



After the Buzzer

Episode 14: Sports Agent Leigh Steinberg

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Bob Wallace: Welcome to After the Buzzer. I'm Bob Wallace, Chair of the Sports Law Practice at Thompson Coburn in St. Louis. We specialize in representing entities with sports interests. Whether it's acquisitions, facilities, finance, real estate deals or contract negotiations, we have lawyers with a lot of experience. I started doing these podcasts because there are a lot of great topics and people involved in sports and I wanted to let our listeners meet them.

Today's guest is noted sports agent Leigh Steinberg. Leigh has been one of the leading sports agents for over 40 years. He was known as the "quarterback's agent," having represented Hall of Famers Warren Moon, Troy Aikman and Steve Young. Today, Leigh is representing last year's MVP, Patrick Mahomes, and up and coming star, among many others. I got to know Leigh in 1981 when he represented St. Louis football Cardinals quarterback, Neil Lomax.

Over the years, we've negotiated several contracts for Cardinal players. I claim our negotiation for Tim McDonald was the basis of the "Show Me the Money" scene in Jerry McGuire, in which many credit Leigh's career as the inspiration for the movie which of course makes perfect sense. Additionally, Leigh has represented 64 total first round NFL picks including the number one pick and unprecedented eight times with 11 Hall of Fame players. I may him can he name those later. With over 300 professional athlete clients and over \$4 billion dollars in contracts negotiated not to mention \$750 million dollars in charitable funds raised, Leigh Steinberg is a sports agent legend. An undergraduate and law school graduate of the University of California at Berkley for this first client I believe was Steve Rakowski who he knew from the dorm. It is my pleasure to welcome super-agent, Leigh Steinberg, to After the Buzzer. Leigh, welcome.

Leigh Steinberg: I'm really happy to be with you, Bob.

Bob Wallace: So am I correct? Is the Tim McDonald negotiation the basis of that Show Me the Money?

Leigh Steinberg: You can have the story any way you'd like, Bob.

Bob Wallace: Okay, good, good, good. That was one of the things I edit out if you say I don't know what you're talking about, Bob. You had nothing to do with that.

Leigh Steinberg: But it was Tim McDonald. And he was a free agent in 1993 and I have taken Cameron Crowe to elite meetings for the NFL which were held that year in

Palm Desert. And Tim was actually a free agent. He could go to any team he wanted to so I went upstairs one night and Tim was talking with, with Cameron about what he was looking for in this situation and Lou Dobbs and MoneyLine was on television in the background. And Tim gestured toward the screen and said I'm looking for a team to show me winning which I haven't had. I'm looking for a team to show me respect. And then he said, or Cameron wrote, but it became "Show Me the Money." And which I've now heard for 22 years, every time I go to an airport or go out to dinner.

Bob Wallace: So tell me, I mentioned that you probably got your start doing Steve Rakowski, is that correct, is that the story?

Leigh Steinberg: There really was no traditional field of sports agency when I started, Bob. It was 1975, the Atlanta Falcons had the first pick. Steve Bartkowski had lived in a dorm where I was a dorm counselor and we became friends and in 1975 he became the first pick in the first round overall and asked me to represent him, so there I was brimming with legal experience. I had graduated from law school in '74 and traveled the world for a year, and we arrived in Atlanta and there were fleet lights flashing in the sky. We were going to sign the contract. When we get to the airport, the fleet lights, huge crowds pressed up against the police line and the first thing we hear is we interrupt the Johnny Carson Show to bring you a special news bulletin and I looked at him like Dorothy looked at Toto when they got to Munchkin Land and I said I know we're not in Berkley anymore. And then --

Bob Wallace: So that was the first deal that you did was what did you use as your background to do that?

Leigh Steinberg: The fact that I had been involved with student politics for a long time and ended up student body president at Berkley and so I didn't understand very much but I did know leverage and there was a rural football league at that time. Teams like the Shreveport Steamer and the Chicago Wind, and Art was a big good looking quarterback so we knew enough to know that leagues would want him and that gave us leverage so it ended up the largest rookie contract in NFL history. But when I was student body president of Cal, the governor of California was Ronald Reagan and he and I got into some very interesting discussions, so I had negotiated at other levels.

Bob Wallace: What was the student body president at Berkley doing negotiating with the governor of California? What were you negotiating about?

Leigh Steinberg: About the fact that we kept demonstrating for one cause or another, especially the war in Vietnam and he would send police in that would crack down and there'd be tear gas and everything else so, the campuses and campus unrest was a huge issue back in the mid 70's and he was determined to hold the line.

