

 VERSION 2

LISTEN UP, SPORTS FANS:

# Streaming Audio & the FIFA World Cup



## WHO WATCHES SOCCER IN THE U.S.?

The World Cup is back in the U.S. for the [first time in 32 years](#), and people are tuning in on their phones, computers, TVs, and through their earbuds. This is a milestone event, and advertisers are chomping at the bit to get into it.

In case you missed booking your inventory, or if you want a more efficient way to reach fans: have you considered sports audio and podcasts?

Spotify and sports radio executives are expecting [unprecedented levels of engagement](#) in streaming audio for the World Cup.

Podcasts are the hotspot for sports conversations. Outside of live coverage, fans can check out [post-game debriefs](#) with top sports analysts, former players, and longtime soccer enthusiasts, and hear their predictions for what's to come.

US viewers spent a collective [80 billion minutes](#) watching soccer in 2025.

[Engagement is strongest in the host cities](#): 42% of urban residents say they will watch heavily, while 22% in suburban areas and 16% in rural communities say they will be watching and listening in.

The [top markets](#) for excitement around the World Cup, based on online activity, are:

- **Miami-Ft. Lauderdale, FL**, especially for Spanish language viewing
- **New York, NY**
- **Los Angeles, CA**
- **San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose, CA**
- **Washington, DC** is the most engaged market that isn't a host city, alongside **San Diego, CA** and **El Paso, TX**.



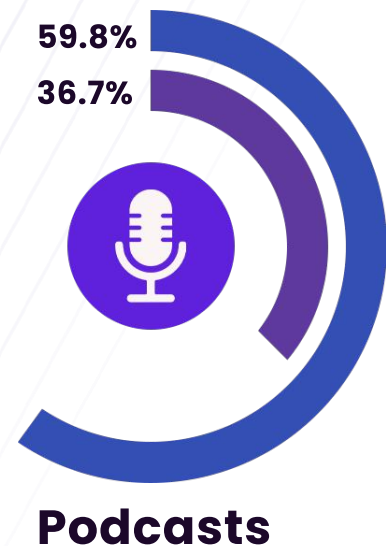
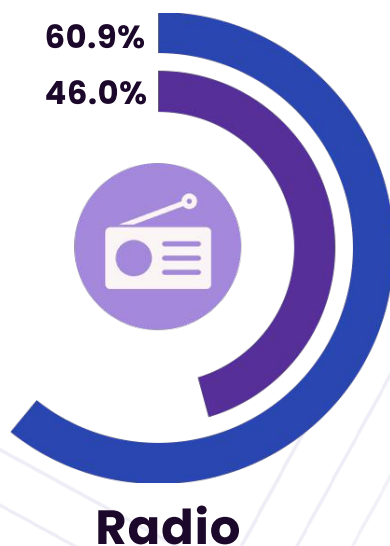
## WHERE CAN WE REACH SOCCER FANS?

Livestreaming is primarily where it's at—but the inventory is going fast, and the unit costs are skyrocketing. Programmatic streaming inventory CPMs are predicted to range from \$60 to \$120. Ad breaks are **few and far between**, with only the pre and post-game shows, half-time pauses, and hydration breaks to reach viewers.

Among U.S. soccer fans, 77% say they turn to radio (traditional and streaming) and podcasts **specifically for soccer content**. Among these, **61% tune into sports radio**, and **60% listen to podcasts**.

## USE OF AUDIO TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT SPORTS

- Soccer fans
- Gen pop



Source: Nielsen Fan Insights, USA, Jan 2025 – Feb 2026

**The Athletic launched a new podcast** in late 2025 just for FIFA coverage. Even international podcasts are getting in on the action, **live-taping across major U.S. cities** throughout the tournament.

## WHO'S LISTENING?

Listenership for sports podcasts has **increased by 71%** over the past five years. Podcasts are hyper-specialized. That lets us reach niche audiences for specific teams, regions, or leagues, as well as those geared toward the World Cup itself.

**Among the 87 million Americans who've expressed interest** in the 2026 World Cup, there are:

- 34 million women
- 17 million Hispanic fans
- 12 million Black/African-American fans

New fans are younger and more diverse.

76% of soccer fans nationwide are Millennials or Gen Z. Millennials are more committed to the World Cup than other generations, with 37% saying they'll watch closely; they're also almost 40% more likely to attend the games than the general population.

They're also most likely to be listening. Millennials are 41% more likely to check World Cup updates through **podcasts**. Gen Z fans are **twice as likely** to listen to sports podcasts as other generations. Avid Major League Soccer fans are **10% more likely** to actively engage with podcasts than sports radio.

Podcasts have grown **specifically among Black audiences**, with a 135% increase in heavy listeners. They're 32% more likely to tune in if a radio personality is hosting.

Avid listeners are already paying attention to the ads they hear.

**Over half of fans say they pay attention to the brands that sponsor soccer teams and events. Sports fans have 80% more trust in podcast sponsorships than advertising in other forms of media — and, specifically among soccer fans, three in four listeners find soccer sponsors more intriguing than other advertisers.**

## WHAT ARE SOME GOOD TACTICS TO REACH AMERICAN SOCCER FANS?

Some adtech executives are describing advertising around the World Cup as a shift from straight-ahead media buys to **buying a “moment.”** But very few advertisers are considering audio as an **outright substitute** for other channels. Those in the know are focusing on the inventory right before and after major games, which is when engagement with sports podcasts tends to leap. Podcasts are also great for reaching people asynchronously with post-game coverage.

In streaming audio, brands look for **contextual placements** that seamlessly enter the conversational flow, not just commercials. They want clever ad reads, but also, they want storytelling that aligns with what fans are hearing. Programmatic placement can help find just the right moment.

There are also ways to bolster audio placements in a programmatic funnel. Because 67% of World Cup fans **plan to watch full games**, geotargeting soccer bars could be another great way to reach fans. 61% of all U.S. fans plan to engage on **social media and mobile apps**. It's a great **second screen activity** to keep the hands engaged while watching a game.



Among those attending games, [29% plan to tailgate](#). With programmatic advertising, we can geotarget grocery stores and liquor stores within a certain radius of the event centers, as well as fan zones and sponsored experiences, to reiterate messages that fans hear on their podcasts.

**Programmatic advertising can help you play the field and navigate the podcast landscape. Version2 and iHeartMedia have you covered.**

## iHeartMedia

World Cup audio inventory is going fast but through our partnership with iHeartMedia there is still time to activate meaningful in-game and shoulder content surrounding the games. Reach out to [sales@theversion2.com](mailto:sales@theversion2.com) to quickly integrate within the impactful opportunities below and more.

- **All 104 Matches Live:** Every game is available to stream live on the [iHeartRadio App](#), featuring FOX Sports' official English-language commentary.
- **Dedicated Audio Channels:** A 24/7 dedicated streaming station provides live match broadcasts, continuous commentary, and on-demand access throughout the entire tournament.

