

History of the AFL

The **Arena Football League (AFL)** was founded in 1987 as an indoor American football league by Jim Foster. It was played indoors on a smaller field than American football, resulting in a faster-paced and higher-scoring game. The sport was invented in the early 1980s and patented by Foster, a former executive of the United States Football League and the National Football League.

The AFL would play 22 seasons from 1987 to 2008 before large debts forced the league to suspend operations in search of a more profitable business model. In December 2008 the league's owners canceled the 2009 season to begin work on developing a long-term plan to improve its economic model.

Unable to agree upon a viable economic plan for the future of the league, the AFL suspended operations indefinitely on August 4, 2009, with Chapter 7 bankruptcy liquidation likely. On September 28, 2009, the Arena Football 1 league was formed, containing multiple former AFL and af2 teams including Orlando Predators and Arizona Rattlers, as well as a possibility for the Tampa Bay Storm and San Jose Sabercats to join by October 9, 2009. Additionally, new teams were formed in former AFL markets Salt Lake City and Chicago.

History

Jim Foster, a promotions manager with the National Football League, conceived the idea of indoor football while watching an indoor soccer match at **Madison Square Garden** in 1981. While at the game, he wrote his idea on a 9x12 envelope from his briefcase with sketches of the field and notes on gameplay. He presented the idea to a few friends at the NFL offices, where he received praise and encouragement for his concept. After solidifying the rules and business plan, supplemented with sketches by a professional artist, Foster presented his idea to various television networks. He reached an agreement with NBC for a "test game".

Plans for arena football were put on hold in 1982 as the United States Football League was launched. Foster left the NFL to accept a position in the USFL. He eventually became executive vice-president with the Chicago Blitz, where he returned to his concept of arena football. In 1983, he began organizing the test game in his spare time around his job with the Blitz. By 1985, he had devoted all his time to arena football, and on April 26, 1986, his concept was realized when finally staged the test game.

"Test game"

The test game was played in Rockford, Illinois at the Rockford MetroCentre. Sponsors were secured, and players and coaches from local colleges were recruited to volunteer to play for the teams, the Chicago Politicians and Rockford Metros, with the guarantee of a tryout should the league take off. Interest was high enough following the initial test game that Foster decided to put on a second "showcase" game. The second game was held on February 26, 1987 at the **Rosemont Horizon** in Chicago with a budget of \$20,000, up from \$4,000 in the original test game. Foster also invited ESPN to send a film crew to the game; a highlights package aired on SportsCenter.



The AFL logo from 1987–2002.

Inaugural season

Following the successes of his trial-run games, Foster moved ahead with his idea for arena football. He founded the Arena Football League with four teams: the Pittsburgh Gladiators, Denver Dynamite, Washington Commandos, and Chicago Bruisers. The first game in Arena Football League history was played between the Gladiators and Commandos at **Pittsburgh Civic Arena** in front of 12,117 fans. The game was deliberately not televised so that it could be analyzed and any follies and failures would not be subject to national public scrutiny. Following the inaugural game, tweaks and adjustments were made, and the first season continued. Each team played six games,

two against each other team. The top two teams, Denver and Pittsburgh, then competed in the first-ever AFL championship game, ArenaBowl I.

Patenting the game

On September 30, 1987, Foster filed an application with the United States Patent and Trademark Office to patent his invented sport. The patent application covered the rules of the game, specifically detailing the goalposts and rebound netting and their impact on gameplay. Foster's application was granted on March 27, 1990. During the term of the patent, 20 years from the date of filing the application, any other league that formed to play indoor football would be forced to use rules and equipment that did not fall under Foster's patent; no indoor football league would be able to use the goalposts and rebound netting found in Foster's arena football. The patent expired on September 30, 2007, allowing indoor football leagues the chance to use some of arena football's innovations.

Early years

From its inception, the AFL operated in a state of semi-obscurity; many Americans had heard the term "arena football" but knew little to nothing about the league itself.

From the 1987 season until the late 1990s, the most exposure the league would receive was on ESPN, which aired tape-delayed games, often well after midnight. The league received its first taste of wide exposure in 1998, when Arena Bowl XII was televised nationally as part of ABC's *Wide World of Sports*.

