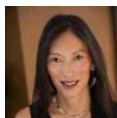


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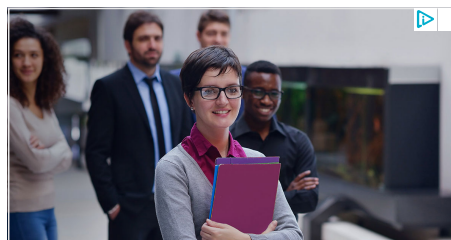
The NFL May Be Losing The Super From Its Bowl



The NFL brand seems to be losing its luster. (Photo by Al Bello/Getty Images)

In a couple of weeks, more than 100 million people will participate in what has long been one of America's favorite past times: watching the Super Bowl on TV. The Super Bowl has been one of the most-watched TV show for years and 2017 is likely to be no exception. But this national event is starting to show some signs of weakness and this year's game may actually be the latest episode in what seems to be a downward slide for the NFL.

The average TV audience for the NFL season dropped by 8% to 11% this year and the last reports showed playoff games were averaging 33.2 million viewers, down over 3% from last year. All sorts of explanations have been offered to explain the decline. The U.S. presidential election was said to have distracted viewers and siphoned off advertisers' dollars. Before that, the Summer Olympics in 2016 were to blame. Also some TV viewers have switched to smaller



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screens, as Twitter live-streamed NFL Thursday Night Football and game highlights could be found on other social channels.

But the issues with the league seem to be deeper than these reasons provide. The NFL brand seems to be losing its luster.

NFL Brand Has Taken Some Hard Hits

The NFL's decline started a couple years ago, when domestic violence charges were waged against Ray Rice and reports about the seriousness of concussions incurred during games were raised. Roger Goodell and the league failure to deal adequately with public concerns about either issue dimmed the halo over the NFL brand a bit.

Then Deflategate took some air out of NFL's bubble. And as more sexual assaults allegations involving NFL players have come to light, female fans — whose viewership had been growing faster than men's — have felt increasingly alienated.

The NFL brand suffered additional blows earlier this year after Colin Kaepernick started what became a series of protests among NFL players to support the Black Lives Matter movement. The protests offended some racially conservative fans and caused them to boycott games and take to the airwaves and social channels to cast a pall over the brand.

The concern over concussions has grown, especially among families with football-playing children, as research into their effects continue and are published. The *New York Times* recently ran a [full-page feature](#) in its Sports section dissecting what happens to a player's brain during and after a concussion, courtesy of a new technology-enabled mouth guard.

And then there's the over-exposure issue that Mark Cuban [raised](#) a couple of years ago. As the NFL expands its TV coverage, the league might be causing viewer fatigue and contributing to its own decline.

Of course the NFL remains hugely popular and the sky isn't yet falling on the Super Bowl's dominion as a media event. It would be a shame for such a venerable institution to lose its