

What's the Problem?



# Will American Football Ever Be Popular in the Rest of the World?

By Mark Hauser, Correspondent

Will American football ever make it big outside of North America? Since watching American football (specifically the NFL) is my favorite sport to watch, it is hard for me to be neutral in this topic, but I will try my best.

My guess is that the answer to this question is yes, however, I think it will take a long time – perhaps as much as a century. Hence, there now seems to be two questions to answer: 1) *Why will it become popular?* and 2) *Why will it take so long?* Here are some important things to consider:



Reasons why football will catch on in Europe:

- 1) It has a lot of action and exciting plays.
- 2) It has a reasonable amount of scoring.
- 3) It is a great stadium and an even better TV sport.
- 4) It is a great for betting and “fantasy football” games.
- 5) It has controlled violence.
- 6) It has a lot of strategy.
- 7) The Super Bowl is the world’s most watched single-day sporting event.
- 8) While team play is very important, many individual stars emerge.
- 9) It has the appeal of amazing athletes who look like super-humans and move in unbelievable ways
- 10) Unlike other sports and leagues, the NFL is not afraid to change its rules to keep the sport fresh, fair, and exciting.

Reasons why football will struggle in Europe:

- 1) There is no tradition established in other countries.
- 2) The rules are more complicated than most sports.
- 3) Similar sports are already popular in many major countries (such as Australian Rules Football and Rugby).
- 4) It is a violent sport with many injuries.
- 5) It is expensive to play because of the necessary equipment.
- 6) Many countries will resent having an American sport “forced” upon them.
- 7) There is competition from many other popular sports.
- 8) It’s already been tried—NFL Europe folded in 1997 after 16 unsuccessful seasons.
- 9) The stars wear helmets, so they are less identifiable to fans.
- 10) There is more stoppage of play than soccer and basketball, which are the two most popular team sports in the world.

Let’s look at some of the points made above. Cricket is a boring version of baseball, yet it is more popular than baseball in many countries. Tradition is the only reason I can think of. Rugby is a sloppy, hard-to-follow version of American football, yet is also more popular in many countries. Again, tradition has to be the reason. Hence, tradition is hard to overcome and takes time.

The effect of violence is hard to figure out because the violence in American football is more controlled than, say, rugby, but it is definitely more violent than soccer or basketball. As for competition, if a sport is great, it will catch on and will replace other sports, which are not as appealing. Just look at the United States, with the decline of horse racing and boxing -- football, basketball, and even Ultimate Fighting have become more popular over time.

Soccer fans are always saying they don’t need more scoring because the strategy in the sport keeps them interested in what little action there is. Well, you could argue that the strategy in American football is more intricate and interesting than any other sport on the planet, so this should be a big plus once the fans learn the rules and nuances of the game. However, this will take time since American football is complicated and most potential fans did not grow up watching the sport.

As you can see from the negative factors in the way, it will take time for American football to catch on. However, I think American football is too exciting a sport not to become popular worldwide eventually. But, what do I know? I am just a football-loving fan. Or, maybe, just maybe, I just know a great sport when I watch one.