

CHAPTER 1

The Wussification of America

In my thirty-three years in public life I believe I have done many cutting-edge things, taken real risks to make change happen, and I surely have said things that have created great controversy (a few of which I'd like to have back). But incredibly, nothing I have done or said gained as much worldwide attention, created as much controversy, as what I said about a football game.

As many people know, I am great fan of the Philadelphia Eagles football team. In fact, when I was mayor, Comcast SportsNet asked me if I wanted to be part of a TV show after each Eagles game. I said sure. I went to every Eagles home game and watched every away game faithfully, so I thought it might be fun. And it sure was. I was on a panel with a former Eagles player, the charismatic Vaughn Hebron; a great sportswriter, Ray Didinger; and the host, one of the best sportscasters in America, Michael

Barkann. Thirty minutes into my first show, I thought, “We’re actually getting paid for this? A bunch of guys sitting around talking about a football game?” Well, the show was a hit, and twelve years later it has become so popular that we now do a pregame show as well.

On December 26, 2010, the Eagles were scheduled to play an important game against the Minnesota Vikings. If the Eagles won, it could help them secure a bye in the playoffs. But unbelievably, the game was canceled Sunday morning before one drop of snow had fallen, based on forecasts of a significant storm. One hour before game time the city had less than six inches on the ground. The western suburbs had less than three inches, and Wilmington, to our south, less than two inches. Good grief! Canceling a game because of that amount of snow—unthinkable! Vince Lombardi must have been rolling over in his grave. Americans in Montana, Wyoming, and South Dakota—heck, even fans in Chicago, Boston, and Pittsburgh—must have been astounded!

At about five o’clock that afternoon our Comcast show producer, Rob Kuestner, called me at home and asked if I would do a phone interview about the cancellation. I said sure, and when he asked me what I thought of the NFL and the Eagles’ decision to cancel the game, I blurted it out that we were becoming “a nation of wusses” and that this was just further evidence of the “wussification of America.”

I never thought these comments would set off controversy that would gain the attention it did. The *Washington Times* asked me to write an op-ed piece about the “wussification,” and they put it, unbelievably, on the front page. I wrote:

It was December 14, 1958, I was a 13 year old boy living in New York City. I was at Yankee stadium watching my (then) beloved Giants play the Cleveland Browns. We had to win to force the Browns into a playoff to decide who would be in the NFL Championship game. There were less than two minutes to go, it was dark and worse yet there were swirling

winds and a driving snowstorm. Pat Summerall, the Giants placekicker, lined up 49 yards away. If he didn't make it they would be eliminated. Given the conditions, I didn't believe he had a chance. He was a straight away kicker and he drove it with everything he had.

Today, some 52 years later, I can still close my eyes and see the ball soaring through the darkness, through the snow and through the wind. He made it! He made it! The Giants won!

That game remains indelibly etched in my memory because it captures the magic of football—a game that is played regardless of the weather conditions. The NFL robbed me and thousands of other fans of the chance to have some new magical memories by cancelling the Eagles-Vikings game which was to be played in Philadelphia Sunday night. It was inconceivable that they would call off a football game. In the movie “A League of Their Own,” Tom Hanks, the manager of a women’s professional baseball team uttered the famous lines, “Crying? There’s no crying in baseball!!” Cancel a football game because of bad weather? There’s no cancelling a game for bad weather in football!! This is the sport where Adam Vinatieri kicked a winning field goal through the driving snow in the famous “Tuck” game. Where the Bengals and the Chargers played an AFC championship game in a minus 64 degree wind chill factor. Where Bart Starr dove into the end zone to win the NFL championship against the Cowboys in near zero temperatures.

The NFL explained that the forecast called for perhaps a foot or more of snow and they didn't want thousands of fans to be “trapped” after the game in stadium parking lots. Conditions never got close to that dire prediction. Major expressways remained open, and there were no significant accidents throughout the night. The city’s subway system, one of the best in the

nation, functioned perfectly. Philadelphia's center city, a ten-minute subway ride to the stadium, had thousands of available parking spots on a Sunday night.

Yet the NFL thought it had to protect the fans. What's wrong with that, you might ask? Simple. First, to call off this game because of snow is further evidence of the "wussification" of America. In 1948 the Eagles won the NFL Championship playing at home through a blizzard that put nearly a foot of snow on the field. We seem to have lost our boldness, our courage, our sense of adventure, that frontier spirit that made this country the greatest nation in the world. A little snow, a potential traffic tie-up, a long trip home caused us to cancel a football game? Will Bunch, a writer for the *Philadelphia Daily News*, said that if football were played in China, sixty thousand Chinese would have walked through the snow to the stadium, doing advanced calculus as they did so. He's probably right, and it's no secret why the Chinese are dominating the world stage.

