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**PRO FOOTBALL** 

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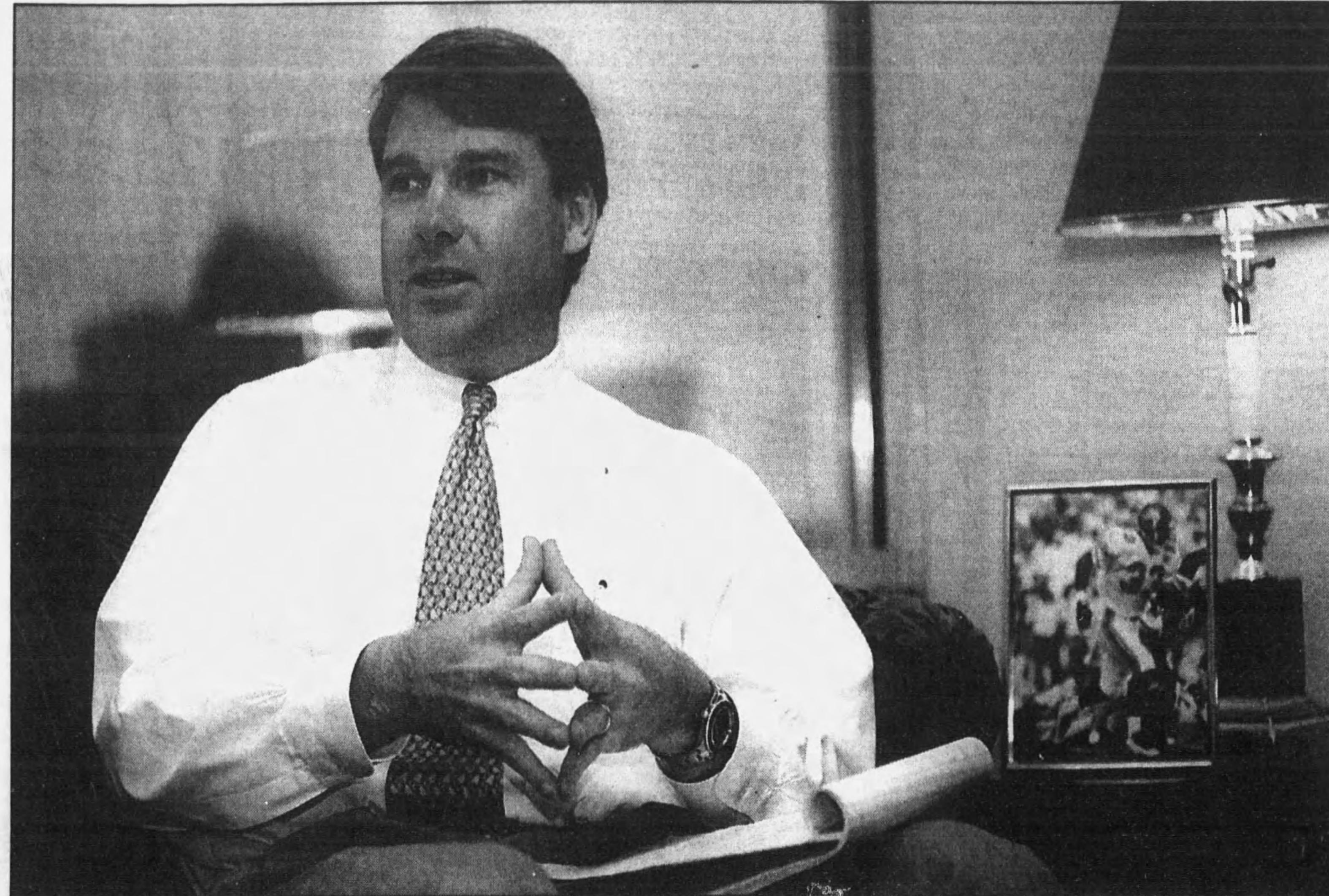


This is Jerry Maguire. He's fictional. You wanna know about real-life ups and downs in the sports agent business? Talk to Pat Dye Jr. and he'll tell you about . . .

