



The NFL by Taylor Swift

A Case Study on how Taylor Swift has forever altered the state of football and pop culture.

Oxendine, Catherine Noel
MEJO 531

Synopsis

During the month of September 12-time Grammy winning artist Taylor Swift was spotted at a Kansas City Chiefs game beside Travis Kelce's mother, Donna, in the Kelce box. Kelce is a tight end for the Kansas City Chiefs, helping them to win the Super Bowl this past February. This was right after Swift was coming off the American leg of her legendary Eras Tour. Swift fans went wild seeing the popstar buddy-buddy with the famous Kelce mother.

Since then, the internet has been a muck with fan theories about the couple's relationship. Most notably the NFL has brought more attention to Swift, going as far to change their social media headers and biography. The NFL even released an official statement on October 4th defending all its coverage of the popstar.



Taylor Swift reacts during a game between the Chicago Bears and the Kansas City Chiefs at GEHA Field at Arrowhead Stadium on September 24, 2023 in Kansas City, Missouri. (Photo by David Eulitt/Getty Images) (David Eulitt via Getty Images)

Timeline:

July 7th – 8th: Travis Kelce attended Taylor Swift's concert held in Arrowhead Stadium, where the Kansas City Chiefs play. Kelce had a friendship bracelet with his phone number on it he attempted to give to Swift.

July 26th: Travis Kelce talked about Swift on his podcast with brother Jason Kelce, who plays for the Philadelphia Eagles.

September 24th: Swift first seen beside Donna Kelce in the Kelce box. She and Donna are seen cheering when Travis scores a touchdown.

October 1st: Swift featured at another game with Blake Lively, Ryan Reynolds, Hugh Jackman, and Sophie Turner.

October 2nd: NFL social media changed the bio on X to “we had the best day with you” and had pictures of Swift posted. NFL official Instagram changed bio to “chiefs are 2-0 as swifties.”

October 4th: Travis Kelce says, “They’re overdoing it a little bit, especially with my situation,” on his podcast in reference to all the NFL coverage of Swift.

October 5th: The NFL releases a statement following Kelce’s comment saying, “The Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce news has been a pop cultural moment we’ve leaned into in real time, as it’s an intersection of sport and entertainment, and we’ve seen an incredible amount of positivity around the sport.”

October 15th: The couple made a guest appearance on an episode of Saturday Night Live.

November 11th: Swift changes the lyrics in song *Karma* to “Karma is the guy on the Chiefs, coming straight home to me,” while Kelce is at her concert. After the concert Swift is seen running into Kelce’s arms and embracing each other.

November 22nd: NFL Commissioner, Roger Goodell, tells CBS Mornings, “I think it’s great for the league to have that kind of attention. So, we welcome it,” in reference to Swift and Kelce.

Background

Organization History:

The National Football League (NFL) was founded in 1920 under the American Professional Football Association. The NFL was made up of originally fourteen teams and faced many hardships from other organizations. In the 1960s the strongest adversary of the NFL was the American Football League (AFL). In 1970 the NFL and AFL completed a merger to create a twenty-six-team circuit. Since that time the NFL has expanded four times adding six new teams. Today the teams are broken into two conferences and then by location. The Kansas City Chiefs are in the American Football Conference (AFC) and are in AFC West with the Denver Broncos, Las Vegas Raiders, and the Los Angeles Chargers.

Stakeholders:

According to the Sports Business Journal “NFL rolls into 2023 season with 37 sponsors”, Gatorade has sponsored the NFL since 1983 being the oldest on this list. The company’s

newest sponsor is YouTube. Notable sponsors on this list are Verizon, which has exclusive telecom services and this year expanded to include coach to coach communications and Oakley which just had a contract renewal to sponsor the NFL through 2030. Other notable sponsors are VISA and USAA which work together on retail banking and Nike and Under Armour which are team specific sponsors. In this case the main stakeholders for this are the fans because that is who is talking about the famous couple.

Case Analysis

Goal

The main goal is any big corporation like the NFL is money and I think that is the driving force for all their coverage on the famous couple. The NFL is realizing there are fan bases that are untouched, girls aged 12 to 17 and women aged 18 to 25 are those fans. And there is a market for them. The NFL can only benefit from the conversation surrounding the infamous couple because of the loyal fan base the NFL already has. People are not going to stop watching football just because they get annoyed seeing Taylor Swift so much. American football is engrained in the culture of this country.



A fan holds a sign supporting Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce as the Kansas City Chiefs play the Chicago Bears during the first half at GEHA Field at Arrowhead Stadium on September 24, 2023 in Kansas City, Missouri. (Photo by Cooper Neill/Getty Images) (Cooper Neill via Getty Images)

Audience

The NFL has an obvious and powerful fan base: men. This has been clear throughout modern times in the United States with football being considered “manly.” The NFL wants to change that, and Taylor Swift is there way to do so. Since Swifts attendance to games viewership among teen girls spiked up 53% from the first three weeks of Sunday Night Football. As for women aged 18 to 24 there was an increase up to 24% and for women over the age of 35 viewership increased 34%. These are good numbers for the NFL because this opens them up to all new types of sponsors that in the past they might not have gotten.

