

# PROUD TO BE A



# GAME PLAN.

## THE CHALLENGE

The NFL has a mission: to transcend the game by using its platform to help youth develop into healthy, confident, and connected adults. Flourishing programs like NFL FLAG, PLAY 60, Inspire Change, and Por La Cultura demonstrate the league's commitment to this goal. Yet, despite the abundant success of these initiatives, many football fans don't realize that the NFL's influence extends beyond the stadium stands.

The NFL has challenged us with combating this lack of awareness by creating an emotionally resonant umbrella campaign to unify the league's fragmented youth health and wellness initiatives. This campaign will target casual fans, youth- and parent-skewing, to boost awareness, brand perception, and engagement with youth programs.

## OUR APPROACH

Our research found that the NFL's established reputation and large size can intimidate potential fans. Without a pre-established, well-developed connection to the league or a team, casual fans feel like the NFL is a members-only club they're too late to join. We call these fans the "football-curious." They're energized, interested, and ready to engage. The football-curious want a way in—they're just missing a place to start.

The NFL Elevate campaign positions the league's youth well-being initiatives as the casual fan's way into the NFL community. To connect with youth audiences, we center our message around the underestimated figure of the rookie. Greatness always has a beginning, and when you're a rookie, you can only go up. Embracing all the stumbles, failures, and growing pains of being a rookie establishes a commonality between larger-than-life NFL players and kids facing everyday challenges. To spread this message, NFL Elevate uses digital, social, and intra-community activations to give football-curious youth a place to start, fostering within them the confidence to take the first step.

## OBJECTIVES

### Drive increased awareness of youth wellness impact work

Spotlight the NFL's youth wellness work as a meaningful, accessible entry point into the NFL.

### Lift brand perception

Make the NFL feel more inclusive, encouraging, and relevant, especially to younger and more female-skewing audiences.

### Drive engagement with youth wellness programs and resources

Give NFL beginners (or rookies) a clear place to start, turning curiosity into participation through accessible programs.

## RESEARCH STATS

900+ Survey Responses

418 Organic Keyword Searches

66 Interviews

54 Academic Sources

20 NFL App Usability Diaries

# THE NFL IS THE BIG LEAGUE OF THE BIG LEAGUES.<sup>1</sup>



## Most valuable sports league in the world, drawing in fans of every kind

- X** More valuable than football clubs (soccer)<sup>2</sup>
- O** Higher regular-season game attendance than MLB, NBA, and NHL combined<sup>3</sup>
- X** Top league of interest for youth and women across U.S.<sup>4</sup>



## American Football is the most watched sport in the United States

- X** Highest average viewership since 1988<sup>5</sup>
- O** Breaks its own viewership records<sup>6</sup>
- X** Over 85% of casual fans (majority women) watched NFL games on television in the past 6 months<sup>7</sup>



## Driving force of American culture among avid, casual, and non-fans

- X** 36% of Americans say the Super Bowl should be a national holiday<sup>8</sup>
- O** 85% of casual fans described the NFL as very or extremely "fan-oriented"<sup>9</sup>
- X** Super Bowl halftime shows dominate global conversations<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup>72% of casual fans describe the NFL as "massive", Team Survey; <sup>2</sup>The New York Times, 2025; <sup>3</sup>FiveThirtyEight, 2023; <sup>4</sup>NSAC NFL Brief; <sup>5</sup>NFL AP, 2026; <sup>6</sup>NFL AP, 2026; <sup>7</sup>Team Survey; <sup>8</sup>St. Bonaventure/Siena Research, 2024; <sup>9</sup>Team Survey; <sup>10</sup>PBS, 2026

# CASUAL FANS DON'T SEE HOW THE NFL TRANSCENDS THE GAME.

## Initiatives support youth health

- X Increase daily physical activity through PLAY 60<sup>1</sup>
- O Host games to raise awareness for mental health<sup>2</sup>
- X Partner with American Heart Association to bring PLAY 60 into schools<sup>3</sup>

## And they provide a community to grow with

- X Teams to join<sup>4</sup>
- O Fans to cheer with<sup>5</sup>
- X Causes to contribute to<sup>6</sup>

