

Position Papers for the National Football League

Topic I: Expansion

The National Football league has the potential to generate billions more in revenue through foreign expansion. The NFL has hosted games in London, and has scheduled a game for Mexico City. The London game even yielded strong attendance. The NFL has previously attempted to expand to Europe, however the league, NFL Europa, folded after 16 years due to \$30 million in yearly loss¹. The league had five German teams and one Dutch team competing, and did not live up to expectations. On the other hand, the three 2016 NFL games hosted in London have sold out Wembley Stadium and generated over \$32 million in revenue².

Two Seahawks players, Jon Ryan and Luke Willson, are Canadian. The Seahawks organization is not afraid to search for international talent, and clearly, other teams are not either. Meanwhile, the Canadian Football League has been very successful, albeit on a smaller scale, generating \$50 million in profit per year, in addition to the recently signed \$40 million television deal³. The Seahawks believe Canada has a fan base that the NFL can tap to generate more profits and begin international expansion. Overseas expansion is a future possibility, however, for the time being, the NFL should look to expand to Canada first. Football is physically and mentally tolling sport. Players could take a hit from overseas travel, and for teams on the West coast, like the Seahawks, it takes almost double the time it would take an East coast team to fly to London.

¹ Starcevic, Neshia. "NFL Europa Folds After 16 Years." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 29 June 2007. Web. 06 Nov. 2016.

² Barrabi, Thomas. "NFL London Ticket Sales: \$32M Revenue From Wembley Stadium Sellout Crowds, Report Says." *International Business Times*. IBT Media, Inc, 10 Nov. 2014. Web. 06 Nov. 2016.

³ Rovell, Darren. "CFL Is Flourishing on Business Side." *ESPN.com*. Disney, Inc, 24 June 2016. Web. 06 Nov. 2016.

The first step to expand the NFL internationally would be to add teams in Canada and Mexico, thus creating a continental league. Toronto is a city in which all three other major sports leagues (NHL, NBA, and MLB) have expanded. By adding a team in Toronto, and then adding a team in Mexico City, the NFL could add one eastern team, and one western team, and thus balance travel. By expanding the NFL to Toronto, the league would begin operations in Canada, and could then periodically incorporate several major Canadian cities. By adding two teams at a time, the league could avoid a conference restructuring. Also, if the NFL incorporates the entire continent, travel will not be too strenuous, or as much as it would be to travel overseas.

Topic II: Concussions and Head Safety

After years of denial and sweeping the issue under the rug, the NFL created a Mild Traumatic Brain Injury Committee in 1994. After appointing Elliot Pellman to lead the committee, injury continued and players began to commit suicide. In 2002, Dr. Bennet Omalu uncovered the truth that concussions cause CTE, which leads to depression and ultimately suicide. The saga continued, and players began to sue the NFL. In 2015, after only one year in the league, San Francisco 49ers rookie Chris Borland retired, fearing his mental health. In 2013, the NFL implemented rule changes, concussion protocols, and put \$100 million toward research on the issue.

First and foremost, the Seattle Seahawks wish to maintain the health of NFL players. Without healthy players, the league simply will not survive. Former Seahawk Grant Fiesel died in 2012 after suffering from a long-term illness stemming from CTE⁴. This caused his family to join the struggle against mental illness. The Seahawks have

⁴ Jenks, Jayson. "Former Seahawk Grant Fiesel's Family Hit Hard by Football's Trauma." *The Seattle Times*. Seattle Times Company, 16 Mar. 2014. Web. 06 Nov. 2016.

hired two mental health professionals, Mike Gervais and Jimmy Stewart, to lead groups and informative sessions with players to counteract the physical and mental impacts of high-level football⁵. Thus, the Seahawks organization is protecting itself and players from career-ending injury, and future effects on the mental wellness of players. The team and league also must maintain profits, and thus keep players safe.

To begin to solve the concussion issue, the league must improve helmet technology. It is clear that CTE and concussions due to football are linked, and the only way to protect against CTE is to protect against concussions. The NFL has already taken a stance against helmet-to-helmet hits, but the impact damages players. Currently, players choose their own helmets, but the league needs to mandate a specific helmet with the most protection, such as the new helmet developed at the University of Washington this past year. The NFL can also add protective, soft under layers to turf fields to dampen the impact that the ground imposes upon players.

Topic III: Players and Criminal Offenses:

The NFL has struggled to consistently punish league policy offenders. From a domestic violence standpoint, the league has actually made some improvement, as Commissioner Roger Goodell decided to implement a policy which administered a six game suspension to first time offenders, and a lifetime ban for repeat offenders, with a reinstatement petition option. This followed the brutal mishandling of Ray Rice's 2014 assault case in which, at first, he only received a two game suspension. In terms of drugs, the league has different policies for performance-enhancing and recreational use of drugs.

⁵ Roenigk, Alyssa. "NFL: Seahawks' New Practice Techniques." *ESPN.com*. Disney, Inc, 21 Aug. 2016. Web. 06 Nov. 2016.

Drug tests are administered in the preseason and offseason, and those who have previously offended can be tested at any point during the season as well.

The Seahawks have taken a hard-line stance against domestic violence. In 2012, General Manager John Schneider confirmed this, explaining that the team would never draft a player who struck a woman⁶. In the 2015 draft, our top pick, former Michigan defensive end Frank Clark, was involved in a potential domestic violence dispute. The Seahawks did not draft him until the organization investigated and proved that he had not struck his girlfriend. Seahawks players are role models and viewed as celebrities, and acts of violence cannot jeopardize this. The Seahawks have had quite a history of dealing with performance-enhancing drugs, and the organization has punished those who have partaken in such actions. Nine suspensions have been issued since 2010, and the team will continue to promote sportsmanship and not attempt to gain an unfair advantage against other teams in the league⁷.

As far as domestic violence goes, the league must be firm and consistent with its punishments. The six game suspensions, and following lifetime suspensions, seem to be good policies, and Goodell must be firm with his decisions. Performance-enhancing drug use should result in an initial suspension, followed by increased testing. Once again, the league must be firm and consistent with its punishments. Recreational drug use, such as the use of marijuana, should not affect players. If players are choosing to use marijuana, it does not affect the integrity of the game, and thus the league should not punish them.

⁶ Blount, Terry. "Seahawks Are Comfortable with Frank Clark despite Domestic Violence Issue." *ESPN.com*. Disney, Inc, 5 May 2015. Web. 06 Nov. 2016.

⁷ Kaylor, Jimmie. "Drugs in the NFL: 7 Teams With the Most PED Suspensions." *The Cheat Sheet*. N.p., 29 Aug. 2015. Web. 06 Nov. 2016.

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