NFL expansion in Europe? Here's what the Commish says

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As the acronym suggests, the National Football League (NFL) has always been a strictly "national" football league. Since its inception in 1920, all teams have been based in American cities. However, since 2007, the league has integrated an "international series" into the league schedule, in an attempt to branch the NFL out into audiences on the global stage. Fast forward to today, as the thought of a possible expansion team outside the U.S., is being discussed by commissioner Roger Goodell.

To hark back to its origins, the first attempt at international play actually came back in 1926, when the AFL's New York Yankees and the Los Angeles Wildcats played at the Maple Leaf Stadium in Toronto, marking the first match played outside the U.S. Then came a series of exhibition games and series, loosely known as "The American Bowl," where 40 preseason games were played across the world, including stadiums that would be utilized in the 21st century: Wembley Stadium in London, England, and Estadio Azteca in Mexico City, Mexico.

Now, fast-forward to 2005, where the first "official" regular-season game would be played, between the Arizona Cardinals and the San Francisco 49ers, in the aforementioned Estadio Azteca. This game shelled out over 100,000 fans, proving that an interest in American football outside the U.S., was definitely there. This set the precedent for a steady increase of international games to be played each season, capped with what will be a record-setting 2026 season, where nine games across seven countries, and four continents will be played.

The important statistic here is four continents. The remarkability of holding not only this many games but also on that many continents cannot be understated, for how prominent the presences of other sports are. For example, the host countries of these games: The United Kingdom, Australia, Brazil, France, Spain, Germany and Mexico, all have one aspect in common — either their national sport or prominently played sport, is soccer, not football. The heavy prominence of soccer to many, will make it hard to believe that a sport like American football will be able to make a presence.

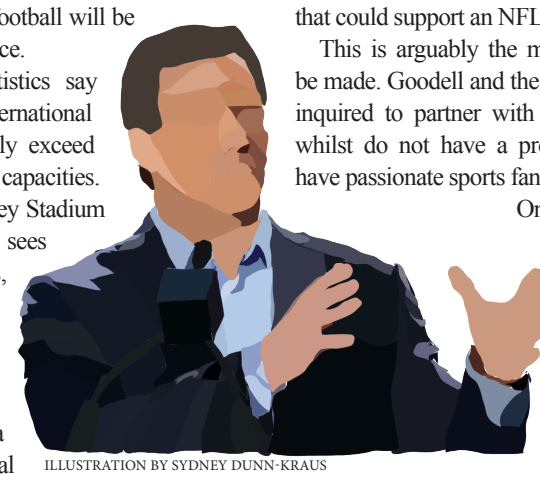


ILLUSTRATION BY SYDNEY DUNN-KRAUS

However, the statistics say otherwise. These international series games regularly exceed 80-90% the stadium's capacities. For example, Wembley Stadium in London regularly sees roughly 86,000 fans, while Allianz Arena passes 65,000.

So, what does this all go to show? To Goodell, it proves a market for professional American football is there, world-wide. Then along the way, an idea formed: what if we expanded the league outside the U.S.?

It's an interesting prospect for sure, considering there has never been an NFL team located outside the U.S. In fact, the closest we've gotten to expanding the league in general, has been nationally, with teams like the Houston Texans joining in 1999 and Jacksonville Jaguars joining the league in the early 1995.

"If our international growth continues the way it is, I can see international growth on an international basis," Goodell said when asked about the idea of expanding internationally.

He brings up an interesting point here. The evidence I've discussed previously proves a growing interest in the sport. So, it makes sense to infer that at this rate, the league could eventually expand with not only games, but teams located in these partnered-countries.

"And in some of these markets, which they're undoubtedly even today, I think there are cities that could support an NFL team," Goodell said.

This is arguably the most important point to be made. Goodell and the NFL have strategically inquired to partner with big-market cities, that whilst do not have a prominent NFL fanbase, have passionate sports fan bases, in general.

One of the hallmarks of any sport is their fans. In the NFL especially, fanbases can give home teams significant home-field advantages, and overall increase the desirability of that team to both potential incoming fans and players.

