

Insiders Perspective: Pat Summerall

Interview By: Jason W. Lee, Troy University

JL: I know that you are out of the same level of national spotlight that you've been in the last couple of years. What kind of things are you currently involved in?

PS: Well a year and a half ago, I had a liver transplant. That is one of the reasons I got out of the broadcasting business. And that's been very successful. I'm feeling great. My health is good. My transplant has worked tremendously well. I've been doing some work for the Cowboys. I live in Dallas. And I've been doing some work for ESPN along the way. I did some games for them last year when Mike Patrick was sick so I filled in for eight games. I'm still active in the broadcasting booth. I'm just not as active as I was.

JL: With this time of year coming up, with the playoffs getting rolling and getting ready for the Super Bowl, what thoughts do you go through with your decade as a player and your better part of three decades involved as a broadcaster?

PS: Well I'm going to Detroit. I'm going to the Super Bowl. There's a luncheon on Friday, before the game on Sunday, that's a luncheon in my honor [for] an award named after me as a result of my liver transplant. I'm involved in the donor program around the country. So we'll be in Detroit before the game and the activities the week before. I'm sort of still involved with what's going on in the NFL. I will see a lot of friends when I'm in Detroit. Everybody in the football world is there. I'm sort of looking forward to that. Other than that, I'm just like any other fan. I'm looking forward to Sunday afternoon and Saturday afternoon.

JL: We all know that you've had a very distinguished career. If you could, would you tell us some of your more memorable highlights that you've had [being] involved in the world of sport?

PS: There's so many. I don't know how many NFL games I did over the years. A couple of thousand I imagine. It's hard to pick out one game that sticks out among the rest of them. The most emotional moment I ever had involved in broadcasting involved golf, which was 1986 at Augusta, at the Master's, when Jack Nicklaus won the tournament—when nobody gave him a chance. He was 46 years old. I remember sitting on the 18th tower, when Jack came up the 18th fairway. His son was caddying for him. The crowd was giving him such an ovation every step that he took up the 18th fairway, as I said. It was an ovation like I had never heard in sports before or since. And when he made the putt on 18 and dropped his putter on the green and his son dropped the bag—and they embraced on the 18th hole. It was something. I was overcome with emotion as I think everyone that was there or saw it on television was. It's a good thing that I didn't have to say anything. The picture told the story itself. Because I was so emotionally involved myself, I couldn't have said anything, I don't think if I had to.

JL: Just recapturing that moment there, you can visualize it all just now (PS: Yeah). That is one of the beautiful things about sport—there's just so many powerful moments that have been experienced.

PS: That's one that sticks out to me.

JL: Absolutely. I know that we've already talked about your involvement in football and you just mentioned some about your involvement in golf. Could you just mention some of your other sport

involvement as far as broadcasting goes? I know that you have been involved in a number of major sport activities?

PS: Well, I did tennis. I did the U.S. Open Tennis Championships for 30 years. I did the French Open for the years that CBS had the rights to broadcast it. I did all of the other tennis that was ever television for CBS, I did two years of the NBA, in the early 70's when Boston had people like John Havlicek , Dave Cowens, and Jo Jo White...I did five heavyweight boxing championship fights. I did dog shows. I did horse shows. I did everything CBS had. Whatever they told me to do, I did. I wasn't always well versed on it, but when they asked me to broadcast an event or sport, I did it.

JL: How did you begin your broadcasting career?

PS: It was all totally by accident. I was playing with the Giants. I played 10 years in the NFL. I was playing for the Giants and I was in New York with a friend of mine and we were just sort of experimenting; looking to see what New York was all about, and he got a call. I didn't get the call. And he got a call from CBS reminding him that he had an appointment that afternoon for an audition at CBS to read an audition script for a radio show. And he couldn't come to the phone, so the gentleman that was on the phone asked me if I could relay the message to remind him that he was supposed to be over at CBS that afternoon to read this audition script. Then I told him that I'd be glad to tell him, but just before I hung up the phone, I heard him say something and I put the phone back to my ear. He said to me, "What are you doing this afternoon?" and I said, "Nothing. I don't know what—I'm going out with the boys and we're going to look around somewhere." And he said, "Why don't you come and read the audition script?" So I went with the guy that was my roommate and teammate, with the Giants at that time; and they liked the way I sounded. So I got the job. That's the way I got started in broadcasting.

JL: How do you think the field of sport broadcasting [has changed] today compared to how it was when you were first getting started?

PS: For one thing, the biggest change is that there are a lot more people in it. The equipment that we use and have access to is so much more mobile; so much lighter; so much more technically good. I think those things are the biggest changes. The performance of the individuals who are involved haven't changed a lot, but like golf there are a lot more of them than there were. There are a lot more people interested in getting into broadcasting than there were when I first began. The mechanics of the job itself, the dedication and the work you have to do—the love that you have to have for the profession hasn't changed a lot. If you don't enjoy it; if you don't like it—it doesn't take the public long to find out that you are not sincere in what you're telling them. You can lie to a lot of people, but you can't lie to that camera or that microphone. They can detect pretty quick how sincere [you are] and how much you love your job.

