



After the Buzzer

Transcript: Bob Wallace's interview with Jessica Berman of the NHL, PR professional Allison Hawk and Molly Higgins of the Los Angeles Rams

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Bob Wallace: Welcome back to After the Buzzer. This is our fifth episode and we want to thank everyone who tuned in. If you enjoy these podcasts or if some topic is of interest of you that you would like to see explored, please provide us with your feedback. You can go to the Apple podcast and go to the ratings and reviews section of our podcast. If you're listening on Stitcher, go to [Stitcher.com](https://www.stitcher.com) and search for After the Buzzer to leave a review or comment.

Today I am very happy to bring you a discussion about a topic that I think is very important, social activism, engagement and philanthropy in sports. More importantly, as our guests we have three women that are really making a difference in this space. I know each of them very well, and I can say without hesitation that these three are favorites of mine, extremely smart and passionate about making a difference in their communities and sports.

Alphabetically let me introduce them. Jessica Berman, Jessica is the National Hockey League's Vice-President of Community Development, Culture and Growth and Executive Director of the NHL Foundation. In this role she participates in the design and execution of the league's strategic corporate social responsibility goals, initiatives, policies and programs in the area of importance to the league. It's club's business, partners and the greater hockey community, with a particular focus on ensuring the initiatives are properly aligned with the league's overall objectives and strategy. The focus of her work is to change the global conversation about hockey. Making it the acknowledged standard of sports experiences that are inclusive, accessible, enjoyable and community friendly.

Prior to this position, Jessica was Vice-President and Deputy General Counsel at the NHL, after working as an associate in the Labor and Employment Department at Proskauer Rose in New York City. She's a graduate of the University of Michigan and received her JD from Fordham University.

Allison Hawk. I've known Allison and worked with Allison for over 20 years, and I've always valued her input on a host of matters. Allison is an accomplished senior executive, entrepreneur and consultant with 25 years of success in professional sports, higher education, non-profits and philanthropy. As President of the Stryker-Munley Group St. Louis and founder of AHC Consulting, Allison is leveraging her extensive experience in public relations, communications and marketing and is a valuable asset for companies and organizations looking for crisis communication and sports philanthropy.

Allison and I work together at the Rams, where together we organize the Rams Community Relations Department and started the Rams Foundation. She's a graduate of Kennedy University in San Antonio, where she received a BA in political science and philosophy. Prior to the Rams she worked at Fleishman Hillard. Allison is a graduate of the Coro Fellowship Leader Program. She serves on several boards, teaches at Trinity and George Washington University and is a frequent public speaker. Allison is a must follow on Twitter and other social media platforms, as her activities are dizzying.

Molly Higgins is our third panelist. Both Allison and I are very proud of Molly, as she started with the St. Louis Rams as an intern and is now the Vice-President of Community Affairs for the Los Angeles Rams. A graduate of the University of Northern Iowa, with a BA in public relations, with a minor in marketing, Molly oversees the Rams' community outreach efforts and aims to creatively leverage the team's platform to help impact lives and create lasting memories.

Specifically, the Rams focus substantial resources on efforts to engage and impact the Los Angeles community through a commitment to support youth

education and mentoring, promote health and wellness and help address issues around poverty. Molly is extremely proud of the Rams' service day and the fact that the Rams are providing more than 5100 hours of community service and impacted 31 local non-profits and 57 schools.

She and the Rams have received numerous awards for the impact they have made. Molly is a valued member of the Rams executive teams that help shape the organization's off the field active strategy. Welcome to you all. Let me just start initially with you Jessica and maybe you can tell us a little bit about what – I mean, I gave a brief introduction about what your role is in the NHL. But maybe you can just give us a brief background on – and then we'll kind of walk through, after you Jessica, maybe Allison and then Molly. Just tell us a little about your respective role.

Jessica Berman: Sure. Thanks so much for having me on this podcast Bob. Really happy to be here with you all and with the other distinguished guests. So my role as the NHL, really my job is to be responsible for the corporate social responsibility initiatives at the league. And we really bring that to life through storytelling and marketing and campaigns, as well as through community engagement.

Our work is really integrated with our teams and our partners, and our job is to really set the tone for the league in terms of the areas of importance from a social perspective, and to focus our efforts on the areas that most clearly align with the challenges and the areas that the league is focused in.