One of the league's early success stories was the Detroit Drive. A primary team for some of the AFL's most highly regarded players, including George LaFrance, Gary and Alvin Rettig, as well as being a second career chance for quarterback Art Schlichter, the Drive regularly played before sold out crowds at **Joe Louis Arena**, and went to the ArenaBowl every year of their existence (1988-1993). The AFL's first dynasty came to an end when their owner, Mike Ilitch (who also owned Little Caesar's Pizza and the Detroit Red Wings) bought the Detroit Tigers baseball team and sold the AFL team.

Although the Drive left the league, the AFL had a number of other teams which it considered "dynasties", including the Tampa Bay Storm (the only team that has existed in some form for all twenty seasons), their arch-rival the Orlando Predators, the San Jose SaberCats of the present decade, and their rivals the Arizona Rattlers.

In 1993, the league staged its first and only All-Star Game in **Des Moines, Iowa**, the future home of the Iowa Barnstormers, as a fundraiser for flood victims in the area. The National Conference defeated the American Conference 64-40 in front of a crowd of 7,189.

While the aforementioned teams have enjoyed success, many teams in the history of the league have enjoyed little to no success. There are also a number of franchises which existed in the form of a number of unrelated teams under numerous management groups until they folded (an example is the New York CityHawks whose owners transferred the team from **New York** to **Hartford** to become the **New England Sea Wolves** after two seasons, then after another two seasons were sold and became the **Toronto Phantoms**, who lasted another two seasons until folding). There are a number of reasons why these teams failed, including lack of financial support from owners, lack of media exposure, to the city's plain disinterest in the team.

The new millennium

The year 2000 brought a heightened interest in the AFL. Then-St. Louis Rams quarterback Kurt Warner, who was MVP of Super Bowl XXXIV, was first noticed because he played quarterback for the AFL's Iowa Barnstormers. While many sports commentators and fans continued to ridicule the league, Warner's story gave the league positive exposure, and it brought the league a new television deal with TNN, who, unlike ESPN, would televise regular season games live. While it was not financially lucrative, it helped set the stage for what the league would become in the new millennium. Also, the year also brought a spin-off league, the af2, intended to be a developmental league, comparable to the National Football League's NFL Europe. There was a lot of expansion in the 2000s. Expansion teams include the Austin Wranglers, Carolina Cobras, Los Angeles Avengers, Chicago Rush, Detroit Fury, Dallas Desperados, Colorado Crush, New Orleans VooDoo, Philadelphia Soul, Nashville Kats, Kansas City Brigade, and Utah Blaze. The Wranglers, Cobras, Fury, Kats, VooDoo, and Avengers no longer compete in the AFL, however.

There were also several rule changes. In 2003, the season expanded to 16 games. In 2005, players were no longer

allowed to run out of bounds. The only way for a player to go out of bounds is if a player is tackled into the side boards. 2005 also marked the first year the ArenaBowl was played at a neutral site. In 2007, free substitution was allowed. And in 2008, the Jack Linebacker was allowed to go sideboard to sideboard.

Decline

After 12 years as commissioner of the AFL, David Baker resigned unexpectedly on July 25, 2008, just two days before ArenaBowl XXII; deputy commissioner Ed Policy was named interim commissioner until Baker's replacement was found. Baker explained, "When I took over as commissioner, I thought it would be for one year. It turned into 12. But now it's time."

Three months later, "based on circumstances currently affecting the league and the team", Tom Benson startlingly announced that the New Orleans VooDoo were ceasing operations and folding. Shortly thereafter, an article in Sports Business Journal announced that the AFL had a tentative agreement to sell a \$100 million stake in the league to Platinum Equity; in exchange, Platinum Equity would create a centralized, single-entity business model that would streamline league and team operations and allow the league to be more profitable. Benson's move to shut down the VooDoo came during the Platinum Equity conference call, leading to speculation that he had folded because of the deal.

Due to the sudden loss of the New Orleans franchise, the league announced in October that the beginning of the free agency period would be delayed in order to accommodate a dispersal draft. Dates were eventually announced as December 2 for the dispersal draft and December 4 for free agency, but shortly before the draft the league issued a press release announcing the draft had been postponed one day to December 3. Shortly thereafter, another press release announced that the draft would be held on December 9 and free agency would commence on December 11. However, the draft still never took place, and instead another press release was issued stating that both the draft and free agency had been postponed indefinitely. Rumors began circulating that the league was in trouble and on the verge of folding, but owners were quick to deny those claims. It was soon revealed the players' union had agreed to cut the salary cap for the 2009 season in order to prevent a cessation of operations.

