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The Five Metrics to Compare NFL Fan Bases

There are a lot of different characteristics of NFL fan bases, and each of the fan bases vary among these attributes. Some have fans all over the country, while others make sure they fill the stadium every Sunday. For this study, five different metrics were used to score each of the fan bases from 1-33 (32 NFL teams, and one extra group who do not identify a favorite team). They are the total number of fans, attendance, attendance per fan, merchandise purchased, and merchandise purchased per fan. By using these five metrics, the fan bases of each team were ranked to determine the best fans in football over the past five years.

Data Explanation

To obtain this data, a consumer survey was conducted among a representative panel of United States consumers that were 13 or older. About 5000 people completed the survey each year, and the results were scaled to represent the entire US population aged 13+ each year. Because of the size of the sample compared to the size of the entire population, results experience a lot of variability from year to year. It is important to note that any number from a chart is in thousands.

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In terms of the raw number of fans in the US, two things stayed consistent throughout the past five years: the Dallas Cowboys have the largest fanbase in the NFL, and the Jacksonville Jaguars have the smallest. The Cowboys had over ten million fans in each of the five years, a number that was recorded only two other times, by the New England Patriots in 2017 and 2019. The Jaguars, on the other hand, never reached one million fans in any of the five years, something that only happened two other times: once by the Tennessee Titans in 2018, and the other by the Los Angeles Chargers in 2019. Cowboy fans accounted for about 9% of all NFL fans in the United States, meaning that about one out of every eleven people identified as such. Jaguar fans accounted for about 0.33% of all NFL fans in the United States, or about one out of every 300 people.

| Year | Fans (Thousands) | Percent Change |
|------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 2017 | 128742.96 | 0% |
| 2018 | 120330.89 | -6.534% |
| 2019 | 121597.96 | 1.053% |
| 2020 | 124413.32 | 2.315% |
| 2021 | 143180.46 | 15.085% |
| 5 Year Percent Change | 11.214% | |
| Total Fans (Thousands) | 638265.59 | |
| Average Number of Fans (Thousands) | 127653.12 | |

As a league, the NFL had about 128 million Americans 13+ attend or watch an NFL game in 2017, which accounted for about 47.62% of all Americans 13+. That number grew to about 143 million by 2021, an 11% increase over the five years. The biggest change in any one year was from 2020 to 2021, a year in which the NFL experienced a 15% increase just one year after the COVID-19-impacted season. The average number of American fans aged 13+ that went to or watched a game over the five years was about 127.6 million.

Rankings

| Team | Total Fans (Thousands) | Average Number of Fans (Thousands) | Rank |
|-------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|------|
| Arizona Cardinals | 9095.56 | 1819.11 | 29 |

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|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|
| Carolina Panthers | 13990.08 | 2798.02 | 19 |
| Chicago Bears | 35768.61 | 7153.72 | 4 |
| Cincinnati Bengals | 10091.09 | 2018.22 | 28 |
| Cleveland Browns | 15428.78 | 3085.76 | 16 |
| Dallas Cowboys | 55895.45 | 11179.09 | 1 |
| Denver Broncos | 19448.54 | 3889.71 | 12 |
| Detroit Lions | 17654.07 | 3530.81 | 14 |
| Green Bay Packers | 37842.35 | 7568.47 | 3 |
| Houston Texans | 12020.10 | 2404.02 | 25 |
| Indianapolis Colts | 8894.67 | 1778.93 | 30 |
| Jacksonville Jaguars | 2422.75 | 484.55 | 33 |
| Kansas City Chiefs | 23044.78 | 4608.96 | 10 |
| Las Vegas Raiders | 13490.42 | 2698.08 | 21 |
| Los Angeles Chargers | 6109.19 | 1221.84 | 32 |
| Los Angeles Rams | 14580.70 | 2916.14 | 18 |
| Miami Dolphins | 13186.96 | 2637.39 | 23 |
| Minnesota Vikings | 17893.41 | 3578.68 | 13 |
| New England Patriots | 45816.98 | 9163.40 | 2 |
| New Orleans Saints | 16373.26 | 3274.65 | 15 |
| New York Giants | 31627.35 | 6325.47 | 5 |
| New York Jets | 11848.01 | 2369.60 | 27 |
| Philadelphia Eagles | 23647.94 | 4729.59 | 9 |
| Pittsburgh Steelers | 31313.57 | 6262.71 | 6 |

