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PRINCIPAL(S)/PRINCIPAUX: Jeffrey L. Orridge, Commissioner, Canadian Football League

SUBJECT/SUJET: Canadian Football League (CFL) Commissioner Jeffrey L. Orridge delivers the annual State of the League Address.

Moderator: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for coming today. I'd like to introduce the 13th Commissioner of the Canadian Football League, Mr. Jeffrey L. Orridge.

(Applause)

Jeffrey Orridge: Thank you so much for coming and joining us on a very early -- Is this thing on? -- on a very early Friday morning of Grey Cup weekend. We're super excited to be here. And thanks again for coming out. It's great to -- I can now say to see some familiar faces in the crowd, because this time last year it was my first experience and there were many people that I hadn't had any contact with or any relationship with, and I appreciate the fact that you've all extended yourself throughout the course of this year to make contact and to help me out in my first year of learning and growth and understanding this League.

I want to first congratulate the Ottawa Redblacks and the Calgary Stampeders for making it to the 104th Grey Cup presented by Shaw. We're all looking forward to a very, very exciting Sunday afternoon/evening.

When I think about the state of the League, the first thing that comes to mind is progress. And we've made tremendous progress. The League is in a very good state. The game is great, and we're poised to go to that next level. I was in Regina just -- less than two weeks ago to announce CFL Week, and a young woman in her mid-sixties approached me, and she said, you know, I'm really excited because, although my son lives in Seattle and my daughter lives in Los Angeles, I'm able to stay connected with my kids and share my Roughrider experience with them through CFL.com and on line with the CFL Pick'Em game. To me, the light bulb went off that a couple of years ago we couldn't have had that conversation. We didn't have the technology. We were not focused on fantasy. But now, no matter where you live, you can stay connected intergenerationally with your family through sport, and certainly

through the CFL, because we're doing things like that. Technology's been a wonderful thing.

So let's start with the game itself. Let's start on field level. So a few years ago people had concerns that our offences weren't scoring enough points. And it was valid. This year our games are high scoring, they're wide open, and super, super competitive. Offensive scoring, well, compared to just two years ago, we're up 20 percent; up ten percent from last year. We average about 49 points a game. The result has been due to significant changes in the rules to open up the game. That's a lot of progress. So about a year ago there were also concerns that there were a really high number of penalties. The League modified its rules, our Officiating Department worked with the coaches and their staff so they could clearly communicate the new standards to the players, and I think they did an excellent job. The result: 12 percent decrease in penalties this year. That's about three flags less per game. That's progress.

But you know, the numbers really can't capture the whole story. I mean, if you think about what happened this season, the dominance of theStampeders, the turnaround in Winnipeg, Wally's amazing success back at the helm of BC, and of course with the Ottawa Redblacks, not only their second consecutive first-place finish in the east but their second consecutive appearance in the Grey Cup – truly, truly amazing. Oh, man, the incredible air show led by guys like Jonathon Jennings and Mike Reilly and Bo Levi Mitchell. But those were just some of the great stories this year, this season.

Officiating. Now, we know that – that some of you have expressed concerns about video review. And it was designed to make the game better, to get more calls right. And that's exactly what happened. We got more calls right. The unintended consequence of changing some of the rules and opening it up to make more plays reviewable is the fact that it interfered with the fan experience. We realize that challenges were up, one per game, and that's significant. So to address that, we made what I hear is an unprecedented move in the midseason: we adjusted it to make coaches think twice about the consequences of throwing a flag that was, meh, gratuitous. They'd lose a time-out. So by adjusting those rules, it actually served as a chilling effect, and it reduced the number of challenges. So that was progress.

So even with the reviews, though, the average length of the game went down. So it went down by a whole minute. So we average about two minutes and 50 – two hours and 51 minutes. And that also meant more plays in less time. Flow of the game – just as important as duration of the game, if not more important, because that goes to the fan experience. So we're focused on that as well. Here's the issue that we have. We've always got to balance the use of technology with the fan experience, with game integration. And we're not the only ones trying to figure this out; all leagues have the same dilemma in terms of video review and the use of technology. But make no mistake, we are the leaders in this. We're leading, people are following. And other leagues are looking at us to see how they can improve their

product. So we've been innovative, we've been progressive, and of course we've experimented a little bit, and things are working out pretty well.

Player health and safety. The safety and health of our athletes remain a priority for us. It's clear that we've got to do – we've got to continue to do a great job in terms of making sure our greatest asset, both on the field and off the field, gets – stays healthy and well. So what we did is a new and improved, stronger drug policy. We instituted an injury spotter for the first time. Just once again, you know, we're looking out for our athletes. Now, this injury spotter is in the command centre, and they have a view of all 24 players. We've used this 700 times to send down video clips to the medical staff on the field, not only to help them – alert them to what's happened on the field, but to help them with the diagnosis of the play. Rule changes. This is important. We modified some rules to eliminate low blocks from the game. And then finally, as you know, we're focused on concussion assessment, evaluation, treatment, and prevention. Important pleased to report that concussions were down 20 percent. We had 50 concussions last year, 40 this year.

