Denver with the Michigan Panthers with Anthony Carter and the Philadelphia Stars. When he bought in, he was saying, you know, we're going even elevate the Generals. Because the Generals, even though they had Herschel Walker, they were 6 and 12, I believe, at first. I can double check it, but I'm almost positive they had a losing season.

He let Chuck Fairbanks go, who was Walter Duncan's guy from Oklahoma. Chuck had been a successful NFL head coach. He's like the head coach of the New England Patriots. But Donald wanted to put his own stamp on there, and so he brought in Walt Michaels who had been the hero of many of the Jets' fans in his own day. We're going to move this. Then he signed in short order, he signed, I believe it was Brian Sipe who has been the MVP. Again, I better check some of this stuff.

Hobson: No. That was correct. How was Walt Michaels a hero? I know he was the coach of the Jets, but why was he so well-regarded among Jets fans?

Ehrhart: Well, he had built a lot of loyalty. He was sort of, you know, because I think he'd had some success. I can't remember what happened why he left the Jets, if he got fired or whether he quit or something. But there was still a lot of --

because I was in New York and I felt, man, there's a lot of people who really like Walt Michaels. And I think that was just some goodwill that Walt had built up over the years of being the head coach of the Jets.

So Donald was putting his stamp on it for the New York audience. Chuck was Walter's guy, but he got something going every week from signing Brian Sipe, and then later signing Flutie. And they're having a cheerleader. I mean when he had the dance team tryouts there at the Trump Tower that was a huge event. I remember people packed up and down outside Trump Tower. It fits on my column. The street's right at 5th Avenue.

Hobson: Where was the USFL league's office?

Ehrhart: We were down at 52 Vanderbilt which was right across from Grand Central, if you're familiar with it. And so it was about 10 or 12 blocks over.

Hobson: Just in a regular office?

Ehrhart: Well, I'd say it was in an office building. Do you ever come out of Grand Central very often?

Hobson: No, I do not.

Ehrhart: It was in a building that the front of it was the Yale Club, and we were on the third floor. It was a high-rise, but we had just rented the third floor of this building. There's a large suite of offices. We've had about 25 to 30 staffers in there, I think.

Hobson: So you're right by the Grand Hyatt though?

Ehrhart: Pardon me.

Hobson: You're right by the Hyatt then, weren't you?

Ehrhart: Absolutely. Yeah. When I first came back, just moved back to New York, while I was trying to find a house, I stayed at the Grand Hyatt, yeah. And that's where we actually had I think our first draft at the Grand Hyatt before Donald came into the league. I don't know with Donald, how did they do that? And maybe that did have something to do with it. I just remembered we had a working arrangement with the Grand Hyatt. Donald might have told his people, you know, working the deal.

Hobson: So Trump buys, and you could see this in the clips when you go back on the coverage. Trump buys in '83, and then you're right, he's in the headlines every week for -- I got to think he must have been scaring the hell out some NFL owners with the fact that he throws money at Shula. He throws money at Taylor. He signs Sipe. He signs Barbaro. I mean, how do you think the other folks in the USFL received or reacted to that flurry of news coverage that Trump was generating right after he joined them?

Ehrhart: At that first period of time with all those things, it was terrific because we all knew that New York had to be successful for the league to be successful. What was happening there -- well, I don't mind saying it at this time.



Even though we had great TV ratings and we had great success in a lot of ways - artistically, player-wise, coaching-wise - there was non-stability with the number of the ownership groups. That carries forward to then your open issue of what Mike Tollin I think missed in the *30 for 30* piece on ESPN is that even after the first year and in our ABC contract we had to have teams in major markets. Absolutely it was required we have teams in New York, L.A., and Chicago.

So after the very first year, New York wanted to sell. Not that he was hurting for money because Walter had enough money, but it just wasn't working with him and his age and travel. He said I'm not a New York kind of guy. And the Chicago franchise which had been owned that first year by Dr. Ted Diethrich, and I can get you his details if you want, and George Allen who is his kind of partner in the endeavor as the coach. Running the team was George Allen. Of course his son, Bruce, was doing the personnel [sounds like], first to George Allen, Bruce Allen. They were in Chicago.

They had lost a lot more money than he planned on. So he said I'm not going to come back. And he was a heart surgeon. He ran the Arizona Heart Institute, one of the famed heart surgeons in the world. His office was in Arizona, in Phoenix, but he had been pushed into Chicago because the league needed somebody in Chicago. Of course George Allen wanted to go and

stick it up the tail of the Bears because he had been -- I think he had been fired by the Bears before he went to the Redskins. I'm not sure fired is the right word, but he had been with the Bears. So don't use the word fired, I threw that and I don't know that for sure. I can't remember from 35 years ago.

So Diethrich said I'm not coming back to Chicago. I'm not going to lose several million dollars more in Chicago. So we didn't have an owner in Chicago. The guys in L.A. were trying to sell their team. That was Bill Daniels and Alan Harmon. They had lost several million dollars in L.A. The guys in Washington, it was a limited partnership group. Berl Bernhard was the managing partner, but there was a group of about 30 guys. They got players hurt, they didn't draw very well. They've finished last in the league and they were hurting financially. So we had, to be very blunt, instability especially in the big cities.

