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# The Relationship Between the Attitudes of Professional Sport Fans and Their Intentions to Watch Televised Games

Daniel F. Mahony & Anita M. Moorman, University of Louisville

## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of positive and negative attitudes, as well as team quality, on television viewing intentions. The respondents were asked the likelihood they would watch their favorite and most disliked teams, their favorite and most disliked players, and the best team. They were also asked the likelihood they would watch the disliked team when it was a threat to their favorite and when it was likely to lose. Although respondents indicated a preference for watching the favorite and best teams, they did not automatically prefer watching their most disliked team. However, when the disliked team was a threat to the favorite team or highly likely to lose, the fans did prefer to watch the disliked team over a neutral team. In addition, positive and negative attitudes toward individual players increased viewing intentions. These results have strong implications for marketing and broadcasting decisions.

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Although ticket sales account for a large percentage of revenue in professional sports, television rights fees are becoming increasingly important (Howard & Crompton, 1995). Recently, the National Football League (NFL) licensed the television rights for their games for \$17.6 billion over 8 years (Brockington, 1998) and the National

continued growth in television revenue, sport marketers must find ways to attract large audiences and prevent any further decline in these television ratings.

Although most leagues recognize this challenge, strategies for meeting the challenge are still evolving. Sport marketers cannot easily rely on many of the strategies tradition-

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**Recently, the National Football League (NFL) licensed the television rights for their games for \$17.6 billion over 8 years (Brockington, 1998) and the National Hockey League (NHL) signed a deal with ABC and ESPN that will pay the league \$600 million over 5 years (Bernstein, 1998a).**

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Hockey League (NHL) signed a deal with ABC and ESPN that will pay the league \$600 million over 5 years (Bernstein, 1998a). These record contracts have assured these leagues improved financial stability in the future. However, television contracts for professional sport leagues are generally renegotiated every 4 to 8 years, and there are some signs these large contracts are not guaranteed in the future. The recent decline in the television ratings for some professional sport events (Bernstein, 1998b) may lead broadcasters to reconsider their investment. For example, the size of these television rights deals have had a negative financial impact on the financial statements of Disney, the parent company for ABC and ESPN (Kaplan, 1998). In order to assure

ally used to increase game attendance, such as giveaways and theme days. In addition, although there has been much research focusing on increasing game attendance (e.g., Branvold, Pan, & Gabert, 1997; Zhang, Smith, Pease, & Mahar, 1996), little research is focused on increasing television audiences. However, a few recent studies have addressed the use of fan attitudes to increase viewing behavior (Mahony & Howard, 1998; Mahony & Moorman, 1999). Although the use of preexisting attitudes to predict behavior and the manipulation of attitudes to increase behavior are relatively new topics in the sport marketing literature, they have been commonly addressed topics in marketing and social psychology research

(e.g., Fazio, Powell, & Williams, 1989). Attitudes have been defined as "a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object" (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 6). The basic premise has been that "products that are negatively appraised will be rejected and those that are positively valued will be given positive consideration" (Mahony & Howard, p. 96). In fact, Fazio et al. found respondents were more likely to choose products when they had a strong positive attitude toward the product and were less likely to choose items toward which they had a strong negative attitude. Based on this premise, marketers have focused on using a pre-existing positive attitude or creating a positive attitude in order to increase purchase behavior.

### **Sport Fans and the Impact of Attitudes**

However, prior research by Mahony and Howard (1998) and Mahony and Moorman (1999) has suggested that the relationship between attitudes and behaviors in sport settings is more complicated. Similar to Fazio et al. (1989), both studies suggested positive attitudes toward teams would also lead to increased viewing intentions. However, the studies also suggested negative attitudes toward teams would lead to increased viewing intentions. This prediction was supported by research related to Zillman, Bryant, & Sapolsky's (1989) Dispositional Theory of Sport Spectatorship, which suggested fans enjoy watching favorite teams succeed and enjoy watching disliked teams fail. In support of their theory, Zillman et al. found that when watching a televised game, respondents enjoyed plays when a well-liked team did well and plays when a disliked team did poorly, but expressed little enjoyment when watching teams toward which they were neutral, regardless of the outcome of the play. These results suggest fans may prefer games featuring disliked teams to games featuring "neutral attitude"

