

Ray Rice Domestic Violence Erodes NFL League Loyalty

Contributed by Brand Keys
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Fan loyalty in the National Football League has fallen from first to third place among major league sports as a result of by the Baltimore Ravens Ray Rice scandal according to a new survey by brand loyalty research firm Brand Keys.

“While the Brand Keys Sports Fan Loyalty Index doesn’t normally conduct diagnostic measures of individual players,” noted Passikoff, “We do measure overall League loyalty.” In January 2014, self-classified football fans representing the NFL’s 32 teams rated the National Football League first in terms of league loyalty. “Based on current Rice related circumstances, their own fans rate the NFL #3, just behind Major League Baseball and the National Basketball Association,” said Passikoff. Loyalty for the Baltimore Ravens team (ranked #7 this year) has so far been unaffected by the publicity surrounding the Rice video.

The fans’ “ideal” is the foundation upon which Brand Keys 2014 Sports Fan Loyalty Index, the 22nd annual fan survey (www.brandkeys.com) by the New York-based brand and customer loyalty research consultancy, is based.

Brand Keys Sports Fan Loyalty Index was designed to help professional team management identify precise fan loyalty rankings in their home and national markets “with insights that enable league and team management to identify areas “particularly emotional attachments” that need strategic brand reinforcement,” said Robert Passikoff, Brand Keys’ founder and president. “Those insights are based upon fans’ ideal team but in the case of fan loyalty, a team is much more than a group of players and the actions of individual players can have dramatic effects on fan loyalty.”

Follows are the 2014 NFL teams that scored well when it comes to fan loyalty, and those that didn’t. For comparative purposes, #’s in parentheses give the team’s rankings for last season:

Top-5

1. New England Patriots (#1)
2. San Francisco 49ers (#4)
3. Green Bay Packers (#2)
4. Denver Broncos (#7)
5. Indianapolis Colts (#5)

Bottom-5

32. Oakland Raiders (#32)
31. Jacksonville Jaguars (#31)
30. Cleveland Browns (#30)
29. Tampa Bay Buccaneers (#24)
28. Dallas Cowboys (#26)

The Brand Keys Sports Fan Loyalty Index provides an apples-to-apples comparison of the intensity with which fans within the team’s home market area support their team versus corresponding values for fans of other teams or leagues in that market.

“Everybody loves a winner, but it’s important to note that win/loss ratios do not entirely govern fan loyalty ratings. Neither does simply counting attendance. “There are other powerful and emotionally-based factors that must to be taken into account,” observed Passikoff.

The percentages next to each component of brand loyalty indicates the contribution they make to fan loyalty and engagement:

History and Tradition (33%)

Is the game and the team part of fans’ and community rituals, institutions and beliefs? These include both moral and legal codes of behavior and principals.

Fan Bonding (29%)

Are players particularly respected and admired? An issue like domestic violence will not only have its effects primarily on this driver, but on an overall basis as well.

Pure Entertainment (21%)

How well a team does, wins, losses sure. But even more importantly than a win-loss ratio, how or entertaining is their

play? And yes, on-the-field aggressive play is part of the acceptable DNA of this loyalty driver.

Authenticity (17%)

How well they play as a team. Whatâ€™s the offense and defense like? New managers, as theyâ€™re seen to be responsible for the genuineness and credibility of the team, can also help lift this driver. How the team â€œ and in this particular instance the league â€œ behaves in a situation like Riceâ€™s.

â€œAs overall league and team rankings correlate very highly with game viewership and purchase of licensed merchandise, and since rankings can be influenced by how loyalty drivers are managed, itâ€™s critical that team marketers manage them strategically to better meet fan expectations,â€• said Passikoff. â€œBut you have to know what the fans really expect â€œ beyond the winning season. The Brand Keys Sports Fan Loyalty Index measures all teams in the four Major Leagues.

â€œLoyalty is a leading-indicator of behavior and profitability,â€• said Passikoff, â€œIt tells us what people are going to do. And because loyalty ratings correlate highly with sales of licensed merchandise, we werenâ€™t surprised when retailers like Dickâ€™s Sporting Goods and Modellâ€™s pulled Ray Rice jerseyâ€™s from the shelves, and when the Ravens themselves tweeted that they â€œwill offer an exchange for Ray Rice jerseys at stadium stores. Details to come.â€•

â€œWhile aggression and ferocity are certainly a thread that runs through the â€œPure Entertainmentâ€• loyalty driver for Major League Sports, and are undeniably characteristics that help teams win,â€• noted Passikoff, â€œThis kind of widespread negative publicity, fan outcry and the appearance of a player letting his fans down and of league indecision or whitewash, unfortunately raises issues regarding not only player behavior but league standards as well. When that happens, bonds of loyalty are weakened for all teams. And when that happens, nobody wins.â€•