

Washington Post
Doug Allen Interview

Will Hobson: I don't want to waste your time. I've just been springing phone calls across the country. I've got few people say like in the first five minutes, actually I wasn't really involved here. But you were with the USFL or the NFLPA?

Doug Allen: I was with both. The NFLPA organized the USFLPA because there were a number of ex-NFL players in the league and they were very upset about the way they were being treated compared to the way they were being treated in the NFL. For example, if you got hurt, you got sent home without medical care and your contract was cancelled. You didn't get paid for the rest of the season the way they did in the NFL. They got \$5 a day in training camp. While the pay wasn't that, it averaged between \$30,000 and \$50,000 a player, there were no benefits and that kind of a treatment. So they asked us to organize a union, and we did. We negotiated a collective bargaining agreement that changed some of those basic problems. And during that process of representing the players, Donald Trump bought the New Jersey Generals and started investing money on the league.

Will Hobson: And before I forget, do you mind if I record this conversation for note-taking purposes?

Doug Allen: No, not at all.

Will Hobson: Thinking back in the time, do you have any just general memories of Trump? Any anecdotes or any stories --

Doug Allen: He's exactly the same today, just he was thinner in those days. Otherwise, he was just as much an asshole then as he is now. My best example of that was -- I have a couple of them. He was not on the bargaining team for the league, but he insisted after he started putting money into the league that he be involved in bargaining. And so he demanded a bargaining session take place at Trump Tower. The general counsel of the USFLPA was also the general counsel of the NFLPA. Richard Burleson and I and a player I much -- I can't remember which one, went to that bargaining session. They were league executives, not the commissioner but league executives on the other side of the table. Many are from the NFL and went back to the NFL after the league folded, and I had known them for years. One of them was Vince Lombardi's son. I don't remember whether he personally was at that meeting.

Anyway, he kept us waiting. We're in the conference room at the top or at the upper part of Trump Tower and we've been sitting there for 45 minutes waiting for him. He walked in and sat down at the head of the table between us rather than on the league's side. He took one look at Richard Burleson and said, "I know you, I know you. You work for Cecil Upshaw." He meant Gene Upshaw. Cecil Upshaw was a baseball player who was

distantly related to Gene. And Richard laughed out loud because it's kind of a funny way to start the dinner Dutch. And I had met Donald before, but Richard hadn't. Richard said, no, I say I don't work for Cecil Upshaw. And the other side laughed when he said that. Donald Trump said "No, no, no, you work for Cecil Upshaw. I'm not having anything to do with this as long as somebody who's a spy for the NFL is in this room." He gets up and walks out, and again his side laughed. They were very happy he left and we had a pretty productive hour or so meeting that didn't include him.

And then the commissioner and the guy who was second in command of the staff in the league called me up later on and thanked me for resisting the entreaties of Trump to negotiate directly with me. They didn't want him to have anything to do with us. But he was a bull in a china shop, just like he is now, and pissed everybody off. I could live with it. I didn't work for him and I got to say no. One time his office called me up and they didn't identify themselves. This woman said this is Donald Trump's office calling, not this is Jean [phonetic] from Donald Trump's office. Just this is Donald Trump's office calling. Mr. Trump would like you -- I'm in Washington. D.C. and she said, "Mr. Trump would like you to meet him tomorrow morning at 8:30 in Trump Tower." I said, well, I can't do that, but I'm going to be in New York tomorrow and I'd be happy to

meet him late afternoon at the Hyatt in Grand Central which he owned at the time.

She put me on hold and it was so long I forgot that I was on hold. I was on a speaker phone. Finally she came back on and scared the crap out of me and said, well, "This is Donald Trump's office again." And I said, yes. She still hadn't given me her name. She said, "I'm afraid if you can't meet with Mr. Trump tomorrow morning at 8:30, he won't be able to meet with you." And I said, lady, you called me, I didn't call you. That's fine with me. After that little exchange, I got a call from the league that thanked me for not falling under to Trump because they didn't want him to have anything to do with those negotiations.

