

The rouging CFL takes on the talent of the NFL

Unlike what your girlfriend told you, field size matters Phillips



ANDREW
RENFREE

point

With the Grey Cup scheduled for Sunday and the National Football League in full swing, there's no better time to strike up a rousing debate about which country boasts a better football league. In one corner is the NFL—a sporting juggernaut that brings in more money each year than most third world countries combined. In the other corner is the seemingly meek Canadian Football League that, while small in comparison to its American counterpart, still produces a better product on the field. It might be tough to see through all the drama and hype that comes as an unwanted side effect to every NFL game like blindness from Viagra, but when you focus on the play itself, it's clear that Canada has the upper hand.

First, the CFL is much easier to watch because the game is quicker. It's one thing for avid fans to sit on a couch all day and watch NFL games plod along, but it's excruciating for the casual fan. Because the NFL has a 40-second play clock, and the CFL's is only 20 seconds, the Canadian game has up to twice as many plays in a 60-minute game, with more actual football, and less huddling and watching the clock tick down. The CFL is like twice the football for half the calories. If the CFL were Subway sandwich, the NFL would be the Filet O' Fish.

The CFL is also a much more offensive game—and I don't mean unpleasant, I mean high-scoring. There are several facets of the Canadian game that make it easier for teams to put points on the board: the extra receiver in the CFL means one more target for quarterbacks

to toss the ball to; the receivers also have more room to run passing routes because the field is longer, wider and the end zones are larger.

In addition to the larger field dimensions and extra player, Canadian teams can send all receivers in motion before the snap whereas the NFL only allows one player to be in motion. This results in more complex crossing patterns that might free up a receiver for a big pass. Mr Phillips may argue that people don't care for the offensive part of the game, but this is North America, not Europe—high scoring is king on this continent.

The third asset Canadian football has over its American cousin is the return game. Canadian rules are set up so that big returns on punts, kickoffs and sometimes even missed field goals happen fairly regularly. Because the NFL has a fair-catch rule, players will often wave the halo over their heads to protect themselves from a bonecrushing hit while killing the chance of a big return.

You don't see players in the NFL like Edmonton's Gizmo Williams who made a career of returning kicks the length of the field. While Phillips may say that interceptions and Hollywood-style production for NFL games is what entices fans, I would rather see a 100-yard punt return any day.

If all of this isn't enough to convince you the Canadian game is better consider this point: the rouge. That precious single point that comes when field goals, or punts in the Golden Bears' case, can't be brought out of the end zone is as Canadian as maple syrup and beavers. It means that a team can win a game on a last-second play by one point on what amounts to simply a botched field goal in the NFL. It's Canadian football at its best. And it's something that can't be matched by anything in American football, not even John Madden spouting off onomopoeias and passing it off as commentary. Take that John Madden.

Oh Renfree, it's not the size that counts, but what you do with it



TREVOR
PHILLIPS

counterpoint

Mr Renfree, my poor, misguided Canadian comrade, you can't honestly think that the CFL is better than the NFL. That's like saying sno-cones are better than slurpees because you can get them in paper cones. Well, they're not, and neither is the CFL.

The major flaw with the CFL is that it's a minor football league. The players that aren't big enough (see your hero Gizmo Williams), fast enough (see Argo John Avery), or are suspended (see Ricky Williams), escape to the 25-year-old Astroturf and sub-million dollar wages after being dismissed from the much more talented and strict NFL. The CFL, like the rouge—that stupid point awarded for futility—is a league that commends suckiness in favour of respectability, and for that they get my thumbs down.

To further demonstrate the CFL's inferiority, I will pose this question to you Andrew: Why do you think the CFL has rules to create more offence? Because they think that ten touchdowns per game is enough to hide the lack of talent and second-rate players that grace their shabby fields. This mentality turns the CFL into a joke because they sell out to the offensive style. Players in motion and three downs to eliminate the run is like having a giant sign blinking that says, "We know we suck but touchdowns are major awesome."

Another thing that's completely useless is the size of the field. The NFL is the one league that didn't listen to the bigger is always better argument. With less room to move and the exceptional speed of the game, players have to be ultimate athletes and make the most of

