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## McMahons: WWE not to blame for Benoit's actions

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**STAMFORD, Connecticut (CNN)** – WWE Chairman of the Board Vince McMahon is known for trying to intimidate interviewers, poking them in the chest and backhanding their notes. So CNN investigative correspondent Drew Griffin was prepared for a volatile McMahon, and so was the crew.

There was a third camera to stay on wide-shot, just in case he got up, tossed a chair or stormed out of the interview.

None of that happened. In fact, after the interview McMahon and his wife, Linda, spent a casual few moments chatting with Griffin, producer Kathleen Johnston and the crew.

During these few post-interview moments, Griffin said he got the sense that McMahon feels the world is really out to get him. He said he could also sense that kind of defensive and aggressive attitude has played a role in his success.

Vince McMahon and Linda McMahon, who is WWE CEO, "were a pleasure to interview," Griffin told CNN.com. "I feel their answers were honest, tough and challenging. They have survived 20 years in a tough business, and they now dominate that business."

Here's an edited version of the conversation:

**GRIFFIN:** Mr. McMahon, is this the business that you set out to build when you bought this from your father?

**VINCE McMAHON:** Absolutely it was, yes.

**GRIFFIN:** This is the vision you had?

**VINCE McMAHON:** Yes.

**GRIFFIN:** Is it bigger, Linda, than you thought it would be?

**LINDA McMAHON:** I never stopped to think about how big it would be. We were so busy, at the time, building, doing, that it grew, and it's wonderful, but if I had sat down and said, "Wow, do I think we'll be in 130 countries, and translated into 20 languages, and growing all the time, I don't know that I had that broad a vision."

**GRIFFIN:** Yeah, I mean, it's a leading question, because when we get into the unpleasantness of this interview, for all intents and purposes, you guys are wrestling worldwide. When you think about wrestling anywhere in the world you think of WWE.

**VINCE McMAHON:** As it turned out that's the way it is today, yes.

**GRIFFIN:** And what I'm asking, is that the way you wanted it to turn out?

**VINCE McMAHON:** From a competition standpoint, that was never given any thought. From a growing standpoint and a vision standpoint, there's no reason why the WWE would not be one of the greatest forms of entertainment in the world, and it has become that. In terms of competition, at one time, I guess, maybe our chief competition was [former CNN boss] Ted Turner, and Ted and Time Warner [parent company of CNN.com] elected not to continue that enterprise. So, it wound up, by default quite frankly, that we're it.

**GRIFFIN:** Do you ever take off?

**VINCE McMAHON:** I don't. I don't want to. Linda does, and encourages me to, but I don't really want to leave it. I mean, it is seven days a week, and if you love truly what you do it's certainly not work. It's just a wonderful experience, and a privilege, actually, to be in this business.

**GRIFFIN:** People who follow the entertainment side of this, they just try to describe it to me as this is a man's soap opera. That's what they're watching; it's a man's soap opera. Real life, we have looked at your company, the growth, the accidents, the problems, everything. It's kind of like a soap opera in real life, looking from the outside in.

And we seem to be going through that again. You know, we're here to talk about Chris Benoit, and I will talk about it, but right now, are you in a crisis mode here, or is this another hurdle you guys have to jump over? You're on the hot seat, right? You're on the hot seat right now?

**VINCE McMAHON:** To a certain extent, but in no way is this a crisis mode. With Chris Benoit's death, and the fact that no one in our organization or anyone who ever met Chris thought he was capable of murdering his family, from an emotional standpoint you can say that's a crisis because it has affected everyone in the WWE including our fans, as well as obviously those in the organization and those who were friends of Chris'.

There's an emotional scar that will always be there. But from the standpoint of a crisis, this is not a crisis in terms of business as such. Our business has not fallen off in any conceivable way from a financial standpoint. Again, notwithstanding we all are trying to recovery from the emotionality of this.

**GRIFFIN:** If a Major League Baseball player, God forbid, killed his wife and his kid and then himself, I don't think a Congressional committee would be sending inquiries to Major League Baseball asking anything. Do you feel, with that kind of pressure, with also the media pressure, with us here, that you're unfairly put [on] the hot seat for some of these things?

**VINCE McMAHON:** Well, let me just say to think that the WWE owes any responsibility for someone who was a mild-mannered man, and someone who had complete control of his faculties as far as we knew, to put the WWE on the hot seat for someone who is a murderer is unfair.

Nothing from the WWE under any set of circumstances had anything to do with Chris Benoit murdering his family. How did we know that Chris Benoit would turn into a monster?

