

# A RATINGS GAME FULL OF STATIC

By BRANDON STEINER

**T**HERE I WAS, sitting in my office, thinking about the Super Bowl, the biggest sporting event of the season, when something popped into my mind. Here I am, a sports marketer, and I have no idea how to explain how do you really measure the impact of a sporting event? Now I know about the Nielsens. When it comes to television, everything is based on ratings. But then I began to wonder, Are the Nielsens really the best way of measuring how many people are watching a sporting event?

It amazes me that the entire industry seems to rely solely on the Neilsens to determine how well a game or event has actually done after exhausting millions of dollars in securing advertising spots throughout the broadcast. The Super Bowl, attracting at least 50 million viewers, may be an exception to the general rule. It seems logical from a financial standpoint for an advertiser to introduce a new project or campaign during this game because the advertising dollars spent will be in direct proportion to the viewership. Paying \$1.2 million for a 30-second spot to reach 50 million people costs an advertiser two cents per person. A local Super Bowl spot this year will cost \$200,000 but will only reach 8% of the country. Go figure, considering that New York is such a powerful market and a New York team won't be playing. The NBA Finals, which gets an average rating of 15 nationally, costs approximately \$370,000. Would you rather have three NBA Finals spots or one during the Super Bowl?

But when it comes to other televised sporting events, it is impossible to use only Nielsens as a method of knowing how successful an event has been. A prime example of this would be the televised World Series that rated somewhere between 15-18, which, according to Nielsen, makes it appear to have been marginally successful. However, local network affiliates had great difficulty selling their local spots, and national spots were sold below what had been anticipated, so it be-



came somewhat of a fire sale.

In short, though the ratings made the World Series seem like a huge success, it was anything but that in reality. How can the ratings, which are only one source, be deemed conclusive when Nielsen boxes are placed in only 500 homes locally and 5,000 homes nationally when there are almost 100 cable stations in New York alone? Another very crucial factor that must be taken into consideration is that people congregate in sports bars, restaurants, fraternity houses, in fire and police houses — places where no Nielsen boxes sit; therefore, a large portion of the sports viewing population can never be incorporated into the Nielsen findings. Another factor that needs to be considered is that on any given night, the average male ages 25-40 will channel surf while watching three or four games simultaneously, and that would seem extremely difficult to monitor accurately. And don't forget picture within a picture viewing.

While the Neilsens have made adjustments in their researching practices over the years, they should not be considered the last word on deciding whether a sports event has been a good one.

I hope someone devises a wider range of research to measure the result we are seeking. Every now and then, it would be nice to get the whole picture rather than learn what people in 500 or 5,000 homes are tuning in to watch. I, for one, don't even know anyone who has a Nielsen box in their home. Do you?

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