





The game plan

Peter Kearney and Ciaran Maguire of Dublin firm Reddy Charlton have been advising on the staging of the first regular-season NFL game in Dublin later this year. *Gazette* linebacker Andrew Fanning tackles the firm's quarterbacks

Reddy Charlton LLP has been advising the GAA and Croke Park on the staging of the first regular-season NFL game in Dublin, which will take place later this year. Managing partner Peter Kearney and partner Ciaran Maguire say that the firm's advice on bringing the NFL to Dublin was mainly linked to the use of Croke Park for the 'home team' fixture for the Pittsburgh Steelers. (Their opponents have not yet been announced, but media speculation suggests it could be the Green Bay Packers from Wisconsin.)

Reddy Charlton has a long-standing relationship with the GAA, acting for both the organisation and the commercial arm of Croke Park. The relationship goes back to one of the firm's founding partners, John McKnight, who played inter-county football for Armagh in the 1960s.

Maguire describes the NFL's international arm as "a pleasure to deal with", adding that the US organisation had plenty of experience in organising games in various venues elsewhere in Europe – including London and Munich.

"It was evident that they were very keen to make this a success, and they were very collaborative in the way

that they worked to achieve the aim of bringing this set-piece event to Ireland," he stated. "There's no doubt that we benefited from that to a certain extent. They knew what they needed and they could set it out clearly."

Field of play

The Reddy Charlton partner says that the deal that brought the NFL match to Dublin was, at its heart, a commercial contract, adding that there were "quite a few moving parts" in an event of that scale.

There was "tremendous support" from the Department of Tourism and Sport to make the event happen, he said. The firm's advice partly covered the practical aspects of accommodating the 40,000 fans who were expected to come from the US.

"You have a policing plan to deal with, you have a transport plan. There is just a necessity for an event of the NFL's scale and scope to have facilities available for things like 'tailgating', which wouldn't be common here," Maguire adds.

"There are puzzles that need to be solved, because it's not something that we generally cater for, so we need to cut our cloth accordingly and tailor it for a bespoke event – and that needs a lot of help," he states.



Touchdown

Describing Croke Park as a ‘jewel in the crown’ for Dublin, Maguire says that the dimensions of the pitch make it better suited for the NFL, in some ways, than a venue such as the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium: “And obviously there’s a lot that needs to be changed within the stadium to facilitate an event like this,” he adds.

“The media interest is of a completely different level to anything that you would need to deal with domestically, and that necessitates an expanded press box and additional facilities as mundane as the cabling that goes with it. There is a phenomenal number of moving parts that all need to marry up,” he says.

Asked what advice the firm would have for anyone looking to attract future big sporting events to Ireland, Kearney points to the importance of the ‘soft power’ that we can yield, epitomised, in this case, by the familial links between the Rooney family, who own the Pittsburgh Steelers, and Ireland.

“I think this event shows the strength of those ties and the advantage that Ireland

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has in terms of our global network. Those types of connections might serve other organisations well as a starting point for attracting future events,” he adds. “It might also provide inspiration to look beyond the traditional goals of getting football or rugby competitions to these shores.”

In a huddle

In addition to the GAA, the firm has a number of sporting organisations, clubs, and societies on its books as clients. “These bodies typically required a broad range of legal services,” says Peter Kearney, “some of which might not necessarily immediately come to mind under the banner of sports law.

For example, for many of the clubs they advise, the most significant assistance they require is related to trustees and, more recently, corporate trustees.

Maguire described sports law as “a very broad palette of work”, ranging from advising clubs on internal issues and personnel matters, to land deals, sponsorship, and broadcasting rights.

Another big issue for sports clubs, says Kearney, is the area of child safeguarding and child protection.

On the topic of the regulatory environment for sports organisations, Maguire says that there are certainly more obligations than existed in the past: “But, to a large extent, I see that as a good thing. Clubs are much better geared up. It’s not people ‘having a go’ to the same extent as might have been the case previously.”

On a broader scale, the biggest change for large sporting organisations has been the increased thirst for broadcast content – people now expect to be able to access games on demand.

