

D. Moldea interview with Len Dawson**(816) xxx-xxxx (h)****(816) xxx-xxxx (o)****December 30, 1988**

No introduction necessary. Len Dawson is the man.

I gave him my telephone number and told him who I was.

Alliance, Ohio; Purdue (All-American, on some lists), Pittsburgh, 1957-59; Cleveland, 1960-61; Dallas Texans/KC Chiefs, 1963-75. 82.6 passing rating, tied with Jurgensen for the best in NFL history when he retired in 1975. He is also a member of the Hall of Fame.

I read him that Jack Danahy statement about the 1970 investigation.

When did he first realize he was under investigation?: "It was in relationship with somebody in Louisiana who had dropped the names of Johnny Robinson and myself.

"It happened after practice one day. It wasn't like I knew three days in advance that these people were coming. Hank just said, 'There're some people from the league office down there, and they want to discuss something. I don't know what it's about. A commercial or something. You're supposed to meet them at 7:00.' I really didn't ask any questions. Little did I know how it was going to end up.

"We met downtown at the President Hotel. And we drove out to the Best Western motel out in Overland Park on the Kansas side. When I got there, Johnny Robinson was there. And I said to myself, 'Something's going on here.' The NFL people were talking about somebody [Gene Nolan] whom Johnny had known in college. I had never heard the guy's name. Johnny never mentioned him.

"I think they felt that somebody lost some money or something, and that's why there was talk that the fix was in. It got down to us taking a polygraph test. They gave us a choice. 'Of course,' I said, 'I'll take it.' Johnny said, 'We'd better get ahold of a lawyer before we do anything.' We both had a friend of ours who's an attorney in Kansas City, and we called him. He came out and advised us.

"They were saying that a lot of times the Chiefs were off the boards. But in those days, it wasn't like USA Today where they put the point spread in every day. We were always favored, because we were the better team. But I didn't know anything about it when the Chiefs were taken off the boards. I could care less.

"They put me in a the motel room with a guy with the machine. I was very apprehensive when they wired me up. I'd never been attached to one of these things [a polygraph machine] before. He apparently had the questions written down. He asked me my name and basic questions. 'Now are you familiar with [Nolan]? Did you ever meet him? Did you ever talk to him? Did you shave points?

Did you try to fix games?' I passed the test. I never bet on anything but cards or a golf game in my entire life."

Dawson adds, "Up to that time, I had no idea that there was an investigation going on. I was pissed because it was just thrown on me. I was upset with Stram because he didn't give me a hint as to what was going on. We were there for a long time. I couldn't call my own family until it was all over."

I told Dawson about the nature of the FBI investigation. He never knew anything about it.

What about in 1970?: "We were staying at the Mark Hopkins Hotel in San Francisco, getting ready to play the Raiders in Oakland. And there was a note in my box for me to call Pete Rozelle. And I said, 'What the hell does he want to talk to me about?' He wasn't in on Saturday. On Sunday, I got ahold of him, and he said, 'Oh, nothing. I just wanted to wish you luck.' Well, I was thinking about the game, but it struck me kind of funny. Why would he call to wish me luck? That was the first inkling I had that something was going on.

"Then on the flight back to Kansas City after the game, Hank said that there might be some sort of inquiry from league officials."

"Stram told me that they were going to break a story on NBC News. I was up in Hank's suite, because he said that the NFL Security people wanted to talk to me. I was trying to rest, because I did have a game to play. When it broke, people were calling me in my room, knocking on my door. The NFL people were trying to make a determination as to what to say to the press and what to release. They brought in some sports writers from Kansas City and other cities. They were trying to get their opinions on what to say to the wolves out there. Finally, I just told them, 'Why don't we just tell the truth. I do know the person. I've only seen him a couple of times in my life. The truth is, I did talk to him on the phone.'"

Dawson's father died in November 1969. Dice got a hold of him in Alliance. "My father passed away suddenly on a Friday before we were playing the Jets in New York. I played in that ball game and then I went to Alliance for the funeral."

"I didn't see the report. Maybe I did. Johnny Robinson was my roommate on the road."

What was going through his mind?: "I thought, 'What the hell is going on? Why me?' I figured somebody was trying to get some publicity, because it wasn't just me. It was a lot of other names."

"After the victory, Frank Gifford was interviewing me. Before the cameras went on, he said, 'Christ, everyone on the Giants' team knows that guy. Everyone around the league knows that guy.' He was just one of those guys who seemed to get acquainted with football players."