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|------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------|
| Tennessee Titans | 6434.46 | 1286.89 | 31 |
| Washington Commanders | 12467.64 | 2493.53 | 24 |
| N/A | 29818.73 | 5963.75 | 7 |

An average of the total number of fans per year was taken over the past five years to properly rank each team using this metric. There were some interesting trends as total fans fluctuated, both league-wide and for specific teams. In terms of specific teams, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Los Angeles Rams, and Kansas City Chiefs were the biggest risers in fans over the past five years, which can be attributed to Tom Brady and a Super Bowl win for Tampa Bay, moving to Los Angeles and a Super Bowl win for Los Angeles, and the emergence of Patrick Mahomes and a Super Bowl win for Kansas City. The largest single-season growth belongs to the Jacksonville Jaguars, who, even after tripling the size of their fan base in one season after drafting generational talent Trevor Lawrence, remained in last for the 2021 season. On the other side of the coin, the Green Bay Packers, Seattle Seahawks, and New England Patriots were the biggest fallers. All three of these teams ranked within the top seven in 2017, and while both the Packers and Patriots were able to stay in the top seven in 2021, they were unable to keep all of their fans. The largest single-season decline belongs to the Miami Dolphins in 2019, almost cutting their fan base in half, but then immediately doubling the count a year later, which could just be a byproduct of the sample. All in all, the Dallas Cowboys, New England Patriots, and Green Bay Packers ranked 1st, 2nd, and 3rd in fans, while the Tennessee Titans, Los Angeles Chargers, and Jacksonville Jaguars rounded out the back end of the list.

Fan Attendance

Fan attendance is arguably the most important aspect of a team's fan base. Teams perform better at home in front of a full crowd, hence why the NFL awards home-field advantage in the playoffs to the best teams every year. For each team each year, data was collected to see how many US fans went to one, two or three, or four or more games. Using this data, a yearly score was calculated for each team, using different weights to properly assign value to each of the different categories. One point was awarded for one game, two and a half points for two or three games, and four points for four or more games. The scores from 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2021 were then added together to find a total score, and then that number was

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Rankings

| Team | Total Score | Total Score Rank | Total Score per Fan | Total Score per Fan Rank |
|----------------------|-------------|------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Arizona Cardinals | 3093.80 | 19 | 0.3401 | 2 |
| Atlanta Falcons | 3342.13 | 17 | 0.2433 | 14 |
| Baltimore Ravens | 4115.67 | 13 | 0.3074 | 4 |
| Buffalo Bills | 4262.38 | 12 | 0.2879 | 6 |
| Carolina Panthers | 2487.25 | 26 | 0.1778 | 26 |
| Chicago Bears | 9040.59 | 2 | 0.2528 | 8 |
| Cincinnati Bengals | 2522.79 | 25 | 0.2500 | 10 |
| Cleveland Browns | 3302.57 | 18 | 0.2141 | 17 |
| Dallas Cowboys | 8199.73 | 3 | 0.1467 | 31 |
| Denver Broncos | 4091.26 | 14 | 0.2104 | 18 |
| Detroit Lions | 2604.69 | 23 | 0.1475 | 30 |
| Green Bay Packers | 9468.36 | 1 | 0.2502 | 9 |
| Houston Texans | 2036.66 | 30 | 0.1694 | 28 |
| Indianapolis Colts | 2176.84 | 28 | 0.2447 | 13 |
| Jacksonville Jaguars | 745.08 | 33 | 0.3075 | 3 |
| Kansas City Chiefs | 5536.41 | 8 | 0.2402 | 15 |
| Las Vegas Raiders | 3360.18 | 16 | 0.2491 | 11 |
| Los Angeles Chargers | 2235.73 | 27 | 0.3660 | 1 |
| Los Angeles Rams | 2890.05 | 20 | 0.1982 | 24 |
| Miami Dolphins | 2693.36 | 21 | 0.2042 | 23 |
| Minnesota Vikings | 5167.10 | 9 | 0.2888 | 5 |