Allison Hawk: This is Allison, and I am thrilled to be here. Thank you for the opportunity Bob. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to be with a great group of panelists. I have a communications firm in St. Louis, but started my career in public relations and helped relocate the Los Angeles Rams to St. Louis. And that's come full circle, which is exciting because Molly is here as well.

But my work now focuses on a variety of communications programs, crisis communications, playbook communications for a variety of organizations, both

in St. Louis and out of St. Louis. And I keep my hand working in the sports world in a variety of ways. But one in particular that is particularly noteworthy here is I still teach sports philanthropy at two different universities. One is George Washington School of Business, as well as Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas.

I have the opportunity to work with the San Antonio Spurs in that particular context and with the other sports teams as well in that regard. One of the things that we really focus on in these particular programs is that there are very specific protocols for philanthropy that really weren't in place a number of years ago, Bob, when you and I were sort of working on it. We were sort of just in the dark. There weren't really any strategies or protocols or any educational programs around it. And now we have a little bit more to think about, really strategically leveraging philanthropy as part of a business model and as part of fan development.

So my role in that regard helps to find ways to prepare those who are in sports now and those who plan a sports career or get into a sports career, to have that opportunity. So it's great to have had the years of experience to put things together in that way, and I'm excited to be here today.

Bob Wallace: Molly?

Molly Higgins: Well, first Bob, thanks for the warm introduction, and I am also happy to be here today with these great panelists. But I do have a question. Am I a good follow on Twitter as well? You mentioned Allison, how about me?

Bob Wallace: {Laughs} You're a great – you know, not necessarily being a huge Ram fan, I don't necessarily follow too much of that. I'm a Dolphin fan these days, has nothing to do with that. My son works for the Dolphins. So I follow the Dolphins now. All three of you I'm sure are great Twitter follows, because you're interesting, interesting people to follow.

Molly Higgins: Okay, I just wanted to clarify that {laughs}, okay. So I oversee our Los Angeles Rams community and charitable efforts, and really since moving to Los Angeles, much of my time, as I continue to learn about this new community, is spent meeting with non-profit leaders and community leaders to really determine who's going to be the best partner for us to help create meaningful change in the community.

So I feel like I have a great responsibility to not only our players, but the organization, to identify the best opportunities for really them to make a difference. And I take that responsibility very serious. I often say much like football, there is a lot of strategy that goes into developing a game plan to help address community needs. So my goal is to put our players, our cheerleaders, our staff in the best possible position to assist in addressing those needs. And I think that's something that I do on a daily basis. Since moving to Los Angeles I really embarked on a listening tour, meeting with a lot of different community leaders, educational leaders, non-profit leaders. And that listening tour is still very much in process. I think I learn something new every day, and I find that incredibly invigorating.

Bob Wallace: So let me just piggyback on that a little because a new team, even though the Rams going – went back to Los Angeles, I'm not sure that it was a complete reintroduction to a community, but it was a reintroduction at the least. And how do you approach from a community standpoint and getting back into the community, strategically how did you look at that?

Molly Higgins: So for me, when we made the move to Los Angeles, you know, I fully embraced the opportunity and approached this new community with a deep curiosity and desire to learn and evolve and build a strategy that was unique to L.A. and not just a carryover from what we did in St. Louis. I think because of Bob and Alison, your direction and our partnership, we did some amazing things in St. Louis.

But I did want to make something that was very unique to this market. I think I mentioned the listening tour. It's taken a significant amount of time. It's still very much ongoing, but there's over 5,000 non-profits in the Los Angeles community alone. So I'm invigorated by these meetings and just kind of seeing it through the non-profit's eyes in terms of how we can help address some of the community's most pressing needs. And I think in Los Angeles, one of the most pressing needs is poverty and homelessness. That's really the defining issue of our region. And then how do we as a team go back and kind of strategize on how do we use our assets and our platform to get the community excited to participate, to tackle some of these needs that otherwise can be overwhelming if we look at them individually?

Bob Wallace: Unlike St. Louis, which is a 3 million person community, Los Angeles is, what, 12, 15 million people, and you're great at marketing. A much different kind of challenge and probably a lot more diverse than what you're finding in St. Louis.

Molly Higgins: Yeah, I mean, I think in St. Louis, one of the Rams' focus areas was the diversity around its partnership, which Allison started and trying to get people to not only accept but celebrate diversity. In Los Angeles, that's not really as necessary. Angelinos really celebrate diversity and recognize it as the strength that it is. But in Los Angeles we have other issues, poverty, like I mentioned, homelessness.

