

**THE AMERICAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE
ATTENDANCE, 1960-69**

By Bob Carroll

Most of what's been written about the "war" between the National Football League and the American Football League during the 1960's focuses on player signings. The account of strategies used by both league in obtaining the signatures of young players on often overly-lucrative contracts sometimes reads like a cloak-and-dagger thriller. Were these football players or nuclear weapons? Nevertheless, as entertaining as the war stories are, they represent only one theater of operations.

Of equal -- in fact, greater -- importance was the AFL's struggle to get its attendance up to NFL level. With adequate game attendance, the AFL could sign its share of hotshot collegians, demand a TV contract on a par with the older leagues, and, most important, eventually bring about a merger of the two circuits.

What follows is a brief look at the figures.

1960

	TOT. ATT	GAMES	AVG	POSTSEASON	GAMES
NFL	3,128,296	78	40,106	67,325	1
AFL	926,156	56	16,538	32,183	1

TEAM	RECORD	FIN.	ATT	AVG	STADIUM
Dal	8- 6- 0	2nd-W	171,500	24,500	Cotton Bowl
Hou	10- 4- 0	1st-E	140,136	20,019	Jeppeson Stadium
Bos	5- 9- 0	4th-E	118,260	16,894	Boston U. Field
Buf	5- 8- 1	3rd-E	111,860	15,980	War Memorial Stad.
NY	7- 7- 0	2nd-E	114,628	16,375	Polo Grounds
LA	10- 4- 0	1st-W	109,656	15,665	Memorial Coliseum
Den	4- 9- 1	4th-W	91,333	13,047	Mile High Stadium
Oak	6- 8- 0	3rd-W	67,201	9,612	Kezar Stadium

Contrary to what has often been written, Lamar Hunt's Dallas Texans actually outdrew the NFL Cowboys in their first season of sharing the Cotton Bowl. The Cowboys drew only 128,000 to their six home games, an average of 21,417, about 3,000 fewer fans per game than the Texans cajoled to their seven home dates. However, the raw totals and averages are a bit misleading. Both teams started from scratch in 1960. The Texans were an exciting, winning team; the hapless Cowboys went through the season winless. Under those circumstances, the Texans' narrow attendance victory was actually disappointing.

In the three other cities where the AFL and NFL went head- to-head, the new kids faced entrenched teams and got creamed. Harry Wismer's New York Titans, saddled by twin albatrosses in the dilapidated Polo Grounds and the mercurial Wismer, drew crowds only slightly in excess of what you might get to a good tractor pull (although Harry always announced many thousands more). Meanwhile, the Giants, with a championship team ensconced in Yankee Stadium, were turning fans away. The Los Angeles Chargers, with perhaps the league's most exciting team, played to tiny houses while L.A. fans stayed home and watched the Rams on the tube. Barron Hilton was happy to take his money-losing winners to San Diego for 1961. The worst situaton was in Oakland. The Raiders had to play across the bay at Kezar, home of the 49ers. As a result, San Franciscans treated them like outsiders and Oakland fans -- if there were any -- stayed home.

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Boston, which had earlier lost several NFL teams, hardly embraced the Patriots. Almost everyone who owned a stadium refused to let the Pats trod on its grass. It took some arm-twisting by the Boston mayor to get them into the U. of Boston Field, a less than ideal home. Pats games were played on Friday nights so as to avoid going head-to-head with Giants telecasts.

1961

-----	TOT. ATT	GAMES	AVG	POSTSEASON	GAMES
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
NFL	3,986,159	98	40,675	39,029	1
AFL	1,002,657	56	17,904	29,556	1

AMERICAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE -TEAMS						
TEAM	RECORD	FIN.	ATT	AVG	STADIUM	
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	
Hou	10- 3- 1	1st-E	195,024	27,861	Jeppeson Stadium	
SD	12- 2- 0	1st-W	195,014	27,859	Balboa Stadium	
Buf	6- 8- 0	4th-E	133,408	19,058	War Memorial Stad.	
Dal	6- 8- 0	2nd-W	123,000	17,571	Cotton Bowl	
Bos	9- 4- 1	2nd-E	115,610	16,516	Boston U. Field	
NY	7- 7- 0	3rd-E	106,619	15,231	Polo Grounds	
Den	3-11- 0	3rd-W	74,508	10,644	Mile High Stadium	
Oak	2-12- 0	4th-W	53,582	7,655	Candlestick Park	

The NFL went to a 14-game schedule in 1961, matching the AFL's slate.

