

TV ratings down, Fox needs to take some of the blame

Written by Maury Brown

Tuesday, 17 October 2006 07:55

If you haven't heard, ratings for MLB's postseason are down this year due to a number of factors. Be it rainouts, adjusting the schedule to deal with possible snow in Detroit, or teams getting swept or nearly swept, the postseason this year has been, well... not as lively as many may have expected.

I wrote about this today for [Baseball Prospectus](#) in an article entitled [Ratings Time](#) (subscription required). Within the article I wrote in part:

If you've got the blahs watching the 2006 postseason, you're not alone if you use television ratings as a barometer. Yes, maybe you or I would sit transfixed watching the Devil Rays and Pirates in the World Series if they made it, but for the average fan, the ratings numbers indicate where their interests lie. Why is this important to the rest of us? Because, it impacts what Fox does, or does not do, with telecasts in the future. For those that say, "Ratings don't matter," in this case, they do, to all of us.

Last year's postseason ratings weren't as good as the year prior, but it would have been hard to match 2004, what with the Red Sox winning the World Series after 85 years after coming back against the Yankees in the ALCS. A drop in viewers from that for the 2005 postseason had to be expected.

Unfortunately, this postseason has seen numbers even more uniformly down, pretty much across the board, and this time you can't place the blame on the White Sox not having the same pull the Red Sox did. There are some other reasons why the drop is occurring, which I'll get to in a bit, but all that aside--when *Dancing with the Stars* beats out the Game One of the ALDS, you have to say that the 2006 postseason isn't going to go down in history as "Must See TV."

When the Tigers won Game One of the ALCS against A's, the game pulled in a 2.8 rating and an 8 share with adults aged 18-49, with 8.59 million viewers overall. The rating was down 22% in that demographic from last year's Game One of the ALCS between the White Sox and Angels, which pulled a 3.6 rating and a 10 share. To explain, ratings are based on the Nielsen Television Ratings statistics. A single national **ratings point** represents 1%, or 1,102,000 households for the 2005-06 seasons.

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Share

is the percentage of television sets in use tuned to a specific program. These numbers are usually reported as ratings points and share.

What I *didn't* mention in the article was the broadcast team at Fox Sports.

What has come out of this article is a number of emails, many of which take me to task for not mentioning the many fans that have been following the game closely for years that are now refusing to watch the games, not because of what I mentioned in my article today, but rather how the content is being delivered.

Take for example Mark Hanson from Watertown, MA:

Here's why I'm not watching: Fox Sports. The more time goes on, the more I refuse to torture myself listening to their collection of moronic booth chimps, the amateurish direction aimed at ADHD sufferers, and the general contempt for both the game and my intelligence. If I really want to follow along I'll look for it on the radio, but more likely I'll just read the box scores the next morning; it'll be a far more enjoyable experience.

As Jay Fossier of San Francisco put it:

I don't understand. Fox is losing a ratings war? They may lose interest in baseball?

Extrapolating the dilemma out to a far degree, perhaps Fox would stop broadcasting baseball or at least post-season coverage?

This is a bad thing? Because, I have to tell you, the only thing upsetting to me about the Steve Lyons firing was that Joe Buck didn't get the axe as well. I mean, I understand the gist of your concern, but aim it away from Fox. The only thing that would be bad about the whole Fox network crashing and burning in an uber-Hindenburg scenario would be that they would take 'The Simpsons' down with them.

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D'oh!

As part of my gig I watch the games to get a feel for the on-air personalities. This year seems worse than last, and that's saying a lot.

While Luis Gonzalez has been a welcome addition to the broadcast booth, I can say that along with the joy in Wrigleyville today with the official announcement of Lou Pineilla becoming manager, a host of fans are dreaming he won't be in the broadcast booth next season. And I've about gone hari-kari watching Eric Byrnes. The hair is the hair, but does he have to play the part of the college frat boy to the hilt?

TBS will get a portion of the postseason games next year, which is good. It will at least give us all that sense that many have during Springtime: Hope springs eternal that TBS gets a better crew than Fox.

Maury Brown is the editor of *The Biz of Baseball* and an author for *Baseball Prospectus*. He can be contacted [here](#).