Now let's tie this all together, and analyze the process in which Goodell is using for this international expansion. First, he assesses which cities in particular hold passionate fanbases for their respective sports. Given this, it makes sense why London, early on, became a hotspot for international play. This being the Premier League, which possesses teams with such rich and unhinged fanbases, that perhaps not only crave soccer, but competition in general.

This makes sense when looking through the scope that many of these Englishmen aren't used to sport. So, the reason Goodell's tactics are so effective is because he slowly introduces these cities to the sport, which in turn allows himself and the NFL executives to gauge the fan engagement with these games. So, they can decide whether to increase the amount of games played, or branch out to different cities. However, in this case, both the latter and former are true.

These decisions Goodell and company have made have not been met without criticism though. Some fans and journalists have felt the decisions to expand were made mostly out of greed, since there are various sponsorship and commercial opportunities for the NFL to capitalize on. For example, they make a lot of money through monetinized streaming services, such as NFL Game Pass.

Players and coaches as well, feel the increased use of international games, specifically the travel schedules, have taken a toll on them. This is an aspect that is not often thought about, as there is extra preparation that is involved, with bringing a full team and staff across various countries and or continents.

So, in general, love them or hate them, the NFL international series are here to stay. The impact they've made on the league, both economically and socially, cannot be understated. This is why the prospect of NFL expansion teams consistently gets thrown around. While there are definitely fanbases that will love to support an NFL team, logistically, the league needs a larger sample size to gauge the long-term successability an NFL expansion team outside of the U.S. may have.

Seven underground artists you should know

By K. FAE HULL
Contributing Writer

Underground music spans every genre, and anti-genre. It can be hard to quantify if an artist is underground or not, but generally these aren't artists you can find on Billboard charts. Another tell is when an artist has fewer monthly listeners and has never signed with a record label. Whether you are looking for something new and fun, or music within a familiar genre to pad out your Spotify playlist, you've come to the right place.

Here are seven underground artists you should know:

If you appreciate folk-rock, give the musician Skyway Man a listen. Skyway Man is a musical troupe brought together by singer-songwriter James Wallace. Though the band is folk-rock, their songs include bluesy keys, futuristic synths and even gospel-like chorus harmonies. Wallace describes the band as "future-gospel songs."

Wallace is quite a character. The Skyway Man webpage details the inspiration behind the band's most recent album, "Flight of the Long Distance Healer." Wallace and a friend found an old box of letters between a woman named Kate and Dr. James Cyr, detailing how their spirituality centered around aliens. Wallace fell down a rabbit hole and eventually contacted Dr. Cyr and Kate.

His earlier albums already had themes around space and spirituality; however, "Flight of the Long Distance Healer" goes full on cosmic. It sounds like a lonely night calling out to the cosmos and finding comfort in the twinkle of the stars. If you need a good jumping-off point (despite their small discography), "The World Only Ends When You Die" is easy to get into and catchy.

For psychedelic rock lovers, the band Tangerine Stoned is the way to go. An Italian psychedelic rock band created by singer Chris Jei and guitarist Alex Key. At first, the two were joined by three others, and then they eventually became a trio of singer Jei, guitarist Danielle Gasperini and drummer Francesco Guerra.

The band has a very mellow style that builds gradually. Their song "Inverno Indiano" from their album "Delliti Scoperti" captures this build-up and establishes itself as a standout song, not needing vocals, just taking you on a journey of sound. The band goes between Italian and English, and the lyrics of their album "Dog Day Afternoon" suggest lethargic hot summer days. The keyboard has an upbeat tone; distortion and echoes bring nostalgia, and the bass adds a specific funk to their music that can't be replicated. They are a band that is still making music and live appearances, so keep an eye out for more music from Tangerine Stoned in the future.

Thinking Fellers Union Local 282 is a rock sound art band formed in 1986. They may not be a true underground band, having become popular within the sound art community and developed a small cult following as they released music regularly until 2001.