Bob Wallace: That's interesting. But for being the dorm counselor, what kind of law were you going to practice? What were you going to do other than be a sports agent or is that what you always wanted to do?

Leigh Steinberg: No, I did raise me with two core values. There was no field to aspire to because both teams at that point, Bob, could still hang up the phone and say we don't deal with agents. So there was no guaranteed right that came later in a collective bargaining agreement in '77 but in those first years they could just hang up the phone and not talk to you if you were an agent or the famous story where they traded a player so there was nothing to aspire to. My dad raised me with two core values. One was treasure relationships, especially family, and the second was to try to make a meaningful difference in the world in a positive way and help people who couldn't help themselves. So my background really was trying to change the world for the better. And that's where I saw that athletes were the celebrities. They were the movie stars and I thought, you know, if they would go back to their high school community and set up a scholarship fund or work with a church or boys and girls club, they could put down roots and trigger imitative behavior.

And then at the collegiate level, the alumni, after all, are primarily related back to the school through the football or basketball programs. And this would be a group of great mentors if an athlete would set up a scholarship fund at the Universities. Troy Aikman has given over a million dollars to UCLA. And then at the pro level, a charitable foundation that would have leading political figures, business leaders and community leaders for a cause. And whatever it was that particularly bothered the athletes so with work done, the former camp in Atlanta running back we set up homes for the holidays where he's put 175 single mothers into the first homes they'll ever own by making the down payment. So philosophically, I saw that I could still do the same thing in terms of making impact in the world through the popularity of high profile athletes so it was when I represented the boxer, Lennox Lewis, heavy weight champion, we did a PSA campaign that said real men don't hit women and that could do more to trigger behavioral change in rebellious adolescents than a thousand authority figures ever could on the issue of domestic violence.

Bob Wallace: You mentioned Lennox the boxer. So did you, so you're really known for football but you have done other talent representation and other sports and I know you've done some new casters and stuff, too, right?

Leigh Steinberg: We have. So, with my partner, Jeff Moorehead, we had a practice that had over 60 baseball players, people like Butch Rodriguez and Sean Green and Matt Williams and Will Clark --

Leigh Steinberg: We had a basketball practice that had a number of first rounders and lottery picks. I represented the U.S. team in the World Cup in soccer back in 1994, represented some Olympians, so basically, they're all the same principles and it allowed us to diversify. Our current practice has mostly footballs but we plan to move to baseball and basketball and now they're new fields like Esports and new sports and new projects coming on that will alter the way we experience sports.

Bob Wallace: So, so let's go back a little bit and talk about your early years. And I always remember, as I said, we met in 1981 and you had quarterback Neil Lomax with the Cardinals, two guys that didn't really want to stay in St. Louis and I

guess I kind of understood that. But what, talk about the early years before there was any players, when you had started just breaking into this business and as you mentioned there weren't a lot of sports agents. There wasn't really a field and I know the Cardinals, they brought me along because they were one of the teams that would hang up on agents.

And I always remembered negotiating with you and then afterwards, you know, we had to make sure that we sort of had the signings happen so they wouldn't upset the front office of the ownership but it's changed over the years, hasn't it?

Leigh Steinberg: Well, and for example, the Cardinals that you worked for ended up moving to Phoenix and then all of a sudden they build a new stadium and all of a sudden they had money and so in your area, you were sort of handcuffed because they felt like they were in a smaller revenue base and so they had to be tougher in terms of contracts. But in those early year, remember, when a player in football signed a contract, when that contract came to an end and they were theoretically free, they weren't because the incumbent team had the right to renew them for just a 10% raise and had the leverage. The team could just keep giving them 10% rises and they had nowhere else to play. It wasn't until 1993 that free agency came along. So that was like the years that dignified begging and because where else did a draft pick have to go but back to the team that assigned him and for some reason the Cardinals liked my players so in 1979, it was Theotis Brown and then in 1981 it was Neal Lomax and then it was Tim McDonald and then later it was Stafford Mayes and then later it was --

Bob Wallace: John Lee?

Leigh Steinberg: John Lee. It just went on and on but I was fortunate because when the team did move, which I didn't think was the right thing to do. I never liked it when franchises abandoned their fans and the consequence of the Cardinals leaving and the Colts going to Indianapolis was it left two empty franchises and instead of rewarding St. Louis and Baltimore with a franchise they gave them to Jacksonville and Charlotte, remember?

