

LA Times NFL Speaker Series

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Los Angeles, California

David Baker

Q. So pleased and excited to have David Baker, Hall of Fame, in the Hall of Farmer. Eight years the president and CEO of the Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio, really the transformer of the Hall of Fame in his career there, transformed it into just an amazing mecca of hope and enthusiasm, and just happy to have you here back on the West Coast, David, because you're a West Coast guy.

DAVID BAKER: Well, it was great to be at the most inspiring place on earth, and I get inspired being in your kitchen. You're a guy who has done so much good for the game, a lot of good for Los Angeles, and I know a lot of guys in your profession, and some of them aren't as relational as you are, and some of them are a little bit more skeptical, let's say, to put it nicely.

But you have always done a wonderful job of covering the game, of not just reporting the score and the pitch and the catch and the stats or the highlight, but telling the story about the people who played it, telling the inspiration of how they were resurrected or redeemed or sacrificed for somebody else, and that's to me -- we all love the entertainment of football, but the more I got into Hall of Fame, the more I loved the meaning of it, the game, the bringing together, the part of being in a huddle.

Certainly for all of us who don't get paid to play football, being on a family is the greatest team we'll ever play on. But I think you've done a wonderful job, as good as anybody that's out there, of covering this game.

Q. Wow, thank you, David. I really appreciate that. We're in LA, can you believe it? An LA Super Bowl. Of course you can believe it, but it's pretty incredible.

DAVID BAKER: And again, not just to stroke you here, Sam, but this is genuine, it's very sincere. A good friend of ours Roger Goodell was Commissioner Tagliabue's right-hand guy when they were thinking about an expansion team here, and it was between, if you recall, Houston and Los Angeles, and they were trying to figure out how to retrofit the Coliseum and make things work and Houston was going to build a new stadium down there, and

it came down that Houston was going to pay a little bit more, and I don't think LA -- it being the second biggest market in the country, believed that the NFL would forsake this just for a new stadium and for a little more money.

In fact, that's exactly what they did, and what that meant was for 20 years, for 20 years, the second biggest market in the country went without a pro football team here in this market. SC was kind of our pro football team, and our son played there and we loved it, but it wasn't the NFL.

To the LA Times' credit, now the Chicago Tribune, as well, they assigned you to the NFL, and you would go to their meetings and I would see you there, and you would report on all the things, the competition committee and the business of the NFL and what was happening and the personalities that were making those big business decisions.

I think that really helped all of us in Los Angeles stay in touch with football. I know this is going to be a great game.

It was wonderful when the Rams were in the Super Bowl three years ago, but this is only the second time -- obviously Tampa Bay last year being the first time, that a home team has played in the Super Bowl.

But this is really something special for the Rams, to be playing in the Super Bowl, especially a \$5 billion stadium in Los Angeles.

I don't think that would have happened, with all due respect, without you keeping football alive for two decades without a team, or the Times and the Tribune making that investment.

Certainly the leadership decisions along the way, Roger and Jerry Jones, was instrumental in making sure that Stan Kroenke was the guy to get here along with the Chargers, obviously, but this is a \$5 billion stadium, and Jerry was the guy who along with Roger said, hey, there's only one guy who can build for LA what LA deserves.

And then along you come with Stan and you've got Kevin Demoff and you've got Les Snead, and man, they rolled all the dice, and yours were the draft choices to get to this game, and it's worked out.

So I think this is spectacular for LA, but you, Roger, Jerry,

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Stan, Kevin, Les Snead, there are so many people who went into this moment that's going to happen tomorrow, whether they win or lose. I don't know, but I'll tell you, all of us who love football and especially all of us who live in Los Angeles are in your debt, buddy.

Q. Wow, that's very kind, Dave. Thank you. How have you seen the Los Angeles fan base evolve and grow over the last five years?

DAVID BAKER: Yeah, well, again, I'm one of us, so I'm speaking about myself here. I was always a Laker fan, and certainly growing up here with colleges, UCLA was always football and USC was always football, and we kind of had these National Championships in the country in both sports many, many years, but we kind of had that habit of getting there about midway through the second quarter and just before the end of the game we'd beat the traffic to get out.