**GRIFFIN:** My question is, do you feel like you have been unfairly put on the hot seat? I mean, we're here right now talking about this. Is that unfair for you guys?

**VINCE McMAHON:** Well, I think it's unfair to assume that there was any responsibility from our organization as to what happened to Mr. Benoit. I certainly think that's unfair.

But at the same time our organization and our product draws great television ratings. We sell a lot of newspapers as well, therefore the media, obviously, would be very interested not only in the subject matter, but also from a selfish standpoint they know we get television ratings.

**GRIFFIN:** We have compiled our own statistics; there's been a lot of statistics about wrestlers who have died under age 50. We, in the last five years we count 18, 14 of them have passed through this organization. From a humane standpoint, I mean, is that hard to swallow, that so many of these wrestlers are dying so young?

**VINCE McMAHON:** Well again, I think that from a responsibility standpoint that we all as individuals are responsible for our own actions. If someone passes through our organization, certainly our organization is not responsible for someone's own personal activities.

So, from a humanitarian standpoint, however, as of late, we've instituted a policy in which those who have even just passed through our organization can, in fact, receive attention from us in terms of, if necessary, drug treatment facilities and things of that nature. We'll provide that to them at no cost.

So, from a humanitarian standpoint we've reached out to those individuals who have previously been associated with us.

**GRIFFIN:** But what struck me when I read the statistics, and I don't want to get bogged down in – this guy did or didn't work for me at this time of his death – just from a wrestling standpoint, when I see so many of these wrestlers dying under the age of 50, I would think, man, there's a problem.

Is there a problem? And did you know it before these studies came out?

**VINCE McMAHON:** I don't know which studies you're making reference to.

**GRIFFIN:** I'm talking about this university professor who's counting among 50 deaths in the last 20 years. Our own count, which is 18 deaths in the last five years ...

**VINCE McMAHON:** Well ...

**GRIFFIN:** Five of your own, who were under contract who have died.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Well, again, I think there's a tendency to look at us as the last man standing in terms of the organization we have become, what is known as pro wrestling, WWE. When you look back on it when a lot of these individuals were around and performing, there were a lot of organizations.

They worked for a lot of organizations, many of them did not, as a matter of fact, work for our organization, or if they did, they just passed through.

So again, I don't know how our organization could be responsible for all of the deaths, you know, no matter who's counting it, and no matter the efficacy of that count, by the way, which is subject to a great deal of scrutiny. So I think that a number of individuals have passed away. Does it speak well for an industry in total in the past? I think that what the barometer now is what are we, as the last man standing in terms of wrestling organizations, what are we doing about the benefit and health of our performers? I think that's the most important part.

**GRIFFIN:** Yeah, and I do want to get to that, but let me ask you about the Chris Benoit tragedy. He was a big star here, and I talked to Benoit's [parents], and they said, you know what, the McMahaons could not have been nicer to our son. Were you guys close to him?

**VINCE McMAHON:** I was, because I dealt with Chris. I wasn't as close as many of his friends, you know. Eddie Guerrero was a very close friend of Chris Benoit. Many others were very close.

But he was my friend, and there was no way that you could ever, ever see anything like this ever coming. It would be the most unlikely individual, I would think, to commit this atrocity you would ever see.

**GRIFFIN:** Linda, did you have dealings with him?

**LINDA McMAHON:** I had had interaction with Chris. I wouldn't call myself his friend. We were an acquaintance; we certainly dealt professionally together, but there were times that I would see Chris with his sons – two boys, Daniel and, and [one from] his first marriage.

And I would see the boys backstage, both of whom looked like Chris, and they were so excited to be there. Chris was just the the ultimate father. He was often requested by our Make-a-Wish charity to be the superstar that interacted with the Make-a-Wish children.

So there was just nothing to indicate what went on in that house, what the actions, what the motivation was behind what went on in that house, that tragedy.

**GRIFFIN:** And I've tried to ask every single person who touched Chris's life, no sign of any of this ...

**VINCE McMAHON:** No sign at all. And again, you can talk to those who were very close to Chris, and traveled the highways with him, and moments that would be very private, and nothing at all.

**GRIFFIN:** It just seems somewhat shocking.

**VINCE McMAHON:** It is shocking.

**GRIFFIN:** The weekend that he didn't show, very unlike him? I would assume it's very unlike anybody in this organization...