Now we had six new expansion franchises coming into the league for that second year which was in order. It was Oklahoma City. They were in Tulsa, they played in Tulsa, they ended up playing. They tried to get in San Diego, but the NFL stopped them. And so they played in -- it was the Oklahoma Outlaws, the Houston Gamblers, the Memphis Showboats, the Jacksonville Bulls, and the Pittsburgh Maulers. So we bought in six new cities, but

underneath it all we had some serious problems with financial instability especially in the big markets.

What we found was that in L.A. it was just too difficult to compete in the springtime, with the beaches. And L.A. was already in trouble with all the Rams and Raiders moving in and out. They lost several million dollars.

So the losses in the league collectively were more than some of the guys could stomach, and so we were scrambling. So for Donald to come in and reinvigorate New York and get the publicity that you just talked about and the interest and that kind of thing, it was initially welcomed by everybody in the league because we were getting attention and we were getting people interested in the league and that was helping the other cities.

We were able to, although it didn't work, we got a new guy in Chicago, but he bailed out. It was another doctor who really just didn't have the money. The guy in L.A. came in with a big bravado signing Steve Young and all that stuff, and then he imploded. Then the Washington guys started low.

And I forgot Boston. Boston, they all made us feel that they could get to playoffs. There was a little old Boston college field in Nickerson Field, and so they moved out of Boston after the first year. So in our big cities we were, you

know, Boston was leaving. We had no owner in Chicago. The guys in L.A. were trying to sell and the guy in New York was selling.

So Donald actually was the super positive event that happened during that period of time. So yes, the answer, a long question, I hope it's what you want to tell. So he was welcomed with open arms and was seen as, quite frankly, somebody who would really help not only stabilize New York but a big catalyst for the progression of the league into that second year of operation.

Hobson: So the '84 season kicks off. Obviously it was still in the spring at that point. Did you ever go to any Generals' games?

Ehrhart: Yes.

Hobson: Did Donald have like an owner's box?

Ehrhart: Yes. He sat in the owner's box and he was very tuned in. Like I said, I compared him initially. He was very committed and involved. It wasn't just some, hey, go to the cocktail party. He doesn't drink and he doesn't do the socialized stuff. He was very committed to making the Generals -- [cross-talking]

Hobson: Describe to me how Donald was during the Generals' game. What was he doing?

Ehrhart: Oh, he would be very into it. I mean I probably sat with him a couple of games during that second season. He'd

high-five after a touchdown, and he'd be paying sincere attention to what was going on. He knew the players, and he knew what was going on. So he was very involved, very passionate about how the Generals are doing.

Hobson: Always in a suit and tie?

Ehrhart: That's my recollection.

Hobson: So he wasn't like wearing jerseys or anything at any of those?

Ehrhart: No. My impression was he was always very dressed for class.

Hobson: There are some stories like him calling down at the sidelines. Did you ever see that happen?

Ehrhart: No. I don't recall. And I don't know that we were even set up to do that.

Hobson: Did he ever mention his own playing career? He played football when he was a teenager.

Ehrhart: No, he didn't talk much about that. But he was certainly proud and very involved in his golf game. But he never tried to act like he knew or he played this. I don't recall him ever trying to second guess me. He certainly made the decision to change the coach. He was involved but he would always ask a lot of questions. What can Barbaro do? Can Barbaro play? We talked quite a lot there only because we're the same age and that kind of thing. He's one year older than I

am, I guess, but I thought he was -- and he did get the Generals turned around. I have to look up what their record was the second year, but they were much improved. You might think they got to the playoffs; whereas, in the first year they've missed the playoffs.

Hobson: Obviously his main office is in Trump Tower. The Generals were playing in the Meadowlands, right?

Ehrhart: Correct.

Hobson: They're practicing in the Meadowlands?

Ehrhart: Yes. They had a practice field while they were there in New Jersey.

Hobson: What was his involvement with the team then? Was it just he came out to watch the games on Sundays? I assume he was in Manhattan for most of the week.

Ehrhart: Yeah, I think so. Again, this is one year that I wasn't -- at that time I was trying to be very neutral with all the teams. We were running around trying to prop up some of these other franchises, and bringing on the new, and administering what the hell is going on with all these other stuff. So I knew he'd occasionally go out there, but I don't remember him or the guys saying, well, Donald is always out watching practice. I'm sure he went out there some, but it wasn't like a daily ritual or anything like that.

Hobson: And he seemed to discuss, he seemed like he knew football conversationally.

Ehrhart: Yeah. He knew it enough to be a good owner. I'm not trying to compare him to any other. We've got different levels in the NFL. I look back to the very successful, the Al Davis. He was not an Al Davis who we knew was running the show and evaluating film. It wasn't like he was watching film and breaking it down, but he knew he would get some pretty expert advice. He would work the phones. I mean he'd ask other owners or other people, what do you think of the Taylor thing? He was more probably the big picture stuff that he would be involved with. You know Lawrence Taylor is a great player, but it wasn't that John Corker could go to his left better than his right or anything like that. It's probably even on a macro basis like I saw his focus.

Hobson: So the Generals have a win record in '84 -- and they lose in the first round of playoffs.

Ehrhart: You're ahead of me. You've already checked that out. If they didn't, that's it.

Hobson: Yeah. The two seasons that he owned the Generals, they had winning records on both years, and they lost a playoff game in both years.

Ehrhart: Thank you. You need to refresh my memory in all this stuff.

Hobson: When did the tension between Donald and John Bassett began?