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|------------------------------|---------|----|--------|----|
| New York Jets | 2622.70 | 22 | 0.2214 | 16 |
| Philadelphia Eagles | 5873.41 | 6 | 0.2484 | 12 |
| Pittsburgh Steelers | 5595.07 | 7 | 0.1787 | 25 |
| San Francisco 49ers | 3979.96 | 15 | 0.1544 | 29 |
| Seattle Seahawks | 4663.76 | 10 | 0.2082 | 20 |
| Tampa Bay Buccaneers | 2114.25 | 29 | 0.1769 | 27 |
| Tennessee Titans | 1314.24 | 31 | 0.2043 | 22 |
| Washington Commanders | 2573.86 | 24 | 0.2064 | 21 |
| N/A | 832.05 | 32 | 0.0279 | 33 |

It should be no surprise that the teams with the most total fans had the most fans in attendance. The teams that ranked top five in total fans filled out the top five in total attendance too. It can be concluded that there is a strong correlation between the number of fans a team has and the number of games those fans go to. From this data, the Green Bay Packers had almost ten million fans at games across the four years, while the Jacksonville Jaguars could not even eclipse one million fans.

However, attendance per fan might be just as good of an indicator of how good a fan base actually is. Teams with small fan bases should not get punished for not having as many fans. That's not something that they have a lot of control over. Instead, looking at the total number of fans at games and dividing that by the number of fans a team has can be just as important in determining who the "best" fans are. By this metric, the Los Angeles Chargers ranked 1st, which saw 36% of Chargers fans go to a game since 2017. There are fans in that 36% that are counted more than once, but if they went to five games, they cover for four other Chargers fans that did not go to a game at all. The Chargers ranked 27th in pure attendance and 32nd in total fans, but based on the number of fans they have, they did very well.

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group who do not identify a favorite team. Not all teams with large fan bases experienced this issue, as the Chicago Bears, Green Bay Packers, and Minnesota Vikings recorded top ten finishes in both categories. Good job, NFC North fans (except for you Detroit).

Merchandise Purchased

Purchasing merchandise to support your favorite team is another important aspect of how good a fan base is. Whether it be jerseys, hats, shirts, flags, or anything else, supporting your favorite team even when they aren't playing is a good indicator of how good a fan base is. Similar to attendance, data was collected to see how many United States fans purchased merchandise every year. They were asked if they spent more or less than \$50, and by using those responses, different weights were attributed to the responses. Spending less than \$50 resulted in one point, while spending more than \$50 resulted in 3 points. These values were selected because an average of \$25 is to be expected for any purchase less than \$50, and an average of \$75 spent for any purchase greater than \$50 seemed reasonable. Once again, that number was divided by the total number of fans of each team to obtain a ranking for merchandise purchased per fan.

Rankings

| Team | Total Score | Total Score Rank | Total Score per Fan | Total Score per Fan Rank |
|--------------------|-------------|------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Arizona Cardinals | 4815.04 | 29 | 0.5294 | 28 |
| Atlanta Falcons | 8727.56 | 20 | 0.6354 | 19 |
| Baltimore Ravens | 8844.06 | 19 | 0.6606 | 15 |
| Buffalo Bills | 9937.96 | 16 | 0.6712 | 13 |
| Carolina Panthers | 7049.58 | 23 | 0.5039 | 32 |
| Chicago Bears | 23779.97 | 5 | 0.6648 | 14 |
| Cincinnati Bengals | 6187.22 | 27 | 0.6131 | 22 |
| Cleveland Browns | 10616.83 | 15 | 0.6881 | 12 |

