



Sound Bites Podcast Transcript

Episode: Justice Alan Page

Dave Fabry: Welcome to Starkey Sound Bites. I'm Dave Fabry, Starkey's Chief Innovation Officer and the host of this podcast. It's not often that you get the opportunity to interview a true American hero, and I don't think that's hyperbole in this case with Justice Alan Page, one of the great... It's hard for me to say this, but I believe it in my heart, as one of the greatest football players and a member of the NFL's 100 best players over the first 100 years, even though he plays for the rival team and teams, really, to my Green Bay Packers. Spending the majority of his career with the Minnesota Vikings, but ending his career with the Chicago Bears. Both have been formidable opponents in the National Football League Conference and in the division that my Packers play in. Justice Page-

Justice Alan Pa...: We'll forgive you for being a Packers fan.

Dave Fabry: I went to Lombardi Junior High School, as you know, so I come by it honestly. And if there is one thing I am, I'm loyal to a fault. This year it has been especially a challenging one to follow the Packers, but I never give up. My loyalty to the franchise is more than to the players. But I can tell you that you broke my heart many times in the late-'60s and early 1970s when I watched my team.

And then the thing I think that's most remarkable is then you went on to an incredible and legendary legal career, serving as an associate justice for the Supreme Court of the state of Minnesota. And really, it's impossible to sort of summarize your remarkable career without taking the entire podcast. And people aren't listening and tuning into this to hear me talk, but I'll try to treat it in a couple different chapters. And so I want to begin first by, you were born in Canton, Ohio. Football fans will know that that is the home to the National Football Hall of Fame. And ironically, you literally, my understanding is, literally helped lay the foundation for the Pro Football Hall of Fame and now you are enshrined there. Talk a little bit about growing up in Canton, Ohio and your dreams as a young man, young boy.

Justice Alan Pa...: Well, I had the good fortune of growing up with parents who loved me, brothers and sisters who loved me, and cousins. Had what I would, for me is the only childhood I know. But pretty uneventful, typical, I think childhood back in the 1950s for a young Black kid. Had the good fortune to have parents who understood and valued education and instilled that in me, although I didn't always follow through on it as well as I should have along the way, but eventually it stuck. Started playing football as a ninth grader, not out of any design, but because my brother had played, I had a cousin who played. They seemed to enjoy it. And as it turns out, I had some aptitude for it.

Dave Fabry: I'd say. Yeah.



Justice Alan Pa...: Well, I was a player who was really good at doing very few things, but I could do those things really well. And those things were helpful to achieving the task at hand, which was to perform on the football field.

Dave Fabry: Did you always play defense?

Justice Alan Pa...: In high school, I was an offensive tackle.

Dave Fabry: Okay.

Justice Alan Pa...: Hated it. Hated it.

Dave Fabry: You then attended Notre Dame?

Justice Alan Pa...: Yes.

Dave Fabry: And was that when you switched over to the defensive side of the ball?

Justice Alan Pa...: That was when I became a defensive player. I came along at the end of the transition from two-way players. And I can remember we had an inner squad game of some sort, and they had me playing both ways. And I thought, "How could you do this?" And I'd done it in high school, but it was at a different level on the collegiate level, and I was just as happy to be done with being an offensive lineman.

Dave Fabry: Okay. And was it before you went to Notre Dame that you took the construction job working on the team that was working with the Pro Football Hall of Fame?

Justice Alan Pa...: It was during the summer. One of the summers, I can't remember which one, but it sounds really important that I worked on the Hall of Fame, I helped construct it, laid the foundation. Really, I swept a few floors on one or two occasions. I worked for a company, most of the work I did was at a site in North Canton, Ohio. They were the Hoover Vacuum Company, which was where they were headquartered at the time, was building an addition. And being a laborer, being about as low on the rung as you could be. I spent a lot of time sweeping fresh concrete floors, getting rid of the dust. And I maybe did that once or twice at the Hall of Fame site also.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. Well, it had to have been humbling those many years later when you were inducted into the Hall of Fame to think about that and never forgetting. And I think that's one other thing that characterizes you, is you don't forget from where you come along the way.

Justice Alan Pa...: Well, I've had a great deal of good fortune, and along the way there have been many people who have contributed to that good fortune. And I just think it makes sense that... Well, as a friend of mine once said, "When you ride the



elevator up to success, you have one responsibility, and that is to send the elevator back down, not just get off the elevator and go about your business, send it back down for the next one to come up." I believe that.