**VINCE McMAHON:** It is. I mean, when you don't show up, that's certainly a no-no because we have such a commitment to our audience. Very unlike Chris, who, I think that may have been the only time he was ever even late. Maybe there had been one or two throughout his entire career. Very unusual.

**GRIFFIN:** So what do you do? Change the show that night?

**VINCE McMAHON:** Oh sure, you have to adapt to conditions, and if you can't find someone then you have to obviously assume they're not going to be there, so you have to change things.

**GRIFFIN:** So tell me what happened the next day, you're trying to find this guy.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Yes, we were. As a matter of fact, at our behest, our office called the local authorities to go over and, since we had no answers, and none of his friends had any answers, let's go knock on the door and see if he's there.

**GRIFFIN:** When you found out initially that he was dead, without knowing how, you decided to switch the show that night, and you came on, and this was going to be a tribute to Chris Benoit.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Right, and to his family.

**GRIFFIN:** Talk me through that decision. You guys with Mr. [Owen] Hart's accidental death, you unfortunately had some experience in these kinds of things. But you made the decision right then to make it a tribute show.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Right, it was a last-minute split decision, obviously, to do that. We had footage, a lot of it, from Chris Benoit's performances in the past, and again, everyone was in a state of shock. I don't think any performers really felt like performing, because as far as we knew, someone had killed Chris and his entire family.

There was no thought that Chris could have done this, given, again, the fact that he was a mild-mannered person. So based upon that information we very quickly put together a tribute show.

**GRIFFIN:** When you found out what did happen, from the police, it had to be less than a day later.

**VINCE McMAHON:** It was.

**GRIFFIN:** I mean, unreal?

**VINCE McMAHON:** Yes. Shocking.

**LINDA McMAHON:** Unbelievably shocking.

**GRIFFIN:** Because you guys knew Nancy [Benoit] too, right?

**VINCE McMAHON:** Sure.

**GRIFFIN:** And, and this was a wrestling family.

**VINCE McMAHON:** And Daniel, as Linda said, would have been, you know, at the events in the past as well.

**GRIFFIN:** So now what do you do, Mr. McMahon? You, you've given this guy this tribute show, now you realize, hey, we didn't know the information then, but how do you react now?

**VINCE McMAHON:** Well, there's no way to react other than obviously we made a mistake. But you make decisions based upon information that you have at the time. Anyone can do a 20/20 hindsight, but you're on the air in several hours, what do you do? It just seemed like the logical thing to do based on the information we had was to pay tribute to Chris and his family.

**GRIFFIN:** Then you came on that next night and said, I'm going to be the last one that says Benoit's name in this ring.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Well, again when after something like this is over and you find out, you know, the facts, regardless of whether or not we had been fooled, or whatever it may be, to put on a tribute show, the fact of the matter, that anyone who becomes a murderer, I mean, you want to disassociate yourself with that individual, there's no question about that, from an emotional standpoint, a business standpoint, everything else.

Chris Benoit will not, and has not, defined WWE. You know, our job is to entertain people all over the world, and we do that. To me it's the, the second greatest job you could possibly have, the first one being curing cancer or whatever it may be as a, as a research scientist or a doctor.

The second most important thing you can do is entertain people and put smiles on people's faces all over the world, and that's our task, and that's what we do, and Chris Benoit will not define the WWE.

**GRIFFIN:** There is a lot of information coming out on the research that was done on Chris's brain.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Right.

**GRIFFIN:** As a leader of an organization of wrestlers, guys who get hit in the head a lot, is that concerning?

**VINCE McMAHON:** Well, let me just say something about this report from a layman's standpoint, and the report states that Mr.

Benoit, Chris Benoit had a mind of an 85-year-old individual suffering from dementia, that was the quote.

So I would, as a layman certainly wonder whether or not that report has any credibility because if you're an 85-year-old and you suffer from dementia, you can't do what Chris Benoit did for a living. It's impossible. You can't function as a normal human being in terms of even getting to the airport to come to work.

So, I would question whether or not that information is accurate if they define what his problem was as an 85-year-old with dementia.

**GRIFFIN:** But we had our own neurologist on staff, CNN, Dr. Sanjay Gupta, he looked at the slides, and he couldn't believe what he was seeing. He couldn't believe the damage mirrored an 85-year-old man who had either Alzheimer's, or dementia, or something like that.

**LINDA McMAHON:** These studies have not been proven, if you will.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Haven't been even critiqued by other members of the scientific community.

**LINDA McMAHON:** Right, and so we've sent a letter -- we've asked to have the study and their findings released to us so that we can take a look at it, because we would like to investigate these findings further and to see what was there.

