

**TRANSCRIPTION/TRANSCRIPTION
NEWS CONFERENCE/CONFÉRENCE DE PRESSE**

Transcription prepared by Media Q Inc. exclusively for the Canadian Football League

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PRINCIPALS/PRINCIPAUX: Randy Ambrosie, CFL Commissioner

SUBJECT/SUJET: Canadian Football League (CFL) Commissioner Randy Ambrosie delivers his first State of the League Media Conference during Grey Cup week.

Moderator : Bonjour tout le monde. Je suis Eric Poulin (ph), directeur des communications des affaires publiques à la Commission Canadienne de Football. Hi everybody. I'm Eric Poulin director of communications and public affairs at the League office. Welcome to the state of the League media conference. Bienvenue au bilan de saison du Commissaire de la LCF, Randy Ambrosie. I would now like to turn it over to the 14th Commissioner of the Canadian Football League, Mr. Randy Ambrosie.

Randy Ambrosie: Thank you, merci. I thought before we'd start anything I'd take a selfie of us while we still like each other.

(Laughter)

You can all just smile for me. Okay, that's good. This may be the first and last time right there, we've got it. What we did is we put together a quick video and the intention was to try to strip out the need for me to recite a whole bunch of facts for the next hour, just to put something fun and energetic in front of all of you. If we can we'll roll this tape. I hope you enjoy it and then we'll get on with the show.

Video: Hello Canada. Oh Canada, a great day to celebrate our great nation and even better a chance to watch some great Canadian football. How sweet must that feel.

He needs to have a big game. If he has a good game they have a great opportunity to win.

What a way to get this started. Did you see that?
You have got to be joking.

Today's CFL is built on a century of patriotic football history with recent investments of over \$2 billion in new stadium infrastructure over 2 million fans attend games in nine major cities. Over 2.4 million fans watch our broadcast each week. One in three Canadians watch the Grey Cup. We are a top three sport entertainment property in Canada.

Our game is trending in the right direction. Offensive scoring is up 19% and penalties

are down 14% since 2014. Almost 60% of our games are decided in the final three minutes. This seasons we reduced coaches challenges to one a game and fans were treated to the year of the catch. They were engaging with the CFL like never before.

With 25 million page views on CFL.ca, 20.7 million video views across CFL social media, 175,000 playing some form of CFL fantasy and 60,000 playing the new CFL frenzy mobile game and new and exciting in stadium spaces and experiences that make game day the best day. The CFL took bold steps in 2017 introducing March CFL Week, launching the diversity of strength campaign and inviting youth across the nine CFL cities to play CFL/NFL flag football, supporting our mission to promote player health and safety.

We've reached an agreement to extend the season into 2018 and banned full contact practices during the regular season. This CFL is strengthening its position in the marketplace and partnering with several of Canada's leading brands. All the while the CFL is a leader in building strong and safe communities. Pound for pound, player for player no league does more to make Canada an even better place. The CFL in 2017, strong and stable and looking towards an even brighter future.

Randy Ambrosie: Excellent. Good morning everyone. It is an honour to be here. I want to say that it's humbling for me and I've thought about this day literally from the first day I took the job, that first press conference with Jim and I. I thought about this day and the chance to talk to all of you and answer your questions.

I'm glad to have all of you here with us. I thought I'd just take a few minutes and share a few thoughts. I want to talk about three things. I wanted to talk about why I love the game and some of the things about being in this league that are really important. I want to spend a bit of time talking about player safety and health and then finally I want to talk a bit about the game itself and then happy to put it up to all of your questions.

Why I love the game, it's so easy and yet so complicated because there are so many pieces. If you were at the awards last night, just being around these amazing players, listening to their speeches, just you know these are superhuman guys. They have the combination of qualities that you have to love. They're competitors and they're commitment to excellence is second to none.

Yet there's a humility to these athletes that I think is rare in professional sports. Their selflessness and we've heard that over and over again but I think it's worth repeating. I heard a story early this year about the Klondike Days in Edmonton. I see Terry there and Terry knows this all too well but they invite all the professional athletes to come to a morning where they close the park and they open it up to handicapped children.

They invite all the athletes in the city to come and be part of that. Then every single member of the Eskimos showed up. The thing that people that report on it tell you is the fun thing is these guys are taking these kids on and off the rides. They say it's impossible to tell who's having more fun, the kids or the players. In so many ways that's the CFL. That's this remarkable quality that our guys have that makes you want to be on their side and makes you want to be part of this league and it makes you want to be proud of it.

The other thing about the game is all of you. I started my relationship with the media maybe differently than most. I can tell you a little story because it's at the heart of how I feel about this. You have a job to do. We're going to have an interesting conversation today and I'm sure there'll be a tough question or two but I started my career in Calgary in 1985. I remember this so vividly. One of your colleagues, Allan Mackie who I count as a friend, so I'm in the locker room and I think we were 0 in 4 or 0 in 5 at that point.

