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NFL shipwrecks Captain Morgan campaign



By [Charles Robinson](#), Yahoo! Sports Nov 12, 12:56 pm EST

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Captain Morgan may have pulled off the quietest and shortest-lived advertising ambush in sports history last Sunday. One that was almost universally unknown, barely noticed, and yet, promptly squashed by the NFL this week.

Like the other 21.9 million viewers watching the [Dallas Cowboys](#) face the [Philadelphia Eagles](#) on Sunday night, you probably missed it. But the brand name known for spiced rum achieved the rare feat of sneaking an advertising fastball by the NFL – in the middle of a nationally televised game, no less. During the third quarter of Dallas' 20-16 win, Eagles tight end [Brent Celek](#)(notes) caught an 11-yard touchdown pass from [Donovan McNabb](#)(notes), then appeared to purposefully back up and align himself in front of television cameras. Putting his hands on his hips, Celek raised his right leg, mimicking a pose similar to the pirate on Captain Morgan's label.



As far as anyone knows, it's the first time we've seen that type of guerilla-style advertising campaign in an NFL end zone. And if the league has its way, it will be the last, too. The "Captain Morgan" was effectively banned this week after the league learned of a wider campaign meant to get players to repeatedly strike the pose during NFL games.

"A company can't pay a player to somehow promote it's product on the field," NFL spokesman Greg Aiello told Yahoo! Sports this week. "Every league has the same rule. ... It's come up before, companies trying to use our games and then players for ambush marketing purposes."

Celek's pose actually resulted in a 15-yard penalty for demonstration, which was incurred when teammate [Jason Avant](#)(notes) tried to help him achieve the perfect Captain Morgan form. Afterward, Celek spoke through an Eagles spokesman and denied any knowledge of a Captain Morgan campaign. But an account executive handling the promotion told Yahoo! Sports the Eagles tight end was indeed involved.

In hopes of raising brand awareness, Captain Morgan intended to offer lucrative charity contributions in exchange for each instance a player was caught on camera doing its pose during a game. The contributions were earmarked for the Gridiron Greats Assistance Fund – a non-profit which helps retired NFL players with various hardships after leaving the game.

"The [ad campaign] has been going around internally for a while and [Celek] learned of the program through his contact at Diageo [Captain Morgan's parent company]," said Glenn Lehrman, an account director at Rogers & Cowan, the Los Angeles-based firm that handles Captain Morgan promotions. "Brent said, 'You know what, if I get the opportunity, I'm going to go ahead and do it.' He sort of beat us to the punch, but we're certainly not going to complain."

The campaign was set to be unveiled next week and was fairly simple: For every time a player was caught on camera striking the "Captain Morgan" during a regular-season game, \$10,000 would be donated to Gridiron Greats. For each instance in the playoffs, the donation would elevate to \$25,000. And for instances in the Super Bowl, the bounty was slated to hit \$100,000 per pose.

But when the NFL caught wind of the plan this week, it promptly put the brakes on the promotion, notifying Gridiron Greats and Captain Morgan that it wouldn't tolerate the pose during NFL games. And while Celek won't be fined for doing it Sunday, a league source also told Yahoo! Sports that striking the pose in future games will result in a "significant" penalty.

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It’s not the first time the league has taken a hard-line stance against “guerilla” marketing tactics. Indeed, the NFL fined [Chicago Bears](#) linebacker [Brian Urlacher](#)(notes) \$100,000 simply for wearing a hat promoting vitaminwater during the league’s media day prior to Super Bowl XLI. And in another incident, former commissioner Pete Rozelle fined Bears quarterback Jim McMahon \$5,000 for wearing a headband with “adidas” on it during a playoff game in 1985. McMahon then famously responded in the NFC championship game with a headband that read “rozelle.”

The NFL will likely be a little more sensitive with this latest promotion, since it would have benefitted Gridiron Greats, and the post-career struggles of players has been a paramount hot-button topic. While the league welcomes charitable donations to Gridiron Greats, it doesn’t want those contributions to be used as a carrot to influence the on-field antics of players – particularly when the antics center on selling a product.

“The issue is that players are specifically prohibited under our policies from wearing, displaying, promoting or otherwise conveying their support of a commercially identified product during a game while they’re on the field,” Aiello said. “Whether it’s rum or soft drinks or any other commercial product, that type of promotion is prohibited.”

So that stance has killed the idea of striking a “Captain Morgan,” and left the brand and Gridiron greats looking for an alternative that would benefit both.

“I don’t want people to think our intention was to [upset] the NFL,” Lehrman said. “We want to find a way to do it, but it’s not going to work out as currently formulated. ... It’s at the point where we need to re-think how we can go about doing this and find a way that we can raise money for [Gridiron Greats] without getting people upset.”

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