Kearney points out that this has been a trickier issue for the GAA as a community-based organisation, since it wants people to attend games and so needs to strike a balance between what it makes available to broadcasters and ensuring physical attendance in stadiums.

Loose ball

Where else does Kearney see a role for solicitors interested in sports law? He acknowledges that there tends to be a

degree of scepticism or uneasiness on the part of clubs or organisations who have to deal with agents on behalf of players or young adults. He identifies that as an area where solicitors can become more involved.

“Our firm’s experience is primarily in acting for organisations or clubs – as opposed to the individual sports person – but for the broader profession, I don’t see why solicitors can’t have a larger role to play, particularly by bringing the trust and confidence of our profession to those relationships.”

Ciaran Maguire adds that solicitors and barristers are also well-placed to bring a wealth of experience to organisations on corporate-governance issues that have become a ‘hot-button’ topic within sport in recent years, citing issues at the FAI and the Olympic Council of Ireland as examples.

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Many solicitor trainees express an interest in getting into sports law, and the Reddy Charlton lawyers believe that an involvement in playing or organising sport at a personal level can provide some advantages.

Kearney, who was involved in the GAA during his teens, is careful to stress, however, that formal advice means drawing on your legal – rather than sporting – knowledge.

“Be involved with your club or your local body and get a good understanding from that vantage point,” advises Maguire. “You get a good sense of how the broader organisation works, and you make the connections and foster links to the people that will need advice at a more senior level.”

Andrew Fanning is a freelance journalist for the Law Society Gazette.



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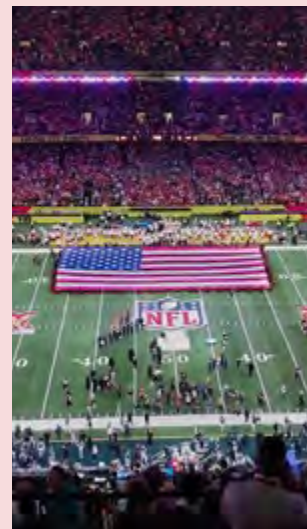
The National Football League (NFL) is the top professional league in the US for American football. Its championship, the Super Bowl, tends to be the most watched television event each year.

The NFL has its beginnings in a league formed in 1920 called the American Professional Football Association. Of the ten teams that took part in the original league, none are still involved in the NFL. The Green Bay Packers joined in 1921 and is the oldest and longest-running franchise in NFL history. In 1922, the league changed its name to the National Football League. In 1959, a rival league, the American Football League (AFL), was formed. In 1970, the two leagues merged, incorporating many AFL innovations, but taking the NFL name. There are currently 32 teams in the NFL. They are divided equally between the American Football Conference (AFC) and the National Football Conference (NFC), each with four divisions of four teams.

Each NFL season begins annually with a three-week preseason in August, followed by an 18-week regular season, which runs from early September to early January, with each team playing 17 games and having one ‘bye week’.

Following the conclusion of the regular season, seven teams from each conference, including the four division winners and three ‘wild-card’ teams, advance to the playoffs – a single-elimination tournament that culminates in the Super Bowl. This is played in early February between the winners of the AFC and NFC championship games.

The Green Bay Packers hold the most combined NFL championships, winning nine titles before the Super Bowl era and four Super Bowls since. The New England Patriots and Pittsburgh Steelers are tied for the most Super Bowl victories at six each. The reigning league champions are the Philadelphia Eagles.



COIN TOSS

- NFL players weren’t required to wear helmets until 1943,
- More than 127.7 million viewers watched this year’s Super Bowl,
- The cost of a 30-second advertisement in the 2025 Super Bowl was said to be around \$8 million (or \$266,666 a second) – the most expensive Super Bowl commercials in history,
- The Dallas Cowboys franchise is worth over \$10.1 billion – the most valuable team in the NFL (according to Forbes, all 32 NFL teams are worth at least \$4 billion),
- CBS paid \$4.65 million in 1962 for the first exclusive rights to broadcast NFL games. In its current ten-year deal (2023-2033), Fox pays \$2.2 billion annually for its AFC package. ABC/ESPN/Disney pays \$2.7 billion a year (2022-2033).