**National Football League 2016**

*Topic 1:* *Expansion*

For the National Football League, expansion opens the door to more business and game opportunities for the teams within the league. Expansion can allow for the football fan base to grow, a potential for an increase in ticket sales, and can generate greater revenues for the league. With best intentions for the league’s future, it is important that the locations for new host teams which are at hand, are investigated thoroughly to ensure the NFL can maintain success there.

An example of a domestic opportunity for league expansion is Las Vegas. As there already is a proposal to move the Oakland Raiders to Las Vegas, their current home is still based in Oakland, California. Just last month, “Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval signed into law a bill allocating $750 million” in public money towards building a new stadium for the Raiders.[[1]](#footnote-1) With this, hotel taxes would be raised up by 1.4 percentage points in the Las Vegas area, in order to help fund the building of the stadium which costs early $2 billion. Due to the increase in hotel taxes, “lawmakers tweaked the bill, in which they added a provision to ensure small firms get at least 15 percent of the work on the project”.[[2]](#footnote-2) Furthermore, it is important to note that the Raiders would have had difficulty to obtain a strong fan-base in Las Vegas if they were still struggling to win five games in a season. But now, they are a top-10 team in the NFL. Moreover, this move could increase tourism to Las Vegas, as it is likely that this transition will bring more travelling fans to the stadiums in addition to the pre-existing high level of tourist attraction that Las Vegas already has. Based on this, the Carolina Panthers agrees with this bill that Las Vegas would be a suitable, permanent home for the Oakland Raiders.

However, an international opportunity that the Panthers is not as confident towards, is the potential for London to be a location for league expansion. Principally, due to the stability of the U. K’s economy post-Brexit. Thus, the chances of Brexit influencing the league’s desire to expand to London can be noteworthy. Some of the consequences that have emerged from the U. K’s withdrawal include reduction in trade, income, and economic growth. And, business in the U.K. is expensive in nature. This may impact the NFL’s decision to expand, particularly if the league loses financial incentives to continue investments in London as a potential host. In addition, “the British pound did struggle in light of the vote and many international firms began questioning the logic of maintaining their European bases in London”.[[3]](#footnote-3) Thus, many economic partnerships must be worked out before a powerful organization like the NFL, should determine whether or not London is a worthy investment. Despite the fact that previous NFL series hosted at Wembley have been great successes, the majority of this decision really depends on how the economy will be affected. Following this U.K. vote, there is still a great possibility for long-term challenges in the U.K. and London particularly. In which the London franchise is still vulnerable to troubles with economic sustainability and can face jeopardy. Thus, this still only opens up more questions than answers at this point. Therefore, “the best option for the league would be to continue hosting games overseas and to continue growing the fan base, but stop the commitment of a team in the U.K. capital”.[[4]](#footnote-4)

*Topic 2: Concussions and Head Safety*

Concussions and head injuries have become more prevalent in today’s league and consequences associated with such are more serious. The number of helmet-to-helmet hits have increased over seasons and is concerning not only to the Panthers, but should be of great concern to other teams and individuals. It was only in recent news that it was confirmed that repetitive injuries or concussions to the head have a direct link to one’s development of the degenerative brain disease, CTE (chronic traumatic encephalopathy). As an entire league, it is essential that we properly address this issue more than it already has been talked about. Not only is bringing awareness to these issues important, but the protocols taken following a player’s on-field injury are made clear and are followed by all teams.

According to the league’s data, “the sharpest increase of reported concussions came from in-regular season games. There were 182 reported concussions suffered in regular season games in 2015; up 58 percent from the 115 suffered last season”.[[5]](#footnote-5) This is a noteworthy percentage when taking into consideration the new found evidence that a degenerative brain disease was found in 76 of the 79 deceased NFL players that were examined. Although there is still the percentage of players who do not suffer from CTE, playing football and the higher level one plays football, and the longer one plays football, the risk of CTE is higher- which is what Dr. Ann McKee, director of the brain bank and expert in neurodegenerative disease at Boston University School of Medicine, talked about in an article for ‘pbs.org’.

Take Cam Newton for example, a fellow Panthers player who recently suffered from a concussion from a serious blow to the head in a game against the Falcons in week 4. Newton shared in a press conference following his time-off during his concussion that “part of me is happy for it, just to know and go through it and to show so many people that this is a real issue and this is a real problem. This is a very physical sport, and it demands your respect on each and every snap".[[6]](#footnote-6) Though physical and helmet interaction is inevitable in a contact sport like pro football and it is an aspect that often rallies excitement and enthusiasm from the fan base, it is imperative that all stakeholders (from players, to team owners, coaches, and the viewers) recognize the significant impact that these constant blows to the head have on players.