- Dave Fabry: Well, I think your life has been a testimony to that. And I think that after you had that opportunity to discover that, as in your words, you were good at a few specific things with regards to playing football, that then you had the opportunity to go to Notre Dame where not only perform very well, you won a national championship and now you're in the College Football Hall of Fame, and then were drafted by the Minnesota Vikings in the first round. They saw the potential. You became part of the original Purple People Eaters who made-
- Justice Alan Pa...: Well, they...
- Dave Fabry: Go ahead.
- Justice Alan Pa...: They saw the potential, but I was drafted in the first round. I was their third first round choice.
- Dave Fabry: They ad three first round picks that year? Okay. I'll-
- Justice Alan Pa...: They had three picks and I was the last one, so I wasn't number one on their list.
- Dave Fabry: All right. That's a-
- Justice Alan Pa...: As it turned out, it worked out for all of us.
- Dave Fabry: Do you know who the two guys were that were taken in front of you?
- Justice Alan Pa...: Clint Jones and Gene Washington from Michigan State.
- Dave Fabry: Okay. Yeah. Well, I would say they both had good careers. But your career with the Vikings, appearing in four Super Bowls and becoming the first, a trivia question, answer to a trivia question, the first defensive player, talking about doing one thing very well. I would argue that you were an edge rusher before there was the definition of an edge rusher, with your speed, playing right tackle, and being able to get in so successfully to the quarterback as part of those Purple People Eaters, were what frustrated so many teams and so many quarterbacks. And you were the first defensive player to be named MVP for the season, as well as the defensive player of the year. I think only one other player, Lawrence Taylor subsequently has done that. But how did that feel to be named the first player to be... There's so many firsts in your life. What drives you to that level of success? Your humility on saying you do a narrow thing very well, but I see so many firsts in your career. What gave you that drive?



Justice Alan Pa...: Well, I think some of it is fear of failure. Just the absolute fear of failure. And fortunately that fear didn't paralyze me. I think what happens with a lot of people is, I think fear of failure is natural within all of us, but for some of us it's paralyzing. And I was fortunate enough to be able to manage to overcome it.

Dave Fabry: And have it motivate rather than paralyze. Was there any specific things, elements that... Did you ever allow it to paralyze you and fear that you had to overcome that paralysis to motivate? Was there anything that you could think of?

Justice Alan Pa...: Oh, probably more than I want to mention on this program. But just thinking back on, I talked a little bit about parents who valued education and my not living up to that potential along the way. I think some of that was fear of failure, fear of not being able to perform, being fear of being looked at as inadequate.

Dave Fabry: So I was just going to go there. Imposter syndrome is one of those things where you feel you don't deserve that success, and that's again, another avenue, another area where a paralysis can be because you don't feel like you deserve it, so you just throw up your hands rather than let it motivate you.

Justice Alan Pa...: Yeah. I didn't have that. Mine wasn't the case of feeling like I didn't deserve it. Mine was a case of feeling like I couldn't do it.

Dave Fabry: Interesting.

Justice Alan Pa...: And being afraid of trying for fear of not being able to. Well, the one thing I've, well, one of the things I've learned along the way is that fear becomes self-fulfilling. If you're afraid to try, you can't, you won't. You fulfill that fear. And I've also concluded that the worst case scenario is, so you try and you fail.

Dave Fabry: What's the worst thing that happens? You get to try again. Hopefully you get another shot.

Justice Alan Pa...: And more importantly, you learn from it.

Dave Fabry: Yes.

Justice Alan Pa...: I think one of the things that we people do, is we think that being successful, however you want to define it, or winning, is what it's all about. And that if you don't win, somehow you have less value. But the reality is that, as people, we either grow or we stagnate, and the only way to grow is to learn.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. And I've learned a lot more by failing failures than I have from my successes.



Justice Alan Pa...: Absolutely. Absolutely. In fact, in my case, when you win, you think it's all because you're strong, smart, whatever it is. When you lose, you have to reevaluate and think, "Well, what did I do or did I not do that caused me not to be successful?" And from that, you grow and develop. I don't think you grow a whole lot by patting yourself on the back and saying, "Aren't I wonderful?"

Dave Fabry: Yeah. The humility, without becoming complacent and while still letting that feeling like you can't or you're not going to be successful, motivate rather than paralyze. It brings me to the next topic that I want to shift to, in that growing up in Canton, I know from your biography that your first thought with the family that had instilled the benefit and value of learning, you wanted to be an attorney at a young age. Right?

