

Prime Video's bumper NFL audience bodes well for future rights talks

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(Ron Jenkins/Getty Images)

Amazon Prime Video's Thursday Night Football (TNF) broadcast of the Seattle Seahawks-Dallas Cowboys NFL game on November 30 drew its best-ever audience with an average of 15.26 million viewers.

To date, TNF is averaging 12.58 million viewers, which was an increase of 29 per cent from Prime Video's 11-game average in 2022, the service's first year broadcasting the primetime game.

The impressive viewership this past week was certainly carried by the large fanbase of the Cowboys, which are a playoff contender, in a matchup against a Seahawks team that is also in the hunt for a playoff spot. The Cowboys narrowly won 41-35, which helped viewership that had a peak of 17.76 million at 9:26 pm Eastern Time.

When compared to last year's comparable game between the Buffalo Bills and New England Patriots, the game was up 53 per cent in viewership.

Amazon's viewership numbers have largely been close to the NFL's TNF broadcast figures when the game aired on various networks, including Fox and NFL Network. However, the final season of TNF games on linear averaged more than 15 million viewers per game.

"A big concern and hesitation always with moving off of linear and going to a streaming platform is losing your audience or losing the scale of reach," William Mao, senior vice-president of Octagon's global media rights consulting division, told *SportBusiness*. He added that "the fact the NFL was able to roughly maintain its viewership is a positive signal" for future media rights deals for Amazon.

The high-rated broadcast for the Cowboys-Seahawks game is a change from last season's three top-rated Prime Video TNF games that occurred in week 2, week 4 and week 3, in that order. Mao noted that there are already five games this season with greater viewership than last season's most watched game between the Los Angeles Chargers and Kansas City Chiefs, saying that watching on the streaming platform is becoming a "normality" for viewers in year two of a deal that runs through the 2033 season.

TNF does not garner the same viewership numbers seen in the two other weekly primetime slots on NBC for Sunday Night Football and ESPN for Monday Night Football. This past weekend's Sunday Night Football game between the Chiefs and Green Bay Packers drew an average viewership of 25.8 million on NBC platforms, the network's fifth 25 million-plus broadcast this season.

The impressive viewership is also a rebound for Prime Video after a disappointing first-ever Black Friday game the week prior, which drew a mere 9.61 million average viewers as the Miami Dolphins beat the New York Jets 34-13. That figure was Amazon's second-least viewed game of the season. Going into the Black Friday game, the service was averaging 12.27 million viewers this season and was hoping to take advantage of most Americans being home from work for the Thanksgiving holiday weekend. Amazon even used the broadcast to advertise Black Friday shopping deals on its global e-commerce website.

The three NFL games that aired on Thanksgiving, the day before Black Friday, set a viewership record with an average viewership of 34.1 million viewers.

“It was the first time it was a Black Friday game, not only a Friday game but one on Amazon,” Mao said. “The day before you have a slate of games where people are at home for the holiday and the Friday still is a consequential thing even though there is the e-commerce people are still getting out. I’m sure there’s going to be more ways that they’ll integrate the Black Friday game into their e-commerce experience.”

Amazon has made big moves in media rights in the US in the past two months, acquiring [National Women’s Soccer League](#) and [Nascar Cup Series](#) rights for the forthcoming seasons. Prime Video will stream 27 NWSL fixtures for the 2024 season and five races in Nascar’s premier racing series as part of their agreements with three other rights partners each.

The success of the recent TNF broadcast will be encouraging signs for direct-to-consumer opportunities, especially for Prime Video going forward as more media rights become available, including the domestic National Basketball Association media rights in 2025.

But the NBA is not routine viewing in the way the NFL’s consistent game days and timeslots are. Prime Video will get that kind of viewing for Nascar Cup Series races that occur on Sundays and its NWSL broadcasts are exclusively set for Friday nights.

“If Amazon becomes known as a destination, not just for Thursday Night Football but for Nascar, NWSL, WNBA they’ve had, becoming an actual live sports destination as opposed to a relatively-speaking in NFL terms, one-off once-a-week type offering, that should have a halo effect as well,” Mao said.

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