



CENTER FOR  
Science IN THE  
Public Interest

## Campaign for Alcohol-Free Sports TV



September 4, 2007

Commissioner Roger Goodell  
National Football League  
280 Park Avenue  
New York, NY 10017

Dear Commissioner Goodell:

We noted with interest Hamilton County Municipal Court Judge John Burlew's comments regarding your suspension of Cincinnati Bengal linebacker Odell Thurman for a drunken driving charge. Judge Burlew was critical of the National Football League for accepting beer advertising dollars and selling alcohol in stadiums while concurrently trying to address alcohol-related problems among its players.

In a letter last spring sent to the 32 NFL teams, you wrote: "I believe that no constructive purpose is served by clubs continuing to make alcoholic beverages available, and that doing so imposes significant and unnecessary risks to the league, its players and others." Your decision to extend the ban of alcohol in locker rooms to include all team functions and travel sends a strong message that alcohol use can be detrimental to the NFL. Additionally, we believe that alcohol advertising during NFL telecasts sends an inconsistent message to both players and fans — including those under the legal drinking age — about the link between alcohol and sports.

Other serious inconsistencies are evident with alcohol advertising during sports telecasts. Sports play a significant role in youth development and help build good character in young people. Even kids who do not participate in sports can learn important values by watching or attending sporting events. Professional sports, especially football, command the attention of millions of youth in this country. The NFL players are role-models and idols for many young people, and the League aggressively courts these young fans. It is troubling that alcohol marketers use sponsorship as a vehicle to reach large numbers of young, impressionable children with messages that indelibly link alcoholic beverages with popular sports such as football.

Underage drinking is a national epidemic and a factor in the four leading causes of death among 12-24 year-olds. Young people today begin drinking as early as 12 years old, and by the time they are seniors in high school, almost three-fourths (73%) have consumed more than a few sips of alcohol. Furthermore, new research on alcohol advertising suggests that exposure to ads and branded paraphernalia is related to increased quantity and frequency of drinking and intentions to drink among teenagers and adolescents. Beer ads on NFL games invariably entertain and amuse young (including underage) people — and they are among even pre-teens' favorite ads. Likewise, the influx of ads aired during the Super Bowl is seen by the largest youth audience on television.

(over)

Your decision to deny Odell Thurman's petition for reinstatement this season sends a message to players that the NFL will not tolerate substance abuse policy violations. However, we agree with Judge Burlew that the move is inconsistent with the NFL's policy to continue accepting alcohol advertising dollars. Eliminating or reducing alcohol ads during NFL telecasts will help break the unhealthy link between alcohol and enjoyment of professional football and reduce the pressure on young people to drink.

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We respectfully urge you to rethink the NFL's current advertising policies and eliminate advertising for alcoholic beverages during televised NFL games.

*Tracy T. Downs*

Tracy T. Downs  
Manager  
Campaign for Alcohol-Free Sports TV

Sincerely,



George A. Hacker  
Director  
Alcohol Policies Project  
Center for Science in the Public Interest