Bob Wallace: Right.

Leigh Steinberg: And but anyway, those days, teams had no leverage. Teams had all the leverage, there was no free agency, so I hunkered down on trying to develop second career plans for the players with the help of some of the alumnus from schools and would network having them understand that they would meet people in business and politics and entertainment and sports and if they would network and keep a rolodex, they'd be able to do great opportunities for a second career.

Bob Wallace: So you've represented some of the great quarterbacks in the NFL. Do you still have relationships with the Troy Aikmans and the Warren Moons and the Steve Youngs of the world?

Leigh Steinberg: I do. As a matter of fact, this year our Superbowl party will have to be virtual because of COVID-19. This would be the 34th party but we're – because of the pandemic, we're having to tape it so people like Warren Moon and Troy Aikman and Steve Young and Desmond Howard and a whole slew of players can send hello messages.

Bob Wallace: Well when you're talking about teams and leverage and stuff, I almost brought out my little violin. I never thought that you didn't have leverage. You're a pretty good – how did you create the leverage so that you got \$300 billion dollars in contracts?

Leigh Steinberg: So you were – here was the problem. Philosophically, I thought that a holdout was the wrong thing but it was the only way to do it because philosophically, I've always thought that the battle between labor and management was a sideshow and that we ought to do our business privately and not have public contract negotiations because the average income in this country is what, like \$60,000 so we don't want to rub in the fact of fans an athlete can't live in \$8 million dollars, needs \$15. And we shouldn't have had collective bargaining agreements, so I said to owners, look, our real battle is for our share of discretionary entertainment spending so the real competition for the NFL is the NBA, it's major league baseball, it's Walt Disney World, it's Netflix and HBO. It's other alternative ways to spend money so we should be together building the brand.

So as the years went on, I started to get close to owners because I had the stars on so many of the different teams and said look, we share this together. Let's stop savaging each other and let that go and so for example, in 2001, the Leonard Davis was the first pick of the then Arizona Cardinals and we had a very smooth negotiation. It was the second pick in the first round. So my point was that I learned a lot about negotiating, frankly, for Bill Bedwell, because in the Theotis Brown negotiation, I kept saying, well if he was paying the fair market value and delivering quality players to the fans at Kansas City, that would be one thing but he's saving that money. If he was giving it to charity, that would be another thing and guess what. He called my bluff and he gave the differential in between the offer they were making and Theotis's to a charity in St. Louis. So I said, you know what? It might not be a good idea to publicly push an owner up against the wall.

Bob Wallace: Right.

Leigh Steinberg: That is the person who ultimately has to sign the check so you better find out how to put your interests together so that we can think of new stadiums with jumbo score boards and luxury boxes and premium seating and an NFL network and how to use the internet and so behind the scenes I started doing that with donors and it changed everything.

Bob Wallace: So did you have different approaches for different teams and different owners and, you know, what was – were you scouting, negotiating with Bob Wallace as opposed to negotiating with Jim Boston?

Leigh Steinberg: Yes, because I knew that Bob Wallace had more limited resources and a more limited budget than did a team like the Dallas Cowboys who were taking full advantage for being American's team and St. Louis was a little slower to develop off the field. They caught up but it took them to go to Arizona. So I knew you were dealing with a more limited budget. Mike Brown of the Cincinnati Bengals, I believe, I committed heinous sins in an earlier life because I kept drawing him, you know, the first round draft pick in 1987, 1992, 1994, 1995 and 1999 and had he been, I represented astronauts, he'd be the commissioner of the moon. So the point was that you knew the Minnesota and Cincinnati and St. Louis back in the '80's in those days had more limited budgets so you just had to live with the fact that you weren't going to get quite the deal you could from another team.

Bob Wallace: So now you mentioned that in, you know, way back when, we had the option year and it was a 10% raise, the games changed a lot. What are the differences now? It's a lot more free for the players, a lot, you know, it may not be the same as baseball but it seems to be a lot better for the players in football. Talk about some of the differences, Leigh.

