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Football Blackout Riles White House

Associated Press

Washington

The Nixon administration threatened yesterday to attack pro football's antitrust exemption after the National Football league refused a request by the President to lift the local television ban on playoff games during the next two weekends.

Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst said in a statement he had asked Commissioner Pete Rozelle, at Mr. Nixon's request, to make arrangements to televise the games locally in Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Washington and Miami this weekend and the championship games December 31 if they are sold out 48 hours prior to kickoff.

"Commissioner Rozelle advised me this morning that it would not be possible for the NFL to comply with the President's request," said Kleindienst. "I have advised Mr. Rozelle that as a result of the league's decision, the Nixon administration would strongly urge the new Congress to re-examine the entire antitrust exemption statute and seek legislation that is more in keeping with the public interest."

At the White House, press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said the President agrees wholeheartedly with Kleindienst's statement.

SHOW

In New York, Rozelle repeated the NFL's previously stated position that its main concern is to prevent pro football from becoming what he called a "studio show."

He said also in the statement that six of the last ten conference / championship games have not been sold out and that since 1967, when playoff games were begun, only 11 of 17 were played to capacity.

"The reasons have been anticipation of local television because of misleading statements by civic leaders and others, actual television signal penetration into home areas, possible cold or inclement weather and the

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necessarily late determination of playoff participants and sites," he said. "It was a combination of these reasons."

Rozelle said he told two congressional committees this fall that Super Bowl VII, pitting the winners of the American and National Football Conferences, would be televised locally in Los Angeles January 14 if all tickets are sold ten days in advance of the game.

Pro football received an antitrust exemption in 1961 when Congress specifically permitted joint agreements by organized professional team sports for the sale of television rights which permitted pro football to offer its games on a TV network as a package instead of to individual stations.

In 1966, legislation again was passed to permit the merger of the warring American and National Football Leagues into the current NFL and the television exemption was extended to the combined league.

In recent years, bills have been introduced unsuccessfully to lift the ban not only on the playoff and Super Bowl games, but on regular season games as well.

A suit filed in U.S. District Court to lift the blackout of Sunday's NFL playoff game here between the Washington Redskins and Green Bay Packers will be heard today by Judge Joseph Waddy.

The NFL begins its playoff games Saturday with the Oakland Raiders in Pittsburgh against the Steelers in an AFC game and Dallas going to San Francisco to play the 49ers in an NFC game.

On Sunday, Green Bay will be in the nation's capital against the Redskins in an NFC game and Cleveland will travel to Miami to meet the Dolphins in an AFC contest.

The championship games of the AFC and the NFC will be played December 31, with Super Bowl VII being held January 14.

SFChronicle, 25 Dec 72, this file:

The game was blacked out in Washington. Commissioner Pete Rozelle refused a request from President Nixon to lift the blackout and a last minute appeal to the Supreme Court was rejected.

See also Russell Baker, "B52 crews are studying maps of the Super Bowl," New Orleans States-Item 25 Dec 72, filed Nixon.