So I think every community has some common issues and then also issues more unique to their market. I mean, you talk about the size of this region, our public education system is challenged. We have the second largest school district in the country, second to Jessica's New York District. L.A. Unified has more than 700,000 students. Eighty percent of the district's families are low income. Last year I think the figure was close to 17,000 students who were homeless, and those are people that identify themselves as homeless.

So we know that number is much higher. That's LAUSD alone, and that's not taking into account other districts in the region. So I think there are a lot of

intersections between poverty and trauma and homelessness and challenges at school. And we often say, how can we expect a child to learn when they don't know where they're getting their next meal or if they have a place to sleep that night? So there are a lot of complex issues in Los Angeles, and immigration is a huge concern. Many of our Latino children live in fear that their parents will be deported.

So there's a lot of challenges, and we just need to work together to determine the most effective ways to help address some of those challenges.

Bob Wallace: When you're dealing with a big city like Los Angeles or Jessica, in New York, although she's really more of a national level, I'm going to get to that in a second, there are so many different issues. I mean, homeless in St. Louis is a pocket problem. In LA it could be widespread. The educational system is a pocket problem in St. Louis. In LA, it could be all across. Allison, when the Rams moved to St. Louis, one of your roles was to try to establish them in that community. What were you thinking about when you made those proposals to us back in those days?

Allison Hawk: Well, what we were thinking about that point was, how do we effectively integrate the organization into the community in a meaningful way? So one of the first things that was done was that the Matthews-Dickey Boys & Girls Club was a practice facility initially. And the strategy was really to identify some of the longstanding organizations in the community and find ways to find some partnerships with their particular organizations that would benefit both.

So Matthews-Dickey was left better than it was, with a renovation and some additional donations that were part of the community. And the strategy behind developing the opportunities in St. Louis really boiled down to who the stakeholders were and really understanding sort of what some of the community players were looking at in terms of the major needs in the community. So the Urban League, the United Way and some of those other organizations that were really critical to helping to frame what those issues were, were really critical to the cause.

And we took our time, I think Bob you would agree, we took our time in thinking through what that would look like in terms of a charitable platform. Because we were integrating into the community, and the last thing we wanted to do was come in and say that these were the kinds of things. So we really worked to identify a whole number of – we took almost a survey, a course approach. I remember we did a number of different grants and then decided that we would be more effective if we layered all of our assets into some programs.

So we really started to then get focused on what it was. But the real key is, was what Molly says, it's really finding out intentionally and over time what the flavor and what the needs of the community are. So we were doing healthy youth partnership and bringing people and convening organizations together on issues of health long before Play 60 in the NFL were doing anything. We also looked at diversity. St. Louis is – we were looking at diversity issues long before the Ferguson situation occurred in St. Louis. And then Molly had the opportunity to work with the players related to that particular crisis in our community.

But we really – we're on the cutting edge, and I think a lot of it also depends on sort of who your owners are. Having a female owner at that time, I think we were looking at it from a slightly different lens than other organizations might and certainly leadership. So yourself, myself and other people who had some interest in some different things, along with some really longstanding, deep rooted issues in this particular community, really made an impact on what it was that we looked at philanthropically.

Bob Wallace: But Jessica, you're coming from a much different view, where you have 30 different communities and you're in two countries. So yours is a much broader swath. How do you sort of align all of those different interests? I mean, Toronto might be different than Nashville, and how do you square all of those things?

Jessica Berman: Sure, yes. It's quite different, as you might imagine, and we need to find a way to prop each of them up and make each feel valued, important and spotlight the work that each of them are doing in a cohesive way. So that it's not haphazard or scattered, but rather feels like it's an integrated platform and therefore feels bigger and is easier to amplify.

So the way that we do that is by creating league wide programs that really align with what we know is kind of adopted by the majority of the league. And then we create a framework that gives it some consistency across each of the markets, but leaves lots of room for the teams to be able to customize, depending on the specific needs in their marketplace.

And we do that both listening to what the clubs want and need and is important to them. But also in some ways, and I'm sure Molly and Allison could relate to this, try to push certain strategic agendas and objectives that we know will catalyze the growth of the league and ensure that we're being purpose driven and strategic in the way that we're leveraging our relationships with communities.

