

Spurs' arena approved by county officials for vote

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Bexar County commissioners approved an agreement yesterday with the San Antonio Spurs for a \$175 million tax-funded arena and called a Nov. 2 vote on the issue.

"I'm excited, I'm elated. It's relief. It's all about the above," Spurs chairman Peter Holt said. Bexar County Judge Cyndi Krier noted that voters will have the final say when they go to the polls in November to decide whether to raise hotel and car rental taxes to help pay for the arena.

Executives with the NBA team, the city's only major league sports franchise, have said the Spurs need a smaller, more lucrative arena better designed for basketball.

Currently, the Spurs play in the cavernous Alamodome. Negotiators with the Spurs, the county, San Antonio Livestock Exposition and the Coliseum Advisory Board hammered out the agreement over the weekend after weeks of discussions.

The pact was outlined in a five-page letter of intent, which was signed by the four parties yesterday. The agreement outlines the major provisions that would be included in a binding contract.

The county and the coliseum board would be landlords for the arena, while the Spurs and livestock exposition would be the major tenants.

Under the letter of intent, the livestock exposition will pay the county annual rent of \$1.2 million after the arena is built.

The amount would increase annually by \$50,000 to a maximum of \$1.4 million.

The deal calls for the Spurs to pay \$28.5 million up front as a down payment, plus annual payments of \$1.3 million for rent and \$1 million toward an operations and maintenance fund.

The Spurs also will pay for what the county describes as three potential "black holes" in the arena's long-term finances: construction cost overruns, annual operating losses and excess capital repairs.

If the team manages facility construction efficiently, there will be no construction cost overruns, negotiators said.

But over the 25-year financing plan, there are expected to be annual operating losses in the early years and large capital repairs in the middle and later years, when costly items such as air-conditioning

Elliott to be released

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — San Antonio Spurs forward Sean Elliott is scheduled to be released from a hospital today, a little more than a week after having a kidney transplant.

Elliott, 31, needed the transplant because of an illness he has had for several years called focal segmental glomerular sclerosis. The condition prevented his kidneys from properly filtering waste from the blood.

His brother, 32-year-old Noel Elliott, underwent surgery to donate one of his healthy kidneys for the transplant Aug. 16.

Sean Elliott, a 10-year NBA veteran, played a big role as the Spurs won their first NBA championship in June. A 3-pointer he made while balancing on his tiptoes in the final seconds of a game was crucial in the team's victory over Portland in the Western Conference finals.

chillers and other components begin to wear out.

The agreement also states \$1 from every parking fee and \$1.50 from every stock show ticket sold will go toward paying off arena debt.

The financing plan calls for the county's hotel occupancy tax to be increased 1.75 percentage points and for the county's car rental tax to be increased 5 percentage points.

This would make the county's hotel occupancy tax 16.75 cents on the dollar — the second highest in the nation behind Houston — while the car rental sales tax would be 15 cents on the dollar.

Commissioner Paul Elizondo said the two anchor tenants will pay roughly half of the facility's total cost, while the other half would come from the hotel and car rental tax increases.

"Basically, it looks like we have a deal," Elizondo said. "So, in the interest of keeping the Spurs in town — which is not my main goal — and to provide a way for this community to have a new venue for the Stock Show and Rodeo, which gives out so many scholarships, we have crafted a deal where the users and the outsiders are paying for the facility."

Spellman adjusting to new position

WICHITA FALLS (AP) — Alonzo Spellman has been a defensive end ever since he started playing football and he's never been interested in changing positions.

But after 19 months away from the NFL, Spellman is more than happy to move to defensive tackle if that's what the Dallas Cowboys want him to do.

"I wouldn't be in there if I wasn't willing to do it," Spellman said yesterday following his second practice as a first-team tackle. "If it's going to make the team better, then I'm all for it."

Spellman is lining up next to Chad Hennings in the spot Leon Lett fills when he's not suspended.

The NFL has yet to announce how many games Lett will miss during his third ban for violating the

league's substance abuse rules, but it's sure to be at least four games.

The Cowboys signed Spellman because they wanted a veteran to help solidify a youth-filled rotation at defensive end.

But with rookies Ebenezer Ekuban and Peppi Zellner holding their own at end, Dallas finds itself more in need of help at tackle, where none of the candidates to replace Lett have earned the job.

"We want to see if he can go inside and give us a little punch at defensive tackle," coach Chan Gailey said. "If we had All-Pros in there, we probably wouldn't move him in there."