It was not a great year and Al is asking me in an interview how I'm handling it. I was a kid so I gave a kid's answer and I said well, I was with the Bisons and we went 1 in 7 and 0 in 8 and I'm kind of used to it. Whoa. Is that not the stupidest thing in the world to say? You know what happens, you all experienced it. You sit down in your locker and in a moment I am – oh my gosh, when Earl Lensford (ph) reads that he is going to think that I drafted the biggest loser on the planet.

No wonder we're 0 in 5. I'm sitting on my locker and I'm telling you, I'm almost in tears. This is so very bad. I walk over to J.T. Hay (ph) with J.T.'s gray hair. He was gray haired then, he's gray haired now. He was a good friend to me. I said J.T. I just made a big mistake with Al. I explained it to him. J.T. said go talk to him, just walk up and tell him you made a mistake.

So I did and Al said to me, I would never print that. I know what you meant. What you meant was that you learned to endure and push through it, you learn even more how to be a pro because you're committed to your craft. He says I know what you meant. I would never have printed that. I think sometimes we get lost in the noise of the difference between you doing your job and how we feel about you doing your job.

I just think, look, I think deep down in every single one of you is a storyteller who wants to celebrate our game but at the same time we're not perfect. I don't think we should pretend to be perfect. I think we have lots of room to grow and improve and some of the things we'll talk about today are those things of how we can take the game to the next level.

From the day I started you've treated me with the greatest respect, an extension of what I came to expect from you as a player and I hope we can continue that into the future regardless of whether we have to tussle and whether that's the last perfectly friendly picture in the history of my tenure as Commissioner. The other thing is just I think this game makes and this role makes me – I've never felt more Canadian in my entire life.

I think at this perfect moment in time when the world is filled with madness and divisiveness, this league has a powerful connection to what Canada stands for. I'm walking through stadiums and meeting fans. I'm talking to people. I'm talking to all of you and everywhere I go I think oh my gosh, I have never – I've always been a proud Canadian, I know that but I have never been more proud to be Canadian than I am at this moment in time.

I think it's because of this league. I think it's because of all of you and I think it's because of our fans. Those are just a few of the many, many reasons why when we talk about the game today you're going to be talking to somebody that is passionate

about the game now and about our future. Talk about player safety and health. I'm very excited about some of the things we've done under player safety and health this year and well before I came here.

I think the move this year to change to the no padded practices format was an important step and the thing is we don't know if it's going to give us the result we're wanting. We don't know that but the thing is you'll never know unless you try. You won't. We have to make sure that as we look through this into the future that we're tracking our data, that we're looking through the decision to what is it accomplishing for us.

At its heart and its foundation it was designed to do something important and that is to try to keep our players healthier. If what we'd be criticized for is the attempt then I'll take that criticism all day long because I think it's worth it. I think the more we can do to look after the players, you saw again those guys last night. Who doesn't want to look after them? Who doesn't want to keep them on the field because the more they're on the field playing and I see my colleagues from Edmonton in the crowd and of course they know I was at the Eskimo dinner this year where they trooped out their roster.

It looked like a legion from Rome and because of all the injuries they had but I think that's an example of something we can do with a collaborative relationship with our players' association in an attempt to make the game safer. Again we have to track the data. But I do have a disappointment on that and it's that joining the league after it had already started didn't give me a chance to get to know the coaches and the general managers the way I'd like to and that's on me.

In an abundance of respect for them given that this is their busy season I haven't been with them as much and I think frankly we made that decision with not enough consultation with the coaches and GM's. I hope this off season to spend a great deal of time talking with them and getting to know them better and tapping into all the things they know about this great game of ours because as you saw last night with Coach Tressman (ph) and you see it all the time.

These are passionate professionals and I want to make sure they're part of the equation as well. The elephant in the room of course is the question on concussions which I'm sure we'll have a chat about today. I think we should be clear on a few things. Number one is concussions are in fact an injury. It is a brain trauma. We know that. No-one is going to dispute that. Concussions aren't good for the players.

I'm happy to say that we've seen some reduction in the number of concussions we're suffering but I think we should also note that we're getting – we're constantly looking for ways to improve our protocols, the fact that we have an injuries blotter but not just for concussions, for everything. We are looking at ways of keeping our players safe but the training and the development of protocols around how we manage the concussion, first of all you have to detect the concussion and then there's the evaluation process to make sure that we're objectively examining what that player's state of health is in that moment.

Then of course there's the important rehabilitation and as you all know we're learning

so much. Science is learning so much about how to do this better. We're going to continue and want to be part of that process for the betterment of our players and their long term safety and health. The other side of this equation is this question of cause and effect. If I get out of the room today without somebody asking the question I'll be terribly surprised I suppose but the cause and effect is unclear. It just simply is.

We're going to rely on the science. I know somebody is thinking right now that somebody else said something. I swear when I hear that I think of my mum because she would say something like if somebody else did something would you. We all had those moments in our lives. The thing of the matter is we are going to rely on the science.

