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First Look Podcast

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Bill King: A Super Bowl, and an opportunity for one of America's busier sports cities to

show itself off.

Bill King: We've got our NFL writer, Dan Kaplan, here to tell us about his conversation

with Atlanta Falcon's owner and Super Bowl host Arthur Blank. We'll dissect Atlanta, with all its ups and downs as a sport town, with baseball writer Eric Fisher, soccer and hockey writer Ian Thomas, and Assistant Managing Editor and Georgia Tech graduate Austin Karp. And we'll ask Executive Editor Abe Madkour what he's watching in the week ahead. We're on our way back to Georgia, here in the newsroom of SportsBusiness Journal. I'm Bill King, and this is First Look.

Bill King: Building a new NFL Stadium doesn't guarantee that a community will land a

Super Bowl, but it certainly helps. The seven NFL franchises that have christened

new stadiums since 2006 all have hosted the game: Detroit, Phoenix, Indianapolis, Dallas, New York, San Francisco, and Minnesota. This Sunday, Atlanta, with its other worldly Mercedes-Benz Stadium makes it eight, eight in a

row.

Bill King: While the Falcons certainly will show off their spectacular new digs this week,

they hope to share another larger story. Our NFL writer, Dan Kaplan, was in Atlanta a few weeks ago to spend some time with Falcons owner, Arthur Blank, and take a look at what that stadium project has meant to the surrounding

community.

Bill King: Dan, tell us a little bit about that. How is this a little different than what we've

seen in a Super Bowl coming to a new stadium in years past?

Dan Kaplan: The first thing you must realize, Arthur had a decision to make, Arthur Blank, the

owner of the Falcons. When he wanted to get a new stadium, he could either do what the Braves ended up doing, which was go to the suburbs and build out there, and which most football teams do because they only have eight home dates. It's not like a baseball stadium or a basketball arena. But he wanted to be downtown for civic reasons, political reasons. He's a big advocate for Atlanta.

Dan Kaplan: In downtown, across the street from the old Georgia Dome, that's also a few

miles from an area called Westside, that at one point was the hub of the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King lived there, Julian Bond lived there. It had fallen on very hard times, and it still really is. In fact, just a few years ago, it was

known, I believe, as the heroin trafficking capital of the United States.

Dan Kaplan:

Arthur wanted to use the stadium as an economic catalyst for this area. Now we've heard this before, we've heard stadiums being marketed and sold as economic drivers, and it never really happens. Arthur's really backing up his talk here. He, himself, through his foundation, is donating 40 million dollars to jobs programs, parks, homes for police officers, refurbishment of homes. An interesting thing he did is he required all the founding partners, sponsors of Mercedes-Benz Stadium, to also invest in Westside, and they've put in 25 million. Of the quarter billion dollars that's been committed from public and private sources, a quarter of that, 60 million, is coming from the stadium.

Bill King:

So often you see those stadiums, especially the ones that do try to integrate into a neighborhood that's got economic issues. You get a couple of [inaudible 00:03:40] outside and you don't really necessarily see the positive impact that you had hoped to see. What's it look like around there now? Do they say it's getting better?

Dan Kaplan:

It is getting better. One thing I'll point out is 700 Westside residents are working in operations at the stadium. In fact, there's a concession stand on the upper concourse, I believe it's called the West Nest, and it's staffed entirely by Westside residents.

Dan Kaplan:

If you drive around Westside, and I took a tour, the Blank Foundation's liaison for Westside gave me a tour in his beat up old Benz. He pointed out where Martin Luther King lived, and Julian Bond. He pointed out some of the dilapidated houses, and some of the dilapidated schools, and he also pointed to some of the refurbished ones. It's a long process, but when you drive around, you see a sprinkling of change. It's not there yet. There's some parks, but there's not a lot of commerce. Obviously they're gonna need more commerce in this area. It's not like the Super Bowl's gonna come to town, even though it's a few miles away, but they've had some success.