Research

The NFL did not have to do research for this opportunity to be successful, I think it was a no brainer. You have a Grammy winning artist allegedly (at the time) dating one of your top football players, you are going to capitalize on this. Swift was already famous from her tour and her new albums getting released, there are inside references to the star all over the internet. The NFL saw a way to connect to a new audience and took it.

Reactions

All the reaction to the couple has not been positive with even Travis saying the NFL is doing too much. However, some Swiftites are loving this coverage on the popstar and her new beau. Everyone is not going to love everything, so it makes sense that the couple is getting push back from NFL fans who just want to watch the game and do no care who is there and who the players are dating. Whereas for avid pop culture lovers this is huge.

I think the biggest issue that NFL fans are having is when Swift fans say “Oh, Taylor put football on the map, she made Travis famous.” Which is a true and false statement. Travis Kelce had a following prior to being involved with Taylor Swift, he won a Super Bowl. Not only that he beat his brother Jason to win that Super Bowl. The man was famous in his own right to football and NFL lovers and fans. To the world outside of the NFL, he was a cute face and a guy who played football and then talked about football with his brother. No one knew who he was or even cared. Especially girls aged 12 to 17 and women aged 18 to 25. If you were not a football fan Travis Kelce was not on your radar. Taylor Swift changed that, she brought Tavis Kelce and in turn his brother and their podcast to the mainstream.

Evaluation

The NFL focusing on Swift has been helpful to them immensely. When the Kanas City Chiefs played the New York Jets, the game Swift was at with Blake Lively and Ryan Reynolds, the game had a staggering 27 million viewers. That number made the game the most watched Sunday football game since the last Super Bowl earlier this year.

This is a game changer for so many reasons, money being the number one. When the Super Bowl is on companies know that their advertisements need to be top notch because everyone will be watching. If a celebrity can bring that many views to a random regular season game in October, the playing field has changed.

Comparison to Another Case

I think a big pull for the NFL with Swift and Kelce is the celebrity aspect of it. The NBA has it figured out, when they have celebrities at games they are put on the front row in stunning outfits and lots of pictures are taken. We do not see celebrities at the same level when it comes to football. I think the NFL is trying to change that so they can open their viewership.

It is also important to note that this is not the only new thing the NFL has done this season. On Disney+ and ESPN+ there was a Toy Story themed alternative live stream of the Jaguars- Falcons game. It was interesting to say the least and while the transfer to animation from live action had many issues it was still popular with NFL fans, especially those with small children.



The Andy's Room setting for "Toy Story Funday Football" *Courtesy of ESPN*

Financial Impact

Since we first saw Swift back in September, Kelce has seen a spike in sales of his fan merchandise. He was in the top 5 of selling NFL players and saw a 400% spike in merchandise sales.

On New Heights with Jason and Travis Kelce there has been a change in viewership too which was notable by the two stars sponsors. In a recent episode from the duo a sponsor was for women's feminine products which prior to the Swift/Kelce relationship would have been odd since mostly men listen to the Pro Ballers. However, with the new attention from teens and young woman the brothers are opening all new avenues. And they are not the only Kelce who is benefitting from all this stardom, Donna Kelce the mother of Jason and Travis was spotted at a Philadelphia Eagles game with Kevin Miles, or famously as he is known as "Jake from State Farm."

Relevant Theory

When looking at the Public Relations Theory for this case I did not know what to pick from. Clearly this falls into the Sports Entertainment since we are focusing on the NFL, I also think this falls into the category of cultural awareness. This is because while Taylor Swift is not a culture of a person's personal identity, she is apart of the American culture as a whole. Taylor Swift is the poster child for the American Dream, she grew up on a Christmas Tree farm in Pennsylvania. Even though she has been famous since she was 14 the star comes from somewhat humble beginnings. She did not grow up with famous parents, she had an average childhood up until her stardom.

Since her Eras Tour, I am sure when people across the world think of a famous American the popstar comes to mind. She is everywhere all the time. The NFL knew this and capitalized on it like a business does, they saw an opportunity and took it.

Recommendations

The Taylor Swift thing is starting to get old and fast. If the NFL wants to manage to stay relevant, they need to keep with the momentum that they already have. The most important part is to keep it NFL focused.

Recently the Minnesota Vikings came out with The Vikings Classic Throwback Jerseys in which the team wore jerseys inspired by the teams 1970s looks. I love this idea and think the NFL could do it. If the NFL wanted to bring in Swifts aura the whole "eras" idea is very popular right now. A whole line of vintage and eras like merchandise could sell very well. Even more so if the NFL kept pulling into the idea of focusing on celebrities at games. The NFL could have celebrities that are native to the home cities that the teams play in come to the games and give them coverage. Plus put them in the eras jersey idea and you have a hit on your hands.

The final idea I have for the NFL to play into the idea of eras is focusing on the coaching staff. Everyone loves LSU basketball not only because they are good, but the Coach Kim Mulkey is a style icon and her actions on the sidelines are entertaining. The NFL should do the same make an era out of coaches and their reactions to different things. There is plenty of footage of a football coach getting mad or being overjoyed, show it.

Conclusion

To end, we have never seen something like this. To be fair we have never had a Taylor Swift before. The NFL is actively playing into the couple and their stardom, while this has benefited the NFL right now, I am interested to see where the company heads with this as the times change and interest changes.

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