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PRINCIPAL(S)/PRINCIPAUX: Randy Ambrosie, Commissioner, Canadian Football League
Olivier Poulin, Master of Ceremonies

SUBJECT/SUJET: CFL Commissioner Randy Ambrosie delivers the 2019 State of the League Address at Grey Cup 2019.

Olivier Poulin: We will have a transcript of this event made available to you as soon as we can have it sent to you. So welcome to the Commissioner's State of the League press conference. I'm Olivier Poulin, Director of Connish—of Communications and Public Affairs at the League office.

Bonjour tout le monde. Bienvenu à cette conférence de presse du commissaire de la Ligue canadienne de football.

I would now like to invite CFL Commissioner Randy Ambrosie to join us on the stage for a quick photo op and then opening remarks.

Alright. Thank you, guys.

Randy Ambrosie: (Off microphone) the most important game, 1993 Grey Cup, I could do that for you. Well, good morning, ladies and gentlemen, mesdames et messieurs. It is an honour and a – and a privilege to be back. This is my third State of the CFL, and I can say, as much as I was terrified the first time, I don't think it gets any – I don't think it – the – there's any less terror today to face the national media. But I also face you with a lot of – with a lot of optimism and a lot of things that I'm – I'm looking forward to talking about with you today.

I thought I might start by just offering greetings from the CFL board of governors and from our teams, and thank all of you in the national media and all of the local media for the work you do to tell our story. It's not lost on us, you know, how important you are to – you know, to our league and – and to getting – you know, getting our story told to Canadians and Canadian football fans. So thank you for that.

I also want to congratulate the two teams that are going to play in the game this weekend, you know, Winnipeg and – and Hamilton. We know one of the great storylines is the two teams with the longest Grey Cup drought – in Winnipeg's case 28

years, and in Hamilton's case 20 years. And boy, these are two really good football teams, and they're kind of built differently. And if you're a football person, I think you'll – you can see a lot of storylines in – in what should emerge on Sunday, and that's – and that's exciting. So you know, best wishes to both teams.

You know, also, before I begin my – my formal comments, I just want to reflect on, you know, what it means to come to Grey Cup, and then I think the significance of being here and doing this event at Grey Cup, and a couple of – couple of things that happened to me this week that really reminded me, you know, why our league is so important, why our game is so important, and why Grey Cup is so important.

And the first is I had a chance on Tuesday morning to do a press conference with – with Alberta Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism, and – and the Status of Women, Minister Aheer. And we were – and we were talking together about the importance – important role that our players play in – on the issue of – of violence against women. And Minister Aheer, you know, made a passionate argument for just how important our players are because they have a tremendous impact on the way young men and men hear – hear the message.

And then yesterday we had a chance to be together with the – the Council of Women's Shelters, Jan Reimer, and the Ending Violence Association, a breakfast. And it was the same message, that – that our players play this critical role in telling that story and – and talking to young – talking to young Canadian men and – and boys about the issue of violence against women. And what it told me and reminded me is just how big our game really is and how important our league really is to this country. And – and I was moved by these amazing women who were speaking out so passionately about the role that our players play in that important issue.

And then last – yesterday I was walking through the – walking through the festival grounds, and this gentleman walks over and asks if he can have a moment. And he told me a story about a friend of his who gave away coins, and it was part of his Grey Cup tradition, and then his friend passed away. And he has – and he has taken up that tradition now. And I guess he went to the mint and bought 700 loonies, and it's his – it's his contribution to what has become this national event called Grey Cup, which – that brings Canadians together. And he wanted me to have one. And again, in that moment I realized just how fundamentally important our game is and how important a role it plays in our – in our ongoing discussion about national unity. Because there is no place you can go in Canada that'll make you feel more Canadian than a Grey Cup. And I plan on carrying this coin with me as a reminder of that important role that our league plays.

So just to kick things off, you know, I – I – there's been a lot of talk over the last, I guess, 16, 18 months about this CFL 2.0 idea. And it was – it's really grounded in four fundamental pillars. The first is, you know, a much more, you know, let's say disciplined business approach, using data and best practices and collaboration. And – and as I think about that particular aspect of – of our – you know, of our 2.0 strategy, I'm reminded. Somebody said yesterday – we were at a – I was speaking at an event, and

they quoted Charles Darwin, who said in the long history of humankind, those who have learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed. And it – it does serve as a – as a great reminder that this idea of the collaboration, that our teams collaborate off the field and compete on. And I think that's a feature of the Canadian Football League that's a credit to our governors, who have come together to – to see a different way to run the Canadian Football League in—into the future.

You know, the second is the try – the – or pardon me, the growth of participation. This is one of the most critical aspects of – of our plan and that – to get more kids playing the game. And if you don't think it's important, then – then you're missing something. You're missing something – you're missing something because football is different than any other sport. Football is the game that you get – last night we saw Brandon Banks, who I don't know, is Brandon a buck-sixty soaking wet? And – and he's – he receives his award after the outstanding offensive lineman received his – his award. And I can tell you he saw a buck-sixty at about 12 years old and – and has gotten bigger since, and all points in between. It is the most inclusive game. It's the game that every kid can play. Every kid can go to a football field and find a home on a football team.

And I hear stories all the time about, you know, young people who are struggling and find their way onto a football team and they – and it – and it becomes home. And that's just one of the many reasons why our Try Football campaign is so important. And we gave away 11,000 footballs this year. And there's some amazing stories about how those footballs were received, and ultimately the impact they can have on young Canadians and get them involved in our game and make their lives better.

You know, the – the third part of the – of the 2.0 strategy is the one that gets most attention, and that's the international strategy. And I think there are lots of reasons, you know, to be curious about it. I'm curious about it myself. I think about it day and night. But a year ago today, standing in this – well, not in this room, but standing, you know, in the same basic venue in Edmonton, we had one international partner, and that was our friends from the LFA in Mexico. And later today we're going to come together with 11 international partners, all of whom have seen value in this idea of working together and collaborating. I couldn't help but think that Charles Darwin might approve of our – of our approach.