Dan Kaplan:

They had a 43% drop in crime over the last year. Now crime is still high, they've seen educational scores go higher, it's still very low, but there have been markers of progress. Perhaps a sign that they are making progress is perhaps the biggest fear that residents now have, is gentrification, a sign that people will want to move there because it's no longer a no-man's land. Frank Fernandez, who is the liaison for the Blank Foundation, told me this is the number one issues they now talk to residents about, is their fear that they're gonna pushed out economically.

Bill King:

It sounds like this is a priority for Arthur Blank. You spent time with him. What does he say about it? What drives him when it comes to this kind of thing?

Dan Kaplan:

He did not want one of these stadiums casting elite, rich shadows over an impoverished neighborhood. It truly is quite a stark contrast. This is one of the most impoverished areas, not just of Atlanta, but the entire Southeast, the Westside community. That is something Arthur personally, morally did not want

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to see happen, a big party at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium, and then everyone drives out and there's no interaction with the community. That's what drives him.

Dan Kaplan:

He talks a lot, in the interview I did with him, how Atlanta's not Birmingham. He's threw a lot of shade at Birmingham. By that, he means that there was a decision made 30, 40 years ago in Atlanta to be the capital of diversity, the capital of civil rights, and Birmingham, obviously as we all know from our history civil rights lessons, made a very stark different decision. Arthur's very proud to be, even though he's a transplant, he's very proud to be an Atlantean, if that's the correct term for someone from Atlanta. He's very proud of it, he's very proud of the civil rights legacy, he's very proud of the diversity, and he wants to show it off. That's partly what the Super Bowl is about.

Bill King:

Well he certainly hasn't been afraid to carve his own path, especially in recent years. It's easy to forget, he's owned this team for almost 20 years now, he bought the team in 2001. But especially in recent years, he has carved his own path, gone off in his own direction. The thing that I think comes off most often around sports, when people talk about Arthur Blank, when people talk about the Falcons, is what he did with concession prices. I'm sure you guys got into that. What did he have to say?

Dan Kaplan:

Well in fact, I lead off the story with that. He had not disclosed previously, but former President Obama actually sent him a letter praising him for what he's done on concession pricing.

Dan Kaplan:

Now concession pricing may seem trivial compared to civil rights, and overhauling an impoverished neighborhood, but Arthur sees it as a moral issue too. He doesn't want families not to be able to buy food for their children at sporting events. Arthur grew up in a middle class family in Queens, New York. He said he knows what it's like to go to an event and not have enough money to buy both a drink and a hot dog for your son or daughter. To him, it was the right thing to do. He says, it turned out to be the economically right thing to do, as well. They've made money off of it because of the volume that its generated at the lower prices.

Dan Kaplan:

Now I asked him why he thought more teams and leagues had not followed suit. He took issue with the premise of the question. He said that they're constantly hosting teams and leagues, and his foundation office is opening the Falcons' books, showing them that it works. They provided me a list of, I think it was 16 teams that have cut concession pricing now. I didn't back check to see precisely how much each of those teams cut the pricing by, 'cause if it's 5% or 10%, it's not the same thing as 50%, clearly.

Bill King:

Or if it's one item at one stand, which is what it frequently is.

Dan Kaplan:

Right. This wasn't a story about fact checking-

First Look 190128 (Completed 01/26/19) Transcript by <u>Rev.com</u> Bill King: Sure. No, absolutely.

Dan Kaplan: -the list he gave me, but when I said to him, "It's been several years since you

did this, or two years since you did this, and there hasn't been this revolution in concession pricing," he didn't like the premise of the question, let's put it that

way.

Bill King: What's he like? You spent a bunch of time with him. What's he like? Compare

him to other owners, or contrast him with other owners.

Dan Kaplan: He and I have a nice relationship. I don't want to say he's down to earth, but he

gave me an hour of his time. He was very relaxed, he was in a pair of what I would call dad jeans, he really likes to talk passionately about the issues you and I have been discussing. When it came to talking about league issues, particularly the battle was with Jerry Jones, he was pretty blunt about what he thought

happened there. It was the bluntest I've heard him speak about that

controversy since it erupted a year and a half ago.

Bill King: Where does he fit in within league circles, within the power structure?