On that first day that I met all of you as the new Commissioner of the CFL, perhaps the proudest day of my life by the way, I made a promise to all of you that I was going to do the work, that I wasn't an expert and frankly let's be honest, I'm not an expert now but I am a guy who has done a lot of reading. I've met with a lot of world class doctors and scientists. I'm trying to do everything I can as are our board of governors and our teams. Our team presidents are deeply committed to this.

We're all trying to understand this better but the science is still very unclear. It is not conclusive. When we come back to it at the end of the day we're going to work our tails off to make this game as safe as we can. We're going to evolve. We're going to improve. We're going to be looking for innovation in safety and health but the science isn't clear which all that tells us is we have to keep working with science. We can't abandon this process now.

We have to keep searching and we have to be part of the process and not stand away from it. I can say that I think on behalf of our governors and our teams that we are committed to being part of this exercise to ultimately understand better what's happening within the brain. One of the scientists I met on this journey said as it relates to the human brain it's good to be humble because there is so much more we don't know than we know.

I think that is profoundly true. I just again say what we're going to do going forward is the same things these amazing teams and governors have been doing now for a long time and that is pursue the truth, keep working with the scientists, keep joining in on the efforts to find a way to make all sports safer because this issue of concussions and CTE are not the exclusive domain of football. It's like literally everything.

I'm with Lily Naserati who is a world class scientist and Lily said do you know how hard your head hits the water if you're diving off a three meter board. She said if you did the math on that they hit the water at tremendous speed with tremendous force. Have you ever done a belly flop? I have a certain advantage over many of you in that area but she said you hit the water hard. We all think we watch these divers at the Olympics where they just slip into the water, like barely a ripple.

Do you know how many thousands of dives you'd have to make in order to land those five or six perfect dives at the Olympics? The answer is thousands and thousands and almost half or more of those are far from perfect. It's gymnastics. It's hockey. It's soccer. It's everything. We all as a sports community have to come together on this

question. I'm proud to say on behalf of the entire Canadian Football League that we're committed to that process and we will work with the scientists to make the game safer. Finally just to shift back to football as you saw in the notes, what a season. I just go to these games and watch the action. This is the league where you cannot leave your seat with three minutes to go. Whether you're up by 7, up by 14, up by 21 or down by 7, by 14, by 21 you shouldn't leave the stands because in this league three minutes is an eternity. We know so much happens in those last three minutes. It's one of the things that makes our game so incredibly special.

This has been a season of seasons for the amount of competition we've had and our partners at TSN have broadcast our games in a phenomenal way. We are proud of that relationship and the way the story is told to our fans. I would say TSN and we think we can still do more but what we've got is a great product. I'm so proud of our players and our coaches and our GM's and our team presidents and I'm looking forward to working with them because I think we've got something special here worth working on.

I believe fundamentally and you'll hear me talk about this over and over again, this league can be two, three times bigger. I think we should be filled in every stadium every night, every game, every time we flip the coin the teams should be looking into full stands because this game is worth watching. We can attract new fans. We can be that place where people gather and have fun. There's great examples.

We're in Ottawa so we know they've done something special here. The community of Red Black Nation that has come together is truly remarkable. It's an example. Remember, not that long ago there was no football here and people said it could never come back. You would – football is gone. Football is yesterday's idea here in Ottawa. Boy, you go to a Red Blacks party which I went to the other night and I can tell you, if that's dead then dead is good.

What they had going on there is something special and man, have you ever seen more plaid in your life than you get here in Ottawa? It's a remarkable thing and it sets the stage for what we can do. I'll finish by saying I was so proud of what happened in Toronto last week with our Argonauts and that crowd, if you were in that stadium that crowd was rocking.

That was a team that decided with its partners to make a wholehearted effort to welcome the fans into the league. We had some help because there was a little bit of green in the stands but why not invite those people from Saskatchewan who live in the GTA back to the stadium every week for every game because what we do know is they are passionate and they love the Canadian Football League. That's the whole story now.

How do we widen the circle and invite more people in to be regular passionate fans of our game? There's lots of room for optimism there. With that, I would just say again a big thank you. It has been the most amazing five months of my life. I have – I get up in the morning and go to work with a feeling of joy. I've got this amazing group of colleagues that if you've seen them this week, they're running around and working so hard because they love the game as much as I do and as much as I know all of you do.

It's fun to go to work with them. Almost in every single case except Matt Newchuk (ph)

—

(Laughter)

They're young and they're vibrant.

(Laughter)

Where's Matt? Oh sorry, Matt is here in the room, darn it. But they're energetic and vibrant and they love the game. It's so easy to go to work with people like that and I've had a chance to spend a bit of time with Jackie Goddard (ph) and I say to Jackie every time I'm with her, your dad was my commissioner. I grew up with Jay Goddard. In fact my brothers and I had the distinction of being a cool family in part because we were really big and we could tell people that we were cool.

But we had a J5V (ph) with Jay Goddard's name on it. I swear we did not know who the Prime Minister of Canada was but we knew who the commissioner of the CFL was and that was Jay Goddard. I hope that in some small way that we can operate this league and I can do my job in a way that would bring honour to the way Mr. Goddard did his job back in the day and so many of our commissioners along the way. That's the standard I'm aspiring to. With that we'll open it up to questions unless we have a power failure which would be cool too but failing that I'm happy to take your questions.