But let's look at the big picture. So half of our games were decided in the final three minutes of the game. Half of the games were decided by ten points or less. Twenty-five percent of the games were decided by four points or less. And we had eight overtime games. That's unprecedented. That's a CFL record. So in terms of parity and competitiveness, excitement, unpredictability, all the things that are great about sport, I'd stack our game up against anybody's this year. So the goal is clear. We need to keep the fans that we already have, we need to attract new fans, and we need to attract new, diverse fans, and make our game younger. We've got to engage that next generation of fans, there's no question about it. And in a minute I'm going to tell you how we're doing it.

So our regular season ratings were up by three and a half percent overall on TSN, and seven percent in this key 18-to-49-year-old demographic. Our total number of viewership on TSN was 553,000, and on RDS 130,000. Six out of our nine teams actually saw ratings increases this year. And compared to last season, our female viewership was up seven percent. Once again, we're really happy with this progress. A recent IMI study that we conducted over the summer revealed that 44 percent of Canadians aged 18 to 34 identified themselves as CFL fans. That's up three percent from the year before. That's second only to the NHL, and it's tied with Major League Baseball. Additionally, many of those young people describe the League as exciting, innovating, authentic, and relevant to them. Oh, did I forget fun? And fun. This League is fun.

Oh, man. Think about what's happening now: the concourses in Ottawa; the end zones in Hamilton; the Rum Hut in Winnipeg; the new tailgating opportunities in Toronto; and the sideline experience in Montreal. These are all things that speak to how fans are engaging in the game and enjoying in the in-stadium experience. Our teams have worked really hard to create these environments, and they're wrap-around environments. It's not just what's happening on

the field, but it's what's happening in and around the game. That's what's bringing people out, and that's what's making it so exciting for young folks.

On the digital front, we've been building a really strong digital team to execute against our strategies to reach those younger fans. Great success: a hundred percent increase in CFL.ca traffic. And I really need to give a shout-out to the Redblacks, the Argos, and the Bombers because their numbers are up 50 percent on their websites. It's the result of us revamping those websites, making them more dynamic, putting more content, more news, more information, and more statistics.

So in recent years we've done new partnerships with Whistle Sports, Twitter, and Facebook. And I'm really pleased to announce that the results have been fantastic. Facebook, we're up 37 percent from last year; Twitter, 80 percent; and in Instagram, a whopping 293 percent increase on Instagram. This is where young people are living, and this is where we are.

The fans are loving the video that we're producing. I mentioned a little while ago about new content and our focus on content, creating our own content, telling our stories: 600,000 video views on Twitter; 800,000 views on CFL.ca; and on Facebook, 5.27 million views on Facebook. We continue to work with Snapchat. We have a new stats platform and a brand new mobile app, which keeps you current and involved in the game no matter where you are in the palm of your hand. We launched and revamped new websites, all of which are contributing to our online presence, which is relevant and fun. And of course fantasy is big. We've doubled down on fantasy. We have a new relationship with Draftkings. That's gone extremely well. And of course we continue to augment our CFL Pick'Em game. And finally, some of the thing that – something that I'm really most pleased about is we have a relationship with EA Sports. CFL is now embedded in a Madden game, so millions, millions of video game players around the world are now exposed to the CFL. Once again, more content. So new online shows and podcasts like The Waggle. It's met with great success, and no doubt our social media presence is stronger than ever. It's light years ahead of where the League was just a couple of years ago.

You all know that our strategy is to bring fans inside this game, closer to the game, and that's exactly why ten days ago I was in Regina announcing CFL Week. The idea is to get more connected to the fans, bring the fans closer to the game. It's also why our board of governors voted unanimously in favour of more live-mic games. Because we saw what the result was. There were double-digit increases in those live-mic broadcasts.

So look, the work is starting to pay off in our TV ratings, at the stadiums, but it's still going to take some time. There's no question about that. But we're committed to innovating and improving, and focusing on progress. We know we're going to grow because we know we're doing the right things. So for the 13th year out of 15, we've had two million fans come through our turnstiles. This is the third straight consecutive year that over two million fans have been in attendance. But overall, we're

down slightly from last year. So we're just shy of about 25,000 fans at every game. That definitely has our attention, but just underscores the fact that we need to continue to do the more – more of the work that I've described earlier to attract new and younger fans as well as keep the fans that we have.

So we're here gathered in Canada's largest city, and the Argos have just completed their first year in their new home, in a brand new stadium. They're under new management and ownership, and there's a brand new game day experience with tailgating. This season they put some great things in place. Like I said, they've transitioned to a new stadium; they've been new and innovative; but they've also learned a lot about the new market. They've learned what fans like, and some things the fans are not so crazy about, and they've been making adjustments as a result of it. It's not where we want it to be. Our expectations were very, very high – perhaps in some ways unrealistic – for a brand new – a brand new club that was starting from deep in their end zone. They didn't start on the 20-yard line, but certainly they brought it out to at least the 35. There's been a 14 percent increase in attendance with their move to BMO Field. The 18-to-49-year-old demo, which is coveted, which is what our focus is, 52 percent increase in television ratings. And overall there was a ten percent increase in TV ratings for Argos games. So the building blocks are in place. And I'd be remiss if I failed to mention that their season ticket holder base has doubled. It's good signs of progress.

So I've outlined progress in our game, our TV audiences, digital, building the fan base, and, when it comes to our largest market, an investment here. But we also have social responsibility and integrity that we have to maintain in the game. So we've continued to build on our policy on violence against women; we've expanded our partnership with You Can Play; we've instituted an anti-tampering policy which governs coaches' movements. So this is what we're really made of. It's the new CFL, it's a – it's a league in motion. It's stable, it's secure, it's exciting. And that allows us to focus on new and innovative things, to keep being progressive, to keep being innovative. We're going to continue to attract a younger fan base, we're going to do bigger and better things in some of our larger markets, we're adjusting to a changing media landscape, and we're seeing real progress in doing that. It's very, very positive.