But these studies are performed on brains of people who have died, and I think it's a very new science, and there is still a lot of investigation to be done. And we would like to see it. We would like to know what the findings are, but they've yet not responded to us to release that information.

**GRIFFIN:** Any changes made in the choreography as a result of any of that?

**VINCE McMAHON:** From a conservative standpoint, as someone who is the head of a public company, the only thing we've done really is just don't use chairs to the head. But other than that, it's what it is in the ring. Accidents do occur; it's not ballet, as they say.

**GRIFFIN:** Benoit's death also brought up the whole drugs and steroid use. He tested clean when you tested him in April, correct?

**VINCE McMAHON:** His last test, yes.

**GRIFFIN:** Was that actually drug-free clean, or clean according to the policy? Like, he had produced prescriptions that said you can have this or that in your body?

**VINCE McMAHON:** You've have to ask Dr. [David] Black that. If he were on some prescriptions prescribed by a legitimate physician, then surely, that would be an exception. If he had an infection or whatever it may be, I have no idea.

**GRIFFIN:** The fact that he had so many prescriptions, and now that's part of the entire investigation, was that surprising to you?

**VINCE McMAHON:** Well, I don't know what you're talking about in terms of 'had so many prescriptions.' What are you talking about?

**GRIFFIN:** Well, he had a bunch of prescriptions for various drugs in which his doctor is now being investigated in federal court for prescribing to Mr. Benoit.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Well, I can't speak for the doctor. All I can tell you is from a general standpoint our drug program adviser found or did not find in his last test, and from a standpoint of the criteria established for Chris Benoit and everyone else. Benoit tested negative.

**GRIFFIN:** The drug policy itself, for the WWE, the critics have been all over it for its lack of severity in punishment, also for what they tell us is a huge loophole, which is this, if you have a prescription, even some of the wrestlers told us, as long as you got a prescription, no matter who it's from, you can pass.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Well, let me ask you a question: If you have a prescription, and it's a legitimate prescription from your personal physician, then why wouldn't it pass?

If you have an infection or you have a sleep problem, you have whatever your problem is, and your physician, a legitimate physician, not one on the Internet, prescribes something for you, then surely that would be accepted in our policy as well as any other policy you can possibly scrutinize.

**GRIFFIN:** But you just had to suspend 10 wrestlers who had not legitimate ...



**VINCE McMAHON:** Well, again, you're getting back to, yes, so they got things since the [WWE drug-testing] policy was put into effect in February of '06, and that's when the barometer was held accountable. Some of those individuals acquired drugs from an online pharmacy, which is clearly written out to be prohibited in the policy, so we took action immediately, the same day.

**GRIFFIN:** But it's my understanding that you didn't even know that until this Albany [New York] prosecutor came forward with that information. They weren't actually caught by the WWE's drug policy. They were caught by some local prosecutor.

**VINCE McMAHON:** True.

**LINDA McMAHON:** Well, that's exactly true. They weren't found positive for testing. The reason we suspended them was because they had obtained their prescriptions through an Internet pharmacy, and that's, as Vince said, clearly laid out. That is absolutely not allowed in our policy.

Our policy is not a 'gotcha' policy. We have a wellness program. We're not looking to just say gotcha. We want to protect the health and well-being of the men and women who are part of World Wrestling Entertainment.

That's why prescriptions from legitimate doctors, from your treating physician, are acceptable if judged to be so by our medical review officer and Dr. David Black who administers the program.

**VINCE McMAHON:** And notwithstanding that, I would take exception to the media, or some quack suggesting that our wellness policy doesn't stack up to anyone's including those in sport.

First and foremost, let me emphasize, we are an entertainment company. We're not sport. We don't compete. There's no cheating involved. It's not like the recent Olympic fiasco in which you have to return gold medals.

There's no betting on what we do. We're Hollywood, we're scripted entertainment, our performers happen to be athletes, and some of them great athletes, but we're different than any sport. Nonetheless, I would suggest that our policy would hold up very well compared, compared to anyone's in sport.

**GRIFFIN:** Well, the critic that I'm relying on is Travis Tygart, who's head of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency for U.S. Olympians, and he says, this loophole with prescription medicine is a joke. He also says that the punishments, if we're both reading that right ...

**VINCE McMAHON:** Right.

**GRIFFIN:** You know, first time is basically a baseline, second is 30 days, [then] 60 days, and then eventually you get kicked out – is nowhere near the kind of automatic two-year suspension close to the Olympics.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Let me ask you a question. It seems as though this lady [sprinter Marion Jones] who was recently found that she was lying and had to return her gold medals. Jeez, I wonder how she passed those tests in the Olympics.