Oakland had another bad idea (Candlestick Park) and a worse team. Denver, under new ownership, continued to be a Rocky Mountain low. The Texans fell far behind the Cowboys in coaxing people into the Cotton Bowl. The Cowboys' attendance went up 33% to 172,000 (24,521 avg.) while the Texans' nosedived.

The good news came out of Houston and San Diego, the two teams that just happened to play for the league championship at season's end. But even there the averages were far below NFL standards.

Perhaps the best home draw, considering it had a boring, losing teamn, was Buffalo.

1962

-----	TOT. ATT	GAMES	AVG	POSTSEASON	GAMES
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NFL	4,003,421	98	40,851	64,892	1
AFL	1,147,302	56	20,487	37,981	1

AMERICAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE -TEAMS						
TEAM	RECORD	FIN.	ATT	AVG	STADIUM	
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	
Hou	11- 3- 0	1st-E	200,285	28,121	Jeppeson Stadium	
Buf	7- 6- 1	3rd-E	195,436	27,919	War Memorial Stad.	
Den	7- 7- 0	2nd-W	178,485	25,498	Mile High Stadium	
Dal	11- 3- 0	1st-W	155,409	22,201	Cotton Bowl	
SD	4-10- 0	3rd-W	153,908	21,987	Balboa Stadium	
Bos	9- 4- 1	2nd-E	150,626	21,518	# Boston U. Field	
Oak	1-13- 0	4th-W	76,893	10,985	Youell Field	
NY	5- 9- 0	4th-E	36,161	5,165	Polo Grounds	
#-9/16/62 Boston vs. Houston at Harvard Stadium						

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The AFL drew an average about half as many fans to each game as the NFL. They were creeping up, but, at this rate, they'd be equal with the older league in the fall of 2036. San Diego's attendance fell off mainly because a rash of injuries destroyed their team.

Houston, still spectacular for one last year, and Buffalo were the best draws in the league, but had they been in the NFL, they'd have been in trouble.

The Texans' attendance moved past the Cowboys' 152,446 and all they needed was to send out the AFL's championship team compared to the 5-8-1 Cowboys. Lamar Hunt -- no dummy he -- could see plainly what would happen once the Cowboys started winning. He threw in the towel and moved his team to Kansas City where he got a good deal on the stadium.

Denver roused a little interest by winning seven of their first nine. The Raiders finally got to play in Oakland, but Frank Youell Field was so small that they would lose money if they sold out every game -- and they actually averaged only half capacity.

Meanwhile, the Titans would have been funny if they weren't so sad. Their entire home attendance for the season would have made a disappointing crowd for a Giants game. By season's end, the league was supporting the team while Wismer scrambled to find a buyer. Without a decent draw in the Big Apple, the AFL didn't really have a chance at equaling the NFL.

1963

-----	TOT. ATT	GAMES	AVG	POSTSEASON	GAMES
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
NFL	4,163,643	98	42,486	45,801	1
AFL	1,208,697	56	21,584	63,171	2

AMERICAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE -TEAMS						
TEAM	RECORD	FIN.	ATT	AVG	STADIUM	
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	
Buf	7- 6- 1	1st-Et	209,719	29,960	War Memorial Stad.	
SD	11- 3- 0	1st-W	191,491	27,356	Balboa Stadium	
Bos	7- 6- 1	1st-Et	169,870	24,267	= Fenway Park	
Hou	6- 8- 0	3rd-E	163,472	23,339	Jeppeson Stadium	
KC	5- 7- 2	3rd-W	150,567	21,510	Municipal Stadium	
Den	2-11- 1	4th-W	132,218	18,888	Mile High Stadium	
Oak	10- 4- 0	2nd-W	122,048	17,435	Youell Field	
NY	5- 8- 1	4th-E	103,550	14,792	Polo Grounds	
--9/8/63 Boston vs. New York at B.C. Alumni Field						

By moving into Fenway Park and by winning their division, the Patriots boosted their attendance slightly, and San Diego was back playing exciting, winning football. But Houston staggered and Denver collapsed and their crowds slipped.

Oakland, under Al Davis, was the talk of the league and did fill Youell Field most of the time. A new stadium was promised but off in the future.

That the new owner Jets-nee-Titans were still mired in the Polo Grounds allows for an estimate of the Wismer Factor - - about how much Harry Wismer's "method" had cost the team in per game attendance. About 10,000.

Surprisingly, the Chiefs-nee-Texans drew fewer fans in Kansas City than they had in Dallas. But, not so surprisingly, they made a small profit because of reduced overhead.

After four seasons, the AFL could still only draw about half what the NFL got per game, even though you could find someone at nearly every party who'd tell you he enjoyed the "wide-open" Americans more than the defense-minded NFL where almost every coach was trying to copy Green Bay's sweep.

