

**Delegate:** Los Angeles Rams

**Committee:** National Football League 2016

**Conference:** Secondary School's United Nations Symposium 2016

The Los Angeles Rams team is a proud member of the National Football League. Since its establishment, the Rams have grown with the league. In fact, we were the first team to integrate African Americans into the professional sport. The NFL has grown immensely over the years, and in recent years the league has made significant progress on each of the issues being discussed in the following paper. The LA Rams are excited to continue to be an integral part of the league's development.

### **Topic 1: Expansion**

As a team that has alternated between three different American cities since its founding in 1938, the Los Angeles Rams are very familiar with the prospect of moving. Beginning in Cleveland, the Rams then went to Los Angeles from 1946 to 1994, before becoming the St. Louis Rams from 1995 to 2015, and then finally returning to LA this year.

Uprooting a national football team is an immense challenge: usually a stadium must be built or improved, and the team's fanbase can be rattled or ultimately jeopardized. Both of these factors result in massive amounts of money spent or lost, and a team should be extremely wary of which city they select to ensure that the money will be made back. The team also needs to be aware of how they execute the move: they must do so as courteously as possible so that the dignity of the two cities and the fans that occupy them is preserved. The Rams believe that this same cautious mentality must be applied to the prospect of expansion.

Moving is costly and risky, and expanding, even more so. Not only must a entirely new roster and staff be invested in, but a new logo must be developed, with new jersey's and equipment and branding. It can also be assumed that a new stadium must be built, significantly adding to the cost. Beyond this, the league is relying on a dedicated and loyal fan base to be cheering on the new team, but more importantly, purchasing the merchandise and filling the seats. Without the financial support of an active fan base, the investment is inevitably a disaster. The Los Angeles Rams remind the committee that football is a sport, but the National Football League is a business. Therefore, every expansion decision must be made on the basis of good business, or the wealthiest league in sports will be unable to maintain its superlative.

The LA Rams believe that international expansion is unrealistic and would be unsuccessful. Though there are significant fan bases in both Mexico City and London, it is impossible to guarantee that active, season-long interest would be maintained across borders. It is likely that the popularity of the football games now played in London is partly due to the novelty of the event, but wouldn't be sustained for a full season with team of its own. Distance and time zones are their own issues. Players already require one week's rest between football

games due to the physical exertion, and jet lag and long plane flights would only add to fatigue and put international teams at a disadvantage. By competing internationally, the NFL would also be exposed to the global market and to currency fluctuations beyond the United States, a recent example being the drop in the pound due to the Brexit vote. Relying on an economy very different than that of the U.S. is risky, to say the least.

The next biggest domestic fan base not currently served by a team is Las Vegas. The LA Rams urge the National Football League to consider this vibrant metropolitan area as its next expansion opportunity. The city is a leader in the hotel industry, and has excellent transportation including its own large airport with abundant non-stop routes. Las Vegas is a destination city that has been growing steadily over the last decade, and would be an ideal home for a new NFL franchise.

## **Topic 2: Concussions and Head Safety**

The public's current opinion of the National Football League in regards to head safety is a problematic one. This is an incredibly complicated issue, as the league must maintain a fine balance between protecting their players and preserving the hard-hitting culture. We need to avoid being compared to tobacco companies who for too long denied overwhelming evidence of the dangers of smoking. Being viewed this way will only hurt participation, viewership, and our image as a whole. The future of football is at stake: if young people and their parents distrust the leaders of the sport in their approach to concussion safety, we will soon have no talent pool to fish from, and eventually no league at all.

Therefore, it is imperative that the NFL get in front of the issue and present themselves as leaders against head injury, rather than corrupt perpetrators of the issue. The Los Angeles recommend that the league take several approaches to combat the head trauma epidemic from all sides. First, we encourage the league to invest in research for the development of technologies that would immediately detect concussions. It is important that as soon as player walk off the field after a hard hit to the head, personnel are able to quickly and accurately assess whether he has developed a mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI). Research must also be funded to advance helmet technology. Not only must our players' helmets offer maximum protection, perhaps a device can be installed that tracks impact levels from within the helmet. This way, players could be easily identified for additional screening, all from the sidelines.

The LA Rams believe it is also valuable to educate its players directly on the health risks of brain trauma, and on safety strategies based on tackling rules and their recent modifications. Players should understand why it is important to protect one's head, and also understand how rules have been modified to assist in this protection. Former players who have first hand experience with head trauma could give talks to teams on this topic. In cooperation with the Player's Association, the National Football League could organize the best way to provide this information.

Another way to promote head safety in the greater football community is to start a campaign educating young people and their families, with a focus on middle school and high school players. During the offseason, NFL players would visit schools to teach kids the importance of helmets, safe tackling, and especially the observance of concussion protocols before and after diagnosis. An NFL player is the ideal messenger for these values, since he is a strong leader and role model that young football players will look up to more than any scientist. This campaign would also spread awareness through television advertisements and other promotional materials. By showing the public that we care about head safety literacy, the NFL can combat notions of football as an unreasonably dangerous sport, or that the league is remotely similar to any tobacco company.

### **Topic 3: Players and Criminal Offenses**

The criminal offenses being committed by NFL players have been casting a dark shadow over the sport. Our commissioner has been criticized for his handling of the 2014 domestic violence case against Ray Rice, and the league as a whole has faced ridicule for the way we handle an increase in substance abuse. To ensure that our image isn't tainted by these shortcomings, the LA Rams encourage the NFL to take immediate action against them, in the following ways.

First, on the topic of domestic violence, we believe that the NFL should ban their perpetrators, once convicted, for an entire calendar year from the sport. During this time period, if the so player chooses, he would be eligible for up to six months of therapy/counseling paid for by the league, as are his victim/s and family members. Through this process the goal is to identify the core issues that resulted in this act of violence, and attempt to rehabilitate the player accordingly. If the player desires to re-enter the NFL, there would be a mandatory evaluation by a panel of qualified psychologists after one year to ensure that the individual is ready to play football as a responsible adult. If this same player is to commit another act of domestic violence at any time after his first offense, he will be permanently banned from the league. This stricter mandate will ideally discourage players from performing these heinous acts. Although the penalty is more severe, a benefit to this approach is that it ensures certainty: first, because it only comes into effect after the conviction, and second because it is a standard sanction. This way, a situation when suspensions fluctuate and could be interpreted as the NFL's failure to discipline its players, would not occur.

The Los Angeles Rams also encourage the league to designate a week during the regular season as "Domestic Violence Prevention Week". This would involve promotional videos aired during games, and the integration of special purple apparel as part of the players' uniforms, as purple is featured the color representing domestic violence awareness.

Second, regarding substance abuse, the LA Rams believe that the league must first acknowledge abuse and addiction as a disease that requires rehabilitation, rather than a character

flaw that requires imprisonment. With this in mind, the NFL is encouraged to view it as an individual pattern, and therefore screen all players for prior drug abuse before they are permitted to enter the league. After all, people who have a history of drug abuse are much more likely to continue doing so. This way, the NFL asserts its intolerance of substance abuse from the start. As for those players who are only identified as abusers when they are tested positive by the league, the Rams urges a strengthening of the current protocol, which involves a three-staged intervention process, and appropriate penalties. This would involve negotiating with the Player's Association to increase the number of annual tests for both performance-enhancing and recreational drugs, in exchange for expanded and prioritized treatment programs in all cases in order to reintegrate players into the professional world. The increase of tests will discourage abuse, while the increase in rehabilitation will help those really struggling. Overall, this player-focused approach will paint the NFL as a pioneer for advanced treatment and respect, rather than taint it as a league prone to substance abusers.