

Goodell's message missed the mark

Albert Breer, *Boston Globe*

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The Browns were one of seven teams visited by **Roger Goodell** this summer, as part of the commissioner's effort to discuss the league's uncertain future with players.

And when that meeting took place Aug. 5, the players felt they didn't get answers. "The overwhelming feeling was, 'What was that all about? Why is he wasting our time?'" said linebacker **Scott Fujita**, a member of the NFLPA's executive committee who's in his ninth season in the league. "That was the consensus here, and guys from other teams I've talked to say the same thing. "Guys are eager to ask questions. He's not answering them. Guys are coming in there with simple, straightforward questions, and the response is kind of disappointing."

Fujita's contention was that the commissioner was evasive on key topics, to the point where several Cleveland players left the room calling him "Dodger Goodell."

The Browns also took issue with Goodell's line of, as Fujita put it, "Things have a way of getting worked out at the 11th hour." Maybe the players took it the wrong way, but most saw that as a veiled reference to pushing the union into a panic situation, by putting players in financial peril through a lockout.

Another problem the Cleveland players had was Goodell posing as an arbitrator between the sides.

"He works for the owners," Fujita said. "To come in and say, 'I'm a liaison, I work for the game,' I mean, come on. We all know that's not the truth. Does he want the game to grow? Yeah, I believe that. But to open the way he did, and act like he's not working for the owners was a slap in the face. Players are smarter than that."

Fujita says, in a broader sense, that the players want to be treated more as business partners and less like employees.

"It's more than a management/employee situation, because the players and coaches really are the product," Fujita said. "The most frustrating thing for us is that owners don't seem like they want to get it done. If you want to get it done, let's get it done."