

A STEP-BY-STEP PLAYBOOK

The Advertisers' Guide to the '26 NFL Season

A step-by-step playbook for getting in the game,
from a first test to the Super Bowl.

NFL PLAYBOOK
2026

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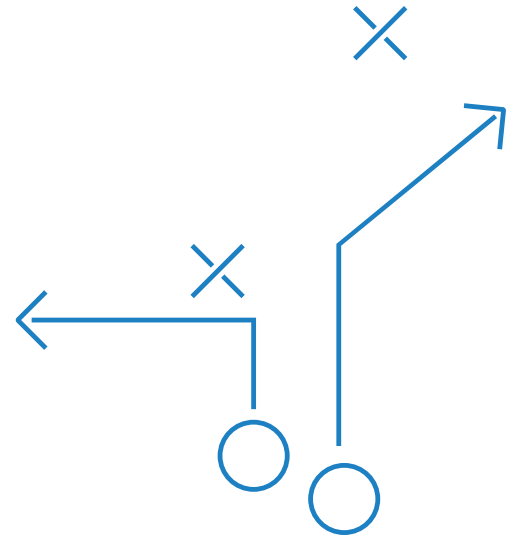
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Call The Play That Fits



Every year, more brands want in on the NFL. And every year, the same assumption keeps most of them on the sidelines: that the NFL means deep pockets, yearlong lead times, and a direct deal locked in months before kickoff. That assumption is only half true, and it is why so many advertisers freeze.

The 2026 season is genuinely tighter than years past. Consolidation and scarcity are real. What actually holds brands back is the belief that there is only one way in – a single national spot inside the game that you can either afford or you cannot.

In reality there is no single NFL buy. There is a spectrum of them: programmatic tests that launch in days, streaming unit with minimums closer to a digital buy, regional games that build retargeting audiences, national windows for scaled reach, and premium sponsorships for brands ready to plant a flag.

The brands winning right now are the ones who picked the right entry point, proved it, and scaled. If you're running TV advertising, there's no escaping football – the NFL owns television, and it runs every week from September to February.

83 of 100

Of 2025's top 100 telecasts were NFL games

09

Platforms carrying NFL games in 2026

18.7M

Average viewers per 2025 regular season game, up 10% year over year

Five Myths About Buying The NFL

THE MYTH	THE TRUTH
"The NFL is out of our budget."	A national spot inside the game runs \$500K to \$1.5M, and that is only one option. Programmatic, streaming, regional, and ancillary inventory let brands test the NFL for a fraction of that.
"Programmatic means bidding blind into an open auction."	Premium NFL programmatic runs through Private Marketplace (PMP) and Programmatic Guaranteed (PG) deals with trusted publishers. It is curated, premium access.
"You have to commit a year in advance."	Upfront commitments dominate, yet programmatic and ancillary buys can launch in days and flex in real time, which matters when planning windows are tight.
"The NFL is a brand play, not performance"	Brands measure site visits, installs, and purchases within minutes of a spot airing. During this past Super Bowl, one Tatari client saw a 65x traffic surge within five minutes.
"Our category is locked out of premium sports."	Category restrictions are real, and programmatic access can open inventory that direct deals cannot. BlueChew, in a heavily regulated category, reached NFL tentpole inventory it had always been shut out of.

01

READING THE FIELD

The 2026 Market Is Tighter, Pricier And More Fragmented

One force is reshaping the 2026 season more than any other: consolidation. Disney now holds a stake in NFL Network and Fubo, and the NFL holds a 10% stake in ESPN, tying the league and the network closer together than ever. Disney also holds the rights to Super Bowl LXI, which sold out before the pre-season even began. That concentration is putting real pressure on inventory across every network, and demand for marquee matchups is already intense.

The downstream effect for advertisers is scarcity. A high share of premium inventory is committed during the upfronts, leaving a thin scatter market and pushing prices up across Disney, Amazon, Netflix, CBS, and Fox. Networks are increasingly enforcing bundling, with total audience packages that fold linear, streaming, and match spend commitments together and remove the flexible units brands used to buy on their own.

