

SPORTS

NFL players delving into politics

WASHINGTON (AP) - NFL players already are well-versed in hard hits and sacks. Now some are getting a lesson in soft money and PACs.

Players from the Washington Redskins and Philadelphia Eagles have formed political action committees to raise money for the Senate campaign of Ed Cunningham, a former NFL offensive lineman and now a player agent.

The players hope the PACs generate interest in politics among teammates and lead to other team PACs. They say the PACs are a way for players to make contacts they can tap when their playing days are over.

"As players we want to have a voice," said Redskins defensive end Dorian Boose, a Cunningham client and one of the organizers of his team's PAC. "We live here, too. We may be in a position where we make a lot of money, but our world is important to us and we want to be a part of that"

Offensive lineman John Welbourn formed the Eagles PAC, which includes 15 teammates. Welbourn also is a Cunningham client.

The players are learning what Hollywood already knows, said Larry Noble, director of the Center for Responsive Politics, a watchdog group.

"They are waking up to the idea that

money buys access," Noble said. "Fame can get them in the door, but like everyone else, money works better than fame."

The Redskins' PAC, dubbed the Players Political Action Committee, held its first fund-raiser last week at The Rock, a popular Washington sports bar. Amid a bank of televisions over a wooden bar, the conversations ranged from NFL happenings to Cunningham's platform.

"I'm not big on the political scene, to be honest with you," defensive end Otis Leverette said. "My past experience with the average politician has not been very good."

The Eagles PAC's first fund-raiser was scheduled for a week after the Sept. 11 attacks. Rather than cancel it, organizers converted it to a charity event for victims.

PACs are formed to boost the influence of people with similar political leanings. Individual donors are limited to contributions of \$1,000 per campaign, while PACs may give \$5,000.

The NFL does not have a PAC, but major league baseball and the Professional Golfers' Association do have committees.

Cunningham said players on several other NFL teams are considering forming PACs. The committees will help increase players' interest and clout on issues that affect them, such as education and taxes, he said.



WIN, LOSE, DRAW

Evander Holyfield connects to the face of John Ruiz during their WBA Heavyweight bout at the Foxwoods Casino in Conn., Saturday. The fighters fought to a draw. Each fighter had beaten the other once prior to Saturday's draw.

Pippen gets degree in Arkansas

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) - Injured Portland Trail Blazers forward Scottie Pippen did not attend Saturday night's game against the Orlando Magic so he could receive his degree at Central Arkansas.

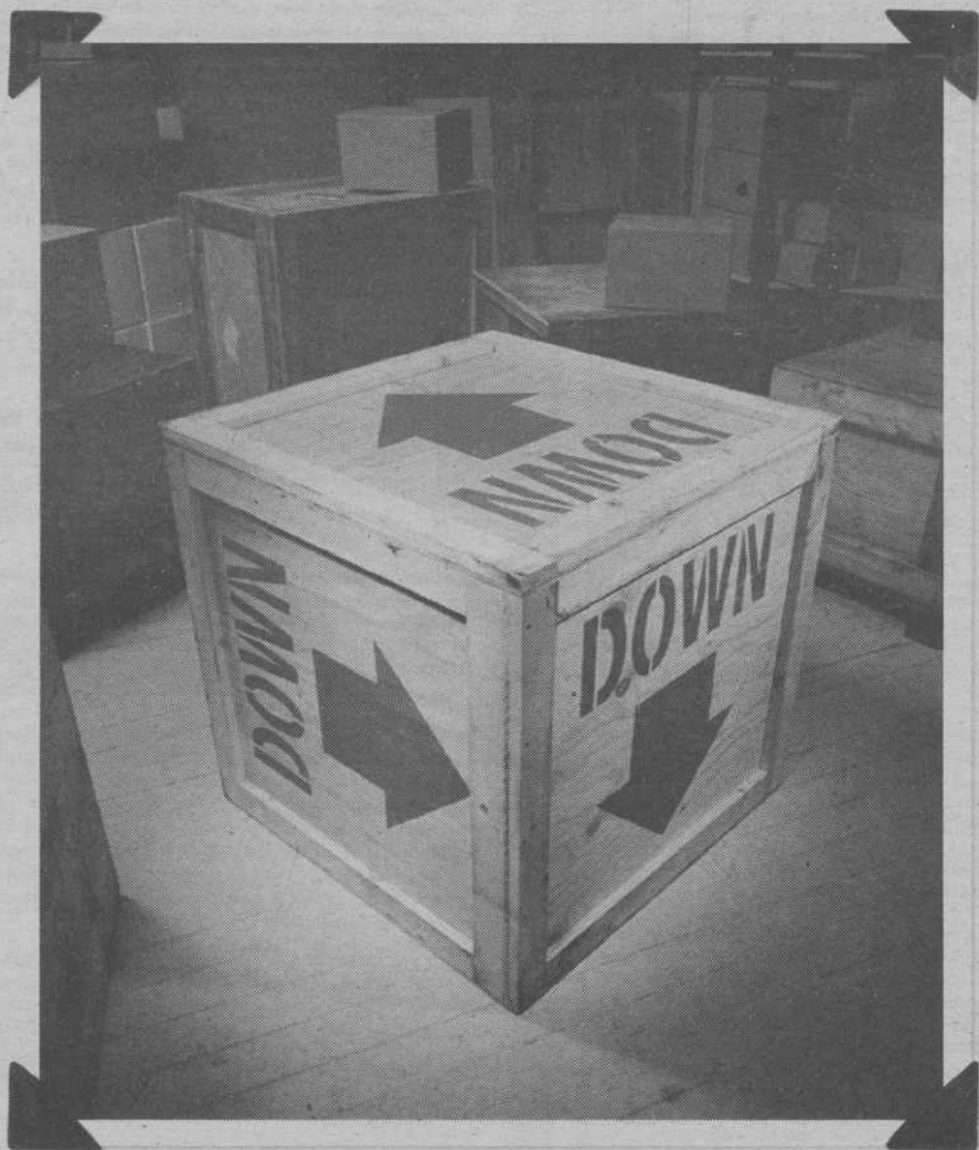
Pippen, who played four years at the Conway, Ark.,

school before being selected with the No. 5 overall pick in the 1987 NBA draft, received a bachelor of sciences degree in kinesiology, a form of physical therapy that focuses on the muscles. Pippen has missed 10 of the Blazers' 22 games with a sore right knee, and went on the injured list

for the second time Friday.

Pippen had planned to fly to Arkansas for the afternoon commencement ceremony even if he had been healthy enough to play.

But since he isn't eligible to play until Dec. 22 against Phoenix, Pippen received permission to miss the game.



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