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Part of it was the smaller AFL markets, of course. No Chicago, no L.A., no Philly, etc. and not much could be done about that. The Chicago Broncos would have been a disaster.

However, much of the AFL's problem was its many minor league stadiums. And there, relief was coming. The first of it arrived in 1964.

1964

-----	TOT. ATT	GAMES	AVG	POSTSEASON	GAMES
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
NFL	4,563,049	98	46,562	79,544	1
AFL	1,447,875	56	25,855	40,242	1

AMERICAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE -TEAMS						
TEAM	RECORD	FIN.	ATT	AVG	STADIUM	
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	
NY	5- 8- 1	3rd-E	298,972	42,710	Shea Stadium	
Buf	12- 2- 0	1st-E	257,324	36,761	War Memorial Stad.	
Bos	10- 3- 1	2nd-E	199,562	28,509	+ Fenway Park	
SD	8- 5- 1	1st-W	169,656	24,237	Balboa Stadium	
Hou	4-10- 0	4th-E	141,777	20,254	Jeppeson Stadium	
Oak	5- 7- 2	3rd-W	127,369	18,196	Youell Field	
KC	7- 7- 0	2nd-W	126,881	18,126	Municipal Stadium	
Den	2-11- 1	4th-W	118,259	16,894	Mile High Stadium	
+-9/27/64 Boston vs. New York at B.C. Alumni Field						

In 1964, the long-promised, long-awaited Shea Stadium arrived and the Jets jumped from losers to winners at the turnstiles if not on the scoreboard. Whether the biggest hit was Shea or the Jets was unclear. The stadium was new but the Jets play was still Titanesque. Apparently, the stadium got the fans who'd avoided the drafty, dirty, dangerous Polo Grounds; the Jets got the anti-Giants contingent. All those New York football fans who couldn't get Giants tickets became Jets fans. In most cases, an AFL team could make more playing for its visitor's share in New York than it could playing at home.

Buffalo, with a terrific team, also drew NFL-size crowds to most games. As far as longtime Buffalo fans were concerned, this PROVED that there'd been dirty work at the crossroads back in 1950 when the "old" Bills had been frozen out of the NFL-AAFC merger.

Denver and Oakland had always been box office weaklings, but at least the Raiders could hope for better things with a new stadium. The switch was that Houston and Kansas City, the best draws in 1960 (when the Chiefs were the Texans) had become bottom-feeders. Jeppeson Stadium, never more than a glorified high school facility, had to go.

1965

-----	TOT. ATT	GAMES	AVG	POSTSEASON	GAMES
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
NFL	4,634,021	98	47,286	100,304	2
AFL	1,782,384	56	31,828	30,361	1

AMERICAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE -TEAMS						
TEAM	RECORD	FIN.	ATT	AVG	STADIUM	
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	
NY	5- 8- 1	2nd-E	384,144	54,877	Shea Stadium	
Buf	10- 3- 1	1st-E	306,675	43,811	War Memorial Stad.	
Hou	4-10- 0	4th-E	240,837	34,405	Rice Stadium	
Den	4-10- 0	4th-W	219,786	31,398	Mile High Stadium	
SD	7- 6- 1	3rd-W	185,712	26,530	Balboa Stadium	

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KC	7- 5- 2	3rd-W	150,449	21,493	Municipal Stadium
Oak	8- 5- 1	2nd-W	147,081	21,012	Youell Field
Bos	4- 8- 2	3rd-E	143,098	20,443	Fenway Park

The NFL's attendance kept going up each year, but the AFL was closing the gap. By its sixth season, the new league was drawing crowds two-thirds the size of the NFL (on a per game basis). Moreover, the per game attendance was only 9,000 under what the NFL had been getting at the start of the decade.

The Jets' attendance bumped up again in 1965, largely because everybody wanted to see if a quarterback could really be worth \$400,000. Had it not been for the Jets, Buffalo would have set a new league attendance mark.

Houston was helped, at least temporarily, by gaining permission to play in Rice Stadium, something they wanted to do as far back as 1960.

The most encouraging sign came in Denver. The community got behind the team to put on a magnificent ticket drive that moved the Broncos' attendance from dead last to fourth in the league. Considering that it would be several more years before the Broncos would register their first winning season, the folks in Colorado deserved plenty of huzzahs. There would be a slight regression in 1966, but the Broncs were finally established.

The other good news was that Oakland would be in a new stadium by the next season and San Diego would have Jack Murphy by 1967. In fact, just about everything was positive except Boston, where the Patriots still ran second to Giants telecasts.