Leigh Steinberg: Well, there's just more money. For a while there from 1993 to 2011, the players got their percentage of the gross up to 55% through free negotiating and 45%. Now owners have 53% and players have 47%. But the point was that the push towards free agency that started in 1993 resulted in big competition over free agent players and B-plus players ended up getting A-plus contracts because they were the only ones available on the free agent market and the only way to enhance the team. More towards the future, the salary they instituted in 1993 really took power in 2011. So it meant a rookie salary cap where there was a lot less negotiability than there'd been before and teams essentially made offers that were the most they could pay under the cap pretty quickly in those negotiations. That eliminated rookie holdouts, it – which was a plus, but less negotiability and we devolved to a two-tier standard. Big stars get progressively bigger salaries. So you got Patrick Mahomes at averaging \$47 million dollars on his contract but to make up for that there has to be a loan to players who are just making the minimum. And so we got the same sort of income inequality although everyone's well-paid, that we do in the rest of the economy.

Bob Wallace: So is that good for the sport? I mean football is such a team sport and the quarterback can't survive unless the left tackle's really good. Now left tackles are really well-paid in this league so that, it's not the income inequality that maybe other positions – but is that good for game?

Leigh Steinberg: Here's the difference. What happens is when you lose that quality left tackle because of injury, concussion or something, the replacement doesn't just descend, if we were using a grading system, it doesn't go from an A to A minus or B plus, it goes from A to C plus, or B minus and it's a drastic hurt. Not only does the team not have the money, cap money, they have the cash, but they don't have the cap space. If they could find a replacement, which they can't mid-season, that's of that quality, no one's sitting out on the street, and second of all, they wouldn't have the cap room to add the player anyway. So injury now takes a disproportionate effect because the backups are

veterans at an expanded veteran minimum but part of it counts against the cap and part of it doesn't, but we have a whole lot of under average free agents and lower round draft picks who make it very steadily, much more than any other day. So the teams are made up of a few superstars and starters and quarterbacks are now making as much money as players in basketball and baseball but that's the position and then it's all positional.

Bob Wallace: As I kind of look at it though. As I see the quarterbacks, it seems to me that the window of opportunity for a lot of teams is when they have a quarterback on his rookie contract and then, I mean the reason that Brady and the Patriots did so well is because he took a below market contract for so long.

Leigh Steinberg: See, you're right. There's a tension between the quarterback wanting the best supporting cast to keep him going because it's greatly in his interests to make the playoffs in the Super Bowl. That's the players who are going to get the most endorsements. That's the players that get the most profile from that. And the desire to be paid well. So it's sort of a balance because if a contract is not structured in a way that's cap-friendly enough for a contending team, then they're going to have to discard a number of players. It reminds me of the time I was representing Jeff George an Indianapolis traded Atlanta to get the first pick. But in the pick they gave up the left tackle and they gave up the wide receiver. And so even though he got to go where he wanted to go, it was with less supporting cast. So, it's greatly in the interest – here's the other switch bomb. In the time since the '80's the game has changed so we now have a much more pass-oriented game and it becomes impossible to get to and win the Superbowl without a franchise quarterback. And we define that as someone that you can win because of rather than with, who you can build a team around for 10 to 12 years and who, most importantly, in critical situations, in adversity, that quarterback's thrown a couple interceptions, the crowd is booing, the center's looking at him like he's on hallucinogens, no one can understand what's going on with the quarterback and the game's getting out of hand, what does the quarterback do then? Can he compartmentalize? Two now past failures, two now external distractions, adopt a quiet mind and elevate his level of play to take a team to and through the Super Bowl. And if you have those players, because most probably a third of the games or blowouts, but now we have two-thirds of them coming down the last quarter and a lot of them come down the last drive. So it's what do you do then and if you don't have that franchise quarterback that search will go on and on and on and some teams never quite solve it.

Bob Wallace: So, you talk about the franchise quarterback and you represented several, many, many...and it's still, and is still representing. How do you deal with the quarterback? And what role do you play in helping him navigate that compartmentalizing that you talk about or dealing with the outside pressures? Or dealing with the family pressures – all of that? What's your role in that?

Leigh Steinberg: It's...those players come with that inborn because it's the same skill they needed in high school games and college games and they have the ability to hyper-focus on this moment exclusive of anything else. So, your advice to him is stay in process, stop worrying about ultimate results and do the things in training, preparation and in the game that get you where you want to go.

So, the first stage of it is have a smooth rookie signing. Until last year with the pandemic we had rookies coming into rookie minicamp, but then instead of going home like they did in the old days, they would stay another month to six weeks for what are called OTA's. And they would have that playbook in their hand and be working with veterans and working with their coaches. So they got a head start. So, you're looking for that to not get interrupted. And then they have to be in camp on time. And then it's studying film and it's looking over and over and over again and doing the homework. So someone like Patrick Mahomes, is never really out of season. I mean he's doing vigorous workouts in the off-season. He's studying plays. He doesn't use the two weeks in between their bye and the playoffs to... he's studying film and making sure that he's prepared. The other thing is that these players live in a bubble. And, the best cure for aberrational behavior is prevention.

