

Brew Tube

By Reg P. Wydeven
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Last Friday, a colleague and good friend invited my wife and I to a Brewer game. He spared no expense – he rented a coach bus, fed us a delicious meal and the Mountain Dew was flowing freely. What made it even more fun was that my great buddies Tree and Ducker and their wives came along, too.

It was \$1 hot dog and Mountain Dew night at Miller Park. Also, it was Jim Gartner bobble head night, and Tree, a bobble head collector, luckily got the limited edition version. To cap off a perfect evening, we watched the Brew Crew pound the Pittsburgh Pirates 10-0 from great seats along the third base line.

The win secured the Brewers' first place standing in the NL Central. With the Brewers' terrific start this year, lots of fans are watching their games. At least we think lots of fans are watching.

Last month, Fox Sports Net Wisconsin announced that Nielsen Media Research, the company that measures TV show ratings, is unable to measure nearly 40% of the potential 680,000 Fox Sports Net Wisconsin viewing households in Milwaukee. Nielsen is using new household meters to measure viewers, however, the meters are unable to read Fox Sports Net Wisconsin's signal. Apparently, the signals from Fox Sports Net Wisconsin and Fox Sports Net North, in the Twin Cities market, are the only signals the new meters can't read.

Therefore, since April of 2005, TV ratings for the Brewers, and also the Milwaukee Bucks, have been drastically undercounted. While 2.33 million fans flocked to Miller Park last season to watch the Brewers, while TV ratings for their games were down 33% from the previous season.

In 2005, Brewer games averaged a 4.3 rating, or 38,132 households in the Milwaukee area. In 2006, however, the average rating was only 2.9, or 25,531 homes. Oddly, average ratings for Bucks games actually increased by 60% last season compared to 2005, from 1.5 to 2.4. Because of the unread signal, Bucks' ratings could have been even higher.

The same problem that plagued the Brewers and Bucks also hit the Minneapolis market. Ratings for the Minnesota Golden Gophers' hockey team, and the Minnesota Wild and Timberwolves on Fox Sports Net North were also substantially underreported.

Nielsen is currently in the process of fixing the problem. While Fox Sports Net has not initiated any legal action against Nielsen Media Research, the network is most certainly examining its legal rights.

While most businesses would acknowledge that Nielsen ratings aren't an exact science and that they are just one factor that goes into advertising decisions, the ratings are still probably the biggest factor.

Obviously, the more popular a broadcast is, the more viewers tune in and the Nielsen ratings are high. The cost of advertising during these broadcasts is correspondingly higher as well. When the Brewers' ratings tanked, the price for advertising during games plummeted as well. Because the ratings were incorrectly low, FSN lost out on advertising revenue that may be impossible to measure.

Since Nielsen's disclosure, last year's low ratings finally make sense. After all, who wouldn't want to watch a young, up-and-coming ball club that wears throwback uniforms honoring the 25th anniversary of our last World Series appearance? Throw in some sausages racing, and it should bury the ratings for 'Grey's Anatomy.'