Hmm, let me see. So whoever this is, Tygart, whatever his name is, from the Olympics, better look into his own policy before he starts criticizing ours, because there's obviously a loophole somewhere in the Olympic policy.

So I can throw it right back at this guy Tygart, whatever his name is, just like he can throw it here. Our policy stacks up just as well as anyone else's in sport, although again emphasizing we are entertainment, and no one in entertainment, no one has this kind of wellness policy.

**GRIFFIN:** So why bother? These guys are under contract for you. They're all adults.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Right.

**GRIFFIN:** Why not let them do what they want?

**VINCE McMAHON:** Well, I think it's important for us to make certain that our athletes, for their well-being, take care of themselves. We first established one of our drug programs in 1987 because we perceived from an entertainment standpoint we had a problem.

It was called cocaine. And we did. We cleaned that up, then we had another policy put into effect, and our latest, as I said, was in February of '06, which is by far the most comprehensive.

So, if you do care about your athletes, and we do, you want them to be as healthy as they possibly can be, then why not do this? Why not be a leader in the entertainment business? Why not have other forms of entertainment follow you?

**GRIFFIN:** So you do feel, you, you are a leader?

**VINCE McMAHON:** There's no question about it.

**GRIFFIN:** You went on TV in the early 90's and said the WWF has one of the most comprehensive drug testing, education ... programs ... in all sports. This program will now be expanded to include testing of anabolic steroids. 'In short, the standards of excellence the athletes in the WWF live by will become the standard bearer of all professional sports for years to come.'

That was the early 90's. You have had steroid after steroid allegations ever since. Did this work?

**VINCE McMAHON:** I think it did.

**GRIFFIN:** How can it possibly work when you see so many wrestlers come forward and say, 'I did it. I took steroids. They didn't catch me.'

**VINCE McMAHON:** Well, again, what happened is that we were, along those same length of time by the way, we were testing, and we were getting very good results, and taking action. We suspended that. The reason we suspended it was because we were competing for our lives, our corporate life that is, in terms of Ted Turner coming after us. So, as a matter of fact, a letter that I wrote to Ted said, why don't you emulate our drug program? Let's be fair about all of this.

And the cost of that at that time -- we were not a public company -- was extraordinary. We suspended that. We had to compete, we lost money, it was a private company, we lost millions of dollars for more than one year and quite frankly did not have the funds to continue this program, and especially when our competition would not.

**GRIFFIN:** And you lost wrestlers, who left, right?

**VINCE McMAHON:** Sure we did.

**GRIFFIN:** To bring their big bodies ...

**VINCE McMAHON:** Right.

**GRIFFIN:** ... where they wouldn't be tested.

**VINCE McMAHON:** No, I don't know if that was necessarily a reason. You'd have to ask those performers.

But I think one of the things, certainly, that Turner did was offer more money. He had deeper pockets than we did, and certainly I think that was the contributing factor, moreover than anything else. But if Ted wasn't testing, that may have been some degree as to why someone would jump from here.

**GRIFFIN:** I'm going to bring up something that [former wrestler] Chris Kanyon said. He said 'you're going to sit down with the McMahons, and they are going to say, we're again pushing forward a new testing and wellness program. We care about our wrestlers. We want to clean up.'

He says this happens every time that the wrestling McMahon industry is under fire, and then it'll fade away as soon as the headlines fade away.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Not true. This was instituted in February of '06. The federal government didn't suggest that we start a program of this nature. The media didn't suggest that we start a program of this nature.

It started because it was the right time to do it; we had the funds to do it. It was the right thing to do.

Who could have ever predicted that the media would bring up this firestorm as it relates to Benoit and bring up all these thing?. The media didn't tell us to go do this, the government didn't tell us, we told us. So, someone can, is certainly entitled to their opinion, and they're stuck with it.

**GRIFFIN:** Steroids, human growth hormone, and the quest for bigger people in this industry: You like big guys, right?

**VINCE McMAHON:** I take exception to the fact that -- our locker room now in terms of weight, as far as big guys are concerned, is lighter than it's ever been in history.

There's an expression in our business that here is where you make your money: It's your face. It's what you do with it. It's your personality; it's what you do with it. It's your delivery, your elocution, it's storyline. It's all those things that are theatrical as well as athletic in the ring.

