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NFL: Churches free to host Super Bowl parties

Dennis Coday | Jan. 29, 2009

Churches can hold parties to watch the upcoming Super Bowl with fewer restrictions this year. For one thing, they can use really big TVs.

The Rutherford Institute, which joined members of Congress in challenging the National Football League's previous rules, has reminded churches that they can host viewing parties on Sunday (Feb. 1) on large-screen televisions in their buildings.

"As long as they follow the basic guidelines set forth by the NFL, churches can now rest assured that they are free to have football parties and show the Super Bowl game," said John W Whitehead, president of the Charlottesville, Va.-based civil liberties organization.

The Pittsburgh Steelers and the Arizona Cardinals face off in Super Bowl XLIII in Tamp, Fla., on Sunday.

NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy said the modified policy eliminated past rules regarding the size of the screens on which the game is shown.

"The only thing we do ask is that these organizations not charge admission -- the game's on TV for free -- and that they hold the parties at locations they regularly use for other large gatherings," he said Tuesday (Jan. 27).

McCarthy said his New York offices continue to receive calls from churches about the policy. "We had always had calls throughout the history of the Super Bowl," he said. "It hasn't been that substantial this year."

Members of Congress and church leaders objected to the NFL's previous ban on widescreen televisions. The league had said churches could not hold Super Bowl parties featuring TV screens larger than 55 inches, even though sports bars routinely did.

Last February, Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, sent NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell a letter with a series of questions about the policy, and Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., introduced legislation that would permit churches to show the game on widescreen TVs.

Goodell wrote back to Hatch to inform him of the rule change and noted that the league believed the legislation was not necessary.

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