What was your relationship with Don Dawson?: "I had met him while I was with Pittsburgh. He was a friend of Bobby Layne's. I understood him to be from a wealthy family in Detroit. I met him through Bobby Layne at Pittsburgh."

His wife died ten years ago.

I told him that I had heard that Dawson and Dawson had met through her and her father. "My wife didn't know him, except through me. She was from Alliance, Ohio. Her father worked for Ford for a lot of years. He got tired of traveling. He bought into a Ford dealership then moved back to Cleveland and got into a dealership in Cleveland. [probably Fiat]."

"I started two games in five years in the NFL. I never started and finished a game. And that includes pre-season games. I don't think I ever played in two games in a row for any amount of time in those five years.

"My first year at Pittsburgh was the year Buddy Parker quit at Detroit, and Art Rooney talked him into coaching the Steelers. Walt Kiesling drafted me. He was the head coach. Walt had some health problems, and Art didn't want to subject him to what was looking like another losing season. So he brought Buddy over. I was the number one draft choice. Teddy Marchibroda and Jack Scarbath were the other quarterbacks. He traded those guys and he got Earl Morrall, who was with the 49ers. He also brought Jack Kemp in, who was a rookie, like me. Buddy brought him in from Detroit. Kemp was released by the Lions, so Buddy brought him over to the Steelers. So the three quarterbacks in my first year were two rookies, Kemp and I, and Earl Morrall, who was in his second year.

"After the second game of 1958, Buddy traded Earl Morrall to Detroit for Bobby Layne. And he was the quarterback. I was at Pittsburgh for '58 and '59, and then I got traded to Cleveland."

I asked Dawson if he knew Bobby Layne was gambling: "I knew he was gambling on cards, but I didn't know about games."

During my interview with Len Dawson, he denied ever gambling with the bookmaker, adding, "I met Don while I was with Pittsburgh. I understood him to be from a wealthy family in Detroit. He was a friend of Bobby Layne's, and I met him through Bobby.

"My wife didn't know Don Dawson, except through me. Her father worked for Ford for a lot of years. He got tired of traveling, so he bought into a Ford dealership. Then he moved back to Cleveland and got into [another] dealership there."

Dawson told me that Don Dawson had nothing to do with his confrontation with the Browns' head coach. "Paul Brown ruled with an iron fist. He could bring a guy to his knees with a few words faster than anybody I'd ever seen. In those days, they didn't have agents. They just sent you a contract and said, 'Sign it.' I hadn't signed it by a certain time, and he wanted to know why. I said, 'I'm not very happy not getting an opportunity to play.'"

When I asked Len Dawson whether he had ever been approached by Don Dawson to gamble or fix a game while he was with either Pittsburgh or Cleveland, the quarterback replied, "No. I don't know why he would. I never played. In Pittsburgh, Bobby Layne played all the time. I think in the five years that I played for Pittsburgh and Cleveland, I think I threw maybe forty-five passes."

You never ever gambled with Dawson?: "No."

What was it inside you that made you play as well as you did in the 1970 Super Bowl? "Throughout the week, once I hit the practice field, I was able to concentrate and focus my attention on what I had to do. On the day of the game, I knew what was there. I knew the pressures on me. My back was against the wall. I was guilty until proven innocent. I was there, and I was the story. I was the center of everything.

"You look for little signs that this might be your day. When I was warming up before the game, my arm felt great. That was one thing I could erase from my mind. The first play was a play-pass, and I hit Mike Garrett for a first down. That really helped."

"When you look at the major games I've played in, I've played well. Even the first Super Bowl that we lost, 35-10, I threw an interception. But if you take away that interception, I played a damn good game. The interception was one in which the tight end was supposed to release right now into the flat in case the linebacker blitzed. The case was that he didn't do that. He went downfield about ten yards or so. By the time he had made his cut to the outside, the ball was partially tipped from my hand and fluttered out there. There was a lot of pressure in that ball game as well."

The call from Nixon: "I thought they were kidding me. I went into the locker room after the game. They said, 'The President wants to talk to you.' I said, 'The President of what?' They said, 'The President of the United States.'"

I asked him about Gil Beckley, Marty Sklaroff, Sam Cohen--he didn't know any of them.

Nick Civella?: "Yeah, I've heard of the Civella people."

Did you have a debt to or did you do business with the Civellas? I told Dawson that there was a wiretap in which a Civella guy bragged, "We own this guy." What's the story?: "No."

I then told him that Civella had been convicted twice sports bookmaking, in 1970 and 1975. Dawson replied, "Which one? There's . . ." I told him Nick, the old man. "Nothing."