At the same time, the NFL has never been available in more places. Nine platforms carry games in 2026: CBS, FOX, ESPN, ABC, NBC, Peacock, Prime Video, Netflix, and NFL Network. Streaming keeps expanding, with Netflix growing from two games to a slate of five, even as streaming-exclusive inventory stays a small and tightly held share of the total.

■ THE COMPETITION IS FIERCE

Move Early, Look Beyond the Marquee Unit

The door has not closed, but the easy, flexible doors are closing first. Flexibility now lives in programmatic, streaming, and ancillary inventory, and that is where new advertisers should start. The brands that get in this year move early, look beyond the marquee unit inside the game, and work with a partner whose publisher relationships can open inventory others cannot reach.

02

ADJUSTING THE PLAYBOOK

Five Ways To Buy The NFL

Think of NFL access as a spectrum rather than a single price of entry.
Most brands start on the left and move right as confidence and results build.

01.

Test

Programmatic (PMP& PG). Launch in days, lower entry, category unlocks.

02.

Stream

Streaming inventory. Audience based, measurable, minimums like a digital buy.

03.

Retarget

Regional & ancillary. Build a warm audience and retarget efficiently.

04.

Scale

National linear & streaming. Convergent reach at scale.

05.

Sponsor

Sponsorships & tentpoles. Premium placements and cultural moments.

You do not have to choose the whole NFL at once. Pick the entry point that matches your budget and readiness, prove it with real measurement, and let the results fund the next step up.

■ THE TAKEAWAY

Every Path Is A Legitimate Way In

Every path in this guide is a legitimate way into the most watched programming in America.

03

THE OPENING DRIVE - TESTING

Programmatic Is Your Safest Way In

For most brands, the hardest part of the NFL is knowing whether it will work and being able to prove the return. Programmatic answers that, because it lets you test premium NFL inventory without an upfront commitment or a year of lead time.

A common misconception is that programmatic NFL means bidding blindly into an open exchange. The real approach is built on Private Marketplace (PMP) and Programmatic Guaranteed (PG) deals with trusted publishers: NBCU for Sunday Night Football, ESPN for Monday Night Football, plus NFL Network, DirecTV, Fubo, and Fox Sports.

Programmatic CPMs for the NFL are often comparable to linear. The advantage shows up everywhere else: campaigns launch in days instead of months, spend adjusts in real time, and you can target specific matchups or audience windows.

It also opens closed doors. BlueChew, a telehealth brand in a heavily regulated category, was largely shut out of standard linear and direct IO deals. Through programmatic access, they reached NFL tentpole inventory that had been off the table entirely.

"We were pleased and excited to be able to use programmatic channels with Tatari to unlock testing in new, high-value tentpole inventory we've had to pass on in the past due to limitations and difficulties on marketplace category restrictions."

Enrique Carmona · Director of Programmatic, BlueChew

■ THE STARTING POINT

Low Spend, Fast Launch, Real Flexibility

Programmatic lets a first-time NFL advertiser enter at a lower spend, launch fast, flex in real time, and reach categories that direct deals shut out.

04

STRETCH THE FIELD - STREAMING

Streaming Opened The Gate

For years the NFL came down to one number. A thirty second national spot in the Super Bowl runs about \$7 to \$8 million, and the biggest inseason windows carry their own premium, so most brands watched from the sidelines. Streaming changed the math - it created a portfolio of accessible entry points: pregame and postgame streams, shoulder programming, and streaming-exclusive matchups, all at price points that fit a real budget.

Platforms like Prime Video, Peacock, Paramount+, Netflix, and Tubi sell against an audience rather than a single national unit.

They carry lower minimums than linear, offer interactive formats and QR codes, and tie site visits, installs, and purchases back to the moment your spot aired. The 2026 Schedule at the end of this guide shows exactly which games sit on each platform.

Streaming also levels the creative field. With dynamic ad insertion, a platform can serve different versions of a spot into the same broadcast based on where a viewer is, the device they are on, and what they tend to watch, so a smaller brand can win on relevance and targeting instead of production budget.

"Streaming is a great way for us to test what being integrated into such a monumental cultural moment can deliver to our brand and business. It allows us to reach a massive, highly engaged audience of modern, connected families with an 'out of pocket' investment that doesn't break the bank."

