



Embassy of the United States of America

# Super Bowl Sunday

An Unofficial Holiday for Millions



Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson holds the Lombardi Trophy after the 2014 Super Bowl game. The Seahawks will again vie for the championship in 2015 against the New England Patriots. © AP Images

**E**ach year, on a Sunday at the end of January or beginning of February, tens of millions of Americans declare their own unofficial holiday. Gathered in groups large and small, nearly half of all U.S. households participate vicariously in a televised spectacle that has far outgrown its origins as a sporting event.

The Super Bowl, which determines the championship of American football, is most of all a shared experience, when Americans choose to watch the game with friends. Neither the hugely popular Major League Baseball World Series nor the National Basketball Association championship commands such attention. Possibly

this is because the Super Bowl is a single game, a winner-take-all contest. Add the televised entertainment that surrounds the game, and Super Bowl Sunday becomes an event even for those who are not football fans.

## Super Bowl Beginnings

American football is unrelated to the game most of the world knows by that name, which Americans call soccer. For most of its history, professional American football was played within a single National Football League (NFL). In 1960, a rival league, the American Football League (AFL), began to compete for premier talent. As the leagues contemplated a merger, they agreed to

a single game each year between their respective champion teams. Because many collegiate football championships were known as “bowls” for the bowl-shaped stadiums that hosted them, one AFL owner referred to the new game as a “super” bowl. The name stuck.

Four Super Bowl games were played before the two leagues merged in 1970 into a single National Football League, which was subdivided into the American and National “conferences.” Each year, the champion teams of each conference play against each other in the Super Bowl to determine the NFL champion.

While most U.S. sports championships are played in the home cities of the contestants, a Super Bowl — as with the Olympics and the World Cup — is awarded to a city some three to five years in advance, opening the door to broad marketing and promotional opportunities. Because the game is played in winter, it affords warm cities like New Orleans, Miami and Los Angeles a substantial advantage. The University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale, Arizona, won the bidding to host the 2015 championship game, Super Bowl XLIX — between the New England Patriots of the American conference and the Seattle Seahawks of the National conference — on February 1.

Arizona has a dry climate with little rain, and weather forecasts predict the temperature at the venue will be a comfortable 21 degrees Celsius. The stadium, which opened in 2006, is the first to employ an innovative, retractable natural grass playing surface. One side of the stadium opens, allowing the playing field's turf to be moved outside for exposure to the elements. That feature also protects the grass from damage when the stadium is used for other activities, such as music concerts.

A Super Bowl generates substantial economic activity within its host city. Many ticket holders, media representatives and others arrive a week before the game, exploring the area and spending freely.

Cities that seek to host the game must submit environmental plans detailing how they plan to make the Super Bowl as “green” as possible.



*Seattle Seahawks fans cheer at a victory parade after the Super Bowl in 2014. © AP Images*

### A Social Event

Americans increasingly gather in private Super Bowl parties, where they enjoy food, drink and televised football with family and friends. The game is always played on a Sunday, when most Americans are not at work. Because of the event's national prominence, even those who are not football fans often join friends to watch the game and cheer for one of the teams. Some of the most-watched television programs in U.S. history have been Super Bowls. The game played in 2014, Super Bowl XLVIII, set a record of 111.5 million viewers.

Another key to the Super Bowl's success is the carefully choreographed entertainment events that surround the game itself. The “halftime show,” musical and other entertainment offered by major stars, takes place on the field during the mid-game rest period. Singer Katy Perry will perform at the 2015 halftime.

For many television viewers, the highlight of the Super Bowl isn't the game, it's the commercials. Advertisers compete to

display their most creative efforts and introduce their newest products. Given the huge audience, advertisers are willing to pay dearly to parade their wares on the Super Bowl broadcast. According to entertainment trade magazine *Variety*, a 30-second ad will cost a record \$4.5 million this year.

Although serious football fans would disagree, Super Bowl Sunday, for millions of Americans, is less about which team prevails than it is about fun. Whether at the stadium or with family and friends in front of the television, most Americans find something to enjoy on this unofficial national holiday. Although serious football fans would disagree, Super Bowl Sunday, for millions of Americans, is less about which team prevails than it is about fun. Whether at the stadium or with family and friends in front of the television, most Americans find something to enjoy on this unofficial national holiday.

[See Super Bowl XLIX official website.](#)