Cancelling the 2009 season

Following a conference call on December 10, a league press release announced that the league had not voted to suspend operations; many media outlets had been reporting that the 2009 season had been canceled. Within the week, however, a second conference call resulted in enough votes from owners and cooperation from the AFLPA to suspend the 2009 season in order to create "a long-term plan to improve its economic model". Teams cut office staffs to only the most essential personnel, and players were forced to find alternative work for the upcoming spring. Efforts to reformat the league's business model were placed under the leadership of Columbus Destroyers owner Jim Renacci and interim commissioner Policy. The league set a March 1, 2009 deadline to vote on a revised business model, but no business decisions were announced at that time; instead, the league set a new deadline of March 31 and extended players' health insurance benefits. It was soon announced that the Players' Association had agreed to a revised collective bargaining agreement that cut the salary cap and moved the league closer to returning to play. In addition, plans were also announced to revive the New Orleans VooDoo and add a Pittsburgh expansion franchise for the 2010 season.

High hopes for the AFL's return began to wane when interim commissioner Ed Policy announced his resignation, citing the obsolescence of his position in the reformatted league. Two weeks later, the Los Angeles Avengers announced that they were formally folding the franchise. Meanwhile, efforts to revitalize the league continued, and the new business plan was ready to be presented to the owners. One month later, the league missed the deadline to formally ratify the new CBA and announced that it was eliminating health insurance for the players. Progress on the return stalled, and no announcements were made regarding the future of the league.

Bankruptcy

On July 20, 2009, *Sports Business Journal* reported that the AFL owed approximately \$14 million to its creditors and were considering filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. Owners were also exploring the expansion franchise in Pittsburgh in order to use the expansion fees to help pay off the debts and infuse enough cash into the league to hold the 2010 season. In early August 2009, numerous media outlets began reporting that the AFL was folding permanently and would file for Chapter 7 bankruptcy. The league released a statement on August 4 announcing that while the league is not folding, it is suspending league operations indefinitely. Several teams

commented that they were still pursuing arena football in 2010 with the possibility of using the financially independent arenafootball2. Despite this, several of the league's creditors have filed papers to force a Chapter 7 liquidation if the league does not do so voluntarily. This request was granted on August 7, though converted to a Chapter 11 reorganization on August 26.

Less than two months after the announcement, and a few weeks after the suspension forced the dissolution of af2, the Arizona Rattlers and Orlando Predators defected to Arena Football 1, a startup league consisting mostly of former af2 teams. The 16-team league expects to expand to "24 to 30" teams prior to the start of their inaugural 2010 season, and is in negotiations with at least seven other teams from the AFL to join, including the Tampa Bay Storm and the San Jose Sabercats.

All assets of the Arena Football League were auctioned off on November 25, 2009; arena football breakaway league Arena Football 1 was accepted as the stalking horse bidder with a starting bid of \$2.5 million. .

Postseason

From the league's inception through ArenaBowl XVIII, the championship game was played at the home of the highest-seeded remaining team. The AFL then switched to a neutral-site championship, with ArenaBowls XIX and XX in Las Vegas. **New Orleans Arena**, home of the New Orleans VooDoo, served as the site of ArenaBowl XXI on July 29, 2007. This was the first professional sports championship to be staged in the city since Hurricane Katrina struck in August 2005. The San Jose SaberCats earned their third championship in six years by defeating the Columbus Destroyers 55-33. Arena Bowl XXI in New Orleans was deemed a success, and the city was chosen to host Arena Bowl XXII, in which the Philadelphia Soul defeated the defending champs San Jose Sabercats.

Rules



An AFL goalpost

- The Field: An indoor padded surface wide and long with endzones. Goal posts are wide with a crossbar height of (NFL goalposts are wide with the crossbar at). The goalside rebound nets are wide by high. The bottom of the nets are above the ground. Sideline barriers are high and made of high density foam rubber.
- The Equipment: The official football is the same size and weight as the National Football League ball.
- The Players and Formations: Eight players on the field; 20-man active roster; four-man inactive roster.
- Substitution: Free substitution is allowed, but some players play both ways either by choice or to step in because of injury.

