

# Canadian Football League looks to reduce violence against women with new policy

**Orridge: “We are doing our part to educate for change, and support behaviour change.”**

By Chris O'Leary, Edmonton Journal August 7, 2015 7:03 AM

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**Canadian Football League Commissioner Jeffrey Orridge**

**Photograph by: Darryl Dyck , MARKETWIRED**

VANCOUVER — The Canadian Football League ventured into new territory on Thursday when it announced its policy on violence against women.

Over the past year, violence against women — and the reaction to that violence — has captured headlines. NFL player Ray Rice, caught on video punching his then-finance unconscious in an elevator, featured prominently among those high profile cases.

The CFL’s new 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,” said CFL commissioner Jeffrey Orridge.

“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 examine 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,” she said. “I want other corporations in Canada to look at what the CFL has done.”

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