

To Roger Goodell, DeMaurice Smith and C. David Baker:

We, the undersigned Pro Football Hall of Famers, were integral to the creation of the modern NFL, which in 2017 generated \$14 billion in revenue. But when the league enshrined us as the greatest ever to play America's most popular sport, they gave us a gold jacket, a bust and a ring — and that was it.

People know us from our highlight reels. They see us honored and mythologized before games and at halftime, and it would be reasonable if they thought life was good for us. But on balance, it's not. As a group we are struggling with severe health and financial problems. To build this game, we sacrificed our bodies. In many cases, and despite the fact that we were led to believe otherwise, we sacrificed our minds.

We believe we deserve more. **We write to demand two things: Health insurance and an annual salary for all Hall of Famers that includes a share of league revenue.**

It might seem like a lot, but it's a drop in the bucket for the country's most profitable sports league. The total cost for every Hall of Famer to have health insurance is less than \$4 million — less than that of a 30-second Super Bowl ad, or about 3 cents for every \$100 the league generates in revenue. Paying Hall of Famers an annual salary works out to about 40 cents for every \$100 in annual revenue, a figure that will increase dramatically in the near future with legalized gambling.

We demand nothing less than this. In the past, the NFL has tried to appease retired players by creating programs like the \$620 million "Legacy Fund." But from our own experience, and in speaking with other retired players, we know that such bureaucracies have proven to be little more than cynical public relations ploys that fail to help those who desperately need it. Commissioner Goodell, we know better, and the fans do too.

The mistreatment of NFL Hall of Famers, who are often exploited as unpaid ambassadors of the sport, contrasts with how Major League Baseball treats its former players. **A baseball player who has appeared on a Major League roster for one day is entitled to health insurance for the rest of his life. A player employed on a roster for 43 days gets a lifelong pension.**

We consider ourselves the founders and early employees of a wildly successful business. Like analogous employees at other iconic American companies like Apple, Facebook and Amazon, it's unjust to leave us behind while league revenues skyrocket decade after decade. **In fact, the NFL is the only major American corporation that is set up this way.**

The NFL is notorious for the hard line it takes against players in negotiations. Yet the league always seems to have plenty of money for other priorities.

One example: Your compensation, Commissioner Goodell, of \$40 million annually as part of a multi-year deal worth up to \$200 million. Meanwhile, many of us Hall of Fame players can't walk and many can't sleep at night. More than a few of us don't even know who or where we are. Our long careers left us especially vulnerable to the dangers of this violent sport, especially those intentionally hidden from us. Commissioner Goodell, there are better uses for that money.

Another example: the impending construction of the Hall of Fame Village, a mixed-use development project that President Baker estimated would cost about \$1 billion. It's not right to invest in such a project without first acknowledging the league's debt to its great players. We are the reason people visit the Hall of Fame in the first place.

The time has come for us to be treated as part of a game we've given so much to. **Until our demands are met, the Hall of Famers will not attend the annual induction ceremony in Canton.** It's well-known that the NFL is celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2020, and while we are proud of our role in building this league, we don't believe 100 years of player exploitation is something to celebrate. As we approach this momentous date, we challenge the NFL to honor its past by helping retired players instead of exploiting their images for marketing purposes.

To be clear, we don't want our efforts to detract from the latest announcement of Hall of Fame nominees, men we are proud to call our brothers. We are supremely grateful for this great game. We are grateful for our fellow players and we're most grateful for our millions of fans around the world. It's the connection between the players and fans — and not the corporate suits — that makes the NFL what it is. We're confident that when our demands reach the court of public opinion, the fans will agree that the NFL owes us a debt of gratitude.

Commissioner Goodell, you have often referred to Hall of Famers as the "Gold Standard" of the league and as "The Greatest Team Ever Assembled," and you're right: We are resolved as a team to stand up for ourselves. To underscore that we are a united front, we have elected a Hall of Fame Board, the first ever entity answering only to the concerns of Hall of Fame players. To advise us, our board has brought in executives at Fortune 500 companies, Wall Street veterans and Silicon Valley entrepreneurs.

Our approach to these negotiations attempts to establish a template for active players in the next round of CBA negotiations for the expiration of the current deal in 2021. Our relationships with active players tell us that we've been historically underutilized as mentors — and that there has been a deliberate attempt to divide active and retired players. For instance, not a single retired player sits on the board of the NFLPA, and the organization's longtime executive director Gene Upshaw once disparaged his fellow retired players by saying, "They can't hire me and they can't fire me. They can complain about me all day long.... But active players have my vote." The interests of retired players have also been neglected by Upshaw's successor, DeMaurice Smith, whose \$4.5 million annual salary with an \$8 million trust far exceeds the compensation most Hall of Famers made, even adjusted for inflation. But going forward, retired players and active players won't be set in opposition to each other. This time, it's different.

Eric Dickerson, the legendary running back and single-season rushing record holder, will spearhead the board's player organizing efforts. Dickerson's status as a charismatic media member and his friendships with multiple generations of Hall of Famers makes him perfectly suited to this role. Leading negotiations on the business end is Gustavo Miguel, a Wall Street entrepreneur and Dickerson's business partner and agent. Dickerson and Miguel have a strong track record of working together; both have made mid-career sacrifices to devote themselves to this important cause.

An NFL marketing slogan states that "Football is Family." We agree, which is why we're demanding to be treated like family members who are integral to the league's present and future. As the legends of the game's past, we deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,

Eric Dickerson, Chairman, Hall of Fame Board

Board Members:

Marcus Allen

Mel Blount

Derrick Brooks

Jim Brown

Earl Campbell

Richard Dent

Carl Ellard

Marshall Faulk

Mike Haynes

Rickey Jackson

Ronnie Lott

Curtis Martin

Joe Namath

John Randle

Jerry Rice

Deion Sanders

Bruce Smith

Jackie Smith

Lawrence Taylor

Kurt Warner

Sarah White, Reggie White's widow