

National Football League 2016
Minnesota Vikings

The NFL has battled public relations since its inception in the 1920s.¹ Everything from rule changes to instant replay to league governance has been attacked by critics of the game, both those who love it and those who play it. Both the Coaches Subcommittee and Player Safety Subcommittee have placed input into recent rule changes, consulting medical professionals and the players' union as well as surveying teams for recommendations.² These rules don't just apply to the physical aspect of playing the game, but also off the field actions by both coaches and players.

Concussions have become a topic of conversation, particularly in the past few weeks thanks to Cam Newton's complaints about targeting and late hits with no penalties. The NFL has set protocol that is required to be followed by NFL contracted doctors, however there is often a lot of pressure on these doctors to make a "good call" in regards to the status of a concussion of a star player. Instead of the current action protocol that results in more questions than answers, the Vikings suggest that the NFL reform the plan to include new technologies and testing. Each player during training camp needs to be tested with the current concussion protocol as to set a baseline for future tests during games. These tests can be quickly and electronically compared in order to accurately determine if a player has suffered from a head injury. This will help to avoid questionable calls. Additionally, the Vikings suggest all helmets be equipped with strategically placed sensors around the inside of the helmet, between the hard-shell case and the padding inside, in order to identify when a player receives a hard hit to the head, either from another player or against the ground, hard enough to warrant a possible concussion. The sensors report to the team doctor's tablet after identifying a set amount of pressure applied with a "red light" showing that the player needs to be tested. The doctors can then proceed with protocol as the player is immediately called off the field before the next play. The team is allowed to call for a time out if they chose or they may substitute the player, but he must come off the field or a timeout will be lost and a fine will be given to the team (minimum of \$10,000). The reasoning behind this idea is that it is better for a team to lose a player for a single play than for a week. Moreover, the team should be fined when a player continues to target other players in dangerous plays that warrant fouls. The team receives a warning after the first hit, but the second hit is an automatic fine for the team, which is determined by the league, on top of the fine issued to the player. If more than two hits occur in a game by the same player, the team is required to have that player watch a video that reviews the crowning rule, fines, and why the rule is in place. The video will also go over what knowledge there is about traumatic brain injuries and the known long-term effects as well as the risk of of injury.

Each individual involved with the team is a mentor or a role model to a younger kid in the game, and they should act as such. Criminal offenses should not be tolerated by the NFL, team managers, coaches, or other players and the NFL should reform their policies accordingly to address issues more intensely seeing as the public is scrutinizing each decision that is made. Overall, the NFL has tackled some of the hardest social problems such as those associated with Ray Rice and Adrian Peterson. Immediately, the problems of the players are tied to the team they play for and the NFL. The current crime rate amongst players in the NFL is surprisingly low, as it is just one or two big scandals talked about each year. The general population of males aged

¹ www.profootballhof.com/news/football-firsts/

² operations.nfl.com/the-rules/evolution-of-the-nfl-rules/

20-30 have a higher arrest rate than men the same age in the NFL.³ While this may be true, the Vikings suggest harder punishments and deterrents in order to prevent these issues from poorly representing the NFL. The NFL should have the players pay $\frac{1}{4}$ of their salary from the total of the last 3 regular season games they played, regardless of the criminal offense, which is defined in the NFL Personal Conduct Policy. The money is donated to an organization or charity that relates to the committed offense. This is a deterrent for players in order to avoid critics saying the NFL needs harsher punishments. On top of the current rules the NFL has in place for those who commit crimes, the NFL should also punish players through their own system. They may still rely on information gathered in the initial investigation, but the NFL should conduct their own. If a player is arrested, they are automatically suspended through the NFL for 2 games, pending investigation. Appeals to the NFL are accepted, however they must file the appeal within 48 hours of receiving the official documents from the NFL stating their suspension. Further investigations will possibly result in the appeals being rejected, as it will be required that investigators share gathered information with the Appeals Committee. Each team needs to take a stance to hold players more accountable for their actions. They can include certain clauses in contracts that automatically terminates the contract. They have to pay back their signing bonus as part of their restitution to their team. Certain crimes are ranked based on a tolerance policy outlined by the Coaches Subcommittee. The Vikings are going to implement these rules and look to become an example for other teams.

Expansion is also a hot topic in the NFL, with games being played every year in London. The Vikings caution against expansion as TV ratings have decreased in the past few years for each team.⁴ Currently, there are too many prime-time matchups or unappealing prime-time matchups, is a lot of debate about Deflategate and player retirement, is accessibility to streaming on mobile devices, and protests for a social movement; all of these causes result in a loss of interest by the public and consequently a decrease in ratings.⁵ There are a few games that are an exception to this statement. We suggest that the NFL promote safe play to families in order to get more advertising for younger players to want to play football. The current talent pool is lacking, with the most memorable players of this era retiring or in their last few seasons of the game and overall, it will be difficult to brand a newly created team, as some have suggested, with a lack of a recognizable household name. This causes the problems the NFL is seeing with ratings and lack of interest. As the NFL currently has no plans of merging with the CFL, adding new players and locations will prove difficult. The Vikings suggest that each team employ a growth league, similar to Major League Baseball's training leagues (AAA, AA, or A) to encourage teams and players to compete at the highest level. This idea also ties into the other two topics because if a player is out with a concussion and the backup is hurt or unable to play for whatever reason, the coach can call up a player from the growth league to play for that game. It can also be used as a deterrent for criminal action, as no player wants to be replaced by a younger player, particularly one that is from a growth league, for acts of misconduct. Healthy competition amongst players encourages hard work. While expanding may drum up interest for a few seasons, there is no telling how the NFL will be affected, positively or negatively, in the long term.

³ profootballtalk.nbcsports.com/2015/08/28/crime-rate-among-nfl-players-is-relatively-low-with-some-caveats/

⁴ www.sportsmediawatch.com/nfl-tv-ratings-viewership-nbc-cbs-fox-espn-nfln-regular-season-playoffs/

⁵ www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/columnist/bell/2016/10/18/nfl-television-tv-ratings-down-election/92388304/