Given that the NFL is the world’s richest sports league, the Carolina Panthers are advocating for some of the NFL’s money to be allocated towards educating players and coaches on how to (potentially) avoid concussions. This can include making practices safer and to ensure that the team understands the protocol. Though the MFLPA has spent $100 million towards intensive study and research on head trauma and the league has strong commitments to spent yet more money to address issues associated with head safety, the Panthers applaud our league for striving to improve players’ safety and for joining the conversation to tackle the concussion crisis effectively. However, the continuous spending of the league’s money has continued to be put into question as to whether or not there has been evident change in attempt to improve head safety. To return back to Newton’s case, in the season opener games, he was not placed into following the concussion protocols though he had experienced multiple hits to the head until the more serious case that was mentioned above. Thus, it would also be noteworthy for the NFL to consider how today’s advanced technology can be utilized to design and develop better helmets for players. An example of how the NFL has done good in this sector of the issue, is the donation of $250,000 in funding to the Army Research Laboratory (ARL) to help in the development of their product. “Army Research Laboratory created a material that stretches at low speeds, but freezes up if pulled quickly”.[[7]](#footnote-7) With this, the substance is applied “to a strap that would attach from the lower bar of a helmet to a player’s chest to prevent the head from snapping back quickly after a hard hit. If the head jerks back quickly, the strap hardens and keeps the head up.”[[8]](#footnote-8) With improved equipment, this is a major step in attempt to minimize the severity of head-related injuries that can be directly implemented into the game. In all, through greater public awareness about concussions and the vital consequences, like CTE, that can result from it, the Panthers strongly believe that this will amplify the search for solutions and hopefully minimalize lawsuits that may arise.

*Topic 3:* *Players and Criminal Offences*

Similar to the concussion and head trauma cases, criminal offences of NFL players have also led to strong public criticism of the league’s approach in rectifying team players’ issues in regards to domestic violence and/or substance abuse. Though regulations and rules have been updated in terms of number of game suspensions or complete release from a team roster, this has still drawn the public to question the validity of the NFL’s current solutions. With this, the league needs to look at these cases in a new perspective.

In recent news, ex-kicker Josh Brown from the New York Giants was released from the team’s roster in light of his admissions that he abused his wife. Police documents released showed that Brown had admitted in emails and journal entries that he “viewed myself as God basically and she (his wife) was his slave”.[[9]](#footnote-9) However, before re-signing the kicker, the Giants had admitted that they were aware of Brown’s abusive behavior/past, yet were unware of the extent of it. Thus, (before his release) leading the team to only suspend him for the season opener game against Dallas in September, for violating our league's personal conduct policy. Which is a slap on the wrist consequence. Furthermore, this expresses to the public that the NFL shows no respect for women (victims) and how the NFL does not call out our valued players for their poor behavior outside the field. With talented players at hand, teams are usually willing to put up with their players’ off-field actions as long as they are professional on game days. Moreover, it exemplifies the limited progress our league has made since the Ray Rice case.

There are overlaps in the league’s approach to tackling the two main issues (concussions and criminal offences) affecting the NFL. One of which, is that the NFL has only convinced the public that we, as a league, are taking issues like domestic violence and substance abuse seriously. However, evidence and reports on the effectiveness and efficacy of our actual actions, are minimal. Some teams may argue for a ‘zero-tolerance policy’, in which players are ultimately released from their team. However, the Panthers believe that simply cutting out players only makes us, the viewers/public, feel better. This does not result nor represent a significant change in attempts of minimalizing criminal offences of other players. Therefore, education about the issues at hand, need to be implemented properly into NFL culture. Even before the NFL, awareness and prevention should begin even earlier. Where high-school coaches need to play their role in teaching players about the prevention of abuse that can take form in different ways. Education plays a key role in drawing attention to important matters like those that our league faces and our team, the Carolina Panthers, think that it is essential to first correct the teaching of prevention on domestic abuse and substance abuse.

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2. <http://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/Vegas-Stadium-Deal-for-Raiders-Passes-First-Hurdle-396738551.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://page2sports.com/59258/will-brexit-affect-nfls-expansion-plans-uk> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/sports/wp/2016/01/29/nfls-number-of-reported-concussions-up-sharply-this-season/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <http://www.upi.com/Sports_News/2016/10/27/Carolina-Panthers-QB-Cam-Newton-address-concussion/2601477549868/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <http://fortune.com/2015/12/31/nfl-concussion-technology/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/21/sports/football/josh-brown-domestic-violence-new-york-giants.html>

   [↑](#footnote-ref-9)