So, it's sitting down with the rookie and explaining that from the minute you walk outside your house you are under binocular-type scrutiny. So, you cannot drive with alcohol in your system. If you go out to a bar you have to have people around you and steer you away from a fight. You have to be disciplined and never put your hands on anybody, but especially women, in anger. And, all of those things that can disrupt a career, you try to make sure that they never happen in the first place, but staying in process, continuing to not be worried about newspaper clippings and outside things, we've very often taken the position on a young player that they are not doing any endorsements their first year, because the owner, the general manager, the coach and them as players, we're looking to see if that young man is serious about football. And, I'm, you know, sure that Baker Mayfield had his rationality played well this year and the year before he was struggling, but he was on every commercial. So, you don't want to put that pressure onto a young player and so Mahomes didn't do big endorsements until after this second year when he was MVP of the league.

Bob Wallace: Mahomes, I mean he's from Texas Tech, right? That's where he...that's his college and, you know, I mean he wasn't a household name coming out of college. Those who were involved in drafting and, they knew about him but, you know, he wasn't like Baker Mayfield who won the Heisman. He wasn't a big, big name like him. How do you identify the players? And then when you do identify them, how do you go about recruiting them and who are you recruiting? Are you recruiting their parents, your recruiting the kid, uh, you know, in basketball I'd say are you recruiting the AAU coach, football is not quite the same, but, uh...

Leigh Steinberg: So with Patrick you could see the arm skills and then if you spend a second talking to him you can see how brilliant he was. He has an eidetic memory meaning he can remember every play he ever played in football and he can remember them to correct them when things went array. So take someone like that, your probably looking at whatever year they're going to come out, so what they do here, you'd be starting earlier before that season, and the first contact is with the parents in our situation. We're looking, we're profiling young athletes for the quality of their heart, their intelligence, their role-modeling, are they willing to do that, and then they're looking for arm strength. His arm strength is like nothing I ever saw before. And, you know,

I've represented over a hundred quarterbacks, and his accuracy is like nothing I've ever seen before. He has the ability to do some freaky things. When ESPN had him out there for car wash, they do an experiment outside where there's a walkway between two high buildings. So for him to walk the passover is a prodigious task, okay? They had a dummy sitting on the other side of it. Not only did he throw the ball over the top which most people can't do, he landed it in the dummy's lap.

Which is, you know, counterintuitive. Um, so then your meeting with his parents. They're probably meeting with a number of other agencies, and you do a first meeting where you layout your background, path to the draft, second career, endorsements and a plan for them that would take him from that exact moment through draft day and then into being a veteran, and then hopefully to all the way to the hall of fame, and then to a second career. So, you talk about Duron Cherry, the retired safety from the Kansas City Chiefs, who because of the Cherry Foundation was able to buy the Anheuser Busch distributorship. Then we introduce him to Wayne Weaver and Duron became the first retired player in years to ever own part of a national franchise. So you're laying out both short-term and long-term, a vision for them. So now they start to hone down and you probably have a second meeting with the parents. And that's all proceeding ever meeting the player himself because they've got plenty to do their last year with classes and with trying to be the best player they can. There are close to a 1,000 certified agents – there were before the pandemic, um, trying to represent these 330 draft picks, so there's massive amounts of competition. The biggest skill in all this, Bob, is listening. If you can tuck below the layers of the onion and get someone to tell you their deepest anxieties and fears and their greatest hopes and dreams, so you truly understand them as an individual, not a generic player, but if you can draw them out then you can help those hopes and dreams as far as those anxieties and fears and take them to whatever their individual fulfillment goals are. So, anyway, it would get down to a few.

Now, states across the country now have regulations. They have state regulatory boards so an agent has to be on register in those states. That's a big shift from before, it means agents were regulated by states. Then you have the Players Association able to enforce certain rules of conduct for agents, or they can take away the right of representation. And then, certain schools have compliance. So families may use the compliance or the union or other people to help them in the screening, but they're well prepared now. They have a list of questions, where again, you know, Biden could have appointed me for Secretary of State, so, it's highly competitive, but there's a match where someone feels like you get them, you offer the best services...in the modern day we're talking about branding, social media, how to develop a unique brand...it's a whole set of different services. Then you're able to sign the player. You have to sign an SRA, which is a standard representation agreement that the national football league players, or the basketball union, or the baseball union, you have to sign a contract that they design.

