Bombarded by elation, jubilance and some wacky celebratory rituals, being in Philadelphia during the Eagles victorious playoff football game earlier this week against the Minnesota Vikings was quite an eye-opening experience for me.

First, there was the pre-game set-up throughout news outlets and social media that city officials were greasing up poles and lamp posts in anticipation of a win - because, apparently, there must be enough people who would injure themselves by climbing them for the city to deem the prevention measure even necessary. Then, post-game and with the team Super Bowl bound, the public chants grew louder and mishap videos inundated the internet. This one went viral as it depicts a happy fan so consumed with zeal that he ran into a subway beam, see here [2]. Thankfully, he is reported to be fine after the incident.

Which got me thinking about whether there are spikes in injuries after sporting events among spectators. Or, health effects of such a spectrum of the roller coaster of emotions people endure. And, in general, whether it was overall healthy to be an avid versus amateur fan.

Is the Super Bowl good for your health?

So, I looked into it a bit further and not surprisingly found lots of good, some mediocre or bad and contradictory information on the topic. It's a mixed bag on the actual data-specific front and much that exists is not ideal.
Though overall, there are a lot of benefits to your health engaging in your community and often your family in this manner. Employing some common sense best serves these encouraging and favorable effects (and can stave off many of the bad ones). There are noted worthwhile psychological and emotionally healthy affirmations to being an engaged fan.

Does the team you root for matter to your health?
My bulldog, Mollie, has ironically been gifted jerseys from both competing teams for the 2018 Super Bowl Championships. Since she was raised to be polite, she complied and tried on the New England Patriots one, but, don't be mistaken, she is a Philly supporter all the way. Go Eagles!

So, is being one or the other better when it comes to a human's well-being? The limited research on the subject reveals it could be when it comes to accidents and risk of cardiac death. The strength of the cardiac association claim is unclear given shortcomings of the particular study design to be discussed.

More accidents?

In a 2003 report in the New England Journal of Medicine, researchers from the University of Toronto studied driving fatalities on 27 consecutive Super Bowl Sundays concluding sponsors might want to provide subsidized public transit, ER trauma units should consider staffing up on these days and warnings about driving should be conveyed to the public. With a U.S. viewership of roughly 110 million, because driving fatalities often involve alcohol, inattention and fatigue, the scientists investigated whether such an event adversely contributed to them when compared to control Sundays. Their findings:

- 41% relative increase of fatalities after telecast (no significant difference before telecast, marginal decrease during it)
  - this was evident for 21 of 27 years, adding on average 7 deaths on Super Bowl Sunday
  - higher than two decades comparison to fatalities on New Year's
- nonfatal accidents also followed this trend (about 46%)
  - larger in states with losing team than neutral states
  - larger in neutral states than in states with winning team
- CA with most wins showed no change. CO & NY with most losses showed 147% increase during relevant years.

Now, that was a while ago, so patterns, our culture and behaviors may have shifted somewhat, but it demonstrates that being a fan of a losing team preoccupied people in a negative way. With peak injuries occurring in the immediate hour (and in particular 4 hours) after the game, clearly emotional tolls can beget physical ones.

More cardiovascular events?
More recently, a 2011 study in the journal *Clinical Cardiology* claimed that "a Super Bowl loss for a home team was associated with increased death rates in both men and women and in older individuals." Robert A. Kloner, MD, PhD, of the Heart Institute, Good Samaritan Hospital and Keck School of Medicine at USC in Los Angeles, and his team of researchers "ran regression models for mortality rates for cardiac causes for the 1980 Los Angeles Super Bowl loss and for the 1984 Los Angeles Super Bowl win." The work contends the 1980 loss "increased total and cardiac deaths in both men and women and triggered more death in older than younger patients. In contrast, there was a trend for a Super Bowl win to reduce death more frequently in older people and in women." He urges, "physicians and patients should be aware that stressful games might elicit an emotional response that could trigger a cardiac event...Stress reduction programs or certain medications might be appropriate in individual cases."

A conclusion from this study regarding this association is problematic. The data did not tease out confounding factors (e.g. pre-existing medical problems, alcohol and high fat food consumption, smoking, environmental factors like bad weather [7] (e.g. very hot [8], very cold [9])). The study design itself [10] was pretty flawed [6], so drawing such a link to the game itself is unclear. We do know that extremes of emotional distress certainly influence cardiac events, but they typically entail more substantial stressors like sudden spousal death or divorce. Those with underlying conditions or older are likely at greater risk.

As I address in the article *Don't Go Breaking My Heart- Literally!* [11]:

INTERHEART performed a large case control, 12,461 person, 52 country-wide study on the significance of anger, vigorous physical exertion and emotional upset in the hour before symptom onset of acute myocardial infarction (aka AMI = a heart attack). It claims a population-attributable risk of 7.7% with strenuous physical activity and 8.5% with anger and emotional upset. The research concludes: “Physical exertion and anger or emotional upset are triggers associated with the first AMI in all regions of the world, in men and women, and in all age groups, with no significant effect modifiers.” It further asserts the consequence is additive if both factors are present during that critical time.

How about overall health?

There has been a lot of work in the social sciences arena that reflects being a team supporter is beneficial to social connectedness and good mental health. Certainly, sitting on a couch watching game after game and making poor dietary and beverage choices isn’t optimal when taken to extremes. We know sleep deprivation, sedentary lifestyles, excessive caloric intake and alcohol consumption can contribute to a host of medical conditions or exacerbate existing ones in addition to impaired judgment which doesn't do us any favors in the domain of injury prevention. That said, like most things in life, moderation is key. Looking forward to getting together with friends to enjoy going to a game or watching one from someone's home can be a very positive bonding and social experience that diminishes feelings of loneliness and isolation (which when present contribute to
What is most important is knowing your personal limitations and taking victories and losses in your stride while making sensible choices. Excitement and disappointment are healthy components of our emotional spectrum. Sustained, extreme anger, on the other hand, can take a bigger toll. Stress in small doses can be a life-saving coping mechanism, when taken to chronic, severe levels does us a disservice.

**Take Home Message**

Since the Eagles are going to win, it might be best for your health to support them. But, I will leave that up to you.

If you can mostly enjoy games like the Super Bowl safely and sensibly no matter the result, then being a fan could be a wonderful stress reliever for you.

Like anything else, if your involvement as a spectator exacerbates social isolation, takes aim at your interpersonal relationships, worsens your overall healthy choices or places you in harm's way, then reconsidering its purpose in your life might be important.

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