Mike Zemna · CMO, Life 360

■ THE MECHANICS MATTER

Lower Minimums, Real-Time Measurement

Lower minimums, audience-based targeting, interactive formats, and real-time measurement turn a streaming NFL placement into a performance test.

05

FIELD POSITION - RETARGETING

Build A Warm Audience, Retarget The Rest

One of the smartest entry points is also one of the most overlooked: use a regional or ancillary NFL buy to build an audience, then retarget them across TV and digital.

The NFL is more than the marquee national windows. A deep, more accessible layer of inventory, including regional games and ancillary programming like pregame and postgame shows and sports talk coverage, still delivers live, highly engaged audiences without the premium price tag. Ancillary NFL programming alone can pull 3 to 5 million viewers weekly at lower CPMs, and it is typically the most available and flexible inventory on the board, exactly what a first time NFL advertiser wants.

Here is the play: run in a regional game or its surrounding programming, capture the fans you reach, then retarget them with follow up streaming and digital creative to move them down the funnel. Retargeting meets people who already showed interest, in the highest attention environment available, and it consistently outperforms cold prospecting.

"Retargeting was an important piece of our post-Super Bowl campaign. We had the ability to take that first Super Bowl impression, and then follow up with additional Fiverr ads to bring viewers down the purchase funnel."

Matt Clunan · Director of Brand Marketing, Fiverr

■ WHY IT WORKS

A Warm Audience At Full Attention

Regional and ancillary inventory gives you NFL-quality attention at an accessible price, plus a clean, concentrated audience to retarget.

06

GOING DEEP - SCALING

National Linear and Streaming, Working As One

Once a brand has proven the NFL works, the question shifts from whether it works to how to go bigger. The answer is a convergent buy, with national linear and streaming treated as one strategy. Linear delivers scale and the premium consistency of a true national placement. Streaming delivers precision, flexibility, and measurement. Together they build a complete funnel from first impression to final purchase.

The 2026 market is pushing buyers this way anyway, as networks increasingly sell total audience packages that combine linear and streaming with Dynamic Ad Insertion (DAI). Expect to buy the audience rather than a single unit.

LOCK NPE EARLY

Non-Preemptible Inventory

Guaranteed to air and cannot be bumped
- essential for premium games and
playoff windows.

THE EFFICIENCY STORY

CBS Controls 25% of Impressions

Among the most efficient CPMs on the
board, with Paramount+ bundled into one
buy - no separate streaming must-spend.

■ THE CONVERGENT PLAY

Buy The Audience, Not The Unit

Scaling the NFL means buying reach, frequency, and outcomes across linear and streaming together, so every dollar flows to where it is most incremental.

07

THE BIG STAGE - SPONSORSHIP

Premium Placements, Defined By Culture

At the top of the spectrum, sponsorships and tentpole moments let a brand plant a flag in culture. Integrated sponsorships put brands inside the broadcast - in instant replay segments, red zone highlights, and game stats features - rather than only in the ad pod.

The access point matters more than the budget. Premium sports inventory is frequently unavailable through programmatic marketplaces and only reachable through direct relationships. Premium does not always require Super Bowl money - brands regularly reach high-profile placements at a discount through floaters and opportunistic buys.

THE SEASON'S TENTPOLES

International Series – a record nine games across seven countries, from the first-ever NFL game in Australia to London, Paris, Madrid, Munich, Rio, and Mexico City.

Thanksgiving – a tripleheader across CBS, FOX, and NBC, plus the first-ever Thanksgiving Eve game on Netflix and the Prime Video Black Friday game.

Christmas Day – two Netflix games and a FOX game, now an established football holiday.

Playoffs & Super Bowl LXI – the highest-demand inventory of the year

"We're using the Super Bowl moment to make sure people are aware there are options in an inspiring and memorable way."

Saman Rahmanian · Co-founder & Chief Product Officer, Ro

■ ACCESS, NOT JUST BUDGET

Own the Moment

Sponsorships put your brand inside the game, in the replays, the red zone, and the segments fans lean in for. That is the highest attention real estate in television, and it turns a media buy into a moment people tie to your brand long after the final whistle.

