

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB NEWSMAKER LUNCHEON WITH STAN KASTEN,  
PRESIDENT OF THE WASHINGTON NATIONALS

TOPIC: UPCOMING PLANS FOR THE WASHINGTON NATIONALS BASEBALL TEAM

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MR. SALANT: Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. I'm Jonathan Salant, a  
reporter for Bloomberg News and president of the National Press Club, or perhaps today we  
should call it the Nationals Press Club. (Applause.)

I'd like to welcome club members and their guests in the audience today, as well as those of you  
watching on C-SPAN.

The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by ConnectLive and is available to members  
only through the Press Club's website at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). Press Club members may get free  
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please call us at Area Code 202, 662-7511.

Before introducing our head table, I'd like to remind our members of future speakers. On October 4th, David Rehr, the new president of the National Association of Broadcasters. On October 9th, Ted Turner, philanthropist and the founder of TBS and CNN and our speaker's former boss. On October 12th, Gene Karpinski, the new head of the League of Conservation Voters.

If you have any questions for our speaker, please write them on the cards provided at your table and pass them up to me. I will ask as many as time permits.

I'd now like to introduce our head table and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. Please hold your applause until all of the head table guests are introduced.

From your right, Rod Kuckro of Platts; Henry Breyer (sp) of the World Bank; Paul Page of Traffic World; Ira Allen, Center for the Advancement of Health; Lori Russo, vice president of Stanton Communications; Chartese Burnett, vice president of communications for the Washington Nationals; John Hughes of Bloomberg, the chair of the Press Club Speakers Committee.

Skipping over our speaker for a moment, Curtis Eichelberger of Bloomberg and the member of the Speakers Committee who arranged today's luncheon. And Curtis, thank you very much.

Len Sanderson, the president of Sanderson Strategies Group; Peter Blank of Kiplinger; Jeff St. Onge of Bloomberg and the coach of the Press Club softball team -- (laughter) -- and Nathan Levinson of Congressional Quarterly. (Applause.)

Today's luncheon is 35 years in the making. In 1971, the Washington Senators moved to Texas and became the Rangers. At one point, the Rangers were owned by someone you may have heard of: George W. Bush.

Meanwhile, the nation's capital was missing the national pastime. After several near misses, the Montreal Expos moved to town in 2005 and became the Nationals. More than 2 million fans greeted the return of Major League Baseball, and the aforementioned George Bush threw out the first ball at the Nats' home opener. The Nationals also got off to a terrific start and led their division for a while.

This year was not nearly as good, but still another 2 million fans will pass through the turnstiles, including those attending these weekends' final games at RFK stadium, against the Mets.

As we look towards next year, The Washington Post reported today that the Nationals' manager, Hall of Famer Frank Robinson, was apparently told that he will not return.

We also wonder whether the Nats will re-sign Alfonso Soriano, the first player to hit 40 home runs, hit 40 doubles, steal 40 bases and throw out 20 base runners.

Down the road, a new stadium is being built in the nation's capital, with its promise of increased revenues for the Nationals (to) enable them to compete for high-priced talent and free agents.

Washington Mayor Tony Williams hopes that the new stadium is not only a catalyst for a winning ball team, but also for developing a long-neglected part of the city.

Overseeing the future of the Nats is team president Stan Kasten, who took over the club when the Lerner family, Bethesda real estate developers, bought the team earlier this year. Mr. Kasten was born in New Jersey, the son of Holocaust survivors. He graduated from New York University and Columbia Law School. Before accepting a job with a law firm, Mr. Kasten and his future wife, Helen, decided to tour major league ballparks. At the end of a Braves-Cardinals game, he walked up to Atlanta owner Ted Turner -- that's the same person speaking here later this month -- and introduced himself. He offered to work for nothing. As Ted Turner told *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, "That was an offer even I couldn't refuse." (Laughter.) Mr. Kasten wound up working for him for 25 years.

One of his jobs was to serve as president of the Atlanta Braves, which ran off an unprecedented 14 consecutive division titles. Have you noticed that the Braves' streak ended this year, after Mr. Kasten moved to the Nationals? (Laughter.)

Besides running the Braves and helping to build their new ballpark, Turner Field, Mr. Kasten also served as president of the Atlanta Hawks basketball team and the Atlanta Thrashers hockey team. He is the only man to ever hold the title of president of three major league teams simultaneously.

Here, is being asked to run just one team, and we're eager to hear his plans for it.

Let's welcome Stan Kasten to the National Press Club. (Applause.)

MR. KASTEN: Thank you very much.

Hey! Thank you. Thank you, Jonathan, for that lovely eulogy. That was -- (laughter) -- very nice.

It is -- it's a great pleasure to be here today -- well, first of all, for a couple of reasons.

First of all, I do a fair number of speeches. I always, though, enjoy being with a great, big crowd like this. We've got to have more than a hundred people here today. I think the reason I feel most comfortable in front of a crowd like this is all those years -- if you went to as many Atlanta Hawks games as I did, you got very used to crowds of just about this size -- (laughter) -- so I feel really comfortable here.

I also, however, have to remember one thing. I know we've got a roomful of media here today, and everything I say is on the record.

I know you've all seen people who get in trouble when they're misquoted. That's never happened to me. That's not my problem. Every time I've gotten into trouble, it's when they quote me exactly correctly. (Laughter.) So I really have to watch what I'm saying to you here today.

But, as I said, I could not be more thrilled to be here today talking to you or here today in Washington doing what I'm doing. So let me take a little while -- I'll tell you why I'm here, how I got here and what we plan to do.

As Jonathan was telling you, I did spend a fair amount of time in my former career in Atlanta doing a lot of cool things, a lot of fun things, running teams, won some games, won some awards, built some venues, had a(n) awful lot of fun.

