

## **Hardberger to NFL: S.A. is no 'small market**

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Mayor Phil Hardberger on Tuesday dismissed NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue's characterization of San Antonio as a "small market" as the uninformed opinion of an outsider.

"Our market is becoming larger every day," Hardberger said. "But I can understand that people that don't live here, that live all the way across the United States, may not know that."

In an interview with the New Orleans Times-Picayune published Tuesday, Tagliabue rejected the idea that San Antonio's support for the displaced New Orleans Saints represents a chance for the city to prove its NFL worth. He implied San Antonio couldn't provide adequate support for an NFL team.

Responding specifically about San Antonio's qualifications, Tagliabue said the NFL has no plans to move "any teams into small markets."

Said Tagliabue: "We're going to be moving up in market size, not either down or flat."

Hardberger rejected Tagliabue's view, saying the league needs to look at "all the money" coming into San Antonio.

"The feeling the commissioner voiced, with due respect, is that of people who live a long way away and are not on the ground seeing what is happening here," Hardberger said.

There are many reasons the NFL labels San Antonio a "small market." Although it ranks eighth in the nation in population, the fan base is considered marginal because the total metropolitan area ranks 30th.

The NFL also dislikes San Antonio being only the 37th-largest television market.

Still, it ranks ahead of NFL cities New Orleans (No. 43), Buffalo (No. 49), Jacksonville (No. 52) and Green Bay-Appleton (No. 69).

Tagliabue, through a league spokesman, declined an interview request from the San Antonio Express-News.

Tagliabue was blunt in his assessment of New Orleans' chances, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, of retaining the Saints. He said the league has all but ruled out the possibility the Saints would be able to play in New Orleans in 2006.

He said the league's initial plan for next season is to play the Saints' eight regular-season home games at LSU's Tiger Stadium in Baton Rouge, La., although he said logistical problems could prevent it. He also reiterated the league's goal of placing a franchise in Los Angeles, the nation's second largest TV market.

Tagliabue said the NFL "is going to do everything possible to make sure there's a New Orleans Saints. But people larger than us and institutions larger than us are going to have to succeed in making sure there is a robust, healthy New Orleans." Saints owner Tom Benson could not be reached for comment.

The Saints, who have relocated their headquarters to San Antonio, will play three of their 2005 home games in the 65,000-seat Alamodome. The Oct. 2 contest between the Saints and the Buffalo Bills will be the first NFL regular-season game played in the Alamo City.

As of Tuesday, 66,348 tickets remained for the three contests, including just 6,883 for the Oct. 16 game against the Atlanta Falcons, the Saints said.

"We will fill that stadium for all three games," Hardberger said.

Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff said fans from throughout South and Central Texas would buy tickets.

The NFL "may be right about San Antonio being a small market," Wolff said, "but we've always argued Austin, South Texas and even (northern) Mexico should be considered part of our market. The NFL has never bought that argument, but with these three games, we can prove them wrong."

Tagliabue was asked in the Times-Picayune interview if San Antonio is "dangerous territory" because local leaders have billed the three Alamodome games as an opportunity for the city to show it can support an NFL team.

Tagliabue alluded to comments from former Mayor Henry Cisneros, chairman of the economic development council of the Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce. "They have to be clear in what their motives are," Tagliabue said. "To be helpful in the context of a national tragedy that grows out of an unprecedented disaster. And their motive is not to steal someone else's team. (Cisneros) said that."

On Tuesday, Cisneros was among city leaders who said Tagliabue's comments should not deter San Antonio from attempting to reach its goal of filling the Alamodome.

"We want to keep San Antonio in position for a team," Cisneros said. "We are only going to get stronger as the years go by. This should not deflate enthusiasm."

Still, Tagliabue made it clear he wants a team in Los Angeles.

"We've had enough teams move from large markets to small markets," Tagliabue said. "So if any teams are relocated in the future, the objective is going to be to concentrate them -- put it this way -- in markets that can really support them."

Those comments rankled **David Lynd**, chief operating officer of The **Lynd Co.**, which manages apartments in nine states and has bought a sponsorship package for the Saints games.

"It doesn't surprise me (Tagliabue) would say that," **Lynd** said. "No one is going to give us anything. We have to prove ourselves. But the attendance at those three games will speak for itself."

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#### COMPARING

#### MEDIA MARKETS

Alamo City: Ranked 37 on Nielsen's list of media markets, with 760,410 TV households.

Markets ranked below San Antonio that have NFL teams:

43. New Orleans, La. (Saints)

49. Buffalo, N.Y. (Bills)

52. Jacksonville, Fla. (Jaguars)

69. Green Bay, Wis. (Packers)

Source: Nielsen Media Research Inc.