Bob Wallace: Give me an example of one of those initiatives that the league has brought into and kind of how you sort of set that agenda.

Jessica Berman: Yes, sure. So a good example would be our – what we were just – everyone was just talking about, diversity. So it's probably the one that's top of mind, just hearing you guys talk about it and knowing how important it is in today's society. We have a league wide initiative called Hockey is for Everyone that has extensions that really run the spectrum in terms of providing opportunities for marginalized or underrepresented groups to have access to player sports, to campaigns and marketing and storytelling, to really spotlight the individuals who might be under represented. And therefore people don't know that they're actually in our sport or having success in our sport.

And so what we'll do is build key focus areas for the clubs, and we'll help them to the extent they need help to identify the right partners. We will help to amplify the great work that they're doing, particularly when it aligns with a strategic priority for us, like diversity and inclusion. We'll even in some instances provide some seed funding or resources, particularly when it aligns with a league tent pole event that might be coming to a community. And we'll use that as an opportunity to sort of catalyze a focus in a particular area that's important to the league and the club. And oftentimes when we're kind of using our league muscle, it's really to focus on the things that we know are really important. And in a lot of instances that's reducing barriers to our game.

And then we'll leverage our relationships with other key stakeholders to really unite the entire hockey community. We know that our role in our sport, not unlike the other leagues, but there's probably some uniqueness in our role within hockey, in that our primary role is to be a convener and to really assemble stakeholders and help to identify synergies in terms of the work that we're doing. So that we all be sort of marching in the same direction to grow the game.

Bob Wallace: Right, I mean, as you look at hockey, it probably is the least diverse of all the sports. And part of that is that it's an expensive sport to play. One of the challenges that we have here in St. Louis at least is ice time and just getting people – there's not a lot of sheets of ice available. And to get there, people have to drive, they have to do it early in the morning. The equipment's expensive. Some of the similar problems with football. How do you kind of address the expense of a sport like that? And I think one of the challenges that hockey has is getting the African-American community and the Hispanic community invested in their sport.

Jessica Berman: What I would say is that from an ice hockey perspective, we have an infrastructure limitation. And that is unique to our sport in that there are approximately 5000 community rinks that exist across North America. So that's quite a small number if you think about how large our sport is and how big our league is. Some of the ways we address those barriers is by promoting

alternative forms of the game. And we do that through partnerships with schools and boys and girls clubs and United Way. And if you reframe how you think about our sport and include street, roller, floor and other forms of hockey, we're as accessible as any other sport, if not more accessible, because you can play it anywhere.

You could play it in your basement. You could play it in your driveway. And in fact a lot of our players grew up playing alternative forms of the game, and the way that we increase access is really by expanding the lens and the funnel, so that we wrap our arms around all those people who are playing hockey, and just don't artificially limit ourselves to ice hockey. So that's one way.

But we also have invested in a learn to play program that exists in all 31 markets, which has really significantly reduced if not eliminated any socioeconomic barriers to entry. And so you could sign up for a Learn to Play program in your NHL community for an eight to ten week program, for – it depends on the market, but anywhere around \$100 or \$150. And it will include equipment, it includes your ice time. It includes access to coaches, which is oftentimes alumni of the league who are actually teaching the game.

And so we're really put a lot of effort to dispelling the notion that it's too expensive to play our sport. And that's been a really key focus of ours. And the other piece of, which I think is super important, is that with shifting demographics that are happening across North America, we know that financial barriers, they don't uniquely affect under represented or minority communities, right. Like, that's sort of universal across our country. And in fact buying power for African-Americans and Hispanic populations, is increasing significantly and at a faster rate than it is with the white population.

So I don't know that it's necessarily true now and definitely not in the future, that those communities wouldn't be able to afford our game. We just need to make sure that they know that they're welcome and that we're providing an inclusive environment and breaking down whatever cultural barriers may exist.

Bob Wallace: And one of the issues that I think hockey and football are dealing with now, and I don't necessarily want to get into that because it's so much litigation, is the safety of both of those sports and the whole concussion issue. And I'm sure that when you're dealing in the communities with youth programs, that's something that is at least a concern to the parents.

Jessica Berman: Yes, I mean, the only – what I would say about that is that we've put so much effort around safety education with our great partners at USA Hockey. And they are really leaders as an MGB in that space. And because of that, we're really fortunate.