08

THE ROAD TO THE SUPER BOWL

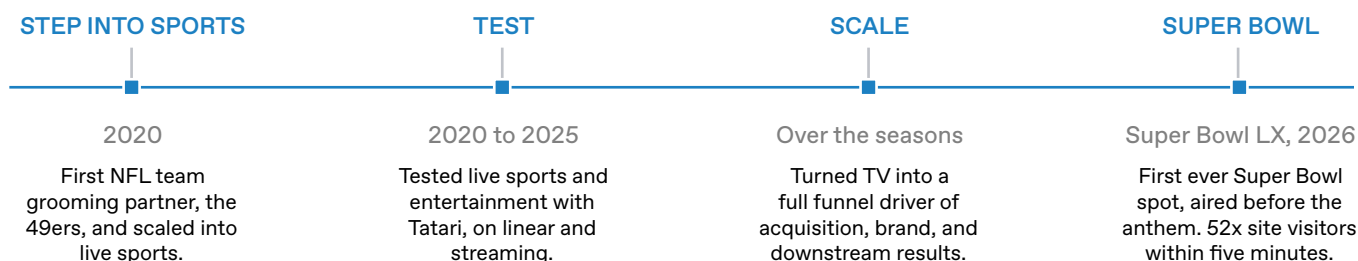
From Testing The NFL To The Super Bowl

The most compelling NFL stories are not one-time swings. They are brands that tested TV, learned what drove performance, and moved into bigger stages, including live sports and eventually the Super Bowl, as confidence grew. During this past Super Bowl, four brands shared their immediate response numbers as a directional signal of impact:

BRAND	HOW THEY SHOWED UP	IMMEDIATE RESULTS
MANSCAPED	Linear and streaming, aired before the anthem	52x website visitors within five minutes of airing
Tecovas	Streaming only, end of the second quarter	65x spike in visitors within five minutes, 3x their World Series placement
Life360	Streaming only on Peacock, before halftime	11x traffic spike within five minutes
Ro	Linear and streaming, first quarter	Highest traffic spike in brand history, sustained for hours, outperforming the Championship and World Series

FROM TEST TO TENTPOLE

How MANSCAPED Went From Testing Sports to the Super Bowl



09

KEEPING SCORE

Proving The NFL's Impact In Real Time

The single biggest reason brands hesitated on the NFL was measurement, and that is the part that has changed most. Live sports are uniquely measurable because they are predictable and concentrated - fixed schedules and huge simultaneous audiences create clean, visible spikes in search, site traffic, and installs the moment a spot airs.

The NFL's impact also reaches beyond the channel you bought. TV creates a halo effect that lifts everything else in the mix. More than half of Tatari's clients see their TV ads boost the purchase conversion rate of other marketing channels by more than 50%. A fan primed by your NFL spot converts later on search or social, and without measuring the halo, that credit gets misattributed away from TV.

THE METRICS THAT MATTER NOW

- | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| 01 Customer acquisition cost | 02 Return on ad spend | 03 Incremental reach |
| 04 Site visits & installs | 05 Cross-channel halo | 06 Immediate response spikes |

"If you place an ad in the Super Bowl and you limit the success of that ad to an outcomes-based metric, you're really doing yourself a disservice. TV is about reaching new audiences and then moving those audiences down the purchase funnel."

Phillip Inghelbrecht · CEO, Tatari

■ EVERY STAT COUNTS

The Scorecard

Measure the impact the ad drove, from site visits to installs to cross channel halo. The NFL is now as measurable as any performance channel, and its halo makes the rest of your mix work harder.

10

THE 2026 NFL SCHEDULE

From Kickoff To The Super Bowl

Nine platforms carry the 2026 NFL season, which runs from September 9, 2026 through Super Bowl LXI on February 14, 2027.

WINDOW	PLATFORM	NOTES
Sunday afternoon slate	CBS & FOX, plus Paramount +	Bulk of regular season games, distributed regionally. CBS holds ~25% of impressions.
Saturday Night Football	NBC & Peacock	The primetime marquee matchup each week.
Monday Night Football	ESPN & ABC	Weekly primetime, sold through DAI and total audience packages.
Thursday Night Football	Prime Video	Weeks 2-18, streaming exclusive, high demand and tight inventory.
International morning game	NFL Network	Five international games across Weeks 4-7 & Week 9, of seven total.

