

Tuesday, 2 June 2020

NRL, the first professional sport to restart, needs to win back young supporters

The latest data from Roy Morgan shows over 6 million Australians aged 14+ (29%) watch NRL matches on TV, including regular season games, finals, the NRL Grand Final and the State of Origin between NSW and Queensland. But this number is down from 6.9 million four years ago.

The National Rugby League has led all professional sporting codes in Australia in navigating a way through the COVID-19 pandemic and became the first of the major football codes to restart its season over the weekend with a match in which the Parramatta Eels (34) beat the Brisbane Broncos (6). This gives the NRL a two-week head-start on its main rivals, the AFL, which resumes on June 11, and an even bigger advantage over other domestic sporting competitions such as the A-League and a restructured Super Rugby AU.

The NRL will be keen to take advantage of the 'clear air' for sporting content and re-engage fans who have lost interest in the sport over the last few years.

TV viewership of the NRL has dropped across all age groups compared to four years ago. But the biggest concern will be the large drops among younger age groups. Just 20% of Australians aged under 25 watch the NRL on TV – down 9% points from 2016, and just 21% of 25-34 year olds watch the sport on TV – down an even larger 10% points.

TV viewership of the NRL has held up better amongst older age groups with 36% of 50-64 year olds, 32% of 65+ year olds and 31% of 35-49 year olds watching. Even so, figures for each of these three age groups are down 5% points on four years ago.

The largest TV audiences for the NRL are its marquee events – and there are none larger than the annual battle between NSW and Queensland, the State of Origin. Almost 3.7 million Australians say they almost always watch coverage of the series, and a further 1.5 million occasionally watch.

(This year's State of Origin has been delayed by the pandemic, and will be played in November, after the NRL Grand Final. The hope is that delaying until post-season means a greater chance crowds will be permitted to attend the three-match contest.)

Unsurprisingly TV viewership of the NRL is concentrated in its 'heartland' States of NSW and Queensland. Nearly three-quarters of those who watch NRL on TV are in either NSW/ACT (46%) or Queensland (28%). One-in-six NRL TV viewers are in Victoria and the remaining 10% are spread between WA, SA, Tasmania and the Northern Territory.

Industry Communications Director Julian McCrann says the NRL's earlier than expected re-start is a boon to the code's broadcasters and to advertisers keen to be associated with some live sporting content:

"The NRL has outdone rival football codes including the AFL, Super Rugby and the A-League with its resumption in late May, giving rugby league a clear run at viewer attention.

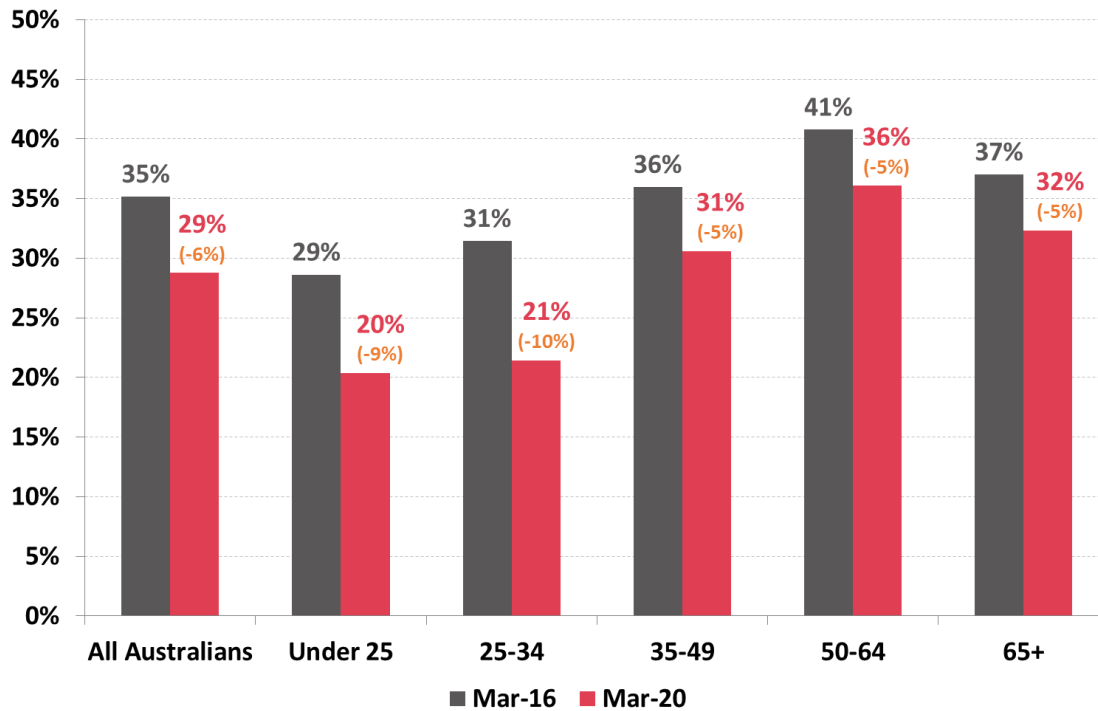
"Australian Rugby League Commission Chairman Peter V'Landys' is a controversial figure but his hard work has given the NRL and its sixteen clubs a chance to 'own' the domestic sporting landscape over the next two weeks. This is welcome news for a code that has dealt with many off-field scandals in recent years and has experienced declining TV viewership across all age groups since 2016.

"The NRL's declining TV viewership is most apparent amongst younger viewers, aged under 35. TV viewership of the NRL amongst younger Australians has dropped to around one-in-five – down from nearly one-in-three as recently as 2016.

"Overall this important demographic comprises around 25% of the 6 million NRL TV viewers. A further 25% are aged 35-49 while around half are now aged in the 50+ age bracket. For the NRL to turn around the decline in TV viewership it's vital to find a way to re-engage this audience.

"The proliferation of fast-growing Subscription TV services captured in the [latest Roy Morgan figures for Subscription TV in Australia](#) offers the NRL, and other sporting codes, new opportunities to reach diverse audiences in an increasingly competitive sports viewing market."

TV Viewership of the NRL by age group 2020 cf. 2016



Source: Roy Morgan Single Source, 12 months to March 2016, n=15,074 and 12 months to March 2020, n=13,208. **Base:** Australians 14+.

For comments or more information about Roy Morgan's NRL Supporter profiles and other Sporting profiles data, please contact:

Roy Morgan Enquiries

Office: +61 (3) 9224 5309

askroymorgan.@roymorgan.com

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Compiled with data from Roy Morgan's Single Source survey (the largest of its kind in the world, with 50,000 respondents p.a), these ready-made profiles provide a broad understanding of the target audience, in terms of demographics, attitudes, activities and media usage in Australia.

About Roy Morgan

Roy Morgan is Australia's largest independent Australian research company, with offices in each state, as well as in the U.S. and U.K. A full-service research organisation, Roy Morgan has over 75 years' experience collecting objective, independent information on consumers.

Margin of Error

The margin of error to be allowed for in any estimate depends mainly on the number of interviews on which it is based. Margin of error gives indications of the likely range within which estimates would be 95% likely to fall, expressed as the number of percentage points above or below the actual estimate. Allowance for design effects (such as stratification and weighting) should be made as appropriate.

Sample Size	Percentage Estimate			
	40%-60%	25% or 75%	10% or 90%	5% or 95%
10,000	±1.0	±0.9	±0.6	±0.4
50,000	±0.4	±0.4	±0.3	±0.2

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