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|------------------------------|----------|----|--------|----|
| Green Bay Packers | 28984.10 | 3 | 0.7659 | 6 |
| Houston Texans | 6483.77 | 26 | 0.5394 | 27 |
| Indianapolis Colts | 5842.72 | 32 | 0.6569 | 16 |
| Jacksonville Jaguars | 2006.33 | 28 | 0.8281 | 2 |
| Kansas City Chiefs | 16481.59 | 9 | 0.7152 | 10 |
| Las Vegas Raiders | 12950.63 | 12 | 0.9600 | 1 |
| Los Angeles Chargers | 4291.61 | 30 | 0.7025 | 11 |
| Los Angeles Rams | 9115.86 | 18 | 0.6252 | 21 |
| Miami Dolphins | 7922.44 | 21 | 0.6008 | 24 |
| Minnesota Vikings | 11270.61 | 13 | 0.6299 | 20 |
| New England Patriots | 33086.40 | 2 | 0.7221 | 9 |
| New Orleans Saints | 10621.71 | 14 | 0.6487 | 18 |
| New York Giants | 16492.07 | 8 | 0.5214 | 29 |
| New York Jets | 7714.73 | 22 | 0.6511 | 17 |
| Philadelphia Eagles | 18459.95 | 6 | 0.7806 | 4 |
| Pittsburgh Steelers | 24030.09 | 4 | 0.7674 | 5 |
| San Francisco 49ers | 13376.56 | 11 | 0.5189 | 31 |
| Seattle Seahawks | 16983.06 | 7 | 0.7582 | 7 |
| Tampa Bay Buccaneers | 6899.36 | 25 | 0.5773 | 25 |
| Tennessee Titans | 3910.09 | 31 | 0.6077 | 23 |
| Washington Commanders | 7028.86 | 24 | 0.5638 | 26 |
| N/A | 1855.47 | 33 | 0.0622 | 33 |

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was spent one million times. The teams that finished at the top were once again the Dallas Cowboys, New England Patriots, and Green Bay Packers. The teams at the bottom were the Indianapolis Colts, Tennessee Titans, and Los Angeles Chargers.

The other metric for merchandise purchased is the number of estimated fans that spent \$25. A number very close to one means that \$25 was spent by the fan base for every fan in it. Interestingly enough, the Las Vegas Raiders ranked 1st, with an estimated 96% of their fans spending about \$25 on merchandise over the five years. The two other teams that rounded out the top three were the Jacksonville Jaguars, despite finishing 28th in total merchandise purchased, and the Dallas Cowboys. The teams that finished last in this category were the Detroit Lions, the San Francisco 49ers, who finished 11th in total merchandise purchased, and the Carolina Panthers.

The interesting thing about these two rankings when compared to one another is how similar the rankings turn out. 20/32, or 62.5%, of a team’s two rankings finished within five spots of one another, and 10/32, or 31.25% finished within two spots of one another. This did not happen in the attendance category, as only 11/32 team’s rankings finished within five spots of each other. By these results, it is clear that the total number of fans does not impact merchandise purchased as it does attendance. Fans of any team buy merchandise at a much more consistent level than they go to games.

Final Scores

To assess each team’s fan base and rank them from best to worst, each team’s rankings from the five metrics were added together and sorted from lowest to highest. The team with the lowest sum of ranks is crowned the “best fan base in the NFL”, while the team with the highest sum of ranks, well, needs lots of help.

| Team | Total Rank |
|-------------------|------------|
| Green Bay Packers | 1 |

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|-----------------------------|------|
| Dallas Cowboys | 4 |
| Pittsburgh Steelers | 5 |
| New England Patriots | 6 |
| Kansas City Chiefs | 7 |
| Seattle Seahawks | 8 |
| Minnesota Vikings | 9 |
| Las Vegas Raiders | 10 |
| Denver Broncos | 11 |
| Buffalo Bills | 12 |
| New Orleans Saints | T-13 |
| New York Giants | T-13 |
| Baltimore Ravens | 15 |
| Cleveland Browns | 16 |
| Atlanta Falcons | 17 |
| San Francisco 49ers | 18 |
| Jacksonville Jaguars | 19 |
| Los Angeles Chargers | T-20 |
| Los Angeles Rams | T-20 |
| New York Jets | 22 |
| Arizona Cardinals | 23 |
| Cincinnati Bengals | T-24 |
| Miami Dolphins | T-24 |