You saw a little bit of that with the sale of the tickets this year, but I think that people have caught the fever. I think the NFL is absolutely at its zenith here. Roger, those owners, the players' union, they've done something special.

I thought they did something incredibly special, Sam, and you and I have talked about this last year, at a time when all of us were in our home and we were paralyzed with fear. You didn't know how long this thing was going to last. You didn't know what was going to happen. You were washing your hands every five minutes. It just seemed like the world had ground to a halt, and it had.

All of a sudden the NFL announced their schedule. They had their draft from Roger's basement. They reported to camp. They played in stadiums that were empty. But to do that they had to have the officials' union, the players' union. I think they did something like \$2 million worth of COVID testing on this. You had to have the networks. You had to have all the media get involved.

I think when that happened, it wasn't just, hey, we got football back. It was entertainment when we were at home and we needed entertainment.

To me I think for all of us who in America were fear driven at that time, quite honestly, and I'm in that group, it was a message that hey, we can do this. It's going to require some courage and we're going to slip -- we may have to reschedule a game, but we're going to get through this.

You look at -- God bless the guys in college football, they did the best they could, but a lot of college football teams were playing five games, six games. I think there was something like 140 college games canceled.

The NFL rescheduled some games, but they did not miss one game. They went all the way through the regular schedule. They went through the playoffs and had an incredible Super Bowl with a 43-year-old quarterback, again, won a Super Bowl.

I think it was bigger than football. It was this message that hey, we can do this, and if we can do it with a football league, then maybe we can educate our kids and get the schools going again, and maybe we can make advances in healthcare. I think that was super.

What it means for LA is something special. I mean, this is perfect timing for LA. I think it's even better that it didn't happen last year in the first year of the stadium.

If they win, one of the things -- when we were at the Hall of Fame, we spent the entire year calibrating excellence and studying greatness, and you look through the history of the National Football League, and man, when people win, it has a huge impact. I mean, everybody knows the Super Bowl has somewhere between \$700 million and \$800, \$900 million impact in direct spend that people from all over the country are coming here and spending here this week, but you know, when you win, it has an impact.

Now that this is really the Rams' second chance to be in the Super Bowl in three years -- when Vince Lombardi went to Green Bay, he was Italian and there was a bit of a racial issue there, he was the first Italian coach, and he goes to Green Bay, Wisconsin, and it's a town of like 90,000 at the time. Five years later, maybe six years later, he's won five national NFL championships, and all of a sudden Green Bay is Title Town USA, and it's a pilgrimage that all of us who love to go to Lambeau Field make.

You've got Pittsburgh, and Pittsburgh had lost steel. The Steelers had no steel in their town. They draft a guy named Mean Joe Greene, who doesn't know anything else except working his butt off, and he worked so hard and his excellence on the practice field translates to the playing field and then the playing field to the stadium, and they win three Super Bowls, and everybody feels better and all of a sudden it becomes a city of art and technology, and Pittsburgh has reinvented itself as a beautiful place.

San Francisco, San Francisco was so culturally divided that the mayor and a county commissioner had been assassinated if you recall and a guy named Eddie DiBartolo buys the San Francisco 49ers and picks a guy named Bill Walsh, and he goes and gets two guys named Joe Montana and Steve Young, and five titles later people are singing in the streets of San Francisco together.

Dallas, they had this horrible real estate recession, and Jerry Jones buys the team, wins three titles and real estate is going through the roof and they've got TV shows about how rich people are in Dallas.

Maybe my favorite one is New Orleans. Hurricane Katrina devastates a town, two-thirds of the town leaves and it's a small city already, and then on Monday Night Football a guy named Steve Gleason blocks a punt and people start believing and all of a sudden it comes back, they go all the way to the Super Bowl, beat Peyton Manning and sure enough all the jazz is back there.

Certainly what it's done for New England.

But I think this is our time. Lakers are doing great, the Dodgers are doing great. But right after this, not too long to go, we got the Olympics here.

