

A CONVERSATION

with Pat Summerall

Pat Summerall is the signature voice of sports broadcasting in America. As a professional football player, Pat was best known as the kicker for the legendary New York Giants championship teams of the late '50s and '60s. After his retirement from the gridiron, he became the mainstay of the CBS Sports broadcasting team for 32 years. In 1994, Pat and broadcast partner, John Madden, joined the Fox network. For 21 years, they were the strongest sportscasting team in the history of the game.

How did you first get involved in sports?

I grew up in a very poor family environment. My folks were separated so I lived with my grandmother, then later with my aunt and uncle. I began devoting my life to sports. That was what I loved.

I went to college on a basketball scholarship, but also played football and tennis. When you play three sports, it's about all you can do, so that was my religion. Sports became my way of escaping from my family and the pain I experienced growing up.

What things were most important to you during this time?

In college and in the NFL I was always traveling to play in a sporting event. Afterwards we usually celebrated with a beer drinking session or something similar. So having a good time was important to me. When I became a professional, achieving success became the most important thing in my life. I wanted to climb the ladder of success to be the best I could at whatever I was attempting, whether playing or broadcasting. Money was important to me too, but I knew that money would come with success. So achieving success was my vision.

By this time I was married with three children and playing with the New York Giants. I played in the NFL for ten years, then went right to work for CBS as a broadcaster. In the broadcasting business there was plenty of liquor available and I became addicted to alcohol.

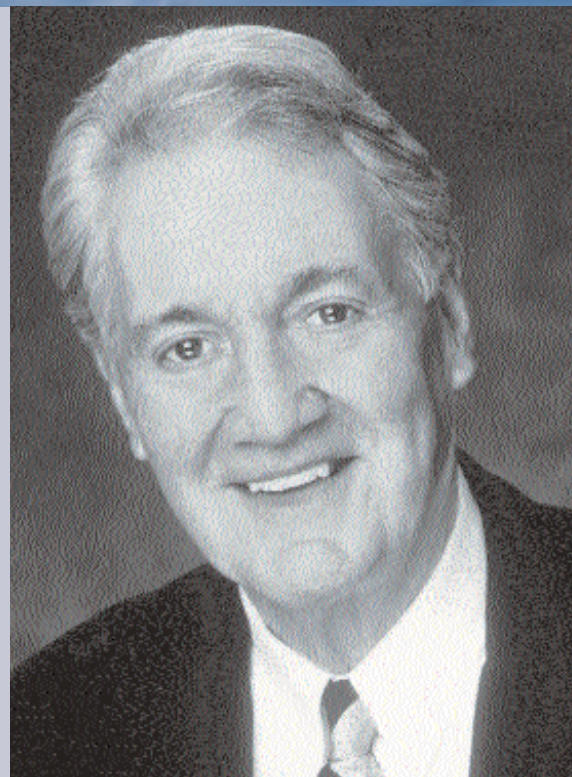
This was having a negative impact on my family but I didn't realize it. I was blind to it. I couldn't fathom why they didn't understand that I was just having a good time. My drinking habit got worse and worse. People told me to slow down, that I was killing myself and that I was neglecting my work. I dismissed it, thinking that I was just as competent as ever. I had become a success professionally and financially but I was failing at home and in my personal life.

What made you change course?

Finally, after years of this, some friends of mine got involved. They all wrote letters to me expressing how much I meant to them, how much they loved me and how much they hated to see what I was doing to myself. They encouraged me to go to the Betty Ford Clinic, which, after much coaxing, meddling and begging by my friends and family, I agreed to do.

What impact did that experience have on you?

After I arrived and got sober, I began to see what I had done to myself. I met people there who were like me, struggling to find out what life was about: what were the good things in life and what were the right things about life. And I realized that this was not something that I could handle alone. Until then, as an athlete, as a successful person in business and in athletics, I thought I could manage everything myself. I didn't think I needed any help. But I began to understand that I



couldn't continue alone. I had to have some help and I had to make a decision where that help was going to come from. So I began to read the Bible in order to investigate if there was a source of strength that was available there from God.