Dan Kaplan: That's gonna be an interesting question going forward because part of his

power was this role on the Compensation Committee. He's stepping down from that. Obviously with Goodell's contract done, that committee does not have as much power as it has had in recent years. He's on some committees, and as we know the NFL is a committee run league, but he's not the chairman of say the

broadcast committee or the labor committee.

Dan Kaplan: I asked him about the coming labor negotiations with the union, and he had

some comments. He basically said that's not ... I don't want to say it wasn't his area, but it's not a committee he's on, and he's one of the owners who just

follows the advice of the labor council there.

Dan Kaplan: I would say he leads by example at this point, in terms of the successes he's had,

not just in the NFL but in obviously Major League Soccer with Atlanta United. He's not a Bob Kraft, he's not a Jerry Jones, he's not an Art Rooney or John

Mara, but he is certainly someone to pay attention too.

Bill King: He is the host of this week's Super Bowl, which will certainly put him front and

center. It always does. Dan, thanks so much for joining us to chat a bit about Arthur Blank. Next up, we're gonna get a little deeper into Atlanta, and not only the Falcons, but what all this stadium boom that's gone on in that city has meant so far, where it goes in the future, and whether this might be that sort of tipping point for Atlanta, that it wasn't coming out of the Atlanta Olympics. Dan,

thanks again.

Dan Kaplan: Thank you.

Bill King:

Host to College Football's National Championship Game last year, and the Super Bowl this year, with new stadiums for the Falcons and the Braves, a dramatically revamped arena for the Hawk, and an on fire expansion MLS franchise, many in Atlanta would tell you that the city is in the midst of shaking a rap that has shackled it for decades, a reputation as the toughest market in U.S. sports. Atlanta is on the rise as a sports town. Does that sound at all familiar?

Bill King:

In 1996, the Summer Olympics put Atlanta on the global sports map. The Braves opened Turner Field, the Hawks moved into state-of-the-art Philips Arena, and the city got its second shot at an NHL team, all by 1999. In 2000, Atlanta hosted both the Super Bowl and the MLB All-Star Game. In 2002, the Georgia Dome put on the Final Four. They have their new ballpark, state-of-the-art arena, popular expansion team, and a stadium that could lure the biggest of events, all of which led to two decades that by many measures had to be considered a disappointment.

Bill King:

What is it that makes anyone think this will end any differently? In to discuss that today, we have our baseball writer, Eric Fisher, from New York, our soccer and hockey writer, Ian Thomas, from San Jose, and our Assistant Managing Editor for Digital, Austin Karp, who has a bit of a background in Atlanta as a proud graduate of Georgia Tech.

Bill King:

Guys, that is the question today. What makes anyone think this is gonna be any different? Eric, you saw it from the baseball perspective, but you also saw it as a general sports guys, right? I mean, any of us that passed through Atlanta over the years I think frequently wondered, you had teams that won, you had everything, and yet still here we are right where we were 20 years ago, new stadiums for everyone, which means partly that the last one didn't go all that well. What do you think? Is this gonna be any different?

Eric Fisher:

I do. I get the sense that things have changed a little bit in Atlanta that perhaps it's not quite the transient town that it was for a number of years, and that was a big part of its reputation. You look at what the Braves did, moving into Cobb County. You look at what some of the other teams are doing. They're really trying to lean in as much as possible towards that local Atlanta resident, and really make it solely about that Atlanta identity, that I get the sense that it's a little bit less of a drive by thing for a lot of these teams than it used to be.

Bill King:

For me, if my mind has changed at all, it's changed a bit by what happened in soccer, which you talk about the upset of upsets. You remember how much skepticism there was when people said, "Atlanta? Soccer? Really?" Ian, you remember that?

Ian Thomas:

Yeah. I think even Arthur Blank admits that he was pretty skeptical that it would work this well. There really is no comparison for a team that has entered in MLS and hit everything out of the park, to use a baseball reference, in terms of what they've been doing in marketing, ticket sales, sponsorship, just connection to

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the city. I think it hits on a lot of what Eric just mentioned before, and their connection to the city's culture.

Ian Thomas: You talk to any team around MLS and they look at what Atlanta United has done

in terms of just embodying what Atlanta is, and I guess in a lot of ways, a new Atlanta. I think that has really worked extremely to their advantage, and has really set them up where this is the sort of thing that might continue to work, even if the team doesn't perform as well in the field as it has in the past.