Will Hobson: So these were negotiations between the, I guess, nascent USFL Player Association and the USFL?

Doug Allen: Yes. But these were negotiations that tried to -- we negotiated that agreement three different times based on the condition and the circumstances of the league and trying to do everything we could to keep it going because it was a great opportunity for players, and coaches, and team executives that weren't working on the NFL at the time. I mean, if you look at all the players that came by the USFL, and not just players but coaches and general managers that were on the USFL, it was like a division of the NFL in terms of the personnel.

Will Hobson: What was Richard Burleson's -- what did he do and what is his title?

Doug Allen: He was the general counsel of the NFL Players Inc. The USFLPA had three full-time staff people meet, an assistant director, and a secretary. Some of the staff of the NFLPA were loaned to us. We paid the NFLPA for their time. So I paid the general counsel and the legal staff with the NFLPA whenever they got involved in negotiations or arbitrations involving USFL players with the knowledge of the NFL players and the USFL players that we were doing it that way. It was cost-effective to do it. So our offices were right in the NFLPA. I kept doing things for the NFLPA. I was a spokesman for us and for the NFLPA. I kept doing some of that for Gene because he asked me to even though I was paid entirely by the USFL players for the three years I was the executive director.

Will Hobson: Do you have any sense of how the direction of the line of communication was with folks in the NFL? I'm curious how folks like in the NFL league office and owners, how they were reacting as Donald Trump comes onboard, buys the USFL team of New York/New Jersey, and then immediately starts rating rosters and throwing money at Don Shula and Lawrence Taylor.

Doug Allen: He wasn't alone in doing that, and I don't think that's so much what upsets them about him personally. It was this idea that he was going to take the USFL through the

fall and directly compete with the NFL and use that as a way to leverage his team into the NFL. That was his strategy. That was just pretty naked and obvious. That's what pissed them off, not so much the fact that he was competing for players because lots of people were doing that and other teams had signed high draft picks and star players. He stockpiled his team and had a great team that probably --

I mean I think the top third of the USFL could have competed in the NFL, and the best team in the USFL would have been a good team in the NFL. So the quality of the play was pretty damn good by the end of the league's existence. I think they were concerned about the competition, but that wasn't what upset them about Donald Trump. It was this notion that he was going to demand and get by leverage a team in the NFL, which is all he cared about. He didn't care about the USFL. He had absolutely no interest in that league continuing its existence. He only was using it as a weapon to try to get an NFL franchise, which he was never going to get otherwise. I mean they hated him.

Will Hobson: That kind of begs a question on why didn't he try to buy -- if his interest was purely on an NFL team, why didn't he try to buy an NFL team before -- ?

Doug Allen: Because the ownership transfer has to be approved by the league, and he wouldn't have gotten that approval.

Will Hobson: Why do you think that is?

Doug Allen: Because he was somebody that just alienated people. He was not somebody that folks thought well of. They were interested in -- especially during those years when people like Dan Rooney or Wellington Mara were the éminence grise of the NFL and espoused the league to think that we're all on this together, they were not interested in somebody like Trump owning an NFL team. He would have had a very difficult time getting an approval to purchase a team.

Will Hobson: Do you think he would have known that?

Doug Allen: I have no idea. He claims a lot of knowledge. He sometimes has and he sometimes he doesn't have, so I have no idea. He and I didn't discuss that. The three times I was with him personally, we didn't talk about it.

Will Hobson: I was just curious if there ever was a moment when he was explicitly told by somebody connected with the NFL, look, you'll never going to get a team.

Doug Allen: Well, he certainly understood they weren't going to give him a team. I think yeah. So if your question is that he think he had a shot at buying and getting approval to buy a team, the answer I think is probably he understood that

that was going to be a real slog because he has probably checked it out.

That's why he was trying so hard through the lawsuit and going to the fall to actually -- I mean for him it was leverage for a deal. I'll make a deal with them, I'll stop suing them. When we get this huge damage award from the jury, like the NBA and the ABA, they'll settle. One of the things that would be part of the settlement is I get to own a team in the NFL. I think that was his only objective. That certainly means he got involved in a turf war.