In 2003, our parent company, Time Warner, was going through the stuff that many of you know about, and it became time for them to change their focus, so they started selling off some of the teams that I was running and changing the strategy of the some of the other teams. And I said, "Guys, this was a good time. I've had a ball. I've done what I do to, but it's really a good time for me to step back and retire." And they were great to me, as they always were, and said, you know, "Go in peace," which is what I did.

So I retired in '03. And at the time, I had a press conference. I told the world that, look, I don't know if I'm retiring for good. I may do this again, I may not do this again. But if I do it again, I would only do it if I could do something -- if I could build something that was bigger and better than anything I had done before. Now, I thought I was setting the bar pretty high. As I said, we won a lot of games, won some awards, built buildings, won championships, so the bar was pretty high. But that's why I'm here in Washington -- what we're doing here is bigger and better than anything I've ever been able to do in my career, and I could not be more excited about it.

To be able to build a team from scratch -- which is kind of what we have to do -- and a stadium from scratch in the most important city in the world, there just isn't a better, cooler challenge for a guy who does what I do, and there's no place where the promise of the upside when we succeed is greater. So I could not be more thrilled about it. And together with our phenomenal ownership group that I will talk about in just a little while, we have extraordinary hopes to be successful.

Let me tell you about some of that.

Along the way, I've picked up a lot of ideas and I have a lot of theories and a lot of beliefs as to how you do this, how you build a franchise for maximum long-term success. To me there are three things that are the most important, and I want to talk about these things.

In our organization and out publicly, we talk about them as pillars. They are forming the foundation for what we're building, the three pillars. The first one, let's talk about building the team on the field. And that pillar is player development. It's how we did it in Atlanta. Every team that's ever been successful had a strong foundation of player development; scouting, developing, signing, all of those things that built the foundation.

Frankly, we're a little bit behind the curve here in Washington because in the last few years, as baseball was owning the team, they were doing their best to put the best product on the field, didn't leave a lot of resources for doing the things in player development that others might have wanted to do. So we have that challenge ahead of us.

But let me tell you how I came to this realization. You heard a little bit about my career. And in the mid -- in the late '70s, mid- '80s, the Braves were a perennially struggling team. And we were having some success, we were having some luck at the Hawks, and Ted was for several years asking me to also take over the Braves. And I continued to resist. I said, "Come on, that's not realistic. That's just too much."

Finally Ted got fed up after yet another horrible losing season. And he comes to me and says, "Stan, you're going to run the Braves."

And I said, "Look, Ted, you know, it can't be done."

He says, "Oh, of course it can be done. It's going to be great! You're going to be the only guy as the president of two teams! Isn't that right?"

And I go, "Yeah, that's right, Ted. Do you know why that is?" (Laughter.)

And he says, "Why?" And I say, "Because it's such a bad idea." (Laughter.)

But Ted and I had this understanding in Atlanta. When he and I disagreed on something, we just did things his way. (Laughter.) And so that's how I became the president of the Braves.

And I set on the course to analyze what was the problem. Think about this. When I took over the Braves, we had the highest payroll in baseball and we had a last-place team. Now again, you almost can't do that if you're trying. Okay? (Laughter.) That's a really bad place to be, but that's where we were.

And so after 30, 60 days getting in there and analyzing, I sat Ted down and said, "Look, Ted. Here is the problem." TBS was the engine driving our train, and the foremost programs on TBS in those days was Braves, Braves Baseball. And the super-station was just coming into its own, extraordinarily important to our company, the most important thing to our company, and so we always had to make the decisions that were driven by the ad boys, who, you know, needed to do the best for TBS.

And those decisions invariably involved, "Let's get this year's hot free agent." And so we did. And whether it was Andy Messersmith or Al Hrabosky or Claudell Washington, we'd sign everybody every year, and we never got any better.

And this is what I sat down with Ted to explain. What we were doing was very much a short-term policy, and it never helped us win. In fact, it was taking us farther away from our goals.

Here's why. Back in those days I said, "Ted, let's say we take \$2 million and we sign a free agent" -- which, by the way, in those days you actually could get a free agent for 2 million bucks. (Laughter.) Now I can't get half a second-baseman for that. (Laughter.)

But I said, "Ted, let's say we take 2 million bucks. What's the best that could happen if everything goes right?" Well, we'll get one great year out of one player. That's what we get.

Now, I said, "Let's say we take that same 2 million bucks, and instead of going out and getting a free agent, we sign more draft picks and we hire more scouts and we hire more instructors and we buy more minor-league teams, and we develop a scouting complex in Latin America and we start expanding our scouting through the Pacific Rim and Australia.

If we take that same amount of money and devote it to those places, maybe instead of one great season out of one player, we will get 10 Major League players with 10 seasons each." That's a difference in return of 100 to 1. Now -- okay, it's not going to be 100 to 1, but you get my point. There's just much greater return doing it that way.

And Ted says to me, "Please, I don't need speeches! Just fix it!" (Laughter.) And that was important, that was critical, because I always tell people that we didn't have a secret formula in Atlanta. Everyone knows how to build for the long term, everyone knows how to do it. So we didn't have a secret formula, but we had a secret ingredient, and that was an owner who really meant it, an owner who, when he said, "You can do this, do it right for the long term," he really meant it.

You hear this all the time in other cities -- I know you do -- where owners say we're going to do it right, we're going to be patient, we're going to build for the long term. You lose two games in a row and people start getting fired. You know, that happens all the time. It didn't happen in Atlanta. It's why we won in Atlanta. And by the way, that's why we're going to win in Washington, because that is exactly -- (applause) -- that is exactly the kind of ownership we have here in Washington. The Lerner family, with Ted Lerner at the top, his son Mark Lerner, Ed Cohen, Bob Tanenbaum -- and we have some of other partners here that I'll introduce later -- the Lerner family has decades, generations of successful, long-term experience in Washington. They know what it takes.