Moderator: For questions we have mic runners on each side of the room. Make sure you have a microphone in your hand before asking a question. The first one as usual will go to Terry Jones first.

Question: Randy in extension to grow the league two or three times bigger, your perception with this group already to this point is that you're a git er done type of commissioner. With the thought of an entire full season and meeting in a room like this next year in Edmonton what would you be disappointed in not being able to deliver on your to do list during that time?

Randy Ambrosie: That's a great question Terry. It's hard to answer. I'll answer it anyway but it's hard to answer because some of the things that we are going to do between here and there have yet to be fully determined. Thanks to Jim Lawson and our board of governors, they've given me some time to finalize the business plan for 2018.

They did that because they recognize that coming in midstream, drinking from a fire hose, you're jumping into the fray and I've spent a lot of time in the stadiums with the teams and with our fans. You haven't had as much time as you'd like to really sit down and reflect. I think the next month or so will give me that time. From this point forward we have two seasons in the CFL. We have the football season and the business season.

The business season starts Monday morning at 8:00. Terry, I think there are some things that we know now that we're working towards. We've been doing a tour through some of the other professional leagues. One of the things we've learned is a centralized ticket function where the best practices from every team come together but

not just in a let's share ideas way but in how do you activate the best ideas.

How do you share the best ideas across all of your partners? That's something we're going to do. I'm hoping to implement that very quickly. I'll be disappointed if we haven't activated the idea of becoming a much better ticket selling league. What we've seen, some of the statistics, like the MBA has gone from season ticket renewals at about 72% to the mid 80's since they launched something called TEAMBO (ph) which is a shared services group they provide to the teams.

It's all about expertise in things like ticket selling. I'll be very disappointed if we haven't activated it and already see the teams having been able to consume the benefit of a shared resource in that sense. The other thing I'll be disappointed if we haven't come together around a more disciplined understanding through data. Coming out of financial services you can't go to the office without at least three reports greeting you in the morning explaining your business to you in some level of detail.

That's a level of sophistication I'd like to bring to the CFL so that myself, the governors, the team presidents are all working together to think about the game. Data is powerful. It will tell you a lot. It will show you where your gaps are. It will tell you where you can do things better, where you've got problems, where you have things that are going extremely well. It focuses you in very real ways.

I'd be disappointed if we haven't activated our data strategy and are starting to see some benefits of a deeper understanding of our game because I believe fundamentally if we're going to take this league to the next level raising the bar of our own understanding of our football game and of the league and our fans and understanding our fans through data. I'd be disappointed if we haven't done that.

I'll be disappointed if I haven't spent a lot more time with our football people. I'm not worried that I won't but I really do want to get to know them. I want them to be part of our solutions and in part Terry the next part of my answer affects all of you because I think our coaches are amazing but as you all know they're very protective.

They put a bubble around the game because that's how they think about it. I want to talk to our coaches and GMs about trying to open ourselves up. I want to see if we can't help our football people be part of the business solution by allowing all of you to tell our story better. I think all it's going to take is talking to each other and not telling them but explaining to them how these things can be done differently by giving them examples of best practices from other leagues.

We know that type of thing helps. If we can say here's what this league does and here's how it's helped them. I'm hoping by working together we can do a much better job of creating a more open ecosystem so our story can be told because as we saw last night, man, we have great stories. That's a thing that I'll be disappointed if we haven't gotten to.

If we have this same session at the end of February we're going to present our final 2018 business plan to the governors at the end of February. If we have a meeting at that time we'll have a lot more to talk about but those are three things I think about every day that are really important. I know we're going to get them done but of course

your question was if we didn't what would I be disappointed in and those are three things.

Question: Hey Randy Raj Madani (ph) here, Sports Centre. Your colleagues south of the border in the NFL have admitted there's a link between concussions and brain diseases, CT and the rest. Chris Newinsky (ph) of the Concussion Legacy Foundation in the aftermath of your predecessor saying there's no link said "no serious scientist is disputing there's a link". He said statements like that are misleading CFL players and the football community. If the people who are studying brains of former players are saying there's a link and the NFL is saying there's a link, why is the Canadian Football League not doing the same?

Randy Ambrosie: I'm going to go here and grab something. My answer is in part because I think we have to follow the science and the science and there's a report I've got here, a group of scientists, some of the leading neuroscientists in the world, doctors of great reputation met in Berlin. They meet on a cycle and their report says it's inconclusive.

They don't know. Look, what I've tried to understand in this process is to understand how scientists think about data. What they're telling us and what I think I understand and again remembering I'm neither a scientist nor a doctor, but what I'm trying to understand is how they think about data points.

More data points are better than less data points but in that report as an example they're saying they don't know. They're saying it better than that but essentially they're saying that. We saw an article that Alan Mackie did on Lily Naserati where they had a woman who to the best of their family's knowledge had never suffered a concussion and had certainly never played football. They found CT in her brain.