Will Hobson: I'd taken a step back. I started reading the \$1 legal last night on my ride back from New York. I got up basically right until Trump comes on board. It seems to me from reading that book and granted it comes from a source - from Jim Byrne who was the communications director in the league. So I've watched the documentary too, the *30 for 30: Who Killed the USFL*. I may go back and watched again, I felt that the documentary painted a bit rosier of a picture of the state of the league right before Trump comes on board after the first season than the book does. The book makes the league seem like it was in a significant turmoil before -- basically the notion that everything was fine and dandy until Trump comes in and fucked everything up is incorrect.

Doug Allen: I agree with you. The league was always precarious. On the other hand, the Arena Football League was similarly precarious and it's been around in various permutations for decades. So the fact that it was precarious did not mean that it was going to go out of business in a minute-and-a-half. The question wasn't whether they could use the help and the money. They were very interested in his money. The question was whether or not they should spend time fixing up their stability in the spring rather than going to the fall.

There were some other owners who decided that they were willing to take that chance or he wouldn't have been able to accomplish what he accomplished, which was to bury the league quickly rather than have it struggle over time. On the other hand, there were teams that were getting, you know, they had a TV contract throughout their existence. Some of the teams were doing well in terms of attendance, that they had some owners with deep pockets. So yes, they were struggling, but franchises and established leagues that are new have struggled. And if you look at the NHL and the Sun Belt teams, they've had some real problems. I mean I think everybody was pretty realistic about the difficulty.

I think the question was whether the long-term facility of the USFL was going to be possible if they did in the spring versus the fall. My considered opinion, and I knew as much

about it as anybody, was that they would have been able to sustain a spring league indefinitely, not without difficulty and not with some hiccups and not with some teams that might have failed, but they would have been able to sustain the league if they were committed to a spring schedule. And we were committed to trying to help them do that because it was hundreds of jobs for a pro football player.

At the time, I said to them I thought Donald Trump was crazy, that that strategy was idiotic and was not going to work. It was clear to me that the only thing he cared about was whether he got a team on the NFL.

Will Hobson: In your conversations with him, did you get a sense that he's a guy who knew football and that he was knowledgeable about the game?

Doug Allen: No. I don't think he cared about the game. I don't think he cared about the players. I think he was maniacal about that one objective and all he cared about was trying to accomplish the leverage to make that happen. He was very focused, but I don't think he was all that interested. I mean he cared about how his team did because he didn't want to look bad to the extent that he -- and I don't remember who was running the team and who was coaching then, although one of the staff people that ended up with the NFLPA called games was a coach. I'm blanking on who the --

Will Hobson: Walt Michaels was the head coach.

Doug Allen: Okay. Well, they had a quality front office and a quality team and he'd spent some money to make that happen. So I don't mean to suggest that he was ignoring that, but that was the intended -- the whole point of that from his perspective, the whole reason to spend the money was to convince them that that team belong in the NFL. He didn't care about the stability or health of the USFL.

Will Hobson: So your direct interactions with Donald with that one --

Doug Allen: I had a long limousine ride conversation with him before he bought the team. He offered me a ride home from the commissioner's party at the first league championship.

Will Hobson: Where was that? At the first USFL league championship?

Doug Allen: Yeah.

Will Hobson: Why was he there?

Doug Allen: I don't remember. I'm fuzzy on the details. I just remember we had a long conversation and he was basically pumping me for information. I was a little guarded in the conversation. I ran into him a couple of other times along the way, and then we had that meeting that blew up. I mean, I didn't spend a ton of time with Donald over the years. He wasn't involved that long and he wasn't somebody who was

instrumental or involved in all of the league management issues that I dealt with. That was the commissioners and their staffs. I knew some of the owners a lot better than him. I knew a lot of the general managers and the folks running the teams. They were mostly from the NFL.