After reading the Bible and listening to so many people, I came out of there with a newborn faith and something I hadn't had before: hope. Hope for a better life; hope for a happier life; hope for a correct life. I became more and more involved and inquisitive about a relationship with God. I began to investigate the life of Jesus and learned that he had come to earth to die on the cross to forgive my sins and give me a new life. I didn't have nearly all the answers by the time I got out of the clinic, but I felt I had a new source of strength to draw on.

I got remarried. My family had fallen

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orce. I was stunned and couldn't understand it. I had a young child at the time and was pregnant with another. I didn't know what I would do or how I would support myself or my children. He left me with two children and plenty of debt. I had to regroup, go back to school, get a job and do all those things to provide for myself and the girls. I fell into a deep depression.

The young lady who was my baby sitter was a Christian. When she would come to the house to clean and baby-sit she would be so happy and positive and kind. Laney would always bring her Bible and end up talking with me about her relationship with God.

I began reading the Bible and as I learned about Jesus I discovered a man who in fact was immortal. Jesus of Nazareth came down from heaven, lived a perfect life, performed miracles, died on a cross for my sins and rose from the dead. Everything he said about himself came true.

I remember at the height of my depression reading the Bible and saying, "Lord, if you are who you say, come into my life." I promise you something happened to me that night. He came into my life and gave me a peace and a confidence about the future that was wonderful.

Later I reconnected with the gentleman who is now my husband, whom I've known since the fifth grade. I discovered that he had the same experience as me and the rest is history. We have been married now for 24 years.

We moved back to Tchula in 1995, bought an old abandoned grocery store, renovated it, and proceeded to establish a church in this old store. It also serves as a food pantry, child care center and offices. We also provide GED classes, parenting workshops and various types of counseling. We do everything from kids clubs to community service projects.

My husband ran for congress in 2000 and lost in the primary by 500 votes. That was the first time either of us had ever run for political office. It was a learning experience to say the least. I

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think we spent about \$500, which is not a lot when you run for a congressional seat.

For seven years I had been involved in different aspects of people's lives, like writing a letter to city hall to help someone with a problem. I began seeing that people needed more rep-

resentation than they were getting. One day somebody said to me, "As much as you do for people here that have issues with city hall, you ought to run for mayor." So that's what I did.

My husband and I believe that we need to help the whole person. We want people to succeed in every area of their lives: with their education, with their jobs, their families and their spiritual lives too. We're trying to restore hope and dignity to our community and to encourage people to become entrepreneurs.

We have just begun a grant program to gather people in groups of ten as co-ops to begin businesses. My husband has led the way by starting an ice-cream shop. But we are looking for people who are committed, who want to change their condition and who are looking for a long-term solution.

When people look back on my administration I want them to say, "She wasn't motivated by gain for herself, but she was committed to the community and to the people." I want to be a servant and help others succeed. I'm hoping that my example will bring about a change for the better in Tchula, our country and in the world. 

Yvonne Brown is the mayor of Tchula, Mississippi, a small town in the Mississippi delta. She is believed to be the only female African-American Republican mayor in the United States. Her husband Robert Brown made an unsuccessful bid for the U.S. Congress in 2000.

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apart as a result of all this. The day I quit drinking, my present wife Cherry also quit drinking. So we have gone through a recovery period together.

How did all this affect your family?

During this period my relationship with my children was very strained. All of them held me responsible for the breakup of the family. But since then, they have seen what has happened to me. They have seen how I've changed, how happy I am now and how involved I am with helping people overcome

alcoholism. I've been able to sit down with all three of them and explain how much this means to my life. As a result of that, some of the damage, maybe not all of it, has been repaired. I am very close to my kids now.

What are your plans now?

I am retiring from full-time broadcasting and stepping out of the booth with John Madden. He and I had 21 wonderful years together but I felt it was time for a break. I am going to do some football and other sports that I haven't done in a long time. I still intend to broadcast because I love it.

If you could start your career over, what would you do differently?

I would approach life in a different manner. I wouldn't be so obsessed with success in my career. I realize now that I was filling my life with things that couldn't bring ultimate fulfillment and purpose. I would make time in my life for God, the author of abundant life. And I would make my family a priority. I would make sure both those things happen. 