

## American Football Gaining International Popularity

In most parts of the world, if you say the word "football" people assume you are referring to soccer, the most popular and most widely followed sport in the world. However, American football is starting to spark more interest overseas. The National Football League actively promotes American-style football overseas, sending players as ambassadors and holding pre-season games in Europe, Mexico and Japan. Games are broadcast in many countries and the Super Bowl is broadcast to almost every country in the world.

American football is played in almost every continent on the planet including North and South America, Asia, Europe and the Pacific Rim nations. The International Federation of American Football is the official international governing body of American Football and oversees 45 member organizations. Beginning in 1999, the International Federation of American Football has also sponsored a world cup of American football with Japan taking the honors in both 1999 and 2003.

American football has also grown in popularity in Mexico, where many households are able to watch games on American television stations. There has been such interest in American football in Mexico that the NFL opened an office in Mexico City in 1997 to supervise fan development, marketing, public relations and special events. The NFL also publishes a Spanish-language web site targeted to Mexican fans.

American football is also gaining popularity in Europe. In 1991, the National Football League backed a European league called the World League of Football. From that emerged NFL Europe, a six-team league that serves as a spring developmental league for National Football League teams in the United States. Five of NFL Europe's teams are based in Germany and one is in the Netherlands. The National Football League not only uses the NFL Europe to develop new players, but also to develop and test new rules and regulations.

American football has always been popular in Canada although Canada does have its own Canadian Football League which plays with slightly different rules than American football. However, the National Football League continues to reach out to Canadian fans. For Super Bowl XL, held in Detroit, just across the border from the Canadian city of Windsor, the National Football League held special events specifically for Canadian fans including a special train that transported Canadian fans to Windsor to view the game at an arena there. The National Football League also publishes a website for Canadian fans that focuses on the progress and statistics of Canadian-born players.

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### About the Author

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