Will Hobson: Do you have any idea who at the Generals -- like when Trump signs somebody like Brian Sipe, was he negotiating the contract? Did he have a guy doing that?

Doug Allen: Well, I think he was probably involved since it was his money, but I wasn't there in the room when they did it. He would have done it with an agent. My contact was more with the player than with the agent. Although I certainly knew the high profile player agents, but I don't remember anything about any of those negotiations that stands out.

Will Hobson: One of the other sort of big picture kind of conventional wisdom views about what happened to the USFL is that you had on one side John Bassett arguing for staying in the spring, and then you had Trump arguing for going to the fall. And once John Bassett got real sick, that had basically ended the debate and Trump was able to basically strong-arm the rest of the owners to go on his side.

I'm sure it was more nuanced than that because part of the court file was minutes of USFL league meetings or owners' meetings. In one of the first meetings when Trump gets on

board, you're right in that he was naked about what his goal was. I don't think he explicitly said I want it merged with the NFL, but he definitely said I think we need to be in the fall. Like right from the very get-go he said I think we need to be in the fall. I didn't come on board here to own like a second run minor league organization. So that first or second meeting when he throws it out there, that was not met with by the other owners there -- there wasn't a whole lot of pushback. There were like at least five or six owners who were like, well, I don't know, but that sounds interesting, I definitely want to explore that.

Doug Allen: They didn't want to scare him away. They wanted his money. They did not want to make it sound like, oh, for God's sake, we're not going to do that. And some of them thought it was a better idea than others. It wasn't him against everybody in the league. It was a group that I think was the majority at the time that didn't want to do it, and a group that was the minority that did that included him. And you're right, when Bassett got sick, nobody stepped into that vacuum.

Will Hobson: Did you have many interactions with John Bassett?

Doug Allen: Yeah. I knew him better than Donald Trump.

Will Hobson: So just describe him to me.

Doug Allen: I thought he was a brilliant guy and I enjoyed his company. I like him. He was entertaining and authentic. In terms of my interaction with him, he was the opposite of Trump. He was interested in what I had to say and what I thought, and he was lobbying me sort of gently for his positions as opposed to Trump who basically wanted to have me salute and say yes sir.

Will Hobson: Bassett was a film producer. That was his background?

Doug Allen: I'm trying to remember because I only knew him in that context, but I think that's right. Well, that was 30 years ago. I don't remember every detail.

Will Hobson: One of the things that comes out in the documentary at least is Burt Reynolds mentions Bassett having a very dour sense of humor. Did you notice that?

Doug Allen: Well, my interaction with him was more sort of talking about those issues that he was trying to accomplish and about the future of the league. It wasn't that kind of -- we weren't friends. I don't mean to suggest we weren't close. I just had a more sort of meeting of equals relationship with him than the way Trump approached it.

Will Hobson: Right. How do you think Bassett viewed Trump?

Doug Allen: As an opportunity and an obstacle at the same time. I mean, I think they very much wanted somebody willing to spend money. The problem is he wanted to spend it on things that, at the end of the day, Bassett and his allies thought was a mistake. So it was a catch-22.

I think it was the ones that were patient and willing to lose money versus the ones who weren't and saw it as an attempt to hit a homerun in the bottom of the ninth. Well, maybe the bottom of the eighth because they certainly had some problems, but that didn't mean that they couldn't continue to play. They ultimately reached the decision to go to the fall I think with the intention of trying to do it, but that just fell apart when they realized that they weren't going to get the kind of opportunity to compete, that there wasn't going to be a vacuum they were filling like they did in the spring and the fall.

There was going to be much tougher competing with both college and the NFL and they weren't going to get even the sort of benign support they've gotten from all kinds of people - from the networks, to the sports press, to the players. Because one of the things that would happen in the NFL is guys who were at the point where they're trying to decide whether to take another shot at the NFL or go to the USFL, they had a pretty good idea by the end of the NFL season whether they were going to get a chance to come back. If they weren't, then they were interested

in the USFL contract. But if they were going to be at the same time, they had to choose some time before. You name the issue and it was worse for them, and it just all collapsed. They realized they were out of business trying to do that. And we all made noises about how we're going to play in the fall and that's going to actually happen and they we're going to take a year off and do it right, but that was all bullshit.