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### **In order to assure continued growth in television revenue, sport marketers must find ways to attract large audiences and prevent any further decline in these television ratings.**

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teams because the potential for enjoyment would be greater. Essentially, fans would prefer games featuring teams toward which they have a strong attitude, regardless of the direction of the attitude, which would be a different attitude-behavior relationship than that found by Fazio et al.

Mahony and Howard (1998) and Mahony and Moorman (1999) also provided a theoretical basis for such a preference. One of the major motivations for sport fans is their desire for feelings of vicarious achievement, which enhances their self-esteem and public image (Madrigal & Howard, 1995; Wann, 1995). Prior research found the success or failure of a favorite team impacts the self-esteem of the fan (Hirt, Zillman, Erickson, & Kennedy, 1992), and fans often increase their relationship with teams when they are performing well, a response that has been labeled *Basking in Reflected Glory* (BIRGing; e.g., Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976). Likewise, prior research has suggested outgroup derogation, referred to as *blasting*, may also have a positive impact on self-esteem and public image (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). Essentially, fans may feel better about themselves when they can negatively evaluate the performance of rival teams, thus ex-

plaining the enjoyment fans experienced in the Zillman et al. (1989) study when a disliked team performed poorly.

In addition, prior research on sport fans suggests a major motivation is their desire for enjoyable stress, labeled "euphoric stress" or *eustress* (Madrigal & Howard, 1995; Wann, 1995). Because *eustress* is more likely to exist when the fan has something at stake, such as public image and self-esteem, fans would be expected to experience the greatest amount of stress when their favorite team is playing. However, it is also logical that games featuring disliked teams would create stress because the fan is hoping they lose.

Based on the research on fan motivation related to public image and self-esteem concerns (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Cialdini et al., 1976) and *eustress* (Madrigal & Howard, 1995; Wann, 1995), Mahony and Howard (1998) hypothesized that NFL fans would prefer watching the favorite team and the most disliked team as opposed to a neutral-attitude team. Further, they predicted that fans would be more likely to watch the disliked team when it was either a threat to the favorite team or when the disliked team was likely to lose. The former situation would likely lead to an increased impact on the self-esteem of the fan and greater stress because of the potential impact on the success of the favorite team although the latter would increase the potential for enjoyment because the fan would likely see the disliked team fail.

The results in Mahony and Howard (1998) found the intention to watch televised games featuring the favorite team was highest. However, there was no significant differ-

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ence between preference for a game featuring the disliked team as opposed to a game featuring a neutral-attitude team. In addition, there was no greater preference for watching the disliked team when that team was likely to lose. Respondents preferred watching the disliked team as opposed to a neutral-attitude team only when the disliked team was a threat to the favorite team. Even in this case, though, the mean intention to watch the game was below neutral ( $M=3.29$  on a scale of 1 to 7). However, there were a number of factors in Mahony and Howard (1998) that may have led to the consistently low evaluation of games featuring the most disliked team and the failure to find many significant differences. The study was done during the NFL's off-season (May), which tends to decrease the strength of attitudes (Brunson, Shelby, & Johnson, 1991; Havitz & Howard, 1996). Also, these researchers relied on the respondents to determine the likelihood the disliked team was a threat and the team was likely to lose. Because some of the results were believed to be related to the procedures used in Mahony and Howard, Mahony and Moorman (1999) reexamined the impact of attitudes on intentions to watch televised games. Mahony and Moorman examined the National Basketball Association (NBA) at the end of the regular season and just prior to the play-offs, and the researchers manipulated through scenarios the likelihood that the disliked team was a threat or was likely to lose.