How great is it for a guy who does what I do to come to his first business meeting with his new partner/boss, Ted Lerner, who's 81 years old, and wants to know what are the details about our 10-year plan for success. I thought that was pretty cool, the 81-year-old guy wanted to hear about your 10-year plan. That's what we have here in Washington. That's the kind of insight we have in our ownership group, and that's why we're going to be successful. We are doing the things it takes.

We have already made great investments in our Minor Leagues. We have -- we're going to talk about it in November when the cycle -- the year cycle ends. We've made extraordinary changes in our scouting and player development program that you're going to be hearing about in November. We have made great efforts in Latin America and, by the way, in the other parts of the world. Let me tell you about that for just a sec because this is really near and dear to my heart.

Every city has pluses and minuses. In Atlanta we had a Super Station, we didn't have some other things. In Washington what we have is this entree to the international community. Everything we do here is not just capturing the eyes of people in the country, because like New York and LA, every city in the country has a news bureau here. But, what New York and LA don't have? Every

country in the world which plays baseball also has a news bureau here. Everything we do is also being watched by them. And they all have embassies.

I've started meeting with those embassy staffs and ambassadors. And those conversations go like this, "Listen, Mr. Ambassador, we're trying to get contacts, we're trying to get boots on the ground, we're trying to do the best we can in your country where they play baseball. If you have a great countryman who wants to come over here and play baseball, what good does he do you in Cleveland or Dallas, you know?" (Laughter.) "Where do you need him to be?!" And they could not be more excited about helping us out. So we have -- we're going to shortcut the process.

I will tell you one funny story. One ambassador said to me -- when we were done he said -- you know, he has some countrymen already playing in the Major Leagues. And he says, "You know, Stan, there's this one player on another team who's very unhappy with his manager."

I go, "No, no, no, no, no. I -- I -- " -- (laughter) -- "I do not -- we're not tampering -- I'm not going there. I just need a little bit of a shortcut."

So anyway, we're doing all of those things already because of the great leadership and understanding that this new local ownership group brings to town. So, that's what we're doing on the field.

Now, I know what many of you who are ticket-holders say: Stan, that's great. But when I'm paying my 50 bucks or my 20 bucks or, yes, three bucks to come to a ballgame -- you can get to a ballgame for three bucks -- I don't want to hear about who you've got in Columbus or Harrisburg or Hagerstown, you know, I want to know what I'm going to see tonight. I want to know what the game is going to be like tonight.

And I really get that, I really understand that, which is why pillar two is so important, and that's focus on the fan experience, focus on the customer experience, what you're going through tonight. We take that also very, very seriously.

I know when you come to a ballgame I'm asking for four hours of time, and I take that request very, very seriously. And so I have to go out of my way to make your experience, from the time you leave your home to the time you get home, as easy, as pleasant, as affordable, as entertaining as it can possibly be. And we're taking that very, very seriously.

At RFK, we've gotten some attention for the things we've already been able to change. July 21st when we took over, we had customer service training so our ushers, who I now believe are the best anywhere, are really a fantastic group of people, welcoming ambassadors. We've worked very hard with our food supplier to increase the amount of food availability, lowered some prices, added a food court -- did all of those things. We've greatly expanded the entertainment that goes on on the board and the audio, and the nonsense that goes on between innings.

It's all important because if I just asked you to come to a game, sit in your seat for nine innings, you know what I'd get? Here's what I'd get. Where I grew up in New York and New Jersey in the '50s and '60s I remember very clearly every year, in September Phil Rizzuto would come on TV

and say, "Congratulations to the Yankees. We sold our one-millionth ticket. It's a great year." Because we had a million people come through the turnstiles. And you know, he was right, a million people was a great year. And the reason it was a great year back then was a million people could pay the freight, that's what things cost back then. But you know what, it doesn't pay the freight nowadays. I can't live with only a million people coming through; I need two million, and two and a half million, and three million people to come through the gates. And to do that, I'd better find ways to get your interest more than just sitting in a seat watching baseball for nine innings. I need more than just the million hard-core fans I get, I need non-hard-core fans, and I need seniors, and women, and kids, and other ethnic groups. I need everyone. And to do that, I'd better be killing myself with other things to do at the ballpark, other entertainment alternatives, other ways for you to enjoy your night and to want to come back.

I lived through this exact experience in Atlanta where we used to play in a stadium called Atlanta Fulton County Stadium. It was a replica of RFK. I used to call it RFK without all of RFK's pizzazz. Or that's what -- (laughter) -- that's what Fulton County Stadium used to be, okay? That's what we had. And no one would come early.

There wasn't anything to do if you came early. People would come at game time, because if they came early, they would just be milling around, milling around. And so when we built Turner Field, our mantra became, "Milling is bad. Buying is good. Milling is bad. Buying is good." So everything we designed was to entertain you, give you opportunities to buy things, to enjoy things, to spend money. We figured out that no one minds spending money if you give them a good reason to, so that's our job, that's our responsibility, to entertain you, to give you a good reason to want to come out, to give you a good reason to spend money, and we take that very seriously.

We are already spending extra money out of our pocket. You've heard about the stadium we're getting -- and it's going to be terrific -- but animating it, activating it? That's on us. So we have hired consultants and designers and people to go out and help us activate the ballpark in many different ways, with specialty-themed restaurants and games and bands and video and audio -- everything to make the four hours that I ask of you the best that it can be. That's what we're doing here in Washington.

RFK is never going to be more than good, old RFK, but by the time we're in our new park in '08, it's going to be the best experience you could possibly have coming to watch a baseball game. (Applause.) Thank you!