It raises the question, how is that? How has that happened? What don't we know? I can simply say this. We are continuing to look at all of it but right now the answer we're getting is we don't know yet. We don't know enough to be conclusive so we have to work at it. Most importantly this is why we have to think about player safety and health in a new way.

We have to keep looking for new ways to keep our players safe. The final thing is I have the greatest respect for our colleagues in the NFL, I do. I admire them greatly but I'm not going to have – my answer is not going to be that somebody else did it so we're going to do it too. Mine will be we're going to keep looking at all of these sources of data and try to be part of the solution and ultimately come to a point where we understand it better.

Question: I just want to follow up. I understand that but there are people who suffer from Alzheimer's and Parkinson's who don't play football either. The US Congress compared football to old school tobacco. There are people diagnosed with lung cancer who haven't smoked a cigarette in their life but that doesn't mean that tobacco doesn't cause cancer. At what point will the league look at some of the other data that shows some overwhelming evidence on the other side and not one part of the data that shows the other?

Randy Ambrosie: Again, I want you to know first of all it's a terrible thing. That we're not going to dispute. We know there are football players who have had CT, we know that. That's a fact that we will not dispute. We know it's a terrible thing. We know there are football players have had CT. We don't and should never disrespect them by disputing those facts.

But we are looking at all the data, I promise you. I'm not standing in front of you blind to one side of the argument versus the other. I didn't make a promise to only look at the study for the things I wanted to read and ignoring everything else. I've tried the best I can and I'm going to continue to look at all of it and meet with doctors and talk to scientists. This is a dog with a bone thing that I think I have and we should all have together in pursuit of a better understanding of the issue. I appreciate your question, I truly do but I promise you I'm not being blind to the other side of this.

There is enough in the moment for me to tell you that I'm looking at all of the evidence together and the answer is we don't know but that's why we keep working at this together and trying to find ways to make the game better and safer for our players.

Question: Eric Francis, Post Media in Calgary. How concerned are you about the stadium situation in Calgary and the lack of progress in terms of getting a new stadium built?

Randy Ambrosie: I'm very worried because there's lots of other colours in this room from other great teams but perhaps the most successful team in the last 20 years in the Canadian Football League and I think by the math I'd be right has one of the poorest stadiums in the CFL.

I think that's a tragedy. When you go across the country to see what's happened, the renovation at BC Place, the renovation in Edmonton at Brickfield, the Commonwealth, Saskatchewan, Winnipeg, Hamilton, what they've done here in Ottawa, Toronto's BMO Field.

I think it's terrible. I do. I think it's terrible that we're playing in an old – I played in that stadium. I happen to love it because I can go in there and look at the locker I sat in for the 93 Grey Cup with fond memories but I don't think that's a reason to keep the stadium.

(Laughter)

I think we need to find a solution to that problem. I'll do everything I can to work with Ken King and the Calgary organization to press for a solution. I think our fans need a state of the art place to come and watch world class football.

Question: Just a follow up question. There's been a lot of talk for a million years about moving the season up a couple of weeks or as much as a month. Where do you stand on that issue?

Randy Ambrosie: I think it's one of the things, of all the questions I'm asked by fans and many of you that's a question that if it's not the top question it's in the top two or three. I think we should seriously look at it. I think there are lots of

reasons to consider it. Personally the way I'd like to see it done is through a lot of interaction with our fans because in the world that I've operated in your customers, your fans in this case will guide you to good answers.

I think one of the things I'm looking forward to is having this discussion and finding ways to engage our fans in the question about a season shift. Personally I remember playing in the 1993 western final in Calgary. It was minus 26. It was a snowstorm. My wife was sent on a mission to find every balaclava she could find in the city of Calgary before the game. The only saving grace was that I was from Winnipeg born and raised and I thought these other guys I'm playing against must be way colder than I am.

In that moment Randy Ambrosie had a small advantage but again it's kind of like the seat in Calgary, not a very good reason to keep the season where it currently is. If we could find a way to do this, if we consulted with our fans, if we talked to all of you, if we make this a decision that we can share together and we did it, imagine playing our Grey Cup let's just say third week of October when it's beautiful everywhere and you don't have to wear 900 layers of clothing and you don't have to go get your winter boots out.

Imagine how much bigger the festival would be when people are wearing long sleeved shirts and a sweatshirt and not a parka and a toque. Through that lens it could be so cool for the Canadian Football League to do it. Personally I really like the idea but I want to make sure that we're thoughtful. One of the things I've seen in this board of governors, they love process. They want to see disciplined decision making.

We'll work our way through a really good process to reach a conclusion on this and one that we can celebrate all of us together as being the right thing to do for the CFL but personally I really like the idea. I get colder than I used to when I was a dumb kid.

Question: Randy, on the topic of best practices, the BC Lions have not had a president since the start of 2017. In a recent conversation with David Braley (ph) he said he was undecided about whether they would have a president for the 2018 season. Do you think that's an appropriate way to operate a franchise?