The results again indicated that watching the favorite team was a highly preferred option and that preference for a game featuring the most disliked team, when no conditions were presented, was not different from preference for a game featuring a neutral-attitude team. However, Mahony and Moorman (1999) did find a strong preference for watching the disliked team when it was described as a threat to the favorite team and when it was described as likely to lose, particu-

larly for strongly committed fans, and the mean intentions to watch the disliked team under these conditions were higher than in Mahony and Howard (1998). Based on their results, Mahony and Moorman (1999) concluded a preference for watching the disliked team was possible under certain conditions, but was not automatic.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Because the results of Mahony and Howard (1998) and Mahony and Moorman (1999) were different, it was important to reexamine preferences for NFL games to determine whether the differences in the results of these studies were related to differences between NBA and NFL fans or differences in the examination procedures. Therefore, the first purpose of this study was to replicate Mahony and Howard's (1998) examination of NFL teams using the procedures employed by Mahony and Moorman (1999).

The second purpose in this study was to expand the investigation into fan intentions to watch a good team that is not the fan's favorite. When a game featuring the local favorite is not available, a common decision facing television networks is whether to show one of the league's best teams or to show a game featuring a disliked rival of the favorite team. Although some may suggest fans would prefer a game featuring a successful team with high-quality players because the quality of play has an impact on the motivation of fans (Wann, 1995), prior research has not consistently supported quality of play as a major factor in fan motivation (Madrigal & Howard, 1995; Sloan, 1989). In fact, many television executives, particularly those in charge of NFL and National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) football games, frequently broadcast games featuring local rivals as opposed to games featuring the best team. This further suggests that the behavioral intentions of fans are complex. The current study reexamined relative preferences for games featuring the best teams in

both the NFL and the NBA.

Finally, the third purpose of this study is to examine the impact of attitudes toward individual players on viewing intentions. Although Mahony and Howard (1998) and Mahony and Moorman (1999) have examined the importance of attitudes toward teams, no prior studies have examined the impact of both positive and negative attitudes toward individual players. Because the attachment to players would appear to have many of the same self-esteem, public image, and eustress implications, fans would be expected to prefer watching games featuring their favorite players. Moreover, it is expected that fans will also prefer games featuring disliked players as opposed to games featuring neutral teams and neutral-attitude players. A positive behavior resulting from a negative attitude toward the player would be consistent with how some players have tried to market themselves. Dennis Rodman and Mike Tyson are two modern examples of athletes who have attempted to profit from negative attitudes toward them. Further, the pseudo-sport of professional wrestling has attempted to use this attraction to disliked wrestlers to increase attendance and viewing audiences for years. The current study will look at the impact of attitudes toward players on viewing intentions in both the NFL and the NBA.

## **Hypotheses**

### **Part 1**

The first purpose, which is to replicate Mahony and Howard's (1998) study using the procedures from Mahony and Moorman (1999), was accomplished in Hypotheses 1-3. The first hypothesis was designed to examine the influence of strong positive and strong negative attitudes on NFL viewing intentions.

*Hypothesis 1.* When asked how likely they are to watch specific NFL teams in a typical game, respondents will exhibit the following order of preference: (a) their favorite

team, (b) their most disliked team, (c) a neutral-attitude team.

*Hypothesis 2.* When asked how likely they are to watch specific NFL teams, respondents will prefer watching (a) their most disliked team when it is described as a threat to the favorite team's chances for success over (b) their most disliked team (with no conditions) and (c) a neutral-attitude team.

*Hypothesis 3.* When asked how likely they are to watch specific NFL teams, respondents will prefer watching (a) their most disliked team when it is described as being highly likely to lose over (b) their most disliked team (with no conditions) and (c) a neutral-attitude team.

## Part 2

The second purpose of the study was to examine the relative impact of team quality on viewing intentions. Television executives often must decide between showing a game featuring a team towards which fans in a region have a strong attitude and a game featuring the best team. Based on both the inconsistent research related to the impact of quality of play (Madrigal & Howard, 1995; Sloan, 1989) and the fact that television stations often chose to broadcast local favorites and local rivals over the best teams, preference for games featuring the best teams in both the NFL and NBA was predicted to be less than for games featuring teams toward which the fan has a strong attitude, but greater than for games featuring a neutral-attitude team.