Of course, the best news of all came when the NFL agreed to merge. While several factors went into making the merger possible, the muscle the AFL was showing at the turnstiles was a major part of it. The AFL had won its war -- to everyone but Al Davis who wanted an unconditional surrender by the older league.

1966

	TOT. ATT	GAMES	AVG	POSTSEASON	GAMES
NFL	5,337,044	105	50,829	74,152	1
AFL	2,160,369	63	34,291	42,080	1

Super Bowl I - 61,946 (Los Angeles)

AMERICAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE -TEAMS						
TEAM	RECORD	FIN.	ATT	AVG	STADIUM	
NY	6- 6- 2	3rd-E	415,768	59,395	Shea Stadium	
Buf	9- 4- 1	1st-E	299,127	42,732	War Memorial Stad.	
KC	11- 2- 1	1st-Wt	259,071	37,010	Municipal Stadium	
Oak	8- 5- 1	2nd-W	253,508	36,215	Oakland Coliseum	
Mia	3-11- 0	4th-Et	219,322	31,332	Orange Bowl	
Den	4-10- 0	4th-W	192,198	27,457	Mile High Stadium	
SD	7- 6- 1	3rd-W	185,712	26,530	Balboa Stadium	
Hou	3-11- 0	4th-E	177,896	25,414	Rice Stadium	
Bos	8- 4- 2	2nd-E	157,767	22,538	Fenway Park	

How much being "legitimate" (i.e. equal to the NFL) helped AFL attendance in 1966 is debatable. Attendance went up, of course, but it had been increasing every year anyway and there was no sudden quantum leap. The AFL had its fans and the NFL had its fans. Just because the two leagues had made peace, it didn't mean that all was forgotten and forgiven. A quarter of a century later there are still people who think of themselves as "AFL- ers."

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The bloom was off seeing the Oilers in Rice Stadium and Boston was still Boston, but otherwise things were upbeat in the AFL right up to that first Super Bowl when the NFL got to crow "We told you so!"

Kansas City set all kinds of team attendance marks in winning the AFL championship. Deservedly too. Hank Stram had Len Dawson, Mike Garrett, Otis Taylor and lots of other exciting touchdown-makers. If AFL-ers weren't happy with the Super Bowl score, at least they could say that their champs were more fun to watch

Incidentally, the game wasn't called "the Super Bowl," at least not officially. It was the "AFL-NFL World Championship Game," which has as much pizzazz as sensible shoes. No wonder it was the only one of these affairs not to sell out.

Miami, the AFL's first expansion team, jumped right in and drew well while losing regularly.

1967

-----	TOT. ATT	GAMES	AVG	POSTSEASON	GAMES
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
NFL	5,938,024	112	53,026	166,208	3
AFL	2,295,697	63	36,439	53,330	1

Super Bowl II - 75,546 (Miami)

AMERICAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE -TEAMS						
TEAM	RECORD	FIN.	ATT	AVG	STADIUM	
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	
NY	8- 5- 1	2nd-E	437,036	62,433	Shea Stadium	
KC	9- 5- 0	2nd-W	315,006	45,001	Municipal Stadium	
Buf	4-10- 0	3rd-Et	280,461	40,066	War Memorial Stad.	
SD	8- 5- 1	3rd-W	277,311*	34,664	Jack Murphy Stad.	
Oak	13- 1- 0	1st-W	276,498	39,500	Oakland Coliseum	
Den	3-11- 0	4th-W	231,801	33,114	Mile High Stadium	
Hou	9- 4- 1	1st-E	185,129	26,447	Rice Stadium	
Mia	4-10- 0	4th-Et	153,594	21,942	Orange Bowl	
Bos	3-10- 1	5th-E	138,861*	23,142	^ Fenway Park	

*-Boston-San Diego moved to San Diego because of World Series
 ^-10/15/67 Boston vs. Miami at B.C. Alumni Field

As if the Patriots didn't have enough problems, they managed to come up with a losing team just when the Red Sox were winning a pennant. The World Series even forced the Pats to play a "home" game in San Diego. And, of course, the outcome of the Series put Bostonians in a grumpy mood until the following March. Anyone who thinks the Pats have been jinxed only during the Kiam years doesn't know history.

The opening of Jack Murphy Stadium meant about 8,000 per game for the Chargers.

Attendance in Miami nosedived by a third. Fans there were over the flush of having a real, live pro team of their own and had begun to realize that their Dolphins exuded the aroma of two-year old fish. On a per game basis, Miami was last in the league in attendance.

New York, Kansas City, and good ol' reliable Buffalo continued to put up NFL-esque attendance figures. Oakland was okay, but considering just how good the Raiders were (really terrific until Super Bowl II), they probably should have drawn more.

