

Televised Football: The Past Writ Large

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Although the NFL and some colleges have profited from the televising of football, TV is not responsible for the game's commercial success. Colleges altered the rules and made the game into an entertainment in order to use it as an arm of public relations; from the early 20th century, promising football players were enrolled as athletes rather than students to establish their college as a "winner". To compete with colleges, the NFL made further rule changes, attempted to generate excitement by equalizing teams, and crafted its own mystique.

To compete with the NFL, USFL founders first adopted a slow-growth policy, but some began to try the blue-chip college players, assuming that the league's success was assured through its TV contracts. The USFL mistook the distribution system for the product. Whether the USFL wins or loses its lawsuit against the NFL, the league is doomed, because football's commercial success is dependent on much more than whether or not games are televised.