We were very fortunate to run into Richard Artifice on a golf course in Las Vegas recently. The secretive Artifice has a long history with the Browns' front office, from the Modell years. He declared some subjects off-limits, such as the move to Baltimore and the as-yet unfounded allegations of his massive gambling debt. Some have said he has avoided interviews in recent years due to being stung by accusations of exaggeration and hyperbole. Not any longer. Our Greg Popelka tracked him down for an exclusive interview with this local icon who was part of the Browns' inner sanctum for so long.

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theclevelandfan: **Thank you for agreeing to meet with us. It is nice to see a celebrity such as yourself follow through on promises like the one you made out on the links the other day.**

Richard Artifice: When we're done, we're even, right?

tcf: **You negotiated a lot of contracts in your time with the Browns. What were some of the more interesting contract demands you encountered**

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RA: Well, there was the year that Eric Metcalf's agent demanded that he be paid per-carry based on the number of end runs, sweeps or reverses he ran.

tcf: **Was this just prior to the "Metcalf up the Middle" era?**

RA: (Pausing) ...No comment.

tfc: **(Maintaining an awkward silence)**

RA: There was the time when I, I mean Art, showed Tom Skladany who was boss, back in 1977.

(Beginning to open up) I mean, yeah, we absolutely did need to make a punter a second round pick, obviously. There is no doubt about that. But to expect to pay him like one? Ha. It was high-stakes poker, and I- I mean Art- didn't blink. We won.

tcf: **(Keeping up with the poker reference) But you might as well have "passed" in the second round if you weren't going to sign him.**

RA: How can you show a player - indeed, the world - who is boss if you're only interested in doing the smart thing?

tcf: **Do you think that Art belongs in the Hall of Fame?**

RA: Well, Al Davis, Lamar Hunt, and Wellington Mara all punched their loyal fans in the gut when they moved, too, and they are in the Hall of Fame.

But I think what the real reason is for why Art isn't in the Hall of Fame right now is that embarrassing "Dirty Bird" dancing episode after the Ravens won the Super Bowl. Commissioner Tagliabue said, "Don't do it, Art... Don't do it."

Art somberly told Paul afterward, "I had no choice."

Art *never* could help himself when the camera was on him

tcf: **What are some memories you have about your years in Cleveland?**

RA: My old Hewlett Packard calculator had to be replaced. It was a classic- dare I say a museum piece. But it only displayed 8 digits, and with the advent of free agency, I needed an 11 digit display. Of course, I had to wait for it - after thinking he was so smart to purchase the Stadium, Art found himself strapped for cash and had trouble affording things like office equipment.

Once I got my new calculator, though, it almost seemed to have a life of its own. Once, in the Stadium, it was 0 degrees Fahrenheit. I mean it was COLD. When I turned on the calculator, and the zero slowly emerged on the display, the "degree" symbol appeared to the upper right of the zero. Art and I, we had a good chuckle on that one.

tcf: **That's not really true, is it?**

RA: (Quickly changing to a measured tone) I can only go by what I see.

tcf: **Is there any truth to the rumor that Art Modell "went commando" under his topcoat?**

RA: (Silence) ...Next question.

tcf: **I won't tell.**

RA: (Shifting in his chair and smiling mischievously)

Well, during one home game against the Bengals, we all went commando. I mean, everyone in the owner's box. It was our way of giving the business to the Paul Brown family.

David and his fraternity brothers started it. He was a bit of a free spirit, you know.

There was Art, out in his seat during the game for his regular TV camera shot, with nothing on but his coat. His hands were down deep, clutching his ...pockets. We could all hear him going, "Wooooo woooooooo."

He was really witty like that.

tcf: **Some Browns fans are surprised that David Modell is apparently not associated with the NFL these days.**

RA: (Wistfully) No, but that David- that boy always had a ...craving for ...adventure that was ...addictive.

tcf: **Was David a jock? We know his dad sure was, from the old black-and-white photos out there of him holding the football for his kickers.**

RA: *Pffff-* no. But boy, could he ever talk. Like one time, when the Browns were hosting the Oilers with a playoff berth on the line. Rather than watching the game, David spent three hours monopolizing various guests in the owner's loge with his stories. This was during his phase where he kept track of the kinds of items he noticed stuck in the rafters of the various high school gyms in the area. Balloons, basketballs, shoes (chuckle).

tcf: **What was up with David telling reporters that the team was actually named after Joe Louis, "The Brown Bomber", instead of after Paul Brown? Was this meant to be a swipe at the Brown family- or perhaps at the Cleveland fans?**

RA: Well you know, if you tell a lie often enough, it begins to be accepted as truth.

I think the Brown Bomber thing actually became true by 1997 or so.

tcf: **(Blinking. Blinking again.)**

RA: You know, Art almost changed the name of the team, but it had nothing to do with the owner of the Cincinnati club. He wanted to one-up the pro baseball team in town. Some people said their name and logo were offensive to Native Americans, and wanted them to change it. I confided to Art that hey, your team's

play is offensive to the color brown. Why don't you change the name of the team, and show everyone who the compassionate team owner in town is? Art never did, but it was ideas like that which caused Art to value my opinions.

tcf: **What was David like around the Browns' office?**

RA: You know that guy on the TV show, The Office? Michael Scott? I think they based him on David Modell. At least the insecure and spineless side of him.

And the lack of maturity and self awareness. And the putting people in awkward situations. And the secretaries thinking he was inept. Well, maybe the character is actually dead on.

tcf: **What did Art's office look like?**

RA: Oversized leather chair; huge oak desk in the center of the room. Large display of fountain pens and a cigar humidor on the desk and a bottle of scotch in the bottom drawer; dark paneled walls with a giant bird's eye view photo of the Stadium.

Bar on the side wall. Big ol' wood console TV/record player in the corner.

He had all the good stuff. Wayne Newton. Montovani for romantic interludes.

tcf: **Ew. How about David's office?**

RA: Let's see... A lava lamp; black light posters; Charlie's Angels pinball machine.

A big mirror on the wall- that was during his Saturday Night Fever phase.

That was worrisome- but not as disturbing as his Taxi Driver phase.

You knew when he had had friends over the night before- there would be all the Pi nk Champale cans and the pizza boxes lying around and the Twister game would still be out.

He had large posters on the wall. Jim Brown; Bernie Kosar; David Hasselhoff...

tcf: **Really?**

RA: (smiling)

tcf: **Hey, Hasselhoff is from Baltimore, no?**

RA: (shrugging)

tcf: **What do you think of all the native Ohioans walking around in Steelers gear?**

RA: I always offer them my condolences. I mean, seeing them walking around like that must only mean that an awful lot of Cleveland fans lost friendly wagers, and to pay up, they have to look like fools in public. Day after day. All day long.

tcf: **Don't you think it makes men look feminine? Good thing Cleveland isn't known as the Queen City.**

RA: Not that there's anything wrong with that.

tcf: **What would you like to tell all of the Cleveland fans who are reading this interview?**

RA: April Fools.