I think it's our time here in Southern California to be proud, to be united, to show our diversity and to welcome our inclusion and show what a great place this is to live.

Q. I think we're going to be seeing a lot of future Hall-of-Fame players on the field Sunday. When you look at Andrew Whitworth, obviously Aaron Donald -- I say obviously, but we don't know that to be the case. Aaron Donald we pretty much know. Jalen Ramsey, and who knows what comes out of that crop of Bengals players. How do you look at that game?

DAVID BAKER: Well, you know, the game itself, I mean, I'm like any other football fan who thinks, if the Titans sacked Joe nine times, this defensive line might get him every other play. But I will also tell you that one of the things I love about Joe Burrow -- you know my boys played football and we talk. A year ago before he got hurt, Joe Burrow was doing an interview, it's like week 3, and he's playing for the Cincinnati Bengals. The Cincinnati Bengals, who haven't been good -- they won a Super Bowl but they haven't been good for a long time and it's week 3 and he's talking to whoever the interviewer was and was about the Super Bowl, and the interviewer said, is it realistic for you to be talking about the Super Bowl, and Joe Burrow stopped him right there, and he said, Mister, unless I'm thinking and dreaming and planning on the Super Bowl, I'm not doing my job.

I thought right then, hey, this guy is special. This guy is special.

I think he showed, hey, you can knock me down nine times, you can sack me, but we're going to win this game.

So I think it's going to be a great game. But I think it's --

what makes someone a Hall of Famer isn't a game. It's a career.

At the Pro Football Hall of Fame, which I'm now retired from, it had a five-year waiting period, and you look at a guy like Tom Brady and you go, listen, let's do this tomorrow. If ever there's a lock in the history of the game, it's this guy. But I think that five-year waiting period is pretty important, to help them heal, not just physically but emotionally, to help them understand for themselves what they did and what they contributed.

I've seen it with a guy like Peyton Manning. When I knocked on the door for Peyton Manning we did it at Mile High Stadium and all his coaches were there. Or a guy like Brett Favre, the day I knocked on Brett's door -- it took 10 seconds for him to be selected. He knew that morning I would knock on his door. I knew I would knock on his door. But when I knocked on his door and told him that he was I think at that time the 302nd best player, coach and contributor in the history of the game, there was a humility there for him. He knew the shoulders that he stood upon.

When I did it for Peyton there at Mile High, it wasn't the polished 45-year-old marketing maven that is so spectacular. It's so funny, at that moment I was talking to an 11-year-old kid. It was the guy who began the journey. They're not thinking about how much money they made or how much money they're going to make. They're thinking about their mom that drove them to practice. They're thinking about their dad. I guarantee you Brett was thinking about his dad who didn't let him quit or that coach that inspired him or their teammates that helped them along.

So I look at tomorrow in terms of the Hall of Fame for those guys on the field, there are some spectacular players, but to make it in the Hall of Fame you've got to have a spectacular career day in, day out.

I think you've got some guys there, you've got a lot of guys -- by the way, you've got a couple young coaches who have certainly got a great start. For Sean McVay to be in his second Super Bowl at such a young age, for Zac Taylor to have turned this team around and be in it, it's got to be a lot of fun.

But that's what I loved about your writing. There are so many storylines in this game, and you always seem to find a storyline about the kid that snuck into the Super Bowl when he was 16 years old, about a guy's mom or dad or why they're playing or why they didn't quit, or talking about their fear, because every guy on that field -- we will think they're fearless, but boy, that night before is a sleepless night.

That's what I love about the game, and that's what I loved about the hall. We think they all fell out of bed great, and you know this, you've covered them. Not one of them did. It's not just because they're bigger, stronger, faster. They thought about quitting a thousand times, too.

To me, that is a wonderful story. We may not get paid for playing football or have a bronze bust in Canton, Ohio. For me, it's that we can learn from this and be a better dad or a better journalist or maybe get off drugs or some other adversity. They've all faced it.

