



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on August 5, 2024

# NFL Rolling Out League-wide Facial Recognition Technology

The National Football League (NFL) is implementing facial recognition technology across all 32 stadiums in a major move to ostensibly enhance event security and streamline entry processes for credential-holders. This decision follows a successful [pilot program](#) and the signing of a league-wide contract with [Wicket](#), a company specializing in facial authentication software.

According to the Wicket [LinkedIn post](#):

As we are gearing up for the football season, we're excited to be part of the NFL's league-wide credentialing initiative to shore up vulnerabilities for high-security zones, including the playing field, locker rooms, and press boxes. Thousands of staff, vendors, and media members will use a new facial credentialing system that pairs the Wicket facial authentication platform with [Accredit Solutions](#) accreditation software.



Joe Allen/X

According to [the article](#) in *The Sports Business Journal* referenced by the company, these vulnerabilities include the current way people prove they're permitted to be in a certain part of the system. This encompasses the illicit transfers of credentials, the use of fraudulent credentials and poor human enforcement of the restrictions separating one part of the venue from another.

The technology will debut in stadiums nationwide beginning August 8, coinciding with the NFL's preseason kickoff featuring the Patriots and the Giants.

## How It Works

Wicket's system operates by requiring credential holders to submit a selfie before arriving at the venue. Upon arrival, their facial scan is cross-referenced with their credentials through Accredit, a credentialing platform integrated with Wicket.

"Credential holders simply take a selfie before they come, and then Wicket verifies their identity and checks their credentials with Accredit as they walk through security checkpoints," explained Jeff Boehm, chief operating officer of Wicket, in an apparently deleted LinkedIn post referenced by [The Record](#).



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Apparently, the system works for noncredentialed game-goers, too. In [another post](#), Boehm expressed his enthusiasm for the fan experience with Wicket's technology, stating, "I love seeing fan reactions to using Wicket." He recounted attending a recent New York Mets game, where "so many fans genuinely love using facial ticketing to get into the game faster. They walk up to an iPad, and it immediately recognizes them, pops their name up on the screen, shows them how many tickets they have, and they walk right in."

### **Lauded Convenience**

Brandon Covert, vice president of information technology for the Cleveland Browns, also [lauded](#) the system's convenience for fans, saying that they simply "come look at the tablet and, instantly, the tablet recognizes the fan. It's almost a half-second stop. It's not even a stop—more of a pause. It has greatly reduced the amount of time and friction that comes with entering the stadium."

The Browns have also implemented Wicket's technology to verify the ages of fans purchasing alcohol, further integrating the software into the stadium experience.

Apparently, the team [started using](#) the system during the Covid-19 pandemic, when fans were required to wear facial masks. Despite the challenges posed by that restriction, the system demonstrated nearly perfect accuracy in recognizing people's faces.

Simply put, "Your face is your ticket," as the company [wrote](#) on its website.

While the adoption of facial recognition technology in sports venues is said to be aimed at enhancing security and improving efficiency, it has sparked concerns among privacy advocates.

According to The Record, critics argue that such technology could be used to track individuals' movements, and that it poses risks of racial and gender bias, as facial recognition algorithms have been known to be less accurate when identifying people of color, women, and "nonbinary" individuals, who identify as neither male nor female.

Wicket's technology, however, claims to operate with a 99.7 percent accuracy rate, even in challenging lighting conditions, and touts "[zero] percent reported false positives." The company assures that its facial biometrics algorithms authenticate individual faces in under a second, and positions its service as a solution to reduce congestion and speed up entry processes.

### **Privacy Concerns**

While highly accurate and convenient, the system was also criticized for its potential for population surveillance, especially in a broader context of the ever-expanding corporate and government intrusion into people's privacy.

"Facial recognition is expanding. It is a crucial element of the Technocratic State. [Of course] it would come via football because entertainment is one of the easiest ways to sell surveillance," wrote journalist Derrick Broze.

He continued with a quote from his book *How to Opt-Out of the Technocratic State*, saying, "From doorbell cameras to home assistants and TVs that are always snooping, the masses are voluntarily abandoning privacy in the name of entertainment and convenience."

David J. Place, a Republican state representative from Rhode Island, remarked that the news "should



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send chills down everyone’s spine who supports the [First Amendment].”

The precision of facial recognition technology used to identify fans at sports stadiums is nothing short of remarkable, as appears from the clip reportedly posted by the Dallas Cowboys, leading observers to draw parallels with China’s extensive social surveillance system and evoke comparisons to the dystopian world depicted in George Orwell’s *1984*.

“Sportsball Panopticon. Enjoy your Bud Lite, boys. It’s safe and effective,” remarked author Joe Allen, transhumanist editor of War Room.

### **A Broader Trend in Sports**

The NFL is not alone in embracing facial recognition technology. Soccer stadiums around the world have also begun deploying similar systems to monitor fans and enhance security.

According to an article by [Privacy International](#), a nonprofit organization based in London, as of May 2024, 25 of the top 100 soccer stadiums globally have integrated facial recognition technology into their video surveillance systems, “with more and more running tests year on year.” This technology is used not only for ticketing and contactless concessions, but also to monitor spectators’ behavior, reports the privacy watchdog.

Moreover, for the first time in the history of the Olympic Games, [Paris implemented facial recognition technology](#) as a core component of its security strategy for the 2024 event. This cutting-edge, artificial intelligence (AI)-powered system is used not only to verify the identities of athletes, staff, and accredited personnel in real time, but also to keep an eye on the public well outside the sporting venues, as reported by [Security Informed](#) and [France 24](#).



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