Now, the third pillar often doesn't get enough attention, but to me, it's critically important, and that is community relations. It's -- community relations is, of course, a major feature of most companies, certainly of all companies of any size and prominence -- and goodness knows we are one of those -- and all of us engage in this because it's obviously the right thing to do, and we certainly believe that, and we have an active program. But it's beyond just the right thing to do. It's also the smart thing to do for business. Let me tell you why.

All of us have figured out, I think by now, how to reach our customers through our game operations, when you're in the park, the things I was just talking about. Okay, we know how to



get to you by clever use of those things. We also by now have figured out how to reach you through our broadcast program. We know to, you know, hit your buttons, give you things you like, so we know how to do those things. But community relations is how I reach you when you're not in front of a TV watching a game, when you're not in the ballpark watching a game. All winter, it's how I connect with my customers.

It's how I get my brand in front of you, how I get my message in front of you, how I get your loyalty to our team and our product when there are no games going on. So it's just a smart business thing for me to do, and we take that very seriously, too, for both reasons -- because it's the right thing to do and because it's a smart business thing.

Couple of examples. When we took over the team, we made a commitment. We talked about our commitment to community service, community relations. And at the time, we told everyone, not only are we going to be good corporate citizens and good neighbors, we are going to be in every ward in this city, walking the streets, meeting with kids, handing out tickets, handing out shirts and jerseys and hats, building fans, building loyalty, building connections.

I have to tell you, just this Wednesday, in our first 60 days before our season ended, I finished my Eighth Ward walk.

We have been to all eight wards of this city, me personally, in the rec centers meeting with kids, doing programs, giving out the hats, giving out the tickets, building fans, having them come to RFK, because we intend to be a major, important force for good in this community.

In the off-seasons we're going to be in Maryland or Virginia doing the same kind of programs. But we wanted to make the statement before our first season was over that we were going to hit all eight wards, and we have done it. And by the way, it's how I learned the streets here, which is not an easy thing. All right? (Laughter.) You know? We'll talk about L'Enfant some other day, but it's not easy to find your way.

And Chartese will tell you, I drove to every one of them myself because I was going to learn every street in the city. And by now I have, and it's by doing it, by going to where the kids are in the rec centers. So we've done that already. We've delivered on that pledge.

Another thing I want to tell you about. In my first meeting with our team, July 21st, I said, Guys -- we talked about a lot of things, some baseball, some not baseball. I said: Community relations, really important to me. By the way, guys, it's so important to you and so smart for you, whether it's for opportunities in the off- season, setting up your post-season career, whatever, it's just really smart. But in case you haven't yet been persuaded of its wisdom, I'm going to prod you along by telling you the new rules we have with the Nationals starting next season. Every player who comes back will have the requirement to make one community appearance a month. Six hours a year. I don't think that's too much to ask. But they all are going to have to do it.

And I said: Listen, you know? We're going to make this easy and we're going to make it good for you. For those of you who are affiliated with projects or who are connected with charities, we'll do it for them. We'll do it in conjunction with them. It will be good for them, it will be good for

you. Those of you who don't have a project or a cause or a charity, we'll hook you up. No problem. We will make this work for you.

And as I said that, you know, not one objection. Not one. We have a great group of players here in Washington. And I suspect most professional players are exactly like this. They need guidance, they need direction and they need expectations, which they are having from our ownership group. This is important to us. My players have jumped right in and gotten right on board with this.

The first weekend, you know, everyone wrote a lot about the stuff we were doing, and the thing that amazed them most was that we had payers at the gates in full uniform welcoming fans to the games. It wasn't that great an idea, abut people seemed to love it. So this weekend for Fan Appreciation Week -- and come on out, because they're back there at the gates, in uniform, welcoming our fans, because we ain't got a business without fans. And we take all of you seriously.

So that's what we're doing in community relations.

Now, I'm going to take questions in just a second. Before I do, though, I want to make one last public service announcement. This is me helping all of you. Okay?

I've told you a little about what our plan is, and I really think we are building our foundation in player development so that when our revenue spike happens in '08, which we know it will in the new ballpark -- and by the way -- (name inaudible) -- in charge of building our stadium, assures me we are opening in April '08. So that's the great news. When we open in April '08, we know we're going to have a revenue spike, which guaranteed means a payroll spike. To be able to take advantage of that, we're going to need to build our foundation. I now believe, after my first 60 days on the job, we're going to have no trouble meeting that goal. A lot of good things have happened. We're going to be able to do this faster than I thought.

When we get to '08, because of all the things I described, because of the national and international attention, I'm telling you, we are going to be the hottest thing there is. And so again, I'm just trying to help here. Do yourselves a favor and get your tickets now. (Laughter.)

Listen! Two years from now -- I know what's going to happen.

I've been through this before. I built a stadium and arena, but not in a market this hot and not doing things that we're doing.

Two years from now you're going to call me, because everyone has my phone number, everyone has my e-mail. I invite you to call me. Call me. Say, "Stan, I want tickets. Can you help me?" And I'm going to go, "Of course." I'm going to knock myself out. I'm going to do the very best I can for you.

What I won't be able to do for you is get you what I could have gotten you today if you'd signed up, because that's gone to the people who are signing us with -- up today.

So I say I'm just trying to help, okay? (Laughter.) I'm just trying to let you know that -- don't get left behind. Everyone who is on today has an automatic priority in the new ballpark over anyone who comes after you. So take advantage of that, okay? Don't say I didn't tell you. Take advantage of that, and get on board, because we are going to have fun, and we're going to win. We're going to be good corporate citizens, and we are going to be people that you are all going to be proud of.