Spellman's only experience playing inside has been on the nickel pass rush, when he was the end

forced into the tackle-like position of having a teammate on each side.

The biggest change he faces is handling the various double-teams and other blocking schemes offensive linemen use on tackles.

"It will take some time to get used to the combination blocks and the quickness of things inside," Spellman said. "You've got to get off the ball and react to things a little bit differently than you do at end."

Coaches believe the 6-foot-4, 292-pound Spellman has the size and speed to handle the job.

"He just has to learn to stay low and learn the reads," defensive line coach Jim Bates said.

Spellman was a ferocious end during his six years with the Chicago Bears, but

he was released last summer after a spurt of erratic incidents triggered by bipolar disorder, a mental illness.

He sat out last season while receiving treatment for the disease and getting his life back in order.

Early in training camp he signed with a one-year deal with Dallas for the veteran minimum of \$400,000.

If Spellman sticks at tackle, Gailey said he'd be inclined to carry one less defensive lineman, freeing up a roster spot elsewhere. He'll also have the luxury of using Spellman at tackle or end once Lett returns.

"I think that would be no problem for him," Gailey said. "I think he could adjust back and forth easily, which can be a key factor for you."

Warren hoping to leave injuries behind

WICHITA FALLS (AP) — Chris Warren was back in Dallas Cowboys training camp yesterday. So were concerns about the groin problem that limited him last season.

Coaches thought Warren was fine until he left camp last week for further treatment with a specialist in Colorado. He was supposed to be back in time for a team meeting and a practice Monday, but missed both.

Coach Chan Gailey was going to meet with Warren when he arrived Monday night, but the running back got in so late that they didn't get together until yesterday morning. Their talk seemed to resolve things.

"He made a mistake and he knows it," said Gailey, whose anger was obvious Monday. "He's apologized to me."

"It was a communication mix-up," Warren said. "I could've handled it differently, but I didn't."

Now that Warren is back, the focus

returns to the groin problem that kept him out of seven full games last year and parts of two more.

"The injury is in kind of a weird spot," Warren said. "It can't be strengthened with weights or any of the things we would normally do."

"It's getting better. I just have to stay on top of it, that's the main thing."

Warren practiced in pads yesterday afternoon after only going through agility drills in the morning. Gailey said there's a chance Warren will play in the exhibition game Sunday night against Denver.

"I think we've got to see how it feels in three or four days," Gailey said. "Then we'll be in better shape to make that decision."

Gailey called Warren's injury a little problem which could become a big one if it lingers. The coach said it's frustrating not knowing whether he can count on Warren to be healthy because there were plans to expand his role in the offense.

"The guy's a great player," Gailey said. "I wish I had it a different way, I really do."

Warren, Seattle's all-time leading rusher, averaged a team-best 4.9 yards per carry last season and had Dallas' two longest runs from scrimmage while playing on third downs and backing up Emmitt Smith.

Gailey had tinkered with using Smith and Warren on the field at the same time and had other ideas he'd hoped to test. For now, those plans are on hold.

"We've lost a little over a week of work with him, not implementing some things we would've like to have implemented," Gailey said. "Whether we still can, I don't know. It's not like there's a lot of installation time to tinker with new things."

A few weeks ago, Warren said he finally was back to 100 percent. He hadn't told coaches of any setbacks before leaving last week.

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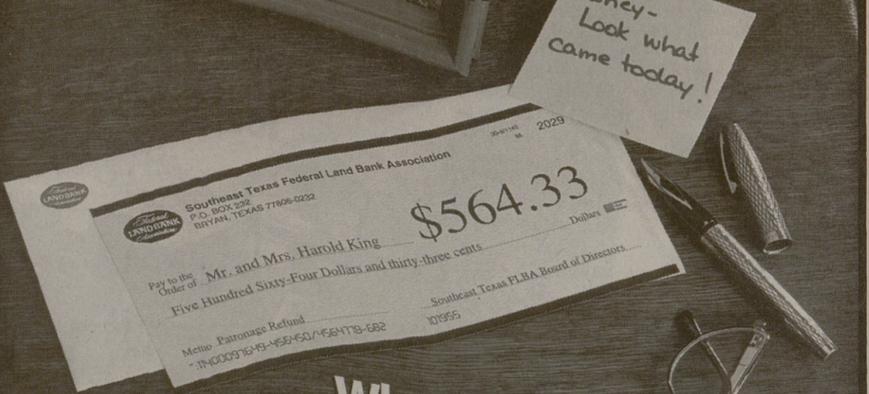
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