**AFTER THE BUZZER Jim Thomas Part 2 Transcript**

Jim Thomas: Yeah. After the Super Bowl just laughed I remember John, you know how he is. He said our schedule was so easy and it was.

Bob Wallace: It was.

Jim Thomas: I'm like John, you don't make the schedule. What do you have? What do you, you know, you have no reason to feel guilty or whatever. But yeah, it was shocking with Vermeil. I mean, there had been rumors and I only, the day after, the day after the Super Bowl, which is like 8:00 a.m. in the morning and in the Super Bowl town and that was Atlanta, and only then just hearing Vermeil talk, I thought maybe it was 50/50, but still I didn't go back to the parade or anything. I went straight from Atlanta in the Super Bowl to Honolulu and the Pro Bowl. You had eight players, eight players in the Pro Bowl. I am changing planes. We didn't have cell phones and I know some people did. But we're changing planes in LA. and I called the desk. Hey, anything going on? I'm changing planes in LA. Yeah, Dick Vermeil just resigned. So I -- I couldn't write this -- we ended up talking to the eight players or some of them there and writing like a player reaction. I get back on the plane and sitting in first class on the plane was Orlando Pace not because he's an elitist. He needed more leg run. I'm the one that told him that he had not -- he did not know. Like that's how quick and and sudden it was?

Bob Wallace: So on your reporting do you think he was pushed out or do you think he just decided to leave?

Jim Thomas: I think if you put the truth sermon in everyone. I don't know if he was pushed out. But remember, people were going to interview Mike Martz, Green Bay and I don't know. I still am not sure the Martz - Vermeil relationship as Martz got more and more, did Vermeil feel threatened by Martz? Did you feel a little jealous? He knew he was kind of the -- didn't they name him, the head coach in waiting?

Bob Wallace: Right. Head coach in waiting.

Jim Thomas: So I wonder about all that. They both kind of deny it. They both, at least to me, have said that the right things. That's one of the great unanswered questions that you've gotten out there. And I don't know. I know Carol Vermeil, a wonderful woman. She wanted him out, even though he wasn't doing the crazy hours that he did with the Eagles he was still doing a lot like you said a few minutes earlier, Robert. What more did he have to prove? How could he get any better than that, you know? And so I don't know. I do think and you know, you know, I get along well with Mike. I do think maybe they win at least one more Super Bowl had Vermeil stayed. Vermeil had ways.

Bob Wallace: Tell about Mike Martz just a little bit.

Jim Thomas: He had a way I think Vermeil of just toning down Mike a little bit. Hey, the offense was fantastic with Mike. One of the greatest offensive minds in the game. We know Mike had a sharp temper. I remember Mike getting mad at me when I did a -- this when Carson, Bud Carson, who was brought in to I think the help the -- was it the 99? Or maybe no, it was the 2000.

Bob Wallace: Remember we had two coordinators.

Jim Thomas: And then in 2000, I don’t know if Bunting left or whatever but the defense was so bad, a lot of those –

Bob Wallace: We were 6 and 0, I think.

Jim Thomas: Right and then Warner gets hurt. But like a lot of players got old on defense, it's just DeMarco Farr had knee issues. Mike Jones had lost a step, stuff like that. I lost my train of thought oh, so he brings in Carson. I remember interviewing Carson after the 2000 Super Bowl and he said 99 great things. But he also said yeah, Mike had a hair trigger. I put that in the article. Mike didn't like it. They had arranged a meeting at a little lunch meeting out at St. Charles to kind of sooth him. Mike was furious. He wouldn't look at me in the little restaurant at the table,

Bob Wallace: Who was at the meeting?

Jim Thomas: I think Zigman, Charlie Army, I think Bernie was there. Mike was great to deal with, yeah, he loses it a little bit. He’d get mad at me and other guys. But all guys do that. I don't think Vermeil ever got mad at me, but I remember Brooks throwing furniture and getting mad at me. I remember Jeff Fisher getting mad at me because I reported some injury that he didn't want to, but I never saw a coach that I dealt with trying to get to know the media, at least the regulars as much. He would come down.