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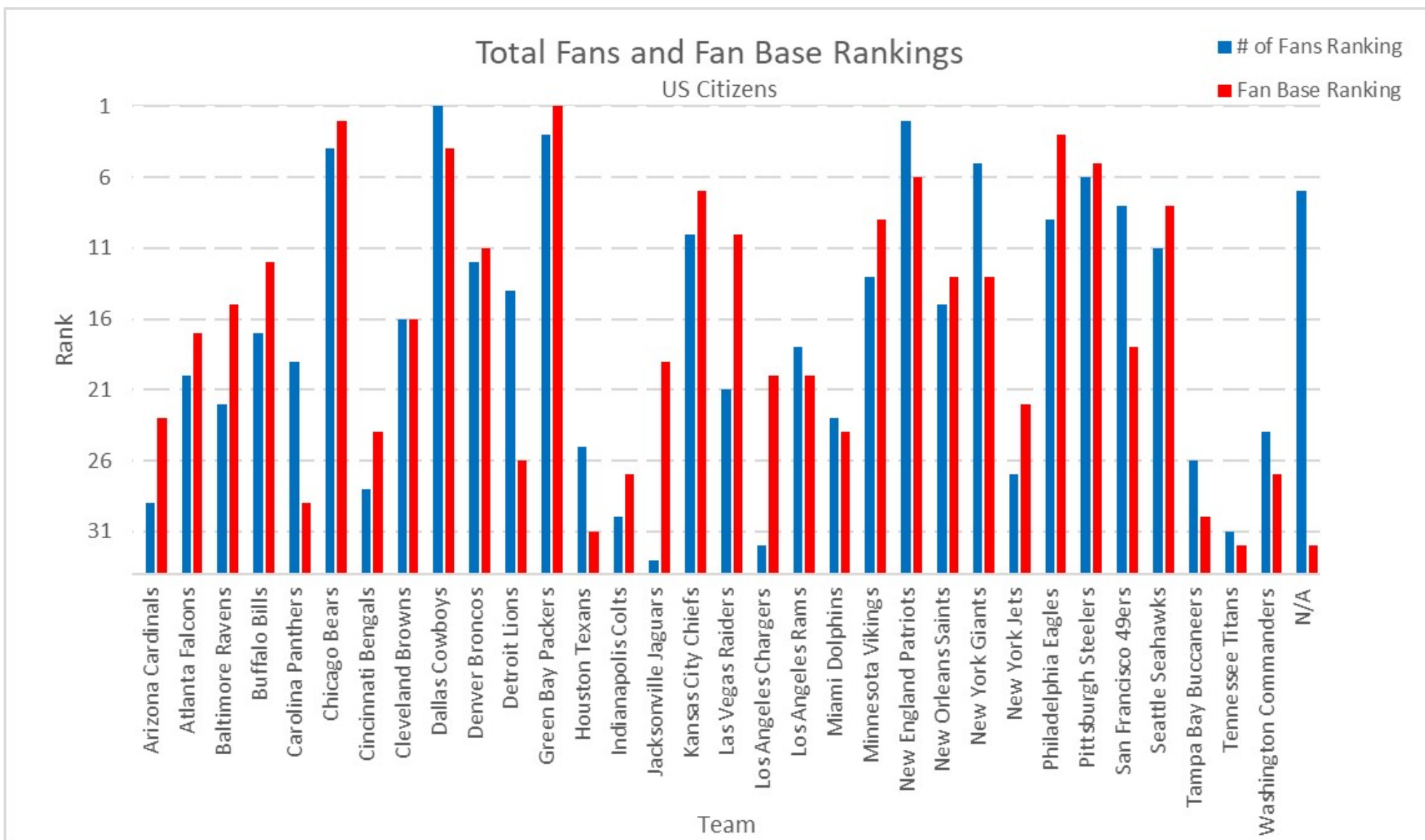
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|------------------------------|-------------|
| Washington Commanders | 1-27 |
| Carolina Panthers | 29 |
| Tampa Bay Buccaneers | 30 |
| Houston Texans | 31 |
| Tennessee Titans | T-32 |
| N/A | T-32 |

The teams that finished in the top five overall were the Green Bay Packers, the Chicago Bears, the Philadelphia Eagles, the Dallas Cowboys, and the Pittsburgh Steelers. Teams on the other end of the spectrum included the Washington Commanders and the Indianapolis Colts tied, the Carolina Panthers, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, the Houston Texans, and in last place, the Tennessee Titans, who even tied with the group who do not identify a favorite team. Surprisingly enough, of the four teams in the AFC South, the team with the least number of fans, the Jacksonville Jaguars, ranked the highest. Do better, AFC South fans...

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This graph shows how each team ranked, compared to the total number of US fans they had. Teams with a tall blue bar have lots of fans, while teams with a tall red bar have the best fans. It's interesting to note that only one team, the Cleveland Browns, finished with the same total fan and fan

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