Football is such a wonderful team sport where -- my son was a left tackle, as you know, and when we would go from USC to Notre Dame, we would take 15,000 people with us who were Trojan fans, and it wasn't quite as big as the Irish, but we were pretty loud.

When the Atlanta Falcons would go to Lambeau Field, those guys had been on that waiting list for 20 years for those tickets; they're not giving it up. There would be maybe 200 Falcon fans there, most of us are parents or friends or wives, and they're loud, especially for a left tackle who depends upon that snap count.

That huddle becomes a place of a sanctuary. Ron Yary, one of our great Hall-of-Famers, told me that he spent 17 years in an NFL huddle and he only spoke twice, but he said he communicated on every play. He said he could listen with his eyes and he could feel the heartbeat of every guy in there, and you could see who was tired or who needed help or who was frustrated.

To me, that is our families, that is our companies, that is our cities, our communities. So there's so many wonderful lessons to learn from this game, and it happens to be in the context of this incredible, incredible game that is football.

Q. Well, you broke some news in there about Tom Brady. Are we saying now that he's got a good shot?

DAVID BAKER: You know, I don't know what the over on him is in Vegas, and now that I'm not in the Hall of Fame I can do it, but I'll bet everything in my wallet he's making it.

Q. I want to ask you about the knock because you mentioned that that was your idea. How did that start, because that really I think will be the -- aside from transforming Canton, which you really did, and the whole concept of the Hall of Fame, which was pretty staid when you arrived, now is very vibrant, the knock is what people respond to and that whole idea of letting someone know they're in the Hall of Fame by knocking on their door.

DAVID BAKER: Yeah, it wasn't just me, it was guys at the NFL Network and a great team at the hall. But the first year that I was there we decided for the first time to bring all 18 -- there was 15 modern era players that are finalists. Then now there's a contributor, a coach and a senior. So that makes 18 finalists that come to the Super Bowl, and we'd get them in the hotel, and then we would announce them to the nation like it happened Thursday night right in the middle of the Honors show.

It's pretty cool because I wasn't there this year, but in the past our guys who are in the audience who have their gold jackets on come up immediately afterwards and welcome this into this incredibly elite fraternity.

But the first year it was in New York and New Jersey at Met Life Stadium, the Super Bowl, so we were doing the Honors show at Radio City Music Hall, and we wanted to get the guys over there, and our meeting as you know, sometimes it can go 10, 12 hours long, and it went long this day. So we were just calling guys.

My first call was to Michael Strahan because he lived in New York and we wanted to get him across to New York, which can take some time to Radio City Music Hall.

My second one was to Derrick Brooks, which he was a fellow owner in the Arena Football League, and I loved Derrick and I just wanted to call my buddy and tell him the good news.

The third one was to Ray Guy, and Ray Guy was that famous punter from the Oakland Raiders who had been eligible for 29 years, and every time had gotten news that this was not going to be the year.

I called him and my cell phone obviously -- I'm from Orange County so it's area code 714, it wasn't 330 from Canton, but he answered it. I said, Ray, this is Dave Baker, the new president of the hall. I'd be president maybe like six weeks at that time. He in his slow Southern Mississippi drawl, he says, yes, sir. I said, Ray, it is my great pleasure, and boom, I could hear him hit the ground, I could hear his phone rattling around. His wife Sandy is going, oh baby, honey, baby, are you okay. This is like two minutes -- and you're in the media business, two minutes in media is a long time. I'm trying to get this guy over to Radio City Music Hall, and she's going, baby are you okay. Finally he gets up, he gets to his phone, and he goes, hey, I'm sorry. He goes, I'm not sure I understood until now how much this meant to me.

It was really at that moment that we all knew that we had to grab that so that fans could see it. So fans could

understand their journey and fans could understand the depth of their feeling.