And the other thing I would tell where Trump was involved, even though not personally, is they tried to leverage their personal services contracts with the high profile players and say that they had to be paid in order to let them go into the NFL. Trump wasn't in that meeting but he was definitely one of the ones pushing that idea, that they would hold their personal services contracts for people like Flutie hostage. They wouldn't let them go into the NFL. First of all, they were in violation of all those contracts because they weren't going to play. They were denying those players by doing that the opportunity to earn a living and they were failing to perform their end of the contract.

So in the middle of that discussion in late summer of 1986, I excused myself and I got on the phone with Jim Quinn from Weil, Gotshal and said I've got about \$30,000 left in the treasury. I don't want to sue the bastards for trying to hold hostage the players that could immediately go to the NFL. And

he said, "Don't worry about the money. We're happy to take the case." I went back in and told them I just hired Jim Quinn, and 15 minutes later we settled that issue and they let everybody go. But that's the kind of stuff he was -- I mean, it was always about trying to get leverage. They didn't hang on to that position very long and he was the one pushing, but he realized they weren't going to play.

Will Hobson: You said you were not at the trial?

Doug Allen: No. I had someone who is the salary cap and agency regulations director at the NFLPA today who I hired as an intern from Temple to cover the trial. I'm blank on his name. We'll look it up in a minute. He's at the NFLPA today, Salary Cap and Agent Regulations. I haven't spoken to him in a while. Anyway, he covered the trial on a daily basis and sent written reports to me as to what he observed. But I mean it was covered in the newspaper so I get a lot of it from press reports.

Will Hobson: If that name comes to you --

Doug Allen: Give me a second and I can look it up. Hang on a second.

Will Hobson: Yeah, because I love to talk to somebody who could just -- because I'm going to have to try to write through that trial obviously, and it would be great to talk to somebody who might have actually descriptive memory of how different scenes played out.

Doug Allen: I'm not sure whether he'd be willing to or remembers much about it. He and I haven't talked about it in years except that I always claim credit for having started him at the NFLPA. Mark Levin, that's his name. Not to be confused with Mark Lovin, although it's well in the same line. In addition, he's been there ever since except for a couple of years where he worked for the Redskins and then came running back to the NFLPA because the -- but the right guy was no picnic. He's done a great job. Lots of teams had tried to hire him. He's a salary cap guru and a really smart guy. He was perfect for the immediate [sounds like] need. He picked out the stuff that was important and gave me a daily report on it for weeks. I didn't have to spend -- I was trying to do it on the cheap. He could take the train every day and take the train back from Philadelphia. It was cheaper than going up there and spending a lifetime and money because --

Will Hobson: You're in D.C.?

Doug Allen: Yeah, I was in D.C. but I was getting all those regular reports from him.

Will Hobson: As that trial started, what was the general -- I guess describe to me the mood and the expectation. Was it expected, oh, the NFL is going to crush them or were people legitimately concerned, I don't know what's going to happen?

Doug Allen: I think they were very concerned. I mean it was never a slam dunk on either side. That uncertainty caused a great deal of concern because antitrust cases are trouble; that's why it's called the \$3 league. When we won the McNeil trial to get players for the agency against the NFL, in the first two minutes after the test case was on behalf of I think six players, we extrapolated what that damage award would be equal to if it applied to a class action on behalf of all players. It was in excess of a billion dollars. I think it was around \$1.3 billion.

So when you have a circumstance where there's been broad scale damages, it could have been hundreds of millions of dollars. I mean they've lost tens of millions every year and that was adding up after three years. So there certainly would have been the possibility that -- and if you read some of the stories from the time about the jury, they were divided on that issue. But if they had been united and given them a significant damage award, that would have been a huge blow to the NFL. While they were in a much better shape than the USFL, in those days there were people like the Rooneys who weren't going be interested in taking tens of millions of dollars of hits in one year. So yeah, I think there was a lot of concern about it.

