



Super Bowl Sunday

An Unofficial Holiday for Millions

Each year, on a Sunday at the end of January or beginning of February, tens of millions of Americans declare their own unofficial holiday. Gathered in groups large and small, nearly half of all U.S. households participate vicariously in a televised spectacle that has far outgrown its origins as a sporting event.

The Super Bowl, which determines the championship of American football, is most of all a shared experience, when Americans disproportionately choose to spend this day in the company of friends.

Neither the hugely popular Major League Baseball World Series nor the National Basketball Association championship commands so intense a grip on the nation's attention. Possibly this is because the Super Bowl is a single game, a winner-take-all contest. Add in the entertainments that have sprung up around the game and Super Bowl Sunday becomes an event even for those who are not football fans.

Super Bowl Beginnings

American football is unrelated to the game most of the world knows by that name, which Americans and some others call soccer. And even the American game has variants, as there are slightly different rules for the versions played by college teams, professional teams and Canadian Football League teams.



San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick signals to the team's line during the second half of a playoff game. *AP Images*

For most of its history, professional American football was played within a single National Football League (NFL). In 1960, a rival league, the American Football League (AFL), began to compete for premier talent. As the leagues contemplated a merger, they agreed to a single game each year between their respective champions. Because many collegiate football championships were known as “bowls” for the bowl-shaped stadiums that hosted them, one AFL owner referred to the new game as a “super” bowl. The name stuck.

Four Super Bowl games were played before the two leagues merged in 1970 into a single National Football League, which was realigned into the American and National “conferences.” Each

year, the conference champions play each other in the Super Bowl to determine the NFL champion.

While most U.S. sports championships are determined in the home cities of the contestants, a Super Bowl — as with the Olympics and the World Cup — is awarded to a city some three years to five years in advance, opening the door to broad marketing and promotional opportunities. Because the game is played in winter, it affords warm cities like New Orleans, Miami and Los Angeles a substantial advantage. Occasionally, a northern city with an indoor stadium will host the game. New Orleans is hosting the 2013 championship game, Super Bowl XLVII — between the Baltimore Ravens and the San Francisco 49ers — on February 3.

Super Bowl Sunday: An Unofficial Holiday for Millions

For the first time in Super Bowl history, two brothers will face off against each other as head coaches — Baltimore Ravens' older brother John Harbaugh and San Francisco 49ers' Jim Harbaugh.

A Super Bowl generates substantial economic activity within its host city. Many ticket holders, media representatives and others arrive a week before the game, exploring the area and spending freely.

Cities that seek to host the game must submit environmental plans detailing how they plan to make the Super Bowl as “green” as possible.

On the eve of Super Bowl XLVII, the Super Bowl Host Committee will hold a community initiative called Super Saturday of Service. The program will be a collaboration between the committee, NFL, City of New Orleans, the New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity and other groups and will result in the renovation and beautification of New Orleans public parks.

A Social Event

Americans increasingly have gathered in private Super Bowl parties, where they enjoy food, drink and televised football. The game is always played on a Sunday, when Americans are not likely to be at work. Because of the event's national prominence, even Americans who are not football fans might adopt a team just for Super Bowl Sunday.

Some of the most-watched television programs in U.S. history have been Super Bowls. The game played in 2012, Super Bowl XLVI, set a record of 111.3 million viewers.



Baltimore Ravens inside linebacker Ray Lewis waits for the snap against the Denver Broncos in the fourth quarter of an NFL playoff game. AP Images

Super Bowl XLV in 2011 had an audience of 111 million viewers and broke the record set by the 2010 game as the most-watched U.S. television program in history.

Another key to the Super Bowl's success is the carefully choreographed entertainment events that surround the game itself. The “halftime show,” musical and other entertainment offered by major stars, takes place on the field during the mid-game rest period. In 2013, the headliner will be Beyoncé.

For many television viewers, the highlight of the Super Bowl isn't the game, it's the commercials. Advertisers compete to display their most creative efforts and

introduce their newest products. Given the huge audience, advertisers are willing to pay dearly to parade their wares on the Super Bowl broadcast. In 2013, a 30-second ad will cost a record \$4 million.

Although serious football fans would disagree, Super Bowl Sunday, for millions of Americans, is less about which team prevails than it is about fun. Whether at the stadium or with friends in front of the television, most Americans find something to enjoy on this unofficial national holiday.

Additional information on the game is available on the official website of Super Bowl XLVII.