And again, in terms our weights of average are way below anything we've ever had before. We have performers anywhere from 5-feet-5, Rey Mysterio, you know, to someone like the giant Kali, who's over 7 feet and over 300 pounds.



**LINDA McMAHON:** Oh, you're forgetting your little Leprechaun ...

(As part of the WWE script, Vince McMahon has introduced a little person, dressed as a leprechaun, who McMahon's character had to admit was his son.)

**VINCE McMAHON:** That's true, right.

**GRIFFIN:** I wouldn't think you'd want to bring that up. [LAUGHTER]

**LINDA McMAHON:** It's all story. [LAUGHTER]

**VINCE McMAHON:** But, but... [LAUGHTER] You know, we have just about every conceivable – we have someone called the Undertaker, we have characters – and that's what people enjoy when they see our product.

If someone just wanted large bodies, sculpted physiques and things of that nature, they would really be into bodybuilding. Bodybuilding would be where we are in terms of sport or in terms of entertainment. That's not the case.

**GRIFFIN:** And you live this allegation all through that [federal steroids distribution] trial [in 1994], which you were eventually acquitted for, but you never told anybody to get bigger?

**VINCE McMAHON:** No, that was obvious. It was brought out in the trial; please go back and look at the transcript. OK?

No, I never told anyone to get bigger. Never. Why would I do that?

**GRIFFIN:** To put a bigger body on TV.

**VINCE McMAHON:** So, a bigger body on TV, does that in any way relate to dollars and cents?

**GRIFFIN:** You tell me. You're the guy who runs the business.

**VINCE McMAHON:** No, it doesn't. Again, I've just finished telling you why people are attracted to our product.

It's personality. It's what you do with that personality. And again, in ring performance, you don't have to be large to be a great performer.

**GRIFFIN:** But I mean, I'm looking at these guys and you're telling me these are all clean bodies?

**VINCE McMAHON:** I don't know what you're looking at.

**GRIFFIN:** I'm looking at your program with these bodies. Sculpted bodies. And every, every one of these blue tabs is a guy who you suspended.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Is a guy who has been suspended?

**GRIFFIN:** Who's been suspended in this last round, uh, for ...

**VINCE McMAHON:** Were they suspended ...

**GRIFFIN:** ...having a prescription they shouldn't have.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Were they suspended because they have big bodies? Or were they suspended because they had a 'scrip they shouldn't have ...

**GRIFFIN:** They had a 'scrip they shouldn't have ...

**VINCE McMAHON:** Provided by an Internet doctor?

**GRIFFIN:** Correct.

**VINCE McMAHON:** They were caught?

**GRIFFIN:** They were caught. And I'm wondering if they were caught making bodies out of steroids. That's what I'm asking you. And I'm wondering if you even know.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Well again, when you look at what they were caught for, do you have that information or not, and it really wouldn't matter, other than the fact that it was through an Internet doctor.

If you have a legitimate prescription for whatever it is you're taking from a legitimate doctor whether it's for an infection or whatever it's for, that's OK.

**GRIFFIN:** But again, you're holding your policy up as the best industry-leading in all of sports, and it wasn't that policy ...

**VINCE McMAHON:** Wait a minute, what did you just -- did you hear me just say that? Did you hear me say that? No.

Go back. Replay what I said. Did I say it was the best, held it up as the best of everything? No, I didn't say that.

**GRIFFIN:** What did you say? I think you did. I think you said ...

**VINCE McMAHON:** No, go back and replay it, that's not what I said ...

**GRIFFIN:** All right ...

**VINCE McMAHON:** What I said is we're in the entertainment business, and no one in the entertainment business has anything at all like the extent of our policy, our wellness policy ...

**GRIFFIN:** And you would hold it up to ...

**VINCE McMAHON:** And we're a leader as far as ...

**GRIFFIN:** ... all of sport as well.

**VINCE McMAHON:** I didn't say it was better than any others. I certainly would take our policy and compare it [or] contrast it to anything in sport, for sure.

**GRIFFIN:** But the policy didn't catch these guys, is what I'm saying.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Well, the vaunted Olympics didn't catch this lady either, so I don't think there's any policy that's foolproof. All you can do is do the very best you can, and after you've done the best you can, and adapt with the changes such as we are. We've had a number of changes in our wellness policy since we instituted in February of '06.

You have to maintain that. You have to upgrade it all the time. That's what we do. So sure, this gal in the Olympics wasn't caught. They're supposed to have the greatest testing in the world. Who else is not caught? I don't know.