*Hypothesis 4.* When asked how likely they are to watch specific NFL teams, respondents will prefer watching (a) their favorite team, (b) their most disliked team when it is described as being a threat to the favorite team, (c) their most disliked team when it is described as being highly likely to lose, (d) their most disliked team (no conditions) over (e) the best team in the NFL. However, fans will prefer watching (e) the best team over (f) a neutral-attitude team.

*Hypothesis 5.* When asked how likely they are to watch specific

NBA teams, respondents will prefer watching (a) their favorite team, (b) their most disliked team when it is described as being a threat to the favorite team, (c) their most disliked team when it is described as being highly likely to lose, (d) their most disliked team (no conditions) over (e) the best team in the NBA. However, fans will prefer watching (e) the best team over (f) a neutral-attitude team.

## Part 3

The third purpose of this study is to examine the impact of attitudes toward players on viewing intentions in both the NFL and the NBA. In addition to having strong attachments to teams, many fans have strong attachments to players. The enormous size of endorsement contracts is an indication of this strong attachment (Lane & Spiegel, 1996). However, athletic careers are short (Coakley, 1994), so the relationship with a player does not generally last as long as the affiliation with a team. Therefore, the intention to watch players toward whom a fan has a strong attitude is not expected to be as high as the intention to watch the favorite team.

*Hypothesis 6.* When asked how likely they are to watch specific NFL teams in a typical game, respondents will exhibit the following order of preference: (a) their favorite team, (b) game featuring their favorite player, (c) game featuring their most disliked player, (d) a neutral-attitude team.

*Hypothesis 7.* When asked how likely they are to watch specific NBA teams in a typical game, respondents will exhibit the following order of preference: (a) their favorite team, (b) game featuring their favorite player, (c) game featuring their most disliked player, (d) a neutral-attitude team.

## Methods

### Sample

The respondent pool for the NFL data collection (N=161) and the NBA data collection (N=157) were

undergraduate and graduate students recruited from classes at a large Midwestern university. Only volunteers who indicated they were fans of the respective sport were used. The use of homogeneous respondents was preferred in the current study because the goal was theory application, and no attempt was made to estimate means or effect sizes for a larger population (Calder, Phillips, & Tybout, 1981).

## Procedures and Instruments

Professional football (NFL) and professional basketball (NBA) games in the United States were used as the sports for this study. They were chosen because they are the favorite two professional sports in the United States for fans under 30 (as cited in Mihoces, 1995), which was the age-group of the respondents. Both the NFL and NBA data collections were done in two stages. After receiving permission from the human subjects committee at the host university, respondents in both data collections signed an informed-consent form before beginning the first stage. During the first phase of data collection, respondents were asked a number of questions related to NFL and NBA teams and players. Both studies were conducted near the end of the regular seasons for the respective sports and before the play-offs began. First, the respondents were asked to name their favorite and most disliked teams, their favorite and most disliked players, and the best team in the league. Second, the respondents were asked to list teams toward which they felt neutral. Respondents were provided with a list of teams to help them recall neutral-attitude teams. Third, the respondents were asked to record their age and their gender.

The second stage of data collection was completed 1 to 2 weeks after the first stage. Because the teams in the second survey were based on the respondents' answers in the first stage, the surveys were personalized for each respondent. However, confidentiality was

enforced through the use of a numbering system. First, the respondents were given a list of teams, including (a) their favorite team, (b) their most disliked team, (c) the team featuring their favorite player, (d) the team featuring their most disliked player, (e) the league's best team as identified by the respondent, and (f) a neutral-attitude team; and using a 7-point Likert-type scale (*Highly Unlikely*=1, *Highly Likely*=7), they were asked to evaluate how likely they would be to watch each team if it were playing on television. Respondents were also asked on a 7-point Likert-type scale (*Highly Unlikely*=1, *Highly Likely*=7) how likely they would be to watch their most disliked team on television in two different scenarios, one in which their most disliked team was described as a threat to the favorite team and one in which their most disliked team was described as being highly likely to lose.