We're made of great owners. We've got strong organizations. We've got world-class athletes. I was at the CFL Awards last night, and not only are they world class on the field, but they are world class off the field. The quality and character of these young men is truly outstanding. And of course we've got the most passionate fans in the world. Last year was my first experience at a Grey Cup as Commissioner, and I saw somebody dressed in garb that looked, you know, like Darth Vader. And in conversation I asked him what he did in real life, and he said oh, I'm just a Supreme Court judge. So you know, it's experiences like that that – you know, it's undeniable, the passion of our fans and how deeply embedded they are in their connection to the CFL. And so it's – you know, there's nowhere to go but up.

Thank you very much for your time and your attention. Welcome again to the 104th Grey Cup presented by Shaw. It's going to be an exciting time. If you just arrived today, it's going to be a great weekend. If you arrived a couple of days ago, you know how much fun it's already been. So thank you, and I'm all yours.

Question: Hi. It's James with the CBC. The NFL has made moves to settle with its injured, concussed former players. Why haven't you made a move to settle with yours?

Jeffrey Orridge: Yeah, so you know, it's the subject of litigation right now. And as a result, I'm precluded from commenting on exactly what we're doing. So I've got to respect the legal process that we're undergoing, and so I can't really comment on more than that. But clearly it is a matter before the courts right now.

Question: If I could just ask you, a number of times this week some very sincere CFL players, executives have told me this league is a family. What do you have to say to your former family members who are injured, hurting, demented in some cases?

Jeffrey Orridge: Well, I respect and admire all the people who helped build this league. There's no doubt about that. And I'm appreciative of what they may be going through. But as I said, you know, some of the – of our former family members are party to a class action suit that is pending litigation so, you know, once again, I can't go any further than that. But certainly, you know, without them, there would be no us. So...

Question: Jeffrey, good mor—excuse me, good morning. It wasn't until Roger Goodell and the NFL had to go in front of the Congress that the League finally acknowledged that there's a link between football and brain diseases such as CT, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, and the rest. Is the Canadian Football League prepared to admit that there is a link between football and those conditions?

Jeffrey Orridge: We work really closely with the medical and scientific community. As a matter of fact, just about a month ago my Vice President of Player Health and Safety came back from a conference in Berlin on concussions. So once again, you know, we – it's still a matter of debate and discourse as to what the linkage may be, but we are connected with the medical and scientific community and we're constantly talking to them about, you know, their findings.

Question: So what is the – what is the League's position on that, then?

Jeffrey Orridge: The League's position is that there is no conclusive evidence at this point. And as I said, we continue to work with them and monitor the progress that they're making in terms of getting a greater understanding of whether or not there is a linkage.

Question: Gary Lawless, TSN. You mentioned that you may do more live-mic games this year. Obviously there were incidents in Edmonton, and there was some pushback from coaches around the League. How will you handle that going forward? And what is the League's position on how Edmonton handled the last live-mic game?

Jeffrey Orridge: Yeah. So we voted as a board to do more live-mic games after we did one and saw the ratings increase. We got the feedback from the fans that this was really exciting, that they wanted to be more involved in the game, and this was a great, innovative thing that the League was doing. So that's why we decided to do more of them. It was disappointing that not every coach participated. Eight out of the nine clubs did. And I don't know that any coach was jumping up and down to do it at the inception, right? But they – but the vast majority of them did that. We're going to evaluate how we go forward with live mics in the off season, and – you know, but we've had great success so far. So I think the whole goal is to get fans more engaged in the game and give them something more. You know, we've got to make sure that we continue to keep the fans that we have and give them something new to look forward to, and attract new fans. And we know that this next generation of fans is very much into trying to get in the game and be ~~yo~~—and – and under the game and within the game. So...

Question: Just – I asked you last – at the end about Edmonton and the – and the last live-mic game. Are you – are you looking into that still?

Jeffrey Orridge: Well, you know, it was disappointing, no doubt, that a coach decided at the last minute that he was not going to participate. It was certainly in violation of a league-wide mandate authorized by the governors. So you know, in terms of compliance, we want to make sure that we're all on the same page, that everybody's on board, and that we're all aligned, because that's the only way we can progress as – as a – as a league. Right? We cannot function as a group of nine teams; we've got to work as a league.

Question: The – through my experience interacting with fans via radio and social media, like, could – like, this year for sure the largest complaint was disruption of the game via flags and challenges. You know, you said you will review. Precisely what are you going to be looking at?

Jeffrey Orridge: Well, you know what? In simplest terms, we're going to review the reviews. You know, this was – this was the first time, this was the first year that we opened up so many plays to review. And we've realized there was that unintended consequence where, you know, there were more coach's challenges. So in the off season we're going to evaluate that. And I can't give you details on that because we haven't gotten together as committees yet. But you know, in December and January and February and even March we get together – the Competition Committee, the Rules Committee – and we discuss these things. We review everything that's happened in the

past, we evaluate it, and figure out how to move forward. So I wish I could give you more detail, but we're not there yet.