Was it possible to fix a game back then?: "It would be a dangerous thing to fix a game. To me, a player would be branded for life if he did that. His teammates would express shock and anger. But I don't know how one guy could do it, even a quarterback. In our system, we ran the ball a lot. Even when I wasn't in there, it didn't make much difference who was quarterback, because the defense scored points to help win games.

"I suppose the quarterback could put the ball on the ground, with turnovers in crucial situations. It would certainly have a bearing on the game. Hell, a kicker could have as much to do with it just by missing. He has more control over it than sometimes the quarterback does."

I then read him the paragraph about the IRS audit.

The IRS investigation of Dawson's taxes: "They came in after the Super Bowl," Dawson says.

"A guy from Detroit and the guy from the IRS sat down in our family room and told me, 'You better have your lawyer with you.' They were honest. They were looking for some money in a secret bank account I supposed had that had not been claimed. Really, they were looking for a payoff.

"They went through all the microfilm at the bank. In fact, I was on the board of the bank that I dealt with. They [the bank officers] were telling me the number of man hours they spent going over everything--every deposit, every check. It was unbelievable.

"In the end, my wife was taking care of the books and maybe didn't report a couple of things. It had nothing to do with anything major. We're talking about a few hundred dollars. There was no hidden bank account, and that's what they were looking for. They found virtually nothing, except maybe a couple of hundred bucks from a speaking engagement--but nothing of any wrongful intent."

On the Frontline program: He was aware of it.

I told him about Piazza and that Piazza fingered Dawson, Emmitt Thomas, and Hank Stram. Dawson laughed when I said Thomas. I told him that the alleged payoff was for \$795,000. I told Dawson that Piazza took and passed a polygraph test.

Dawson says, "You know, because of that program, not only did he [Piazza] take a polygraph test, but I had to take one, too. So did Hank Stram. They [the NFL] did it just to clarify it. The NFL Security people and Warren Welsh flew into Kansas City and were out at the Marriott hotel by the airport. I had to clear myself all over again."

He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1987.

He never heard of Emmitt Thomas: "Of all people, Emmitt Thomas, why, he's the most superstitious guy in the world. I was quiet my first few years of professional football; but Emmitt was that way all the way through. I never ran around with Emmitt or hung out with him, other than on the football field."

"He still believes in voodoo and shit like that."

"I'll tell you who was really hot when that PBS program came out: John Brodie [the star quarterback of the San Francisco 49ers from 1957-1973]. He wanted to sue them, because it implicated all the starting quarterbacks in that era. He had gotten a tape [of the program] and looked it over and wanted all the quarterbacks of that era to see if we could get a lawsuit against public television."

I told Dawson that there was no single person I had heard more rumors about in pro football than him. I asked him why he thought that was: "I don't know why they singled me out. Maybe it's because I'm the quarterback. In 1966, I started my career in broadcasting. Maybe that was it, because I was so visible. I had four radio shows a day, five days a week, and I was the sports director of the television station in Kansas City. I was doing the 6:00 and the 10:00 sports, starting in 1966 and all through that period. So Monday through Friday, everybody knew where I was."

I told him that the fixed game was December 20, 1970 between Kansas City and San Diego. "We always had a problem in San Diego. One problem was jet lag. We didn't fly jets then. So we had six, seven hour flights. We'd leave on Saturday and Sunday we didn't have any gas. I told them that we should go out there earlier. Some professor sent me a study of top executives who had decisions to make on the spot--which football players do. You have to react on what happened. If they go from one coast to the other, they send them a day or two early so they can get acclimated to the area and the jet lag."

I then read him the Piazza interview with Frontline, specifically the part about the alleged payoff.

"That's ridiculous. We used to call Emmitt, 'Black Emmitt.' I don't think you can see him from twenty-five feet."

Did Hank Stram gamble? ""Hank never gambled, and he took the polygraph test to prove it. I'm glad I didn't know all this stuff was going on. That really would've bothered me."

I then the earlier part about the game for which the payoff was earmarked.

I then told Dawson about Tropiano's charge that the December 12, 1970 game against Oakland had been fixed.

Dawson was never called before the federal grand jury.

I asked him again whether he gambled with Dice Dawson. He denied it. I told him about the games in Cleveland and that I had heard that there was no relationship between him and Dice Dawson after he left Cleveland--with the exception of a possible telephone call. I told him that I keep hearing that he was gambling with Dawson while he was in Cleveland. "Gambling? No.

