

# Professional sports teams' marketing efforts in Columbus, Ohio

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## Introduction

NFL teams compete on the field but share most of the league's annual revenue creating a unique situation where businesses are *simultaneously cooperating and competing*.

How has this lucrative market been approached by the NFL? Have these franchises cooperated in the pursuit of gaining more fans?

## Research Objectives

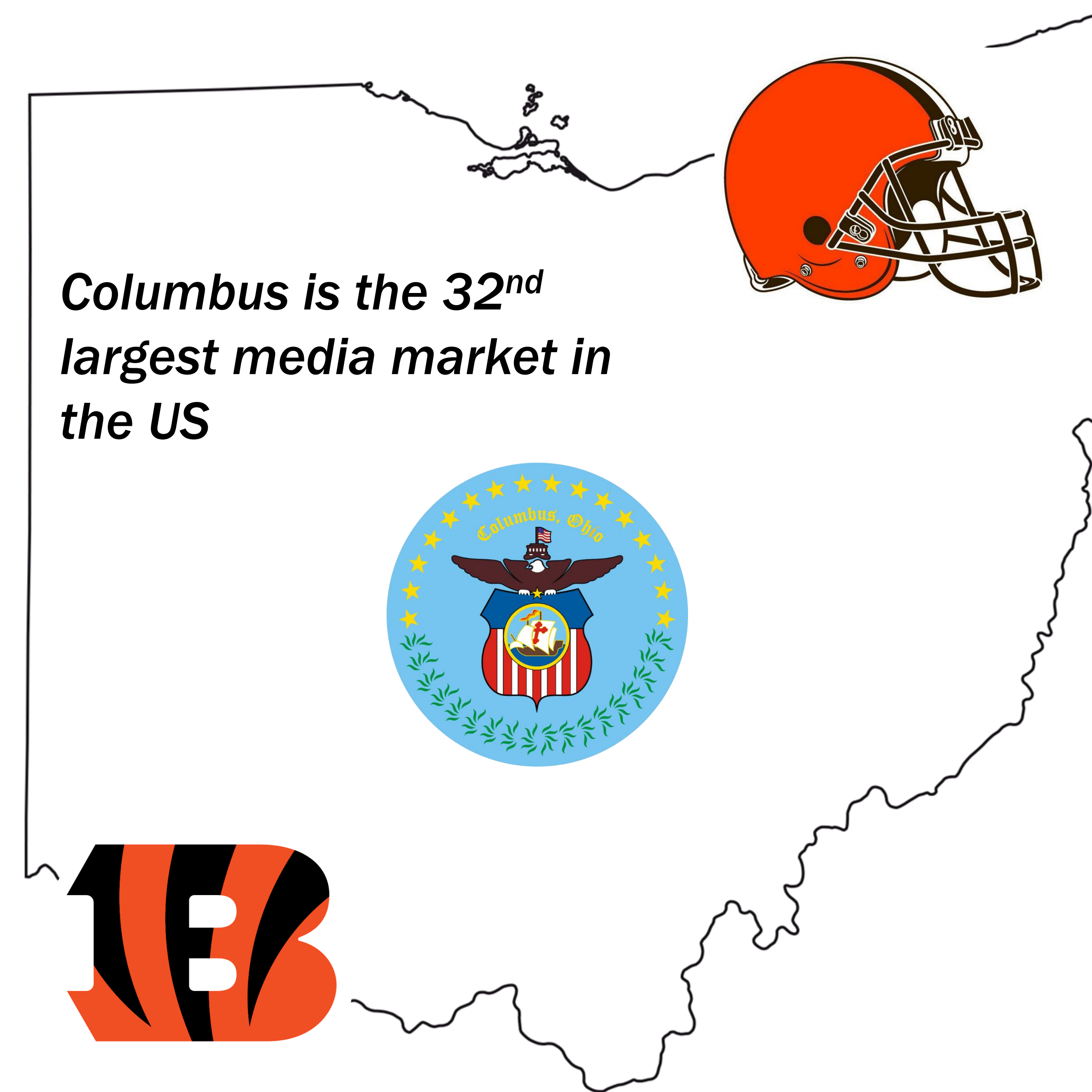
This study serves both as a history of the Columbus sports market, and as a granular look at how professional sports franchises balance their relationship as competitors and collaborators. This information will help future scholars and practitioners in sport, marketing, management, and other fields by shedding light on each side's strategy, and potential areas for mutual benefit.

## Procedure

Interviewed four sales/marketing staff members from three NFL franchises and a CVB person from Columbus, and analyzed their responses along with information from news articles over the past two years.

## Timeline

- In December 2012 then new team president of the Cleveland Browns Alec Scheiner reached out to the Greater Columbus Sports Commission.
- On August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015 the Cleveland Browns held an "Orange and Brown" scrimmage at Ohio Stadium in Columbus, Ohio in front of 60,000 fans.
- In February 2016 it was revealed that city officials asked the state for \$5 million to help the Cleveland Browns move their training camp to Columbus.
- Later in the month of February 2016 the pursuit to bring the Cleveland Browns training camp to Columbus was dropped by the Columbus Partnership. It was later revealed that the Browns wanted the city and Franklin County to spend \$15 million on a new training facility near the Ohio State University.



**Cleveland Browns on securing the Columbus market as their own...** "I would say it's an extreme priority, because that's an untapped marketplace, and that's a very hard thing to find this day and age."

**Columbus CVB** "Well, in speaking of ...the Browns, the Steelers and Cincinnati... no one has ever put a real stake in the ground here to try to capture the Columbus market, other than the most recent efforts of the Browns."

**How the Cincinnati Bengals view the Cleveland Browns...** "but on the business side, we're not really competing with the Browns for sponsorship dollars or ticket sales. Maybe a little bit Columbus, but not, none of us are like trying to... I think the Browns are making a little bit stronger push, but we don't feel threatened by that."

## Findings

### Communication between teams is...

#### Unregulated

While some interviewees claimed there is an actual platform the NFL provides for teams to share information others can't recall such a thing. It is apparent that there is not a clear initiative by the NFL to promote sharing best business practices between front offices. The only strict regulation by the NFL is PR and conduct policy.

*"If you got the time and you've got a great program that you put together, you can post it on the platform that the NFL provides for all teams to see and it's certainly we wouldn't have any issues with it. It's not like we want to be secretive. It's just become more of a time issue. You don't really think about that often."*

#### Informal

If teams have a cooperative relationship it is through personal contacts.

*"It's just your general networking, so the better relationship you have with someone, the more information you might share with them. But, those relationships are formed over networking at conferences and/or personal relationships that you build."*

## Conclusions

Whether teams would actively seek to cooperate and split up a neutral market if it means to grow the national pot with more NFL exposure in that market, teams have their own agenda and if a neutral market is in the picture they want it for themselves. The Browns feel confident with their market share in Cleveland and want to branch out to the rest of Ohio and beyond. The Bengals on the other hand primarily focus their efforts on Cincinnati, and don't even branch out much like even local Dayton.

# Collaboration vs Competition