

NFL Agent Huyghue Named First Commissioner of New UFL League

By Aaron Kuriloff

Sept. 17 (Bloomberg) -- Michael Huyghue, a former professional football executive and player agent, was named the first commissioner of the new United Football League, scheduled to begin play in August 2008.

Huyghue, 45, spent the last two decades working as an attorney with the National Football League's management council, an executive with the Detroit Lions and Jacksonville Jaguars and an agent representing players including Carolina Panthers first-round draft choice Jon Beason and suspended Tennessee Titans cornerback Pacman Jones.

Huyghue, who also ran his own agency and consulting firm, said he's assembling a management team for the New York-based league and relying on experience he gained working with the then-expansion Jaguars and other start-ups.

"I've seen what it takes to be successful and I've seen what franchises and leagues have done that made them unsuccessful," he said in a telephone interview. "So I think I have a good feel for what steps we need to take for this to be effective."

The league, which hasn't decided where to locate teams, is scheduled to play outdoors, using rules similar to those in college and professional football. The first franchise owner is Mark Cuban, who owns the Dallas Mavericks of the National Basketball Association, a league news release said.

"Michael possesses the perfect combination of first-hand expertise in the football industry with the strategic vision necessary to shape and launch the UFL," the league's founder, WR Hambrecht & Co. Chairman Bill Hambrecht, said in the statement.

Cornell, Michigan

Huyghue, a graduate of Cornell University and the University of Michigan law school, began his football career as a legal intern with the NFL Players Association and joined the league's Management Council as an attorney in 1987, where he handled hundreds of arbitration hearings. He became general manager of the Birmingham franchise in the NFL's former world league in 1989, at the age of 29, making him the youngest general manager in professional football, according to the release.

Huyghue then worked as vice president and general counsel of the Detroit Lions and senior vice president of football operations for the Jaguars.

Huyghue joins Hambrecht, 71, who is founding the league with Tim Armstrong, vice president of advertising sales for Google, Inc., and has hired Bill Daugherty, founder of Interactive Search Holdings and a former NBA vice president.

NFL Rivals

The 32-team NFL, which generates the highest television ratings of any U.S. sport, has seen competitors come and go. Since it agreed to merge with the American Football League in 1966, three other challengers have folded: The World Football League played a full season in 1974 before shutting down; the United States Football League lasted from 1983 to 1986; and the XFL closed in 2001 after one season.

Huyghue said other agents helped convince him the new league could attract players by appealing to those such as former Jaguars quarterback Byron Leftwich, who was released before the NFL season began.

Huyghue said the UFL would compete with the NFL by maintaining a high level of play at affordable prices and focusing on cities without NFL teams.

“When teams start reporting wait lists for tickets of 30,000 or 50,000, you know there's a demand for the sport,” he said.