

VISIONARY AWARD RECIPIENT **TOM GLICK**

Selling beef sticks and cheese balls, managing a skeptical father-in-law, and eventually building a multinational football juggernaut: The journey crossing oceans, leagues, and limits of an ALSD Visionary Award recipient.

By Jared Frank, ALSD

In the early aughts, young sports executives feared few things more than being stuck in an elevator, conference room, or fill-in-the-blank confined space with former NBA Commissioner David Stern. But that's right where Tom Glick found himself on his first day on the job at league headquarters.

The year was 2004. Glick was no longer the youngest buck, having cut his teeth for a decade and a half in sports organizations. But his bildungsroman included small towns like Jamestown, New York and Huntington, West Virginia. To Stern, Glick was unproven, without experience, polish, or pace. In his hallmark provocative fashion, he opened the dialogue during their first one-on-one meeting by asking Glick one direct question: "What on earth is an NBA CEO going to learn from a guy from minor league baseball?"



Tom Glick's career began about the same time a young entrepreneur named Bill Dorsey founded a small, niche organization headquartered in Cincinnati, Ohio called the Association of Luxury Suite Directors. Glick and the ALSD's growth paths mirror each other in many ways, reflecting longevity and willingness to adapt in this continual young person's game of sports business. So it was fitting that at this year's 29th Annual ALSD Conference and Tradeshow, the association celebrated Glick's three decades of service and leadership with the ALSD's Visionary Award.

The Visionary Award is the single individual honor recognized annually by the ALSD. Since it's the only one, it must mean something. At least we like to think so. It's a de facto lifetime achievement award, even if the



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ALSD Visionary Award

recipient's life is not finished achieving. In his introductory remarks, Dorsey claimed Tom Glick to be the youngest Visionary Award recipient to date. Given the enthusiasm for new mountains to climb demonstrated in his acceptance remarks, it's clear this visionary still has miles to go before he sleeps.

Glick is currently in his second year serving as President of the NFL's Carolina Panthers. "A sleeping giant if there ever was one," he told the brimming ballroom of ALSD 2019 attendees. The Panthers are a young organization, soon to turn just 25 years old. They play in a marketplace of 15 million people and counting. And under the management of new owner David Tepper, the Panthers are pivoting towards more growth-focused strategies, highlighted by a sizable real estate investment just south of the North Carolina border. Tepper is primed to develop a 200-acre property, located 20 minutes from downtown Charlotte, that is two and a half times larger than The Star – the mixed-use development in Frisco, Texas anchored by the Dallas Cowboys team headquarters. "If we can come close to what [the Cowboys] have done, we'll really be doing something," Glick says.



His career didn't start so handsomely. Just ask his father-in-law. After an unpaid internship his senior year of college, Glick took a temporary position paying a meager pittance of \$700 a month with the Jamestown Expos, a short-season minor league baseball team in Jamestown, New York. He was married. He had an infant son. "I had a lot of doubts from my own father and certainly from my father-in-law," Glick remembers.

Fast-forward to this past October when the Panthers played the Eagles. Glick, now earning a slightly higher salary, treated his father-in-law in his native Philadelphia to a police escort and behind-the-scenes access at Lincoln Financial Field. "He's a bit more comfortable right now."

Glick was out of the industry as fast as he

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entered it. "I got into the business for a bad reason, which is I love sports," says Glick. "It's not that it's a bad reason. It's just not enough of a reason." The Jamestown Expos season ended, and Glick found himself working a Hickory Farms retail kiosk in the local mall, treating holiday shoppers to samples of beef sticks and cheese balls.

It was during this time a Jamestown season ticket holder offered Glick a career in the insurance business. The compensation would have quadrupled his salary hawking assorted salty meats. "I was this close to taking it," he says while positioning his index finger and thumb millimeters apart. "I was trying to put food on the table. But [my wife] Maria talked me out of it."



Few people who stay in minor league sports for any length of time don't absolutely love the experience, both the challenges and the rewards. Minor league baseball pinned

Tom Glick's shoulders to the mat after three months, but it couldn't extinguish his youthful blue flame. Good fortune delivered many next opportunities. After Jamestown, he held various positions with the Sacramento River Cats, Lansing Lugnuts, Huntington Cubs, Welland Pirates, and the Peoria Rivermen hockey club. He broke ground on new stadiums in Lansing and Sacramento and broke attendance and revenue records in parallel. "I made a decision early on to just try everything," says Glick.

His go-for-it mindset governed passages from one stage of life to the next and ultimately overseas in 2008, when he accepted the role of Chief Executive Officer of Derby County Football Club in the United Kingdom. A thirsty curiosity and respect for place served as his atlas for navigating parts previously unknown to him. A winning team never hurts either. After four years at Derby County, City Football Group (CFG) came calling. CFG's flagship team is current English Premier League champion Manchester

City, but the group also owns MLS' New York City FC, as well as clubs in the top divisions in Australia, Spain, Japan, and Uruguay. "[CFG] led me to amazing places," says Glick. "Places like Hanoi and Jakarta and Tokyo and Beijing and Abu Dhabi."

Glick now enjoys seven direct reports at the Panthers, all in the same city. At CFG, he built a high-performance team with direct reports in Manchester, London, New York, Shanghai, Tokyo, and Singapore, all living in different time zones, speaking different languages, and viewing the world through different cultural lenses. "We were still able to get that group of people to commit to a common goal and a common purpose," he says. "That is as much of what drives me now as anything else – getting a group of people together, having a shared purpose and shared set of goals, running different departments, but all committing to one another."



From the ALSD 2019 stage, Tom Glick graciously imparted many lessons from his 30-year journey through sports and entertainment. But he also directed attendees to consider the future prospects primed to drive our industry's next chapter, namely the disruptions occurring in media, technology, hospitality, and venue design. "This industry is just getting started," he said in closing.

All of us in sports and entertainment can learn from this visionary who started at \$700 a month, circled the globe, and is now leading one of the NFL's most exciting franchises. Not bad for a guy from minor league baseball.

Visit ALSD.com to watch a congratulatory video from the Carolina Panthers, featuring team owner David Pepper, Chicago Cubs owner and former Derby County investor Tom Ricketts, Lansing Lugnuts owner Tom Dickson, and many more sports leaders impacted by the vision of Tom Glick. Congratulations Tom on receiving the ALSD 2019 Visionary Award.