- Formation: Four (4) offensive players must line up on the line of scrimmage. Three (3) defensive players must be down linemen (in a three or four-point stance). Only the "Mac Linebacker" may blitz on either side of the center. Alignment is two (2) or more yards off the line of scrimmage. No stunting or twisting. Offensive motion in the backfield: One receiver may go in a forward motion before the snap.
- Timing: Four 15 minute quarters with a 15-minute halftime. The clock stops for out-of-bounds plays or incomplete passes only in the last minute of each half or when the referee deems it necessary for penalties, injuries or timeouts. Each team is allowed three (3) time-outs per half. In the last minute of the game, the clock stops if the team with the lead has the ball and fails to advance the ball past the line of scrimmage; this discourages teams with the lead from "taking a knee" (i.e., having the quarterback kneel shortly after taking the snap from center) near the end of a game.
- Movement of the Ball and Scoring: Four (4) downs are allowed to advance the ball ten (10) yards for a first down, or to score. Six (6) points for a touchdown. One (1) point for a conversion by place kick after a touchdown, two (2) points for a conversion by drop kick and two (2) points for successful run or pass after a touchdown. Three (3) points for a field goal by placement or four (4) points for a field goal by drop kick. Two (2) points for a safety.
- The Kicking: Kickoffs are from the goal line. Kickers may use a one-inch tee. Punting is illegal. On fourth down, a team may go for a first down, touchdown or field goal. The receiving team may field any kickoff or missed field goal that rebounds off the net. Any kickoff untouched which is out of bounds or hitting an overhead structure (i.e. scoreboard) will be placed at the 20-yard line or the place where it went out of bounds, whichever is more advantageous to the receiving team. If a kickoff goes beyond the end zone and stays in bounds (such as kicking it into the field goal "slack net" or if the ball goes under the net), the ball will come out to the 5-yard line. The same is true if a missed field goal attempt goes beyond the end zone and under the net. If the receiving player chooses not to take the ball out of the endzone (takes a knee) or is tackled in the endzone, the ball is placed on the 2 1/2-yard line.
- Passing: Passing rules in Arena Football are the same as outdoor NCAA football in which receivers must have one foot inbounds. A unique exception involves the rebound nets. A forward pass that rebounds off of the endzone net is a live ball and is in play until it touches the playing surface.
- Overtime Rules: Overtime periods are 15 minutes during the regular season and the playoffs. Each team gets one possession to score. If, after each team has had one possession and one team is ahead, that team wins. If the teams are tied after each has had a possession, the next team to score wins.

Growth of the league

Average attendance for AFL games were around 10,000-11,000 per game in the 1990s, though during the recession connected to the dot-com bubble and the September 11, 2001 attacks average attendance dropped below 10,000 for several years. Since the start of the 2004 season, average attendance has been above 12,000, with 12,392 in 2007. Eleven of the seventeen teams in operation in 2007 had average attendance figures over 13,000. In 2008, the overall attendance average increased to 12,957, with 8 teams exceeding 13,000 per game.

Television

Beginning with the 2003 season, the AFL made a deal with NBC to televise league games, which was renewed for another two years in 2005. In conjunction with this, the league moved the beginning of the season from May to February (the week after the NFL's Super Bowl) and scheduled most of its games on Sunday instead of Friday or Saturday as it had in the past. In 2006, because of the XX Winter Olympic Games, the Stanley Cup playoffs and the Daytona 500, NBC scaled back from weekly coverage to scattered coverage during the regular season, but committed to a full playoff schedule ending with the 20th ArenaBowl. NBC and the Arena Football League officially severed ties on June 30, 2006, having failed to reach a new broadcast deal. Las Vegas owner Jim Ferraro stated during a radio interview that the reason why a deal failed is because ESPN refused to show highlights or even mention a product being broadcast on NBC.

For the 2006 season only, the AFL added a national cable deal with OLN (now Versus) for eleven regular-season games and one playoff game.

On December 19, 2006, ESPN announced the purchase of a minority stake in the AFL. This deal includes television rights for the ESPN family of networks. ESPN will televise a minimum of 17 regular season games, most on Monday Nights, and 9 playoff games, including ArenaBowl XXI on ABC. The deal resulted in added exposure on ESPN's *SportsCenter*.

The AFL also has a regional-cable deal with FSN, where FSN regional affiliates in AFL markets carry local team games.

Expanding the season

The practice of playing one or two preseason exhibition games by each team before the start of the regular season was discontinued when the NBC contract was initiated, and the regular season was extended from 14 games, the length that it had been since 1996, to 16.