Now, I'm going to, I guess, turn it over to Jonathan, get some questions. I hope, I pray somewhere in there he can find a question about Soriana or Frank Robinson. What -- (laughter) - - is it possible you could find one in there? Let's see what you've got. (Applause.)

Stand here? Okay.

MR. SALANT: Actually -- and I know it comes as no surprise -- the question on everyone's mind this morning is focused on Frank Robinson's future. Will he be back as manager next season or in another capacity?

MR. KASTEN: Oh, outstanding question. (Laughter.)

(Chuckles.) Listen, it's that time of year when -- at season's end, you know there are an awful lot of decisions that have to be made and evaluations that have to be made. Those things will be made in due course. I don't have anything to say about it today, on Friday. But our season's ending soon, and then it'll be time to make decisions like that and make announcements about things like that. How's that? (Light laughter.)

MR. SALANT: What will the Nats do to recognize Frank Robinson's distinguished career in baseball, especially his role in holding the team together when it was in limbo?

MR. KASTEN: You mean, of course, whether or not he is the manager --

MR. SALANT: Yes.

MR. KASTEN: -- yes.

Well, first of all, let me say this about Frank Robinson. I've said this publicly. I told this to people when I wasn't here, and I've said this both publicly and to Frank privately once I got here. Frank Robinson, for me, as a kid who grew up following baseball in the '50s and '60s, was just an icon, just a hero. He continues to be that to me today.

Here's why. Frank Robinson is the only one of -- one of the great home run hitters in the history of the game, one of the truly great sluggers, but the only that you can think of and you can think about as someone who also appreciates the hit-and-run and hitting the cutoff man and moving the runners over and hitting, you know, and sliding and bunting. Frank Robinson thinks on all these levels. I think he is a walking, living, breathing example of how you play baseball. And as such, there's obviously a role for him. Everything he's done deserves to be cherished and

respected and tributed at the appropriate time, and you can count on the Nationals to do the right thing. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: Regarding Nationals management, is general manager Jim Bowden also questionable to return for 2007?

MR. KASTEN: I have said that Jim Bowden's our general manager, period. The reason I say it that way is -- some of you may have noticed, when there are contracts running out, stories get written about it, and for the month or two or six beforehand, that's all you read about.

And so in Atlanta, I had a GM who stayed with me for 14 years, and we never talked about how long his contract was because I didn't want it to be the subject of speculation. I wanted him to just be part of the management team. Like in corporate America, we don't talk about how long a corporate executive's contract is, we talk about the plan, and moving forward. And we don't allow -- I think the speculation about any individual like that is -- gets in the way of what we're trying to do. Can't help it with managers and players, those things are public. But to the extent we can have executives keep our business affairs private and not become a distraction in the public, that's what I think is best.

I've said it before, I'll say it again -- Jim Bowden is our GM, period.

MR. SALANT: They'd like to ask about Soriano.

MR. KASTEN: Who? (Laughter.)

MR. SALANT: Are you going to try to re-sign him as a free agent?

MR. KASTEN: Yeah, I knew I'd get a Soriano question today. Alfonso Soriano, one my absolute favorite players in baseball. What a great season he's having. In fact, this 40-40-40 stuff -- a season that has never been done before in the history of baseball, which I plan to remind his agent, suggests to me that means it's probably never going to happen again, either. (Laughter.) But I just -- a little commercial, if you're watching.

No! But I love Alfonso. We love what he's done for our team. In addition to the player he is on the field, he's a great, great kid. He's our hardest worker, and we love him in the locker -- and he's at an age where he can still be part of our team when we are successful, which is in the very near future.

So, you bet, absolutely, I'm going to be about there trying to sign him. But I have to remind everyone, this ain't the NBA. This is not where you draft Shaquille and you go to the finals. That's now how it works in baseball. It's never been about one player, it's always been about 25, it always will be about 25. And if I take too many of our limited resources and dedicate it to one place at the expense of all those other things I told you I have to do, that would set us farther back, as we learned from the Braves in the '80s.

I won't do that. I will keep us on track to build this thing right. If I can do it in a way that keeps Alfonso here -- which I think I can, which I'd like to do -- then we are absolutely going to do it. If I can't, we'll take our two top draft picks for him, build up our pipeline that way, and also get farther down the road. Either way, we're going to be okay. But do I want to have him? You bet. Am I going to try? Absolutely.

MR. SALANT: Let's go back to the question about leadership. What qualities do you think are most important for a successful general manager and manager?

MR. KASTEN: Let's take general manager first. I think, first of all, I need a guy with a vision. It's one thing -- let me talk to you for a minute about the difference between basketball GMs and baseball GMs. This is important, because in basketball there's a universe of people which is very small. Every year we have 30 new people join the NBA, 40 new people. That's it, that's the whole universe. That's not true in baseball. In baseball, we have hundreds and hundreds that are eligible that might well become a player at some point during the year.

In basketball, because the universe is limited, it's much more of an eyeball scouting experience if you're a GM. You know every player that you're talking about, that you're making a trade for. If he was a recent draft pick, you might even know his family. That goes on all the time. It's unheard of to make a trade for a player whose game you don't know intimately, unlike baseball, which is much, much more of an organizational challenge. Because not only is it possible for you to make a trade for a player whose game you don't know intimately -- you may not have heard his name till 10 minutes ago-- because you're making a trade with a team and you're balancing it out and the only fair thing would get a(n) A player or a Double A player, you got to call up your scouts who check their reports, and that's the way you make a deal. It's an organizational challenge in baseball, much, much more so than it is in other sports.

So we need someone with the ability to organize, someone with an overarching strategic vision for how the pipeline feeds into the major leagues and someone who's tireless, someone who absolutely works night and day. That's what you need in the GM.

