

# The San Diego Union-Tribune.

July 26, 2006

## **New Spring Pro Football League Formed for College Graduates**

By Brent Schrottenboer  
Union-Tribune Staff Writer

A La Jolla-based pro football league that requires its players to have college degrees has been formed and is scheduled to begin play in April in college stadiums in the Southeastern, Big Ten and Atlantic Coast Conferences.

The All-American Football League will announce its formation today at a news conference in New York City. It plans to start with eight yet-to-be-announced teams playing in college or bowl stadiums, though the league is still working on obtaining stadium usage agreements, a television deal, as well as owners to operate the teams.

Former NCAA President Cedric Dempsey, the league's acting commissioner, said the league's initial teams will be based on football-crazy campuses of the Midwest and Southeast, with plans to expand after that. The league plans to draw many of its players from the campuses and college conferences in which teams are located. That way, local fans will get a chance to see graduated players from their favorite teams continue playing professionally after they've failed or elected not to pursue other pro football opportunities, such as in the NFL.

"It's going to resemble more of a college game," said Dempsey, a former San Diego State athletic director. "It will be a better opportunity for players not in the NFL to demonstrate their wares. The universities like it because of the emphasis on graduation. They also have stadiums hardly used in the offseason, and this gives them income for their facilities. It's win-win for the schools, athletes and fans."

The West Coast is not expected to field teams in the first year, though league headquarters are in La Jolla, where Dempsey resides.

Whether it can be viable in the long run is the initial big question among sports marketers. By playing in the spring, it will compete for talent and football fans' attention spans with NFL Europe and arenafootball2.

“On first blush, it's the strong connection with some pretty accomplished people that gives the idea some credibility,” said Paul Swangard, managing director of the Warsaw Sports Marketing Center at the University of Oregon. “But the practical reality is: Is there any money to be made doing this? They come into this with a really wonderful cause marketing appeal (by requiring players graduate), but I don't think fans go to games because they care if all the players graduate.”

Dempsey is chairman of a league board of managers that includes retired ACC Commissioner Gene Corrigan, retired UCLA Athletic Director Pete Dalis, former President of Turner Sports Harvey Schiller and former UCLA Chancellor Charles Young, among others.

Dempsey said the league expects to pay more to players than arenafootball2 or NFL Europe and to draw more fans because of its established connections between fans and players they've followed for years.

To buy a franchise, prospective ownership groups will need approximately \$2 million to \$3 million in initial cash outlay and a \$15 million line of credit, Dempsey said. The league is seeking local ownership of teams, with fans and alumni able to purchase ownership shares.

League spokesman David Hopcraft said the league hopes to start securing franchises around Labor Day but was “more than halfway there” in securing the necessary stadium agreements. He declined to name potential locations.

The formation of the league officially has been in the works since May 2004, when James Bailey, former executive vice president of the Cleveland Browns and Baltimore Ravens, filed papers establishing AAFL Enterprises, LLC. Bailey is the league's chief operating officer and also a La Jolla resident.