

## UFL will offer its sponsors on-field options

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Published May 25, 2009 : Page 04

The fledgling United Football League is coming to market with an integrated sponsorship package it is claiming is assault proof.

While acknowledging a lack of sponsorship dollars in the market, Frank Vuono, the former NFL consumer products chief who is the league's COO, said the UFL will offer a package not available at most large sports properties.

"The NFL model has evolved as one where networks pay huge rights, so they have to protect their advertisers, and they can't let any sponsors on the field," Vuono said. "So you end up with sponsors who feel like they are getting ambushed on the broadcast."

Consequently, the UFL sponsorship package set to hit the market includes integration that features an LED field-level perimeter signage system from ANC Sports, similar to the one installed at the MLS Seattle Sounders home field in Qwest Field this year. Sponsor logos on uniforms and fields are also being promised, as the league sells eight top-tier categories that include media exclusivity for the national broadcasts on Versus, which begin in October and end with a championship game from Las Vegas scheduled for the Friday after Thanksgiving. Title sponsorship of the championship game is also available. The league is also hoping to include rights to players and broadcast talent in its packages.



Vuono said that he has initially been concentrating on vendor relationships for everything from helmets to tackling dummies. But now he's beginning to take sponsorship packages, priced in the middle six figures, to the street.

"The biggest objection we are getting [from potential sponsors] is the economy," Vuono said. "No one's telling us there is too much football already for us to succeed."

As far as its TV productions go, the league wants its telecasts to look and feel like the NFL's, said its television and broadcast consultant Mike Trager. It will use 10 to 14 cameras per game and use graphics packages that are a similar quality. All games will be produced in HD and will be streamed live via UFL-Football.com.

To underscore that quality, the league earlier this month hired TV veterans John Gonzalez and Peter Lasser to direct and produce the telecasts, respectively.

"All people working on the key elements of production have NFL or major college experience," Trager said. "We'd like to be a professionally produced football game."

The league is planning some new production wrinkles, Trager said. Producers will be allowed more sideline and locker-room access, and coaches will be made more available for on-camera interviews.

"We're not planning any tricks," Trager said. "There's no comparison to the XFL. We're going to show football the way football fans want to see it."

The league, with owners including financier Bill Hambrecht, AOL's Tim Armstrong and Paul Pelosi, husband of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and college roommate of former NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue, plans an initial season with teams representing four markets — Las Vegas/Los Angeles, New York/Hartford, Orlando and San Francisco/Sacramento. The teams will play a six-week schedule and will feature an average ticket price of \$20.

Eric Bechtel, managing director of Rule 1.02 Marketing, is assisting with sponsorship sales. Former NFL Properties licensing executive Jeff Sofka is consulting with the league and is orchestrating apparel, licensing and branding efforts.

*Staff writer John Ourand contributed to this story.*