

Why dudes go nuts while watching the big game

By Bill Briggs

You see this raging rowdiness in “The Black Hole” – a freakishly fired-up swath of the Oakland Coliseum where Raiders rooters are notorious for needling their football enemies.

You can witness this same ferocity among Philadelphia Eagles fans – so ornery they once booed a man dressed as Santa Claus before pounding Saint Nick with snowballs. Then again, if you are any sort of sports-obsessed guy – (OK, let’s just say, if you’re a guy), you, too, probably talk smack with your buds and vent venom at the flat screen whenever the score gets close.



Jed Jacobsohn / Getty Images

Dudes become even more dudelike when watching a game because of a spike in testosterone and cortisol, a new study find. Here, fired up Philadelphia Eagles fans cheer before the start of a game.

Well, now we know exactly why – on a chemical level – boys will be boys when a ball-game hangs in the balance. According to a [study published Wednesday](#), dudes actually become even more dude-like while watching their beloved teams compete.

Blame steroids. The natural kinds, that is. During games, two hormones – testosterone and cortisol – increase within the bodies of sports boosters, especially “dedicated, young, male fans,” writes a study team headed by Leander van der Meij, a PhD at the University of Valencia in Spain and VU University Amsterdam in the Netherlands.

Of course, you hardly need instant replay to feel your testosterone tide rise as the big play unfolds. Your eyes widen. Your pulse quickens. You prepare to holler – or curse. Here’s what you didn’t know: that testosterone stream is part of a hormone secretion dubbed the “challenge hypothesis.” This, the study’s authors say, is how humans internally “prepare for the game.”

The scientists examined 50 Spanish soccer fans (via 5-milliliter saliva samples) as the group viewed the 2010 World Cup finals between Spain and the Netherlands. (Spain

won 1-0). Interestingly, “no sex differences” were noted in the testosterone levels of the fans examined, said van der Meij.

(Ladies, speaking for the men, we respect that sports fire.)

But the amount of cortisol was generally much higher in the guys than in the gals, the study found. That sudden gush from the adrenal gland – typically generated by stress and used to boost blood sugar – is consistent with the “social self-preservation theory,” the authors wrote. In other words, “young and greater soccer fans ... perceived a particularly strong threat to their own social esteem if their team didn't win.”

“Watching the match was probably more stressful for men than for women,” van der Meij said, via email. “Male fans expected a bigger goal difference ... and perceived the match as more frustrating than women.”

For senior soccer buffs, meanwhile, their saliva samples showed less cortisol than those taken from the younger fans, according to the study.

“A possibility is that older fans may have coped better with the stress of viewing the soccer final,” van der Meij said.

The veteran fans simply had weathered so many sports nail-biters, their adrenals had grown used to on-field tension.

That's not to say that the oldsters – especially the graying dudes in the stands – didn't give a spit.

What's the most outrageous thing you - or your guy - have done at a game? [Tell us on Facebook.](#)

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