Video games

The first video game based on the AFL was *Arena Football* for the C-64 released in 1988. On May 18, 2000, *Kurt Warner's Arena Football Unleashed* was released by Midway Games for the PlayStation game console. On February 7, 2006 EA Sports released *Arena Football* for the PlayStation 2 and Xbox. EA Sports released another AFL video game, titled *Arena Football: Road to Glory*, on February 21, 2007, for the PlayStation 2.

Literature

In 2001, Jeff Foley published *War on the Floor: An Average Guy Plays in the Arena Football League and Lives to Write About It*. The book details a journalist's two preseasons (1999 and 2000) as an offensive specialist/writer with the now-defunct Albany Firebirds. The 5-foot-6 (170 cm), self-described "unathletic writer" played in three preseason games and had one catch for -2 yards.

Expansion/contraction

The Arena Football League had expanded and contracted many times throughout its history. At the end, the size of the AFL was 15 teams. Every year in the AFL there has been at least one team who did not play the previous season with the same name. The league last expanded in 2006, when it went to 19 teams. The league conducted an expansion draft in September 2005 in order to stock the Utah Blaze. Because of Hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans VooDoo announced that they would suspend operations for 2006. Players under contract to the VooDoo were transferred to the expansion Kansas City Brigade franchise. The 2007 season saw the return of Arena Football to **New Orleans**, only to fully close after the 2008 season.

League expansion plans

During a conference call prior to ArenaBowl XX, Commissioner Baker stated publicly the names of several cities that were under consideration for future league expansion. More recently, Baker had reiterated these expansion plans and also stated that the league was considering expansion into international markets based on twenty-one exhibition games. The expansion rights to two other markets had been sold to potential ownership groups, both of which are National Football League team owners in those respective markets. Teams were not placed in those cities, however.

In 2008 the AFL released a press release stating that they had partnered with German marketing group 2Plus to investigate the possibility of hosting AFL teams in **Germany**. In mid-August 2008 an AFL delegation including Jerry Kurz visited Germany to speak with 2Plus in person and to visit various possible host cities. During that week a delegation from Amsterdam traveled to Germany to speak to the AFL about Amsterdam hosting a team.

The AFL had their sights set on three possible German host cities.

Düsseldorf Hamburg Mannheim

Düsseldorf or Hamburg was expected to host an exhibition game in 2009. Other cities in Europe had also showed interest in housing an AFL team.

Amsterdam, Netherlands

Barcelona, Spain

London, England

Commissioners of Arena Football

Jim Foster - 1987-1992

Joe O'Hara - 1992-1994

Jim Drucker - 1994-1996

C. David Baker - 1996-2008

Ed Policy (interim) - 2008-2009

Jerry Kurz – 2010 – Present (2012)

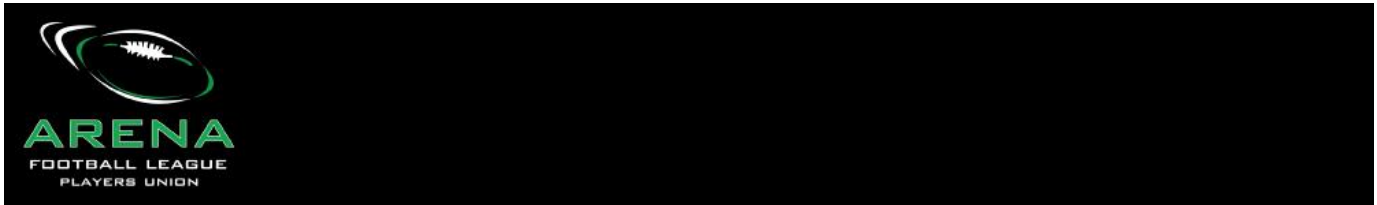
****Update** 2010 – Present (2012)**

AFL Logo 2010 - Present



www.arenafootball.com website 2010 – Present (2012)

AFL Players Union Logo 2010 – Present (2012)



www.af1pu.com website 2010 – Present (2012)

Officials with the new Arena Football One league said Thursday they are on schedule to return to the field next spring with a more modest economic model they hope will ensure its success.

The new indoor league debuts in April in 15 communities, including seven cities that hosted teams in the now defunct Arena Football League.

"The challenge is to do it in the best businesslike manner," Arena Football One commissioner Jerry Kurz said during a news conference announcing the revival of the Chicago Rush, a perennial AFL power. "The [old] league didn't do that."