In a manager -- I was blessed with being with maybe the best one of all time in Atlanta in Bobby Cox. Bobby Cox is not what a lot of people would write down as a manager. He is not this Patton-type, hard-charging, yelling, screaming guy. That's not Bobby Cox. But he is a guy who delivers respect to all his people, he gets it back because of that, obviously knows the game intimately, but he's guy who leads men not with yelling and screaming but with personality and his example of how to treat people and how to make people win.

I had a great talk with a great, great player this year who's about to retire. We knew each other from the past, and we just sat in one of the back rooms at RFK just talking about some stuff, and we talked about managers in baseball, and he had been with Bobby Cox at one point in his career. He said, "Stan, the thing to me that stands out is on a Bobby Cox team, those guys -- everyone wants to win -- we all want to win -- but on those teams, they want to win FOR Bobby." You don't see that at other teams. It's because of the relationship he has in driving these people.

And ideally, if I could get a manager -- and there are many of them out there -- if I get a manager for whom players want to win, that really adds an element on top of all the physical talent that they bring to the park.

MR. SALANT: What positives are you taking from this current season? What is there to build on?

MR. KASTEN: Well, there are great, great many things to build on. We made a midseason trade, and then we made a pickup around the 1st of September. Those two moves have added four full-time players to our team, with Austin Kearns and Felipe Lopez; Ryan Wagner, who's developed sensationally in the bullpen; and now picking up Nook Logan, who looks like a real full-time center fielder. We've had a(n) extraordinary season on the field.

More importantly, though, what we've done in our minor leagues, what we've done in our scouting, that's where the rubber meets the road. Again, starting in November when I can talk about these changes, we'll be able to talk about all the many great things that have happened. And I really do think our calendar has been moved up by at least a year. I expect to be good much sooner than I thought we were going to be.

MR. SALANT: With so many players -- so many people focused on 2008 and the new stadium, what are your club and organizational goals for next season?

MR. KASTEN: Well, you know, our club and organizational goals -- boy -- are always the same -- we want to win. We want to win next year, and we're going to try. As I told you, I thought we had challenges in our foundation. So right now, job one is building that foundation, as I have described. We're doing that. That's happening.

Along the way, we expect everyone to win. What we teach in the Minor Leagues is how to go about winning. So, I expect us to win. I know we won't every night, but we show the attitude in addition to the aptitude, I think we will continue to make progress.

I don't know when we're going to win, I don't know when we're going to win a pennant or when we're going to win a World Series. But I can tell you, this season we had important building blocks on that road to getting us there, and we need to continue that process next year, and we will.

MR. SALANT: What other improvements do you plan to RFK Stadium for next season?

MR. KASTEN: You know, I don't know all the specifics. I will tell you this, we tasked our front office staff, when we came in -- you know, we were awarded the team in May.

And by the way, let me take a second to introduce some my other partners here, some of our other owners.

First, Al Maldon, who is one of our minority partners. He's also a senior vice president for external affairs. (Applause.)

And where's Faye? Is Faye still here? Yeah, Faye Fields, Faye Fields, another one of our owners. (Applause.)

In addition to the Lerner family, that you've read about, we have an extraordinary cadre of local Washingtonians who are also supportive and behind us and helping us in many, many ways, and their help has been instrumental.

When we all came together in May and were awarded the team, we sat down as a front office and talked about what we can do when we took over. And we tasked the front office to get creative, show us what you can do. And so we did a lot of cool things. First of all, we scrubbed the place from top to bottom. I hope many of you noticed that. We planted trees and bushes outside, trying to beautify the place. We added the kids area. We added the insanely silly but popular presidents races -- (laughter) -- which have really taken on a life of their own. And by the way, we are thinking about -- I probably can announce it here, don't you think -- we are thinking about -- you know, we do the four presidents, these large, 10-foot mascots that get in a race every night. Alas, poor Teddy hasn't won yet. And we'll talk about that. And they are the four presidents who are on Mount Rushmore. We call them the Rushmores. And they have a race every night, and it's hilarious. But we're thinking about adding another one for next year. And we didn't know how to decide it, and we thought, you know, what, we should hold an election because that's -- (laughter) -- that's how you choose a president, right?

So we're planning things like that for the off-season, maybe. And we're going to try to spiff up the area as much as we can on that theme. We challenged our staff, they came up with these ideas. They came up with all the things that you experienced July 21, 22, and 23. We had astonishing reviews. I'm not used to those from the media, you know -- (laughter) -- but greatly appreciated.

Anyway, this same staff is there. They now have had another half season to think about it, and a whole off-season. We now also have budgets. So I don't know what they're going to come up with, but that's their mission.

Keep it coming. Coming up with new stuff is what they're supposed to do.

Now, RFK's always going to be just RFK. So we have limitations. We have wiring and electrical limitations. We have kitchen limitations. We have space limitations, all of that stuff I didn't want to bore you with. But there are things we can do, and we are working hard to do all of it. And if you have an idea -- Stan.Kasten@nationals.com -- just send it along. This is what we do. Thank you.

MR. SALANT: Where do you draw the line between paying to keep an outstanding player or -- versus having the extra money to spend in building the team? What are the factors in that judgment call?

MR. KASTEN: I think you have to have a philosophy about how you build the team, and we've talked about that. As Branch Rickey understood in the '30s, the most efficient way to do that is to build your organization, develop your pipeline, the most efficient way to get players.

The next way is through trades, and the least efficient way is free agents.

However, there's a time and place for everything. I want to remind everyone: in Atlanta, we didn't sign our first prominent free agent -- Greg Maddux in 1993 -- until after we had already been to two World Series, and we had done that on our own.

