

College Sports Programming on the American Forces Network: A Content Analysis of the Coverage of Intercollegiate Athletics Presented to U.S. Military and Mission Audiences Abroad

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The American Forces Network (AFN) is a satellite television system operated by the United States Department of Defense for members of the military serving abroad. It is also accessible to certain diplomatic personnel and family members, but restricts its audience to these military and State Department people stationed overseas and cannot be viewed within the U.S.

AFN carries regular American programming that is provided by networks and stations in the U.S. Among the eight channels that make up the American Forces Network is AFN-Sports, which televises sports 24 hours per day. On occasion, such as during the NCAA basketball tournament or on Saturdays and Sundays of the college and professional football seasons, other AFN channels include sports programming as well.

Historically, since World War I, the coverage of sports in military media has been credited with maintaining morale and providing troops with a link to their home culture (Bryant & Holt, 2006). Evidence also suggests that ties to favorite teams often increase when military and expatriate sports fans are out of the country (Keenan, 2007). Considering the demographic characteristics of those in the U.S. military, with over two-thirds between the ages of 18 and 30 (Active duty, 2008), similar to the student and recent alumni populations of most colleges and universities, the inclusion of college sports on AFN may have special meaning for this audience.

As a means of examining the college sport content on the American Forces Network, a census of all AFN-Sports programming from January 1, 2009 through December 31, 2009 is provided in the research described here. Since AFN does not archive program listings, the procedure used involved daily retrieval of information for AFN-Sports from <http://myafn.dodmedia.osd.mil> during the period studied.

Variables of interest include the proportion of all AFN-Sports content devoted to college sports, college sport programming genre (regular season, post-season, live games, tape delayed games, pre-game, post-game, coaches shows, discussion, etc.), type of sport (football, basketball, baseball, track and field, etc.), sport gender (men or women), conferences represented (ACC, Big East, Big Ten, etc.) and individual schools shown. As a means of comparing the exposure of college sports on AFN-Sports to the sports programming available to typical domestic audiences, regular ESPN program listings for 2009 will be compiled to serve as a baseline on all dimensions studied.