### Analysis

Because the responses related to the five games described in Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2, and Hypothesis 3 were not independent, a one-factor repeated measures ANOVA was used. All the games were examined in one ANOVA in order to decrease the chances of making a Type I error. The independent variable was the team featured in the game (e.g., their favorite team, their most disliked team), and the dependent variable was the respondents' self-reported intention to watch the team. Tukey's HSD-procedure was used to make post hoc pairwise comparisons in order to control the experiment wise error rate. Tukey's HSD-procedure is considered to be best when the n's in each group are equal and almost all of the pairwise comparisons are being made (Kennedy & Bush, 1985).

Because the responses related to the six games described in Hypothesis 4 and Hypothesis 5 were not independent, 2 one-factor repeated measures ANOVA were used. However, all subjects who identified their favorite team and the best

team as being the same were eliminated before the ANOVAs were computed. Including these respondents would have inflated the preference for the best team because fans may have reacted more to their strong positive attitude than to team quality. The independent variable was the team featured in the game (e.g., their favorite team, the best team in the league), and the dependent variable was the respondents' self-reported intention to watch the team. Tukey's HSD-procedure was again used to make post hoc pairwise comparisons.

Because the responses related to the four games described in Hypothesis 6 and Hypothesis 7 were not independent, 2 one-factor repeated measures ANOVA were again used. However, all subjects who identified their favorite player as being on their favorite team or their most disliked player being on their most disliked team were eliminated before the ANOVAs were computed. Including these respondents would have confused the relative preference for the players and the teams. The independent variable was the team featured in the game (e.g., the team featuring their favorite player), and the dependent variable was the respondents' self-reported intention to watch the team. Tukey's HSD-procedure was again used to make post hoc pairwise comparisons.

wise comparisons.

### Results

The sample in the NFL data collection (N=161) included 112 men and 49 women, and the mean age was 24.09 years old. The sample in the NBA data collection (N=157) was made up of 113 men and 44 women with a mean age of 23.01 years old.

#### Part 1

The one-factor repeated measures ANOVA for Hypotheses 1 through 3 indicated a significant main effect for the team featured in the game,  $F(4, 640)=177.80, p < .001$ . Tukey's HSD-procedure, shown in Table 1, was then used to make pairwise comparisons. As predicted in Hypothesis 1, the results indicated the intention to watch the favorite team ( $M = 6.37$ ) was significantly greater than the intention to watch the disliked team ( $M = 2.88$ ) and the intention to watch a neutral-attitude team ( $M = 3.07$ ). However, there was no significant difference between the mean intentions to watch a neutral team and the most disliked team. Therefore, the results provide only partial support for Hypothesis 1. Although this was not consistent with the prediction in Hypothesis 1, it was consistent with prior research on both NFL teams and NBA teams (Mahony &

**Table 1**  
Means and Standard Deviations  
for Hypotheses 1 Through Hypothesis 3

Team	Likelihood of watching
Favorite team <i>M (SD)</i>	6.37 (1.06) a
Disliked team (threat) <i>M (SD)</i>	5.53 (1.61) b
Disliked team (highly likely to lose) <i>M (SD)</i>	3.78 (2.04) c
Neutral team <i>M (SD)</i>	3.07 (1.70) d
Disliked team (no conditions) <i>M (SD)</i>	2.88 (1.69) d

Note. Means that do not share the same letters differ at  $p < .05$  in the Tukey's HSD-procedure.

Howard, 1998; Mahony & Moorman, 1999).