Ehrhart: John and I were like great friends. He and I were on this expansion. I guess he and I were the two guys on the expansion. So John and I travelled the country and put together those purchases of the expansion team. I guess I was the representative from the league and he was the representative from ownership. I am going to full disclosure. I was very close with John. John initially would set it up. He welcomed Trump into the league and John would tell me, he says I want to get a hell of a rivalry started by taking on the big bad guys from New York and create a rivalry because John had a very successful -- and in a lot of ways John and Donald were very similar. John knew how to market. He had the Burt Reynolds' and the Loni Anderson's. In Tampa he was like Donald Trump. To Tampa he was the guy that was everywhere, and was marketing, and giving away mortgage earnings. You bring your mortgage to the game. And if you want, they burn your mortgage or pay off your mortgage.

I mean he was the master marketer there and he started out thinking, man, this is great, to have The Donald into the league; he'll stir up New York like I've stirred up Tampa. So in that first period of time they were, I think, very respectful of each other. But John would kind of laugh when I'd say I've



got to call him out because we need to create rivals in this league because we didn't have any real natural rivalries that you have like the Redskins and Cowboys that developed over the years in the NFL. So John was creating a rivalry there to start with.

Then I think when the tension got going more with the spring-fall thing, I can't remember when John started his cancer treatments but I don't know whether that's coming there but John started -- I guess, it was the third year or more when John was really quite ill and had so many of the radiation treatments. But I think it was probably more into the third year when the law stuff got going. That's where, I think, John and Donald got at each other because of the spending stuff too. Now Donald didn't start the spending stuff because in the first year - and that's why I gave you that background - when the guys started spending too much money beyond their means and that's when they lost too much. I know John used to always tell me too many guys were losing too much money.

Today it seems like half the Major League Baseball teams lose more money than the guys were losing. But in those days, for example, I think the Michigan team lost like \$5 million the first year of operation. That was one of the biggest losses because they were in a big city and they signed Anthony Carter and Bobby Hebert. They bring a lot of these really great

players. So there was more tension, I think. Like Denver and Tampa and Oakland, their payrolls were probably \$2 million. They had big guys who were \$3 million and \$4 million total.

Hobson: Just a few quick questions. One, Burt Reynolds was in the documentary. What was Burt Reynolds connection to the USFL?

Ehrhart: He was a part owner of the Tampa Bay team. I don't know if you saw the *30 for 30* piece.

Hobson: I did, yeah.

Ehrhart: Tollin got an interview with him. Bassett had put together an ownership group. He was the managing partner. Burt owned a small percentage. I don't know that he was still married to Loni Anderson at the time or what but she was involved in it. And then Jerry, I'd have to look it up, the country singer that ran around with Burt had a little interest in it too. In fact, the name I gave you last week, Jim McVay -- did you get that in my email?

Hobson: I did. Yeah, I gave him a call.

Ehrhart: Jim was there the entire time with the Bandits, and then he later went to work after the USFL, he left -- he went to work for the Buccaneers. And then he's still in Tampa running the Outback Bowl. So he can really give you all the details about Bassett down there because he was close there. He was the head of marketing there.

But anyway, Jerry - the guy that sang the songs and then he had hired Spurrier. He knew bringing back Spurrier, who won a Heisman Trophy in Florida, he was the master marketer down there, but he was also being a little more careful of the spending.

Hobson: In a story I've seen about the USFL, it's always been John Bassett versus Donald Trump. Where did these confrontations play out? Was there like an owner's meeting where they argued? Were they just exchanging angry letters from Tampa to Manhattan?

Ehrhart: Again, it started out more as almost marketing and a ploy to create a big rivalry. To create the big bad New York Yankees, everybody wanted to beat the Yankees kind of syndrome. I think they were always respectful of each other at the meetings. There was never yelling or anything like that. In our meetings, we had some big strong-minded guys - the Taubmans, and the Trumps, and DeBartolos and all that. I've been through the Major League owners. They were even much more competitive than the USFL. We actually had some pretty back there. But I guess it was more just the law -- the legal stuff got going later on.

I left New York and then Chet left and they brought in a new commissioner there, and then Donald was such a powerful personality there in New York City. I think probably into the

third year, when Donald brought in Harvey Myerson, that was where there was some more of the potential conflicts. But I think it was just everybody was struggling. Of course this didn't come out publicly with the media that these other teams were struggling so much because we were trying to put on a brave front. But as I've described, on the second year of the league the rest of us -- when I say us, I mean I'm thinking of Memphis. For two years, the second and third year, the rest of the owners were funding Chicago. Because we have to have Chicago, so we were all being assessed to pay for Chicago. And then in the third year we were also funding Los Angeles.

Hobson: The reason I asked about the confrontations with Bassett is because -- have you seen this letter that Jeff Pearlman put on?

Ehrhart: Yes.

Hobson: This letter is dated August of '84. So this would have been after the first season. I'm just curious when --

Ehrhart: No, no. That's after the second season.

Hobson: I'm sorry, after Trump's first season.

Ehrhart: Right. Exactly.

Hobson: It seems like in this letter there was hostility seven months after or less than a year after Trump's entry in the league.

