



# Long Bomb: How the XFL Became TV's Biggest Fiasco

*Brett Forrest*

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There is no failure like televised failure. It is the most public failure. The most humbling failure. So it was odd when the two men who had assembled the biggest bomb in television history began high-fiving on the sidelines of the XFL's final game.

But not everyone was celebrating. Dick Butkus bristled. Jesse Ventura just wanted it all to end. And the general public couldn't wait to watch something completely different.

Brett Forrest's **Long Bomb** is the unofficial inside story of what really happened in the XFL, the renegade football league dreamed up by NBC and the World Wrestling Federation. Forrest reported on the XFL from its first training camp to its championship game, and he takes us inside the limousines and locker rooms and onto the field to deliver the dope that NBC's all-access cameras only promised. Along the way, **Long Bomb** seamlessly interweaves the story lines that arose from the doomed enterprise.

When network titan NBC lost television rights to the NFL, sports department chairman Dick Ebersol was willing to do anything to get football back under his wing. Meanwhile, Vince McMahon, at the apex of his powers with the WWF, desperately wanted to prove that he was more than a two-bit huckster. Old friends, the two men shared a common hatred of the suits who ran the NFL. By combining football, wrestling, and reality TV, they planned to reinvent the way America watched sports.

That's where the story begins. **Long Bomb** follows the plot twists toward the humiliating finale, introducing us to key figures along the way. As color commentator, Jesse Ventura was a piece of the puzzle that was supposed to explode the TV sports formula. Soon enough, he became an expendable scapegoat. Dick Butkus was meant to lend a measure of football credibility to the fledgling operation, but ultimately even he couldn't see what was worth saving or dressing up.

Long Bomb also tells the story of the men who played in the XFL, which promised as much to them as it did to its viewers. Set in Las Vegas, the book follows the Outlaws, including the league's biggest star, Rod Smart. His nickname, He Hate Me, was the one thing that worked in the XFL. But the real story behind He Hate Me has never been told.

Forrest deconstructs every aspect of this moment-in-time experiment that spoke volumes about the direction of the entire TV sports business. A combination of desperation and hubris, the XFL reflected a confused media landscape, where the cost of airing big games ran too high in a wilderness of splintered audiences and expanding entertainment choices.

The XFL was supposed to be greater, bigger, better—more, more, more. If it worked, competing networks would have fallen over each other copying the formula. If it didn't work, man, what a train wreck.

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