



## NFL apologizes for Super Bowl seat fiasco

**(CNN)** -- Football officials are apologizing to ticket-holding fans who were denied seats at Sunday's Super Bowl, but that may not be enough to stop lawsuits over the issue from going ahead.

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell on Monday took full responsibility for the seating fiasco, in which about 400 fans with tickets were denied seats because certain sections of Cowboys Stadium in Dallas, which hosted the event, weren't ready.

A total of about 1,250 fans were affected, but roughly 850 of them were relocated to other seats, while the remaining 400 were left without, the NFL said. Some people in the Dallas Cowboys organization volunteered to give up their employee tickets so affected fans could have a seat, Goodell said.

"We apologize to those fans that were impacted by this," Goodell said at a news conference Monday. "We will certainly do a thorough review and get to the bottom of why it all occurred, but we take full responsibility for that as putting on this game."

NFL Executive Vice President Eric Grubman said the problem was officials "just ran out of time" to complete infrastructure like railings and steps and to tighten risers. Employees were still trying to get the work done as late as Sunday afternoon, he said.

The Green Bay Packers won the Super Bowl on Sunday night, defeating the Pittsburgh Steelers 31-25.

Matthew Rush, 40, a Steelers fan originally from Pittsburgh, was one of the 400 or so fans left without a seat at the big game. After spending the whole day being moved around to different parts of the stadium while officials tried to accommodate them, Rush and others were eventually moved to a glassed-in bar just below field level where they could watch the game on television monitors, he said.

What view they had of the field was obscured by those standing on the sidelines, he added.

"It was happening 300 feet in front of us, but (it was as though) we weren't there," Rush told CNN on his way back from Dallas on Tuesday.

After halftime, Rush said, he and others were so frustrated that they left the stadium, and he watched the remainder from his hotel room.

Rush said he spent a total of about \$5,000 to attend the Super Bowl with his wife. He spent \$800 per ticket, which he purchased through the Steelers' season-ticket-holder lottery.

The NFL promised to give a free ticket to next year's Super Bowl and a refund of triple the cost of the \$800 face value of the ticket to each of the 400 fans denied seats on Sunday -- or a free ticket to a future Super Bowl game of the fan's choice, plus round-trip airfare and hotel accommodations. Fans can pick the option they want.

But Rush said that doesn't make up for the anger, frustration, and disappointment he still feels at missing his beloved Steelers at the big game.

"I actually feel worse for the Packers fans, because they missed their team winning the game," he said.

Rush said he's further angered by Grubman's revelation that football officials were aware of a potential seating problem as early as the middle of last week. Grubman said officials had still hoped to complete the work by game day, so they didn't warn fans about a problem.

"We made a judgment that we had a very good shot to be able to complete it," Grubman said. "We made a judgment that it was the right course of action to bring the fans in, rather than discourage them or create a sense that they wouldn't have the information necessary."

Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones on Monday said the Cowboys "deeply regret" the problems experienced by the affected fans and share the responsibility for it with the NFL.

Rush has started [suesuperbowl.com](http://suesuperbowl.com), one of at least two websites for fans mulling possible lawsuits over the seating issue. He said he is obtaining legal counsel and is urging affected fans to get in touch. So far he has heard from about a dozen people, he said.

"We're still figuring out what our rights are, whether damages come into play or not," he said. "This is more than just a breach of contract. ... This was a very traumatic experience for a lot of these people."

Another website compiling submissions from angry fans is [superbowlsuit.com](http://superbowlsuit.com), started by Wes Lewis of Los Angeles. Lewis, 26, told CNN he was one of the 850 fans initially denied a seat but later accommodated.

He went to the game with his father, who was able to enter the stadium -- but when Lewis presented his ticket, he was told to go to the ticket resolution center. He said he waited there with other fans for nearly three hours with no information from officials.

Eventually, Lewis said, someone from the NFL handed them fliers that promised the triple refund and entry to a hospitality area to watch the game. Angry and frustrated, that's when he started his website, using his cell phone, Lewis said.

In the end, Lewis said, he was able to join his father in the stands in their original seats -- but he said he still feels a duty to keep the site running.

"The NFL has an ethical, moral obligation to rectify this, and I have a moral obligation because the site's at the forefront of the situation," Lewis said, adding he doesn't feel the league is doing enough.

Lewis and Rush said they're in touch with each other and are coordinating their efforts. Lewis said he's not focusing on lawsuits as much as trying to collect the stories of affected fans; so far he has had about 250 submissions, including about 50 detailed stories.

Asked about possible lawsuits, Goodell said Monday, "We're more concerned with making sure we take care of the fans in an appropriate way, and that's what we're going to focus on."

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