Ehrhart: That's true. That's why I think it started more towards the end. Beginning when he first came in, there was this let's have a rivalry. But ask McVay about that letter because Jim -- feel free to call Jim because he was a bit down there in Tampa. He will give you some insights about that. Because I think right at the end of that summer of '84 that's when I was moved to Memphis. There was a lot of confrontation of the, are we going to be spring or fall. My recollection was that was more the issue. One reason, and again I've put my career on the line too because I thought at that time we had to -- and that's when I left New York to go to Memphis. It was because we had to be positioned in markets that could survive in arid markets, except New York where there was a competitor NFL team. We were suffering, except Tampa, because Bassett had the ability to make that work.

By that summer of '84 we had already been through - we'd hired this McKinsey & Company and all the big in-house people to do us a study on whether we should be in the fall or we should be in spring. So yeah, by that time we had a lot of consternation. Philadelphia moved to Baltimore to be in the -- because the Colts had split out off, they moved to Indianapolis. Detroit and the Michigan Panthers, they merged with the Oakland Invaders. It looked like a strategy. By the time of that letter, we were committed to moving to the fall. You saw the

owners positioning themselves to be in a non-NFL city, and so Tampa was hung out because they were in a city that had the Buccaneers. So John was being squeezed because, you know, could he compete with the Buccaneers in the fall? That's why the context is not always just Trump because of what was going on in the league.

You had Denver moving out of Denver and they merged with Jacksonville. You had, as I said, the Detroit merger with Oakland. You had Philadelphia moving to Baltimore. You had all of this stuff going on during that same period immediately after the second year getting ready for the third year. And of course then we applied the third year with 14 teams I think. We're getting positioned to be a fall league because by that time the mood of the league had been paved for us to survive and to get past these problems of the teams that couldn't make it in the big cities because whether it was because they were fighting against NFL-dominated cities or whether it was the springtime that nobody in L.A. or Chicago -- you know, they were in baseball or doing summer events and we needed to be in the fall.

So that's what the timing is as you're getting -- pressuring the back-and-forth between Bassett and Donald. But it was much more involved than that. It was the complexity of finding a successful model for the league to survive. That's what led a lot of people into the legal end because by that time

the NFL, like you said, they had really gotten upset and pissed off. They had that event at the Harvard Business School, out to kill the USFL. They were already tampering with some of the players. Of course, the Giants bought back Lawrence Taylor and even Cris Collinsworth. That wasn't publicized much, but I think Cris Collinsworth had signed a futures contract with Bassett. At that time he was a big risk -- you might want to check that out because I don't know that that's been --

So John, he engaged in a little bit of that same Trump theory of signing a futures contract with Cris Collinsworth who was a very respected Cincinnati Bengals player at the time. McVay will know more about that letter and the background of that. He was there with Bassett so he can tell you that.

Hobson: As a group, the USFL owners -- Trump, he was obviously the most active. I guess, the question I want to ask is as a group, how would you compare the USFL owners to NFL owners in terms of just their wealth and backgrounds? Do they have the means and resources that the NFL owners did?

Ehrhart: You mean the AFL from the '60s?

Hobson: No. The USFL.

Ehrhart: No. Compare the USFL to who?

Hobson: I'm just saying in 1984, if I had compared the owners of the 24 NFL teams that were then to the owners of

however many USFL teams there were, were the NFL owners really considerably wealthier people with more resources?

Ehrhart: Oh, absolutely. The NFL certainly had, you know -- and their cash flows from traditional money as well as franchises or trading I think was less than \$100 million and you had millions of dollars of television money and sold out stadiums in many of the cities. If I just go through our league at the end, we had nobody in L.A. In fact, the rest of us were - when I say the rest of us, they were the ones who were funding that - that was draining us. There was nothing in Chicago and Washington. Boston had moved from Boston to New Orleans the second year, and then it moved to Portland in the third year. So there was the Boston Breakers, and the New Orleans Breakers, and the Portland Breakers. They were financially unstable.

Oakland was strong because Taubman had merged with Taube. So you had Oakland strong. You had Philadelphia strong. You had Memphis strong. You had New York strong. And that was about it. So we were trying to keep up a brave front, but the truth was -- and that's what when people say what really killed the league, it was that we had a financially unstable situation and didn't have the kind of cash flows -- I absolutely believe it and I've been on the record saying it wasn't anything that killed us that was individual or anything like that. It was that we didn't keep playing because had we kept playing, it's so



like the restaurant, you got to build back the business. We had name brand recognition and so on, but then we didn't have enough people motivated to play in the fall of '86, actually even after the trial came down in the summer of '86.

Hobson: Why didn't you play in the fall of '85?

Ehrhart: No. We played in the spring of '85. No, we couldn't play -- like our championship game actually with the Generals, they won in the Giant's stadium in I think July of '85. They just finished an 18-game regular season. You couldn't just gear back up and start playing again in September. Our plan was we would finish the '85 season in July and then really get squared away, and then it would basically be the '86 season would be our switch to the fall.

In fact I remember we had bumper stickers down here to tell that the fall '86 is boats bowl [sounds like]. I think there were 18. We paid players a third of their salary to keep them with us under contract during that, what was going to be the long period between July of '85 going to camp. It would have been a full year's time rather than a six months' time. So really it wasn't that long, but we had a schedule worked out to play. We've met with ESPN, and ESPN was going to have -- we still had a smaller ABC contract, but that was up for grabs because ABC required us to have the stage in those niche

markets. And so we were still in negotiations, I think, with ABC about the material governance in the contract.