Second, the NFL didn't trust the fans to use their own judgment about whether going to the game in the snow was worth the risk they might encounter. If I had planned to take a seven-year-old with me to the game, I probably would have decided to stay home and watch it on TV, but if I were going with some of my friends I would have driven to center city, parked, and taken the subway to and from the stadium. But that's *my* decision to make, not the NFL's. We all hear talk about the "nanny" state, but now we have the "nanny" NFL, so concerned about the welfare of the fans, and perhaps potential liability, that it feels it has to protect us from ourselves.

In fact, it was all about potential liability. I have nothing against making a decision that will keep people safe, but I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about leaders making a decision based on the sole calculation that it will keep their job safe. Today it seems like everywhere you look you find an army of lawyers advising us against doing things and a flotilla of worrywarts right behind, cheering them on, telling us we can't take that risk—and not because they're really worried about us. This seems to have produced ludicrous results. Schools close in eastern cities when there are two inches of snow on

the ground; sometimes they close before a flake has fallen. Think of all the school boards, corporate boards, and editorial boards that keep throwing money on dumb projects, sticking to the same talking points, because no one has the guts to say, "Let's do something else instead." The first law of organizations is that a bureaucracy in motion tends to stay in motion until someone willing to take the heat stops it. Compounding that is the fact that it is always easy to do nothing than to do something. So you cancel school, or you cancel the game, or you don't build that factory, or you don't announce a new plan to fix things. All of these absurdities are products of anti-risk-takers who seem to have come to dominate American life. If these things were all this attitude produces, it would be annoying, nothing more. After all, what sparked my comment was just a football game.

But what is so desperately important is that our newfound "wussiness" is affecting big things that really do matter to our country and to our people.

The American infrastructure is literally beginning to fall apart, and our leaders understand this but are unwilling to invest in fixing it. They're afraid it's too hard, too complicated. They don't want to risk spending the money that's necessary because they're afraid of losing the next election. Can you imagine what would have happened if our leaders of yore felt the same way? There would be no Erie Canal, no intercontinental railroad, no national highway system, no Hoover Dam. All of these projects were hard and difficult to get done. All of them involved significant expenditures of taxpayer money. But we did them because they were important, they were necessary for our growth, they were worth the risks. Of course, there were wusses and naysayers back then, but we didn't put them in charge of things. As John F. Kennedy said about his plan to put a man on the moon by the end of the sixties, "We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard."

When I quoted Will Bunch about how the Chinese would have handled a game in a snowstorm, I was quoted in Shanghai and Beijing newspapers. I am certain they believe that we have, in

fact, become wusses and that that belief informs the way they deal with us. As my friend Donald Trump points out, the Chinese are pushing us around without fear of reprisal. They subsidize Chinese-made products and sell them here at such low prices that it drives American manufacturing out of business. They dumped pipe into the United States at such low prices that it literally ended the production of pipe by the steel industry, costing Pennsylvania three thousand good jobs. Steel company executives, the steelworkers' union, and elected officials complained and took the case to the International Trade Commission. It took several years to succeed, and by the time the case was won and a quota was put in place, thousands of jobs had already been destroyed. However, the dumping was stopped, and thousands of jobs were saved going forward.

The Chinese steal our intellectual property, manipulate their currency to give themselves huge economic benefits over us, and send us crappy products—and not just cheaply made jeans. I'm talking about lead-laced toys and poisoned dog food and who knows what else. They seem secure in the belief that we won't fight back because we are scared because they hold so much of our debt. Why don't we fight back? Why don't we get tough with them? They are probably waiting for us to do so. Can you imagine what impact it would have if we even threatened to limit the amount of Chinese goods that could come into the United States? Their economy simply couldn't stand it, and my guess is that though they wouldn't like it, they would respect us a whole lot more than they do now.

Do you think Teddy Roosevelt or Harry Truman wouldn't have fought back?

If we are to continue to lead the world economically and in other ways, we must regain that American spirit, that boldness and courage, that willingness to take on challenges no matter how hard or how great the risk if the reward makes that risk worth taking. We need leaders with the courage to risk the thing that matters most to them: their own jobs!

No wusses need apply.