## right night and ON CNS

## By Len Pasquarelli STAFF WRITER

ucked discreetly among a stack of books on the bottom shelf, all but buried in a cluttered wall unit dominated by photographs of clients and ponderous legal tomes, are the two volumes that should top the must-read list of every sports agent. One is Playing for Keeps, a book by ESPN football "insider" Chris Mortensen that details the excesses of onetime agents Norby Walters and Lloyd Bloom and the pair's potential ties to organized crime. The other: What They Don't Teach You at Harvard **Business School**. Seated at his desk in a modern Buckhead high-rise office building, agent Pat Dye Jr., the less celebrated son of you-know-who and the founder/president of **Atlanta-based ProFiles Sports** Management, Inc., smiled wryly when the books were pointed out by a visitor. "Mandatory reading, for sure, for anyone in this business," agreed Dye, who will spend today at the Georgia Dome watching one of his favorite and most prized friend-clients, San Francisco tailback Garrison Hearst. That business had some of its seamier elements exposed in Jerry Maguire, and by now mil**lions who saw the Tom Cruise** flick feel they possess an insider's comprehension for its inherent underhandedness. In truth, however, Maguire was a love story wrapped around football and self-fulfillment and featuring a catch-phrase that is now annoyingly incessant. Show me the money, you say? Dye and his staff could reveal the much rawer side of a livelihood that includes hardball negotiations and soft-spined clients who renege on representation commitments, and to which agent Ralph Cindrich once noted you need only "a business card and pay phone" to belong. "My friends ask all the time how close [the movie] came to hitting the real deal," said Amy Irvine, director of client services for ProFile. "Hey, it was good and you could relate to it . . . but it was pretty tame compared to some of what we see here almost every day. One difference was, Pat and I don't fall in love. The biggest one, though, is that reality is a whole lot worse." **Case in point: The fictitious** Maguire lost a meal-ticket client, Keith Cushman, when the All-America quarterback opted on the eve of the NFL draft to sign with the conglomerate agency that fired Maguire. Dye not only can trump that tale, but also demonstrate that truth generally is more hurtful than fiction. In 1996 he was dumped without cause by a pair of clients, wide receiver Eric Moulds of Mississippi State (now in Buffalo) and Auburn offensive tackle Willie Anderson (Cincinnati), days after he had helped both players get selected in the first round. On the flip side, while Maguire had wide receiver Rod Tidwell to help save his sanity and his savings account, Dye has about two dozen clients who put their faith in his expertise. Thanks to the references they are eager to provide, the list is growing almost as quickly as his reputation. "He's not flashy, none of that gold-chain-around-the-neck stuff," said James Stewart, the former Tennessee tailback and **Jacksonville first-rounder in** 1995. "About the only thing bad I ever heard when Pat was recruiting me was that he was a hard negotiator with the teams. And to me, that was a good side, man." Dye, 35, is hardly the only sports agent in Atlanta and, despite a surname that typically grants him instant entrance in these parts, certainly is not its best-promoted or most selfhyped. But Dye, who acknowledged his father's reputation



Sr., who bore a coach's usual mistrust of agents, when he finally granted his son the blessing to pursue the career.

"He's done things right and that's probably cost him a few clients," said the senior Dye. "But from the standpoint of being content, I'll bet he's got a better lifestyle than most guys in his business. When he puts him head on the pillow at night, he probably sleeps better. And he's got some great and gratifying stories." Indeed, Pat Dye Jr. can spin yarns now about going to the Hearst residence for the first time to pitch the family of one of this state's most famous players. Or of the fishing trip where he signed Bennett. Or of flipping hamburgers and chicken at 2:30 a.m. for 50 of Pritchett's "intimate friends" because the player wanted to celebrate his selection of an agent. And he can contrast those borderline-ribald tales by noting the satisfaction he has derived from making Bennett, a player from a deprived background in Mississippi who is so close to Dye he now visits Pat Sr. every year for a hunting trip, secure for life. Or the good feeling he got from finding a Super Bowl opportunity for Hearst when there didn't seem to be many takers and the negotiations called for creativity. Or the gratification of having all his clients attend his wedding, scheduled around mini-camps, Barabra Dye pointed out, in June. "We drove four hours after a high school graduation in Augusta to get there, because none of us wanted to miss it," said Mary Hearst, mother of Garrison. "Pat has a great gift for dealing with people and he's always in our thoughts. He's one of the few [agents] who came into our house and made us comfortable. That's important, because you're recruiting the [parents] as much as the player. He's always in our thoughts." Apprised of that endorsement, Dye was dutifully grateful and noted the difference between it and his first fling with the agent business. That came in January of 1988 at the Senior Bowl in Mobile, Ala., when a young and naive Dye encountered all the stereotypes he'd only previously heard about - agents in full-length minks, guys openly paying players, "runners" promising women and drugs to prospective clients. "I thought to myself, 'What am I getting into?' and almost got back in the car and drove home," he said. "Now I'm glad I didn't. Of the agents I really respect, it wouldn't take more than two hands to count them. But I think I'm doing things right and I think my guys feel I'm doing things right . . . and that's what is most important."

TAIMY ALVAREZ / Staf

Show him the integrity: Unlike the fictitious Jerry Maguire, Pat Dye Jr. has never had a potential first-round pick bail out on him just before the draft. His experiences have, in fact, been worse.

doesn't hurt when he is talking to parents of a prospective client, inarguably is, in the vernacular, a major "player" now.

