

# Yea, team! Winning fans see self-esteem boost

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Fans of a college football team that wins a big game could experience a boost in self-esteem that lasts at least two days after the event, a new study suggests.

On the other hand, fans of the losing team won't necessarily suffer a loss in their [self-esteem](#) following the [game](#), the results suggested—although they may see a decrease in their mood.

The key for fans of both teams may be the positive effects of watching the game with friends.

"Just feeling connected to others while watching the game helped sustain self-esteem," said Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick, co-author of the study and professor of communication at The Ohio State University.

"So for fans of the winning team, the social aspect of sharing the victory with each other led to a self-esteem boost. For fans of the losing team, sharing the pain may have protected them from losing self-esteem. Those who didn't watch at all experienced a self-esteem drop—they felt completely left out," she said.

The study appears online in the journal *Communication & Sport* and will be published in a future print edition. Co-authors were J.C. Abdallah and Andrew Billings of the University of Alabama.

The study involved 174 students from Ohio State and Michigan State universities, who participated right before and after a key football game between their schools on Nov. 21, 2015.

Michigan State, ranked ninth in the nation, defeated third-ranked Ohio State on a field goal as time expired, winning 17-14.

The [student](#) participants were questioned about their self-esteem, mood and other issues right before the Saturday game, and then again the next day and the following Monday. Students were told the study was about their "well-being and [leisure activities](#)" and were asked unrelated questions so that they wouldn't suspect the real reason for the study.

Before the game, students from both universities had similar levels of self-esteem when they rated how positive they felt about their body, appearance, academic ability and other measures.

But on the Sunday after the game, the happy Michigan State students had significantly higher levels of self-esteem, which went up even higher on Monday. In contrast, self-esteem levels didn't change much for the sad Ohio State students.

How—and if—the students watched the game was critical, results showed. Examining students from both schools, those who watched the game socially had the highest average self-esteem on Sunday, followed by those who didn't watch the game, with those who watched by themselves scoring lowest.

However, on Monday, when students returned to classes, both those who watched socially and those who watched alone saw self-esteem go up.

"The game was probably an important topic of conversation on campus the following Monday, and that boosted the self-esteem of those who watched it and could talk about it and share the joy or pain," Knobloch-Westerwick said.

Those who didn't watch had a drop in self-esteem on Monday—to even lower than for those who watched alone.

"People who didn't watch couldn't participate in the conversations, which probably led to a loss of self-esteem."

As far as mood, the Michigan State students showed a slight increase in mood on Sunday, and then a drop on Monday. Gloomy Ohio State students saw a significant drop on Saturday and a small further dip on Monday.

But on both Sunday and Monday, Michigan State students scored well above their Ohio State counterparts in terms of mood.

Why didn't Michigan State students see more of a boost in their mood after the big win?

Knobloch-Westerwick suspects it was because they were already flying high on Saturday before the game.

"The weekend had started and they were probably excited about the game. There may be a ceiling effect where they couldn't feel a whole lot better than they already did," she said.

Overall, the results showed one key reason why sports fans enjoy watching the games: the boost they get in their self-esteem from supporting the winning team, Knobloch-Westerwick said.

But it also showed that the game is most rewarding when you share it with your friends.

"You want to be in this with other people. Winning or losing, it is better to be a fan with your friends."

**More information:** Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick et al, The Football Boost? Testing Three Models on Impacts on Sports Spectators' Self-Esteem, *Communication & Sport* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/2167479519830359](https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479519830359)

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