Bill King: All right. It's a little different when you go to a town and it's your college town,

right? Let's preface that by laying out, you're not from Atlanta, right? You're a

Charlotte guy, Austin.

Austin Karp: I'm a Charlotte guy.

Bill King: But you did spend a significant amount of time down there, as a sports fan, and

now you see it from the side of the business. What do you think?

Austin Karp: Well first off, it's really tough for the Falcons and the Braves, obviously to

compete with the likes of Georgia Tech, so I feel bad for them. But yeah, when I was down there, the Thrashers were [inaudible 00:16:04] expansion team, and

it was almost like, "Wait, there's a hockey team coming?" There was no excitement around that. Obviously that wore itself out when the team

eventually left town a couple years later. But it is a tough town to crack. There's so much going on between the pro sports teams, and a vibrant concert scene,

festivals, bars. There's just so much to do in Atlanta.

Austin Karp: I just look up [inaudible 00:16:25] Facebook feed now, and I see all of my

contemporaries who stuck around Atlanta. They're all draped in these Atlanta United jerseys, and it's amazing. But it's the first thing that they've all, that Atlantan, that people who haven't stayed in Atlanta have been able to call their own. They're not coming in from another place. This is something that is entirely Atlanta. People from all walks of life, all different demographics have really just

latched onto the Atlanta United phenomenon. It is really cool to see.

Bill King: I think for me, the United's success almost is the exception that proves the rule,

because what's so different about the United. If you're in Atlanta, and you're a sports fan, but you're not necessarily an Atlantan, you have a favorite team. If you come from Chicago, you probably have the Cubs or the White Sox, you have the Bears, you have the Blackhawks, you have the Bulls. Maybe you were a Chicago Fire fan, but I'm thinking it's not nearly as likely. If you are, it's not quite

as ingrained.

Bill King: I remember talking to the guys there at that MLS franchise as they were starting

up, and one of the things they were hopeful about was exactly that. They didn't have to worry that they weren't the Yankees. They didn't have to be in Atlanta,

a city that's loaded with all these transplant who have all these favorite teams. I think that played right into their wheelhouse. Ian?

Ian Thomas:

Yeah, I mean, these what you would call MLS 2.0, or MLS 3.0, however you want to look at the teams that have launched in the last, let's call them five or six years, have really been able to tap extremely well into that sort of thing, where they're coming into a town and saying, "Whether you are a New Yorker that lives down here, whether you're from the west coast and you move over here for work, or whether you maybe are from a city that never had MLS before, here is a new team for you to get behind. Here's a new team to root for. Don't worry if you're a Mets fan, a Yankees fan, a Dodgers fan. You can enjoy this team. It's different."

Ian Thomas:

I think that obviously has helped a lot. But I think that also putting it in that context underplays what they have been able to do, and really connect with a lot of people in Atlanta, a new person in Atlanta, different demographics, the Hispanic person who maybe didn't feel like they connected as well to football, or basketball, or that sort of thing. A young college student that loves college sports and wants a different kind of energy when they go to the stadium. A family that has really connected with it's a cheaper ticket than the Falcons, and it still has all the perks of going to Mercedes-Benz and getting the lower price concessions, and things like that. They've put all those things in one pot, put on top of it great marketing and great players, and it really has exploded.

Bill King:

Well we all mentioned the transplants in this conversation. I just want a little bit of a backdrop there. It is real. In Atlanta, people age 25 to 74, born in other U.S. states, that number's 45%. By way of contrast in Boston, it's 16%. In Philly, it's 28%. We think of Houston and Dallas as fairly transient, the number in Houston is 26% and the number in Dallas is 32%, because again, we're talking about within a state, not necessarily within a market. Those are very different numbers from you're seeing in Atlanta.

Bill King:

See the Atlanta metro area has about a million more people than Boston, and about 1.4 million more than Detroit. But it has fewer state-born residents than either of them. Now that is not changing, and if it does, it's gonna take forever. You talk to Steve Koonin at the Hawks about it. He likes to crack the joke, "We don't breed well in captivity," is what he says. Steve was born and raised in Atlanta, went to UGA, ran sports marketing at Coca-Cola. He's about as Atlanta as you can get. That's the way he sees it.