Bob Wallace: Molly, I mean, there seems to be a diminishing participation in football here in St. Louis. One I think – is some a result of the professional football team leaving. The other is all the stuff that you read about the concussions. How about in LA? Are you seeing some of that in the community, parents not wanting their kids to play football as much?

Molly Higgins: You know, we haven't seen it too much. Right now what we're facing is going into these Latino communities and schools, they really haven't had much exposure to football. So we see it as a tremendous opportunity to kind of get in there, educate them about the game and enjoy the game from there. So that's really exciting to us.

Bob Wallace: Not to make this a political discussion at all, but obviously over the past couple of years, two years, activities of our players and especially in football and some of the others, has come under some scrutiny. And you hear the shut up and dribble or, we just want to see you play. And I'm sure there is some division between the interests of the players and the interest of ownership and the interests of the organization. How do you – Molly, how do you – and you've been in the middle of a bunch of that from when you were here in St. Louis and you went through the Ferguson things and some of your players were actively involved in all that. How do you deal with some of that? And how do you sort

of get everybody on the same page, even though they may be on a different page?

Molly Higgins: You know, the way we've always approached it, and I'm proud of the way we've approached it, we first seek to understand really the player's perspective and where they're coming from. Because I think at the end of the day, the goal isn't for the players to create controversy. It's to create change. And they know they have a powerful platform and can use it to draw attention to issues that need to be addressed.

So what we try to do is really understand their end goal and then make recommendations on ways that they can make progress towards that goal. So many times our players, if you talk to them, they know what they want to accomplish. They just need help kind of identifying the most effective ways to do that or the most effective partners and subject matter experts to work with to really be that positive force for good. And we've found that time and time again. I think it first starts with trying to listen and trying to understand their perspective. And to me, life is all about perspective and being able to put yourself in other people's shoes.

Bob Wallace: Right, and I must say, I was very proud of the way the Rams handled the Ferguson and hands up, don't shoot. You guys had a very measured approach. I was very proud of the way you didn't demonize your players and supported them, although understood the community's sort of sensitivity towards that. I thought you guys did an outstanding job. I was at the Civil Rights Museum in Washington DC. I took a picture of it and sent it to Molly of the three or four Rams players coming out of the tunnels. And that's prominently displayed in the National Civil Rights Museum. I think that's something that you guys can be very proud of.

Allison, as someone who advises now not sports teams or people that are involved in the sports world, how do you sort of advise people about, there

might be a player who gets in trouble, there might be an issue that's against – that you don't agree with, how do you sort of deal with those kind of situations?

Allison Hawk: Well, I think there's a whole notion of what's spontaneous versus what's strategic. And I think the world has sped up in the last three or four years. So I think there's the whole strategic approach to those things. And then there's the needing to react to – in the situation in St. Louis where we had a drunk driving fatality or another kind of crisis situation. I think each case has to be looked at sort of individually to understand exactly what the situation is and then sort of understand where the stakeholders are and bring people around the table to have the conversation as to what that looks like.

Sometimes I think it involves getting more organizations involved. I think you always have to realize that every stakeholder's got a different perspective, and trying to bring as many stakeholders together to understand what that looks like in order to create an approach. One of the unique facets of what I did when I was in the team work and now what I do in communications, and we represented the Ferguson Commission and have done a number of things in that space, is really figuring out who the stakeholders are and then creating the communications messaging. Because oftentimes it's very quickly assessing the situation, determining what the messages are based upon really gathering the information and really understanding what's going on. And then being able to sort of take that out to the next level.

I think social media has changed the way we as communications professionals do things. It used to be that you could sort of have a little bit of time to react and have a statement. But now there's really a whole lot more thinking on the fly. So I think crisis communications and really understanding chain of command and how those things work is really, really critical.

So I think it's a different world. But I do think that the power of sport, whether it's a team or an athlete, is really not something that people really thought about until the last 10 or 15 years. And I think now there's really some opportunities

to do it strategically. As Molly says, really help understand what it is – what the objective is and then sort of figure out how to partner to do that kind of thing.

Bob Wallace: So Jessica, what would you say to someone who said, we don't care what your players think. We don't care what the organization's position on X is. We want them to skate and score goals. And that we don't want to use your platform for anything other than selling tickets and providing us entertainment. What would be your response to someone who said that?

