

Big games, close scores lead to more auto fatalities for winning fans

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Closely contested major sporting events are followed by a significant increase in traffic fatalities for fans of the winning team, according to new research from North Carolina State University. It turns out there may be more on the line than many sports fans bargained for.

"A previous study showed that traffic fatalities increased in the hours following the Super Bowl. We wanted to see if that held true for other high-profile sporting events and, if so, whether the number of fatalities was influenced by whether the game was a close one," says Dr. Stacy Wood, Langdon Distinguished Professor of Marketing at NC State and lead author of a paper describing the research. "Are blow-outs more dangerous because they're boring, and people may drink more? Or are close games more dangerous because the excitement drives up [testosterone levels](#)?"

Wood and researchers from the University of South Carolina (USC) evaluated traffic fatalities after 271 games played between 2001 and 2008, including championship, tournament and rivalry games in professional and college football and basketball. The researchers looked at traffic fatality data in the area where the game was played, and in the hometowns of the winning and losing teams.

The researchers also used a panel of experts to rate how close each game was on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being a blow-out and 5 being a nail-biter.

The researchers found that traffic fatalities increased significantly after close games, and that games which were rated as nail-biters were far more likely to result in traffic fatalities than blow-outs. Each increase in the closeness rating was associated with a 21 percent increase in fatal accidents at the game site. To go from a blow-out to a nail-biter resulted in a 133 percent increase in observed fatal accidents.

Furthermore, researchers found that the increase in fatalities occurred only in places where there were winners – the site of the competition and the hometown of the winning team. "This pattern of results is important in that it suggests that the cause of the relationship might be associated with competition-induced testosterone," Wood says.

"During a close game, testosterone increases for the fans as well as the players – that has been established by previous studies," Wood says.

"After the game, testosterone levels drop for the losing side, but spike for the winning side. Because testosterone is linked to aggressive behavior and potentially aggressive driving, we hypothesize that this may play a role in the increased number of [traffic fatalities](#) in areas with a high proportion of winning fans."

More information: The paper, "The Bad Thing about Good Games: The Relationship between Close Sporting Events and Game-Day Automobile Fatalities," is forthcoming from the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

Provided by North Carolina State University

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