I got to knock on the door of 60 or 70 guys during those eight years, and it was Jerry Kramer who waited 45 years, Randy Moss who -- Randy Moss to me, I just love him. He is a big personality, but when he came to the door, he was that guy who was a big star, and when you're a star it's all about yourself and all about protecting yourself, and you've got that big, beautiful smile. But when I told him, welcome to Canton, and I thanked him for all he'd done for the game and all he's going to do for the game, and promised him at the Hall of Fame they will keep his legacy forever, I'll tell you, I could see him transformed, just transformed from this guy who was a star to this guy who's an ambassador for the game.

So many of them have done that. By the way, there have been so many guys who are first-ballot Hall of Famers and you see them come in, but I'll tell you, when we have that weekend, and you've been there, man, the guys that are so special are the Hugh McElhennys, the Charlie Trippis, the Marv Levy who's 96 years old. There is this deal that these guys -- or the John Maddens. They love the game and they respect the game, and it is special.

That knock on the door -- Morten Andersen. Morten Andersen came from Denmark in the 10th grade as a high school exchange student. He goes back 41 years later, and he's the leading scorer in the history of the NFL. When he came to the door he put his head on my shoulder and cried for two minutes, and got a little uncomfortable at one point, but I'm very close to Morten, he's my buddy. But each one of these guys, it wasn't about one game like tomorrow will be, but it was about this journey.

They all thought about quitting, and they all needed the encouragement from somebody at some point, and they all -- they're not perfect people. I want to stress that. To me it was never about the hero worship of football stars or just the entertainment of football. It was about this incredible journey of adversity and integrity to drag a whole lot of other people to greatness with you and to a place that they didn't believe that they could get to.

Again, like I've said, what I love about that is we're seeing that in this incredible platform of football, the enormous ratings and the wonderful things we see and the Shakespearean drama that takes place in a three-and-a-half-hour game but where there's a fall from grace and somebody fumbles and then there's a redemption, they come back later, and then there's a resurrection and all these wonderful things.

But it's also very applicable to the rest of our lives. We all

struggle; none of us are perfect. If we can -- one of the great ones they had, I hope this is okay because you've stirred in me a lot of memories and emotions, but when I went to Calvin's door, Megatron, we had been in Mile High Stadium for Peyton that morning, we fly to Detroit. It's like 10:00 at night, and his wife knows we're coming and they've got a family conference call going on that's about business, but -- and it's dark out there. I mean, it is dark.

So we get up, we knock on his door and Calvin comes to the door and he knows it's me so he knows it must be good news, and he had this smile that lit up the entire outdoors.

He said two things to me. I said, what does this mean to you. He says, this is a message that I can share with a whole lot of other people and a whole lot of other kids, that if you put together enough good days, you might have a day like this. I thought that was a wonderful analogy of what life was all about.

Then the other thing, I was saying goodbye, he said, are you going back to Canton. I said, actually I've got to go knock on a couple more doors, and he says, oh, you're going to go gather up some more tears, aren't you.

I think that's what the journey is. It's that kind of emotion.

It's been wonderful to be a part of it, and again, it's not because I'm Ed McMahon knocking on their door like the Publisher's Clearinghouse, but I think at that moment, those guys are living in their legacy, and everyone has a legacy. Sam, you have a great legacy.

So if we can help everybody put those challenges in life in perspective, to overcome that adversity, to remember enough good days and the people who helped us get there, to me that's a wonderful place to be and it's a great job. I was privileged to do it.

Q. For every knock on the door, there are about two knocks you have to make to let people know it's not this year, and I wonder who draws the short straw on that one?

DAVID BAKER: Well, there were times when other staff members did it because we didn't have time, but if I could, I always want to make sure that I did that because we had experiences, there was a Hall of Famer who -- we didn't get to in time and somebody was celebrating next to him, and let me tell you, if you're invited -- if you're a finalist, you're one of the best thousand players in the history of this game that's been played by 330 young men and women, 5 million played it in college, only 29,000 have ever been appointed to play it, coach it or officiate it in the National Football League, and there's only 354 right now

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who have bronze busts in the Hall of Fame and I think 180 who are living who still have their gold jackets, because a lot of guys, including John Madden, he took his gold jacket to the grave with him. I was talking to Mike last night, his son, and he's buried in his gold jacket.