Justice Alan Pa...: At a very young age.

Dave Fabry: And you parked that dream when you discovered that football was going to be a vehicle to enable you to go to Notre Dame and then have this success that anyone would desire, but then you shifted and went to law school. How explain how you were able to park that original dream of law while you had this football career, only then to take up becoming an attorney and eventually Supreme Court justice later.

Justice Alan Pa...: Well, let me just talk about my legal journey. As a kid, you get to that age, people start asking you what you want to do when you grow up. And growing up in Canton, Ohio, the options for a young Black kid were not all that great. Things went really well, you might find a job in a steel mill. I had an uncle that spent 40 years working in steel mills, and the one thing that was clear to me, even at a young age, was that the work was dirty, it was dangerous, and it was repetitious. Three things which weren't high on my list. Didn't know any lawyers, never met one, didn't know what the law was really about, but had heard stories about lawyers making lots of money, not working too hard and driving big fancy cars. Well, in the eight, nine-year-old mind, when you balance the two, it goes straight to big fancy cars. Right?

Dave Fabry: Sure.

Justice Alan Pa...: The other thing, to be fair, I was eight years old when the United States Supreme Court decided Brown versus the Board of Education. And for me, that decision which sounded the death knell for state-sponsored segregation in this country, it sent me the message that the future could be better, that there was this thing called justice, and that the law had the power to provide justice. Above the doors of the Supreme Court Building in Washington are the words, "Equal justice under law." That decision for me shifted the ground.

Dave Fabry: And can imagine, I can only imagine.

Justice Alan Pa...: And it gave me the sense that fairness could prevail and that maybe I could be a part of that. And so I didn't really park the dream or shelve the dream of becoming a lawyer, I just started playing football, didn't lose sight of the fact that I wanted to be a lawyer when I grew up. Played high school football, played college football at Notre Dame. One of the reasons I chose Notre Dame is because it had the academic reputation that would be beneficial in terms of law school. Got drafted by the Vikings and actually enrolled at William Mitchell College of Law in 1968, my second year, the start of my second year with the Vikings.

Dave Fabry: And they allowed you to sequence that into the off season? Or were you going to law school during the season?

Justice Alan Pa...: Well, I started, it was, William Mitchell at the time was a night school. So I started playing football, practicing during the day. And I didn't last long, by the way. The Socratic method, the way they teach in law school, was something that was new to me. I felt like I didn't have a clue what was going on. I was probably the dummy in the group and I've got this football thing going and a new baby at home and all of that, so I dropped out.

Eight years later, it was time to go back. This time fully prepared and committed to learning the law and understanding how the law worked. First time around, I wasn't prepared or committed to that, the second time around I was. And you will hear law students and lawyers say they hated law school, I loved every minute of it. It was challenging, it was fun. It was nine years into my football career. I mentioned repetition earlier, not being high on my list. Well, nine years in, I was ready for-

Dave Fabry: A new challenge.

Justice Alan Pa...: A change and a new challenge, and law school revitalized me. And I just, as I say, fell in love with it.

Dave Fabry: I was an undergrad at the University of Minnesota. I'm just a little bit younger than you, and I remember that. And that you graduated from there, went on then to serve, initially, I think you were in private practice a couple years-

Justice Alan Pa...: Private practice for, I don't know, five, six years. Went on to the Minnesota Attorney General's office for seven years, I think, and was elected to the Minnesota Supreme Court.

Dave Fabry: And that was usually an appointed role. You were the first to be elected into that role. And then you were reelected, what, three times before?-

Justice Alan Pa...: Well, I was the first in a few generations. Actually, I'm trying to think, at the start of the statehood and through the first maybe 80 or 90 years, the elections and



the selection of judges through election was quite common. But then it went away and I was the first one in quite a while who saw an election. And we have this system that allows for appointments, and most judges, both at the appellate level and the trial level in Minnesota are appointed.

Dave Fabry: Got it. And you were the first African American Supreme Court justice in the state of Minnesota. I think, again, fulfilling that-

Justice Alan Pa...: Based in the state history.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. And so thank you for your service to the judicial system after... I mean, many people after having this career as a football player would've said, "Okay, I hear what you're saying about repetition and avoiding the mundane and wanting a new challenge." But then this was really relighting that challenge that had been lit, that inspiration, I guess, that had been lit at a very young age for you to, really, as a boy, growing up during the Brown versus Board of Education era, to complete that cycle is nothing short of remarkable, in my opinion.