As predicted in Hypothesis 2, the results indicated the intention to watch the disliked team when it was described as a threat to the favorite team's chances for success ( $M = 5.53$ ) was significantly greater than the intention to watch the disliked team with no conditions ( $M = 2.88$ ) and a neutral-attitude team ( $M = 3.07$ ). This finding supports Hypothesis 2 and is consistent with the results related to NFL and NBA games in Mahony and Howard (1998) and Mahony and Moorman (1999), respectively. However, the mean intention to watch the most disliked NFL team when it was a threat was much greater in the current study ( $M = 5.53$ ) than in Mahony and Howard ( $M = 3.29$ ).

As predicted in Hypothesis 3, the results indicated the intention to watch the disliked team when the disliked team was described as being highly likely to lose the game ( $M = 3.78$ ) was significantly greater than the intention to watch the disliked team with no conditions ( $M = 2.88$ ) and the intention to watch a neutral-attitude team ( $M = 3.07$ ). The results provide mild support for Hypothesis 3 and Zillman et al.'s (1989) Disposition Theory of Sport Spectatorship, which suggests that fans may enjoy watching a disliked team fail. Although the results were consistent with Mahony and Moorman's (1999) study of NBA teams, they were not consistent with Mahony and Howard's (1998) examination of NFL teams.

### Part 2

The football sample ( $N=125$ ) was examined in Hypothesis 4 and the one-factor repeated measures ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for the team featured in the game,  $F(5, 620)=124.87, p < .001$ . The basketball sample ( $N=83$ ) was examined in Hypothesis 5, and again the one-factor repeated measures ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for the team featured in the game,  $F(5, 410)=81.00, p < .001$ . Tukey's HSD-procedure,

**... the results indicated the intention to watch the disliked team when it was described as a threat to the favorite team's chances for success ( $M = 5.53$ ) was significantly greater than the intention to watch the disliked team with no conditions ( $M = 2.88$ ) and a neutral-attitude team ( $M = 3.07$ ).**

shown in Table 2, was then used to make pairwise comparisons. As predicted in Hypothesis 4, the mean intention to watch the favorite team when no conditions were presented ( $M=6.41$ ) was significantly greater than the intention to watch the best team ( $M=5.10$ ). In addition, the intention to watch the best team was significantly greater than the intention to watch a neutral-attitude team ( $M=3.18$ ). However, in contrast to the prediction in Hypothesis 4, the intention to watch the disliked team was never significantly greater than the intention to watch the best team, and intention to watch the best team was actually greater than the intention to watch the disliked team when it was likely to lose ( $M=3.73$ ) and when no conditions were presented ( $M=2.80$ ). When examining NBA teams in Hypothesis 5, the relative preferences for each game type were the same

as in Hypothesis 4. Because the preference for watching the best team was greater than predicted, the results did not provide consistent support for the predictions in Hypotheses 4 and 5.

### Part 3

The football sample ( $N=42$ ) was examined in Hypothesis 6, and the one-factor repeated measures ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for the team featured in the game,  $F(3, 123)=48.80, p < .001$ . The basketball sample ( $N=53$ ) was examined in Hypothesis 7, and the one-factor repeated measures ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for the team featured in the game,  $F(3, 156)=55.70, p < .001$ . Again, Tukey's HSD-procedure, shown in Table 3, was then used to make pairwise comparisons. As predicted in Hypothesis 6, all of the NFL game types were significantly

**Table 2**  
**Means and Standard Deviations**  
**for Hypotheses 4 and Hypothesis 5**

Team	Likelihood of watching	
	Football	Basketball
Favorite team <i>M (SD)</i>	6.41 (0.93) a	6.04 (1.38) a
Disliked team (threat) <i>M (SD)</i>	5.52 (1.54) b	4.99 (1.83) b
Best team <i>M (SD)</i>	5.10 (1.50) b	5.14 (1.56) b
Disliked team (highly likely to lose) <i>M (SD)</i>	3.73 (2.05) c	3.63 (2.06) c
Neutral team <i>M (SD)</i>	3.18 (1.64) d	2.76 (1.60) d
Disliked team (no conditions) <i>M (SD)</i>	2.80 (1.67) d	2.93(1.87)d

Note. Means in the same column that do not share the same letters differ at  $p < .05$  in the Tukey's HSD-procedure.

