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CFL unveils policy on violence against women

Focuses on prevention, education

BY CHRIS O'LEARY, EDMONTON JOURNAL AUGUST 7, 2015



Canadian Football League Commissioner Jeffrey Orridge

Photograph by: Darryl Dyck, MARKETWIRED

The Canadian Football League ventured into a new territory on Thursday when it announced its policy on violence against women. Over the past year, violence against women has repeatedly found its way into the news, attaching itself to well-known names. First, it was NFL player Ray Rice being caught on video punching his then-fiancee unconscious in an elevator. Former CBC radio personality Jian Ghomeshi and comedian Bill Cosby dominated headlines and social media discussion with a myriad of accusers coming forward against them.

The CFL's policy focuses on prevention, education and "will respond quickly on behalf of those harmed when it does occur, provide help to those affected by it and seek behaviour change from anyone found to be perpetrating violence."

"The Canadian Football League condemns violence against women in all of its forms: Domestic violence, sexual assault, verbal abuse and the disrespectful and damaging attitudes that can form the foundation of violence. We all need to do our part to combat it," CFL commissioner Jeffrey Orridge said.

"For us it means educating for change across the entire league. It means offering to help women when they tell us they face violence. It means supporting behaviour change on the part of perpetrators and it means when we have clear evidence, imposing sanctions.

"This policy was designed with women with a sincere effort to act in the best interests of women. It was developed in partnership with EVA (Ending Violence Association) Canada, following consultations with several women's groups who are currently delivering ... programs with CFL teams."

The policy applies to all CFL employees. That includes players, coaches, officials, executives and staff. All will receive annual mandatory training on violence against women and the issues surrounding it. The league says it will assess any reports of violence and assess the situation and future risk to the women or children in question and provide them support.

"We will not act as criminal investigators, fact finders judges or juries," Orridge said. "Our focus will be on providing access to experts who can intervene in the situation, assess the risk to the woman, mitigate any harm in the best possible way, seek the behaviour change on behalf of the perpetrators and contribute to positive outcomes for individuals, families and communities."

In clear and documented cases of violence, the league will impose sanctions ranging from suspensions to a lifetime ban.

Claire Freeman was one of the consultants in the development of the policy. The former executive director of Hamilton's Interval House said that while public outrage over the past year's big-name violence against women cases often screams for punitive results, the path that the CFL's policy will take is more effective.

"I want the right intervention for the right risk and I think that's why we have to do it in a systematic way," she said.

Freeman said that not only football fans, but other corporations should be inspired by the policy.

"I have worked in this field for many years and worked on the front line with the women who have left relationships and worked with many many families who have unfortunately lost their children or mothers to this issue. I've also been on research projects with men asking them 'What made you do it?' " she said.

"This is a completely engaged community question that we all need to put forward.

"We could collectively give that answer to them and that's what's so amazing about this program. It is a start of a change and the CFL, this leader in Canada ... I want other corporations in Canada to look at what the CFL has done."

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