Hobson: What I'm more confused about is if you're saying the main mistake you made was not playing, when should you have kept playing? You said that they should have just played in the fall.

Ehrhart: After the trial came down -- I apologize, feel free to -- because I know I'm just, you know, there's a lot of ground here. After the trial came down, of course, you know the story of that. I still got the check here. We didn't get it for four years later. But the verdict was the \$1 travel damages, and we did recover the attorney's fees because they were in violation of the Sherman Act, so we got \$6 million which was our attorney's fees. If there was a villain in this whole thing, it was Harvey Myerson. He was the lawyer who was so full of himself. We had an owners' meeting shortly after the trial verdict in the summer of '86. Yeah, the summer of '86. And I can't remember the dates when the verdict came in.

And then Myerson was adamant saying that, we'd won the case, they found they violated it. This was just a wrong jury verdict of \$1, that the jury inspections were confusing. He was basically absolutely guaranteeing that we would win this on appeal. He overplayed his hand so much. He said we're going to win huge amounts of money because we had the verdict, we just

didn't know the right damages and the jury didn't understand it. I guess one juror had said, well, once they filled in the \$1 on the last verdict page because the jury interrogatories that they filled out were very confusing, and he said perhaps we're going to win this.

So he convinced the then group of owners to basically delay and wait until he would get the appeal won. So that appealed to the owners and they said, well, keep your powder dry. We all got sucked in, I guess, is the right word to say on that. We want us to continue to play Memphis. We had our office and our full staff and everything like that. But because of that instability in some of the other owners, that this was kind of a tempting big leap [sounds like] fact that Myerson was offering and saying, well, we will win the appeal and then you'll be able to recover a lot of money and then you'll be able to really position yourself. We made the mistake instead.

What killed the league in my opinion was that once we've made the decision to move to fall, right or wrong, I think it was probably the right decision because we had proven in the big cities we weren't making it in the spring; therefore, we had positioned ourselves to be in the non-NFL cities. So, that fall of '86 when we would have had teams of - if I count it right - I think we had eight teams. We would have had Oakland which have no NFL team. We had Arizona with no NFL -- this was before the

Cardinals moved and before the Raiders had gone back. Denver had relocated and was in partnership with Jacksonville. Jacksonville with the team. Tampa was still up in the air because John died almost the day that the trial started or somewhere in the middle. So that was a little bit up there. Philadelphia was going to be strong. And then Trump was of course strong in New York City.

I may be missing one count here, but we were going to be the eight-team league and we had some pretty good players. For example, the Houston team was gone by then and so Jim Kelly was going to be the quarterback for the Generals in New York, along with Herschel and everything. They would have had a very competitive -- they could have been on a plane with the New York Giants or Jets. We'd certainly some great talents there, which turned out to be an all-league quarterback with Jim Kelly playing with Herschel, et cetera.

So in my opinion and I think the opinion of a lot of people, but of course it didn't get a lot of publicity, was that it wasn't just Donald Trump that killed the league or anything like that. It was more the financial/economic pressures and then, if anything, being strung along by a lawyer. I guess the lawyer would have been better off to say, look, we're going to appeal, just saying, but you guys need to keep playing, to hang on to your brand. You've got more people know about you that

had never known about you before. You've got the contract to play with ESPN.

Hobson: But I don't understand, why would the lawyer recommend to keep not playing? Why did Myerson said don't?

Ehrhart: Because he was, again, so full of himself. He's an egoist. He said I'm going to win this thing. He said this way I can get an injunction that you've been damaged. I think he thought that he couldn't get the appeal -- I'm trying to remember some of the things he said. Well, if you're playing, you then show that you didn't need -- you were okay to survive on your own. We've got to show that the NFL has damaged you greatly. This son of a bitch went to jail for bilking some other clients, not on our case.

In fact four years later, when I went up to New York to collect the \$6 million in attorney's fees that the NFL finally had to pay because it got appealed all the way to the Supreme Court, Myerson's creditors for the people that he stole money from tried to get our \$6 million. I have to go in court to get the judge to say, wait a minute, this is money that USFL owners had put up to pay Myerson's firm and they won that verdict. So nobody else gets to grab the money. All these other creditors were trying to file liens against the money, and so we had to prove that the money was not being awarded to Myerson's firm.

It was being awarded to the clients who put up the money to fight the case. So he was bad.

I'm obviously, I'm loathing on the guy, but I don't mind the son of a bitch -- his ego has gotten in the way and his verbosity. He was full of himself like nobody else. In fact one of our lawyers down here said he screwed up the case so badly. He thought having it in New York City, and that turned out -- like you and I talked last week or the week before, that was a worse tactical decision because then he didn't have a friendly situation. Had this case been filed in Memphis or Birmingham or one of these cities, there are good guys here working hard and trying to create some new jobs and the NFL is trying to put you out of business. But in New York City, the NFL turned it around - like probably your research showed - and made it like Donald was richer than any of those poor little NFL guys and he was trying to take advantage of them. They made him the enemy, and so that's what got the jury going down the wrong direction. Donald was the only owner that testified too.

Hobson: Why is that?