However, sound art is a pretty niche genre, so popularity within that genre isn't saying much when considering the wider scope of music. Their music meanders between melodic and discordant, with the throughline of ambient noise and sound art. Their lyrics conjure imagery of apocalypse, operations and science gone weird. "Strangers From the Universe" is a standout album of theirs. Notably, this album is their most popular album; it is their most cohesive collection of songs while still staying within their strange style. Still, throughout their discography are strewn some gems, weird and wonderful, such as their songs "Not in the Popply Dimension" and "91 Dodge Van."

Musician Jeffery Lewis, like Thinking Fellers Union, is another artist who is popular within his niche. His music falls within the anti-folk style. Unlike how it seems, anti-folk is not the opposite of folk music; in fact, it is very likely that if you enjoy folk music, you will enjoy this style. Anti-folk is a genre that developed as a reaction to the folk genre becoming formulaic and rising in popularity. Key signatures of this style are self-deprecating themes, punk and folk inspirations, and a raw acoustic sound.

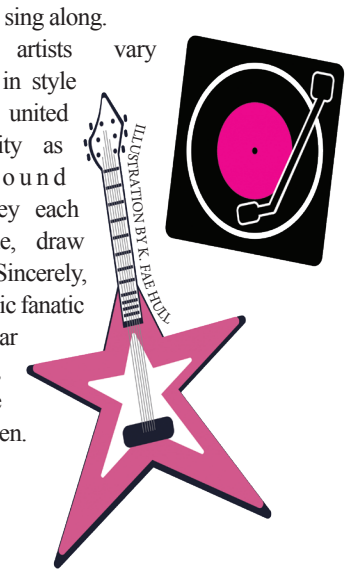
Lewis' lyrics are a highlight of his music. They are charmingly pessimistic while still, somehow, being hopeful. His lyrics are complex and witty and often leave you thinking. Lewis' most popular and first album, "The Last Time I Did Acid I Went Insane," included songs about dying in the East River and the hopelessness of love, just as it had songs about discovering who you are and the secret fleeting connections between strangers. His newest album, "The EVEN MORE Freewheelin'," is a bit more polished and mellow. The song "Sometimes Life Hits You" is a humorous song about life being a roller-coaster ride. "Inger" is a bittersweet song about loss, home and love. It's poetic, clever and devastating. If you like "Inger," you may also like "The River" and "Dream Wheel."

Could be Stars is an indie number with a whimsical style. The music is clean and emotional. The vocals are what make them especially remarkable; they have a unique way of harmonizing slightly off. The vocals provoke a slow, depressed feeling, in a very cathartic way. Their album "Everything I Love" is especially well composed. Within "Everything I Love," the song "Starfall" is the "star" of the show. It is short and sweet, and it doesn't overstay its welcome. The vocals in "Snow (Electric Version)" especially arouse nostalgia, like singing karaoke in the car. Everything they make has a bittersweet feeling about it.

Another psychedelic rock band, The Pilgrims, has a melodic, soft style and wistful feel. It's a project created by Gabriele Fiori, the headliner of heavier bands Black Rainbows and Killer Boogie, when he wanted to delve into a folksier vibe. Their music almost feels like an autumnal lullaby. Their albums "Walking into the Forest" and "...From the Earth to the Sky and Back" are filled with mellow acoustic songs and hypnotic distortion. "Dragonfly," a song from "Walking into the Forest," is easy to catch yourself humming along to, and the acoustic guitar solo in the middle has striking energy. Their music is perfect to play while studying, hiking, driving and admiring the changing autumn leaves.

Barry and the Fountains are a group formed from The Fountains, surrounding the jazz musician and vocalist Barry Jean Fontenot. They have a chill, smooth, R&B sound. The band only has one released album and a few singles. Their album "The Great Extreme" is a short collection, punctuated by bassist Dylan Harris' exciting basslines, saxophonist Izzy G's sweet playing and Barry's precise, flowing singing. "The Flow," a song from "The Great Extreme," is unique. "The Flow" slowly swells; it develops, mounting to an eventual climax where the chorus repeats in an extremely satisfying way. Barry changes how he sings it each time, adding flair to keep you engaged with his voice, but he sings clearly, and it is easy to sing along.

These artists vary drastically in style but are united in solidarity as underground artists. They each have value, draw and soul. Sincerely, from a music fanatic to you, dear reader, give these bands a listen.



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