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NFL ticket resale deal may be odd play for Patriots

By Bruce Mohl
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The National Football League is preparing to embrace the ticket reselling business, which could prove awkward for the New England Patriots.

The NFL is planning to name an official ticket reseller for all its teams in the next two weeks. Six companies are vying for the business, including StubHub Inc., the eBay-owned company that is locked in a court battle with the Patriots over the legality of selling team tickets above face value.

The deal underscores how the ticket reselling business has gone mainstream in America. But it also highlights how the Patriots are trying to buck that trend, insisting their tickets are licenses that can be revoked if customers try to resell them.

Greg Aiello, an NFL spokesman, said the Patriots supported the decision to hire an official ticket reseller for the entire league because of the way the resolution was crafted.

"The resolution gives each club the ability to ensure that its own club policies relating to tickets are implemented as part of any league secondary ticket deal," Aiello said in an e-mail. "The Patriots have been consistent in their position on their own tickets, but did not want to dictate policies to other clubs."

Many NFL teams already have contracts with ticket resellers. Even the Patriots offer a service through Ticketmaster that allows season ticket holders to sell unwanted tickets at face value to fans on the team's season ticket waiting list.

Details of the NFL ticket resale deal have not been disclosed, but it's expected that one company would become the league's official ticket reseller as individual team deals expire. Industry officials say the company that wins the NFL's ticket reseller contract could pay up to $20 million a year to the league or give the league an equity stake in its business.

Major League Baseball announced a similar deal this summer with StubHub. The deal requires each team to direct fans who want to buy or sell tickets on the secondary market to StubHub. Terms of the deal were not disclosed. The National Basketball Association and the National Hockey League do not have official ticket resellers.

In addition to San Francisco-based StubHub, the other ticket resellers vying for the NFL contract include: Ticketmaster of West Hollywood, Calif.; TicketsNow of Rolling Meadows, Ill.; Viagogo of London; FlashSeats of Cleveland; and Seat Exchange Inc. of Chicago.

Don Vaccaro, the chief executive of Connecticut's TicketNetwork.com, which consolidates ticket offerings of brokers across the country, said the proposed deal with the NFL is a sign the ticket resale business is a stable, maturing industry.

"The revenue that secondary market companies are making is much more transparent than it was a few years ago," he said. "Event producers and sports leagues want to share in that revenue."
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