

Rice talks football, politics, future at NFL meetings

DANA POINT, Calif. (AP) — Condoleezza Rice finally got her chance to address the NFL. Judging by the numerous standing ovations she received, Rice scored a touchdown.

The Secretary of State under the Bush administration, who once aspired to be the league's commissioner, was invited by Roger Goodell to speak to the "NFL family" Sunday at the owners meetings. She spoke to

several hundred rapt listeners about everything from football to politics to the need for American optimism in a trying time.

"I am prepared to answer any questions on Russia, the Middle East, advice for the draft, the zone blitz," Rice said, drawing laughs from everyone, especially Goodell.

"And why no one should ever run a prevent defense."

Rice was mentioned as a

potential candidate to replace Paul Tagliabue, and Goodell thanked her "when you were busy three years ago when they selected a commissioner. I've invited somebody who wants my job in front of the same people who hired me," Goodell joked.

To which Rice responded, "It's true, when I was talking with the Russians and ... the Iranians and Venezuelans, your job seemed like a pretty good one to me."

Rice comes by her football chops naturally. She described how her father was ready for a John Jr., who would become an All-American linebacker when, instead, she was born. She mentioned tossing the coin for the opening of the Tennessee-Alabama game in Tuscaloosa and, after the Crimson Tide won it, quarterback Brodie Croyle saying to her: "Nice flip."

And Rice praised the NFL for its efforts in internationalizing the game.

"What the NFL does abroad is a part of public diplomacy," she said. "To try to use sports and sports diplomacy to present the values we stand for, to give people a little different outlook at what we stand for (as Americans). America's

game, I just know, will be one day an international game of some proportion."

Rice predicted that such nations as Britain, Germany and Australia will become hotbeds of football.

"We need to find countries with a mass sports culture. Countries where they play either rugby or Australian Rules Football or soccer," Rice said. "Not places where they play cricket. I would not go there."

She also congratulated Pittsburgh Steelers owner Dan Rooney for being nominated as ambassador to Ireland.

While acknowledging the difficulty of the times, with a failing economy, rising unemployment and such uncertainty about the future, Rice urged her audience to never

lose a positive outlook.

"What matters in the United States is this is the place you can come and realize your dream," she said.

"The one thing people love about this country is this is the place you can come from humble circumstances and do great things. It doesn't matter where you've come from, it matters where you're going.

"I don't mean to diminish in any way how difficult this [time] is, but I know America has been through difficult times before and always came out on top at the other end. I know it's tough to be optimistic in times like these. But I do know we are the most optimistic people on Earth. There's an answer, we'll find it, we'll work on it," Rice said.

Feds: Michael Vick illegally spent pension's \$1.3 million

Special to Sentinel-Voice

RICHMOND, Va. — The U.S. Department of Labor has filed complaints accusing suspended NFL star Michael Vick of illegally spending about \$1.3 million in pension plan funds for his own benefit, including paying restitution ordered in his dogfighting conspiracy case.

The department filed the complaints in federal district and bankruptcy courts the same day Vick left a federal lockup in Kansas, apparently bound for Virginia to appear at a bankruptcy hearing next week. Vick was at the Federal Transfer Center in Oklahoma City late Wednesday afternoon.

Mark Lichtenstein, one of Vick's bankruptcy attorneys, declined to comment on both the Labor Department allegations and the details of Vick's apparent temporary move to Virginia for the April 2 hearing.

The Labor Department said Vick made a series of prohibited transfers from a pension plan sponsored by MV7, a celebrity marketing company owned by the

former Atlanta Falcons quarterback.

The department alleges that Vick violated his duties as trustee of a pension plan that covered nine current or former MV7 employees.

"This action sends a message that the Labor Department will not tolerate the misuse of plan money and will take whatever steps necessary to recover the assets owed to eligible workers," Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis said in a prepared statement.

The department also accused two of Vick's former financial advisers, Mary R. Wong and David A. Talbot, of participating in some of the transfers.