Bob Wallace: Martz?

Jim Thomas: Martz would just come down at 7 o'clock at night and sit there and talk to us. Tell us all kinds of things, and no matter what you might be on deadline, you would stop when the head coach comes down, or if you came down, we never say Bob go away; I'm on deadline. Those are important people and who knows what you might pick out for Charlie Army. It was never quite the same after the ‘01 Super Bowl. But relationship with Mike because that was the first time where he was really criticized. As we all know, the Rams were heavily favored of all the Super Bowl champs. I think if you put the truth serum into Belichick, he would say that was the least talented. But no, Mike was very interesting to deal with and people would say because yeah, sometimes he would have a cluster out of town. How do you deal with this guy? We have a very narrow focus if you're a writer, I'd say he's great copy. You want guys that are great copy whether it's good or bad. You were always great copy. Charlie Army was always great copy. John Shaw was always great copy. Martz. That's why covering the Rams was so great.

Bob Wallace: I don't want to go to each one of the successors to Martz but just generally what happened to the franchise?

Jim Thomas: Well, even in the late days of Martz, the salary cap caught up into Georgia's credit and to Cronkite's credit, he was still a minority in it. You guys, once you got going, you became a contender in that brief but spectacular window. You spent to the cap every year and you redid contracts to –

Bob Wallace: We always made a promise to the coach that we would spend to the cap.

Jim Thomas: Yeah. Oh really. Well, and, but you just couldn't keep everybody. And part of the trap of success is that all the players think they're responsible. So slowly you started losing defensive players. I remember sitting with, what was the place where we go and called it the Red Ox

Bob Wallace: Red Ox.

Jim Thomas: It was me, Bernie and Sigmund and Warner, Bruce and Carter, all up, this was I think entering the 2000 season. And he says we can sign two of the 3 and basically it was the 1st two to take a bite of the apple. So.Warner was first and that was during camp. Then came Bruce. That was before a preseason game in Nashville, and Carter was out of luck.

Bob Wallace: Mike didn't also like Carter too, because he sort of turned on Carter.

Jim Thomas: A little bit? I think some of the coaches didn't think Carter, they wanted Carter to be like DeMarco Farr, who was like, you know, they didn't think Carter hustled enough for whatever where. But I mean, the guy was a great player. You know, if you end up with over 100 sacks. He's maybe the hall of the very good, maybe not quite hot. He was a very good player and suddenly all these defensive players start leaving. I remember Martz coming in, the depth chart, the cardboard depth chart. Throws it down on my desk and he had this was in maybe it was ’03, it might have been ’04. I think it was ‘04 and he has marked in yellow all the defensive players on a 2001 depth chart that were gone. You know, the London Fletchers, the Carters, Lyle Light all that and so because of the cap you lost all that. In hockey, it just caught up with the Blues. If you're a Super Bowl team or a Stanley Cup team, the way the cap is, you can't keep them. And so I think as much as everything finally caught up, he had a lot of clashing egos. You know this better than me. And, you know, there were clashes with Martz and Zigman and the Army in there and have all that going on, but I think the biggest thing that nobody talks about that led to the greatest show premature ending Faulk’s knees gave out. And that came his last really good season, as he was great in ‘01, he was hurt in ‘O2, ‘03 he was pretty good, but after that he had nothing left and he was the X Factor. To me, arguably the greatest two way back in NFL, rushing receiving back, you have Lenny Moore. I know that's older for some of your listeners and and Roger Craig were good, but they weren't the runners.

Bob Wallace: And that's the thing, Thommelson.

Jim Thomas: Yeah, that's a good call. And then also Warner has those thumb issues and he started fumbling. And you know it bothered him in New York. All of a sudden in Arizona, Warner starts wearing a glove on his throwing hand and this was an arena. I think Arena League, or NFL Europe injury that just got worse. But when he put that glove on in Arizona, he could grip the ball better and all of a sudden he was the same old Kurt. So you had those, you had those two things, and it's a shame. And then that was a bad decade, Bob after that.

