



LEAGUE LEADER

Roger Goodell's focus on leadership, health-and-safety issues, and more earn him the 2012 AFCF CEO Coach Of The Year Award.

By Paul Markgraff

Roger Goodell is no stranger to leading through challenging times. In his seventh season as commissioner of the National Football League (NFL), he has met with numerous obstacles, addressing a wide range of issues to improve the NFL, including player health and safety; the medical needs and pensions of retired players; personal conduct; innovative fan services; and international development.

As such, the American Football Coaches Foundation® (AFCF) named Goodell recipient of its 2012 CEO Coach Of The Year® Award. He was selected by unanimous vote of the AFCF Board of Directors and will be honored at the foundation's CEO Coach Of The Year Dinner, to be held at the Waldorf=Astoria in New York City on December 10, 2012.

"This is a tremendous honor. The people who have won this award before are well respected CEOs and entrepreneurs," says Goodell. "The AFCF is a great organization. To be selected by them is humbling."

Leading At A Young Age

Legendary head football coach of the Green Bay Packers Vince Lombardi once said: "Leaders aren't born; they are made. And they are made just like anything else, through hard work." Goodell understood the power of strong leadership at a young age.

"I not only recall my coaches from high school, but also from junior high school and youth leagues, all the way back to when I used to play in the police athletic leagues in Washington, D.C.," says Goodell. "Throughout your life, you are influenced by people, and coaches had a huge impact on me because I was so involved in sports. They're teachers. They teach you values and discipline. They encourage you and discipline you

and teach you that you don't achieve anything without hard work."

In high school, Goodell was named captain of the three sports he played: football, basketball and baseball. His experiences with team sports laid a foundation for the type of leader and teacher that he has become in the professional world.

"Officer Davis, who was my baseball coach in Washington D.C. in the police athletic league, was one of the early coaches who really understood fundamentals and understood how to teach them to me. The great coaches are the great teachers," says Goodell. "I'm a big believer in team sports and working with others toward a common goal. When you can get people to work together, it's not only great in sports, but it's great in life; it's what leads to successful organizations."

After high school and college, Goodell began his journey through the ranks of the NFL. And, he started where anyone who has earned his way to the top begins: on the ground floor.

In 1982, Goodell joined the NFL as an administrative intern in the league office in New York, embodying the American ideal of starting in the mailroom and earning ones' own keep.

He joined the New York Jets for the 1983 football season as an intern, returning to the league office in 1984 as a public relations assistant. In 1987, then-commissioner Pete Rozelle appointed Goodell assistant to the president of the American Football Conference, Lamar Hunt. Goodell then served in numerous executive roles under Paul Tagliabue, becoming executive vice president and chief operating officer in 2001.

Operational Excellence

Goodell's numerous responsibilities

within the league office have primed him to tackle the challenges of today's NFL. In 1994, Goodell was instrumental in an initiative within the league to improve offensive production. He oversaw the administration of the instant replay system and the restructuring of the officiating department.

More recently, Goodell presided over the successful structuring and ratification of the 2011 collective bargaining agreement between the NFL and the National Football League Players Association. During the 2012 season, he helped structure an historic eight-year collective bargaining agreement between the NFL and the National Football League Referees Association (NFLRA).

Instead of focusing solely on financial issues during labor negotiations with the NFLRA, Goodell helped shape the future of the league by looking at long-term reforms. Beginning with the 2013 season, the NFL will have the option of hiring a number of officials on a full-time basis to work year-round, including on the field. The NFL will also have the option to retain additional officials for training and development purposes, and may assign those additional officials to work NFL games. His long-term vision creates a foundation for continuous improvement in the league.

"Learning the lessons that I've learned through discipline, hard work, perseverance, teamwork, I use those lessons every day of my life," says Goodell. "When you're involved with anything, your obligation is to make it better, to find out what you can do to improve it. My obligation is to find out what I can do to make the NFL better, to improve the game itself, to make it

safer, make the games more exciting, to find ways to improve the experience for the fans. For everybody involved with the game, it's important to find ways to make it a better experience."

A Focus On Safety

One of the reasons so many fans enjoy football is the excitement of the game, made only more exciting by ever-bigger, ever-faster, ever-stronger players battling between end zones each week.

But with bigger, faster, stronger, comes a deeper focus on player safety. Goodell has led the way on player safety, instituting changes in the way the game is played and funding scientific efforts to achieve a greater understanding of how injuries occur.

In early September, the NFL announced the largest donation in its history – \$30 million to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) – to be used at the discretion of the NIH, which is part of the federal government's Department of Health and Human Services.

The NIH is one of the world's foremost medical research institutions. It will administer the funding and research, which is designed to benefit athletes and the general population, including members of the military.

"We're trying to improve the safety and the well being of our athletes throughout football and through other sports, and even beyond sports to the military," says Goodell. "There is so much more for us as a society to learn about the brain, about brain injury and disease. We want to accelerate that learning and do everything we can to find answers to some of the challenges that face all of us in sports and beyond."

Potential areas of NIH research include accelerating the pace of discovery to support the most innovative and promising science of the brain, including: chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE); concussion management and treatment; and the understanding of the potential relationship between traumatic brain injury and late-life neurodegenerative disorders, especially Alzheimer's disease.

In addition to brain research, exciting and important areas of health research

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will also be funded, including: sudden cardiac death in young athletes; heat and hydration-related illness; chronic degenerative joint disease as a result of athletic injuries; the transition from acute to chronic pain; and the detection and health effects of performance-enhancing substances, including human growth hormone.

"Working with the best scientists in the world is a rare opportunity, and to be able to fund their work will hopefully advance our knowledge and not only make our game safer, but make every sport safer," says Goodell.

Nearly a week before the announcement, the NFL and the U.S. Army launched a long-term initiative to enhance the health of soldiers and players by sharing information, providing education, and engaging in discussion on concussion and health-related issues that affect both organizations.

The multi-faceted initiative, built upon the mutual respect shared by the two organizations, is designed to promote help-seeking behaviors

and empower soldiers and players to maintain healthier minds on the playing field and battlefield.

The initiative includes event-based programs, websites and social media that foster peer-to-peer opportunities to share information, lessons learned and tips on how to recognize, prevent and manage concussions, and reduce the stigma associated with reporting brain injuries or asking for help with health issues.

"We accept our leadership position in football, but we also recognize that we can affect well beyond the football fields to the playgrounds, and beyond that to battlefields," says Goodell. "We have always focused on sharing whatever information we learn and study. We want to make sure we are doing everything we can to recognize that concussions are beyond just a football issue. We have to recognize our responsibility to the communities we live in and to do the right thing. The more you learn about the brain and injuries to the brain, the quicker we'll identify solutions and help people." 