



NFL 2005: TRADITION & CHANGE

It's America's top sport because of what it builds into a season.

Forty years ago this year, the Harris Poll named the NFL America's most popular sport (see story below). It has held that rank every year since, and, in fact, increased it. What's the NFL's secret? "Respecting tradition but also being open to change," says Commissioner **PAUL TAGLIABUE**.

The 2005 season will be no different:

- **The competition:** It's high quality and it's intense. Take the Super Bowl XXXIX teams, the New England Patriots and Philadelphia Eagles. Right now, they may be the "teams of the millennium." The Patriots have won three of the decade's five Super Bowls. The Eagles have won the most games since 2000 -- 59.

But the competition is so tight in the current NFL system that every team -- and fan -- enters the season with hope. Last year, for instance, five teams made the playoffs that were not in the postseason the year before -- the eighth consecutive season in which at least five teams (out of 12) accomplished the feat.

- **The Patriots:** They can do what no other team in the Super Bowl era has done -- win three Super Bowls in a row and four in five seasons. They don't want to be called a dynasty. "I'll leave the comparisons and historical perspectives to everyone else," says their head coach **BILL BELICHICK**. "We'll start the season at the bottom of the heap with everyone else -- same record and all trying to get to the same point."
- **First regular-season game outside U.S.:** It will be "Fútbol Americano" this October 2 when the Arizona Cardinals and San Francisco 49ers make history at the Estadio Azteca in Mexico City, Mexico. It will be the first regular-season NFL game to be played outside the United States in the 86-year history of the league. Estadio Azteca is the site of the largest NFL single-game attendance ever -- 112,376 fans for a 1994 preseason game.
- **40th Super Bowl -- Celebrating Tradition:** In the 40th year of the NFL's No. 1 popularity, the league will play its 40th Super Bowl -- Fourt in Detroit, Michigan on February 5. The NFL will use the occasion to look back at the "Road to Forty."

The Super Bowl was born as a result of the 1966 merger of the NFL and AFL. "Today we are enjoying the fruits of that 1966 merger," says Commissioner Tagliabue.

NFL: 40 YEARS OF NO.1

Forty years and counting! In 1965 -- 40 years ago -- the Harris Poll said that sports fans chose professional football (41 percent) as their favorite sport, overtaking baseball (38 percent) for the first time.

"Football has become America's favorite sport," said Harris in November of 1965. "It is quite clear that the full potential of NFL football has hardly been tapped. Proper promotion and exposure should be able to greatly expand the NFL audience, and television can undoubtedly play the major role in broadening the base of fans."

In the next four decades, that 1-2 rating has not changed.

In 2004, for the second consecutive year, according to the Harris Poll, more than twice as many people (30 percent) named professional football as their favorite sport over baseball (15 percent).

"Many people share the credit for the NFL's accomplishments," says NFL Commissioner **PAUL TAGLIABUE**. "We stand on the shoulders of all those who came before us and set the foundation for the NFL's rise to the preeminent position in sports entertainment."

"Pro football," says *Sports Illustrated*, "rules America."

AMERICA'S FAVORITE SPORTS	
Sport	Percent
NFL	30
MLB	15
College Football	11
Auto Racing	7
NBA	7