Bill King:

But we do now see some success for most of these franchises. Eric, the move out into the burbs, how does that play? It was about bringing them closer to what they said was their fanbase, right?

Eric Fisher:

Right.

Bill King: Is that also a fanbase that is also inclined to have already been Braves fans?

Maybe a younger demo that group up with the team?

Eric Fisher: Right, right. I do want to go back first to those stats that you cited though. Those

were some very interesting numbers. But if you looked at the reputation around a lot of these Atlanta sports teams, you would come away with the impression that that number was 90%. I'm being a little facetious here, but my point being

...

Bill King: It has been the crutch.

Eric Fisher: Correct. But my point being is that even if you take out that 46%, that still leaves

you with a lot of native-born people to really lean into this local culture and this local thing. That's still even if you were to forfeit that, which none of these teams are, they're still a very large and vibrant market, to Austin's point and

Ian's points. That's still on the table here.

Eric Fisher: Now relative to what you're asking about with the Braves, yes, they looked at

their heat map and where everybody was coming from to get to Turner Field. It

was essentially Buckhead North. There wasn't really anything of any consequence on the south side of Atlanta. You combine that with a Cobb County government that was eager to work with them, and then they put that together. Then you fold in the chance to really do an entire cityscape essentially from scratch. They saw an opportunity to open up a whole new model of stadium development that instead of trying to phase this in or waiting for third-parties to come in over a five, 10, 20 year period to build up around a facility,

you just do it all in one shot.

Eric Fisher: There were a lot of things that really went into the stew all at the same time to

make SunTrust Park happen. The results have been pretty strong so far. That attendance is up, you've got a new energy, combined with the team getting good again at the right time that they went to the playoffs in yer two of their new facility, and given their young talent, they're gonna be good for a

foreseeable future.

Bill King: Which is a really good transition to that other point. I want to talk to Austin a

little bit about this, the winning, is people talk about winning. Those teams won. We all remember that the Braves won in part because they only won so far. But you know the Hawks won those years. The Hawks I think had 10 straight years in the playoffs. They were in the playoffs for something like 18 or 16 out of 20 years. These were winning teams. Austin, what is it about Atlanta that that

didn't carry the day, or was it just they got spoiled?

Austin Karp: They were very spoiled on the baseball side, particularly with the Braves.

Nobody would show up to a lot of these regular season games at Turner Field 'cause there was just the expectation. It was like the Patriots now, you'd just expect that they were gonna win the division and go to the playoffs. Maybe you

can catch a playoff game, but even some of those playoff games would not sell

out.

Austin Karp: Getting back to some of what Eric said, yeah, that area, north of Atlanta, your

Dunwoody, Sandy Springs, Marietta, suburbs up there-

Bill King: Blowing up.

Austin Karp: -that is one of the biggest baseball hotbeds in the country, particularly at the

high school level, and supplies a lot of the Southeast colleges with players. You'll see a lot of the players in the first round of the Major League draft come out of

there.

Bill King: [inaudible 00:24:10]. A lot of showcases tournaments down there. Yup.

Austin Karp: [inaudible 00:24:11]. Whole lot of showcase tournaments. It was an easy

decision to move up there.

Austin Karp: Getting into Turner Field was a pain in the butt. If you took, MARTA, you didn't

have to hop onto a bus to get to an area that was not the best part of Atlanta, and there was nothing to do around the ballpark. It just became not a very good

experience as well, to get down to what was Turner Field.

Bill King: No, huge infrastructure issues that they're not dealing with now, but they are

dealing the fact that they're a suburban ballpark. They've zigged when everyone

else is zagging. We'll see how that plays out.

Bill King: How it plays out, that's the last thing I want to touch on. I want to ask you guys

each, I'll put you each on the spot, is it different this time or is Atlanta based on the demo and based on a lot of other things doomed to repeat itself as this

disappointing sports town? Austin.