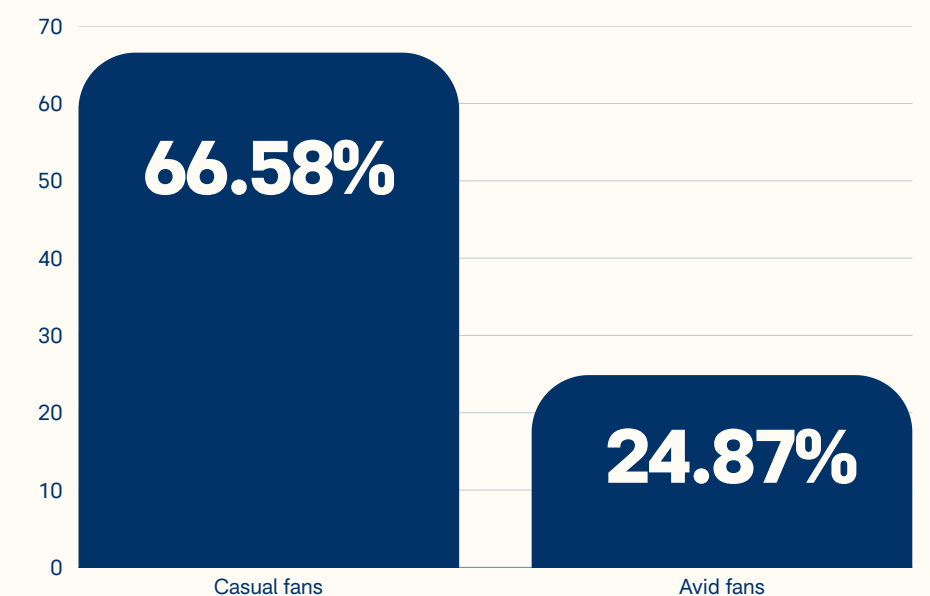


## But these larger-than-game initiatives lack awareness among casual fans

- X More than half of casual fans are not familiar with initiatives, including Por La Cultura, Inspire Change, & PLAY 60<sup>7</sup>
- O Flag football is in schools nationwide, but 53.42% of casual fans say they're not familiar at all with NFL FLAG<sup>8</sup>
- X Large discrepancy in initiative awareness between avid and casual fans: average 41.71% difference<sup>9</sup>

# 53.42%

Casual fans who are "not familiar at all" with any NFL youth initiatives



Discrepancy in average lack of awareness of each initiative for casual versus avid fans

<sup>1</sup>NSAC NFL Brief; <sup>2</sup>Psychiatry Online, 2024, Sports Business Journal, 2025; <sup>3</sup>EurekaAlert, 2025; <sup>4</sup>NFL; <sup>5</sup>Team IDI; <sup>6</sup>NFL; <sup>7</sup>Team Survey; <sup>8</sup>Team Survey; <sup>9</sup>Team Survey

# FOR THE FOOTBALL-CURIOUS, THE LEAGUE FEELS OVERWHELMING.

## Football-Curious:

(adj) 6 to 25-year-olds with growing interest in the NFL, but who lack the confidence, fluency, or familiarity to feel they're fully in.

### Meet Paige



She's got her team. She feels that NFL energy. But she doesn't know where she fits in. She wants something she can contribute to and feel good about participating in, but she doesn't know if the NFL fits that description.



### The rules of football can be confusing

- X 91.06% of casual fans describe the NFL as at least slightly "confusing"<sup>1</sup>
- O 93.79% of casual fans say someone explaining the rules would improve their experience<sup>2</sup>

“If you don't remember the rules, it's really hard to follow.”  
- 12, female<sup>3</sup>



### There are constant changes to the league

- X Drafts and roster changes<sup>4</sup>
- O 25-35% roster turnover rate<sup>5</sup>
- X Annual rule changes<sup>6</sup>

“I just don't watch it enough to be like, oh, I really understand this.”  
- 16, female<sup>8</sup>



### It feels like others have a deeper understanding

- X Nearly 80% of casual fans agree with, "I sometimes feel like other people know way more about football than I do."<sup>7</sup>

“My friends always tell me about the players. I don't know what they're talking about.”  
- 10, male<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Team Survey; <sup>2</sup>Team Survey; <sup>3</sup>Team IDI; <sup>4</sup>Denver Broncos on SI, 2025; <sup>5</sup>Denver Broncos on SI, 2025; <sup>6</sup>NFL, 2025; <sup>7</sup>Team Survey; <sup>8</sup>Team IDI; <sup>9</sup>Team IDI