JL: I know that you have been recognized in many forms and fashions. You've been honored in many ways through the success of your career, but who do you feel are some of the best sport commentators going today in sports?

PS: Well you know I've sort of always made it a policy not to evaluate those people who are in the same business that I am in, although I might not be as active as I once was. There are a lot of people I enjoy. I listen to every broadcast and what is said in every game and I try to evaluate what kind of job they're doing. I don't think it's wise to evaluate, or publicly evaluate, the kind of people that are in the same business that I'm in. I never have made a comment about anybody else. There are some I think are good and some I think are not so good. I just don't comment on them.

JL: Sure. I totally understand that. One of the other things that I did want to ask you today—obviously people are familiar with your work in front of the camera, but what about your involvement in some of the most popular video games of all time? I think that's one thing that might interest our readers—is to get a little insight on what that was all about.

PS: Well, I was involved for years in the All-Madden games that are so popular now. There's a golf game [Golden Tee] that I am involved in. That's the hardest work, I think, that I've ever done in broadcasting. The tracks for those video games—you sit in a little cubicle and they tell you, the people who are building the game, they want you to say for example if Emmitt Smith scored a touchdown for Dallas from five yards out—and they want you to use different inflections in different ways; maybe 20 different ways. So you say the same thing over and over again, but you try to sound differently each time you say it. And then they edit the track together and put it on the track of one of those games. It's a labor that you can do for a while. I'd say a couple of hours. And you try to emphasize the inflections in each word. After a while you start to forget what you've done and how you've done it. You're saying the same words over and over again and that want you to say it differently, but sometimes you can't remember how you said them to begin with. It's just hard work to sit there and do it hour after hour, after hour. And sometimes it takes as much as three days of reading just to get one series of plays ready for one of those video games.

JL: It sounds like it would be quite challenging to get involved with that.

PS: It is.

JL: At the beginning of our interview you made some mention about some health issues that you've had to deal with over the last couple of years. Would you like to tell us how everything is going with your health these days?

PS: Everything is fine. The liver transplant, which I had at the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, Florida, a year and a half ago. There was some doubt—I guess there's always some doubt when you have an operation of that magnitude, whether it's going to work. Are you not going to reject or whatever? But I still take medicine, anti-rejection medicine, but I feel as good as I've felt in 20 years. The transplant worked. It worked perfectly. I met the family of the donor about 6 months ago. [The donor] was 13 years old, from Pine Bluff, Arkansas. We had a pretty emotional meeting. It's a pretty rational thing. A pretty devastating thing to think as I lay there in the bed thinking that somebody had to die for me to live, and I started to wonder. I've had a great life. I've had a full life. Why do I deserve another chance? The justification of that other chance and the fact that I'm going to live when somebody has to die is a very emotional thing to go through. I thank God everyday that the transplant operation was a success and that I have no problems, and that I'm still enjoying life. It's just a very gratifying thing. And I thank God everyday because I'm still enjoying life while somebody else had to die.

JL: I know that you've accomplished so many things, both as a player, as a broadcaster, and the many things that you've done outside of the public eye. Could you tell us some things that you are involved with? I know that you've got Summerall Sports and some other activities that you're currently involved in. Could you just share with us some other things you are doing outside the public eye these days?

PS: Well most of the stuff that I'm doing is in the public eye, just not on the national scene. As I mentioned, there's a luncheon Friday before the Super Bowl that's for the organization that oversees organ transplants around the country. I'm involved with some other charities here in Dallas, in this area. I do a

lot of speaking trying to spread the word of how good the Good Lord has been to me. So I do a lot of that about my own experiences through the transplant and before that. I went to the Betty Ford Center back in 1992, to overcome addiction to alcohol. And I've successfully done that. There's just a lot of things. I'm on the board now for the Betty Ford Center, the Chairman's Council it is. It is a group of people that are involved in the administration at the Betty Ford Center in Palm Springs. So it's a full schedule. Although I'm not on the air as much as I used to be, it's still a full schedule and a gratifying schedule.

JL: Well, with all of the things that you have going on, what is left for you to accomplish? Is there anything else out there that you want to get involved with?

PS: I'd like to be a better golfer.

JL: Oh, wouldn't we all? Do you have any words of advice or a favorite quote that you would like to pass on to our readers?

PS: I would just say I think that everybody deserves a second chance. All of us are going to fail at some point in our life in something. And I think as long as you keep a positive attitude about the things that God has put into your life and the opportunities that will come along—as long as you keep a good attitude, I think that's a very, very important thing for all of us to do.

JL: I appreciate your time and all of the answers and honesty that you gave us, everything that you've done and just sharing some insight about your experiences and your background.

PS: Thank you very much.

**Pat Summerall's
Words of Advice**

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