



THE SAN DIEGO
CHARGERS
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1960 WESTERN DIVISION CHAMPIONS 1961

Owen Swanson
2016

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As America has evolved industrially, politically, and socially throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, so too has the nature of Americans' taste in sport. As time has progressed, the NFL, not baseball, has become the national pastime. Now, the league is faced with a crossroads: does it continue to grow into a league that is adored worldwide as a bastion of fun, healthy competition, or does it recess into stagnation as it restricts growth and dictates the actions of the players like nazis? There are a number of important issues that must be sorted out to determine the NFL's direction, and if any progress is to be made in the next few days, one action must happen first: Roger Goodell must be fired. Goodell has a track record of restricting fun, power overreaches, and dismissal of player safety. As a result, this season has seen a massive decline in primetime ratings. If we want the league to continue to grow and return to its former glory as the pinnacle of American sports, decisions must be made to enhance player safety, improve parity in the league, increase the level of play, and bring fun back.

The San Diego chargers are committed to serving the people of the great city of San Diego, this includes its commitment to not relocating. However, if enough funds cannot be generated, the team may be forced to do so. A recent ballot initiative on the Nov. 8, 2016 ballot in San Diego lost, but garnered the support of 43% of those who voted¹. This initiative proposed a new stadium/arena/convention center in Southeast downtown San Diego to be funded by an increase in hotel tax, in tandem with private funds generated by the owners and the league. The plan would not only help downtown thrive economically and create a unique, vibrant area of the city, it would be funded by an increase of only four cents on the dollar in hotel tax. This hotel tax only taxes visitors to the city, so it would not negatively affect citizens². Despite the failing of this initiative, there is clearly considerable support for the Chargers in the city of San Diego, as the "yes" vote was still over 40%. As a result, the Chargers reaffirm their commitment to staying in the city, but make it clear that they will relocate if necessary, and if the situation is advantageous for the team, ownership, and new market.

Expansion at this time in the league's history would be an excellent way to renew interest in football. Bringing the league to new markets, such as Toronto, Las Vegas, or Mexico City would marshall in a new group of NFL fans and spread talent more evenly throughout the league, thereby increasing parity and raising the level of play. Mexico City has been shown to be the city with the 7th most football fans and the most unaligned fans³, meaning that the stadium

¹Breech, John. "Chargers Owner Gives Timeline for Possible Relocation Announcement." *CBS Sports*, CBS Interactive, 9 Nov. 2016, Web. Accessed 10 Nov. 2016.

² Spanos, Dean. Dean Spanos on why San Diego Chargers need new Stadium. *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, 25 Aug. 2016, Web. Accessed 10 Nov. 2016.

³Silver, Nate. "The NFL Should Expand To London. But First: Canada, Mexico And LA." *FiveThirtyEight*. N.p., 11 Nov. 2014. Web. 07 Sept. 2016.

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would sell out, there's considerable interest in football, and there would be no problem growing the expansion team's brand. The dual advantages of expansion are so great, that it would be a colossal missed opportunity to not expand.

Player safety, health, and enjoyment are issues that all go hand in hand, and in order to properly address these issues, the player needs to come first. After all, the players are who produce the on-field product that fans pay to see; without the players, there would be no NFL. Roger Goodell's clear lack of understanding of this fact is reason enough for him to get fired. When one takes into account all of the missteps he has taken during his tenure, it is clear that he needs to go. Since Goodell took over as commissioner in 2008, Dave Duerson, Ray Easterling, and former beloved San Diego Charger Junior Seau have all committed suicide and been diagnosed with CTE. Chris Borland and Calvin Johnson have retired in their primes, both citing health concerns. Class action lawsuits have been filed stating that the NFL neglects its players. Despite all of this, the league has only acknowledged a link between concussions and football and created programs to improve tackling technique at the youth level. The minor rule changes that have been made are not enough, and the league has even continued to perpetuate hard-hitting culture by selling photos of an illegal hit by James Harrison (for which he was fined) on their website. The San Diego Chargers propose the creation of the "Junior Seau Memorial Player Safety Fund." This would be a sum of money that is collected through pay cuts to league executives and payments by league owners. In addition, steps need to be taken to protect the players more; the safety risk is contributing to the decreased level of play, as good players stop playing due to health concerns (e.g. Barry Sanders, Steve Young, Calvin Johnson). The money would be used ONLY for the purposes of CTE research and paying for players' health expenses related to head injury.

It is essential that steps are taken in the near future to ensure that players behave themselves in order to return the league to good moral standing in the minds of fans, and ensure that our players are good role models to today's youth. The league's stance on violence needs to be more strict and the marijuana policy needs to be loosened. Yet another example of Goodell's incompetence is the way he handled the domestic violence incident of Ray Rice. Rice was given a two game suspension for dragging his unconscious wife from an elevator, and only after outcry from the public did Goodell hand down a more severe punishment⁴. Compare this to when Goodell unilaterally suspended Tom Brady four games for deflating footballs and Goodell's ineptitude is clear. As a result of the ordeal the NFL announced new, more strict domestic violence penalties, but this was only the result of public anger, not proactivity by the

⁴ Bien, Louis. "A Complete Timeline of the Ray Rice Assault Case." *SB Nation*, Vox Media, 14 Nov. 2014, Web. Accessed 10 Nov. 2016.



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commissioner⁵. It is right that players should be punished severely for use of illegal drugs, however they should not be punished for the use of medical marijuana. The opioids that players are often prescribed legally often lead to addiction and do much more harm than good to players⁶. Money needs to be contributed by the league to research on marijuana's medicinal effects so that it can be legitimized more than it already is, hopefully leading to more federal approval of the drug. Current marijuana suspensions are far too severe considering the drug's effects and that it is legal in states in which 6 NFL teams play, and medical marijuana should be completely allowed for the good of the players.

The problems faced the by the NFL today are completely solvable. A major ratings decline can be solved by improving play. Play on the field can be improved with a few minor changes that spread out talent, improve player health and safety, and ensure good players don't get suspended for minor offenses. All of these changes can be made, and they will cement the NFL as the best league in sports. It all begins with firing Roger Goodell.

⁵ Sharp, Katie. "NFL Announces New Domestic Violence Policy." *SB Nation*, Vox Media, 28 Aug. 2014, Web. Accessed 10 Nov. 2016.

⁶ Garcia, Alexis, and Joshua Swain. "The NFL Should Let Players Use Marijuana." *Reason.com*, Web. Accessed 10 Nov. 2016.



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