Randy Ambrosie: David has been one of the great stewards of our game and we all know that. David's place in our game and I think I've said if we ever do a Mount Rushmore equivalent to the CFL, David Braley has got to be the first face on that mountain. But I would encourage David and we will work with the BC Lions to do everything we can to help that team function at the highest level possible.

That's the conversation I'd have with every team. I want to be able to do that with each one of our organizations. It's not a BC Lions thing for me. It's an all teams, how do we help each team to maximize its opportunity and its marketplace. Again you framed that correctly. It's a best practices thing. Data will tell you the truth. You don't have to have an opinion on it. You can simply say when you do this, this is what you get.

When you pull this lever this is your output. That's the conversation I want to have with all of the teams. What's the best way for your team to be successful? Part of what I want to do when I talk about data is to be able to measure things. There's a management axiom. If you can't measure it you can't manage it. Part of our challenge is without collecting information all you have is opinions.

In the CFL we have a lot of those and that's fun too because it stimulates great dialogue but at the end of the day what I'd like to do I have a more data driven approach but a consultative relationship with all of the teams to make sure we're helping them optimize their business model for the success not only of their team but of our league. I hope all of the nine teams will feel the same way, that they would want me to be interested in their franchise. They would welcome a discussion and then we find a way to help the teams implement a system that is going to help make them more successful.

Question: A second question if I may. The league used to have a policy on players who wanted to go to the National Football League before their contracts expire where they had a six week window in the off season. Through collective bargaining that was taken out.

Now you have teams that independently put that window back into contracts, sometimes with a handshake, sometimes with a deal in a drawer. Agents are confused whether the league has a policy that allows that or not. Some teams are upset that other teams do it. Do you need a standardized policy on players wanting to go to the National Football League before the expiration of their contracts?

Randy Ambrosie: That's a great question. I would confess it's probably an area of the CFL that in the short window that I've been digesting everything else that I'm not as certain about how those things are working or not working. One of the things I do want to do, the conversation with the GM's. I've had some feedback from some of them about a whole bunch of topics, the negotiation list and other things.

What I want to do is sit down with them and ask a lot of questions, try to figure out what's working and what's not working but Dave to your point, we should have disciplined processes. One of the things that allows any business to be stronger is if it's got fundamental foundational pillars on which it operates because those confusions that can exist in the marketplace when you don't know whether it's left or right or up or down or big or small, those confusions can affect your business in a very negative way.

There's an answer to your question, a specific answer I don't know but the broader answer is that I think we should seek a way to establish standards and norms working with our player association as partners, working with our teams as partners to set those things in place and ask but frankly demand that those things are met, that those standards are met otherwise why have a standard if you're not going to ask those standards to be met.

We have to get them in place, articulate them and not just within our own independent ecosystem. We should share that with all of you as well because you're the storytellers for our game. You have to understand how those things work so if you're asked you understand them as well. That's definitely a business season issue for me and one that I hope to have a much better answer for you in the fullness of time.

Moderator: Next question from the CFL all time reception leader Nik Lewis. Are you starting a new career Nik?

Question: I'm working on it. How ya doing? We had a question about concussions. I believe we talk about a word, concussion, way too much and not about brain health. We know that you can expand the brain and we know you can rehab the brain. When will we stop selling safe when we know there's nothing we can do to make the game safer? When will we start educating our players on brain health and rehab of the brain?

Randy Ambrosie: Nik, it's a great question. I'm happy to say that you've been in this game and you have a distinction that few others will ever have in their lifetime. Your career stands above almost all but I think we are doing some of those things. We start the season off with an education program on concussions and we're talking to the players about concussions.

We have an annual medical conference where we bring all the doctors from around the league and leading experts from around the world together to talk about player safety and player health. One of the things we are talking about right now, working on is how to be in that best practices and best practices in this case, what do you do – the evaluation once you've educated we do everything we can to educate the players.

The evaluation is to make sure that if somebody is hurt whether it be a concussion or otherwise but we evaluate it properly and then there's the rehabilitation part. I think you're talking in some ways about the rehabilitation side of that three pronged issue.

We're talking about how do we make sure we're doing the best, we're using the best techniques and the best science in the world to make sure that if somebody has a concussion that we're doing everything we can to make sure we're healing their brain and setting them up for long term success.

Nik, I promise you that is so important and we're going to keep working on it every day. I have a commitment from our governors and from my colleagues at the league office to do just that. We will work on that rehabilitation part of it with great passion.

Question: I think it goes further than just concussions. Every time you hit your hard you're gradually declining. I think it should be an education to work with groups and work with professionals that do rehab the brain to give education. We know you can get a concussion without a head trauma. Our brain moves in our skulls.

If you study the woodpecker or the battering ram, the brain never moves in their skull. That allows them to do what they do. But our brain moves in our skull so we cannot ever play this game without our brain moving in our skull. What are we doing to protect our players and educate our players to rehab the brain not because you have a concussion but because you're doing something that is going to gradually decline at a rapid pace if you're not doing things to counteract it?