And then finally, the last piece that doesn't get talked enough is – is what I call the new approach. And that is I have started a discussion – we have started a discussion – with our players. As you know, we – you know, we successfully completed our CBA negotiations back before training camp started. But I would offer that we need a different way of thinking about our relationship with the players. We have to find a way to engage our players in the – engage them in the fundamental opportunity to grow this game together and be – and be partners in growing the game together, think about our relationship differently. You know, we tend to negotiate with our players on an issues approach, and then it's back and forth, trying to f—you know, trying to find a way to reach an agreement. And I'm – been talking with our player association friends and thinking about a way to embrace them in our 2.0 strategy, in our desire to grow our

game and – and grow our revenues and make them part of it and really engage them in an enthusiastic way around the future of – of football in the CFL. Because we want our players to do better. We want them to make more money, we want them to have a better future for their families. And there's a way to do this if we just put our heads together.

And I had a great meeting a week ago with the CFL governors, and we talked about this very thing, and I got – I got phenomenal support to – to take that idea forward. And I shared that with Brian and Jeff at the PA, that in the days to come we have to start talking about, you know, reorienting our approach around this – this new approach.

I'd say the same holds true for our coaches: that it's time for us, after putting – installing a program that was basically m—bent to in—you know, create good, fundamental business discipline, that it is now time – it's now time to go to our coaches, who are such a critical part – and we heard that last night. You know, Coach O, you know, spoke passionately about the – the role that coaches play. And I was excited for him, and I was proud of him, to be honest, listening to him talk about, you know, the role that coaches play in – in our great game.

And I think this winter, when we get together for our league meetings, we need to s—we need to spend some time with our coaches talking about how we bring them into this opportunity. How do we – how do we make our coaches feel part of our – of our plan to grow our league and – and allow them to – to do better, and ultimately, you know, to – like everybody, and all of you in this room, we all want to look after our families. And we find a way together to do that. And I'm looking forward to it.

And then the third leg of that same stool is our alumni. I – I believe we can do more. I believe our alumni can do more. I believe our alumni want to do more: you know, to greet fans in the stadium, to make fans feel welcome, to reach out, as Jim Lawson so beautifully said, you know, really the future is about the new Canadians. It's making the new Canadians feel as much a part of the CFL as – as the generations who have been fans of our league for, you know, the past many decades, Reaching into those communities is going to take an army of people. It's going to take all the players, it's going to take the coaches, it's going to take the alumni, all of us together, reaching into those communities, not just advertising, not just sending out a flyer, not just – not just, you know, putting a pamphlet in somebody's mailbox and telling them that there's a game on Thursday night, but a real reach-out to those communities to tell them our history, as Jim pointed out last night, to explain our history.

There's lots of research to suggest and support that new Canadians have a strong desire to feel more Canadian, and I can promise you this. I think this is the greatest opportunity we could possibly can – could possibly being put in front of us because this is Canada. What's happening this week in Calgary, what happens in our stadiums across the coast, what happens coast to coast, is Canada. This is – this league stands for everything that's good about our country. We are the country that builds bridges. We are the country that is inclusive. We are the country where a Hamilton Tiger-Cat fan

today somewhere, you know, on these grounds, will stand next to a Bomber fan, and they'll have a beer together. That's – that's the CFL, and that's Canada, and we need to reach into those communities, and that's a big part of the 2.0 strategy.

And we've got to think bigger. And I won't be apologetic for that. I won't ever apologize for thinking big for this league because I've been around it my entire life and I've always felt that we can do more. I've always felt that we've punched below our weight. I've always believed that we – our destiny is to be a big league, not a small one. And we can – have to think bigger, and we will.

You know, on that note, somebody pointed out to me this morning – it was actually my dear friend Matt Maychak – and I asked about the venue, and he says well, it's a theatre. It's the Bryce [sic] Theatre. And it's – you – he says you could actually – and here he comes. He said you could actually put on *The Death of a Salesman* in that theatre. And I went wow. I – I wonder if that isn't foreshadowing today's State of the CFL. But I'll never, ever, ever apologize for being the biggest cheerleader for this league. I couldn't imagine a more important purpose for the person that occupies this role, to believe in its future and to promote this great game, and to promote our players and coaches. So I'm committed to that ideas. And we are no longer the much smaller of two; we're the second-biggest of many. Get used to that idea. We're no longer this much smaller of two; we're the second-biggest of many.

We're about global partners. We're about global players who can stand, as was beautifully said last night, can stand shoulder-to-shoulder with their Canadian – with their Canadian teammates and their American teammates and take this game to new levels of success. Those global partners are important because, as we saw just a few weeks ago, the – our friends at the LFA are now going to welcome 25 Canadian players to play in the LFA this – this coming season. And that's about growing our game and giving Canadian football players more opportunities.

Playing football and being a Canadian football player cannot just be about playing in the CFL. It has to be about more than that. And I think we should all collectively s—all set our sights on being able to tell the stories of 25 and then 50, 75, and a hundred and – and so on Canadian players that are living out their football dream in other parts of the world, and perhaps taking a little bit of Canada with them along the way, and being ambassadors for our game and ambassadors for our country. And I can get really excited about that because that's a fundamental commitment to Canadian football by creating more jobs, more jobs for Canadian players.

We are now and will be the world's largest global football league. The world's largest global football league is the CFL. We had – we had nine players on our active rosters this year and two practice roster spots. That's 27. This coming year we'll have two global spots with three practice roster spots. That's 45. We're the biggest global football league in the world, and we have to start thinking like that and we have to start acting like that. It is time for some good, old-fashioned CFL swagger to acknowledge and recognize our place in this – in this sports landscape and be proud of it.

You know, I think it's also about leading the way and being leaders, but being leaders in the Canadian way: by building partnerships around the world; by not descending on our partner nations like an evil empire, but rather working together; by reaching out; by offering a hand of friendship, which is something that comes so naturally to all of us in this room, that we are the nation that can lead the world. We are about building friendships, and we're about caring about our neighbours. We're about inclusion. We're – and we are the most welcoming nation on the planet. And I think that this approach to our football ecosystem will pay handsome dividends in the days ahead.