A clientele heavy with former SEC stars includes high-profile but low-key NFL vets like Hearst,

fast track as a commercial legislator at the prestigious Birmingham firm Burr and Forman before deciding to go full-time into sports representation with a client roster of only two. But it was the most significant roll of the dice for a son whom Pat Dye Sr. had warned of the pitfalls of agentry and discouraged from getting into a field viewed by many with the same disdain normally associated with politics. "Suddenly it hit me that all we had was a legal pad and a residential phone number," Dye recalled of the '94 exodus. "I basically signed my life away to get a bank line of credit and we had my basement finished and divided up into two offices. And that's where we set up shop and got after it." In the ensuing weeks Dye hit the ground running and, within two months he had negotiated nearly \$20 million in new contracts. Nine of 12 football clients represented by Robinson-Humphrey eventually joined Dye. In '95, he moved into his new headquarters. His staff now includes Irvine and director of client development Corey Brown, once manager of football operations for the Jaguars. The streak of success, coupled with the ability to land Hearst with the 49ers this spring, are some of the high points. Conversely, there's no doubt the defections of Moulds and Anderson were the low point of Dye's



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**BILL PARCELLS** 



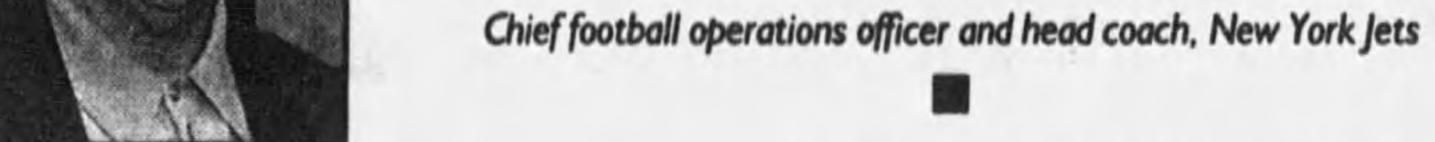
Indianapolis defensive end Tony Bennett, Arizona wide receiver Frank Sanders, Saints tight end Irv Smith, Jaguars defensive tackle

**Kelvin Pritchett and Stewart.** 

"[They're] all strong-character guys and that is pretty much a reflection of Pat," said New York Jets coach Bill Parcells, who despite losing out on Bennett and Pritchett in past free-agent markets, maintains a high esteem for Dye. "There aren't a lot of guys in his line I would trust if I had a kid who needed an agent, but he is one of 'em."

Added Jaguars senior vice president Michael Huyghue: "In a business with a lot of dirt, Pat has stayed clean and his word means something."

**Beyond the straightforward** approach, unwavering commitment to service clients' every imaginable requirement and philosophy that every one of his players is a member of his extended family, what may set Dye apart from some competitors is a rollercoaster scope of emotions - not unlike those experienced by Maguire — which reflect the highest highs and lowest lows of the business. The Maguire character may have been a symbiotic mesh of the disparate personas of real-life agents Leigh Steinberg and Drew Rosenhaus, but there are as many if not more parallels in Dye's history and they have steeled him. Most notable was his 1994 departure from the sports enterprises division of Robinson-Humphrey, where he worked five years with director Richard Howell on some landmark contracts (like that of Emmitt Smith) but eventually scratched the itch to start his own firm and develop his own client base. Not until a few days after his exit with assistant Laura Candler, when the two were sitting at Dye's dining room table, did they realize the risk involved in leaving a stable, established corporation with local identity and clout for the gamble on which they were about to embark.



career.

"It's the only time I ever saw him question himself and whether he wanted to stay in the business," said wife, Barbara, an institutional stock broker. "It went beyond just hurtful; it was personal."

Anderson, taken 10th overall in '96 by the Bengals, was an impressionable kid too easily swayed by any agent with a good line. Moulds, taken 24th by the Bills, had already cut a clandestine deal with another agent prior to the draft. There had been stories during Mould's career of dubious off-field behavior and some league personnel men who know and respect Dye even questioned the sagacity of taking him on as a client. But Dye, who now concedes he may have been intoxicated by Moulds' athleticism, helped rehabilitate the player's reputation and sold the receiverneedy Bills on him.

"From the first day, though, [Moulds] was never the typical Pat Dye client," said Irvine. "We're family here and he didn't fit. If there's one thing about Pat that doesn't jibe with this business, it's that he's probably too nice to be an agent. The thing with Moulds and Anderson devastated him. Certainly he's not a cocky person, but he's always been a confident one. That expe-

rience dented his confidence." Stunned by the dual departures, Dye fought back. Although he prevailed in the arbitration of both cases and is reluctant to discuss the dispositions, fellow agents contend he would have made \$500,000 in commissions from the players and settled for far less in the resolutions.

Several of Dye's current clients responded with contempt when asked about the two players. All reiterated the closeness of a bond that exists with Pro-Files clients and that was obvious last week when the phone rang constantly in the modest offices - Bennett phoning to discuss a knee injury, Stewart to relive his NFL record-tying five rushing touchdowns last Sunday, Tony **Richardson of Kansas City seek**ing out tickets for the Florida-Auburn game.

The family-type atmosphere was all but mandated by Pat Dye

Certainly it wasn't the first such career gamble for Dye, who graduated fifth in his class at Cumberland School of Law (Samford University) and was on the