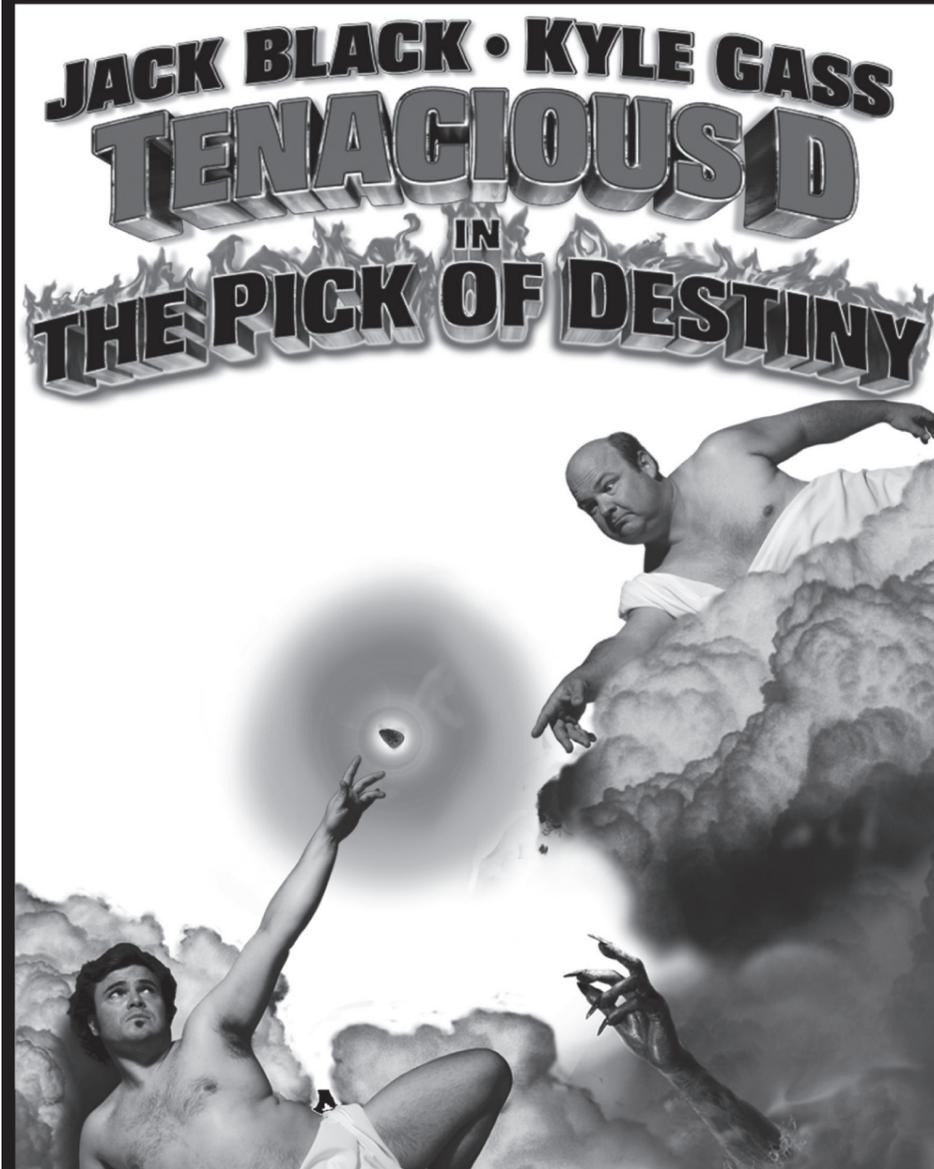
the sometimes cramped space. The competitors who can't perform get moved to the CFL; there they have ten extra yards to play because they need more space to be more effective. All this does is serve to make the NFL an elite league for athletes and athletic performance.

Returning a punt in the NFL is an example of this. In the NFL it's much harder to do because of the limited space. Since 250lb linebackers hit hard enough to kill, return men deserve a fair catch rule. The CFL goes with the five-yard buffer zone to allow for more return yards in another lame attempt to get more offence.

But if talent, smaller fields and better defences don't sell the NFL, their coverage by national television networks definitely should. It starts with the amazing marketing power of monopolizing an entire day from 10am, when pre-game starts, until 10pm, when post-game finishes. They have four continent-wide networks broadcasting in high-definition with two or three broadcasters at each game to provide in-depth analysis.

But, the most amazing thing that separates the NFL from the CFL is the sheer visual image on screen. Take for example a game in Cincinnati, with the 50 000 plus in attendance, the Orange and Black covering the field and amazing action on it. It's like watching a three-hour action movie with an unpredictable plot line. That's why I choose my NFL Sunday Ticket over Friday Night Football.

It's a shame Mr Renfree. For the last few years the CFL has really grown within this nation and even started to garner some international attention. But with the collapse of the Ottawa franchise, the Ricky Williams distraction and, in some ways, the ending of the Eskimos streak, the league has really taken a step back this year. I would love to see a day when the NFL's worst go against the CFL's best in a battle for football respect. But until that day comes, you'll find me flipping between CBS and FOX on Sundays, not falling asleep in front of the CBC.



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