And you have to earn that right to be a leader, and that's by doing things well. It's by standing by your word. It's by being authentic. It's by being genuine. It's by being – it's by being Canadian. And ultimately, the long-term goal is that this helps to re-energize the football market in Canada, that it helps to – it helps to attract new generations of Canadians. We've tried the old approaches in our biggest markets, and largely it hasn't worked. It's time for a new approach. It's time to be big.

You know, I'm – I – I'm struck by this amazing young woman, Canadian woman, Bianca, who – you know, she won the Rogers Cup. And I think we gave her a very polite, you know, Canadian clap, appreciating her success, and then she wins the US Open and she's a national hero. And what does that tell us? It tells us Canadians like big things. Canadians want big things. Canadians want to cheer for big things. I th—I don't know how many million people there were at the Raptors parade. A lot of them, I can tell you, I don't know that they've seen that many free throws in their life. But they wanted to be part of something big, and they were. And that's our opportunity. That's what the CFL needs to be like going into the future.

And ultimately, it has to still set on the foundation that we are proudly Canadian, and that our Canadian players are always going to be part of our future, and we're looking for ways to help them grow. But we're going to set this whole thing on the fact that we are proudly Canadian and global. That's the – that's the new way. That's CFL 2.0. So with that, I thank you all for letting me make some opening comments, and I'm happy to open it up now to questions.

Olivier Poulin: Alright. So we're going to take questions. Please raise your hand so I'm able to see you. Folks on that side of the room, I have lights in my eyes so I might not be able to see you much but I will get to you. Please identify yourself and the media you are representing when – we're going to start with Terry Jones with the first one.

Question: You kind of touched on this right off the go, your intro there. But from a personal point of view, if you look at – at your seasons as a Commissioner so far, the first two I think were du—were exceptionally positive. I th—I think it was almost like a honeymoon period, some people might – This year there are all sorts of speed bumps to deal with: the Montreal ownership; the declining attendance in several areas; the – you know, the not-smooth trip to get things going in Halifax, if they're going

to get going, yada-yada-yada. What's this been like personally, to be the Commissioner this year, as opposed to the previous two?

Randy Ambrosie: Yeah, Terry, thanks. That's actually a very good question, and I've thought about it. And – and I'd say as I look back on my career, you often find that there are kind of almost two different – two different environments you – you work in as a – as a CEO of a business. You know, sometimes you're doing the things you want to do, and that's really the forward-looking things. That's the stuff on the horizon, and it's so exciting. And you – you get to spend a lot of your – your personal energy on that forward-looking stuff. And then there are times you have to do the stuff you have to do. You know, it's more of the blocking and tackling. And – and I think this was a year a lot like that second part of – of a CEO's life, where you had to focus more on the stuff you have to do.

But Terry, the reason – the reason the other stuff, the reason why the stuff that you want to do is so important, because it's the – it's what – it's what sustains you. It's the part that allows you to see beyond the day-to-day. It gets you excited about, hey, we're going to find solutions to these current issues, and then we're heading into the future with this big – you know, into this big opportunity. So they're both necessary parts of a – of an executive's life. You have to be able to move between the have-to-dos and the want-to-dos. But I'll tell you, the want-to-dos, that's the beacon. That's the North Star. That's what – that's what keeps you going, because you know that the things you're working on are being – are being worked on with purpose.

But it – but it was, without a doubt, it was a different year of the three that I've had in this role. It was a different year, but it was also filled with a great many rewards. And again, as I go back to my earlier comments, we're also today going to be joined by 11 partners. So while we did a lot of the stuff we had to do, we've also been advancing on the stuff that we want to do that – that are important to our future. But thank you for the question.

Olivier Poulin: We're going to go to Steve Simmons, completely over there to the left.

Randy Ambrosie: Oh, hi, Steve.

Question: Three years on the job now. Why have the league, the Argos, the giant that's Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment failed to build Canadian football in Canada's largest city more than it has?

Randy Ambrosie: Well, Steve, I'd actually argue that they've had some early successes. Theirs is a business plan that is designed to be methodical. They're – they never, and I don't think we ever, should have imagined that any of the things we're working on, no matter how excited we are about them, were ever going to be defined by, you know, essentially a toggle, that we were just going to toggle the switch and all was going to be good.

The situation that Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment inherited was created over a very long period of time. Look, I played – I played in Toronto in 1987 and 1988, and I played at Exhibition on Saturday afternoons. And I can tell you I'm pretty sure there was anywhere between 40 and 45,000 fans at Exhibition. And Steve, I think you were one of them because you've been around the Argos for a very long time. But that move to the SkyDome – and it was a slow decline, and then there's a lot of competition that the – you know, came into the market.

So the problem wasn't created overnight and won't be solved overnight. But what I can tell you is I could not have imagined a better partner for this league in Toronto than Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment. And we are dis—having discussions with them, and that's why what I call the new approach is so important. We can't ask the Toronto Argonauts, nor can we ask the BC Lions, nor could we ask the Montreal Alouettes, to solve their market problems by themselves. This is not a – this not a Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment challenge. This is a CFL challenge. This is an all-of-us challenge. W—it's why we've got to create an army of committed and passionate partners to march into this massive market. We've got to get into classrooms; we've got to go see grade four kids and grade five kids and grade six kids, and we've got to tell them the story of our great game. We've got to take footballs.

There's a tremendous story, one that struck me is – was Hamilton. And they brought footballs to a school, and it was an inner-city school, lots of – lots of first-generation Canadian kids. And the parents dressed these – dressed these girls, th—and their head scarves were yellow because their parents wanted them to be Ti-Cats. And – and that is the opportunity in Toronto. That's the opportunity to get into those communities that might not know us today and invite them to be not – I don't want to send them a flyer. I don't want them to see an ad in the newspaper. I want them to be actually invited by a human being that loves our game. And they're – you know, look, it's the biggest market in the country. It's not going to take a lot to – to move the needle there. But it's going to take a har—lot of hard work and effort.