But I think they also thought that the USFL had been its own worst enemy and that they had a good shot at proving that.

So they were worried about whether they were going to win, and they were very worried about what the damage report might be and whether they were going to have to fight that through appeal. So there was a great deal of uncertainty.

Will Hobson: What would happen if the jury had awarded, say, what the USFL was asking for? What if they had won and gotten a judgment in excess of like a billion dollars?

Doug Allen: Well, the league expanded after that so I suspect it would have been similar to what happened with the ABA and the NBA when the players sued to stop the merger and were successful. There would have been some effort to settle it with an accommodation that made some of the worst USFL owners financially more whole and would have provided some opportunity for some of those owners and/or their teams to play on the NFL. I mean, they had teams in places that there ended up being teams in the NFL ultimately anyway, like Tennessee or Jacksonville or Orlando.

So there were locations that ultimately were in the running for NFL teams and I think that probably would have been on the table. It would have depended on how strong the case was and what the damage award was. And I think they thought they dodged a bullet with their \$1 award. I really think they thought that they were pretty close to having to go the wrong way.

Will Hobson: One of the things that interest me about this is really how close -- say what you will about his tactics and his goal, but how close Trump really did come to -- the jury rules somewhat in favor of the USFL. It ruled that the NFL was a monopoly. If they awarded damages as the USFL is seeking, Trump would have owned potentially the only team, if he had been able to get a stadium, the only team in New York. He would own a team with Jim Kelly as a quarterback and Herschel Walker as his running back, and he would have bought that team on the cheap basically. He'd paid something like \$5 million or \$6 million. A new NFL franchise in New York would have been valued at that time \$60 million, \$70 million, to \$80 million. So he came pretty close.

Doug Allen: Just like the loser of the Super Bowl over here. I don't think he counted that as a win. Not at all.

Will Hobson: No.

Doug Allen: He likes to win. I don't think he thought they'd win into the W call. If you talk to the lawyers involved and read some of the things from the jury and from those who were observing it every day, he might have been a catalyst for the loss. He was also one of the reasons they lost.

Will Hobson: Right. Did you ever hear about a mock trial before the actual trial?

Doug Allen: Yes, and I'm sure they did that. We did it with the McNeil trial. It's not a mock trial. What it is is focus groups that model what a jury does with people that might be on the jury and you try different witnesses and testimony out on them and different arguments. So I'm sure they did that. I know they did that. They certainly did it in the McNeil trial and it was very effective. For example, it told us we needed to try to get as many women on the jury as we could and we got an all-women jury. So yeah, I think they did that. And I think the NFL probably did a better job of that than the USFL because they had more resources. That's an incredibly expensive thing to do. We put a lot of money on the jury in the McNeil trial.

Will Hobson: How does that work? I have never witnessed it. So it's not an actual mock trial. It's just you used like polling?

Doug Allen: No, you're not trying to mimic what a courtroom looks like, although you can do that in a courtroom. You collect a group of people that as much as possible would represent folks who would come from the jury pool and then you try out different combinations based on age, race, gender, that sort of stuff. Then you try different opening arguments, and there were focus groups. Then you debrief them and ask them how they thought it worked, whether that convinced them. You tell them different information that you know will come out on the

trial and how you position it. I mean it can go on for weeks. In those days it wasn't nearly as common as it is now or had become. To tell you the truth, I'm not sure the USFL did much of that. But I know the NFL did.

Will Hobson: Because there's a rumor but just a pocketful [sounds like] story that floats around between the USFL folks that about a month or two before the actual trial, they held these what they called a mock trial not focus groups, and that in the practice run the groups awarded a big judgment to the USFL, and that it was through that process that the NFL lawyers developed the strategy to basically focus on Trump and hang the case around Trump as the villain. Even if the NFL was operating as a monopoly, this is a bunch of rich people debating between each other and that he doesn't need the money.