I think despite it being an honor, and they recognize it's an honor being a finalist, they're still the most competitive guys in the world, and so it still feels like somehow a loss, and it shouldn't be. It is spectacular.

For most of them, if you're invited twice as a finalist, you've got an 82 percent chance of being in the hall some day.

But I would say two things that are important. One is I remember having been commissioner of the Arena Football League. I wanted to make sure I called Kurt Warner that first year when he didn't make it, and he said, oh, Commish, don't worry, I understand. I said, I hope we can call you next year with better news. I'll always remember that he said, but tell me one thing, please tell me, did my buddy Orlando make it, who was up the same year. I said, no, I'm sorry, Kurt, he didn't make it, either. And he got mad at me. I mean, it didn't matter that he didn't make it, but for Orlando not to make it -- frankly, it should be hard to make it into the Hall of Fame, but I would also say that one of the things that the hall does that I dearly love is we have an archive for everyone.

My son will never be a Hall of Famer. He played eight years in the National Football League, and while he was a first-round draft choice and got to start a lot of games, he'll never be a Hall of Famer. But he has an archive. If you played one week in the NFL you have an archive.

It's what we can get to put in it, but you can put stuff in it, we can get you on tape and you can tell us what the game meant to you so that your grandchildren's grandchildren's grandchildren can know that. Again, one of the things I've loved about that is we all have a legacy. What are we leaving when -- some day I've told my wife when I have my funeral, which may not be long the way things are going, I don't want people gathering telling stories about what a good guy I am. I want them to gather and I want to somehow be able to communicate to them how much I loved them and how much they've helped me in this.

I got to see that over and over and over again. So it's special.

Q. There's some synchronicity in that Sam Baker played eight years in the NFL and you were eight years as president and CEO. Why not a ninth year? Why did you decide to hang it up?

DAVID BAKER: You know, I think it's time for somebody else to have the best job in the world --

Q. So there's some synchronicity in that Sam Baker played eight years as a left tackle in the NFL and David Baker was eight years as president and CEO of the Hall of Fame. Why not a ninth year?

DAVID BAKER: Well, you know, I think for a couple things. It's time for somebody else to have the best job in the world, and it is really the best job in the world. I wanted to have opportunity to come back to Orange County because we have 10 grandchildren here, about to have a great grandchild in about a week.

I love Canton, I love the good people of Canton; it is the most inspiring place on earth, but it doesn't offer the abundant sunshine and the authentic Mexican food that Southern California does.

I think there's a few other things I'd like to do that I wasn't going to be able to do there.

But this has meant a lot to me. The way I took the job was I was doing something else, and we have a project out in Henderson, Nevada, and a good friend Jed Hughes called me and said, hey, I'm doing a search for the president of the Hall of Fame, would you be interested in applying for the job, and respectfully I declined because I was doing this other project.

But he sent me the job description, and I sent it to my wife and attached it and said, hey, you'll never guess what happened today, and then I promptly erased it. She called me like 15 minutes later and she said, hey, we're going to go do this, and I said, well, sweetheart, I already told them no, and she said, well, you call them back.

I said, well, sweetheart, we've got this other project and what about our kids and our grandkids, and she said, well, you've got FaceTime and you've got partners that can take that over. I said, sweetheart, I don't know if you know this but it is cold in Ohio, it's colder than you have ever been. She said, that's okay. I said, why do you want to do this so much? And she said, have you read this?

And quite honestly, I had not. She said, you need to read this because this is what you believe. My mom and dad came from Arkansas and Mississippi to Southern California because they heard there was work here. My dad worked in a lumberyard, was the hardest working man I'd ever known, but my mom had no other great attribute other than loving kids, and she kept other people's kids. I learned great lessons from them, but frankly if it wasn't for sports I wouldn't have gone to college. I wouldn't have gone to law

school.

In my next generation, both my kids, Sam played football obviously at SC and then went to the Falcons and Ben played a year at Duke before going to NYU, and SC was the winningest team in the country and Duke was the losingest team in the country. But what was great about it is when we sat down, not only do we have both records, but both my boys, and you know them, they were learning the same lessons. They were learning from great coaches. They were learning how to be good teammates and good neighbors.