Question: Terry Jones with The Edmonton Sun, Journal, Post Media.

Jeffrey Orridge: It's good to see all three of you.

Question: Yeah, and the President of the Football Reporters of Canada, which is where these questions are coming from. But before I get into that, in reference to your live-mic thing and this expanse, to what extent have you identified that some of the progress you're attempting to make is being road blocked by the Football Ops Departments around the League?

Jeffrey Orridge: You know, there's always a balance that we have to strike between football interests and business interests. You know, and I'm not trying to – to give you a soundtrack, but that's the reality. The reality is that the football guys are invested in making the best product on the field and improving their lot and making sure they win. That's what they're hired to do. There's a group of us – the board of governors, management, the League office – that is intent on making sure that the fan experience is satisfying. We want to meet and exceed the expectations of the fans. So you know, sometimes there is a tension, there's no doubt, between what the Football Operations thinks is best for them and what is best for the business. And we always have to balance that, and we – and you know, it's our job and my job to try to marry those interests so that we have the best possible outcome.

Question: Do you feel that, to some extent, the tail is wagging the dog, though?

Jeffrey Orridge: Who's the tail and who's the dog? No, I – you know, in all – in all sincerity, we're only going to get better if we function as one. We are a team. It's not – it's not – the Football Office is not one team and management is not another team. We're all in this together, and we all have the same goal in mind, right? To make the game better, to maintain the integrity of the game, and give the fans what they want and more of what they want. So that's the goal.

Question: At this time last year you stood there, I asked a question about the media availability situation, and you obviously were not aware that a problem existed. You became aware of that. The League took some – we got a day in the dressing room in some cities – not mine. To what extent are you hoping or planning to expand on that? And I'd like to compliment, incidentally, yesterday here we had an experience with the media day that – well, there's a couple of more steps they have to take to get completely there. It was – it was a great step forward. But to what extent are you intent on making our lives easier?

Jeffrey Orridge: Yeah. Well, you know what? Thank you again for raising that last year in this forum. And thanks for coming to visit as well subsequent to that, and we

had this conversation about more access to the media. Look, we need you guys. We need you guys to tell our stories, to promote our game, to get people more engaged and more involved. So like you said, we are making a lot of progress in that regard. We augmented our media pol—media availability policy last year by instituting league-wide one day for locker room access or a room adjacent to the locker room, right? Now, if it didn't happen in your city, that's a problem because that is a league-wide policy, that one day a week the media has to get access.

But in addition to that, the things – the other things that we're doing – and it's not just locker room access; CFL Week in Saskatchewan in March, there are going to be three days of unprecedented access for the media. We're going to have our superstars there. Right? Fifty of them coming in. We're going to have our rising stars, we're going to have guys who are making the combine. And in addition to that, we're going to have coaches and GMs available to you. So there are other ways to access the CFL and to tell our stories, and we're trying to make that as widely available as possible by doing things not just in the locker room but outside of the locker room.

Question: But as an expansion of that, though – sorry about that. As an expansion of that, though, is it your intention to have more than one day going forward in – with locker room access, and to get rid of that infuriating thing in my market where you've created a B Plan where there could be a dress—an access in a room off the dressing room, which is ludicrous, and just ditch the thing and give us what everybody else in the League has?

Jeffrey Orridge: Yeah. I think, you know, the goal is to give you more access, right? And last year we didn't have as much as we do this year. There's some people who think that the policy didn't go far enough; there are other people, maybe Football Ops people, who think the policy went too far. So once again, it's trying to strike that balance between giving you what you need, giving us what we need to tell our stories to get fans even more connected, and making sure that the football folks feel as though they can do the best job that they're hired to do. So you know, it's step by step, Terry, but we're making progress, right? From – the conversation we had last year is vastly different than the conversation we're having this year.

Question: Commissioner, it's a privilege to be here from the European media. Andres Susana (ph) from Hungary's Sport Monitor. One quick question and one long question. The quick question is the League is – can't plan or planning any action, commemorative action this year regarding this Monday going to be the 165th anniversary of the birth of Earl Grey, and next year going to be the hundredth anniversary of the death of Earl – of Earl Grey. So this was what will be the quick question, and --

Jeffrey Orridge: So that's exciting news. That's exciting news. That's – and you know what? What we are doing next year is next year it's going to be very special for all of us in this country. Not only is it the – it will be the 105th Grey Cup presented by Shaw, but it's going to be held in our nation's capital. And that coincides with the 150th

anniversary of the Confederation of Canada, so there are going to be a lot of activities around that. And I'm sure, based on that, we're going to embed those kinds of narratives in there as well. But you know, it's going to be a huge celebration. One of the things that's great about this League is I think there are very few leagues in the world who can boast that there have been 104 opportunities for a tradition to go year to year to year. So we're really excited about that, and next year it's going to be 105, so we must be doing something right.

Question: Yes, thank you. And the other question is – and regarding to this, which you mentioned, there going to be another prestigious anniversary, the hundredth anniversary of the NHL. And I asked Commissioner Bettman at the World Cup, and this is the same question to you, about the globalization of the game. The League is focused on the domestic and the international globalization. I mean, the domestic is, I suppose, like Yukon Territory, Nunavut, Northwestern Territory [sic]. You can imagine considering inconceivable that one day they can join the League? I mean, there is any chance in Whitehorse or Yellowknife going to be – we going to see any – any CFL game? And the other one is the international globalization, like acceleration of the mass transportation. So it's possible, you think, is other teams joining, like probably in the future the NFL or the NBA?