**Table 3**  
**Means and Standard Deviations for Hypotheses 6 and Hypothesis 7**

Team/Player	Likelihood of watching	
	Football	Basketball
Favorite team <i>M (SD)</i>	6.50 (0.80) a	5.89 (1.45) a
Favorite player <i>M (SD)</i>	5.45 (1.64) b	5.06 (1.69) b
Disliked player <i>M (SD)</i>	4.60 (1.50) c	3.55 (1.93) c
Neutral team <i>M (SD)</i>	3.45 (1.60) d	2.79 (1.51) d

Note. Means in the same column that do not share the same letters differ at  $p < .05$  in the Tukey's HSD-procedure.

different, and the respondents' order of preference was as follows: (a) to watch the favorite team when no conditions were presented ( $M=6.50$ ), (b) to watch the favorite player ( $M=5.45$ ), (c) to watch the most disliked player ( $M=4.60$ ), and (d) to watch a neutral-attitude team ( $M=3.45$ ). Likewise, when examin-

ing NBA teams and players in Hypothesis 7, the order of preference was the same, and all differences were significant. These results supported the predictions in Hypotheses 6 and 7.

ative attitude tends to lead to a strong positive behavior (e.g., Fazio et al, 1989). In addition, the current study calls into question the suggestion that strong negative attitudes toward a team will automatically lead to a strong positive behavior (i.e., television viewing) if no special conditions exist. Because there

negative attitude, when coupled with additional conditions, can positively affect the fans' intention to watch. When the fans have information identifying the disliked team as a threat to their favorite team, their preference for watching the game featuring the disliked team is strong. The strength of the respondents' intention in the current study to watch ( $M=5.53$ ) was much greater than that observed in Mahony and Howard (1998). Because Mahony and Howard permitted the respondents to form their own conclusion about the level of the threat posed to their favorite team, it would suggest that the fans' heightened attitude in the current study may be attributed to the manipulation of the scenario. These results provide some clear suggestions for sport marketers. When making broadcast decisions, it is important for sport marketers to identify strongly disliked teams and attempt to market those teams as serious threats to fans' favorite teams in order to increase the intention to

**NFL fans in the current study were more likely to watch a game where their most disliked team was highly likely to lose than to watch a game featuring the disliked team with no special conditions or a team toward which their attitude was neutral. These results provide suggestions for both sport marketing practitioners and researchers.**

ing NBA teams and players in Hypothesis 7, the order of preference was the same, and all differences were significant. These results supported the predictions in Hypotheses 6 and 7.

### Discussion and Implications

The current study again confirmed prior research that professional football fans in the United States do prefer watching their favorite teams on television. This outcome is consistent with both Mahony and Howard (1998) and Mahony and Moorman (1999). This predicted behavior is also consistent with traditional attitude-behavior literature, which has found that a strong posi-

was not, consistent with Mahony and Howard and Mahony and Moorman, a significant difference between the fans' preference for watching the disliked team with no conditions over watching the neutral team, it can be concluded an intention to watch the disliked team is not automatic. However, the relationship between attitudes and behavior in sport is still unusual because subjects did not prefer watching a neutral team when compared to a disliked team. In contrast, respondents in Fazio et al. were more likely to choose a neutral food item over a strongly disliked food item.

However, the effect of a strong

watch the disliked team. This may be done by advertising how the performance of the disliked team may impact the local favorite. For example, when both teams are good, the performance by the disliked team may affect the playoff hopes of the favorite, and when both teams are not as good, the performance may even have an impact on draft position or on who finishes in last place.