Bob Wallace: So, do you see the players, the college players, being much more sophisticated than they used to be? Do you, you know, Booger McFarland came out recently with a statement that players were more interested in

brands than they were about playing – I don't know if I agree with that...I don't think I agree with, and he put a racial tone to it as well. But do you notice that players are more sophisticated now, uh, that they come out with more of a plan than they used to?

Leigh Steinberg: Undoubtedly they're more sophisticated than they were, because they've grown up, they're millennials who've grown up or whatever that generation is called...

Leigh Steinberg: Because...they've grown up with social media where you and I learned it in later life, they grow up with it. I mean you see 3-year olds on a flight working an iPad better than I can so they're much more sophisticated. As to their motivation, these are unique individuals who are so hypercompetitive that they want to compete and they want to win. They want to be starters. They want to win games, they want to go to a Super Bowl, they would try to beat you in tiddly winks. So whether or not they're more aware of social media and more sophisticated doesn't matter. But they're also millennials which means that the attention span... it is slightly shorter. So what used to be an 1-1/2 presentation may be more like 30 minutes.

Bob Wallace: But you know, but on top of being millennials and social media, they're also more socially conscious right now. So let's talk about your involvement with some of your players and some of their social justice movements uh, that they're involved in. I mean I know Patrick Mahomes did some wonderful things in Kansas City for voting and all. Knowing what I know about you and what you believe in, that's important that your players are involved in that stuff.

Leigh Steinberg: I think it's important for their development also. The enemy of players is self-absorption. You know, it's, it's feeling they're the center of everything and not understanding they're part of a larger society. So I encourage players to (1) inform themselves so they know what they're talking about; (2) be careful about how they do it, but (3) stand up for colleges that are important. So if you have unjust police shootings or killings, or you have situations in the inner city, the first step is, can you raise your voice to raise awareness, and the second is can you design a program yourself that will alleviate these conditions. So, we do an agent's academy and a sports career conference and we're not put a model together where we can take it into inner city schools and give those high schoolers a head start on not being an athlete, but being a professional working for a team, a league, a conference, working in marketing or branding or PR facilities management training and try to do that. So players need to be careful because we have a very divided country, but not comprising principles and, and standup in a way that's effective and communicates and doesn't get misunderstood.

Bob Wallace: Right. You know the famous, Michael Jordan quote – well, he says he didn't say that - "republicans buy sneakers too." Have you ever had to have a conversation with one of your athletes saying if you take this position, you're going to lose some fans, therefore you may lose some endorsements. Are those hard conversations in if you have to have them?

Leigh Steinberg: There hard only because this country as you saw last week in Capitol Hill, you know, is divided not just between two parties, but you have active white supremacists out there and people are angry. So, you're stepping into the middle of that, but if not now, when and what would be the time? This is the time and I had a father who used to say that if you're looking for someone to change a circumstance or a condition or solve a problem and you keep waiting for they or them to do it, you know, older people, political figures, he'd say son, you could wait forever, then they is you, you are the they. So I'd like athletes to have a sense of empowerment where they understand as long as they know what they're talking about and carefully crafted their message they need to speak up.

Bob Wallace: Speaking of empowerment now, college athletes and there's a lot of discussion about whether they are employees and whether they should be paid, this name, image and likeness (NIL) issue. Do you think college athletes shouldn't be paid? I always tell people that I think they should be paid, but I'm not smart enough to come up with the system that works. That doesn't mean it shouldn't happen because I can't come up with it. I think there are enough smart people, put them in a room, put everything on the table and let's discuss it. What's your feeling on college athletes being paid and the next step in this NIL colleges?

Leigh Steinberg: Well, the...here in California we passed SB-206 which allows players to market their name, image and likeness with a marketing adviser. Um, and that's for the NCAA to adopt similar rules. Just last Saturday they decided to put the brakes on it because people were already to start signing with marketing agents. That particular slice will only help so many players. Think of football quarterback, think of someone whose got brand coming out of school, plays for Alabama or Florida State or think Jameis Winston, think Johnny Manziel, you know think too of Tua Tagovailoa and those types, and maybe a female who is competing for the Olympics, like a gymnast or something. Having said that, there's so much popularity for college football that there...I am sure there are opportunities in Alabama for players who are not the superstar player. As to your first question, we have two types of players that come to campus under scholarships. Some of them coming from middle class that are supporting them.