But these people were caught. They were caught by an agency of the government because they bought things from an Internet pharmacy, which is strictly prohibited. Would they have been caught in the policy as far as testing, concern and time? I think there's no doubt they would have.

**GRIFFIN:** Your attorney was quoted in USA Today as saying only the stupid ones get caught. In the WWE only the stupid ones get caught. Does that show the frustration level of somebody who's trying to keep a business clean of this stuff?

**VINCE McMAHON:** Again, I think whether you're running the Olympics or whether you're running the WWE, you try to put in a wellness policy that's absolutely as comprehensive as it possibly can be. And you administer it as such.

There are going to be people who cheat, by the way, all the time. There are people in sports that cheat. People in entertainment that are cheating themselves, I suppose, by trying to get around some of our policies. But we're going to catch them. It's a matter of time.

And one other thing along those lines is that we test, on average, as far as our roster is concerned, a minimum of four times a year, which is, if you've done your homework you will know, much greater than most everybody else.

**GRIFFIN:** Right. Are you concerned, at all, of the pace or the lifestyle of your performers?

**VINCE McMAHON:** No, I mean, the lifestyle in terms of the pace of their work?

**GRIFFIN:** The demands on their physical bodies. We've talked to them, some of these guys will admit they use a lot of pills to wake up, to go to sleep on a plane, to do whatever.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Right.

**GRIFFIN:** And then they go out and it's not like a rock and roll star. They go out and bash their bodies up against the ring.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Let me just say this in terms of the pace. The average top talent in World Wrestling Entertainment wrestles approximately 120 days a year. Those that are under contract to us, and being paid, obviously, sums of money that are not top

talent, wrestle an average of 70-some days a year.

I don't know about you, but compared to the average person out there, that's a pretty good gig. Hundred and twenty days a year, on average, if you're a top talent.

I'm not talking about yesteryear. I don't know who it is you're quoting in terms of the talent you spoke to, but in yesteryear it wasn't that. It was much greater in yesteryear. I'm talking about today. And I think that's all we can talk about.

**GRIFFIN:** I think I'm talking about it in context, again, of these statistics, where we see so many of these fellow dying at an early age. And I'm wondering if the Chris Benoit incident, even the Eddie Guerrero case, gives you pause to look at the lifestyle that these wrestlers have to perform under.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Again, let me just state that, until recently, we weren't the only wrestling organization in the world; there were lots of them. The vast majority of these performers who have passed away worked for other organizations, some, no doubt, who worked for ours as well.

But that's what happened in the past. In the past they worked more days. It was a different environment then, generally speaking they drove in their car from city to city.

I can only speak to the way it is now. In terms of now, certainly I would think the older performers, if nothing else, would be jealous of the current performers by working, if you're a top talent, 120 days, on average, a year. That's not a lot, compared to the old school guys who worked more. There's no doubt about that.

**GRIFFIN:** Yeah, except that a lot of those guys are dying. I mean, you've had five, right?

**VINCE McMAHON:** Right.

**GRIFFIN:** And you've said in your release it's five too many.

**VINCE McMAHON:** It is.

**LINDA McMAHON:** One is too many.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Right.

But you have, obviously, one by accident, in terms of Owen Hart, another by suicide in terms of Benoit, and the other three had heart problems.

And by the way, as a result of that, and our wellness policy, we've also instituted a cardiovascular aspect of our wellness policy that we never had before.

You had to assume that since these guys were great performers, and they do it day in and day out without any complaints, they had great hearts. Some of them don't.

Those three obviously didn't, and recently we found one who was a top performer and caught it early, and he went through a process that now does allow him to compete continually in the ring.

But that was before we had [the] cardiovascular aspect to the wellness policy as well. You can't fry us, OK, for what we're doing now, for what people did and their lifestyle and their habits that never changed from 20 years ago. Unfair.

**GRIFFIN:** Yeah, except 20 years ago you were still a big player in this business.

**VINCE McMAHON:** I was, definitely.

**GRIFFIN:** I really wonder why you bother with the drug testing, though. I'm not over there asking Clive Davis if he's drug testing his rock and roll [performers].

**VINCE McMAHON:** Right.

**GRIFFIN:** Right? And it's the same kind of business arrangement with you guys?

**VINCE McMAHON:** It is, absolutely it is, but it's the right thing to do for your performers if you have problems or perceived problems when someone has a lifestyle. Don't you want to help them?

Look at it from the standpoint of business. Is it good business to have your performers with you performing at a high level, as

best they possibly can, and healthy, thus their career itself continuing in terms of longevity? Is that good business?

