

Cepeda: Super Bowl is beer's big game

 [satrib.com/opinion/2045508-155/beers-big-game](https://www.satrib.com/opinion/2045508-155/beers-big-game)

By Esther Cepeda The Washington Post

Alcohol products and commercials featuring characters and animals that are eye candy to kids are nothing new.

I recall being delighted as a young teen by the stately and glamorous Clydesdales, especially during their as Super Bowl brand ambassadors in the late 1980s. Social drinkers might be skeptical of advertising's impact on drinking, and it's true that I didn't grow up to drink irresponsibly.

To be fair, however, I don't recall Super Bowl Sunday to be the weeks-long, multibillion-dollar national cultural and economic juggernaut that it is today. Commercial time for the 2015 Super Bowl is clocking in at about \$150,000 per second.

Worse for non-NFL-obsessed households like mine — which in the past avoided the racy, vulgar and otherwise tasteless ads by simply not turning on the TV — parents today no longer have much power to keep these big-event mini-movies from getting in front of their kids.

In the last few years, advertisers have taken to "leaking" or "previewing" their big-game spots on YouTube and other social media sites to [drive buzz in advance of the game](#).

Budweiser's marketing objective is to remain relevant to young adults who have grown up during the craft and artisanal beer age. Its tactics include ads featuring horses, puppies and video-game characters, such as another TV spot slated to play during this year's Super Bowl featuring Pac-Man.

Screenshots, memes, Vines (short, looping videos) and YouTube links will be getting huge play among not only the 20-something millennials that Anheuser-Busch is hoping to target, but also their little brothers' and sisters' Snapchat and Instagram accounts.

Following the backlash to Bud Light's series of Spuds MacKenzie ads and the Federal Trade Commission investigation into allegations of directly pitching alcohol to children, Budweiser cut back on the cute animal factor angle. But it has started using dogs again.

Last year it featured a puppy during the Super Bowl. Then, in a tonal twist, it rolled out [a very powerful ad](#) directed at young audiences featuring a young man not coming home to his pup because he chose to drink responsibly and slept over at a friend's house. The ad featured the ominous line: "For some, the waiting never ended" — a reference to those who did not get home safely after drinking too much.

It's a shame Budweiser couldn't have saved the irresistible power of cute animals for their public service announcements instead of using them to hook impressionable young viewers.

And based on years of conclusive research, there's no question young viewers are indelibly impressed by alcohol ads.

"What we know is that millions of kids will be watching the Super Bowl and what kids like in alcohol ads are animal and people characters, and a good story," said David Jernigan, the director of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "Nationwide polls routinely show that Budweiser ads are number one or in the top five of commercials kids like most on the Super

Bowl. And we know that the more kids are exposed to alcohol marketing, the more likely they are to start drinking, or drink more."

Jernigan says Super Bowl Sunday is an opportunity to have the conversations about the negative side of alcohol consumption that the ads will never show, such as excessive drinking being responsible for about 4,300 deaths annually and more than 190,000 emergency room visits for people under 21.

Ugh. Who wants to have a teaching moment before, during or after the game? The Super Bowl festival is supposed to be fun — or at the very least, relatively harmless.

But there it is, moms and dads. As with every other aspect of advertising-powered entertainment, we've got our work cut out for us.