Consistent with preferences in Mahony and Moorman's (1999) study of NBA fans, but in contrast to Mahony and Howard's (1998) NFL study, NFL fans in the current study were more likely to watch a game where their most disliked team was highly likely to lose than to watch a



game featuring the disliked team with no special conditions or a team toward which their attitude was neutral. These results provide suggestions for both sport marketing practitioners and researchers. Practitioners could increase the chances that fans will want to watch a disliked team by stressing that the game will be tough for them and they are likely to lose. However, the mean preference for a game in which the disliked team was likely to lose was still below neutral so focusing only on this would not appear to be the most successful strategy. For researchers, the results of this study combined with prior research (e.g., Mahony & Moorman; Zillman et al., 1989) would suggest that there is an increased preference for watching the disliked team when it is unsuccessful, but more work is needed to find when this preference is greatest and how sport marketers can truly take advantage of the fans' desire to watch a hated team fail.

Although, as predicted, both NFL and NBA fans' first preference was for their favorite team rather than for the best team, the finding that both the NFL and NBA fans in the current study preferred watching the best team in the league over the disliked team with no conditions and the disliked team when that team was likely to lose was not consistent with our prediction. The fans' preference for the best team over the disliked team is significant because it suggests that despite the desire and willingness to watch a disliked team under certain conditions, the fans' preferred choice would be to watch a more talented team. Further research is needed to examine the dimensions and nuances of the fans' preference for the best team. It is not at all clear what aspects of watching the best team are attractive to the fan. Their attraction to the best team could be based on several factors including the talent level of the players, the team's style of play, the competitiveness of their games, the significance of the outcome, and/or many other factors.

Although one may simply conclude that the best team in the league should be featured on television each week that the local favorite is not available, such a strategy may not be possible. For example, it may be unlikely that any NFL team would be willing to allow one team to receive significantly more broadcasting opportunities than other teams. If one team were permitted unequal exposure via television, it could pose serious problems for other teams to effec-

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**The fans' preference for the best team over the disliked team is significant because it suggests that despite the desire and willingness to watch a disliked team under certain conditions, the fans' preferred choice would be to watch a more talented team.**

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tively market themselves. This may especially be true in college athletics in the United States where the universities look toward television broadcasts to promote both the athletic program and the general university. It does appear clear, however, that broadcasting decisions to

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**. . . in both leagues, the attraction of the favorite team is greater than the attraction of the favorite player.**

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automatically feature a local rival rather than the best team are unwise and contrary to the preference of both NFL and NBA fans.

Finally, in both the NFL and NBA, fans prefer to watch their favorite player over a disliked player or a neutral team. Also in both

leagues, the attraction of the favorite team is greater than the attraction of the favorite player. Interestingly, although NFL fans did not prefer watching the most disliked team over a neutral team when no conditions were present, they did prefer to watch the most disliked player when no conditions were present over watching a neutral team. This outcome is consistent with Mahony and Howard's (1998) original theory that strong negative attitudes can lead to positive behavior. With regard to the NBA, these results are consistent with the league's focus on marketing its star players. It has been said that professional basketball is about the name on the back of the jersey (the player), rather than the name on the front (the team) (Vitale & Weiss, 1995).

However, the NFL has not traditionally focused its marketing efforts on individual players. Because the fans' preference was clear for both the NBA and the NFL, a suggestion for the NFL would be to follow the path of the NBA and implement some marketing strategies to maximize the fans' attitudes toward both their favorite and most disliked players. In addition, two other recommendations suggested by the results of this study relate to preference for individual players. First, both leagues should focus on increasing the number of players that it markets. The one failure of the NBA player-focused strategy was that it focused on too few players (e.g., Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson) and the league ran into problems when these players retired. Second, because the marketing of players that elicit both positive and negative attitudes from fans can lead to increased interest in games featuring these players, the leagues should focus on marketing both types of players. As professional wrestling discovered years ago, a good villain is almost as valuable as a good hero. However, because this is one of the first studies to look at the impact of players on viewing behavior, more research is needed on the impact of players on fan

behavior. In fact, although the current study provides a number of suggestions for current marketers, further research is still needed on many of the attitude-behavior relationships in sport.

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