Justice Alan Pa...: Well, as a person, I'm not one... Think about driving a car. You can look in the rear view mirror. Why do you look there? Because you want to be safe going forward. There is a tendency to want to look in the rear view mirror and pat yourself on the back. As those of us who have been athletes, we want to look back and say, "Wasn't I great?" That's not me. That doesn't work for me. And so looking forward, what is the next challenge? What is the next thing that I can contribute to? Because as I say, you either grow or you stagnate. And for me, looking back would've been stagnation.

Dave Fabry: Well, I think that's a very important statement as well, because our journey together has been related to your hearing loss. And it's really been over the last year or so where I've had the opportunity to both assist you on your hearing journey, but you've taught me some valuable lessons. Many audiologists who might be listening to this podcast have grown up over the last four... I've been an audiologist for 40 years this year. And many of us have struggled with the fact that there is a stigma associated with hearing loss and the use of hearing aids.

And many, many times I'm engaged in a battle for people to acknowledge that they have hearing difficulties, what that impact is on their life, and to persuade them to use hearing aids is quite a struggle. And so when we first became acquainted, you not only weren't stigmatized by the use of hearing aids, you asked me a fundamental question of, could we not only work on getting you fitted with a new pair of devices, but do you remember what your other first question was of me?

Justice Alan Pa...: I don't. Remind me.



Dave Fabry: You asked if I could make them in an unusual color.

Justice Alan Pa...: Yes.

Dave Fabry: And some people, if you'll recall my answer when you asked that was, I said, "I can make them in any color but purple because I'm allergic to the color of purple and it would burn my hands." But some people may be surprised to know that your favorite color is blue. And I've never asked you, why is your favorite color blue when you did play for the Vikings for 11 years?

Justice Alan Pa...: Well, I will be honest with you, my favorite color is actually pink.

Dave Fabry: Oh, okay.

Justice Alan Pa...: But I figured pink might be a little much.

Dave Fabry: We could have done that, too. But how is it that you wanted to say, "I don't want to try to camouflage hearing aids, but rather let the world know that I'm wearing devices that they can easily see?"

Justice Alan Pa...: First of all, you can't camouflage them.

Dave Fabry: No.

Justice Alan Pa...: They're visible.

Dave Fabry: Yeah.

Justice Alan Pa...: So, hey, for me, why worry about it? Maybe if you could really could do a good job of camouflaging them, I would have thought that way, but from my vantage point you can't, so that's number one. Number two, we've come a long way. We've got people walking around with AirPods and who knows what all else in their ears. If people can walk around to listen to music and not be self-conscious about it, somebody who needs hearing assistance, why should we not have the same freedom? I don't understand that.

Dave Fabry: Completely agree with you.

Justice Alan Pa...: And finally, why not have something that, at least in my mind, is stylish?

Dave Fabry: Yeah. Thank you. I agree with that. Yeah. The blue ones we have, I think, are rather stylish.

Justice Alan Pa...: Might I say, I was reading to a group of second graders last, actually last Monday. And at the end of the reading, we took some pictures and some of the kids were... I was sitting down and they were standing next to me and one little



boy said, "What's that in your ear?" And I said, "It's my hearing aid." And he turned his head and said, "I have hearing aids, too." And that just made it for me.

Dave Fabry: That's awesome. You hadn't shared that with me. I love it.

Justice Alan Pa...: Well, it literally-

Dave Fabry: It just happened.

Justice Alan Pa...: Just happened last week.

Dave Fabry: To me, now, I don't want to overstep my bounds here, but I know that you've written four books with your daughter, Kamie, one of which is entitled "Alan and the Perfectly Pointy and Impossibly Perpendicular Pinky." And I'm thinking perhaps there is a future book for you two that might address something related to removing barriers and opening up opportunities for discussions about hearing loss at any age. Because that's an awesome story and I love that he said that.

Justice Alan Pa...: Well, it was a special moment. This little second grader, with this little tiny behind-the-ear hearing aid...

Dave Fabry: Had a bond.

Justice Alan Pa...: Had a bond. We shared something.

Dave Fabry: That's really cool

Justice Alan Pa...: And what was interesting, is when he asked the question, one of his friends was there. And when I said, "It's my hearing aid," both of them said, the kid with a hearing aid said, "I have a hearing aid, too." And his buddy said, "He wears a hearing aid." For me, it just couldn't have been better.