Jeffrey Orridge: Yeah. Sure. So I'm really glad you asked that question because the question of expansion very rarely comes up in my conversations with people. I'm being a little facetious here. The thing that – we're always looking to – to grow the League and look for new opportunities to get more embedded in more – in more communities. The thing about expansion domestically is we've got to have three things in place, primarily. Right? We've got to have great quality ownership. We've got to have a great facility to play in because that's what fans expect now. And you can see throughout the League that's exactly what's happening. You know, we have – we have beautiful venues right, you know, just a few kilometres away here at BMO Field. Ottawa is a perfect example of the future of the CFL: wide concourses, intimate settings, really exciting venues where people can congregate and share socially.

So you have to have a great stadium. You've got to have great ownership that has a passion for the game, and really the resources to invest. And then finally, you have to have corporate sponsorship as well. Because you can't rely on the vicissitudes of the weather or whether your team is winning or losing to attract fans. But we know, we're confident that wherever we put another team in this country, the fan base is going to be there. The community's going to be there to support it. So that's one thing. It's not an active file, but let me put it this way: we're open for business.

Globally, the market, the – the global landscape is changing so dramatically. It has accelerated so quickly. The future has clearly arrived ahead of schedule, right? And because of those things, we have to look to increasing our reach. And it doesn't necessarily mean playing outside of Canadian soil, but it does mean penetrating new markets. And we can do that now. We're doing it in the US with our

relationship with ESPN. We are televising games in the UK and Ireland. This year's Grey Cup is going to be streamed in approximately 150 countries. So the advent of technology is allowing us to expand our markets.

Our goal ultimately is to be part of that global conversation of sport, along with the NHL and the NBA and Major League Baseball. We need to be part of that conversation. And the steps that we're taking are getting us there, closer and closer. So I'm glad you raised that because that is a particular goal of ours right now, because we live in a global marketplace. We can no longer be insular or provincial in our thinking or in our action. Right? And this game is clearly exportable. I use this – you know, when I got here last year – and I can say this now because I'm an American by birth but a Canadian by choice – that it is so amazing to me that you can find maple syrup just about anywhere, right? You can get great maple syrup in Vermont, but there's only one Canadian maple syrup. Right? There's only one Canadian Football League. Right? It is unique. We've got a unique value proposition, we've got a unique selling proposition, we've got an incredibly exciting game. All the elements of sport that you would ever want are right here in this game: unpredictability, excitement, parity in the League. What's better than that? So it will happen, there's no question.

Thank you for your questions. I appreciate it. And thank you very much for coming from other parts of the globe, and – and also emphasizing that this is not just a Canadian thing. It is ours. It is – we're very proud that this is the Canadian Football League. But we're also very proud that we've gotten the attention and the interest of people around the globe. So thank you again for coming.

Question: Jeffrey, in recent weeks – in recent weeks, say on the stretch of the regular season, the CFL Office has acknowledged that the Replay Com—Replay Command Centre has made errors, late fourth-quarter games that – late fourth-quarter instances that may have really decided some games. What – what are the steps the League Office is taking to improve replay review at the Command Centre to make sure it gets right?

Jeffrey Orridge: Yeah. So we've got to get better. I think that we have done an incredible job with instituting video replay, and we are setting the benchmark for other leagues, and they are taking notice and they're looking to us because we've got a leadership position. Anytime you try something new, you've got to tweak it. Anytime there's innovation, you've got to evaluate it and see how you can get better. So that's what we're going to do in the off season. Like I said, we're going to review the reviews.

Question: How, though? What are you going to do?

Jeffrey Orridge: How – what are we going to do?

Question: Yeah.

Jeffrey Orridge: We're going to get together, we're going to see what worked and what didn't work, we're going to review our systems, our processes, and our personnel, just like we do every year in the off season.

Question: Commissioner, Steve Simmons from the crumbling entity that is Post Media.

(Laughter, applause)

Jeffrey Orridge: But you're still here.

Question: I'm still here. I didn't get the bon--

Jeffrey Orridge: And that's a good (crosstalk).

Question: -- I didn't get the bonus, by the way.

(Laughter)

Question: This has been a Grey Cup Week fraught with problems going back several months, from the original ticket prices to Pizza Pizza of yesterday to freebies hand—being handed out. Does this convince the League that the League must be more involved with Grey Cup, as opposed to handing it off or selling it off to a team and then watching it somewhat crumble, as we've seen in the last several months?

Jeffrey Orridge: Well, I'm sure it's not going to be a surprise to you when I have a – I differ with your characterization of things crumbling. I've got a different perspective on that. I think that – we admit that we made a mistake. We own this collectively, where the ticket prices were originally too high. We made a correction. We listened to the fans, we understood the marketplace a little better, so we made that correction. I think the other thing that you mentioned, you know, in terms of Pizza Pizza, specifically addressing that, that was a situation where it was an unauthorized promotion. When we first learned of it, yesterday afternoon, we immediately sought to correct it, because that was not right and there was nothing that we had to do with it, so we corrected it.