This didn't come from families where it's really a tough economic circumstances and those players are left at a standard of living on the campus which is below their non-athletic peers. And because my parents gave me an allowance when I went to school and if they didn't I could have worked in the summer to supplement that income, but players can't. So we don't need to have them live like the Sultan of Brunei, but if you give them enough money so they at least have access to a car, they could get home for Thanksgiving if they chose to, and they could have decent meals and things, then I think there would be less contentiousness. The problem is that whatever you would do for that group of high revenue athletes, like football players, you also have to do for an equal amount of female athletes because of Title XI. So when you refer to not being clear on how to solve it there are big barriers and but I think that if they created some funding for athletes from disadvantaged homes so they don't look up at the stands and see there are

80,000 fans, they don't look in the student store and see their jersey number being sold, they don't look at the TV ratings and realize the size of the NCAA contracts. I also would pass a rule that you'd have to have the pros part of it where anyone who graduated from high school could come out and play pro ball in whatever sports they tried. Very quickly, football players have realized you're probably not going to be a freshman running back able to survive in the NFL. If you're an offensive lineman you're going to need to grow, you know, over time so you'd have a much better chance. But if we did that then you'd have true student athletes on campus and then even though I wish every player would get a degree, they don't now. And some of them, like in one-and-done are just going to school to get to the pros. So, I'd eliminate that group and then you could stop the alums, agents and other people from corrupting the system.

Bob Wallace: Right. I agree with you on that. So coming down towards the end, Leigh, and I appreciate your time, uh, doing this, but you worked on a lot of different issues of, I know Save the Rams, some of the other things, your charitable work, what...what are you most proud of?

Leigh Steinberg: I think it's, it's helping the athletes raise hundreds of millions of dollars for a variety of causes dear to them. In my own life, when I saw the rise of white supremacy and Oklahoma City, I thought we need a new generation to fight this and our time is now. So I went to the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and we did a training program in the thirtieth biggest cities. We had one there in St. Louis. We train young doctors, lawyers, business people, housewives how to spot hate groups and how to intervene in crisis situations and then how to go into school systems and promote ethnic tolerance so young kids are taught not to hate. And, we trained, I don't know, 10,000 of them in the 30 biggest cities so it's been vanguard against hate. S

So, I think at the end of it, it's what you've done for others that really is the key. I struggled with alcoholism for some years. I'm now in my eleventh year of sobriety, but the reason I've been public about it is in the hope that it will help someone still struggling and someone whose still caught in that spiral of addiction and is hopeless in searching and there is help out there for people who are struggling. So, it's trying to make a difference with your life and leaving the world better than you found it.

Bob Wallace: So, in your mind, and, and, it is...it's almost 45 years you've been involved in the sports world?

Leigh Steinberg: I think it's actually 47 when I started.

Bob Wallace: You look pretty good for 80 years old.

Leigh Steinberg: Laughter.

Bob Wallace: We talked about the league, the sports world chain, what do think it will...where will we be in 10 years? Do you have a crystal ball that you can tell us about?

Leigh Steinberg: I think we're still going to advance on a more vibrant ways to experience sports. So we had Mahomes do a project in virtual reality where you could put a helmet on and you are all of a sudden in Arrowhead Stadium and predicated on what you do with the ball in your hand and how you throw it and what happens. You're either rushed and sacked or you're throwing touchdown passes, but it feels real, like you're in that moment. I think we'll have people able to sit at home and dial up every experience an athlete has as time goes on so they can experience the thrill of a long run or something else.

There are now new leagues where fans vote on who the coaches are and what players get cut and all the rest of it. We're moving where all of the advances in technology...I have a new plan so you go to a stadium and you're a millennial and 3 hours 15 minutes, with 28 minutes of action is probably making you very restless if you're of that generation that's used to multitasking. So on this phone app you would take in, you would have your fantasy steps down one side, you'd have your gambling bets down the other, you'd be able to text and talk smack to people in or out of the stadium. We let the fans vote on one play call a games - if they protest a call. We let fans vote on one referee overturn. Now when you touch it, you can order from the snack bar. When you touch it you get a whole unending diet of content that is other games, with puzzles, quizzes and it all monetizes at the end. So I think we're heading there.