And I cannot tell you how much pride we took when we won a world championship in 1995 -- how much pride not just the organization took but the entire city took when that night, winning game six against the Cleveland Indians, the pitcher standing on mound, who threw the one-hitter, the greatest World Series game I've ever seen pitched -- the player who hit the home run for the only run in the 1-nothing game -- the player standing on the mound to close the game -- all three of them, like most of the rest of the team, were scouted by us and drafted and signed and developed and put together in a team. That's what made it extra special.

Championships in Atlanta were created on the fields of West Palm Beach in spring training and all -- and Richmond and Greenville and all other Minor League cities. That is how we're going to do it here. We have to focus on that as job one.

Then, when you have foundation, there is absolutely a time, not just for trades, but then the final piece, free agents. And we are ready to go, because we have ownership desperately committed to doing it right and winning. But there's an order to it, and we're focused very much on doing it in the right way.

MR. SALANT: Which players on the Major League and the Minor League level do you expect to be the core of the future of the Nationals?

MR. KASTEN: Well, that's the funny thing about expectations. I brought with me a tool, an analytical tool that we used every day in Atlanta. And it's a four-year grid of every contract on our team. Now, it sounds simple. But it's very important, because it's fine to talk about what my payroll will be this year and what it'll be next year and the year after, but no, I do it line by line, person by person. I want to know who's at second base four years from now, what's our plan.

Now, we change it once a week or once a month. That's what happens. That's okay. But we always have to think about that.

So for today I will tell you that, wow, if Alfonso was here, he'd certainly be a core player.

And the players we picked up this year, Kearns and Lopez and Wagner and Nook Logan, they're certainly part of our future. And obviously Ryan Zimmerman, who we think should be the Rookie of the Year this year, Nick Johnson, Brian Schneider, they're core players who can be with us for a long time. And there are others.

I do have to caution you, though. Things happen in baseball. It's a zero-sum game. I have 29 really smart, hardworking competitors working to beat my brains in every day. That makes my challenge even harder. And so things are going to happen along the way.



When we get there, those eight or nine players I've just named, they won't all be there, but for today, all of them are capable to contribute to a winning team here in Washington.

MR. SALANT: Besides the Potomac Nationals, do you plan to have other Minor League teams in the Washington suburbs?

MR. KASTEN: Well, we have good news on that front. We've had a very successful off-season in terms of developments in our Minor Leagues, and that's one of them, the reaffiliation. We've moved our team, which was affiliated with New Orleans last year. There was nothing wrong with the facility or the city, but it was in the Pacific Coast League. It was the easternmost -- second easternmost city in the Pacific Coast League, which meant all our AAA games were thataway. And so if they were at New Orleans, that's when they were the closest to us. Most of the time they were in Tucson or Tacoma, you know, just bad for our whole system.

We relocated to now where we're in Columbus, Ohio, a six-hour drive, one-hour flight 11 times a day. And Columbus is in the International League, which plays in Richmond and Norfolk and Scranton and everywhere a heck of a lot closer. That's number one.

Number two, we had a Minor League team in Savannah, the Savannah Sand Gnats. We've relocated them. We're now in Hagerstown. So we have two A League teams, Hagerstown, Potomac. Our AA team is Harrisburg, two-hour trip up the road. Our AAA team is Columbus. And we think that's a heck of a lot of improvement for one off-season.

MR. SALANT: What would you like to see changed in the collective bargaining agreement this next go-round? Baseball says that financially it's much healthier than it's ever been.

MR. KASTEN: I think this is a really good time for baseball. And not only has baseball said it, I think all observers say it, the things that are now going on in our business off the field as well as on the field, it's never been better. It really is an era of renaissance. And Bud Selig, who has taken a lot of barbs and shots over the years, doesn't get nearly the credit he deserves for presiding over this renaissance. So I agree that it really hasn't been better.

Now, none of us on either side of the bargaining table takes this for granted. We understand it will take continued cooperation, continued innovation to keep that train on the tracks. I expect -- we're not allowed to talk about collective bargaining and I won't, but everything we hear is the spirit in the bargaining room is good. We all know that hasn't always been the case. But the spirit now is good. The level of cooperation is greater than it's really been in our history, again something Bud Selig deserves a lot of personal credit for. And everything we've heard suggests that we are going to have a good, positive outcome of the collective bargaining agreement for a contract which expires this coming December.

MR. SALANT: The Nationals lead the league in errors this year. How do you teach Major League ballplayers to throw and catch the ball? (Laughter.)

MR. KASTEN: Actually, not my department. (Laughter.) But we get people who can really teach that. That's the first thing we do. (Soft laughter.) No, you know -- yeah, we have problems.

A team -- what we learned in Atlanta -- this is interesting. We used to have a team like that in Atlanta. In the late '80s, as we were building up, we also had horrific defense, because it's kind of the last thing you get to. You know, first, let's find pitching and then let's get some hitting; oh, and then let's, you know, spice it up with defense if we can. So it is kind of the last thing in the sequence.

So that first year that we really turned it around, that we ready to click, and we started signing the lower-level, the minor free agents. What we did was add defense in 1991. We signed Sid Bream, we signed Rafael Belliard and we signed Terry Pendleton -- three Gold- Glove caliber fielders. And you know what we found out? All of a sudden, our pitchers were way better, you know. (Laughter.) And that's what happens, and that's the importance of defense. So I hear you, I agree with you.

This year, we've made great progress offensively. The regular lineup that we have put on the field the second half of the year is a terrific offensive lineup and can compete with anyone already. We understand we have other needs. Those include defense. You know, we will continue to have it on our to-do list.

MR. SALANT: In Atlanta, you were able to create the strong entertainment element at Turner Field. What are your detailed plans for added entertainment in the new stadium?

