

# Cards part of NFL's experiment

League will use game in Mexico to judge sport's appeal

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TRIBUNE

The Cardinals just want their first win Sunday night in Mexico City against San Francisco.

The NFL wants a whole lot more.

The game may be the most significant undertaking the league has ever conducted in terms of international growth. How it fares will influence whether the NFL ever does it again.

"We know there is global interest in (hosting) a regular season game," NFL chief operating officer Roger Goodell said during a conference call Tuesday. "We want to see how this works and how it impacts

## 49ers at Cardinals

**When:** 5:30 p.m. Sunday

**Where:** Estadio Azteca, Mexico City

**TV:** Ch. 3, ESPN **Radio:** ESPN (860 AM)

**Records:** Cardinals 0-3, 49ers 1-2

the fan base."

Goodell said places like London, Canada and Japan all have expressed a desire to host NFL regular season games.

But the obvious choice, he said, was Mexico, where NFL interest has been "growing dramatically" over the years. Goodell said the league constantly conducts marketing studies and surveys to measure interest in Mexico, but he declined to elaborate on the findings of those studies and the NFL does not release statistics that might support that claim.

"American football is big,"

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ESPN televising the Sunday and Monday night games with Spanish announcers.

ESPN also broadcasts games of the ONEFA, Mexico's version of the NCAA and college football. Zendejas equated Mexican college football to that of United States high schools.

"If I were looking at any culture that wanted to emulate American culture, I would think turning them on to something that is so apple pie and Chevrolet would be the way to go," said Louie Moses, president and co-founder of Moses Anshell, a Phoenix-based advertising agency that has run ads in Mexican markets for the Arizona Office of Tourism. "The NFL is a pretty American product — like McDonald's, which I'm sure has been very successful in Mexico City.

"This is my gut feeling. I haven't done any research on that, but if Mexico City or Mexico as a country is the target, I would think the NFL has done its homework."

Moses also said the sheer amount of people in Mexico City would probably make it worthwhile for the NFL to market its product south of the border.

Mexican businesses have bought into the concept. The television network Televisa is the main sponsor of the game. The NFL already had a business office in Mexico City. And there has been talk about playing a game there since the last preseason game in 2001.

Goodell said the NFL did look at other NFL teams to have a "home" game in Mexico, and even had some preliminary discussions with some of them. But he said the Cardinals were "anxious to do this."

and that they were a natural to be the home team.

Giving up a home game — after an 0-3 start — looks a little harsher for the Cardinals at this point. While the Cards benefit from a national TV appearance, they will not benefit financially if there is a huge crowd.

Goodell said mechanisms were put in place so that neither the Cards nor the 49ers would be hurt at the gate. The same plan also means the Cards don't get a huge upside despite a larger-than-normal "home" crowd.

While Estadio Azteca normally holds 105,000, the NFL's senior director of international public affairs, Pete Abitante, said capacity will be about 20,000 less than that.

Abitante said that was because the league is roping off the first 10 rows to preserve sight lines. Other spots in the stadium can't be sold to accommodate the media crush, Abitante said.

There still might be an issue of selling enough seats. The most popular NFL teams in Mexico were the ones with all the TV time in the 1970s and 1980s: Dallas, Miami, Oakland, Denver and San Francisco. The Cardinals don't make the list.

As of Tuesday, some 20,000 tickets still remained for the game. Joaquin Del Rivero, general director of NFL Mexico, told The Associated Press there's a 50-50 chance of a sellout. But Abitante called it a "walk-up culture," one that can sell as many as 30,000 seats for a sporting event on game day.

"We are comfortable it will be packed," Abitante said.

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