Jessica Berman: I would quote Nelson Mandela and say, "Sports has the power to change the world." And it's a missed opportunity, because sports is one of the few things, certainly in today's environment, that actually unites people. And it would be a shame for organizations, players and others who have the privilege of working in this industry, to not leverage that opportunity.

Bob Wallace: Molly, you have anything to add to that?

Molly Higgins: Yes, I mean, from our perspective, organizationally, I have an issue if we ask our players to support organizational priorities, and then we turn around and not support priorities of the players. So I think that like everyone said, sports is unique and that it has such a diverse following, and people from all walks of life that maybe wouldn't think about some of the issues if our players wouldn't bring that to the forefront.

So people love our platform when we're doing things like encouraging kids to be healthy and active. And we're celebrating our military heroes and bringing awareness to cancer prevention. But sometimes when we use our platform to draw awareness to social justice issues, that upsets people. And those conversations aren't always easy and comfortable, but that doesn't mean they are not necessary. In my opinion, everyone needs to be worried about these social justice issues, and it might not be popular to talk about community police relations or criminal justice reform or poverty or educational inequities. But they're important to our players, and quite frankly, they need to be important to

all of society. Just because it doesn't impact a specific person directly, it doesn't mean it doesn't impact each person indirectly. So I just think that it's our responsibility to utilize our platform to shine a light on some of these issues.

Bob Wallace: Do you see a difference in sort of the Midwest approach, St. Louis as opposed to the left coast approach? I mean, I would say, not knowing, not having ever lived in LA, that St. Louis is a lot more conservative than Los Angeles.

Molly Higgins: Yes, certainly. I mean, even looking outside the social justice issues, this year we were proud to welcome two male cheerleaders to the Los Angeles Rams. I mean, as we were going through that process and what this meant, I kept reminding people that we have a long history of diversity. And if we're going to say we're about diversity, we need to be about diversity. So Quinton and Napoleon came to try out and they were terrific dancers. And we put them through a fair process, and at the end of the day, they earned their opportunity. And they earned a spot on the Los Angeles Rams cheerleaders. It wasn't across the board popular. We took some heat. But we knew that it was the right thing to do.

But as I kind of reflected on that, I said to Keely Fimbres, who both Allison and Bob know, I'm not sure that we could have made this decision in St. Louis. I hope that we would have been courageous enough to do it, and I believe that I would have been courageous enough to do it. But I think the backlash would have been much more extreme and much more severe. But I think that's part of the space. You have to lead with your heart a lot of times and lead with the goal of equality.

Bob Wallace: It might be a little bit different, and you guys have all touched on platforms, and I said in my introduction that Allison was a must follow Twitter person and so was Molly. And so I'm just – how has social media Allison, over the years, how have you seen that sort of change the landscape in sports communications and sort of the role of players in the community and the organization and following of that?

Allison Hawk: Well, there's an immediate opportunity to get the word out in a way that literally can move like fire, in a positive or a negative way, through the Twitterverse and what have you. So to look at the power of sports, if you look at Chris Long and what he's done with Waterboys, and to see some of the things that happen online from a fundraising standpoint, from a sort of really pulling together with a call to action, I think it's really exciting to see how the stories are old, how the money is raised. And then at the point of sale or at an actual game where we've seen players who've made statements or comments and what have you and things have gone viral very quickly.

So it's very different. So there's really this power in our ability to all be sort of citizen journalists and be able to sort of talk about what's going on. And when a player or an organization takes a stance on it, there's a real opportunity to do it. And I will say that I think it usually is something that, if it's part with an organization involvement, if it's part of an overall cohesive plan that's sustainable over a period of time, I think it's more effective. I think one ups from players don't tend to be as effective as things that are sort of sustainable over time. But I do think social media has changed the landscape, and David and Goliath can really compete in the same space.

Whereas before, with advertising costs and such, it was a very different kind of thing. So there is an opportunity, properly leveraged with strategy behind it, that I think is incredibly effective for this powerful platform.

Bob Wallace: Molly, what advice do you give your players about social media? I mean, when the rookies come in, is there some advice?

Molly Higgins: Absolutely. We bring in a professional to speak to them about that. But I guess at the end of the day, just be smart and think about it before you hit send. And I often say to the guys and to our cheerleaders and to our staff, don't put anything out there that you wouldn't be proud to share with Grandma. So it's the Grandma rule. Let's make Grandma proud. And I think to Allison's point,

everyone is now a journalist. So we have a lot of citizen journalists out there. So you're always being watched. You're always being reported on. Everyone has a phone with a camera, whether you're out to dinner or at the grocery store. Make sure you're making Grandma proud.

