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Summer Olympics and MLB — Top Buzz Worthy Properties in 2021

After navigating the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, many sports executives were hoping for a return to normalcy in 2021. Despite the significant hurdles and concerns – including empty or limited attendance, shortened seasons, canceled games and sick athletes – the year did in fact witness the return of sports and fans' attention to their favorite teams.

According to the 2022 Buzz Report, produced by YouGov Sport, the Summer Olympics, MLB and the NFL were the top three properties for U.S. sports fans in 2021. They earned Buzz Scores of 24.4, 16.0 and 15.6.

Generating the Buzz Report

YouGov Sport monitors public perception of sports through one of its signature tools — SportsIndex — which tracks 200 domestic and international sports events in 30 sports across 34 markets. YouGov Sport measures 16 brand metrics — impression, quality, value, reputation, satisfaction, recommend, index, awareness, attention, ad awareness, word of mouth, consideration, purchase intent, current customers and former customers. However, one of the most important metrics is brand buzz. To compile the Buzz Score, every day 100 people are asked to identify the sports events and leagues they've heard positive news about and the ones they've heard negative news about in the previous two weeks. A completely positive report will have a Buzz Score of 100, while a completely negative report will have a score of -100. A score of 0 is a neutral result.

“The Buzz Report provides sports properties and leagues the ability to measure the effect of news headlines and offers insights on how fans are reacting to their sport,” said Tracy Schoenadel, Global Chief Customer Officer at YouGov.

The 2022 Buzz Report Results

Not surprisingly, the Summer Olympics recorded its highest Buzz Score in August 2021. Its score of 24.4 catapulted it from eighth place the previous year and was 8.4 points ahead of MLB in second place. Team USA dominated the medal count in Tokyo with 113 total medals, 39 of them gold, surpassing China's total of 88. Even with a 14- to 17-hour time difference and empty stands that muted some of the excitement on television, Americans were interested in how their country's athletes performed against the rest of the world.

A return to a more regular season helped MLB jump from fourth place in 2020 to second in 2021 with a Buzz Score of 16.0. This result was fueled by the World Series, which saw the Atlanta Braves win their second World Series title since moving to Atlanta by beating the Houston Astros in six games.

Perhaps the most unexpected result was the drop by the NFL from first place in 2020 to third place in 2021. With 15.6 points, the NFL couldn't quite top MLB. The NFL reached its highest score in January as 14 teams battled in the playoffs, with Tampa Bay winning the Super Bowl on Feb. 7.

Rounding out Buzz Report's top five were NASCAR and NCAA Division I college football. With 11.1 points, NASCAR dropped from second place in 2020 when, at the time, it was one of the few sports properties offering live competition, to fourth. The thrill of college football was evident at the beginning of the season with the property recording a Buzz Score of 10.5 in September.

Completing the top 10 were the NHL (9.4 points), PGA Tour (8.7), NCAA Division I Men's college basketball (8.4), U.S. Open Tennis Championships (7.9) and Wimbledon (7.8).

If only U.S.-based properties are included, then Summer Olympics and Wimbledon would be replaced in the top 10 by the NBA (7.4 points), which finished third in 2020, and Minor League Baseball (6.2).

To see the full 2022 Buzz Report, go to YouGov Sport's website.

Achieving the largest gains among the top 10 in the 2022 Buzz Report was Wimbledon, which jumped 10 places, followed by the Summer Games and U.S. Open Tennis Championships, both of which improved by seven places. Conversely, the biggest drops among the top 10 came from the NFL and NASCAR, which placed first and second in the 2020 report and both dropped two places in 2021.

From a calendar perspective, fans were most engaged in January (NFL, NHL) and September (college football, U.S. Open Tennis Championships). However, no property held fans' attention enough to rank in the top 10 in February, April, November or December.

"Sports, particularly these 10 properties, may have helped the U.S. work its way out of the pandemic into a more pre-pandemic life in which Americans were drawn back to their favorite sports," concluded Schoenadel.

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