So – so Steve, I think your question is – I think you're asking the right question, but I'd say it's not a Toronto Maple Leafs Sports and Entertainment problem; it's an all-of-us problem. And I believe the answer is to gather an army and go into those communities and tell them our story. As Jim Lawson so aptly put, tell them the history. Explain why this game is so important to Canada. Explain some of these quintessential moments that so many of us identify with. And then talk about the future with them being part of it. I think that's the answer in our – in our major markets, and it's something that we're deeply committed to.

Olivier Poulin: Alright, the next question will be Dave Naylor, followed by Farhan Lalji. We'll go to CTV Calgary, and then Didier Orm ejuste from Montreal.

Question: Randy --

Randy Ambrosie: I can't see you. Sorry, Dave.

Question: Over here. To your left.

Randy Ambrosie: OK.

Question: Up left.

Randy Ambrosie: Oh, there you are. Hi, Dave.

Question: As part of the – the recent – most recent CBA, there's an NFL window for players to audition for NFL opportunities. You – although we understand that that arrangement is not done with the National Football League in terms of allowing players to go down there while CFL teams would retain their rights. What happens if this is not solved in another month or so, or another few weeks, and players want to start working N—for NFL teams and aren't clear whether or not they're free agents or free to do so?

Randy Ambrosie: Yeah. Dave, again, a good question. You know, I think the answer is that as soon as we finish Sunday night – and this is – I – I was the – I don't know, like, when one of those moments you wish you could take back, I said, you know, the Grey Cup ends and then you don't go into the off season, you go into the business season. And I kind of wish I could take that back. Should of kind of promoted for about a two-month real off season. But I think, Dave, the answer is that on Monday morning we have to – we have to start looking at some of these issues that – that one in particular, and figure out where we stand and – and what the solution is.

But I – I think it raises a more important point, and that is I want to change the very way we – we go at these issues and – and talk to our player association, you know, with – with Brian and with Jeff, and talk to them about how it all affects the future. So I th—I – I don't know what the answer, Dave, to that issue is today, but I'll tell you that's a Monday morning – that's a – well, not – maybe not, you know, the, like, literally after two Tim Horton's for sure. But that's a Monday morning issue and one that we're going to have to tackle quickly.

Randy Ambrosie: Farhan.

Question: Randy, right up here as well, next to Dave.

Randy Ambrosie: Hi. Hi, Farhan.

Question: Just want to ask you about the BC Lions' situation revolving David Braley and any potential sale. You know, it appears as Mr. Braley gets healthier he wants to be even – even more involved, but has still talked about selling the team. Is there any progress on how involved are you and the league in trying to facilitate that?

Randy Ambrosie: Yeah, Farhan, thanks. So I'm – I'm happy to report that Rick LeLacheur and David have asked me to participate in the process, and I've had a

chance to meet some remarkable people who are interested in – in owning that team. Those conversations are ongoing, and – and I've had follow-up discussions with a number of them. I – I expect, again, that's probably a Tuesday morning conversation between Rick and I and David to, you know, kind of where are we with those various groups and what do we – you know, what do we need to talk about next.

But I sense in David, you know, first of all, you'll – you'll never – David will never yield his love for our league, never, because he is – you know, he has been such a big part of everything that's been – been good about us. But my sense is that David is committed to the sale of the team, and now we just have to find the right partner, and – and David has to work out the business deal. But I expect that, you know, again, it's kind of hard for some of these things to happen in the – in the midst of all the noise of – of the playoffs and the Grey Cup, but I – I expect that those conversations will intensify, you know, in the – in the coming weeks.

Olivier Poulin: We'll go to CTV Calgary (crosstalk).

Question: Hi there. Chris Epp with CTV Calgary. If I could have you shift back in the light, sir, just for the camera (crosstalk) --

Randy Ambrosie: Oh, sure. Sure.

Question: We've had a couple of high school football programs here fold the last two years, and the – the main reason we hear is parents are worried about their kids and worried about concussions. How do you combat that? How do you grow the game when that's what you're dealing with?

Randy Ambrosie: Yeah. So it goes back to – and thank you for the question. I – I think it goes back to what we – what I was describing earlier. Look, I think Try Football – I think Try Football is the answer. It's so grassroots. Kids need to throw a football. They need to experience the thrill of the spiral, making a first catch, you know, running for a touchdown, just plain having fun. I think what we're – we've got to work with our amateur football partners. Contact football is being played. It's safer now than it ever has been, and it keeps getting safer. The tackling techniques are so totally different.

We have a bit of a perception problem, and – and that issue of concussions has been identified as a football issue; it's not. Talk to doctors all across this country, and they'll tell you concussions are coming from virtually every sport on the planet, and they're coming from well outside the – the sporting realm. Lots of people are – are suffering concussions from all kinds of things. This is a problem that we have to take on together. But we have been – you know, I think there is a perception that ours is a more acute problem. And I – I don't believe that's the case. But we need to get kids to play in whatever way their parents are comfortable with, and that might be flag football. And you know what? I'm OK with that. If you get a bunch of kids that are enjoying flag

football and throwing the ball around, that will be their stepping stone. And maybe the – maybe they move to contact football a little later in life.

But I think the answer is what we – what we did this year. It is so grassroots. And this maybe has been what's been missing for, you know, the last five to ten years, is we haven't done enough. We go to schools and find that they don't have footballs in their – in their gymnasiums, that their phys ed teachers don't have them to hand out. They don't have them on the curriculum. And those are things that I think we can do to change that paradigm.

So I think, as much as that is a disappointing – it's a disappointing news, it's also an opportunity. Let's go back into those schools and let's send – let's orient them to a different way of playing football. Because I don't – I don't – it's doesn't matter to us how kids play our great game, just as long as they're playing it. Thank you.

Olivier Poulin: The next question will be from Didier Orm ejuste, then we'll go to Scott Stinson, Jeff Hamilton, and Danny Austin. Didier?

Question: Hey, Randy.

Randy Ambrosie: (Crosstalk)

Question: Randy? Just here.

Randy Ambrosie: Oh (inaudible).

Question: In early June you said that you're negotiating with one group of potential owners for the Alouettes. Then in August you said that there was more than two groups that you were negotiating with. Now here we are, Grey Cup week, no announcement have been made. What can you tell us about, you know, the Alouette sale? Where are you in the process, and can we expect an announcement to be made shortly?