Bob Wallace: Tell me a little bit about the move and the Rams, you know, probably takes over, you know, Zygmunt and I are pushed out. Shawn steps away.

Jim Thomas: Well, it wasn't the same around the building for the media. We got to know you guys and again, it's not like you necessarily did us favors, but it was a tremendous working relationship. We didn't get the access. Who is it? Linehan closed practices for a while, I went to -- there were some warehouses, as you know, behind Rams Park. I hid behind a tree for a couple of weeks and then Chief Lindsay caught me, Dan Lindsay, bless his heart, and that and that was the end of that. We were furious about that. But yeah, so you have Joe Vince, who turned out to be very funny. Very great to work with. ‘05 that was the year Mike was sick and you have Linehan come in. He started out great, you know and then that went downhill. And then you Hazlet he was fun, took over as the interim coach in ’08. And then what was it 2010? Spagnola comes in, but Kronke takes over, right, as the owner, and I remember we're in Rick Smith's office, the PR head at Rams Park on the phone, Bernie and I and that's where Kronke said, I'm a proud Missouri man and I was right away when he took over, even then, we're wondering about the lease. Will he move the team? And I'm a proud Missouri guy. I take great pride in helping to bring the team here and I'm going to do everything in my power to keep it here. So then 2012, the team is suffering, boy, some bad football as you know, from what ‘07 through ‘11? Five seasons? 15 and 65, 3 and 13 was the average record. Well, they had a chance to make the playoffs. I think they finished 7 and 9, but they had a chance and Bradford was the NFC Offensive Rookie of the Year then McDaniels wasn't good for him. Things go downhill. Fisher, I knew some people that were very close to Fisher, and I wrote it, and my mistake was I should have made it the lead. I should have made the headline. It was a little bit buried in the middle of the story, how Fisher was freaked out this was January 2012, the interview was at Stan’s office in what was then Pepsi Center, now Ball Arena in Denver. The hockey and NBA arena and how Fisher was freaked out. He got all these questions about what was it like to move the Oilers to Tennessee and how did you do this? How do you do this all about moving the team. And I asked I think it was Kronke about it, I forget the at the press conference where they hired Fishers, but I forget what he said. So we go along there and then and then we have -- this is the only time where I personally caught, later found out where Kevin Demoff lied to me, is when they bought the parcel of land and I got him on the phone and it might have happened right around Super Bowl week that year and Demoff said he's just doing this to shake St. Louis up. It's too small for football. It's not a football purpose, and that that was the only time Demoff -- I remember asking Goodell at the state of the Super Bowl asked him about it and he lied to me.

Bob Wallace: He said it was a real estate guy.