Ehrhart: Because of fucking Myerson. Excuse me. I know this is on tape. Myerson was trying to appeal to Donald and Myerson was trying to be Mr. Big Shot in New York City. I don't know if you've done much research on Myerson, but he was a trip-and-a-half, swagger, flamboyant with pulling out the colored

painted handkerchiefs, the suspenders. He didn't call. We kept saying, well, you need to call some of the coaches that have worked hard to do this, and the players, somebody from some of these other markets to show that, hey, all we're trying to do is survive because the evidence was there. The NFL - like you said - once it's the second year they decided, man, these guys are stealing all our players, they're getting great ratings, and we need to get proactive and get back out there.

Hobson: What was the Reggie White anecdote? Tell me about Reggie White's contract that the NFL team tried to screw up.

Ehrhart: For example, he was under contract to us here with the Memphis Showboats. This was I guess during the period of litigation. The owner of the Philadelphia Eagles, Norman Braman, he flew down to Memphis to meet with us. And I said, well, we're not supposed to be talking. Pete Rozelle, your commissioner, says you're not supposed to have any contact with USFL because we're the plaintiff and you're the defendant. He looked at me and said, oh, screw that. But he wasn't a bad guy. So my people said you've got a player down here that we'd like to have up here with the Eagles. He was talking about how we were screwing him by keeping him here in Memphis and all of that. He went to Tennessee, and he was a wonderful guy. He died way too early in life. They offered him more money and all this kind of stuff to leave.

Finally, I remember I got a little bit upset with him and I said, Mr. Braman, you say that he might be able to make your team, the Eagles, and play a little bit; I say he's not only better than anybody you've got on your own damn team, he's probably better than anybody in the whole NFL and that guy ended that. So we thought everything was kind of cool, and then we later learned about a year later that the Eagles had bribed Reggie's agent. They gave him a job if he could deliver Reggie, and Reggie got so upset later on. He fired that guy. But that's a whole different story. But I mean the NFL was obviously very active in trying to, you know, because we had some great players.

Tollin did a good job in his *30 for 30* piece talking about all of the players that went off with great success. Of course you know how player personnel guys, oh, these guys are stealing all the good players. That became a pretty big issue for the NFL. And then they were worried about the smart guys could see where things were going with cable television. I don't think the public really did much about it, nor did anybody really kind of understand that totally except maybe Chet Simmons. But Chet left the league after the second year.

Hobson: If USFL played in the fall of '86, would they have had a television contract?



Ehrhart: Oh, yeah, we had a television contract with ESPN. You see, we still had a contract. It was a three-year deal the first year, and then I renewed it for another I think three years. ABC, we still had a contract. But as I had pointed out earlier, they were still debating about our requirement. But I think they would have waived it. We had actually laid out a full schedule with ESPN, and I think it would have been pretty darn good. You've got to follow TV and stuff. In those days the NFC was on CBS and the AFC was on NBC, and then the ABC had the Monday night game. They would do a regional telecast, then they'd do a late game. So we had a counter program. For example, say when NBC would have the late game on in New York, we would counter program and have on say the Generals playing on that channel head-to-head against say the Chargers playing against Oakland.

So even though maybe we were the upstart or the competitor, we could match it up and we felt we could get some pretty good television ratings there. That's why I say it was such a mistake because we've done all the work. We worked so hard in fact even after the trial in '86, I mean that was huge news. Every day they were interviewing something and we were all over the place, and so we had brand name recognition. That's why a lot of us were like if we had just gone ahead and played. This was July and we were ready to go to training camp. We had good

players. We had teams. We were down to eight teams. We've gone and consolidated them. I think we would have done fine.

There were still some concerns. Like say Tennessee. They had plenty of money down in Arizona, so they were sent down to Arizona. That was going to be a great team. There was no NFL there. We were sent - Memphis and Philadelphia and Oakland - all non-NFL cities. And we had television. So, if we had just kept playing, then probably, maybe. One of the things that Trump did talk about later on, the NFL maybe would have replicated what they did 20 years ago. There would have been a merger. And there were various mergers because, remember, some of our people had conversations with some of their people. I mean Al Davis, we would talk about it because he engineered the merger when he was on the other side with the AFL. Of course, he hated Rozelle. He and Rozelle had that ongoing litigation going on.

There were some NFL owners who said, you know, there were some talk about bringing in cities like Arizona or Memphis or Oakland to solve some of their problems. So there was so much, maybe not yet official reported deals, with a guy like Carl Peterson who went on to become Executive of the Year by the time he was president of the Baltimore team which started out in Philadelphia. But Carl had contacts and he would talk to people. I would be talking to some of my people. Everybody

thought, well, if this happens, maybe that happens and all that kind of stuff.

Hobson: Did you attend the trial though?

Ehrhart: No. In fact, the NFL took my deposition and it lasted like two or three days. It was very unlikely. But then Myerson, when he took over the case -- he didn't file the case originally, he came in afterwards. We had Bill McSherry's term. He'd probably be willing to talk to you too. He was the lawyer that first filed the case. And then Myerson kind of sashayed into it. He had Trump's backing. He had said he could do a better job at this, and he was Mr. Big Shot. So Myerson - but again I wish we could do it over again - I guess we listened to him at the time that Harry Usher, who has since passed away, was the commissioner of the league then. And Myerson said he didn't want anybody else attending the trial from outside of New York.