MR. KASTEN: Okay. Well, that's a great question and one of my favorite stories, because as I've already told you, we need you to come early. What we were able to successfully do in Atlanta is when we finally did jazz it up with all the old terms that I talked up, we started opening our gates instead of 90 minutes early, we opened our gates two hours early, and what we found was we had a line an hour before that waiting to get in. That's what we're trying to create here.

And so we've actually hired the same consultant who did all of the theming for Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium. We've hired them here to do that stuff for us. And so the kids' areas and the games and the novelties and the video and the live entertainment stuff -- you can expect all of that to be going on here. And again, that's add-on. That's stuff that the Lerner family and Nationals management are working on collectively to make the new park the best experience it can possibly be.

MR. SALANT: This questioner writes, "You preach long-term planning for the Nats. Why aren't a lot of the cities that do the same long-term planning of its own are building underground parking near the ballpark, even though it, like the Nats, may be a mess for a year or two?" (Laughter.)

MR. KASTEN: Okay. We -- this is -- we came in -- let's remind everyone -- at the tail end of something of a very long experience, okay, a long and difficult experience. And we thought the worst thing we could do, the last thing we should do is now get in and try to rewrite everything. We came in with a set plan -- and by the way, a plan -- a very tight plan to get everything done on time so that it worked. We understand and completely agree with the goals of everyone in the city administration who wants and needs what's happening around the ballpark to be the

centerpiece of the rebirth of a whole new part of town. It's important to us more than anyone else, because if the area is a success, we're going to be a success.

We do know this, though: Nothing will succeed unless our ballpark is a success. That has to be job one. And I think everyone involved in the process has always understood what job one was: making the ballpark the best it can be. We have rolled up our sleeves and we're helping in that. We have pledged not to derail anyone. We have pledged not to take anyone over budget. We're with you in this all the way -- on time, on budget, first class. And again, everything we can do to get that, we will. And we're going to ask everyone else to not put the cart before the horse. Let's get what we all need to be done first, let's get that right first.

MR. SALANT: The NFL and the NBA have aggressive international strategies. What's the long-term view for the international market in baseball, and how does Washington fit in?

MR. KASTEN: Well, I think I got to that. Do I need to do the ambassador story again?  
(Laughter.)

Okay. The Nationals are going to take advantage -- again, that's a natural advantage we have in this city that other people don't have. And the reason I can tell the world about this is even if they know what I'm doing, there's nothing they can do about it because they don't have embassies in other cities. So we're going to be aggressive in reaching out.

I will say what MLB has done internationally is another great success story. Everyone in our industry acknowledges that the leader in Internet development is MLB.com -- far ahead of what the very good, progressive leadership at NBA and NHL has done. But MLB.com is something of a success not just nationally, but internationally, that no one has been able yet to catch up with. And so, through the use of the Internet, through our expansion, we're now -- I think all teams now have outreach whether it's in the Dominican or Venezuela. We also have outreach in the Pacific Rim.

We talk about games. We had the World Baseball Classic, as you know, this last year. Again, the brain child of the leaders of Major League Baseball -- an extraordinary success. Sold-out stadiums in San Diego for the last weekend. This is the beginning, I think, not just of an era of internationalism in baseball, but also was an important milestone in the record of cooperation between players and management. This was a joint venture of the union and management, and it was an extraordinary success. So again, a real success for our domestic product as we work together, and a great, great story internationally.

MR. SALANT: How do you maintain loyalty to your team, or any team, when the players switch teams so frequently?

MR. KASTEN: I had a coach in the NBA once, Kevin Loughery -- he used to play in Baltimore. Some of you may know him. He had the best way of describing this. He said fans should just root for laundry, not for players -- (laughter) -- you know, just root for the uniform. You know, don't -- you know, you shouldn't be worrying about the players because they do change, and it's all about the team, it just is.

And I never had a problem with that. I have friends on other teams, players who played for me, friends with whom I'm still close. But I know what I root for, I'm rooting for my team to win. I also remind players, when they tell me how important they are, that this franchise was here long before any of us came here, and it's going to be here long after all of us are gone.

It's the franchise which is important. It's the franchise -- here's how -- another way I told it when I had this debate with an NBA player once who talked about, you know, stars and individuals in the NBA, that's what it's all about, it's all about the players. And I go, I don't think so. If Michael Jordan told you tomorrow he's going to be at 14th and K playing basketball by himself, no one would come to see him, okay? You're coming to see people who play in leagues, wearing uniforms, competing for something. That's what you're watching. You're not watching individuals playing basketball. It's the hierarchy that gives any purpose to the individual player. And so I'm following teams, and I don't have a hard time doing it.

MR. SALANT: Before I ask the last question, I wanted to offer you the official National Press Club coffee mug.

MR. KASTEN: Great, thank you.

MR. SALANT: A wonderful beverage while you're -- beverage for when you're scouting players. And a certificate of appreciation for appearing before the club.

MR. KASTEN: Oh, that's great. Thank you.

MR. SALANT: And as an inspiration, a ball autographed by the 2006 division champion National Press Club softball team.

MR. KASTEN: Oh, fantastic. (Laughter, applause.) Thank you very much, Jonathan. That was great. Thank you.

MR. SALANT: For our final question, will Teddy Roosevelt ever win the president's race?

MR. KASTEN: You know, someone asked me the other day whether these president races are fixed. (Laughter.) As if I was running, you know, WWE or something like -- you know? My response to them was, no, they remain broken. (Laughter.) And that's how I'm going to leave it. You'll all have to stay tuned.

Thank you very much for having me here today. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: I'd like to thank everyone for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booze and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch.

And thanks to the Eric Friedheim National Journalism Library at the National Press Club for its research. Research is available for all club members by calling 202-662-7523.

Good afternoon. We're adjourned. (Sounds gavel.) (Applause.)

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