



## **THE NFL SHOULD THINK OMAHA**

*Another Original & Exclusive Column From The Mind of DINO COSTA*

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-Capital City, Wyoming

When I was a kid I used to get a big kick out of the Kansas City-Omaha Kings.

From 1972 through the 1975 season, the city of Omaha shared custody of an NBA franchise with the Kings splitting their home games between Kansas City and Omaha, Nebraska.

I've been to Omaha a few times, I've passed through the city on Interstate-80 even more times, and whenever the thought of "Omaha" comes into my mind I find myself very bullish on the idea of Omaha being potentially a terrific pro-sports locale.

If the Chargers situation doesn't work out for them in Los Angeles (*I don't think it will*) then perhaps they'll think about Omaha as a more permanent destination sometime down the road?

Why Omaha?

Why not, Omaha?

Let's consider a few things that Omaha has in its favor in terms of possibly acquiring an NFL team, or, an NBA or an NHL team in its future.

Firstly, the city of Omaha currently counts close to a million people within a 60-mile radius of the city.

Omaha also is the home to 5-Fortunate-500 companies currently, in addition to two universities that take part in division one athletics. The city has hosted the college baseball World Series for years, and they seem to have sports-loving fans who show up to watch whatever is going on.

For instance, one might not think of Omaha as a hockey hotbed, right?

Well, one would be very wrong.

The University of Nebraska-Omaha Mavericks hockey team averages nearly 6,000 in attendance whenever they open the doors to the beautiful CHI Health Center.

You know how many college hockey programs across the country averaged better attendance than the Mavericks did last year? Five. And all of them are traditional NCAA hockey powers.

Only the programs at North Dakota, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Ohio State, and Minnesota-Duluth, averaged crowds at their games better than UNO did a season ago.

College hoops, you ask?

How about the way that Omaha supports Creighton?

Last year the Blue Jays played before capacity crowds a few times and their overall season-average at the CHI Health Center checked in at 15,980 which was good for 8th overall in the country, better than basketball powers like Indiana, Michigan State, Virginia, Ohio State, Memphis, Michigan, Arizona, and Cincinnati.

Of course, the hottest ticket in town is always when the College Baseball World Series hits the city, and just this past summer I had the unfortunate situation of driving through Omaha when this was going on and couldn't find a hotel room within 100-miles of the city...I ended up staying someplace in Iowa that night.

I have no question that if several current NBA teams were in Omaha rather than in their current city, that the interest in the team and the attendance for home games would well exceed what some of these teams currently are able to draw.

It's the same situation with the NHL.

If the Florida Panthers, or the Arizona Coyotes, or the Ottawa Senators, if any of those 3 clubs were in Omaha, there isn't a doubt in my mind that they'd be playing before capacity crowds most night's they opened their doors.

The bottom line is this; while most would never consider Omaha to be a sports-crazed community, the evidence proves otherwise, and I'll continue to believe that this is an untapped market just waiting for someone to take advantage of the vociferous and rabid fan base that exists there.

An NFL franchise in Omaha would be in a great position to not only draw fans from the city of Omaha itself as well as from the capital city of Nebraska, Lincoln, off to the west – but in addition – this would have the ability to be a regional franchise by drawing fans from another few states currently without a pro sports franchise – Iowa, where Des Moines which is only a 2-hour drive away would interest fans – and you could even include some parts of western Kansas as well.

In some ways, Omaha reminds me a little bit of Oklahoma City, another place where people were skeptical of pro sports succeeding until crowds at OKC Thunder games proved otherwise over the last several years.

Another advantage that Omaha has is where it's located, in the central part of the country within easy reach of many other cities.

Depending on the sport and the league a franchise in Omaha would be able to have some terrific natural rivalries, right?

Right off the bat, an NFL franchise would have Omaha and Kansas City detesting one another.

If Omaha had an NBA team you could see rivalries with teams such as Oklahoma City, Chicago, Memphis, Milwaukee, and Minnesota.

An Omaha NHL franchise would be able to develop a rowdy rivalry with St. Louis, no doubt, in addition to some other cities I've already mentioned, Chicago and Minneapolis.

The biggest issue of course to an NFL team in Omaha is a stadium, of course.

Who would build it?

How much will it cost?

Who would own the team?

But these are the same questions asked of any community seeking to go to the big-league's who are also without a current facility to house a franchise.

There is also some past precedent that a city like Omaha could hang their hat on when talking about the city's appetite for pro-football.

It was only a few years ago that Omaha did host a professional football franchise when the city was the home of the Omaha Nighthawks of the United Football League.

Now, was this pro-football, yes, albeit minor league professional football and the league the Nighthawks played in only lasted 2-years.

But still, you have to be impressed with the way the community came out in support of this team.

Their first-ever game played at Rosenblatt Stadium sold-out with 24,000 people in attendance. That first season the Nighthawks did not play to a home crowd of less than 20,000 easily leading the UFL in attendance.

Throughout the two-and-a-half years that the UFL was around the Nighthawks always drew well...for minor-league football.

So it only stands to reason that if Omaha could turn out those kinds of crowds for a minor-league product, what would the fans of that city and around the region do with an actual NFL team?

Of course, ticket prices would be much higher, but this goes hand-in-hand with becoming a professional sports city.

To conclude, Omaha is a growing and thriving city full of enthusiastic sports fans and I think it will only be a matter of time before someone takes a serious look at the city for professional sports and realizes that pro sports on the big-league level could work out very favorably for this eastern Nebraska town.

The Omaha Chargers.

Even the name sounds pretty good 😊