Arena Football One this week purchased the assets of the AFL in a deal approved by a judge overseeing the AFL's Chapter 11 bankruptcy proceedings.

The reported \$6.1 million sale included all team names, logos, records, film and video libraries, and other assets from the Arena Football League, which called off the 2009 season a year ago and then indefinitely suspended operations in August.

AFL then filed for bankruptcy protection. Legal proceedings also included af2, a 25-team indoor football league with teams in smaller markets that the AFL partly owned.

"The game was always good," said Kurz, who spent the last six years as president of af2. "Some would say [the AFL] tried to do too much, too soon. We won't make that mistake."

Arena Football One will be a mix of former AFL and af2 teams, with Chicago as the largest market. Tampa, Fla., Arizona, Cleveland, Orlando, Dallas and Utah -- all former AFL locations -- will also be represented in the new league.

The league will also have teams in smaller markets such as Spokane, Wash., Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Okla., Milwaukee and Bossier-Shreveport, La. League offices will be in Tulsa.

Arena Football One will operate as a single entity, with all players and coaches considered league employees, an arrangement similar to Major League Soccer. The league also hopes it will have lower costs with centralized purchasing, insurance and marketing.

None of the former AFL ownership groups are involved in the new league, although there are some familiar faces coming back in Chicago and Cleveland.

The Rush announced that the return of head coach Mike Hohensee, who guided an earlier Chicago team to an Arena Bowl title. New owners in Cleveland, meanwhile, said that former Cleveland Browns star Bernie Kosar would serve in an advisory capacity. Kosar was the Gladiators' president in 2008.

Kurz said the league has hired Neal H. Pilson, former president of CBS Sports, to explore potential TV deals. The AFL had recent broadcast exposure with NBC Sports and later with ESPN.

****Update****

The Arena Football League is back in 2010 and has entered into a new telecast partnership with NFL Network, it was announced Thursday.

The AFL will premiere its 2010 regular season on NFL Network with a live, primetime game telecast Friday, April 2 at 8 p.m. ET. Weekly featured AFL "Game of the Week" telecasts are scheduled for Friday nights in primetime throughout the AFL's 18-game regular season.

AFL playoff games between the top four teams in each of the National and American conferences will be played in August, culminating with the 2010 ArenaBowl Championship game on NFL Network on the weekend of Aug. 20-23.

All AFL games on NFL Network will be telecast in high definition and feature specialized in-game audio techniques that capture the fast-paced intensity that is the hallmark of the AFL's "50-Yard Indoor War."

AFL Commissioner Jerry Kurz stated, "This is a tremendous milestone for the fantastic, fan friendly game of Arena Football. To be broadcast partners with the NFL Network is going to be the ultimate experience for our great fans, players and coaches.

"We embrace football at all levels," added Charles Coplin, Vice President of Programming of NFL Network. "The AFL deal gives us exciting live football games on Friday nights from a league that has produced NFL players in the past, including Kurt Warner."

The game of arena football was invented in February of 1981 by Jim Foster, who was a promotion manager at NFL Properties at that time. Foster went on to launch Arena Football League play in May of 1987, and the popularity of the new hybrid indoor gridiron adaptation quickly grew. After 22 seasons of play with coverage on NBC, ESPN and others, the telecast partnership with the NFL Network in 2010 opens a unique new chapter for the AFL.

The deal with NFL Network was negotiated on behalf of the AFL by consultant Neal Pilson. Under the terms of the agreement, the AFL will be responsible for the sale of advertising inventory and

work jointly with NFL Network on production, planning and execution. NFL Network will provide the on-air talent.

****Update****

Jan 17 2012 2:03PM

CLEVELAND (AP) -- Cavaliers owner Dan Gilbert added a football team to his burgeoning sports empire.

Gilbert has purchased the Cleveland Gladiators of the Arena Football League, a team that plays its games in Quicken Loans Arena. Gilbert, who bought the Cavaliers in 2005, also owns the Canton Charge of the NBA Development League, the Lake Erie Monsters of the American Hockey League and is opening two casinos in the next year.

The Cavaliers, Gladiators and Monsters all play at Gilbert's arena.

Gilbert's acquisition of the Gladiators was announced Tuesday. He bought the club from area attorney Jim Ferraro, who moved the franchise from Las Vegas in 2007.

Former Browns quarterback Bernie Kosar is a team advisor.