

It's X-treme, but is it real?

The XFL hits the gridiron this February. Should you watch?

By Dave Doyle

Are you ready for some football—in February? Vince McMahon hopes you are. The man who made the World Wrestling Federation a ratings and marketing bonanza by selling sex and fabricated violence to young adults is hoping to lure the same audience to his new football league, the XFL.

On the surface, it would appear the odds are stacked against McMahon's venture, which will kick off its inaugural season on Feb. 3.

Football fans have consistently rejected products they found to be inferior to the National Football League, like the United States Football League in the 1980s. And the XFL's season starts right after the NFL's Super Bowl, when conventional wisdom has it that football fans would have their fill of the product for awhile.

But McMahon has never been one to listen to conventional wisdom. He created his wrestling empire by becoming the first promoter to take his product national in 1984, back when the pseudo-sport was considered a purely regional attraction. He pioneered pay-per-view when few thought there was money to be made. And he brought wrestling back to network television.

So McMahon certainly isn't going to let the naysayers get in the way of his attempts to put together a football league. "The audience gets it," McMahon said in a recent press conference. "We're here to have fun. That's what we do for a living. Football is fun. It's a great game."

Unlike the ill-fated USFL, McMahon has no pretense about being able to compete with the NFL's level of on-field play. "When you think of the number of players in Division I football who start and who never have the opportunity to try out for an NFL team... [it's] a huge number of quality players," said McMahon.

Instead, McMahon is hoping to find an audience for the XFL with trappings that run the gamut from innovation to flat-out gimmickry.

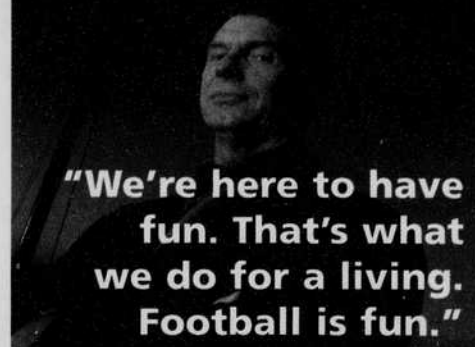
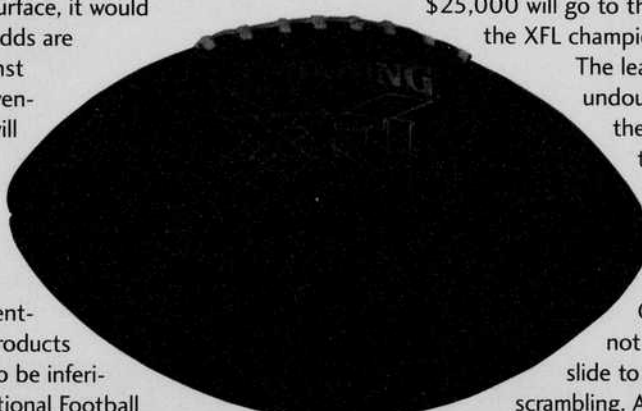
Unlike the NFL, the XFL, which will air on NBC and UPN, will not allow point-after-touchdown kicks—the scoring team will

have to run or pass for a conversion. Teams will have 35 seconds to get the next play started, as opposed to 45 in the NFL. And the league will offer a progressive pay scale. All players will make a base salary of \$35-\$50,000. But players will be awarded a bonus of \$2,500 per win, and a bonus of \$25,000 will go to the members of the XFL championship team.

The league will undoubtedly feature the sort of violence that made the WWF famous.

Fair catches on punts will not be allowed. Quarterbacks will not be allowed to slide to safety when scrambling. And head slaps will be legal.

Off the field, fans can expect the some of the same storyline antics that have turned McMahon's wrestling shows, "Raw is War" and "Smackdown," into ratings successes. Just like the "Smackdown" camera will conveniently follow Stone Cold Steve Austin into the dressing room just as he is about to attack someone, the XFL camera crew will be allowed into the locker rooms. And on the



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sidelines. And in the huddles. And the XFL seems to be spending more time hyping its cheerleaders than actual play on the field. Casting calls and tryouts have been held in each of the league's eight cities—New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, Las Vegas, Memphis, Birmingham and Orlando.

But all the gimmickry leads to a natural question—is it real? After all, this league is the brainchild of man who made a life out of manipulating a staged athletic competition. McMahon understands the doubts, but is emphatic about the XFL. "It is real football," he said. •

2001 XFL Schedule

Week 1

NY/NJ Hitmen @ Las Vegas Outlaws

Sat. Feb. 3, 8pm

Chicago Enforcers @ Orlando Rage

Sat. Feb. 3, 8pm

Memphis Maniax @ Birmingham Bolts

Sun. Feb. 4, TBA

LA Xtreme @ San Francisco Demons

Sun. Feb. 4, 4pm

Week 2

Chicago Enforcers @ LA Xtreme

Sat. Feb. 10, 8pm

SF Demons @ Orlando Rage

Sat. Feb. 10, 8pm

Birmingham Bolts @ NY/NJ Hitmen

Sun. Feb. 11, 4pm

Las Vegas Outlaws @ Memphis Maniax

Sun. Feb. 11, 7pm

Week 3

SF Demons @ Memphis Maniax

Sat. Feb. 17, TBA

LA Xtreme @ Las Vegas Outlaws

Sat. Feb. 17, 8pm

Chicago Enforcers @ Birmingham Bolts

Sun. Feb. 18, 4pm

Orlando Rage @ NY/NJ Hitmen

Sun. Feb. 18, 7pm

Week 4

NY/NJ Hitmen @ Chicago Enforcers

Sat. Feb. 24, 8pm

Birmingham Bolts @ Orlando Rage

Sat. Feb. 24, 8pm

Las Vegas Outlaws @ SF Demons

Sun. Feb. 25, 4pm

Memphis Maniax @ LA Xtreme

Sun. Feb. 25, 7pm

For the complete schedule, visit Steamtunnels.net.

Source: XFLBoard.com. All times are EST