

Nixon Gets Back in the Ball Game

Los Angeles

Richard Nixon's self-imposed isolation from news reporters has ended with a phone call to a Los Angeles newspaper. The subject wasn't the Mideast, the Panama Canal or Jimmy Carter's fireside chat.

It was football, one of Nixon's well publicized passions. He'd read a Los Angeles Herald Examiner article on the selection of George Allen as football coach of the Rams.

"Hello, this is Richard Nixon," the former president told sports writer Gordon Jones. "I am calling to say I think you wrote a very sensitive story about George Allen in today's (Thursday's) paper."

Nixon, who has been in seclusion at his seaside San Clemente villa most of the time since resigning in 1974, has been unavailable to the press by phone and has made few public appearances in the past three years.

"The voice was strangely famil-

iar, like an old friend who has been out of sight for a few years," Jones said in his copyrighted story yesterday.

Nixon complimented the paper for reporting Allen's humanitarian side.

"You wrote about his concern for the little people," Nixon said, "the things he does quietly behind the scenes, and I want to tell you what I know about him. It's a side of Allen that almost never gets reported in the press."

"I'm pleased that he feels that way," said Allen, reached at his suburban Virginia home.

Football fan Nixon said: "I'll bet even money he takes the Rams

to the Super Bowl next season with all that (Ram) talent."

"He's got us in the Super Bowl? Well, I've always liked the challenge," said Allen. "If everyone pulls at the same end of the rope, we can have a great year. That's our objective."

Nixon said he knew of Allen when the Ram mentor was coaching football at Whittier College, Nixon's alma mater, then became friends with the coach when he came to the Washington Redskins in 1971.

"We chatted quite often after that," Nixon said.

"He is hard to understand

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sometimes, but he is basically a very decent man," the ex-President said of Allen. "He isn't much for a pat on the back for reporters. He's more golly and gee and a milkshake, and I don't think most members of the press are that way."

It wasn't until halfway through the 15-minute conversation that Nixon realized that the writer was the same Gordon Jones whose father, William C. Jones, was the former president of Whittier College. Nixon attended Whittier College and was a member of the school's Board of Trustees during Jones' tenure.

Jones normally covers horse racing for the Herald-Examiner.

"What I want to know is why a nice Whittier College graduate like you is covering the horses?" Nixon asked.

"I think you might want to move up from horse races to political races like Scotty Reston of the New York Times and Bill Henry of the Los Angeles Times.

"It's all right to cover the horse races, but don't bet on them because you can't beat them."

After Nixon hung up, Jones said he briefly pondered Nixon's advice but decided to bet on the next race. He cashed a \$263 exacta.

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