

The National Football League – The Power of ‘The Shield’



The National Football League recently held its player draft. The draft has now become an event of sorts. The very first draft began at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Philadelphia in February of 1936. No team had a scouting department – a list a player names was created from media sources, visits to local colleges by team executives, or by recommendations to team executives. Ninety names were scratched to a blackboard in a meeting room for which the teams would choose from. Today, 32 teams select some 250 players over a three-day period. A few years back, the NFL moved the days of its draft to Thursday, Friday, and Saturday...all held in prime time. Draft coverage is handled live by both ESPN, and The NFL Network.

The National Football League is an extremely powerful brand. Roger Goodell, the league commissioner, sees his main duty as “protecting the shield.” In his position description, ‘shield’ refers to the brand mark of the NFL. In a very short period of time the game of football has become a very big business. The league is valued at \$9 billion dollars. Each team is worth nearly \$900 million dollars - this is a 200% increase in just over eight years. New stadiums – new network deals – new player superstars. While the brand has grown up, it has remained a constant. The brand is about the sport itself, and the deep feelings fans have towards it. “Yet it’s the great branding of the NFL that serves to transform a game played to entertain into community and civil institutions that customers develop deep and lasting emotional connections to.” So says Alexander Villeneuve of *Beneath The Brand*.

The NFL is about the brand and does everything in its power to promote it. Its last Super Bowl pitted the Baltimore Ravens against the San Francisco 49ers. In contrast, take a look at The National Basketball Association. Their last Finals had LeBron James of the Miami Heat versus Kevin Durant of the Oklahoma City Thunder. See the difference – the NBA touts its superstars, while the NFL promotes the brand. The NFL has as many if not more superstars than the NBA on a per capita basis. However, it chooses instead to make the brand the hero. It’s not that they do not showcase the likes of Aaron Rogers of the Green Bay Packers or Tom Brady of the New England Patriots, but they place the brand at the very pinnacle of all they do. A lot can be learned from the branding of professional sports, and the athletes themselves that can transfer to your brand’s position in the marketplace.

Protect thy brand. Always remember that the most important thing you own is the brand itself.



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