

# Super Bowl ratings top last year

By Howard Fendrich  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — This lopsided Super Bowl drew more TV viewers than last year's down-to-the-wire thriller.

ABC Sports' telecast of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers' 48-21 victory over the Oakland Raiders on Sunday for the NFL title registered a preliminary big-market rating of 43.8 — 3 percent higher than last year and the best since 1998.

That means an average of 43.8 percent of the country's TV homes were watching at any given moment.

The Super Bowl is often the most-watched TV program each year, and nine of the 15 highest-rated shows in history are NFL championships.

Preliminary, or overnight, ratings measure the country's 55 largest TV markets, covering nearly 70 percent of the United States. National ratings were expected later Monday.

In 2002, the New England Patriots' 20-17 upset of the St. Louis Rams on a final-

play field goal had a 42.5 overnight rating on Fox. The final national rating of 40.4 tied for the fourth-lowest for a Super Bowl since 1972.

The 1998 overnight rating was 44.4 for NBC's telecast of Denver's 31-24 victory over Green Bay.

Viewership was consistently high throughout ABC's broadcast Sunday, starting with a 41.7 for the first half hour, which rose to a 44.5 by the end of the second quarter. Even halftime was a popular show, with a 43.4 rating from 8-8:30 p.m. EST.

The audience — which advertisers paid ABC an average of just over \$2 million per 30-second commercial to reach — dipped from 9-9:30 p.m. EST, during which time Tampa Bay enjoyed its biggest lead, 34-3.

It was in that segment that officials reviewed a ruling that negated a possible touchdown by the Raiders with a little more than two minutes left in the third quarter.

As ABC's broadcasters discussed whether the touchdown should have counted, play-by-play announcer Al Michaels said with a laugh to analyst John Madden: "Anything to hold an audience at this point."

With about six minutes remaining in the game, Oakland wideout Jerry Rice's touchdown cut his team's deficit to 34-21, prompting Michaels to say, hope in his voice: "Well, for what it's worth, at least the Raiders are CLEARLY back in the game."

Indeed, Oakland's mini-rally probably helped bring viewers back to the game. The rating rose a bit from 9:30-10 p.m., and hit its peak for the final 15 minutes, from 10-10:15 p.m., with 46.1 of the country tuning in.

"There was a significant interest in the game: the matchups, the coaching story with Jon Gruden," said Neal Pilson, former president of CBS Sports and now a consultant. "And the game kind of rescued itself late in the third quarter, when Oakland scored a couple of touchdowns. We were headed for a real blowout."

The good ratings for this year's Super Bowl will benefit next year's broadcaster, CBS, which will sell its ad time based largely on how many viewers were reached this time.

"The biggest benefactor is CBS," Pilson said. "ABC doesn't get a single nickel more or less."

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## Sierra returning to Rangers

By Stephen Hawkins  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DALLAS — Outfielder Ruben Sierra agreed Monday to a minor league contract with the Texas Rangers, getting the chance for another comeback with the team for which the former All-Star started his career.

Sierra was invited to spring training as a non-roster player. He is guaranteed \$90,000, and if added to the major league roster would get a \$600,000, one-year contract and the chance to earn \$200,000 more in performance bonuses. If Sierra isn't added to the roster by the March 30 opener at Anaheim, the 37-year-old outfielder could request his release.

Sierra was disappointed a year ago when the Rangers didn't offer him a new contract, even after he hit .293 with 23 homers and 67 RBIs in 94 games during the 2001 season and was the AL comebacker player of the year.

"It's a second home to me. I grew up there and wanted to come back," Sierra said by phone Monday from his home in the Dominican Republic. "I hope I can finish my career in Texas."

Last season, Sierra hit .270 with 13 homers and 60 RBIs in 122 games for Seattle. He was used primarily in a reserve role the final two

months of the season because of a strained left quadriceps muscle.

The Rangers return outfield starters Juan Gonzalez, Carl Everett and Kevin Mench from last season and signed Doug Glanville to a one-year deal.

"Here's a chance to add a guy we think can potentially be part of the mix that we like," said new Rangers manager Buck Showalter, who also managed Sierra with the Yankees in 1995. "Guys like Ruben find a way to get it done. Where it fits and how it works out will work itself out."

Sierra isn't worried about having to compete for a spot on the roster.

"I'm not thinking about that. I'm thinking about being ready," Sierra said. "I'm not thinking about trying to make the team or that it's going to be hard. I've been through a lot of stuff harder than that. It's not going to be difficult."