Randy Ambrosie: Yeah, Didier, thank you for the question. And – and you know, I – I've – I come from the investment industry, where I spent, you know, almost three decades, and I know that these transactions take time. You know, I would confess that I would have liked to have gotten this – the sale of the Alouettes done sooner. But we've been in discussions with a number of very strong groups, going back all the way to May. We are in a very encouraging – I'm very optimistic that the conversation we're in today is going to yield a successful outcome. But you know, you get down to those last steps in the process, and there's lots of Is to dot and Ts to cross. Again, I can't – I can't commit to a timeframe, I can't commit to a date, but what I can say is I am very optimistic the – the – that the group we are in an active discussion with today are deeply committed. They are remarkably – they are a remarkably strong group. They would bring a whole host of capabilities to an ownership situation in Montreal.

Didier, I – I don't know the answer specifically. What I can tell you is there's an amazing commitment being made by the Canadian Football League to getting this done, and – and an equal commitment by the group that we're in discussions with, and that process continues. And – and I hope to have a successful announcement sometime in the next few weeks.

Question: Can you tell us if the Lancrofts (ph) are part of that group, and who is part of that group?

Randy Ambrosie: Yeah. I – I'm ba—basically, by way of an agreement we have, we're not – you know, we're not at liberty to reveal who is in or – or not in that group. They are flying under the – under the – the name of the Montreal Alouettes Ownership Group. And – but we've made an agreement with them: we won't reveal, you know, who's in or not in their group for – you know, until such time as they're ready to do that.

But again, you know, we are hoping – and – and you know, perhaps a reset of how different the situation is today than the one we faced before – you know, before kickoff. You know, we've got this success that happened in Montreal that culminated with 21,000 fans at the Eastern Final. RDS ratings in Quebec were up 24 percent this year, which is amazing. We've got this incredible football coach in Khari Jones that seems to have inspired these young players. You've got a – and brilliant young quarterback in Vernon Adams that literally looks like he's got some magician training, and he was fun to watch.

The situation is so different than the one we faced in – you know, in – in the early season. And at some point, the season is a hard time to be doing this. So again, I think the honest answer to your question is we feel – we feel like we're close. We know we still have a little bit of work to do, and that work will – that work will continue through the weekend and into the early parts of the – the next coming weeks, and we hope to have a successful announcement before too long. Thank you.

Olivier Poulin: Next question will go to Scott Stinson. We have nine questions on the list right now, so we're going to try to go through all of them. If you have a question, now's the time to tell me so I can manage that accordingly. Scott?

Question: Hey, Randy. You have the – you have the 27 global players this year, and up to 45 next year. How much do you think those players actually need to get on the field and be impactful in games in order to have that second phase of, you know, broadcasting deals and people in other countries who might actually want to tune in to CFL games to see these players play?

Randy Ambrosie: Yeah. Yeah, you know, ag—again, I think it's a great question. And I'd say the answer lies in some – some of it is awareness in their own ma—in their own markets that they're playing. And that's why we're talking to our international partners about how do we tell that story. You know, how do we tap into

their existing fan bases? I – I had an opportunity several weeks ago to attend the German Bowl in Frankfurt. Twenty-one thousand fans attend their national championship game. It was inspiring. They had a festival, a game day festival, that was just – it was awe-inspiring, how big the game is growing there. We have to tap into those markets.

Look, I think that – you know, I'm – I'm often – I often reflect on the way we came at this, and – and you know, we made a decision that this was going to be an important opportunity for the league, and we took a first step. And I would confess that we didn't have it all figured out. It's not like we were – not like we had an entire playbook. We just said let's take a step. You know, as somebody s—once said, you know, great is the enemy of good. We take that first step because we th—it's at least we're tat—going in the right direction.

I'd say we've had some – some success this year. This winter, I think, is the next big step. You know, as you know, we've hired a new Director of Global Scouting, really a lo—have a lot of buy-in from our teams. They were part of the selection process. So Greg's going to, you know, head out, and we're – we've got scouting combines around the world. I – the – our – our partner federation and leagues that are part of 2.0 are all – are all telling us they've got some great kids they're excited to show us, you know, this winter at their scouting combines, so we're excited. We just think what we're going to do is get to training camp and have a much bigger pool of talent. And from that, I – I think it's going to take that first star. I think it's going to take that first player.

And – and you know, the – we had s—in Winnipeg, with Thiadric S—Hansen, you know, and – and some of the success he's had this year. And one of the really encouraging things is to hear Coach O'Shea talk about him. S—Coach O'Shea says, you know, the players just love him. He's this hardworking kid. He loves the game of football. I actually saw him last night, and he was just beaming. He's playing in the Grey Cup. So I think the answer is, you know, this – that first – that first breakout player who's going to – going to really, you know, have – leave a mark on the game, that's probably where we'll see the next big – the first big real rise in our international attention, will be these kids who come and – and start having some, you know, notable on-field success. And I think that's going to help us along the way. But – but it – you know, it's going to come because we attract more – more talent, and that's what this winter is all about. But thank you for the question.

Olivier Poulin: Jeff Hamilton?

Question: Hey, Randy. Obviously, la—in the off season, it was no secret there was – there was a strain between the players and the league as they were working through a new agreement. We're not quite a year from that moment, but can you kind of ta—talk about that relationship with the players, where it's gone from there? And, as a second, it's now been – again, not been a year, but we still don't have a copy of the – of the CBA. the new – the new things that have come in, the cancellation of the

game, was kind of brought out of nowhere, and we found out that it was in the agreement yet we don't know what those – what that agreement looks like.

Randy Ambrosie: Yeah. Jeff, maybe I'll just deal with the second part first and tell you that there was a lot of language that was new in the agreement, so you know, there was a back-and-forth basically all season long. Steve Shamie's going to give me heck for this later, but you know, lawyers get billed by the hour, so sometimes it takes them time to get these things done. And I love St—where's Steve? Steve, are you in the room? Yeah, there's my buddy. Steve – Steve is never comfortable unless I give him a hard time at least once. But Steve, I think we can say that – that the language has all been now hammered out and we've – you know, we have the final – final, final version. So you know, that – that will now find its way into the public domain. But it did take some time to get to that.