Doug Allen: How prescient.

Will Hobson: Have you ever heard that?

Doug Allen: Yes. Yes, I have.

Will Hobson: You heard that exact? What have you heard?

Doug Allen: That they did what I described, that they had mock juries. Not mock trial, but mock juries. They tried out different arguments on them. They tried out different evidence and the kind of testimony that they thought they might get. Then they would poll them and debrief them, but they didn't just do it with one jury. They would do it with different kinds of

people and more than one mock jury. But they would deem folks who would come from the actual juror pool so that they could get a sense of whether there were any cultural, or age, or race, or gender issues that they needed to be sensitive to. It's a way you try out the theory of the case on them and they tell you whether they buy it or not. It's not perfect because you can't put in a testimony that hasn't happened yet.

But if you've taken depositions, you've got to have somebody role-play the person that gave the deposition let's say if there's testimony. If you have unlimited legal resources, you can do more than one at a time. You can have two going. That's the way we did it. We had two going on at the same time just trying different arguments out and then comparing the results. But the way we did it, you do it behind a mirrored wall so you can observe it in real-time as well as see what happened. We filmed it. We filmed them so we could not only debrief the mock jurors but so we could see how individuals reacted to different things that were being said. And like I said, the most important thing we found out was, for example, that we needed women on that jury and we ended up getting an all-woman jury.

So I'm sure they did the same kind of thing and it told them a lot about the best way to present the theory of the case and the best way to present the evidence, and that's the

conclusion they came to, which, knowing what we know now, it sounds pretty reasonable and prudent. I mean the guy was just a complete jackass. He really was. He was then exactly as he is now, just not as famous and much thinner. Otherwise, he's the same guy. Not a fan, as you can tell. And not just politically now, but I thought what he was doing then was narcissistic, arrogant, and absolutely misguided. I thought he was nuts to try to take on the NFL. And I had a lot of experience with the NFL.

Will Hobson: That's interesting because I expected coming to this interview that somebody working on behalf of the players would have been at least a bit sympathetic because one could argue that in that two or three-year period, Donald Trump was one of the best things that happened to NFL players in terms of his throwing money around forced salaries up.

Doug Allen: That part was great. But the objective was completely misguided. I don't know. My interest was in maintaining the opportunities for professional football players who didn't have contracts with the NFL to make a living, to have a chance to demonstrate their talents, and to do it in a way that was valid and productive. What he tried to do to that league was completely antithetical to any of that. That destroyed the opportunity for people to make \$30,000, \$40,000, or \$50,000 a year playing professional football back when that

was real money. It wasn't NFL money, but it was a lot more than maybe we're going to make if they weren't playing football. And it gave them a chance to develop their skills and show people what they could do, and the fans were great, and the experience was really a positive one. I've wanted that to be able to continue for those players and was really upset that they put it all on red and lost.

Will Hobson: You've touched on a question I wanted to ask. What were USFL players getting paid when the league went down?

Doug Allen: By then it was probably more like -- the mean and the median are a little different because there were some superstars getting paid a lot of money but there weren't many of them, and then there's a whole bunch of other players. But the average guy was probably, if he was a solid player and not hanging on by his fingernails was probably making between \$30,000 and \$60,000 or probably \$40,000 to \$50,000, \$45,000 to \$50,000 was the typical number. There were some making more, but there were big bunch of guys in that band.

Will Hobson: Is there anyone you'd recommend me calling from the playing days who you think would be representative of the victims here, the people who lost their jobs and never got an opportunity to play again?

Doug Allen: I'd have to go back and think about who was still on the roster but wasn't somebody who played in the NFL.

It would be tough. I'd have to go back and look at rosters to do that. I can remember a lot of guys -- my memory is mostly of the guys who were in the USFL and then in the NFL, because I went back to the NFLPA. Some guys like Buddy Aydelette, who played for Pittsburgh Steelers. He was the president of the USFLPA. After the league folded, he played for the Steelers for a while so he had a career in the NFL. Herb Veetman [phonetic], but he played with the NFL too. The trouble is a lot of the guys that I've stayed close to was because their careers continued.