I think that was an ego thing, and then probably it was to some degree because he was doing his own gig. He has cover stories. He thought, well, maybe then the NFL could put one of us on the stand. But four years later, when the NFL finally gave me the check - because I had been the chairman of the last executive committee, that's why I had to go and follow it up four years later - one of the NFL guys said, man, we're sure glad you didn't testify because we were worried about some of the information that might come out there. You know, because

Myerson just got into this whole screwed up deal about the economist that he had testified and that it was extrapolating numbers from the AFL 20 years earlier.

That's what some of the jurists later said. It was just that the damage part was so confusing. And when he wanted hundreds of millions of dollars, we just ended up deciding that the only damage was \$1 and they had to work it out themselves. Mr. Trump had plenty of money and I'm sure Donald -- I mean I wasn't there to see any of the testimony, but I'm sure Donald was seen as Mr. Big New York. And that's what got in.

I didn't know if you found out anything more about that mock trial. It was actually McSherry. I think he's told me something about that mock trial.

Hobson: I've got to track down Bill McSherry. Is he who told you about the mock trial?

Ehrhart: Pardon me?

Hobson: Was it Bill who told you about the mock trial?

Ehrhart: He was one of the ones. He knew about it too. Because I talked to him since you and I talked, and I'll give you his phone number.

Hobson: Oh, you did. Oh, yeah, because he is no longer at the firm, he left that. But anyway, yeah, if you could definitely give me Bill's number.

Ehrhart: I know he was aware of that. We didn't hear about that until much later, but the trial was almost handled -- the way it worked out -- because had we won a \$6 million verdict, then the NFL couldn't have put their big PR machine and say that's the \$1 league and make jokes about it. It just depressed all the other owners so much. There was such negativism with all the jokes about the \$1 league to be in their markets.

That was another reason why that fed into Myerson telling people to not play because the NFL's PR machine at every city, it was USFL only gets a dollar. And then every NFL owner would make a comment about, yeah, they got what they deserved, and it was a minor league and it was only worth a dollar. So that depressed, I think, the folks from --

Hobson: So you talked to Bill McSherry recently?

Ehrhart: Yeah, I talked to him after you and I talked.

Hobson: What did he say about the --

Ehrhart: I didn't try to cross-examine him or anything because I hadn't talked to him for a long time. I was more concerned he had some hip replaced in the fall. But I think he's 69 or 70. He's about my same age. But he's a wonderful guy and a good guy. His law firm initially filed the thing, but then somehow Myerson got control of the thing. That was probably because of Trump's ability to control the New York

market. Because Chet was gone, I was gone, not that we could totally balance because he certainly had the charismatic power and being the owner of the New York franchise, which is so important that he carried that trial there in New York and that kind of thing. He has the ability, just like I say, he's like the sun. When he comes into a room he's able to be the leader, so to speak.

Hobson: What did Bill say about his recollection about the mock trial?

Ehrhart: I'm sorry. About the what?

Hobson: What did Bill tell you recently of his recollection about this mock trial?

Ehrhart: Oh, yeah. He just remembered about the mock trial. I didn't try to go in and say, we'll have to do or say or anything. I said I know I talked to you about the mock trial, and Bill, did you ever hear much about it, because I was trying to remember who it was. It was one of the NFL guys, one of the staff guys who talked to me about one of the NFL owners that I had to interact with later on. Because we tried to get the NFL expansion that year, that's why I gave you my background.

That was 20 years later, I guess. No, that was '86. Yeah, when that went along later, that was in '92. So we had various conversations with them. And I think it came off. I wouldn't

try to hone in on it but I think Bill probably -- somebody told Bill about it too. Bill remembers about the mock trial, I think he acknowledged this. He remembered he heard about it from the NFL lawyer or it might have been through the lawyers that put it on. Because he practiced in New York all those years, so he knew how Arthur Liman had been disqualified as the NFL lawyer. He's much more tuned-in about all the legal stuff there because he did go to part of the trial, I think. Although he wasn't the lawyer for it, but I think he showed up there too. So he knows more about the trial itself. He said he'd be glad to talk to you as well.

Hobson: Okay. Do you have his number handy?

Ehrhart: Yeah. I'll tell you what, let me email it to you. My assistant got it out of her desk. I don't know. I'll email it down to you, Bill McSherry. And you could tell him that I told you to call.

Hobson: Sure. I'm thinking about the USFL and about Trump. I'm trying to figure out what are the good scenes, moments, to describe as sort of pivotal moments in the league's history as it relates to Trump. So obviously I think the press conference announcing his purchase is a possibility, maybe one of the press conferences announcing when he signed Sipe or Flutie, and then the trial. It makes sense. He had to testify at the trial. Are there other really big moments you think of?

Were there like owners' meetings where he and Bassett really crossed swords? Were there any other moments that I'm not thinking of or I'm not aware of that you would say that's a really important moment that deserves mention?

Ehrhart: Well, I would say because of his huge personality, he was able to have the greatest leadership capabilities. But that's not necessarily -- I'm trying to think of a moment. I mean he could be tough on people, but he was such a spark. He probably kept the league -- had Donald not come in, I would say we probably wouldn't have made it to the third year. But with his bravado and his ability to have the great excitement in New York City, we may not have made it into the third year. So to that degree, he was as important in a positive note that way.

As some of his detractors would say that the move to the fall ended up not working out, but I'm not sure that it was his fault in a sense because we voted to go to the fall too. We found -- and I knew that these big cities that were in NFL locations would not make it, whether it was competing with baseball or just being in NFL. But I guess his passion, his excitement and his ability to connect -- because, again, like Herschel Walker is still close with him today. His ability to connect, the players enjoyed interacting with him, most all of them. I think he had a connectivity to him. I mean he can talk



sports, and I think that shows since he's going to do an overall in the league.