1968

-----	TOT. ATT	GAMES	AVG	POSTSEASON	GAMES
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

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NFL	5,882,313	112	52,521	215,902	3
AFL	2,635,004	70	37,643	114,438	2

Super Bowl III - 75,377 (Miami)

AMERICAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE -TEAMS						
TEAM	RECORD	FIN.	ATT	AVG	STADIUM	
NY	11- 3- 0	1st-E	433,760	61,965	Shea Stadium	
KC	12- 2- 0	2nd-W	338,911	48,416	Municipal Stadium	
Oak	12- 2- 0	1st-Wt	328,705	46,958	Oakland Coliseum	
SD	9- 5- 0	3rd-W	303,188	43,313	Jack Murphy Stad.	
Den	5- 9- 0	4th-W	281,374	40,196	Mile High Stadium	
Hou	7- 7- 0	2nd-E	283,383	40,483	Astrodome	
Buf	1-12- 1	5th-E	251,796	35,971	War Memorial Stad.	
Mia	5- 8- 1	3rd-E	215,980	30,854	Orange Bowl	
Cin	3-11- 0	5th-W	180,343	25,763	Nippert Stadium	
Bos	4-10- 0	4th-E	156,459	22,351	> Fenway Park	
>-9/22/68 Boston "home game" vs. New York played at Birmingham, AL, because of conflict with major league baseball						

For the first time since 1959, the NFL's regular season attendance actually decreased. Not much. About 500 per game. You could blame it on a spate of bad weather in California or a big traffic jam in Philadelphia. Nevertheless, the slight burp in NFL-ing allowed the AFL to do a couple of nyah-nyas when THEIR attendance went up.

Of course, the biggest nyah-nyah came in Super Bowl III when that \$400,000 quarterback led the Jets -- the guys who used to be those laughable, lovable, but lonely Titans -- to victory over the NFL's finest.

The AFL had its second expansion team, Paul Brown's Cincinnati Bengals. They arrived two years before Riverfront Stadium and so were condemned to little Nippert Stadium on the U. of Cincinnati campus. It was a situation much like Oakland had faced with Frank Youell Field where they actually drew well but didn't have enough seats available. Good ol' reliable Buffalo fell off a little in attendance but small wonder. The team that had been the best in the AFL only a few years before was, to put it charitably, stinko. They were so bad in fact that they got to draft first in the combined draft. Their choice was O.J. Simpson, who did some pretty fancy running for the Bills over the next ten years. Where he might have ended up had the AFL and NFL still been at odds and conducting separate drafts is anyone's guess.

1969

TEAM	TOT. ATT	GAMES	AVG	POSTSEASON	GAMES
NFL	6,096,127	112	54,430	162,279	3
AFL	2,843,373	70	40,620	167,088	3

Super Bowl IV - 80,562 (New Orleans)

AMERICAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE -TEAMS						
TEAM	RECORD	FIN.	ATT	AVG	STADIUM	
NY	10- 4- 0	1st-E	440,442	62,917	Shea Stadium	
Oak	12- 1- 1	1st-W	371,714	53,102	Oakland Coliseum	
KC	11- 3- 0	2nd-W	345,519	49,360	Municipal Stadium	
Den	5- 8- 1	4th-W	326,851	46,579	Mile High Stadium	
SD	8- 6- 0	3rd-W	324,178	46,311	Jack Murphy Stad.	
Hou	6- 6- 2	2nd-E	309,420	44,203	Astrodome	
Buf	4-10- 0	3rd-Et	286,466	40,924	War Memorial Stad.	
Mia	3-10- 1	5th-E	242,815	34,688	# Orange Bowl	

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Cin 4- 9- 1 5th-W 191,091 27,299 Nippert Stadium
Bos 4-10- 0 3rd-Et 149,412 21,345 B.C. Alumni Stad.
- One home game played at Tampa

If you were writing the AFL story for the movies, you'd want Lamar Hunt's team to win the last Super Bowl the league would ever play in. Of course, you might be accused of blatant sentimentality.

If you were writing for the Wall Street Journal, you'd want to point out that seven of the ten teams averaged more than 40,000 per game, and that Miami awaited only a team and Cincinnati needed only a stadium.

If you were writing for the Boston News, you'd discuss the Red Sox.

The single most significant statistic as far as attendance was concerned is that the NFL averaged 40,106 per game in 1960. Ten years later, from a standing start, the AFL averaged 40,620 per game. Yes, the NFL, with its bigger markets, was still ahead. They'd increased average attendance by about 16,000. But the AFL, with Riverfront, Arrowhead, and Sullivan in the near future, had pulled off a small miracle.