

THE SPORTIER

The NBA Finals: Who Was Watching?

Sunday saw not only the conclusion of a six-game NBA Finals, but also the ending of the NBA Bubble that has been widely praised for producing 0 cases of COVID-19. To cap off the wild ride of a season, from beginning normally last October, to pausing abruptly in March, and starting again in Orlando in July, the ending we all saw coming played out: LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers captured the NBA Finals crown. With his winning of the 2020 Finals MVP Award after averaging 29.8 points, 11.8 rebounds and 8.5 assists in the series, LeBron James became the first player to ever win a Finals MVP award with three different teams (Miami Heat, Cleveland Cavaliers, Los Angeles Lakers). Over a year after promising Lakers fans that “the spell won’t last much longer” after a 37-45 record ended his first season as a Laker before the playoffs, LeBron was able to recruit Anthony Davis to his squad, which formed one of, if not the, best duos seen in recent years aside from the Splash Brothers, Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson, from the Golden State Warriors.

LeBron’s fourth championship begs the same question with newfound validity: Can LeBron James be considered the greatest basketball player of all time, or is Michael Jordan still the top dog? Though LeBron James’ 4-6 Finals record is more respectable than the 3-6 that it was before, and though LeBron has clearly surpassed Jordan in the longevity department, will Jordan’s superhuman abilities, his 6-0 Finals record, or his never-dying fire ever be matched? Though LeBron’s Finals records can be argued as slightly unrepresentative of the player that he is, including the many battles with the Warriors where he clearly was at a disadvantage, the Miami Heat trio of prime LeBron and All-Star level Dwayne Wade and Chris Bosh going 2-2 in the Finals is a troubling stain on LeBron’s record, especially since he scored a weak 8 points in a Finals game against the Dallas Mavericks in 2011, a series which resulted in a loss. Still, is it possible that LeBron’s team-first basketball will ever top MJ’s intense focus on being “the man”?

If you didn’t watch the NBA Finals this year, don’t worry, because many people didn’t. Games 3 (5.94 million viewers), 2 (6.61 million viewers), and 1 (7.41 million viewers) were the three least watched NBA Finals games in history. There are two main factors for this major decline. The conflict that NBA Commissioner Adam Silver recognized was the constant social justice promotion that was found everywhere, from the backs of players uniforms to the court itself. After the record-low ratings and viewership, Silver announced that next season will see less promotion of social justice, as he understands that people are almost always watching for the game itself. The second reason that the viewership for this series fell was competition among

other sports. Both the MLB Postseason and NFL Regular season were competing for viewers during the NBA Finals. Game 3 of the NBA Finals, the least viewed of the six-game series, was hosted on the same night as Sunday Night Football’s matchup between the Philadelphia Eagles and San Francisco 49ers. On this day, the NBA Finals saw 5.94 million viewers, while a much less significant NFL game sat at 15.08 million viewers. Game 6 was semi-historic, as it was the highest rated show opposite of Sunday Night Football since Game 5 of the 2018 World Series. Still, the NBA saw 8.29 million viewers against the Seattle Seahawks-Minnesota Vikings matchup that hauled in 11.42 million viewers. In total, this year’s NBA Finals saw an average of 7.5 million viewers per game, a 51% decrease from last year’s edition, mainly due to the two factors mentioned previously.

At the end of the day, with anybody watching or not, the 2020 NBA Finals is a historic event, as it was sustained and was successful throughout a pandemic.

Sporting Event	Average Viewership (Latest Series*, Per Game)
NBA Finals (2019)	15.14 Million
Super Bowl (NFL)	102.1 Million (All Platforms)
World Series (MLB)	13.91 Million
Stanley Cup Finals (NHL) (2019)	5.33 Million

***Numbers for NBA Finals and Stanley Cup are from 2019 to show comparisons from non-COVID seasons**

The Chaos of the New York Yankees

The Yankees can't win in the playoffs, and it is beginning to be troubling. The Yankees, just this past Friday, were eliminated by the number one seeded Tampa Bay Rays in the best-of-five ALDS. After not being able to scrape across a single run against a Rays pitching staff on short rest, the Yankees need to return to the drawing board with their heavy-offense approach that seems to be dismantled by injury every year. On the other hand, the Rays are at the top of the world right now. Currently leading the Houston Astros 3-0 in the ALCS, their small market, moneyball approach proved strong against the Yankees. Taking a closer look, entering the 2020 season (taking into account pro-rated salaries), the Yankees payroll was \$109,439,081, good enough for first in baseball. Comparatively, the Rays ranked 28th out of all 30 clubs, with a payroll at just \$28,290,689. Further, Gerrit Cole's pro-rated salary for this season (\$13.33 million) is still more than the combined worth of the pro-rated contracts of the Rays 10 starting players (9 batters, 1 pitcher = \$8.11 million) in Game 5 of the ALDS. The method of carrying players on contracts with less money and focusing on analytics was popularized by the Oakland Athletics, and is a perfect strategy that allows small-market teams such as the Rays to beat the star-heavy Yankees. As the Rays near ever closer to their second World Series appearance, the Yankees are left to ponder questionable managerial decisions, an un-clutch closer, and inconsistent hitting heading into a big offseason.

Sources:

[CBS Sports](#), [ESPN](#), [Complex](#), [Pro Football Talk \(PFT\)](#), [Fox Sports](#), [Sports Media Watch \(SMW\)](#), [SMW](#), [SMW](#), [SMW](#), [NBC Sports](#), [Bloomberg](#), [Deadline](#), [Spotrac](#), [Twitter](#), [ESPN](#), [NFL](#), [Sports Illustrated](#)

2020 Playoff Team (From ALDS and NLDS)	2020 Season Payroll (COVID-adjusted)
New York Yankees	\$109,439,081
Los Angeles Dodgers	\$107,917,397
Houston Astros	\$82,536,161
San Diego Padres	\$72,597,954
Atlanta Braves	\$63,061,931
Oakland Athletics	\$36,720,178
Miami Marlins	\$31,330,593
Tampa Bay Rays	\$28,290,689

The COVID Saga: The NFL

Over the past couple of weeks, with the start of the NFL regular season, COVID-19 has infiltrated the league. The major outbreak began with the Tennessee Titans, as on Monday, September 28th, the team announced that coach Shane Bowen had tested positive for the virus. Even though Bowen did not travel with the team the day before to their game against the Minnesota Vikings, the Titans saw 13 positive cases within players from Tuesday to Friday. This prompted the league to make its first postponement of the season, in which a game between the Titans and Steelers was pushed to Week 7. The Patriots were the next team hit hard by the virus, with their cases from players such as newly-signed quarterback Cam Newton and Defensive Player of the Year Stephon Gilmore. This not only postponed the Patriots and Chiefs game one day back, but it just recently postponed this past week's Broncos-Patriots matchup to next week. These few cases are just a handful of examples of the spike in cases within the NFL, a league, like the MLB, that has opted to not create a bubble for the regular season. In fact, the NFL has begun allowing fans in their stadiums as of recent weeks, with the Dolphins even being cleared by Florida's governor to allow all 67,000+ fans to fill their maximum capacity. With the NFL announcing that approximately two-thirds of teams have players or personnel with the virus, it is going to be a challenge for the league to stay afloat in a sea of positive cases.