I think we're heading eventually towards solutions in the concussion realm because there's now a profit motive. I held the first concussion conference back in 1994, and I've held 16 since and we're actually doing a live talk on it and we now do them at the Super Bowl conferences. But the point is that we're coming up with football that only has blocking and tackling during games and players aren't hitting otherwise. We're coming up with new nutraceuticals and pharmaceuticals, prophylactic to protect the brain or cure it once it's done. Helmets that do more than just protect against a skull fracture and better ways of blocking and tackling. So this is a major ticking timebomb because the players are so big and strong and fast and the G-force that hit is stronger, but I think we're getting to a place where because there's a profit motive there'll be more innovation.

Bob Wallace: Okay. Let me ask you, and I apologize for not touching on this earlier, but I did want to get your opinion on the lack of diversity in hiring the NFL. I mean we're going into another season and it looks like we'll have one person of color being hired. There's something wrong with that, isn't there?

Leigh Steinberg: Yes, there is. And the tragic thing is we've gone backwards. It's important for so many reasons: communication skills with the players, it's important to have role models for young blacks and know they don't have to be an athlete, but they can be in the front office. It's like when Obama was elected president, it helped perpetuate the idea that African Americans can also be president. There are thousands of jobs in sports which are nonathletic and we need to make sure that we have enough diversity that the Rooney Rule works, right?

And, and in front offices...now the way you have to start is you have to start bringing in people of color at a younger age. Right? So they work their way up the front office, they work their way up to the coaching staffs. So the infusion has to start at the bottom so you're getting a number of coordinators in football or just ready to take the next step for who are people of color. Look at the players, there 2/3, 70% African American. Pro-football is a great pastime and passion in this country now. It's not only the most popular sport, it's the most popular televised entertainment. Some weeks 5 of the top 10 shows are that. So this has to set a model for other sports and football should be first in having talent, but you've got to get them to the coordinator level first. You've got to have large number of black and Hispanic agent assistance and then coordinators so that you've got so many of them coming out – it was similar to black quarterbacks, right? So, you look at it, the MVP of the league two years ago was Patrick Mahomes. The MVP of the league last year was Lamar Jackson.

Bob Wallace: Lamar Jackson.

Leigh Steinberg: And, you know, you look all around at the Russell Wilsons and Tyler Murrays and Deshaun Watsons, you know of the world and they're setting a great example, but we need to have more. It's not an option. We just need to do this.

Bob Wallace: Can we get the players to become a voice for that? We want to see more of us in these positions.

Leigh Steinberg: I think that's a very good suggestion. And um, you know, now that it's the off-season for most players, I'll start talking with them about. I'll call it the Wallace Program.

Bob Wallace: Okay. If you need any help, I would love to do that with you. So, in closing Leigh, how much longer are you going to be involved in this arena?

Leigh Steinberg: Remember, I've always picked the things I thought were fun and interesting to do, along with representing athletes. So, if it was, you know, saving the San Francisco Giants, if it was writing two best selling books, if it was being the consultant on a series of motion pictures, all those things, so we're training younger people. I've got a really good younger partner, Chris Cavat, my son, Matt, is also an agent. We've got younger people to do some of it, but I'll keep my hand in, but there are other fun avenues.

Bob Wallace: Well that's great. Well Leigh, thank you for taking the time. I know you're busy. I know you got to...are you heading to Kansas City this weekend?

Leigh Steinberg: I am.

Bob Wallace: You can get in the stadium?

Leigh Steinberg: Um...

Bob Wallace: I guess you know somebody, huh?

Leigh Steinberg: No. No. It's no agents allowed, right? Yes, somehow I think I'll, I'll go in. The other game is Green Bay vs. Tampa Bay that we have clients in. I'm trying to convince our younger lawyer, Chris, that he must go to that game and sit outside in the sand. While the aging, decrepit...

Bob Wallace: I hear you.

Leigh Steinberg: There you go.

Bob Wallace: Well good. Well, thank you Leigh very much. I appreciate your time. Good luck. Good luck to our Kansas City boy in Missouri. We root for him here in St. Louis. And they're such a fun team to watch and he's such a good player, so best of luck to you and I appreciate you taking the time.

Leigh Steinberg: Well it's my pleasure. You've always been great at what you do and a real gentleman and you've made you own contributions to the world of sports for which we're grateful.

Bob Wallace: Thanks Leigh. Alright, to our listeners, I hope you enjoyed listening to Leigh and that you enjoyed this and our other podcast. If you have, let us know. You can provide your feedback by going to the Apple Podcast and going to the rating and review section for our podcast. If you're listening on Stitcher, go to [Stitcher.com](https://www.stitcher.com) and if there's a topic that you would like to hear us discuss, let us know that too. We thank you for listening.