# IT FEELS DIFFICULT TO FIND A WAY INTO SOMETHING SO MASSIVE.<sup>1</sup>

## Finding a way into something new is scary

- X There are so many steps to starting<sup>2</sup>
- Fear of the unknown leads to avoidance<sup>3</sup>
- X Trying new things is overwhelming for kids<sup>4</sup>

## Youth compare themselves to peers who have already started

- X Social comparison is the basis for perceived competence<sup>5</sup>
- Self-esteem is relational<sup>6</sup>
- X "It's people's attitudes like that that make it feel so daunting. Like some club I'm too late to join."  
- 21, female<sup>7</sup>

## Often, the first step is all you need

- X A step increases goal persistence and likelihood of completion<sup>8</sup>
- Temporal landmarks increase intention to pursue goals<sup>9</sup>
- X The first step combats the intention-behavior gap<sup>10</sup>



# INSIGHT



## **CONTEXT: WHEN SOMETHING FEELS BIG AND ESTABLISHED,**

The NFL's massive<sup>1</sup> scale can both unite fans and distance the football-curious.

## **TENSION: LIKE EVERYONE ELSE IS ONE STEP AHEAD,**

With complex rules and an evolving structure, nearly 80% of casual fans say they feel like other people know more about football than they do.<sup>2</sup>

## **MOTIVATION: BEGINNERS DON'T DIVE IN. THEY LOOK FOR A PLACE TO START.**

The NFL's initiatives create both a gateway into the game and an accessible place to grow.

*Strategy:*

# ***GIVE THE FOOTBALL-CURIOUS A WAY IN.***



**GET** football-curious women and youth

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**WHO** feel like the NFL isn't built for beginners

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**TO** see the NFL as the league that builds confidence and access

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**BY** showing how the league gives youth a place to start and people to start with

**The Idea:**

# **MAKE THEM PROUD TO BE A ROOKIE.**

## **Rookie:**

(noun) A beginner; someone who is defined by growth. They absorb everything—feedback, experience, pressure—and use it to get better, faster, stronger. More than that, a rookie elevates others. Their energy is contagious. Their hunger reminds teams why they started. Their fresh perspective challenges what's been accepted and opens the door for something better.

A rookie isn't just becoming something new; they're becoming something greater.

The NFL takes "Rookie" from a symbol of inexperience to **a badge of honor.**

An in-depth campaign dedicated to proving that the NFL is not only a supporter of youth health and well-being, but an organization that gives back to society by **changing narratives and moving people forward.**

The word "rookie" carries feelings of negativity, inferiority, and a lack of skill. The Rookie campaign tackles this perception and **transforms what it means to be a rookie.**



# Creative: THE ROOKIE CAMPAIGN.

## LOGO

"Elevate" is italicized to appear to move forward.



**ELEVATE**  
FOR THE ONES COMING UP

Arrow/football references the tagline and the NFL.

As a rookie, you can only go up.