I think the question you asked, Jeff, about the – about the relationship is – is also an important one. And I guess when you – you – I – you try to go into almost everything I do with a real, you know, sense of optimism and a – and a positive feeling. I think I was surprised, you know, that in the negotiation there is a lot of tension, and it doesn't always – doesn't always reflect on the fundamental rel—relationship; it's just in the moment there's a lot of frayed edges. And you know, what Brian and Jeff and I have talked – and Steve and I have talked about with them is about a reset, you know, about – about just recognizing that we are going to win together. The best way to win is to win together. The best way to build a future is to do it together.

And – and I've shared with them my – my own ambitions for our players. I want to see our players do better; I really do. I – I think that w—as we grow the game, we should have a real appetite for our players to enjoy the benefits of that success. And you know, we've got the early stages of a plan. I've talked to Brian and Jeff openly about our desire to try to come at this differently. I think they're very willing partners, and they've got such a positive attitude about – about the 2.0 strategy, so I'm encouraged by that.

So I do feel like we're now kind of coming out of that fog and – and into a – and into clear skies, but it's going to take hard work. You know, there's never going to be an easy – you know, like, just a cookie cutter solution to how we do this. But I believe that if we set our minds right, if we think about each other in a positive way, if we don't walk in with swords but walk in with a sense of – with a sense of friendship, I think that we can do a lot together. And I feel the same way about working with our coaches and our non-player football operations staff. I feel the same way about working with our alumni. Just let's get together and build an army that want the same thing: a big, strong CFL. Because if we get into every nook and cranny of this country, we're going to find our way to, you know, a few million more fans that'll make our game even stronger.

Question: I just have one more. I mean, over the last couple of years player safety's been a big topic, and – and the face of that player safety, I guess, argument or – or debate has been Jonathan Hefney. And we've talked about him for years as the guy, and – and this past year, a guy who didn't get the off-season

coverage that players are now afforded – you know, kudos to the league for – for getting that in place. But now a guy who, again, the CFL's not responsible for his actions, but got into some legal issues, and a lot of people, a lot of players talked about him being a stand-up guy and that the result of him not being helped out by this league is the reason why, at – at least in part, is the reason where he is today. And I just wanted to know from you, Randy, if – what the league takes away from that experience, a guy who was the face of this player safety, who unfortunately has – has a sad ending here.

Randy Ambrosie: Yeah, Jeff. I don't think there's a person in this room that – that wouldn't have – that wouldn't say they'd feel bad that Jonathan's found, you know, trouble in his life. And – and I'm – I shared a locker room with a lot of players, and, you know, many of whom are friends of mine today, and many that I've lost contact with. And of course what you'd want for all of them is a good life. You want them to take all the things that we learn from the game and the benefits we got from, you know, learning the lessons of the game into a – into a more successful after – you know, afterlife. It – it clearly didn't happen for Jonathan. And for that, I think we can all just say that's a tragedy.

You know, I think what we learned is what ultimately came out of this year's CBA, is, you know, we – we have to think about this issue differently. It was really the first time we were confronted with it. You know, Jonathan Hefney's situation was essentially a flashpoint for a different kind of discussion. You know, and credit to our – credit to our team and credit to the players for recognizing that and coming together and finding a solution so now, you know, the players – the American players are now covered for three years. And that's a big step in the right direction.

So I think, Jeff, I think that's the learning, is that – and you know, may—and maybe in – maybe going forward we can get ahead of it even, you know, as opposed to dealing with it after, get ahead. And that's why the having a different type of relationship is important. Maybe we can find solutions together. But thank you.

Olivier Poulin: Danny Austin?

Question: Randy, why are players who test positive for banned substances eligible for end-of-season awards? It would seem like that should be an obvious disqualifier.

Randy Ambrosie: Yeah. You can – and my honest answer is I – I had not thought about it. I don't know that we had thought about it, you know, prior to – prior to what happened, you know, this – this past few weeks with – with Trevor Harris. And I would offer this. And Jim Lawson – Jim, where are you? Jim is standing there. And Jim – Jim reminds me all the time, you know, all the work we have to do. And – and the thing that I'd say, this has to be something we talk about with the players this off season is – is, you know, should we – should we think about it differently. You know, obviously, fir—you know, first of all, I'd say I'm exc—I'm excited to watch Andrew play this

weekend. He's – he's definitely one of our game's stars, and I'm excited to see him play in – in the Grey Cup this weekend. But we hadn't thought about it. And it's something that, again, I think it's not maybe a Monday morning issue but it is definitely s—I think a conversation we will have with the players in the weeks to come.

Question: And secondly, just quickly, Dave Dickenson had some fairly strong words about this NFL window and about how he felt that it was the league almost devaluing itself a little bit. With what you were talking about, about the CFL getting some swagger back, how does it fit into that – that vision that we're now sort of saying first-year players who teams invest in have the option of leaving so quickly?

Randy Ambrosie: Yeah. Well, I'm a Dave Dickenson fan, and I find no – I – I understand his frustration. Look, I – I'd like to find a way to get our players – and this is I – what I hear from fans all the time. The fans want our players to play. They want our players to stay in the communities. They want these long-term relationships, and in part because our players are so amazing and they do this work in the community so fantastically, and they basically become part of the community, and they want them to stay longer.

And part of the challenge we face is a good challenge, and that is that most people don't appreciate how good our players are and how close they are to NFL – to the NFL. I mean, we're seeing players back and forth, back and forth all the time. Our – our players are world-class athletes. And when they have that chance to – to – you know, to go to the NFL, as – you know, particularly, you know, the Americans who kind of grow up in that environment, I'd – I'd like to see them have opportunities to – to do that.