Randy Ambrosie: Again Nik, I appreciate you asking the question and you're coming from a place that's important and that's from somebody who's played the game for a very long time. What I can say is if we can do more on education we will. It's good to raise the issue because these are important moments in time for us to say now that our football season is over how do we get ready for the next one and player

safety and health has to be an important part of that.

Can we do more to educate the players? I'm sure we can. We can work towards that and will work with the player association and will work together with our medical community and the leading experts to find as many ways as we can to educate the players. It's one of the reasons why for example I've said I feel like Sundays on Mondays. You're like a high school vice principal where you're the chief discipline officer.

I hate fine days. Fine days are not fun but the one thing I have said, I'm going to fine on and we're going to be super tough on is the head shots. Literally that's the water's edge. We are going to be super tough on that. It's a whole bunch of things mixed together that we have to continue to work at and do better. We are deeply committed to doing that on behalf of all the players Nick.

Question: Randy on the topic of health and safety, not necessarily concussions, I know the players association will speak later today, has been very encouraged by the fact they've got a former player now as the commissioner and certainly the decision during the season to eliminate padded practices gives them more reason to be encouraged.

The number one topic for them right now is making players whole, injuries that take beyond a year to rehabilitate. They want complete rehabilitation benefits for those. Jonathan Edney (ph) is the poster boy. I know you've had a chance to digest that issue in these last five months. Where are you at on that?

Randy Ambrosie: Farhan it's a great question. We're going to work with the players association, behind closed doors, to talk about these kinds of issues and work to find a solution that is good for everybody. You have to know that these early days I really have appreciated the relationship we've been building with the PA and I have a great respect for them.

What I don't want to do, I don't want to have that negotiation in the public. Public negotiations are never a good thing. They almost always end up causing one side or the other to feel bad. When one side feels bad or injured in some way then you can't be as productive because you're so busy licking your wounds that you're not thinking straight.

This is a conversation we will continue to have. We have talked about, we will continue to talk about and as we go towards the conclusion of this current collective bargaining agreement to make sure this issue is top of mind and see if we can't find a way to work together for a solution.

Moderator: We have 3 to 4 minutes to go. I have a list of questions. We'll try to make sure to cover everyone that hasn't asked a question yet.

Question: Hi Randy, I'm Gord Holder from Post Media Ottawa. You spoke earlier about developing practices to make the game safer. My question is what can the league, what should the league do to deal with those former players who will not be covered by whatever practices you introduce at this point?

Randy Ambrosie: Can you just clarify your question? I want to make sure I'm answering the right thing.

Question: What can or should the league do to address the issue of former players who have medical issues, concussion or other, that will not be affected by any change in practices the league introduces now?

Randy Ambrosie: To a degree it's the same question that Farhan asked but you're asking it differently. We can and we should have this conversation with the player association and look for a way to provide that that's in the context of a more complete negotiation of our CBA. That's part of the answer.

In an hour and a half or two hours I'm going to go to the alumni luncheon and I have a strong relationship with the alumni, in part because I am one and we're talking about these issues as well and thinking about how do we work with the alumni. What are some of the things? As an example we're talking to them right now about how do we help them do more to put a business model in place for the alumni where they can be a bigger entity and then those funds can be used for players.

They already do this by the way. The alumni association has a fund where players who have some distress in their life, in some cases medical, in other cases just life experiences that the alumni association is stepping in and providing some relief. We're talking to the alumni association about how do we help them. How do we help them become a bigger entity with more funding so they can step in and do more things to help former players?

It's one of those – there's no one silver bullet to these things in most cases. It's a collection of things that you put together. You think about it holistically and you attack each one of these potential solutions one thing at a time. I'm proud to say we've got a fantastic relation with the alumni and we'll look to do that. We've got a fantastic relationship with the player association and we'll look to work with them. Together we can find a way to provide answers to some of the questions that you've been asking.

Question: One of the most common concerns I hear from fans is the state of officiating. You made some changes to replay during the year. What's your take on the state of officiating right now and the state of replay and what needs to be addressed?

Randy Ambrosie: Drew, great question. I was at I sat on a panel at a sports forum about a week and half ago. I was with Bill Daly from the NHL, it was the American Hockey League, Lacrosse League, major league soccer and that question and they all said the same thing. That is the number one thing they're criticized for is the state of their officiating. There's a bit of a misery loves company.

Officiating is always going to be tough. I think the speed at which our game is played today makes it very hard for officials to get it all right but I think we should look for ways to get help our officials to do the best job we can have them do on the field. That's why we're so proud of some of the programs we've got in place.

We're working with the NFL on an official exchange program. More training and more development, officiating is so important because fundamentally it's the integrity on which our game sits. Is the outcome of our game the outcome that was based on what the players did, is what officiating ultimately serves. Its purpose is to make sure the game is decided by players, not by extraneous factors.

I think we have to talk to our officials this off season, again something I haven't done a lot of. Where are the gaps in their training if there are any they'd like to see us address? How do we do that better? As I've said many times we have to revisit the command centre question. As it stands today and this was by unanimous agreement by the teams, the command centre replay review principle was that it was designed to correct egregious errors.