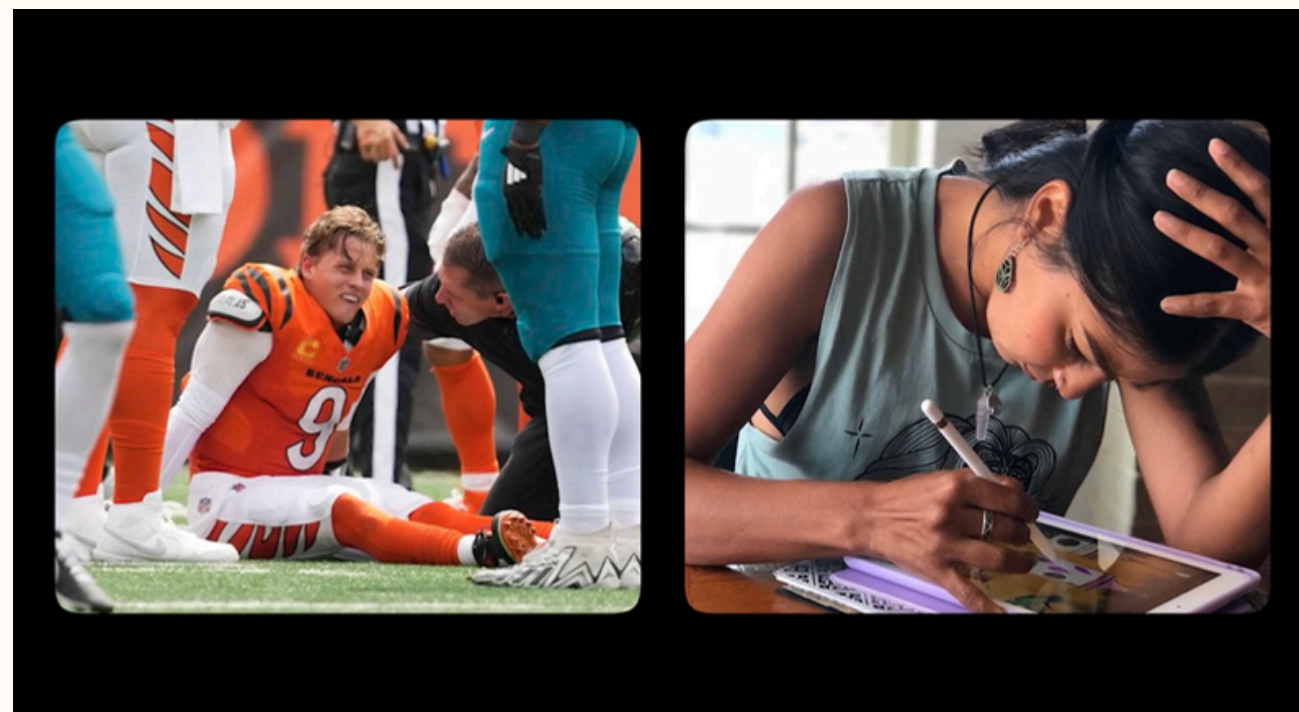
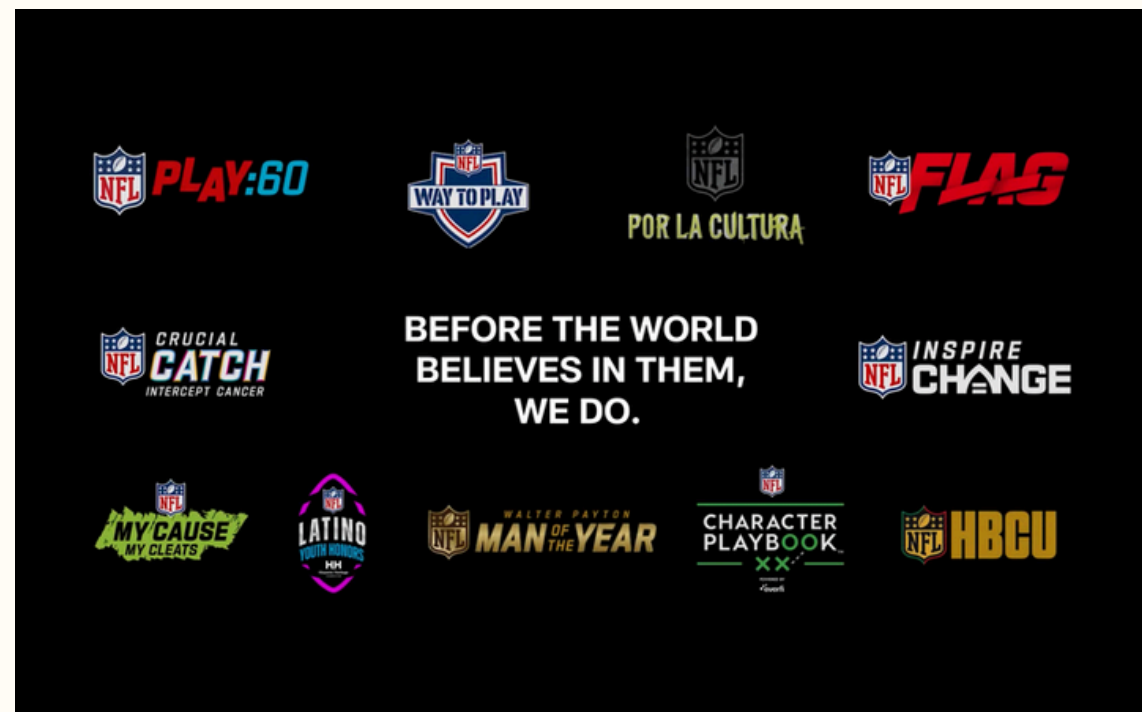
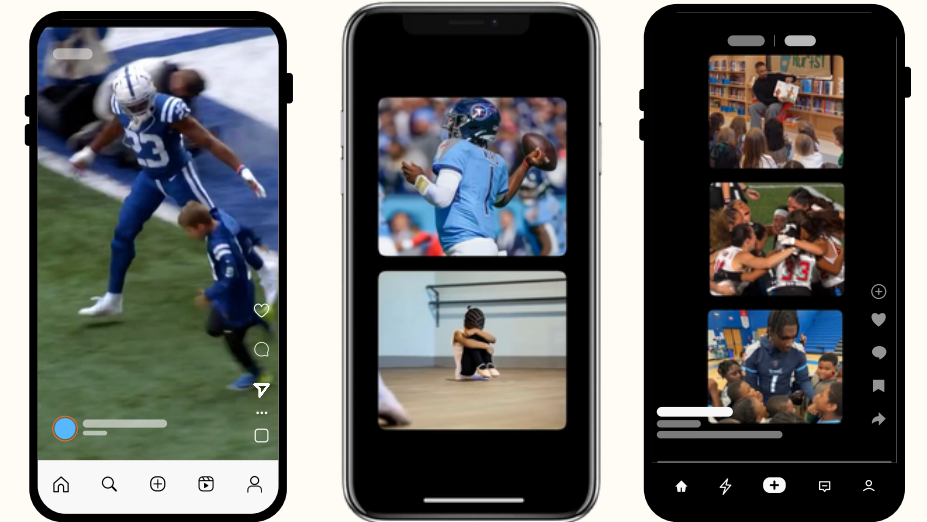
**WEBSITE** nfelevate.com