Or is it good business just to let them develop bad habits, if they do, and do nothing about it? Which is the better businessman? I think we just answered that question.

**GRIFFIN:** Yeah, but if the wrestlers who are doing it are fighting you, I mean, they're self-destructing.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Well then, again, from a good business standpoint, it's important for us to be able to help them, in terms of their careers deal with the celebrity, deal with the income that they generate, which is tremendous and deal with life on the road, and you've got all this adulation, and things of that nature.

It's important for us to help them deal with that in an acceptable way, in a way in which will extend their career, and thus, as a good businessman, we want them to be healthy.

**GRIFFIN:** Instead of just showing them the door and getting another of the hundreds of guys that want to wrestle for you.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Well, again ...

**GRIFFIN:** Fill their shoes ...

**VINCE McMAHON:** OK, but then you're starting all over. Once you have made an investment in a personality you want to make sure that as best as possible an individual from a long-term standpoint can perform for themselves and for you and for the public.

That's good business. Help them as much as you can.

**GRIFFIN:** Is there anything you'd like to say to Mike Benoit? Or should you say anything to him?

**VINCE McMAHON:** I don't know what you say. I mean, really, other than, obviously you have some degree of sympathy for the father, and for the mother, and for those in Chris Benoit's family, and his friends, and his associates in our organization for what happened.

But certainly there's no shame on the part of Mr. Benoit. He didn't do this; it was the son who did it.

Other than that, what do you say to someone when their son becomes a murderer and murders his family, other than we have sympathy because, obviously, you didn't do it. But what do you say?

**GRIFFIN:** And the fact that he did have some kind of brain injury, to get back to that point, I would think from a business standpoint, Mr. McMahon, you would be concerned about that, if you are concerned about your wrestlers.

**VINCE McMAHON:** There's no question we are. We're concerned about everything. But again, you're frying me with facts, if they are facts, that are after the fact. How did anyone have any idea that Benoit, that Chris Benoit, had any brain injuries? The only way you would know that is an autopsy.

And again, the findings themselves state that Chris Benoit had the brain of an 85-year-old man with dementia. And I would suggest to you, that from a layman's standpoint, Chris Benoit could not do what he did for a living. He could not function as a normal human being. He couldn't even go to the airport if in fact that report were accurate.

And he was an 85-year-old man with dementia. You tell me, from a common sense standpoint, if you know of an 85-year-old man with dementia, can he function normally? Much less at a high level?

Remember verbiage, remember where the cameras are, learn, know how to perform, and things of that nature, in a high level athletic standpoint? Come on, the answer, obviously, is no.

So, I think you have to question the validity of this report right from the get-go. Notwithstanding that, if it does have validity, we want to know about it.

We've asked these people to give us the information. We've asked them, let other people in the scientific community critique your information. They haven't done any of that.

If in fact we find that something like this is occurring, then we will take every conceivable measure to do something about it. It's only good business if you do things like that. It's good business if you protect your performers, sometimes even from themselves, from doing things that they want to do. That's very important. It's good business to do that, and we're very good business people.

**GRIFFIN:** Yeah, I guess it. It doesn't make sense that a man who is suffering from dementia would do that. But from what I understand of Chris Benoit, it also doesn't make sense that he killed himself and his wife and his child. And that answer still lingers as to why, doesn't it?

**LINDA McMAHON:** And I don't know that it will ever be answered because none of us know what went on in that house, and I don't think we'll ever have that answer.

**GRIFFIN:** Do you think you'll ever find out that it was connected in any way to his job?

**LINDA McMAHON:** I don't think so.

**VINCE McMAHON:** Well, it might be connected to his job from the standpoint that, let's face it, this job takes you away from home. You are away from home.

And if there were problems with that, problems with a marriage, of Chris Benoit leaving his home to have to go to work, on a weekly basis as many salesmen do year in and year out here in this country and other countries, then that could have been one of the marital problems. We'll never know.

**GRIFFIN:** I'm going to wrap this up, but I just want to ask you again, is the WWE steroid-free, drug free?

**VINCE McMAHON:** I don't think that there is any organization in the world, be it entertainment or be it sport, that can tell you that they are totally drug free, otherwise we would not see that lady have to turn in [her] gold medals from the Olympics.

The Olympics can't control this. They try. We can't control this. We try.

All you can do is be a responsible businessperson, and a caring human being, to be able to do everything you possibly can for your performers and/or athletes. Above and beyond that, there's a certain amount of personal responsibility that goes with walking the streets.

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