Later on he was interested in boxing, as you know. In fact, he flew out here to Memphis to watch the Lennox Lewis-Mike Tyson fight. That was here in Memphis. I can't remember, was that 12 or 15 years ago? So he's always been passionate about every sport, whether it's boxing or golf. It's the competitor in him and his attempt to be at the very highest levels. So he didn't want to mess around with a minor boxing deal. It was going to be the top of the line in boxing and the top of the line in golf courses. I think that always showed through. I think when he opened the Trump Marina out there, he brought the whole Generals team out there for that. So he had the ability to connect and talk to the players.

Hobson: He brought the players down -- I'm sorry. Where?

Ehrhart: To the opening party at one of the casinos there. I think it was the Trump Marina. Was it called Trump Marina or Trump Castle? I guess whatever one. The one in I think '85 or '86. There's no question, there was a good solid connectivity with the competitors. I think that shows through the day whether he's talking about the golfer that he talked to or Herschel Walker being on the [indiscernible]. He has the ability to connect with athletes because I think he understands the type. And that's the way he is. High performance I guess

is the way of it. So the high performance athletes match his high performance in everything he does, whether it's energy or enthusiasm. He's fearless in the sense that not everything absolutely works, but he's going to shoot for the moon every single time.

Hobson: Steve, I think that covers pretty much all the major things I want to ask about. Is there anything else we didn't talk about that you think I should know?

Ehrhart: Well, I guess just the theme. Because I know so many people are on the anti-Trump wagon. That kind of message that came out of Tollin's ESPN's piece, the player that they were always talking about because he played for Tampa, so he heard the one side of it. But I think that's the one thing I want to stress, that if there was somebody that helped our downfall, it would be Harvey Myerson more than anybody else. I know Donald did a lot of great things for us. On the other hand, no question he wanted to play in the fall. So people said, well, okay, that's what cost him - by trying to move it to the fall. But I think there's a much more complex answer to that question.

Hobson: Where would the USFL had been if Donald Trump had never gotten involved with it?

Ehrhart: I think we would have really struggled to survive even into that third year. I think it would have been a

struggle. Because remember, we were looking for owners in Boston, Washington, Chicago, L.A, and New York. We never did get solid ownership in the other big cities. And to succeed as a major television product, you've got to have those big cities.

So I think without him, it would have been a nip and tuck to even make it to the third year. Could we have survived as a minor league team? Because if the NFL had gotten their way, then all of the stars that we've got in those first few years we wouldn't be getting them anymore because they had woken up and they were going to go compete and not let us sneak in there and be the guerilla warriors anymore.

So it would have been a real struggle. He probably bought an extra year's time by his role in the league. So in retrospect, he certainly through his focus and his desire to make us into the very best football product, it all didn't work out. But I don't know that it did not fall at his feet.

Hobson: Who were his top executives? Who helped him run the football team?

Ehrhart: There's a guy named Jay Seltzer, who was more of the business operations guy. I don't know if he's still around. I haven't mentioned that name for 20 years. Kevin MacConnell, he was the PR. He was only 24 years old then but he was the PR director for the league. He's still around. I have to find out where he's at. He was the assistant AD at Rutgers and I think

he went down to the Tampa Bay when the Rutgers coach went down there.

Hobson: He was the PR director for the Generals or for the league?

Ehrhart: No, for the Generals so he worked for Trump. Kevin MacConnell, he'd been at Rutgers as their associate AD like a couple of years ago. I don't know if I have a number on him. But he was an employee that stayed in football. He interacted with Donald a lot. Jay Seltzer was an older guy. I don't know whether he's still even alive, but Donald really -- even though he had Jay being the co-business person, Donald was involved in the day-to-day role. If there was a major issue about, you know, are we're going to sign Barbaro, are we're going to sign Taylor, we're going to do this or that. I mean he was very involved, I would say. For a period of time, we talked basically every day. In that I'm sure he talked to other people too. I'm not saying it was just me I'm sure he talked to.

Hobson: Steve, I really appreciate your time. If you could do me a favor and email me or have your assistant email me the --

Ehrhart: I'll make sure she did. He can be a little cynical. I don't know if he will be quite as open as I am because I think he's very cynical about Myerson. I think for sure that he'll probably be pretty open with you.

Hobson: Thanks again. I'm sure I'll have a follow up question or two I'll need to certainly get back to you at some point.

Ehrhart: When are you shooting for your story?

Hobson: I don't know. There are a few different things to figure out. My guess is I'll be back in touch with other questions before but as soon as I have an idea of when the story might run I'll let you know.

Ehrhart: As I look back at your theme, you said you're trying to use the USFL in only one small part of this. I think it struck you even like to think of making sure that everything was absolutely top of the line whether it was the hotels. And then in most sports, he's been obviously focused on being at the very best level. I think that showed what his boxing -- stuff like around the boxing and the golf and even as he's approached this presidential thing, bringing the big Trump plane and to roll it up there and be absolutely top of the line, so to speak.

Hobson: Well, Steve, thanks again for your time. I'll look to your email and I'll be back in touch.

Ehrhart: Okay, thank you.

Hobson: Bye.

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