It was not as currently formatted designed to make the perfect call. When the command centre officials are looking at the tape they just want to make sure something that was clearly wrong is corrected but it wasn't designed to make the absolute perfect decision. It's essentially a question of do we have the right standard. Perhaps what we'll learn and I think talking to fans, fans want us to make the perfect call.

If you're going to go to the command centre, what I'm hearing from fans is they want us to make the perfect call. We should review that Drew. We should have that conversation with all of you and our fans. We should revisit that question. We should talk to our command centre team and determine whether there's a way to elevate our standard, not from egregious error correction but to the perfect decision.

The other thing we need is more transparency. This is a point that I am passionate about. As you probably know in Hamilton the last game of the regular season we started to broadcast. For that game we broadcast the command centre screens onto the stadium video board. What you can do now is show the screen and you can circle the things that the video officials are watching.

Essentially they'll be signaling what their basing their decision on. I think the more we can show our fans what we're seeing in the command centre and why we're making a decision will help at the very least create the transparency that we're looking for but the broadest answer possible is of course we want our officiating to be as good as it possibly can.

I'm proud of our officials and I know it's a super tough job. I want to support them any way I can. I want us to be proactive in training and development and ultimately try to be sure we have the best officiating for the greatest game in the world.

Question:
Cup?

Quick follow up, when is Hamilton getting a Grey

Randy Ambrosie: That's a great question and again the answer is that so far we've allocated the Grey Cup in 2018 to Edmonton and the process for the decision on 2019 and beyond is one that I haven't entered into that process at all. Again business season starts Monday so Drew maybe if you call me in three weeks I might have a better insight than that.

At this point all I can tell you is we've been talking to and working with Edmonton 2018 and looking forward to that and who knows, based on the question earlier, who knows? Maybe we'll be playing the Grey Cup in October by the time we get to 2019 and beyond. Those are all important questions but ones that I don't have a perfect answer for today.

Hamilton by the way is a great city and we want to take the Grey Cup there.

Question: This is the last question. I'll make it a two part one. On the line of transparency can you give us clarity on what happened from your perspective and the league office perspective on the (unintelligible) earlier this year?

Randy Ambrosie: At the end of the day what's most important to me is we got the right decision made. I think we learned some things. Honestly what I would tell you about it is I think we learned some things about being proactive, about vetting, about process, about the inclusion of experts into the process.

I have to be careful and I want to be careful because when you're talking about human beings you should be careful that you're not being disrespectful to anybody. That's not my deal anyway by the way. What I think we did is we worked through a process to get to the right place. I want to have that process in place earlier.

I want how does that phrase go? You don't want people to see the sausage as it gets made. At the end of the day you want to enjoy good sausage. Look at me. I'm no expert on it but I do think – I'm proud of the outcome we got because I think we understood at the end of the day that decision we reached was the right one for the CFL. It was the right one for Canada in this moment in time and beyond. I wouldn't want to say anything more because I have too much respect for everybody who was involved in the process.

Question: The last one was going to be on Johnny Manziel. There's been a lot of talk about him all year. It seems like the last commissioner took a stance on him. Yours is up in the air and I guess the restrictions on whether or not he'll sign a contract have been hidden. What do you need to see and why is this guy important to be in the CFL?

Randy Ambrosie: It's a great question. I'll come at it this way. What's most important is not the question of any one particular player. What we're trying to do is most important. This we can be absolutely clear on. I think for a very long time and this happens not just in the football business but in all businesses, the people in the business who are experts in this case at football are asked to make decisions on things for which we don't have the expertise.

IN the case of somebody who has had a history in this case of violence against women, I don't think a bunch of football people should hold their selves out as being experts, I really don't. That's why we bring in other specialists to help us, to guide us. The reason why things are going to take time is because process is going to trump time. Process is going to trump time every case.

What is happening is we have put in place based on experts who have helped us to understand how to pursue a determination of whether somebody is worthy to be in our

game, that has come at the right place in their life has got to be done by people who have a specialty and an education and the training.

The problem is that Randy Ambrosie meets some of these young players and I like them. I immediately think they're great. That's a bad reason to have somebody re-enter the game of football and enter our game. It's a bad way to do it. I promise you I'm not trying to hide the Johnny Manziel question. What you're getting is the full and complete transparency.

We have a process in place now and I don't care whether it takes another month or three months or five months. Nobody gets into the game until they fulfill the criteria that are set out by experts because then I can stand in front of the team, in front of the community, in front of all of you and say we did the work.

We believe this person is in the right place in life to come into our game. I'm hoping we'll get to that very quickly but that's what we're doing now. I think with great support from Jim and our board of governors, that's the standard we have put a policy in place on this with support from our governors and team presidents. This is the way we're going to do it.

Moderator: Thank you everyone. We went 25 minutes long so I hope you got most of your questions. Thank you. Have a great day. We'll see you at practice. Thank you Commissioner.