Jim Thomas: He said it was a real guy. He said I know of no plans for him to build a -- and he knew very well. I, this is my biggest regret, I covered some of the news about the move. They wanted someone -- you still have to cover the team and the games. So it wasn't like before the move to St. Louis, right? 80% of my time I was covering what's happening here? What's there? I spent maybe a third -- we had a news writer David Pun who was later trying to cover the news stuff. But my biggest regret was I read many times over the relocation guidelines. There's no way they can meet these guidelines and move. And obviously, I guess the lead never -- I remember the Eric Rubin had the town hall meeting at Stifel. It was then, and that's, you know, it was then that afterwards it's after the Q&A with the crowd where he's up on the stage there talking to reporters where all of a sudden, he says, well, no real occasion that that's not really a guideline that, you know, they're not binding. It fixes and it got to the point where we’re not leaving to Houston for the meeting there, my wife drops me off and she's into the football stuff and I just said, you know, when I come back here St. Louis isn’t going to have a football team I was that convinced by then but I got a little bit of hope. Remember at the meeting when the initial vote was against the move, and that's when Jerry Jones went in the room and like swayed everybody swayed all those folks, and that was it. So David Hunt covers the press conference. I'm down in the lobby. My job is to pick off all the owners as they leave and it was just incredible what Jerry Jones said and more incredible with the Dallas writers some of whom I knew forever saying this will get Jerry Jones in the Hall of Fame getting a team in LA, and I'm like biting my tongue. He took a team from St. Louis, and I know the LA fans, well you stole the Rams from St. Louis. LA did nothing. I mean, Lee Steinberg tried -- they put up no, they couldn't get anything going, you know, LA St. Louis put up what 300 million for the Dome? And then they were ready to put in 400 million for the new stadium there. And so that was tough. That was a tough night for St. Louis and even though you have to be objective as a reporter for me. Then they’re gone. I'm covering the league at large. Which was kind of fun. You, you know, you don't have don't have the readership as if you had a team there. But it's my second year doing this. I'm in the office and I'm making out my credential requests to cover like the first 4 or 5 NFL games on the road, get the literal tap on the shoulder for our sports editor, our hockey writer Jeremy Rutherford was leaving to join the new athletic and we want you to cover hockey. I couldn't have named other than the Blues, I couldn't have named 50 NHL hockey players at that time. You know, I remember when they moved here and I was a teenager then and it was fantastic. And remember, they go to the cup three times. We're all playing street hockey, all that. We're going to the games, buying cheap seats. But I knew nothing about hockey.

Bob Wallace: Did you know the game. Did you know it at all?

Jim Thomas: Not too much. I didn't watch much. You know how it is when you're when you're covering a beat and the NFL offseason there's always something. There's free agency, there's a draft, there's combine, there's the owners meeting. We at that time, we’d cover all the playoff games. You know, I could go to whatever playoff games I wanted and go to the Super Bowl. So I didn't -- maybe a little bit of playoffs, but I wasn't much of a hockey fan and I expressed trepidation over it. But they said, well, we're not going to cover football anymore. You can either work the desk or cover hockey and I didn't mind working the desk as an editor, but to do it, you know, five nights a week, I just felt like even though I was getting up there in age, I was like 62 at the time, I still had more energy than to do that.

Bob Wallace: So what the difference between covering hockey and football?

Jim Thomas: Well, the hockey goes so fast, so fast, and I would come home from the games and you're still worked up the adrenaline of writing on deadline, and they would have the replay of the games on TV. I'd watch maybe the first period carry before I fell asleep. Yeah, and oh, so that's what happened on that play. So that's what happened there. They have that, the travels different. It was fun to go to the other towns. Pre COVID, we flew on the team charter and we would pay for the flight. We stayed at the team hotel. Well, that was that was cooler, COVID. We never stopped traveling and but you'd have to arrange everything yourself so that that that was tough. The players were friendly, but -- and people would only well football players you get better quotes from the football players.

Bob Wallace: Was it any to do with language?

Jim Thomas: No, no well, some, I mean, like there may be a Russian player, maybe their English wasn't that good, but a lot of the old stereotype of the you know the farm boy from Saskatchewan, I'm just going to give -- you would get more outlandish stuff from a London Fletcher or DeMarco Farr, even Isaac Bruce. Oh, my gosh when Ironhead Hayward was here, you never knew what he was going to say London. It would be like a buffet line. OK, I want humor I'm going to go to Marco. Yeah, you want straight talking. I'm going to go to Isaac or whatever Kurt Warner. You know how this is with quarterback now. Maybe Wednesday, they meet with the media, and then after the game. Kurt Warner would be there every day and be a Friday would be he'd be sitting at his locker. It's guys you need anything? And usually it was no.

Bob Wallace: You weren’t used to that.

Jim Thomas: No, so hockey was a little different. But then the people were good to deal with. I never and they were nice people but whether it was Mike Yo or Ruby or Doug Armstrong you never got to know them and know them maybe away from the game a little bit. Like I got to know you or Army Zigman or Shaw or even Martz. Even to a degree Linehan or Brooks you know. You could never crack it. And they were nice and Murray and I got along great. I'd always try to make them laugh. Say something goofy. But it was just different.