We always give tickets to our corporate sponsors. We always give packages away to people who have been supportive – supportive of us. This is nothing new this year. Right? So ticket giveaways is nothing new. We always do that. The great thing is that we're expecting a full house on Sunday. We know that there's been a tremendous surge in tickets sales from the – from Sunday night, when the final two teams were announced, which is typical in sport. So I think that it's going to be a – once again another great event, another incredible game, and a terrific fan experience. So I don't have any concerns about that.

Question: Jeffrey, Duron Carter bumped into – Gary Lawless from TSN. Duron Carter bumped into Rick Campbell on a Saturday night, you suspended him on a Monday, he appealed – like two days later; he appealed within a week. It was, give or take, eight, nine – eight weeks before an arbitrator finally made a ruling. And you know, a lot of teams said at the time it affected the competitive balance because they're waiting to find out if there was going to be a ruling, and then they'd find out on Wednesday or Thursday there wasn't. And towards the end of that stretch, you know, every week it was the subject of is Carter going to – you know, is the suspension going to be – going to be upheld, is it going to be set aside, and are we going to have to face him. How do you fix this?

Jeffrey Orridge: Yeah. You know, it wasn't just those – those teams who were facing the Montreal Alouettes. It was the Alouettes themselves who had some trepidation and some insecurity about that because of the level of uncertainty. You know, Duron Carter had every right, in accordance to the CBA, to submit for arbitration. Am I disappointed that the process took longer than I would have liked? Absolutely. I made a ruling, like you said, within a couple of days, right? I mean, and that ruling was to suspend. I think the issue that we have right now, and the challenge that we have, is the process itself, in accordance with the CBA, it allows for the arbitration period, which is not really a problem, but there are a finite number of arbitrators who are on the approved list by both the PA and the League. And of that finite group, they're busy. So we had to wait for a number of those things to happen, right? We had to get in the queue. So that's why it took longer. And then you've got to – you've got to amass all the evidence, you've got to present the evidence, and then the arbitrator has to make a very thoughtful decision. So we're kind of at the – at the – we're subject to – to the process, right? Would I like to have it speeded up? Absolutely. I think it would be in the best interest of everyone to have it sped up.

Question: Mr. Commissioner, Bruce Arthur from The Toronto Star. I've got two questions. The first is, in terms of ticket giveaways for this week, that's clearly something that every league does for every championship game. But are you saying that the scale of giveaway tickets this year is typical for a Grey Cup?

Jeffrey Orridge: Well, I'm not – I'm really not privy to what the Argos do on – in taking care of their corporate sponsors, but I know what we do in taking care of ours, and ours has been very typical. It's pretty consistent along the board. So you know, I think the idea is to spur engagement and to get people more involved, and so promotions is all part of the game.

Question: And the second question. In terms of concussions, reporting – the concussion numbers that you have this year seem a fair bit lower than what the NFL is reporting. And the NFL Executive Vice President, Jeff Miller, admitted to a Congressional subcommittee that there was a link between football and degenerative brain injuries. In fact, their – their class action lawsuit admitted that about 30 percent – that was the estimate, 30 percent of players played in the NFL would suffer at some

point from premature brain diseases. Your stance on the science of the game, how much of that is informed by the fact that there is pending litigation against the CFL?

Jeffrey Orridge: You know, I'm – I'm not a medical expert, so I can't really posit a notion about that. I can say that, you know, we are – we're invested in what we're doing in terms of health and safety going forward. I can't speculate or comment on what the NFL's findings have been and what led them to that conclusion. But at this point, you know, it's still – last I heard, it's still a subject of debate in the medical and scientific community. So – and certainly, Bruce, you're aware that I can't comment on any pending litigation, you know, otherwise I would compromise the legal process in this country, and we're not going to do that.

Question: Drew Edwards from The Hamilton Spectator.

Jeffrey Orridge: Hey, Drew.

Question: (Crosstalk) Commissioner. I know you said that you're happy with the state of officiating and how things have improved. The folks in Hamilton might disagree with that. They're concerned that essentially the outcome of a playoff game was dramatically affected by not one but two officiating mistakes in the same game. How specifically are you going to address concerns surrounding officiating, which I think are league-wide, and what would you say to a fan base in Hamilton that feels it may have lost a playoff game because of an officiating mistake?

Jeffrey Orridge: Yeah. You know, these concerns about officiating are not just league-wide; they are worldwide. Right? I mean, every single league wants to get officiating better, and we're all working towards that. I'm as disappointed and frustrated when things don't go right, when mistakes are made. I share the fans' disappointment and frustration, there's no doubt about that. But I think, on balance, our officials do an amazing job. They get the vast, vast majority of calls right. In the event that there's a mistake made, we admit to that mistake. We own up to it. And the only way you can improve is if you admit to making a mistake and try to figure out how to fix it.

So you know, the things that I can say going forward is that we're going to evaluate everything. We're going to evaluate processes, we're going to evaluate systems, we're going to evaluate personnel. Because at the end of the day, as disappointed as we are, I don't think there's anybody more disappointed than the officials who make the mistake, because they're striving for perfection. And sure, I think deep down they know it's unattainable, but that's what – that's why they're in this game. They're in this game to do things right, to be perfect, even though we know that, because we're humans, we will never be perfect. But they're striving to do that, right? So you know, as frustrated or as upset as we may get with a missed call or a mistake, I don't think there's anybody who cares more about being perfect than them. And they're committed to it.

