

Pathfinder

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Sports

TV—Boon or Bugaboo?

How does television affect sports attendance? Does it hurt? Does it help? Sports promoters have long wondered. Last week, a 22-year-old Princeton graduate had what looked like the first accurate answer.



Crowds. *Does television keep them home or get them out?*

In 1949 Jerry N. Jordan, son of C. L. Jordan, executive vice president of N. W. Ayer & Son, Inc., Philadelphia advertising firm, needed a thesis to complete his studies at Princeton University. He wrote one on the effects of television on family living habits, expanded it as a graduate psychology student at the University of Pennsylvania, where he expects to receive a degree in February.

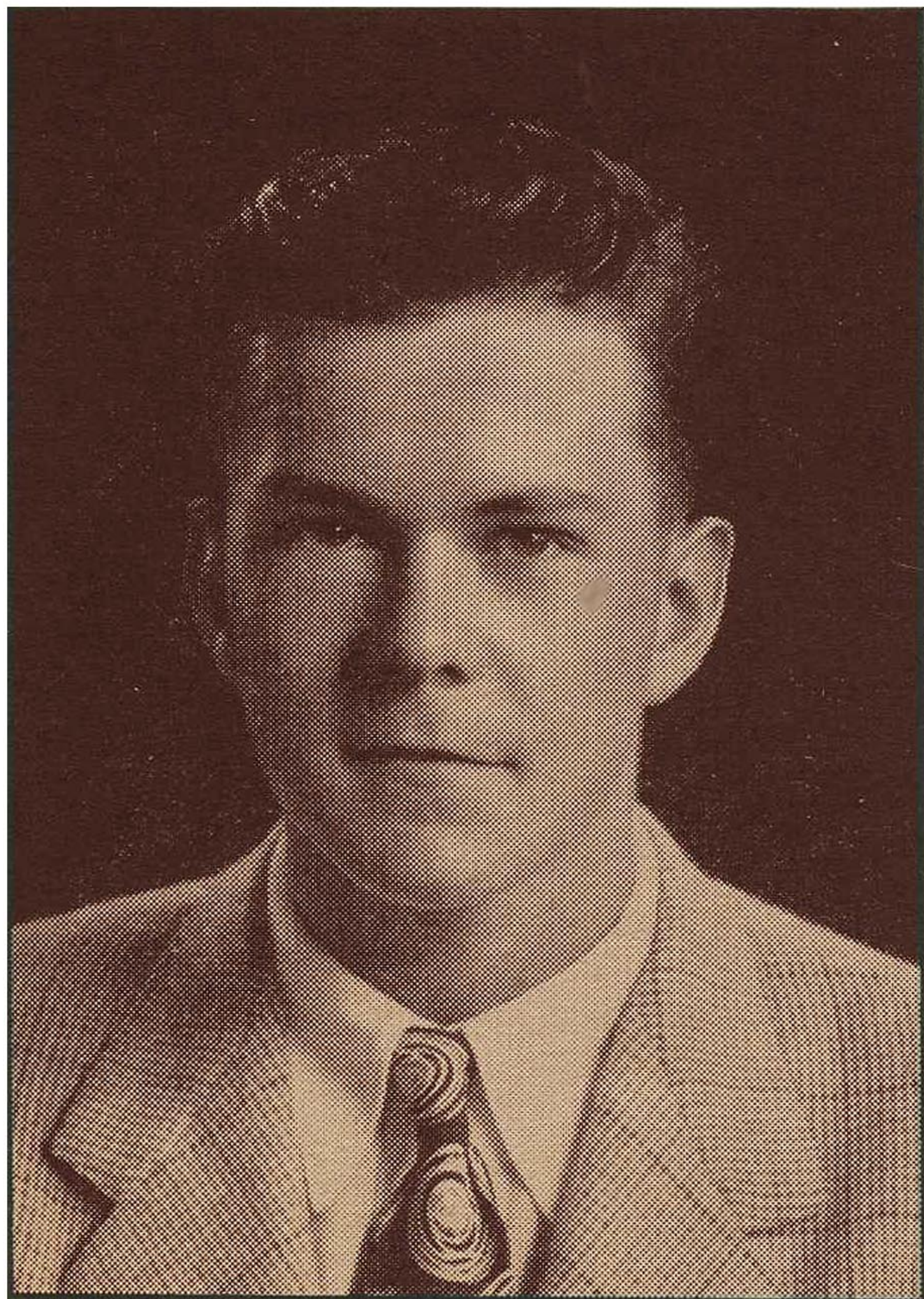
Last June, a Radio-Television Manufacturers Association committee, appointed to survey the effects of TV on sports, joyfully grabbed Jordan's work. Probably never before had a major U.S. industry so welcomed a college student's paper.

Jordan's main conclusions: Sports fans have been among the first to buy television receivers. The new TV owner stays glued to his set—at first. But after the novelty wears off (in one or two years for football, sooner for baseball) he goes to more games than does the non-TV owner. Moreover, he takes members of his family along more often than does the man without a television set. The long-range effect of television will not be harmful to sports—and may lead to increased attendance.

Private Census. To get his data, Jordan sifted attendance figures of 16 major league baseball clubs, 444 minor league clubs, 194 colleges and universities and 33 secondary schools and covered 572 cities and towns. Radio-TV men say his TV survey is the first on so big a scale. Some of Jordan's specific findings:

● ● Forty-six percent of the non-TV owners among male heads of families attended a football game in Philadelphia last fall. Only 24% of "new" TV owners (3 months or less) did so. But 54% of "old" TV owners (who had had sets 2 years or more) saw one or more games.

● ● College football continued to draw more people last year. Colleges which televised their games had an attendance increase of 63%. Colleges which did not had an increase of only 51%.



Jordan. His survey finds the answers.

● ● Forty-five percent of non-TV owners among male heads of families saw at least one major league baseball game in Philadelphia last summer. Only 44% of new TV owners did so, compared with 58% of the old owners, who also went to more games than did non-TV owners.

● ● Attendance at minor league ball games within TV radius of big league games definitely is hurt—especially at night. But only 13 of 1949's 444 minor clubs were within such range. Eight suffered a decrease, but five showed increases.

● ● Football is hurt more than baseball by TV because of its short season. Smaller colleges and high schools are little affected by telecasts of football games of nearby larger colleges because their crowds come from students, loyal alumni, friends and neighbors.

● ● Widespread televising of basketball has not tumbled it from its ranking as the nation's No. 1 spectator sport.

● ● Most boxing authorities are convinced that TV is fatal at the gate. But most wrestling promoters credit television with booming gate receipts.

● ● Hockey promoters, who banned TV, got no increase in attendance, now are considering televising games.

Jordan concluded that other factors have vastly more effect on sports than television—notably performance. For instance, this year's National League Philadelphia Phillies, a first-place contender, are drawing 40% higher crowds than a year ago. The slumping Athletics have dropped 50% at the gate. Yet both teams have their games televised from the same park to the same city.

On the action of some colleges in banning "live" telecasts of this fall's football games, young Jordan had some mature reflections: "Serious attention once was given to excluding newspapermen from the ballparks . . . and the Eastern Intercollegiate Association actually passed a resolution banning . . . broadcasting of football games in 1932."

The inference: With sports attendance up 440% in the last two decades, today's alarm over TV may look equally ridiculous 20 years from now.