The filing further complicates Vick's bankruptcy case, which has gradually moved along in Newport News while Vick serves a 23-month prison term in the federal penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kan.

The judge presiding over the bankruptcy case has ordered Vick to testify in person at next week's hearing on confirmation of his Chapter

11 plan.

U.S. Bureau of Prisons spokeswoman Felicia Ponce said Wednesday that Vick was at the Oklahoma transfer facility but added that she could not disclose the inmate's ultimate destination until it he arrives.

There was no indication of when Vick left Leavenworth or when he would arrive in Virginia.

Vick will likely be kept in a southeastern Virginia jail until the hearing, but it wasn't known which one. Newport News Sheriff Gabe Morgan said he had not been notified that Vick would be staying in the city jail, but it was possible Vick and federal marshals could show up unannounced.

U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Frank Santoro earlier this month rejected the idea of allowing testimony by video hookup, saying he needed Vick in the courtroom so he could assess his demeanor and credibility.

Vick's plan for paying his creditors is based largely on his intention to resume his

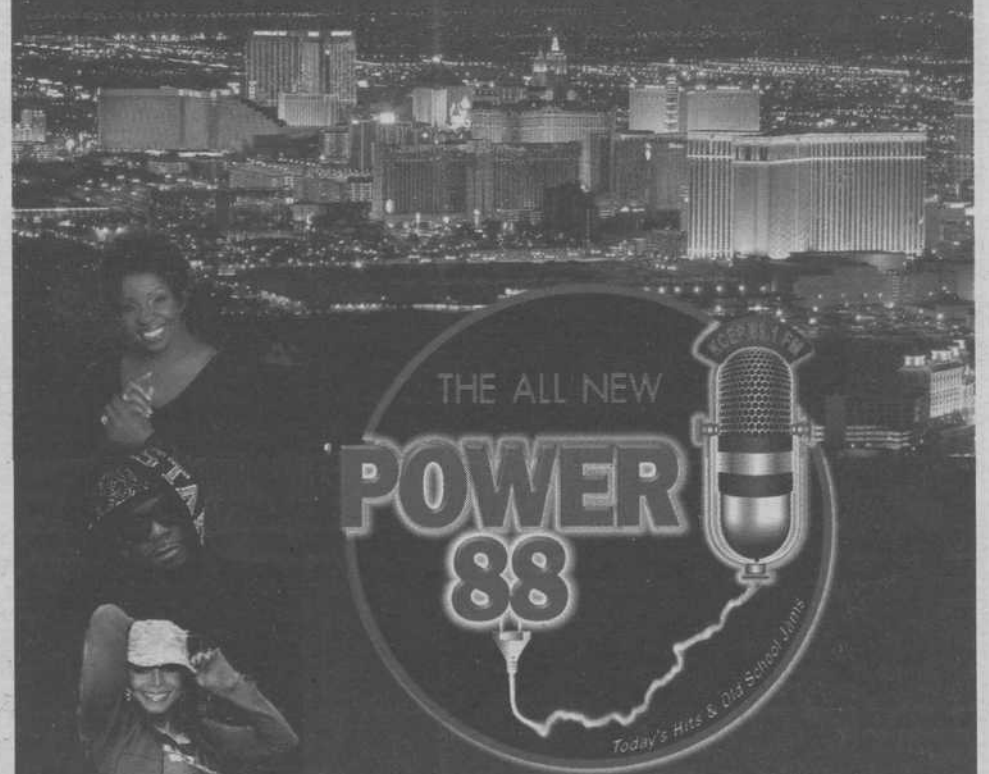
(See Vick, Page 11)



NO JAW 'LEFT' BEHIND

Vitali Klitschko, left, of Ukraine and Juan Carlos Gomez of Cuba exchange punches during their WBC world heavyweight championship fight at the Hanns-Martin-Schleyer hall on Saturday in Stuttgart, Germany. Klitschko won the fight by technical K.O. in the ninth round. Klitschko's brother Vladimir also holds a world title as well.

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