To tell you the truth, I don't know how much attention they were paying to that. I know Buddy did because he was the president of the union and the guys on the executive board did. An average player was kind of waiting around to see what's going to happen, and we tried to give them updates. But until the results of the trial were known, everything's kind of up in the air. It was a moving target anyway, so that last year was pretty chaotic. Like I said, we renegotiated the CBA. Well, we renegotiated that CBA three different times in two years. We were just trying to keep the train moving down the track.

But I have to give that some thought and look at the rosters. If you can give me some names, I could tell you if they would be worthwhile to do. I can remember all guys who got a chance, and a lot of players did. There were a lot of good

players in the USFL. My financial adviser is a guy who played for San Antonio and never played in the NFL. He played with Penn State, Pete Speros. In fact, he's in Northern Virginia. But I don't remember whether he was still playing then. I think he might have been. It might be worth talking with him. He's a smart guy. His firm is called Sullivan, Blaney & Speros. They're financial advisers in Northern Virginia. I know he played the NFL for San Antonio, but I'm not sure how long. I've got to look at the records to see that, but he'd be worth talking to.

Will Hobson: One of the things, as I think about the story, is knowing I would say what we know now about the later life health impacts of playing football, you can argue that it makes framing the former USFL players as victims a little bit harder. Obviously, there are guys who lost jobs, but the ones we think of went on to fame and fortune in the NFL. The ones that didn't, I mean some would argue it's not the worst thing in the world that they were no longer playing professional football for \$40,000 a year. But if I could talk to somebody who could tell a story that would run counter to that, no, this was a great thing in my life and then I lost this job.

Doug Allen: It's been 30 years so I'm having a hard time coming up with a list of names, but I guarantee you there were lots of players that were really disappointed they just have to

keep playing with the USFL. It's not like people had to twist their arms to play professional football for \$50,000 a year, which was probably double what people were making typically or otherwise. So I don't think that there weren't a lot of people very upset about the fact that -- because some of them were on the cusp of making it in the NFL and didn't, and some of them didn't last very long in the NFL. Some of the best players in the USFL did not have careers in the NFL, plaine doubt [sounds like]. So I don't think players --

The players were not happy at all when the opportunity was gone. I call them the lunch-pail players. They love playing professional football, and they love the fact that somebody has given them a chance to do that because most of them didn't have an opportunity to play in the NFL or they wouldn't have been in the USFL. If they had, they would have picked the NFL over the USFL. So I don't agree at all that -- and they had a chip on their shoulder because I think they rightly thought that on many teams that they could have played with many NFL teams. The top of the NFL was better than the top of the USFL, but the top of the USFL in many cases was better than the bottom of the NFL. For the players, that meant that they were able to demonstrate they had the talent that the NFL either didn't have room for or didn't recognize. So I completely disagree that players weren't

the victims of this. They were absolutely *the* victims of this because that immediately snuffed out 900 jobs.

Will Hobson: That how many you think there were?

Doug Allen: Well, at one time we were that many. I don't remember how many teams we were still, but we're still active. But it was hundreds of professional football players.

I'll take a little credit for this, as a result of the union and the threat of a strike, which as the book points out was taken seriously by the league, we got a pre-season pay that was reasonable. We got medical care if you were hurt paid by the team. We've got your contract guaranteed for the rest of the season if you got hurt and couldn't play. If they didn't pay you, there was an extra line of procedure to make you an immediate free agent, or if they owed you any money and didn't pay you so you could sign with the NFL if you were good enough. We got proceeds and pay for the first time. Because the first year they played, before we had a contract, they didn't get paid for the playoffs. They got extra money for playing in the playoffs. So yeah, I mean I think the players were very happy that the USFL existed and were very disappointed when it went down in flames.

[End of transcript 0:52:00]

[End of audio 1:05:48]