Austin Karp: I think you're gonna continue to see some peaks and valleys, particularly with

the established teams, your Falcons, your Hawks, your Braves, as they go on the record front, and what kind of player they can bring in. Particularly in the NBA, it's a name driven sport. The Hawks don't necessarily have any huge big name

players at this point, so they'll need to improve there.

Austin Karp: But Atlanta United has a pretty solid future ahead of them. It's not a name

driven sport. Those are people who are just going to watch a soccer game and be with the people around them, 50-60,000 of your closest friends, 70 if they open up the whole place. I see a good future there. But one thing they're always

gonna have to compete with, and it's the biggest sport in the state, is the University of Georgia, University of Georgia Football. That's still remains number

one. That's another thing that they're competing against there.

Bill King: Ian. Look, I ain't gonna ask you which way the MLS franchise is going, 'cause

that's pretty clear. But as a broader sports town, what do you think?

Ian Thomas: Sure. Being so close to the MLS team, it does make me look at the city a little

more optimistic for them, as maybe some of the other sports. I do think, to Austin's point, MLS is not necessarily a star driven league. Yes, Atlanta United has some great stars right now, but I think they're built in a way they can weather a storm. I think, in a way, that will force the other teams in the market to raise their level of fan and community engagement, and things like that, and maybe really start to foster what can become or viewed as one of the great

sports [inaudible 00:26:30].

Bill King: Eric Fisher.

Eric Fisher: Yeah, one of the other things that I think I've been seeing that we haven't talked

about yet is just what's been happening with a lot of these second-tier cities, or slightly smaller cities. What I mean by that is places like Minneapolis, Buffalo, Pittsburgh, and I would throw Atlanta into the mix. A lot of these somewhat smaller cities below the top five are seeing a lot of growth, and that's being driven by the fact that New York and Washington, in particular, have gotten so

expensive for a young person to live in when they come out of college.

Eric Fisher: I think a place like Atlanta is really poised for growth, like a lot of these other

second to third-tier cities, that they'll go to a college and maybe that Atlanta resident, instead of trying to find a job in New York or Washington, are gonna stay in Atlanta. I think that really bodes well for the growth of that town, and a lot of other towns 'cause I'm based in New York, and we're seeing a lot of folks

here, 30 and under, that just can't afford to live here.

Bill King: Well traffic aside, I don't hate Atlanta. With that said, I really do believe that

there are some major stumbling blocks here that this town is gonna have a hard

time ever getting over, and it takes generations, not years.

Bill King: When you look at these markets, both in terms of size, but especially in terms of

demographics, the three markets that look the most like Atlanta, three U.S. sports markets that look the most like Atlanta: Washington, Miami, and Phoenix. Those are the like places. They all struggle. They all struggle for those same reasons because we are tribal, we grew up with teams, and we tend not to let go of them. I don't think that's gonna change, and so I think Atlanta, again, we have to look at it generationally. It's gonna take a while, I don't think it's

there yet. I do think there's gonna be some very exciting runs.

Bill King: I think it's gonna be a great week for the NFL, and a great Super Bowl, as long as

they get the weather, and as long as the TSA doesn't get in the way, and people can get in and out. But I do think long-term, I want to see whether baseball works back in the burbs, I want to see whether the Hawks really can get people excited. The NFL's the NFL, the Falcons will draw, that'll never be an issue,

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they're gonna get their big events. But I think we're gonna be talking five years from now, if we have this conversation, I think it'll be about like it was in the mid-2000s.

Bill King:

That's been our conversation about Atlanta, now we're joined by our Executive Editor, Abe Madkour, who as he does each week, is gonna tell us what he's watching in the week ahead. Abe, what are you watching?

Abe Madkour:

Well Bill, I'm gonna be in Atlanta with a number of other of our colleagues for a number of days. You can really get a great vibe about the state of the NFL when you're at a Super Bowl, 'cause you can meet with so many different constituencies. You can meet with media partners, you can meet with sponsorship partners, you can meet with vendors, you can meet with teams, and league officials, and player association executives. You really get a good sense of the relationships.

Abe Madkour:

Last year, there was a lot tension. There was a lot of fraught with uncertainty about the future of the game. The league was coming off, I thought a pretty unremarkable year. The narrative was around ratings, and around player health and safety.