We've got great officials in this League. This game is super fast, these guys are super big, the field is super large. Look, if you've ever been an official – and I can say that I have been. I used to officiate basketball in a lawyers' league, if you can imagine. Oh, my gosh, talk about a hard job. But I can't imagine a harder job than being a CFL official with all the dynamics that are going on. And what we are doing to improve, we have a CFL-NFL exchange program, which has been widely heralded by both sides of the border because these guys are getting more snaps, these guys are getting more experience. We have these guys now working in our training camps. So we're always focused on officiating development. We send clips every day, evaluations. These officials are evaluated on every play for every game. And based on their ratings, they either need more time and more development, so some guys are actually sent back to university, and some guys are promoted with more assignments. Right? So there's always that balance.

And so the goal is to get it right, and that's why we instituted video replay as well. But the goal is to get it right, and sure, we definitely need to improve, and we will improve. We're going to make some fixes, there's no question.

Question: Commissioner, Sean Fitzgerald from The Athletic. We have the sex question every year at the coaches' conference; we have the horse in the lobby of the Royal York every year; and for a lot of years it seems like the tradition has been what's wrong with the CFL in Toronto. The Argos had the new stadium. Why did it seem to fall so flat on so many levels?

Jeffrey Orridge: So if we want to start with the – with the performance on the field, right, it's something that nobody predicted this year. There were certainly high hopes for the team to be much more successful than they were. So when you don't have a winning team in a market, it takes some of the air out of the balloon. That's one thing. I think the second thing is that it was a brand new transition team. If you think about it, even though there were seasoned executives, they were seasoned executives from the League Office that were in charge of running this team. So it takes a while to get up to speed. I think the third thing is you got to figure – you got to put things in context. Where did Toronto start last year, the year before, the year before that? We started deep in our own end zone, really deep in our own end zone. So you know, as much as we would like to open up a packet, put it in water, stir it, and then it's instantaneous, we've got a cake. It doesn't happen that way.

So the signs are good that we are – it's not we're about to rebuild; we are rebuilding. And the conversation that was had two years ago was about when is ownership going to change, when is management going to change, when are we moving out of a cavernous Rogers Stadium, when are we going to be in an intimate setting. And I guarantee you every fan that I've ever spoken to, whether it's at a tailgate in Toronto when I talked through there or at the stadium itself, after the game they've all told me they had an amazing experience, whether the team won or lost. So the goal is, as long as you have a great fan experience, those fans are going to go out and they're going to tell two friends, and they'll tell two friends, and so on and so on, and the goal is

that it's going to build. Because it's a great game, and it's a great experience, and it's a great stadium, and we're going to have better product on the field, there's no question. And we're only as good as every one of our teams. So we still have a vested interest in making sure that our biggest market is successful.

Question: Just a quick follow-up, if I may. The Argos, I think, over the last 16 years have averaged an ownership changeover every four years over that time, which is more than a lot of teams might change a general manager. And every time a new ownership group comes in, it's always been something very similar to that, yet here we are. What sort of things are the Argos doing moving forward to maybe break that cycle?

Jeffrey Orridge: You know, I can't speak to the past, but I can – but I can definitely tell you what I know. What I know is I moved here ten years ago, and I went to some Argo games in Rogers, and it was cavernous. And even though I had great tickets on the 50-yard line, and even though I was like six rows up, I still felt very, very removed from the field. Look at BMO Field. There is no bad seat in the house. You've got great sight lines. It's – it's expanded concourses. It's a great place to view any sporting event. So that's the first thing. The second thing is they've got brand new, committed ownership. I don't think anybody would challenge me when I make the assertion that Larry Tanenbaum is one of the greatest sports mind and greatest passionate people in sport in this country. And you – and you couple that with a partnership with Bell Canada under George Cope, that's a great – that's a great formula for success. Got a brand new stadium; committed, quality ownership with people who really care; and you've got one of the largest markets in Canada. It's a huge opportunity.

So I don't know about the circumstances that existed before, but I can tell you going forward it's got all the elements of success. And it just takes time. Things don't happen overnight. We all wish they – they would have sold out every game. I'm sure the ownership wishes that. I'm sure the management wishes that. The CFL Office certainly wishes that. You know, the other eight teams in the League with that as well. Right? But it didn't happen this year, but let's be optimistic because we know we're doing the right things. All the elements are in place. We are going to get better.

Question: Commissioner, Steve Simmons from The Toronto Sun. You referenced earlier adjusting to a changing media landscape. How – how do you justify having a more restrictive access policy than the NHL, the NFL, the NBA, and Major League Baseball?

Jeffrey Orridge: Well, I don't think it's a matter of justifying it. We're not the NFL or Major League Baseball or the NHL. We are – we – we are the CFL, and we are making – and you know, Steve, we're making steps towards that, right? We want to open up this game as much as possible. We want as much media visibility, as much media interest, and as much media support as we can get. And if that means more

access, that's what we're trying to do. So last year, when Terry brought to my attention that there was a policy that seemed to – and I've had conversations with people like Kirk Penton and other people around the League that have said that the CFL has been migrating slowly towards a more restrictive policy over the years.

The time for us, it's time now to reverse that trend. And that's why we have a new and improved policy which mandates that every club around this – around the League have access one day a week. That's why we're doing things like CFL Week in Saskatchewan, where we do have three days of unprecedented access. The idea is, look, I'm on your side, guys. We need you to promote our game. We need you to tell our stories. Our strategy is – is stars, stories, and big events. And you're the best guys to do it.