But you know, this is something that was done in consultation with all of our GMs. So it wasn't a – wasn't an – a unilateral decision that was made by – you know, ma—by one or two people. It really was done in consultation with the teams. They felt it was a way to attract more players who could see the CFL as a way to continue their pro football careers and maybe – maybe, if successful, they – they'd have a chance for – you know, for their NFL dream. So it's something we have to keep thinking about and talking about. I don't know that we'd all – so many of the things that we do you – you try to take a step in the right direction, but you have to learn from it. You have to acknowledge that sometimes what you thought was the answer isn't. So then you have to reset and sit down and discuss it. I – and I think that this is one of those topics. But – but thank you.

Olivier Poulin: Before we go to Global, in your question and answer, the first question that Danny asked, you mentioned Trevor Harris. I think you meant Andrew Harris. (Crosstalk).

Randy Ambrosie: An—did I say? Sorry, I – I meant Andrew. Yeah.

Olivier Poulin: Yeah, sorry, Just to – allow me to correct that. We'll go to you.

Question: Sorry, I don't have a lot of hands here. Cami Kepke from Global News. Just to add on to what Danny said, what would you say to coaches who feel like they're developing players only to see them leave for the NFL? The Stampeders lost two players last year; they could lose three this year. How do you reassure those coaches? And do you feel like this could hurt franchises?

Randy Ambrosie: Yeah, again, it's a great question. You know, on – on one hand you are so excited for the players. I mean, this is their – they're amazing athletes, and of course they're being noticed. And again, it just reminds us that our game is as good as foot—football being played anywhere in the world, including the NFL. And some of these players are going to have opportunities because they perform so well. I think in this particular case in Calgary, it's – it's evidence of a – it's evidence of a scouting and talent protocol that is – that is finding these amazing players. I mean, this is one of the reasons why John Huffnagel has a 72 percent winning record. He – he has been able to restock the pond as well as anyone has, really. You know, maybe – maybe – and – and he won the Hugh Campbell Distinguished Leadership Award last night, maybe because John's as good at doing this as Hugh Campbell was.

And I don't think we – I don't think anyone wants to prevent these athletes from fulfilling their dreams. But on the other hand, we have to balance that off with the fact that we want to keep great players in this league, and that's why we have to grow our game. We have to grow our game, and we have to grow – we have to grow our revenue base. We've got to find a way, working with the players, for our players to make more money. Because the single biggest defence against people leaving for more money is to pay them more money here. And we're only going to do that, we're only going to get that done, if we work together. And that's something we want to sit down with the players in the days ahead and talk about.

Question: And just one from our colleagues in the Maritimes. Just wondering, are things progressing as you would like on the Halifax expansion, and is the league considering a conditional franchise offer this year, or is it waiting on the stadium vote at city council?

Randy Ambrosie: Yeah, there's the – you know, the understanding with our friends at Schooner Sports and Entertainment is there was always going to be the – you know, the discussions of where do we go next always have to be based on, you know, the stadium issue being resolved. I believe that vote is going to be held by Halifax Regional Council on December the 10th. I was sharing messages with Anthony LeBlanc just in the last couple of days, and, you know, what I'm encouraged by is the dialogue they've had with Ha—you know, Halifax Regional Council. They've been doing a lot of learning. There's been a lot of – a lot of adjustments made to their plan that I think have helped to bring – to bring about much positive energy, much-needed positive energy, to the program.

So you know, we are optimistic that they – that stadium will be approved. We will then immediately move into a full business planning, you know, just make sure that every I is

dotted and T is crossed. That'll be done in collaboration and partnership with Spo—Schooner Sports and Entertainment. And – and then we'll take that to our governors and show our governors, OK, now that we've got the stadium, we – it's hard to build a business plan until you know what the stadium is going to look like. Because the stadium is at the epicentre of your – you know, of your business model. So to get that done, you just very quickly and intensely work with them to get that done, and we'll take it to our governors. I'm optimistic.

But I would also say this. We should always be in Atlantic Canada. In some way, somehow, some way, we should always be there because those are great football fans. Our ratings in Atlantic Canada were up 50 percent this year. And we went there for a football game and we bra—and embraced them, and they embraced us back. And you know what? As far as I'm concerned, we've got to find a way to be there. We – we are hoping for a stadium. And we're hoping for our tenth team. But I'd like to say to the people of Atlantic Canada you are part of the CFL family. We are in fact a coast-to-coast league. And – and we're going to find creative ways, if not through an – a franchise right now, but we're going to find creative ways to be there. We're going to go back to Halifax and talk to the – Mayor Savage. We're going to go back to Halifax and talk to the Premier. We're going to find a way to be in Atlantic Canada. We're going to Hali—find a way to be in – in Nova Scotia and in New Brunswick and in every part of that great part of our country because there's a lot of football fans there, and we need to embrace them. But thank you.

Olivier Poulin: Alright, next question will go to Glen Suitor, followed by Darrell Davis (crosstalk) --

Question: Hey, Randy.

Olivier Poulin: -- and we're going to end it with Dave Naylor. We're also going to hold the media shuttle.

Question: Hey, Randy. Yeah, up here. Just kind of a two-parter on football ops. Is there going to be any more discussion, or is it sort of locked in, with regards to the third quarterback? A guy like Cody Fajardo started there and developed, and it's such an important position to make sure we're developing the next guy. The other – the other one was you mentioned the partnership with coaches. Is there any discussion, or could there be, on the possibility of a coaches' pension being worked in if a coach is in the Canadian Football League for a certain amount of time? And the last part maybe, if Atlantic Canada does get a team, and we all hope it does, would there be any tweaking of the ratio? I know you said that Canadians will always be part, and I – I think we all believe that, but could there be any tweaking in the Canadian ratio?

Randy Ambrosie: Wow. (Off microphone). I – I've only had one coffee, so I've got to say that's – but it was a Tim Horton's coffee. (Laughter). Just – no, so just, you know, on – on the – you know, on the last issue, you know, we haven't talked about

But Glen, I think you raise an important issue, and that is, you know, this is another one of those things we should talk about. We should make sure – and I know Steve, who would – would agree, sometimes your ideas, you find that there are unintended consequences. And you'd want to be sure that if you – if something that was done because you thought it was the right thing, and it hasn't exactly played out, then you go back and say OK, let's – how do we fix that? So what I think you're hopefully seeing from us is we're trying to – I don't know that we've ever had arrogance, but we're trying to be somewhat humble in our approach to these issues so that we don't go in with a predetermined answer, we go in think—looking for the answer. And if we do that, I think we're going to come out better for it. And thank you, Glen.