## SOCIAL

Adaptable social content to reach female and Latino audiences.

## ACTIVATIONS & OUT OF HOME

Create ways to directly engage with initiatives through interactive OOH, the NFL Elevate app, and the NFL Elevate credit card.



## VIDEO

Anyone can be a rookie. The side-by-side shots relate rookies in the NFL draft to rookies in any situation. Worry, hesitation, and falling down are universal to every rookie, and the NFL is a place that offers a hand, encourages them to find their feet, and helps them grow in confidence.

# THE NFL WILL INVEST IN ROOKIES.

**OBJECTIVE:** Maximize creative effectiveness.

**STRATEGY:** Deliver emotionally resonant messaging through high-impact media placements that drive attention and engagement among the target audience.

**OBJECTIVE:** Drive emotional engagement.

**STRATEGY:** Place impactful creative in high-attention media environments.

**OBJECTIVE:** Improve perception of the NFL.

**STRATEGY:** Leverage premium, contextually relevant media placements that build trust and deepen brand affinity.

MEDIUM	CHANNELS	INVESTMENT	% OF SPEND	RATIONALE
<b>Social</b>	YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat Programmatic	\$4,300,000	41%	Highest youth reach (YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat) <sup>1,2</sup> Short-form video drives engagement <sup>2</sup> Efficient for scale + frequency <sup>3</sup> Creator-led content feels authentic <sup>4</sup>
<b>CTV/Streaming</b>	Netflix, Hulu, YouTube TV, Amazon Prime	\$2,600,000	25%	High attention, non-skippable formats <sup>5</sup> Premium, brand-safe environments <sup>5</sup> Strong viewership among audience <sup>6,7</sup> Co-viewing with families <sup>7</sup>
<b>OOH</b>	Public Playground/Park, School, Transit	\$1,000,000	9.6%	High reach, unavoidable exposure <sup>8</sup> Reinforces digital/social campaigns <sup>8</sup> Contextual (schools, parks) <sup>9</sup> Boosts mobile/social engagement <sup>8,10</sup>
<b>Innovative / Experiential</b>	Cinema, Gaming	\$900,000	8.7%	Memorable, immersive experiences <sup>11</sup> Drives social sharing <sup>12</sup> Builds emotional connection <sup>12</sup> Connects IRL + digital <sup>12</sup>
<b>Influencer / Partnerships</b>	Player, Influencer	\$550,000	5.3%	Trusted voices for youth <sup>13</sup> UGC drives authenticity/strong connection <sup>13</sup> Athlete credibility and influence <sup>14</sup> Increase attention and engagement <sup>14</sup>
<b>Audio</b>	Spotify, iHeartRadio Podcasts, SiriusXM Podcasts	\$300,000	2.9%	High daily teen usage <sup>7,15</sup> Reaches during screenless moments <sup>16</sup>
<b>GEO</b>	ChatGPT	\$200,000	1.9%	Captures high intent moments <sup>17</sup> Discovery + information seeking <sup>17,18</sup> Growing youth usage <sup>18</sup>
<b>Production</b>	NFL Elevate App, NFL App, NFL Credit card, NFL Elevate website, CBS, FOX, NBC/Telemundo Deportes, ESPN (App), Paramount+, Fox One, Peacock Stadium Display, Stadium Stair Display	\$400,000	3.8%	Activate owned apps for continuous engagement Show up in live NFL viewing moments Amplify through in-stadium experiences