Dave Fabry: Well, for me, you just made my day. And that makes my job all the more worthwhile when we can break down barriers. For me, in many cases, I would say that I presumed that you would want to try to do your best to camouflage devices. And for many people, that's fine, too. And as you said, if you really could do it-

Justice Alan Pa...: It never works right.

Dave Fabry: It never works right. You try to match it and it never is quite right. And then it just maybe clashes even more. And so then why not? And you really challenged me to just say, "Why not make them in my second favorite color?" And-



Justice Alan Pa...: Well, I wear a lot of blue suits.

Dave Fabry: Okay. Yeah.

Justice Alan Pa...: My watch band is blue. In fact, my watch, I have an Apple Watch that is blue, so it all matches.

Dave Fabry: Yeah. Well, I love it. And for me, the idea... You mentioned the changes. When did you first notice that you had a hearing loss?

Justice Alan Pa...: Oh, seven, eight years ago.

Dave Fabry: And you got your first hearing aids around that time?

Justice Alan Pa...: Maybe a couple of years later.

Dave Fabry: Years later. And was it a difficult... Initially, were you somewhat hesitant to wear them?

Justice Alan Pa...: No. Actually, one of my colleagues on the court who had left the court and gone on to do other things, had lunch with her one day and she mentioned that she had got just gotten hearing aids. And I thought, "Well, if she can do it, I can do it."

Dave Fabry: Love it.

Justice Alan Pa...: So from that point forward, I was in with both feet, if you will.

Dave Fabry: Love it. And you're wearing a custom style, you liked that, with rechargeable batteries. We fit you with the Evolv AI custom devices, so it makes it easier getting them in and out. Certainly we discussed the fact that at the time you were wearing masks and putting them on and taking them off a lot and were tired of flinging the hearing aid off of your ears.

Justice Alan Pa...: Well, I will just pull this out. This is so simple and so easy to use, and with the rechargeability with the Bluetooth. And with the Bluetooth, I mean, it is not unlike wearing AirPods or something like that, with the benefit of, they help you to hear.

Dave Fabry: Right. They're customizing the audibility for your hearing loss, while also, again, I'm biased as well, but I think they look rather stylish. And the functionality to be able to stream any audio, even navigation or podcasts like this, or phone calls, is great.

Justice Alan Pa...: They've really been a benefit to me.



- Dave Fabry: Well, I thank you for taking the time to speak with us today about your remarkable journey. In 2018, you were given the highest civilian award that can be honored to anyone, with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. And in my opinion, there's no greater honor and no greater representative of that award than you in the way that you have been driven to, as you mentioned, focus on education, excel in not one, but two different disciplines and embody this message of access. And even now, we didn't even talk much about your education foundation that you formed with your late wife, Diane, that continues to focus on diversity and inclusion for African American children, to ensure that Brown versus Board of Education to this day guarantees that people will have access to public education. And I thank you for that commitment. And I can tell you, I'm so in honor of your career and your legacy and your life.
- Justice Alan Pa...: Well, thank you, Dave. As I said before, I've been fortunate. And I think those of us who have been fortunate, been privileged, have both the obligation but also the opportunity to do what we can to make the world better for all of us. It was Paul Wellstone that said, "We all do better when we all do better." Well, what's the point if we can't work to help everybody do better?
- Dave Fabry: Well, I think I'll leave it at that. And I want to thank you for making my life better with the interactions that I've been able to have in working with you.
- Justice Alan Pa...: Well, thank you. I've enjoyed it. It's been fun.
- Dave Fabry: Yeah, we're not done yet either. We'll continue to going to work together here.
- Justice Alan Pa...: Oh, absolutely. I have to say, I love following your travels. I get to tour the world.
- Dave Fabry: Well, and likewise me with you, because I know you're a proud granddad now. You've got four children, but you've got grandchildren. And I'm expecting my first grandchild in May of next year, so you're already teaching me how to do that well by me watching your Gruber as you refer to it, a grandpa Uber.
- Justice Alan Pa...: Grandpa Uber.
- Dave Fabry: And it's really what it's all about and is sharing life and helping each other. So thank you for that. And for those listening to the podcast and this episode of Starkey Sound Bites, appreciate your listening. If you enjoyed this episode, please like it, share it with your friends on your favorite podcast, subscribe if you wish, so that you're not going to miss a single episode. And Honorable Justice Alan Page, thank you for your time today and I'll look forward to seeing you again soon.
- Justice Alan Pa...: Thanks, Dave. Enjoyed this immensely.