Olivier Poulin: Darrell Davis?

Question: Randy, over here.

Randy Ambrosie: Hi.

Question: Hi, Randy. As a way to make the game safer, to create more room to score touchdowns and change the kicking strategy, have there ever been any discussions about moving the goalposts to the back of the end zones?

Randy Ambrosie: Well, interestingly enough, there were lots this past weekend.

Question: I bet there were. I bet there were.

Randy Ambrosie: In fact, I had 75 Riders fans that were willing to get a blowtorch and take the goalposts down late in the game. But no, all kidding aside, we haven't had that discussion about the goalposts. It did of course flash last weekend, you know, with what had to be one of the most interesting game-ending situations we've seen in a long time.

But you know, you raise a good – you raise a good point, and that – that takes me to something that we're about to launch. And Greg – Greg Dick – Greg, you're in the room? Yeah, there's Greg. Greg is about to lead a process that we're calling our – an – an innovation committee. And we're going to bring together coaches and GMs and team presidents. We're going to bring together our broadcast partner at – at TSN. And we're going to sit in a room and we're going to ask each other the questions of what could we do. What could we do to make the game better?

You know, on the kicking game this year, I think we had – did we have 11 more – did – is that right? Did we have 11 more kick returns for touchdowns this year than we did last year? I think that is one of the best parts of our game, and it – and it is a great part of it because the field is big. And it – and it creates lots of room for those exciting plays, and those plays are the ones, like so many others, that wow our fans. But – but we should look at everything. And I think that's what the innovation committee is going to

be challenged to do, is look at everything. How can we make the game more fun? How can we make the game faster? How can we make the game safer?

But – but the idea here was a little bit of what I maybe referred to earlier as a bit of a repair from the way we've done a few things, you know, during my – during my first couple of years. This time what we're going to do is we're going to get the coaches and GMs involved right now, like right now at the grassroots, and get them talking because there's a lot of answers can come from them. And – and that's how we're going to do it. So I – I hope that all those things and ideas are on the table, and – and that my ultimate goal is to launch what we would call, or used to call, our pre-season, to call it our innovation season and use those games perhaps to show our fans some – some ideas, some – some different things that have come through these discussions.

And maybe – maybe the first season is you just show them in the pre-season and get the fans to think about them. And then I'd like to roam the stadiums and – and do my – do my fan forums, and I'd like to really get the feedback from the fans on some of the things that we have – have shown them in the pre-season and then see where that takes us, and maybe implement those things that our coaches and players and GMs and presidents like and our fans like and maybe implement them a year later. So you know, these are the ideas. But ga—again, get used to the notion of an innovation season rather than a pre-season.

Olivier Poulin: (Crosstalk)

Question: Oh, sorry.

Question: Hi, Randy. Jamie Nyers (ph) here from CJME in Regina. The season started with Simoni Lawrence hit on Zach Collaros. And it was quite a lengthy appeal process. The CFLPA has proposed having former players, similar to the NFL's appeals process, for on-field incidents. They have Derrick Brooks and James Thrash, of course. You just saw the incidents. They're being upheld, suspensions, a week rather than several weeks. Why did you reject that proposal from the CFLPA to really help out the relationship with the CFLPA and CFL? Because it came quite emotional during that appeals process. And do you think there needs to be an expedited process for appeals for suspensions?

Randy Ambrosie: Well, you know, there's probably two answers to your question. And thank you, by the way. It's – the – the first part comes in. You'd be surprised how very few times we've had to go to arbitration in our – in our history with the PA. So I – I'd be careful to label this as an epidemic that somehow needs an urgent solution. It just hasn't happened very often.

And the second thing is we had just finished negotiations, and that was a long and arduous, you know, process. I don't think it was the time to – to open it up to – you know, to a b—essentially a se—a renegotiation around the CBA. So you know, part of the message was let's just – let's stick with what we've got and get through the season,

and – and then sit down after. I have found it's easier – it's easier to talk about a lot of things when you don't have the tension of the games being played. You're just able to think a little more clearly. There's a little mo—there's mo—a little more clarity of thought in the room.

So we're not dismissing anything. And if – again, if we're going to honour the spirit of what we want to do, we're going to try not to thi—not to go into the room with absolute predetermined s—ideas, but rather go sit down and – and try to figure things out. I – I feel, for the most part, that we've gotten most of these right. We – we've – working hard to inplu—improve player safety, and I think that was an important statement. And that – that decision ultimately was the right decision because it made an important statement about, you know, how seriously we're taking the issue.

And I do think we've seen in our players a lot more – a lot of good behaviour improvement around how they're – you know, how they're playing the game, and I think part of that comes from those lessons learned. So again, I wouldn't characterize it as a no, but just a can we just take a deep breath and – and have a conversation when – when things are a little calmer.

Question: Just a follow-up, the timing, though. Did you want it to be extradited so it's not (inaudible) before (off microphone)?

Randy Ambrosie: Yeah. I – you know, I – I think those are things for Monday. You know, honestly, I – I'd not sure I've – in – in this moment that I'd be we—serving the process well by saying what I think we should do or not do because that – that could – to Brian and Jeff and our friends at the PA, that could almost come off that I'm starting to – to ne—negotiate the issue with them, and I – and I don't want to do that.

I – what I'd like to do is say OK, look, we've had a season with the new CBBA. What's worked really well; where are there, if any, are there some challenges that might – that might need to be addressed. I'd like to take Steve Shamie, who's wa—not only – not only, you know, the great negotiator for the league but a great friend, and a great friend to the game of football, I'd like to take Steve and I and go sit in a room and just, with an open mind, say what – you know, what do we think we could do better and differently.

Olivier Poulin: Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you, everyone. That's a wrap. The bus is waiting right outside to get you to practice at McMahon Stadium. Thank you, everyone.

Merci beaucoup tout le monde. L'autobus pour les médias est juste devant le Boyce Theatre.

Thank you.