<sup>1</sup>Pew Research Center; <sup>2</sup>Sprout Social; <sup>3</sup>Quimby Digital; <sup>4</sup>Hearts & Sciences; <sup>5</sup>emarketer; <sup>6</sup>MRI Simmons; <sup>7</sup>Deloitte Digital; <sup>8</sup>OAAA (Out of Home Advertising Association of America); <sup>9</sup>adzze; <sup>10</sup>Nielson; <sup>11</sup>Digital Marketing Institute; <sup>12</sup>Inspira Marketing; <sup>13</sup>Forbes; <sup>14</sup>Colormatics; <sup>15</sup>Edison Research; <sup>16</sup>Spotify Ads; <sup>17</sup>Deloitte/WSJ; <sup>18</sup>Google Business



# IN 2026-2027, THE NFL WILL WELCOME A NEW GENERATION OF FANS.

	CURRENT	GOAL	MEASUREMENT/KPI
AWARENESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>X Low awareness of NFL initiatives among football-curious youth</li> <li>O 53%+ of casual fans not familiar with key programs (PLAY 60, FLAG, Inspire Change)</li> <li>X NFL seen primarily as entertainment, not as an accessible entry point</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>X Increase awareness of NFL initiatives as beginner-friendly entry points</li> <li>O Position NFL as a place to "start" for football-curious audiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>X Unaided awareness of NFL youth initiatives (+15-20%)</li> <li>O Ad recall (video/social)</li> <li>X Reach &amp; frequency (target: 750M+ impressions aligned with media plan)</li> <li>O Search lift for "NFL FLAG," "PLAY 60," "NFL beginner"</li> </ul>
BRAND PERCEPTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>X NFL perceived as intimidating, complex, and not built for beginners</li> <li>O 91%+ describe league as confusing; ~80% feel others know more</li> <li>X "Rookie" carries negative connotation (inexperienced, behind)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>X Lift perception of NFL as inclusive, supportive, and beginner-friendly</li> <li>O Reframe "rookie" as a badge of pride and growth</li> <li>X Position NFL as a confidence-building community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>X Brand favorability lift (+5-8%)</li> <li>O Agreement with: "NFL is for people like me/beginners" (+10-15%)</li> <li>X Perception shift: "NFL helps people grow"/"welcoming community"</li> <li>O Social sentiment analysis (positive vs. negative mentions of "rookie")</li> </ul>
ENGAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>X Passive consumption (watching games, highlights)</li> <li>O Low participation in initiatives/programs</li> <li>X Limited interaction beyond game-day content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>X Increase active participation in NFL ecosystem (FLAG, PLAY 60, digital experiences)</li> <li>O Drive interaction with "Rookie" content and UGC</li> <li>X Encourage first-step behaviors (learning, joining, sharing)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>X Social engagement rate (likes, shares, comments, saves)</li> <li>O Video completion rates (short-form)</li> <li>X App downloads/interactions (Rookie App, NFL app touchpoints)</li> <li>O Participation metrics (initiative engagement)</li> <li>X UGC volume using campaign hashtags</li> </ul>

## NEXT STEPS

The NFL invites casual fans to join their youth initiatives under a single, emotionally resonant campaign. Through NFL Elevate, we show that the NFL's initiatives are an accessible and inviting place for youth to try something new. Our campaign unifies the NFL ecosystem under the powerful image of the Rookie, and, in our pitch, we'll show how NFL Elevate integrates video, social, OOH, and digital to elevate the next generation of rookies. We look forward to taking the first step with you.