Bob Wallace: Why do you think is that the culture of the sport?

Jim Thomas: Don't know maybe it maybe that's the way Doug Armstrong runs. He runs a pretty tight ship now, saying that Armstrong was always good to me if I needed something. He always returned calls. He was great at press conferences on the phone, but he would only give you so much. I don't know how many times, he said Jim, I'm not your source office. When I was when I was trying to just to find out stuff the first year I they missed the playoffs by one point and I just –

Bob Wallace: We used to always tease you as sort of the jinx, right?

Jim Thomas: Right. Because my record with Mizzou football wasn't very good except for those four or five years, the greatest show, the football was awful. So I tell you –

Bob Wallace: You got a little salty about that after a while.

Jim Thomas: Well, yeah, and my mom -- Bernie would put in, like once a while he'd put in my record. In his Bernie Best and my mom would be totally upset and she’d call. Yeah, so they missed the playoffs by a point. And then remember, and at the start of the cup year in ‘99, they were in last place like January 1st. I get on the team plane once after tough loss. And the way it worked, the front would be Armstrong and the coaches, assistant coaches and any team executives. Then there’d be the media and then behind us would be the players they wanted them behind us in case they, I don't know, drinking or playing cards, we wouldn't see. And I made it a point to not to try to spy. I would report not – if I saw a player in a sling I wouldn't report.

Bob Wallace: You couldn't report upper body injury.

Jim Thomas: But I mean if I saw it in the locker room or saw it in the hallways in the stadium I would report it, but up there I'm like, under normal circumstances I wouldn't be here, so I'm not going to report it anyway, I'm getting on the plane after tough loss and Armstrong's there and he looks up at me and he says you know, maybe you are a jinx, so it had it had gotten it, had gotten to him, but that first year it was just such a learning curve. My son, my youngest son, Roger, the rock drummer. I knew he was a hockey fan. I didn't know how much. He helped me so much. He would never be -- some of the -- I didn't go on some of the early road games and he would come to the house and he would explain stuff to me or I'd call him and check. What do you think this and that Tom Timmerman helped me a lot. I was like a four, you know they said the average 4 year old asked like 2,000 Questions a day. That's how I was. So you know Jeff, those guys were all good to me and by the 2nd year, the cup here. I had an idea, but really and I knew this from the -- it takes a while to develop sources and I knew by the time I was ready to retire, I would just really be feeling comfortable and have some sources and It was still tougher with the Blues to get sources, but I originally I was 62 when I decided to do it. I originally wanted to go, like 4 years. Then it became five years. Then it became six years and then. Finally --

Bob Wallace: So you covered them for seven years?

Jim Thomas: For six years.

Bob Wallace: Six years? The Stanley Cup year, how was that?

Jim Thomas It was just fantastic in as many ways as you can imagine. Not, you know, the first half of the year, they were terrible. You have a coach firing in November and they fired him, like, right after the game. We weren't even finished writing our game stories when they announced that Yo was fired and then January this kid comes from out of nowhere and Jordan Bennington and starts winning and winning and winning and they start climbing up the standings. I go right at the start of the winning street. They come from behind to beat the Florida Panthers and it was, they had a franchise record 11 game-winning streak. This was like Game 2 or 3 of that. A couple of days before that game was the Rams New England Super Bowl where the Rams shut out like 19 to nothing? I remember watching that game from my hotel down there in Florida. But anyway, remember going into the locker room and they're playing Gloria. And I look at Vince Don, who was very young and would tease me to the point where I thought he was one of my sons, always kidding me about being old. I said you guys just have a big win and you're playing this disco song, you know. And so there was all that to it and never been to a playoff game. I just remember Winnipeg for the first game, they had the White Out. And just how they're razing Bennington, and it was just crazy. And I remember at the start of the media day for the Stanley Cup. It was at TD Garden, Boston Garden and there's a crowd around Bennington, and I'm doing a story about how Bennington is the greatest come out of nowhere, player in St. Louis Sports since Kurt Warner. I interviewed Warner for it. Warner knew nothing about the Blues or Bennington but he tried to play along so I tried to ask Bennington a question about it, explain to him who Warner was blah blah. And I said, do you see yourself as a, you know, as maybe a hockey version of that? And he says well, I don't know anything about Warner, but it sounds like a heck of a story – an answer. So no, it was fantastic and being in Boston Garden for the game seven and I remember who was it I think Shen scored a goal to make it 3 to 1 in the third period, all the inactives and the front office people were sitting. It was so crowded they didn't have a suite for them in TD Garden. Robert Thomas, who had a hand injury. He had his hand in like a cast or splint, he's sitting immediately to my right, 18 inches away, but I remember just and I didn't pay attention. I did. Do I remember turning to them after Shane's goal made it 3 to one in the third period and the look on their faces like that it hit them, St. Louis is going to win the cup. So I've been asked many times what was the great two fantastic stories for me career wise 20 years apart, which was the greatest?

