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The Name Game

Corporation to pay over \$100 million to name new Astros stadium 'Enron Field'

HOUSTON (AP) — The Houston corporation that spearheaded a private effort to build a retractable-roof, downtown ballpark agreed Wednesday to pay more than \$100 million to name the stadium Enron Field.

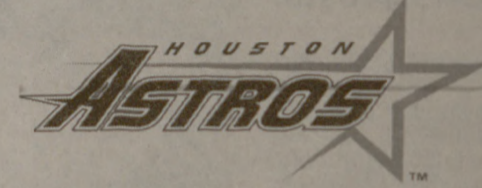
Officials for Enron and the Houston Astros declined to be specific on financial details, except to say the naming-rights fee would be paid over 30 years and that Enron also would build a large parking garage worth another \$30 million or more.

The deal also includes the right for Enron Energy Services, a subsidiary, to manage the facility. That could include providing power if the Texas Legislature deregulates the electricity industry as expected.

"We'll do what we do best, which is manage energy and facilities, and we'll let the Astros do what they do best, which is winning baseball games," Ken Lay, Enron chair, said.

The 30-year management contract could run

about \$200 million, Lou Pai, chief executive officer of Enron Energy Services, said. His company has a similar agreement with the San Francisco Giants and is pursuing such deals with



other stadium projects nationwide.

The estimated \$300 million Houston stadium complex had gone by the working title "Ballpark at Union Station" until Wednesday. Officials dropped the name of the 88-year-old train depot, which shadows left field.

"Union Station still is an important component," Astros owner Drayton McLane Jr. said of

the historic building, which will be the team's offices. "We went with Enron because it's straightforward."

A handful of major companies were thought to have the inside track because of their intimate involvement in the stadium.

When McLane considered moving to the Washington, D.C., area in 1996, he cruited several other area companies for a no-interest loan of \$34.7 million to cover related costs.

The businesses insisted that the stadium be downtown rather than next to the stadium in south Houston. This summer, Enron plans to break ground on a seven-story downtown office building.

Voters narrowly approved the stadium in 1996, accepting McLane's plea that the stadium no longer was financially viable to support a competitive franchise.

Saints look to deal for Williams

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Just when Mike Ditka thought he would never love again, the New Orleans Saints coach saw Ricky Williams and fell hard.

How hard? Well, the man who judges all running backs by Walter Payton is willing to give up every draft pick this year, some from next year, and a few players as well, to get the Heisman Trophy winner.

"We're going to talk to the five teams, one through five, and see who has an interest in taking all of our picks," Saints general manager Bill Kuharich said Wednesday. "Maybe all our picks and some other things. We want him. We think he can have an immediate impact on our whole team and our season."

The Saints do not have a second-round pick; that was traded to St.

Louis for wide receiver Eddie Kennison. Kuharich said that could be a deal breaker. But if a deal can be made, the Saints want to make it.

"I think this player has an opportunity to make us better all around," Kuharich said. "He'll make our receivers better, our line better, our quarterback better."

Williams arrived at the Saints camp in the afternoon with little knowledge of the team — "I know they never won a playoff game, right?" — and worries about meeting Ditka.

"All I knew about him was just what I'd seen of him walking up and down the sidelines — yelling," Williams said. "I didn't like the look on his face. You know, that mean expression he has. He never looked happy, ever. I thought I'd hate to play for him, he doesn't smile. I was even afraid of him at the combine, I didn't want to meet him. But he's the nicest guy in the world."

Ditka spent some time reminding about the glory years in Chicago, the days when Payton was carrying the ball and the Bears were dominating the NFC Central.

He also told Williams he wants to transfer that game plan to the Saints.

"He said that when he had Walter, they needed a quarterback," Williams said. "And he said, 'It wouldn't have mattered because any quarterback I had was just going to hand the ball off to Walter.'"

He said he likes to run the ball. He's not going to throw the ball around and turn it over. He's just going to run the ball. They'll get mad at him, and it'll be boring, but he'll win."

The Saints' offense was 28th in the NFL last season, dead last in rushing.



WILLIAMS



DITKA

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Price under surgery on

HOUSTON (AP) — The Houston Rockets' backup guard Price underwent successful surgery Wednesday, a day after suffering the injury in his victory over Golden State.

Price has been hampered by a variety of injuries during a five-year career and is expected to be out three to four weeks.

Team physicians formed the arthroscopic procedure to repair a cartilage tear in the lateral meniscus of his right knee.

Price twisted his knee landing awkwardly after a pass to Scottie Pippen in the final play of the first Tuesday night's game.

He missed the entire season with a knee injury because of an elbow injury another knee problem.

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KATIE HOLMES
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