Abe Madkour:

Going into Atlanta, I think league officials have to feel pretty good about the week ahead. I know Roger Goodell faced a lot of questions on rules, and officiating, and he should expect that. But they have another story to tell, ratings rebounded nicely, concussions were down noticeably, there seemed to be more of a positive narrative around the league. Owners weren't taking swipes at each other like they were last year.

Abe Madkour:

You are seeing its changing face of ownership, Bill. I'm gonna be looking about that. You have David Tepper, you have the death of, of course, Paul Allen, and the death of Bob McNair. You're seeing a different face of ownership. Those are the things I'm gonna be looking at this week.

Abe Madkour:

Next week when we talk, Bill, I'll have a better sense of what the relationships are gonna be like going forward. I think a big one to watch, of course, is D. Smith and Roger Goodell, and players, and management, because that one is still fraught with some uncertainty.

Bill King:

Do you think it's gonna be hard for them this week to move that message off of last week's games? Because that has certainly been the narrative in these last few days. Can they move that along, or do you think that's gonna dominate conversation, particularly around Goodell's annual address.

Abe Madkour:

Well I think around Goodell's annual address, for the consumers and the consumer media out there, I do think it's gonna be about officiating, why has Roger Goodell not spoken about the calls? There's been a lot of calls about, why hasn't he been more higher profiled during some of these issues? But if you look

all season, he's kept a very, very low profile. I think a lot of that has been by design. They have a new PR team at the NFL. I think they're crafting a new public policy around Commissioner Goodell, making him less visible, I would say less available.

Abe Madkour: But to your question, I think the storylines in Atlanta are gonna be pretty clear.

It's gonna be about officiating, and it's gonna be about the Patriots, and it's

gonna be about some of the young stars [inaudible 00:31:34].

Bill King: They do have some great storylines coming off of this game. They really do.

Abe Madkour: They do. We'll have to keep an eye on some of those things. But the relationship

with ESPN is better. I just think there aren't some of these negatives storylines

around the league.

Abe Madkour: But your question is a very good one. I think mainstream media will focus on a

couple of things. Will there be changes to the officiating? Is this the final run of the Patriots? Is the league really well set up for young stars like Goff, Mahomes,

and others to take the league forward? Those are things I'm watching.

Abe Madkour: A couple of other things I'm watching, Bill. It broke late last week, but Eric Fisher

had it in SportsBusiness Daily. But Tropicana Field will be the first venue in North America to go entirely cash-free. I really am interested in what the Rays are doing, Bill, because they can take chances. They have a lot of opportunity to try new things, they looked at a venue of the future that was gonna be

try new things, they looked at a venue of the future that was gonna be dramatically different, it's not gonna get built in Ybor City, but they can try different things with merchandise, food and beverage, in-game presentation, and to go entirely cash-free, where if you walked in with cash, Bill, and you needed to buy something, you'd have to buy a gift card and then do it. It's a data play, but they also say it's also gonna be for efficiency sake, and speed up lines. But I'm gonna be really following that. I think that's a pretty interesting

thing.

Bill King: It is.

Abe Madkour: Two other really quick things. We're in the midst of looking for our next

recipient of our Celebration of Service Award at the Sports Business Awards in May. If you're listening and have a very admirable non-profit that uses sports to improve society and help peoples' lives, we'd love to hear about their story, and

consider them for our Celebration of Service Award.

Abe Madkour: You know that Charlotte, our hometown, Bill, is hosting the NBA All-Star Game.

As a notice to our listeners out there on the podcast, if you are going to be in Charlotte, those days around the NBA All-Star Game, our office is just a stone's

throw from Uptown Charlotte.

Bill King: Come on by, we'd love to see you.

First Look 190128 (Completed 01/26/19) Transcript by <u>Rev.com</u> Abe Madkour: Come on by, we'd love to see you. Those are some of the things I'm watching

and keeping an eye on.

Bill King: That's it for us this week. For Abe Madkour, Dan Kaplan, Eric Fisher, Ian Thomas,

Austin Karp, and our producer, Anna Mason, I'm Bill King, and this has been First

Look.