Question: But if I can walk into a Major League clubhouse in February and every single day until October, how does one day a week of open access work for you?

Jeffrey Orridge: Well, it – it's certainly not – not equivalent to what other leagues are doing. We're doing what we're doing, and we are continuing to get better. And as I mentioned before, you know, candidly, there are – there – some people think that, you know, more access would interfere with or impede the progress of the product on the field. There are other people who certainly want more access, who feel that promotion and marketing is paramount. So there's always that tension, there's always that balance, but you know, obviously we're working towards more access, right, in the things that we're doing. And it's not just locker room access, like I said.

Question: Jeffrey, hi. Darrell Davis from Rock Already (ph) in Saskatchewan. The Roughriders this year were fined, disciplined for roster restrictions. Could you tell us how you monitor the transactions, the player transactions, and how you can guarantee that something like that won't happen again?

Jeffrey Orridge: Yes, so there are no guarantees, which is why we have a very stringent monitoring system. So we do – we do visits, we have – we do audits, we do annual audits, we do periodic audits throughout the year. The goal is to make sure that there is competitive balance, that there's integrity that's maintained within the League, and that nobody is unduly advantaged or disadvantaged, and that's why we do it. But that's why we have these systems in place. There's – there's no cure, but we certainly – because we have these policies that we follow, I believe it serve as a deterrent effect if people want to step outside the lines.

Question: Do you have representation in all the cities who are attending practices, who are attending games?

Jeffrey Orridge: The League actually runs that, and so we will – we will go in periodically to various – to various markets and evaluate that. But we always have annual audits as well as periodic audits. So – so teams are always under scrutiny,

under a certain level of scrutiny to make sure that their practices are compliant with League rules and that we maintain that level playing field.

Moderator: So I'm just looking at the time. It's 9:30, so we'll take about two or three more questions and we'll wrap this up because you guys have to get on the bus as well. Yes.

Question: Commissioner, could you be specific about where the League is at with the second Edmonton mic, where the mic was worn by Jason Maas but he didn't talk? And like, is that matter closed? What is the opinion you're hearing from other stakeholders in the League? And since that tactic worked for the Eskimos, what would you do if another team employed a similar one next year?

Jeffrey Orridge: So – so the issue the second time around with Coach Maas is he was mandated to wear a mic the second game. That was part of the conditions of the discipline that I met out to him when he violated the first opportunity to wear the mic. So did he comply with the letter of the law? Absolutely. Was he non-compliant with the spirit of – and the intent? Probably. And so that – there's where the complication comes in. So because it was a board mandate, the board will subsequently be meeting on that, and I will orchestrate that. Because we've got to figure out going forward how to ensure the integrity is maintained, that people are in alignment, in compliance, and do the right thing. So I can't give you more details right now, Dave, but – but rest assured we are – we're continuing to look to ways to improve alignment and make sure that – that everything is followed. It's not just the letter, but it's the spirit. Because everybody knows what we were trying to do and why we were trying to do it, and the success that we've had. And we're only as successful as each one of our teams, and we can only be successful as a league if we're all aligned.

Question: Commissioner, this is the third time in ten years the Grey Cup's been in Toronto. You've talked about a revamped process for awarding Grey Cups. Can you explain clearly what the criteria are for cities that want a Grey Cup and how they go about getting that?

Jeffrey Orridge: Yes. So it's kind of been interesting, you know, when I've looked back and I've talked to people about this process. There are some situations, as you know, in the past where Grey Cups have been awarded based on business considerations. There are other situations where it's been based on a strict rotation. There has been a hybrid. There have been certain commitments that we've made to leverage certain opportunities. That's all been done in the past, I understand. We are actually moving now towards more of a hybrid situation, where there will be a bid process. And we have to ensure that communities and provinces and the clubs themselves are all making a concerted effort to make the Grey Cup the best possible. So we're moving towards that bid process.

But at the same time, we want to ensure that all teams continue to get their opportunity to host a Grey Cup because we feel that that's vitally

important as well, you know, to be embedded in the communities and to make sure that there is a rotation. So that's what we're continuing to work on.

Moderator: Last question.

Question: Jeffrey, some of your predecessors have had frustrations dealing with the board of governors, and a piece that Steve had this week, Tom Wright said they didn't listen to me then about the Argos, why would they listen to me now. Do you believe that you have the full confidence and support of your board of governors right now?

Jeffrey Orridge: Yeah. Absolutely. So I've been in this role 18 months. At the end of February I presented a strategic plan for the League for the next five years. It was unanimously endorsed. And we are executing against that plan. And as you can see, look at the progress we've made in the last year. Right? Our website traffic is up 100 percent. We – our television ratings, in an era of cord cutting and cord shaving and cable shaving and all those other things, the fact that there's been unprecedented competition in the marketplace, where in Toronto Canadian sports teams have made these incredible runs in playoffs, all these things going on at the same time, and we've still managed to grow in terms of TV audiences last year to this year.

So the things that we're doing are working. Right? Online, social media, marketing, our television partners, TSN, they've done an incredible job. The cablecam. The Labour Day Classic. They're doing everything they can to augment the broadcast. So we've got great elements in place, and we've got great success stories so far.

Moderator: That's it.

Jeffrey Orridge: OK? Hey, thank you all very much for coming. Thanks for the time. I appreciate it.

(Applause)