Bob Wallace: I'm going to change this topic a little bit and talk about women in sports. And as I said earlier, I mean, the three of you are three senior people who have made a career in sports. I just noticed Jessica a couple of days ago that the Flyers just hired a woman president of Business Operations. So there's a little bit of diversity. But you're all functioning in a male dominated environment. Jessica, what are some of the challenges, opportunities, that you see in this space?

Jessica Berman: I would say it is challenging, and part of the challenge is that I feel like women in the industry need to be very intentional about striking the right balance, depending on your environment. And I've never walked in a man's shoes. So I don't know if that is the experience of a man. But the sense I have and from so many conversations about diversity, I think when any underrepresented group is part of a conversation and you are one in the room and there is many others who are not like you, you need to strike the right balance between ensuring your voice is heard and making sure that you're leaving space for others and not falling into stereotypical traps.

I think women in particular have to use emotional bandwidth around that, which is unfortunate, but important for their success. And to me the thing that's exciting is that, certainly in the last I would say five or so years, as I've become more integrated onto the business side, I've met more and more women who really seem genuinely interested in mentoring other women and really changing that journey for generations to come. And I think probably those of us who are sort of at that precipice or at least on the journey but still have some ways to go, will benefit from that as well.

But research shows from a D&I perspective, that if you're the only one at the table, it can be challenging. But if there's more than one of you at the table, that

it can be both validating as well as helpful in terms of how your message might be received. So I just think the more we make strides in this space, the easier it will be for women to feel that they can contribute meaningfully, that their voice will be heard and that their contribution matters.

Bob Wallace: Prior to your new role as what you're doing now, you were part of the negotiating crew for the NHL. So you sat at the table. Was that a different experience being one of the women at the table or part of that negotiations? Did you feel that gender had any role or – positive or negative when you were doing that?

Jessica Berman: That's an interesting question that nobody's ever asked me. So kudos to you Bob. I would say when I was acting as a lawyer, the dynamic was different. Maybe – and honestly, I've never really thought about this, so this is a completely raw thought in response to your question. But it strikes me that your JD, your law degree in some ways is like an equalizer. I think once you're on the business side, there's just so many other factors at play politically, structure wise and strategic priorities. And I don't know, in some ways being on the legal side felt a little bit simpler. And I don't know if the fact that we all had the same qualifications, like I said, sort of acted to kind of level the playing field in some ways.

But it definitely feels different, and there's probably a host of reasons why that would be the case. But I also think there's just – on the legal side, and I don't know if this has been your experience Bob, but there's a lot of female lawyers, a lot of female lawyers. And so that dynamic that I was describing earlier of being the one at the table or one of a few at the table, is a little bit different. Because there was just a lot of peers who were experiencing a similar dynamic perhaps, that could really be supportive in that way. Recently the league hired a new executive vice-president of Social Impact, Growth Initiatives and Legislative Affairs, who's my boss. Her name is Kim Davis. And I know having her as a mentor has been really instrumental for me in navigating my role and my work in my league. So that was a huge plus I would say for the NHL, just

to have her. And she's a woman of color, an African-American woman, and her voice is powerful and makes a difference.

Bob Wallace: One of the things I am proud of is that, well, Molly and Allison were people that I viewed and appreciated their opinion. But I always notice, even with myself and Allison, who was in a senior role with me, that there was a little bit of an implicit bias. When you're dealing with some guys that were, whether they were coaches or general managers, that were older and came from a world where there wasn't an African-American sitting across the table, not a player or something. Or there was a woman who was aggressive or smart and wouldn't hesitate to share their opinion. That you did get a little bit of pushback. Allison I think you experienced a bunch of that. You want to talk about some of that a little bit?

Allison Hawk: Yes, definitely. I mean, we had the conversation about a man is seen as assertive and a woman saying the same thing is seen as aggressive. I had some real run ins with some of the people, particularly in the coaching player side, because of that really old school thinking at the Rams organization, and in all – really all organizations. I think Jessica what you point out I think is a pretty legitimate way to think about it. It's really sort of on that business side. There's a little bit more of an understanding and sort of a respect level.

