

# [***The Super Bowl is really an American holiday. So welcome to the party, Cousin Taylor***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B8Y-HT81-DY7V-G01G-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Media people can be forgiven for turning the coming weekend into "Taylor Swift's Super Bowl LVIII," seizing upon the shiniest of objects to enhance traffic among those who aren't particularly invested in the game itself. Yet of all TV events, the Super Bowl has long since perfected the art of attracting an audience that isn't necessarily there for the football, but rather to simply participate in the communal nature and spectacle.

Whatever incremental audience and [*additional popularity*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/07/sport/patrick-mahomes-kansas-city-chiefs-star-taylor-swift-spt-intl/index.html) Swift's relationship with the Kansas City Chiefs' Travis Kelce brought to the NFL season, what commissioner Roger Goodell called [*"the Taylor Swift effect"*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/06/sport/taylor-swift-roger-goodell-nfl-spt-intl/index.html) should be less pronounced at the Super Bowl, which has already evolved into the equivalent of an unofficial national holiday in the US, celebrating the nation's collective love of sports, marketing and family, with a heavy side dish, usually, of old-fashioned patriotism.

Long before DVRs and digital teasers, casual audiences tuned in to see the commercials, which took on an extra air of significance as cultural touchstones. A few relatively early legends in that category - [*Apple's "1984" ad*](https://money.cnn.com/2014/01/22/news/companies/1984-super-bowl-apple/index.html), broadcast 40 years ago, comes to mind - established that these ads could be not just product pitches but mini-masterpieces, little works of art that could spur thought as well as chuckles.

Music, too, has become an integral part of the game, and another bridge in appealing to those who don't know the intricacies of when to blitz and might not otherwise feel particularly compelled to move away from the table with the mini-hamburgers and seven-layer dip. Give much of the credit for that to the then-renegade Fox network and its sketch comedy "In Living Color," which in 1992 counterprogrammed the halftime show and siphoned away a huge chunk of the audience.

The next year, the NFL recruited [*Michael Jackson*](https://www.cnn.com/style/article/super-bowl-best-halftime-shows-fashion/index.html) to blow the doors off with a live performance, and the notion of halftime consisting of nothing more than the studio crew of football analysts debating Xs and Os disappeared forever.

As one of the most powerful forces in sports and media, and by far TV's main attraction, the NFL has thus refined its approach throughout the years. Along the way that has meant overcoming multiple setbacks, from ***politics*** to a pandemic to concerns about the debilitating injuries and [*lingering health effects*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/08/health/concussion-brain-injury-summit/index.html#:~:text=Research%20has%20shown%20that%20repetitive,impaired%20judgment%20and%20suicidal%20behavior.) that playing the sport inflicts on its players.

Not surprisingly, given that context, even Swift's attendance has become oddly politicized, never mind all the actors and musicians that have spoken out about candidates and causes, or the players that have dated celebrities (admittedly, few with a following to rival hers) over the years.

Fundamentally, though, the Super Bowl is now bigger than any star or other distraction, even bigger than football. Last year's game, in which the Chiefs beat the Philadelphia Eagles, averaged 115 million viewers, a significant surge over 2023, and a sign that whatever weakness the NFL had shown in its once-impregnable armor appeared to be behind it. Playoff games leading up to this weekend also exhibited [*healthy ratings gains*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/30/entertainment/chiefs-ravens-ratings/index.html).

The cast of characters might change at Christmas dinner from year to year - finding a seat for someone's new boyfriend, or saying goodbye to a divorced spouse - but the holiday and the related traditions go on. So it is with the Super Bowl, and the role it occupies within American life and culture.

Welcoming cousin Taylor to the party will likely have its benefits, with the disclaimer that some of the non-fans who tuned in during the regular season would have shown up (grudgingly, perhaps) for the Super Bowl anyway.

Still, even people who couldn't name a single player (and this year, maybe just one) would have been there Sunday. Because in these divided, often fractious times, the Super Bowl remains the one thing that we, America, still do as a family.

Analysis by Brian Lowry, CNN

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