Bob Wallace: What's the answer? I go back and forth. I think I tell the football people it was football and the hockey people, it was hockey. The hockey, it was 50 years and they were last place this season. Then again, the Rams had been the losing his team in the 90s and it was 1990. And as you have said and I quote you, all the time that this may be a baseball town, but it's a football, winning the Super Bowl. Although they say winning the Stanley Cup, maybe the hardest trophy.

Jim Thomas: Maybe, but still. Baseball town, football nation. I guess soccer world. But what a career. 20 years apart, there's been no other main beat writer in St. Louis that's covered 2 championship teams. Because we had normally they're all baseball. The Hawks way back when won, they won one in St. Louis. The basketball Hawks.

Bob Wallace: Let ask you as we come to a close, I want to give you a few, what do they call it? Lightning round questions.

Jim Thomas: Don't hedge like Frank Cusamano.

Bob Wallace: Make them short, OK? Make your answers short.

Jim Thomas: I will.

Bob Wallace Will St. Louis ever get an NFL team?

Jim Thomas: Not in my lifetime

Bob Wallace: Will Tory Holt make this Hall of Fame?

Jim Thomas: Yes, but it'll take a while.

Bob Wallace: Greatest player is that you've covered?

Jim Thomas: The greatest player that I've covered.

Bob Wallace: All the three places you've been in football, Missouri and hockey.

Jim Thomas I guess I'm going to say personal favorite, Isaac Bruce. You could say Faulk but it was very short with him. We had three spectacular seasons here.

Bob Wallace: Other than me, favorite personality that you've covered?

Jim Thomas: Wow, that could be a long list. I think I want to say Martz. Let's say Martz, yeah. Bob, you’ve done a great job with us, man. I enjoyed –

Bob Wallace: I don't know what we're going to have to – we’re going to cut this because when we started this conversation I said, you know, people don't spend an hour listening to podcasts. We've gone two hours and I want to have you back because one of the things I think will be good like that, we're going to break this up.

Jim Thomas: My gosh, it has been almost two hours.

Bob Wallace: One of the things I'd like to do is sort of --

Jim Thomas: Slice us into two shows, so we will slice into the two shows.

Bob Wallace: Right we will slice into two shows and I want to have you back and we’re going to talk about the upcoming NFL season. So I've given you an assignment to go back into your books.

Jim Thomas: It's amazing how quick you forget it. I remember, like, 3 drafts after I quit covering football usually it would be like the third round before there be a player drafted that I had not heard of. It was like the Blues were playing and it was a later game -- they were, it was like the 11th pick over all, wherever they picked, I had no idea. I forget. But I will say I know many more than fifty players in the NFL even though.

Bob Wallace: Well, thank you, Jim, for doing that. We're going to pick it up again in another couple of weeks, right? We're done.

Jim Thomas: He’s sleeping in there.

Bob Wallace: Yeah, he’s sleeping.