But I have to tell you, I think you do have to use the best of yourself to get what it was across, and you had to be, as you say, as intentional as possible. And you had to have a thick skin. I mean, I can't tell you how many times I was maligned by a member of the staff, and you just really have to have some fortitude to stand up and just really call it clearly and not go into a traditional female mode of crying or doing something else. And you had to pick your battles.

There's a Winston Churchill quote that I always loved. It's, like, "If you stop at every barking dog, you never get to your destination." I can't tell you how many times I had to decide whether or not something was worth sharing, worth bringing up. Certainly how many times were you involved in something that

could have been a lawsuit at some point? I mean, it happened all the time. And again, not with Bob or anything like that, but so many times you have to make a decision. And you have to just be the best possible self you can. And then mentor those around you, particularly the young women.

Bob Wallace: Molly, you're on the hot seat because Jessica has quoted Nelson Mandela. Allison quoted Winston Churchill. So I'm waiting for you to quote somebody else, the first podcast where we've had where we've had such illustrious references. But it's been 10 years since Allison experienced some of that. I'm sure that the Ram organization has grown. Talk a little bit about how you feel maybe Allison paved the way or some other women paved the way for where you are right now.

Molly Higgins: Yes, I mean, I think organizationally we have evolved a lot. I do remember some of those times that Allison is referencing. And I did experience some of that early on in my career. But I think over the years as you continue to perform, you earn trust. And I certainly believe that I have that now with ownership and upper management and the head coach and the general manager and the players.

Bob Wallace: So as we come to the end of this podcast, look at your sport five, ten years down the line. What do you think will be different?

Jessica Berman: Well, I hope if our initiatives are successful, we'll have an engaged, larger, emotionally connected fan base that is reflective of the communities where we play and includes an environment where everyone feels welcome and safe to enjoy our sport and extract the amazing life lessons and teachable moments that you can learn by playing our game.

Bob Wallace: Allison?

Allison Hawk: I would look at sports as being a really intentional partner with communities for community change, based upon some of the things that we've talked about today, poverty and inclusion and diversity and those kinds of things. And that

sports used powerfully and with some strategy behind it, really can make a huge difference in the communities where it serves, and it really helps all boats to rise. And so I think the opportunities, if people can get around some of those conversations, are really, really tremendous, because as Jessica says, and I would completely agree, it's the one thing that unites us and brings us all together and unites us for good.

Bob Wallace: Hockey's biggest challenge Jessica in the next year or two?

Jessica Berman: Access from a culture perspective as well as from a financial perspective, and just making sure that we're in places that are relevant to the people we want to reach. This next generation, and I have young kids, so when I'm watching the things that they're doing and the way that they're consuming content and media and information, when I ask them to kind of join me to watch a TV show at night on the couch, they're, like, why would I do that? I could just go on my iPad and watch one minute of twenty different things. I'm, like, why would you do that? One minute of twenty things? You're not going to learn anything.

So we're in totally different places from the next generation. And so when they begin to be our consumer, and it's already happening with the older part of Gen-Z and the millennials, it's going to have to completely revolutionize the way that we talk to our fans.

Bob Wallace: Who's a Gen-Z? What's a Gen-Z? What are we? I'm older than all of you guys, so I think I'm a baby boomer. What are you guys, millennials?

Allison Hawk: I'm a Gen-X.

Bob Wallace: You're a Gen-X, okay. All right, well obviously...

Molly Higgins: You're not getting old though. You knew me when I was – I'm now getting old.

Bob Wallace: Right, I think we all are. Obviously I want to thank all of you for doing this. I think our audience when they hear this will see that we had three really thoughtful, smart, engaged people discussing issues that I think are very important. So I want to thank you all for taking the time to do this. I know you're all very, very busy. It's Friday, which also is not a great time to do something. So I really appreciate you letting me take advantage of our friendships and engage you in this conversation. So thank you Jessica, Allison and Molly.

Jessica Berman: Thank you very much, it was a pleasure.

Molly Higgins: Thank you.

Allison Hawk: Downloaded (inaudible) After the Buzzer, I'm ready. I'm ready for it.

Bob Wallace: After the Buzzer, I'll let you guys know when we go up live, okay? Happy holidays to you all.

Female: You too as well.

Female: Bye everyone.

Female: Thanks Bob.

Bob Wallace: Okay, bye.

THE END