

Moms love Super Bowl

Marketing group poll shows nine of 10 watch the NFL's big game, but more than half are more interested in commercials

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[GARTH WOOLSEY](#)

Of the many grand terms used to describe the Super Bowl it turns out that "the mother of all football games" may be one of the more accurate.

There's beer and testosterone in the Roman numeralled mix, all right. But nearly half of the adults aged 18 to 49 who watched last year's game were women and there's every reason to believe the same percentages would apply to last night's big game in Detroit. What's more, one survey says that 91 per cent of U.S. mothers planned to watch XL.

Nine out of 10? Mamma mia!

I can see where mothers who might not normally be caught dead watching an NFL game get drawn into the Super Bowl vortex. The event is much more than the game and as an excuse to gather round the tube, by family or tribe, by brotherhood or sisterhood, young and old, it is unrivalled.

Yet 30 per cent of that group of mothers planned to watch the game apart from their husbands or boyfriends. Girls will be girls.

All are welcome to worship at the altar of the gridiron and the ... oh, yeah, the pre-game and half-time entertainment, too. Plus, lest we forget, the commercials.

These being the sports pages and all, we tend to pay attention to things like turnover ratios, half sacks and quarterback ratings. But the same group that came up with the 91 per cent figure, the U.S.-based Marketing to Moms Coalition, says 53 per cent of mothers are more interested in the commercials than the game itself.

What doesn't make sense is this: Despite the huge number of women watching the game and despite the fact that they are thought to control 85 per cent of household spending, Super Bowl advertisers are reluctant to target them specifically.

"Think of this," Maria Bailey, CEO of Marketing to Moms Coalition, tells *Media Life* magazine, "mothers in the U.S. every year spend the same as the gross national product of Portugal, Spain and the Philippines. So, I mean, you might as well go where the product is."

I come from a long line, on the female side, of football fans. My grandmother on my father's side shared season tickets to the Saskatchewan Roughriders and my mom, now in her late 80s, probably hasn't missed at least some of each year's Grey Cup game for many decades. And, I don't know of anyone who watches the CFL for the commercials. Do you?

The CFL is riding a wave of renewed interest and more than holds its own against the NFL when it comes to interest in Canada. But south of the border, the NFL rules. That's hardly news, but the degree to which the dominance continues to evolve is.

Fully one-third, 33 per cent, of U.S. adults who follow at least one sport, according to a recent Harris poll, say pro football is their favourite sport. Baseball was a distant second, at 14 per cent, while college football was just behind at 13 per cent. (Combine pro and college football and you're up to a truly overpowering 46 per cent.) The others: auto racing (11 per cent), men's college basketball and hockey (both 5 per cent), men's

pro basketball (i.e., the NBA, 4 per cent) and men's golf (also 4 per cent).

The Harris pollsters say that the NFL's growth has been mostly at the expense of baseball. In 1985 the two were nearly tied at No. 1 (about 24 per cent each), but while pro football gradually grew to its current 33 per cent, MLB has tapered down to only 14 per cent. Interesting, too, that the NBA did so poorly in this December survey, coming in below the NHL.

As for the Super Bowl, there's no telling precisely how many pay attention neither for the football nor the commercials, but for the off-chance that there might be another "wardrobe malfunction" of the sort Janet Jackson made infamous. Which elicited this line worth repeating from one of yesterday's performers, Stevie Wonder. Asked if he'd ever had a wardrobe malfunction, he replied without hesitation: "Not that I've seen."

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