

CFL tackles violence against women with B.C. initiative

If there is evidence, CFL commissioner says there will be sanctions

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[The Canadian Football League](#) is taking a lead role in tackling violence against women with new rules that ban players for life if they're caught in domestic violence.

The new policies set a precedent in Canadian sport by implementing yearly domestic abuse training that spans the league.

The move comes after a series of high-profile cases in the U.S. National Football League. When video emerged of NFL running back Ray Rice smashing his wife Janay Palmer's head against an elevator wall last year and knocking her unconscious, it sparked international outrage.

The league was criticized by fans and observers of not doing enough to punish players.

"I don't really think it's a football problem; it's a societal problem," said CFL commissioner Jeffrey Orridge.

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"The 'Ray Rice' issue highlights a problem that's going on the world. It's really about protecting the sanctity of the life of other human beings. We want to use the weight of the CFL to change attitudinal behaviours," Orridge told CBC Friday.

CFL says it has a voice in the community

The new policy was announced in Vancouver Thursday and B.C. was lauded for being at the forefront of tackling violence against women with programs like ["Be More Than a Bystander."](#)

"We have a voice in the community and I can't think of a better way to use that voice than to do some good in our community, said Orridge. "(Violence) won't be tolerated any longer."

If there is evidence, Orridge says, there will be sanctions. Those sanctions are harsh, ranging from suspensions to a potential lifetime playing ban. The policy applies to anybody who works for the CFL, not just players.

Hopes that the NFL will follow CFL move

Ending Violence Association of B.C. helped developed the ground-breaking initiative for the CFL.

Tracy Porteous, executive director of the association, said the span of the league's commitment across the country sends a strong message.

"Never before have we seen a professional sports team sign on with an anti-violence women's group to say they are going to do crime prevention messaging across their entire province and (that message)

spun off to the Toronto Argos, Calgary and Winnipeg," she said.

Porteous said she hopes the NFL will follow the same model.

Team leaders say it just makes sense.

"We have a tie to fans and a voice in the community and I can't think about of a better way to use that voice to do some good in the community," said B.C. Lions President and CEO Dennis Skulsky.

Fans also applauded the move.

"These guys are role models to the kids so anything they're doing to help bring awareness and bring it into the public eye is a great thing," said Greg Kilvert, a football watcher.

"It makes me proud to be part of a city that brings awareness to those kind of issues. And the Lions have done a great job," said Jenn Marshall, a fan of the team.

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