THE INTERNATIONAL SERIES – A RECORD NINE GAMES

WEEK	MATCHUP	LOCATION
Wk 1 - Sept 10	49ers vs Rams	Melbourne, Australia
Wk 3 - Sept 27	Ravens vs Cowboys	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Wk 4 - Oct 4	Colts vs Commanders	London (Tottenham)
Wk 5 - Oct 11	Eagles vs Jaguars	London (Tottenham)
Wk 6 - Oct 18	Texans vs Jaguars	London (Wembly)
Wk 7 - Oct 25	Steelers vs Saints	Paris, Stade de France
Wk 9 - Nov 8	Bengals vs Falcons	Madrid, Bernabeu
Wk 10 - Nov 15	Patriots vs Lions	Munich, Allianz Arena
Wk 11 - Nov 22	Vikings vs 49ers	Mexico City

HOLIDAY AND SPECIAL GAMES

DATE	EVENT	PLATFORM
Wed, Sept 9	Kickoff Game: Patriots at Seahawks	NBC & Peacock
Wed, Nov 25	Thanksgiving Eve: Packers at Rams	Netflix
Thu, Nov 26	Thanksgiving tripleheader: Bears/Lions, Eagles/Cowboys, Bills/Chiefs	CBS, FOX, NBC
Fri, Nov 27	Black Friday Game	Prime Video
Fri, Dec 25	Christmas: Packers vs Bears and Bills vs Broncos on Netflix, Rams vs Seahawks on FOX	Netflix and FOX
Sat, Dec 26	Week 17 Saturday doubleheader	NBC (4:30 ET) and Peacock (8:00 ET)
Sat, Jan 9, '27	Week 18 Saturday games	Netflix (1:00 ET), ESPN and ABC (4:30 and 8:00 ET)

THE POSTSEASON

Jan 2027	Wild Card, Divisional & Conference Championship rounds	CBS, FOX, NBC, ESPN and ABC, with streaming on Peacock and Prime. Specific games and platforms are set as the bracket forms.
Sun, Feb 14, 2027	Super Bowl LXI, SoFi Stadium, Inglewood, CA	ABC and ESPN (ESPN's first Super Bowl, ABC's first since '06)

MAKE THE CALENDAR WORK FOR YOU

Testing: start in the Sunday regional slate, ancillary and pregame programming, or streaming around Thursday night.

Scaling: Sunday Night, Monday Night, and the CBS/FOX national windows deliver convergent reach – lock NPE early.

Building an audience: regional games and the international morning windows are efficient places to build retargeting pools.

Planting a flag: Thanksgiving, Christmas, the International Series, and the playoffs are the tentpoles, and they require the earliest commitments.

11

IT'S GAME TIME

The NFL Has Never Been More Accessible

The 2026 season is tighter and more fragmented than ever, which is all the more reason to be intentional. There are more ways into the NFL than at any point in history, and the brands that win are the ones who pick the right entry point, prove it with real measurement, and scale toward the moments that matter.

01.

Start Small, Prove It

Programmatic, streaming, and regional buys let any brand test the NFL without committing at the scale of an upfront.

02.

Buy Across The Board

Nine platforms, linear and streaming, tentpoles and ancillary, the whole ecosystem is in play.

03.

Measure Everything

Real-time response, cross-channel halo, and outcome metrics make the NFL as accountable as any performance channel.

■ READY TO TAKE THE FIELD

Schedule a demo and see how Tatari helps brands plan, launch, and measure NFL campaigns across linear and streaming, from a first programmatic test to the Super Bowl

The playbook is here. The only thing left is to run the first play.



Turn The NFL Into Your Advantage

Schedule a demo and see how Tatari helps brands plan, launch, and measure NFL campaigns across linear and streaming, from a first programmatic test to the Super Bowl, with the measurement to prove every dollar.

[SCHEDULE A DEMO TODAY →](#)

GET IN TOUCH

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