

# Football ratings study: The bandwagon is your second-favorite team

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Former BYU star Ziggy Ansah now plays in the NFL for the Detroit Lions, who lead the NFC Northern Division with a 6-2 record.

When it comes to watching NFL games in Utah on television, the most popular teams are the Broncos, Cowboys or 49ers.

But a new study by Brigham Young University and the Fox affiliate in Salt Lake City shows that choosing to broadcast a local favorite isn't always the smartest ratings decision.

"When you look at the difference between the average team effect, like say the Miami Dolphins, and the next top tier after the Denver Broncos, the results are small, practically insignificant," said BYU statistics professor Scott Grimshaw. "We went in thinking that we would find the next big team, but really we found no difference."

Grimshaw teamed up with Scott J. Burwell of Fox 13 in Salt Lake City on a report that appears in the [\*Journal of Quantitative Analysis in Sports\*](#). Their model predicts within a local market which matchups would generate the largest TV audience.

Based on actual ratings data, the analysis shows that fans don't just watch their favorite team - they also hop on the bandwagon of whoever is winning and lighting up the scoreboard. And when two high-scoring, winning teams play, it's ratings gold.

Looking ahead to the Week 14 games in December, the statistical model Grimshaw built does not favor Fox 13 broadcasting the 49ers game despite their relative popularity in Utah. That's because the Seahawks, last year's Super Bowl champions, face Chip Kelly's fast-paced Eagle's offense during the same time slot. That matchup will draw higher ratings in Utah than the 49ers contest against the winless Raiders.

"One of the intriguing conclusions is that these are a ranking of teams against hypothetical situations," Grimshaw said. "NFL games are the premier local TV program and the station can profit from choosing the right game."

Although he found NFL teams have similar popularity, Grimshaw knows that every sport and league is different. Take college basketball's March Madness, for instance. Grimshaw previously did a study showing that little-known Cinderella teams draw 35% higher ratings than powerhouse schools with national name recognition.

"The Cinderella [teams](#), with all the national media attention they get, become a national star," Grimshaw said. "It's not that these schools have an established national fan base, it's that the NCAA tournament celebrates the Cinderella more so than other sports."

Provided by Brigham Young University

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