

**Paul Tagliabue:  
The Bears, George Halas' Legacy**

*Paul Tagliabue was Commissioner of the National Football League when he addressed The Economic Club of Chicago on December 16, 1998.*

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“It doesn’t make much sense to go through a football season without coming to Chicago, because in many, many ways, a lot of the history and the roots of the National Football League are in Chicago. Canton,

Ohio is often called the birthplace of pro football, because the organizational meeting in 1920, which led to the League being formed, was held in Canton. However, and I’m sure there are some historians in the room who know this already, the meeting would never have taken place had it not been for George Halas. He’s the person who was then running the Decatur Staleys, who called the owner of the Canton team and suggested they have a meeting to form a league. And the National Football League was formed in 1920. My perspective, I guess, is that it was then a local enterprise for many decades to follow. It was a local business. It was a box office business. It has now become not only a national business, but a global business. But, in many ways, it’s still a very much a local business...

“The first piece of the local has to do with where the League was in the twenties. Teams in Hammond and Evansville, Indiana. A team in Rock Island. Teams in Racine and Kenosha, Wisconsin. Teams in Toledo and Dayton, Ohio. It was a local enterprise. The membership changed almost annually. The Staleys, then the Bears, became an immediate cornerstone of the League.

“Chicago figures prominently in the history of the National Football League in another very significant way. And as we look back now, it is a little known part of the history of the League. I refer to

the role of African Americans in our sport. Everyone knows about Jackie Robinson. Most of us know about Marion Motley, and others who were the first African Americans to play in the NFL after the Second World War. But, from Chicago, in the twenties, there was an extraordinary athlete, African American, named Fritz Pollard. Born on the North Side of Chicago in 1894. Graduated from Lane Tech High School. Nationally, he’s still not well known. There’s a wonderful biography of Fritz Pollard, published by the University of Illinois in 1992. Fritz Pollard was a pioneer in racial advancement during the first half of the twentieth century in many, many ways, including pro football. He was a student and a football star at Brown University, where he became the first black athlete to play in the Rose Bowl. He also became the first black quarterback, and the first black coach in the National Football League in the 1920s. Later he became a very successful businessman in New York. Was in the investment business, entertainment businesses, and was another true giant of our game.

“But, when you talk about giants, and here I’m using a small “g,” I think there’s no place to start, other than with George Halas. He was not only the founder of the Bears, and a man whose family continues to operate the Bears today, but he was a key creator of the most unique structure of a sports league in the United States, and a structure that’s really unique amongst sports leagues as you look around the world...

“Mr. Halas was a person I had an opportunity to work with when I was a young attorney. He testified before Congress in 1981 with Pete Roselle. Unfortunately, we were before the Judiciary Committee, so Henry Hyde was a big part of the proceeding. But, his passion for football and his passion for making the NFL something special was clear not only then, but throughout his life.

“In the twenties, he did something that only television could do later. He took the sport from the Midwest and took it nationally. He signed Red Grange, out of the University of Illinois and had a

very extraordinary barnstorming tour. It was the first time that pro football gained any visibility on a national scale. At a time, of course, when baseball, and Babe Ruth and others, were the national pastime. Many of you probably know the story. After this extraordinary barnstorming tour they concluded in Washington. And the senator from Illinois took Mr. Halas and Red Grange to the White House to meet President Coolidge. And the senator introduced Mr. Halas, and said, 'This is Mr. Halas and Mr. Grange of the Chicago Bears.' Then the president said, 'I'm pleased to meet you. I've always enjoyed animal acts...'

"Mr. Halas had a great metaphor for the National Football League. And he used it in the last time he appeared before Congress. He said that the League was like a wheel of a wagon. And that the League itself, and the strong League institutions were the rim. And the teams were the spokes. And every spoke had to be the same length. Had to have the same opportunity to be part of the wheel. And had to be just as strong as the strongest of all the spokes. And only then could we roll along together..."

### Prime Minister Tony Blair: America's Role

*British Prime Minister Tony Blair, the first serving British prime minister to visit Chicago, addressed The Economic Club of Chicago on April 23, 1999, as NATO was waging war against Yugoslavia in Kosovo.*



"While we meet here in Chicago this evening, unspeakable things are happening in Europe. Awful crimes that we never thought we would see again have reappeared—ethnic cleansing, systematic rape, mass murder. I want to speak to you tonight about events

in Kosovo. But I want to put those events in a wider context—economic, political and security—because I do not believe Kosovo can be seen in isolation.

"No one in the West who has seen what is happening in Kosovo can doubt that NATO's military action is justified. Bismarck famously said 'the Balkans were not worth the bones of one Pomeranian Grenadier.' Anyone who has seen the tear-stained faces of the hundreds of thousands of refugees streaming across the border, heard their heartrending tales of cruelty or contemplated the unknown fates of those left behind knows that Bismarck was wrong. This is a just war, based not on any territorial ambitions but on values. We cannot let the evil of ethnic cleansing stand. We must not rest until it is reversed. We have learned twice before in this century that appeasement does not work. If we let an evil dictator range unchallenged, we will have to spill infinitely more blood and treasure to stop him later..."

"We have always made clear this campaign will take time. We will not have succeeded until an international force has entered Kosovo and allowed the refugees to return to their homes. Milosevic will have no veto on the entry of this international force. Just as I believe there was no alternative to military action, now it has started I am convinced there is no alternative to continuing until we succeed. On its 50th birthday, NATO must prevail. Milosevic had, I believe, convinced himself that the Alliance would crack. But I am certain that this weekend's summit in Washington under President Clinton's leadership will make our unity and our absolute resolve clear for all to see. Success is the only exit strategy I am prepared to consider.

"We need to be working now on what comes after our success in Kosovo. We will need a new Marshall Plan for Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania and Serbia, too, if it turns to democracy. We need a new framework for the security of the whole of the Balkans. And we will need to assist the war crimes tribunal in its work to bring justice to those who have committed these