Sierra is still Texas' career leader in triples (44) and ranks fourth in hits (1,246), homers (177), RBIs (730) and extra-base hits (469) in 1,147 games over parts of nine seasons.

In 1,898 career games with eight teams, Sierra has a .270 average with 276 home runs and 1181 RBIs. He ranks sixth on the all-time career list for home runs by a switch-hitter and has homered from both sides of the plate in a game six times.

## Oklahoma

Continued from page 7

have confidence in him, and he has confidence in himself. We'll keep going to him."

Price finished the game with 17 points and five assists just one game after hitting the last-second shot that sent OU into overtime against Texas Tech. The Sooners ended up beating the Red Raiders in the extra period, thanks in large part to Price's late heroics. The senior leader has averaged 18.7 points per game and owns the Big 12's best free-throw percentage at 92.9 percent.

"Hollis Price is the heart and soul of that team," Watkins said. "They just find ways to win. It's not always pretty, but it's effective."

Much of the Sooners' effectiveness can be attributed to their overpowering defense. OU is allowing a mere 58.7 points per game, which leads the conference.

Watkins' new-look Aggies will look to change this as they attempt to pick up their third Big 12 win of the year.

Tip-off is scheduled for 6 p.m.

## Graf leaves retirement for doubles match

By John Pye  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MELBOURNE, Australia — Andre Agassi held up his end of the bargain in the Australian Open. Now wife Steffi Graf and the rest of Agassi's entourage has to step up. Graf, who won 22 Grand Slam singles titles before retiring three years ago, promised to join her husband in mixed doubles at the French Open if he won his fourth Australian Open title.

"She won't like it, but it's my responsibility to make it happen," Agassi said Sunday after winning at Melbourne Park.

Coach Darren Cahill has to shave his head "in my bathroom, with my clippers and at my doing," and fitness trainer Gil Reyes, a non-drinker, has to down one of Andre's "special" Margaritas.

The 32-year-old Agassi overwhelmed Rainer Schuettler on Sunday in a 76-minute, 6-2, 6-2, 6-1 demolition.

It was his eighth Grand Slam title and his fifth in the last three years, making him the most dominant player of the last three years. He also became the oldest man to win a Grand Slam singles title since Ken Rosewall won the 1972 Australian Open at 37.

"You never know when it's your last, but I'll never forget being here," Agassi said. "I'll never forget the love and support here. I feel like I'm half Australian."

On Saturday, Serena Williams completed her "Serena Slam" by winning a fourth

consecutive major.

And, for the fourth time in as many Grand Slam finals, she beat older sister Venus. Only this time, it went to three sets and it gave Serena "a new perspective on things."

The latest of the Sister Slam matches went 7-6 (4), 3-6, 6-4 and lasted 2 hours, 22 minutes, almost double the time it took Agassi to dispatch Schuettler.

"She won't like it, but it's my responsibility to make it happen."

— Andre Agassi  
Men's Australian Open Champion

Serena won the French Open, Wimbledon and U.S. Open in 2002 and, with the Australian title, it marked only the sixth time a woman has held all four major championships at once and the first since Graf in 1994.

"I never get choked up, but I'm really emotional right now," Serena said. "I'm really, really, really happy."

Venus, who at 22 is 15 months older than Serena, wished "I could have been the winner."

"Of course, you have a great champion

in Serena and she has won all four Grand Slams, which is something I'd love to do," she said. "So, yeah, I'd kind of be just like her."

Serena holds a 5-4 career edge over Venus in major titles and has a 6-5 lead in head-to-head matches. Serena collected \$654,000 for this victory and Venus won \$327,000.

Team Williams also won the women's doubles, on the eve of the singles final, beating Paola Suarez and Virginia Ruano Pascual 4-6, 6-4, 6-3.

If Graf needed any encouragement to return, it was a challenge from former No. 1 Martina Navratilova for a mixed doubles match at Roland Garros.

At age 46, Navratilova won her 57th Grand Slam title, serving out the match as she and India's Leander Paes beat Todd Woodbridge and Eleni Daniilidou 6-4, 7-5 for the mixed doubles championship.

It was her first mixed title in the Australian, and completed a "Grand" Grand Slam — at least one title each in singles, doubles and mixed doubles in all four major tournaments.

"This goes beyond any wildest dream," said Navratilova, who was playing in her first Grand Slam final in almost eight years.

Navratilova won 18 singles and 31 doubles Grand Slam titles.

At 46 years and 3 months, she was a month older than the previous oldest winner in a Grand Slam event, Australian Norman Brookes in the 1924 Australian men's doubles.

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