I'm proud of them now, as I am our other kids.

It's been special, but it's also time to go do something, too, but I will always be grateful for the many -- there's just been so many memories with it, Sam.

Q. Probably too hard to narrow down, but what was your greatest moment?

DAVID BAKER: Again, Sam, I'm sorry, it's hard leaving something you love that much, and there's no good time to do it when you do. But there was so many moments that any fan would love, the knock on the door, giving the gold jacket with Commissioner Goodell, giving the ring in their stadium in front of their fans, to look into the eyes of a guy like Jerry Kramer and to watch him remember those fans cheering for him at Lambeau Field, my goodness, there are so many great moments.

But I've often thought about this because at Super Bowl 50 in San Francisco, Brett and the other guys, it was a great class, we had him in the class, and as you know, it's a very busy time for us at Super Bowl. It's arguably the second biggest thing that happens at the Super Bowl next to the game is the election class from Hall of Fame.

But the day of the game, we actually get to decompress a little bit, and so we're having brunch with this class, and we're getting ready to put them on the bus and take them to the game and they're introduced at the first quarter break. A young 10-year-old kid comes up, and he asked if he could get his picture taken with me, and I kind of go, well, listen, don't you want Mr. Favre, and I can get you some of these other guys. He says, no, sir, I'd like my picture taken with you.

Pete Fairley, who was my chief of staff at the time, gave me a pin. Do you have a pin, baby? But it's the lapel pin that all of our staff and Hall-of-Famers wear that says the Pro Football Hall of Fame. I don't wear it because now I'm technically no longer with the Hall of Fame, but I did then, and so he gave me the lapel pin, and I reached down on

this 10-year-old kid, which is a long way for me at 6'9", and as I'm putting it on him, his mother is on the other side whispering into his ear in a way that it's going right past the kid's ear into me, and she says, "Now you have to live a life of character."

To me, that's the essence of what sports is all about. That's the essence of what the Hall of Fame is about. That's the essence of writers like you, of Jim Murray, Grantland Rice. They wrote stories so that future generations could learn from those stories.

It doesn't mean that you're perfect. It doesn't mean that you're moralistic. It means that you're going to persevere. It means that you're going to overcome adversity.

So I kind of got in the habit after that if I'd see some kid at a stadium, Colleen would give me like she did then a Hall of Fame pin and I'd put them on them and say, hey, now you've got to live a life of character, and talk to your dad and what that's about.

Through the years I've had so many kids write me or parents write me and say, let me tell you what this means to us. But that is an easy moment for me to see the real value of what sports is all about, and again, I've seen it in so many of these guys. I mean, let me -- we take them over to the Honors show, we introduce them in the middle of the show. Our guys in the audience come up and welcome them.

That same year, Brett Favre is in it, and we have a press conference afterwards, and you've probably been at it, I imagine, so they're lined up here and I kind of administer the press conference so I'm waiting for cameras and 100 press guys to get started, and Brett happens to be the first one next to me.

I said, how you doing? And he goes, are you kidding? He goes -- he looked at his hand, he goes, I just shook the hand of Roger Staubach, and you would have thought they played golf or know each other or do something, and he could see me kind of chuckle a little bit, and he said, no, you don't understand; all my life I dreamed of being Roger Staubach, and then he paused for a second, and he goes, hey, I guess I'm on his team right now, right? And I said, you're on his team forever.

But even Brett Favre had somebody who he dreamed of being. That's what I love about the game. That's what I love about the huddle. That's what I love about the way you write about it.

Q. Thank you, Dave.



DAVID BAKER: Thank you.

Q. Dave Baker, Hall of Farmer, new induction. I don't have a jacket for you, but really, really appreciate it, Dave. Great seeing you.

DAVID BAKER: Hey, let me give you this because you were a Bill Nunn Hall of Fame Writer of the Year, and thanks for all you do for the game, buddy.

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