Beyond the Final Score: Sports-Themed Lottery Games for Today's Fans

By Scientific Games

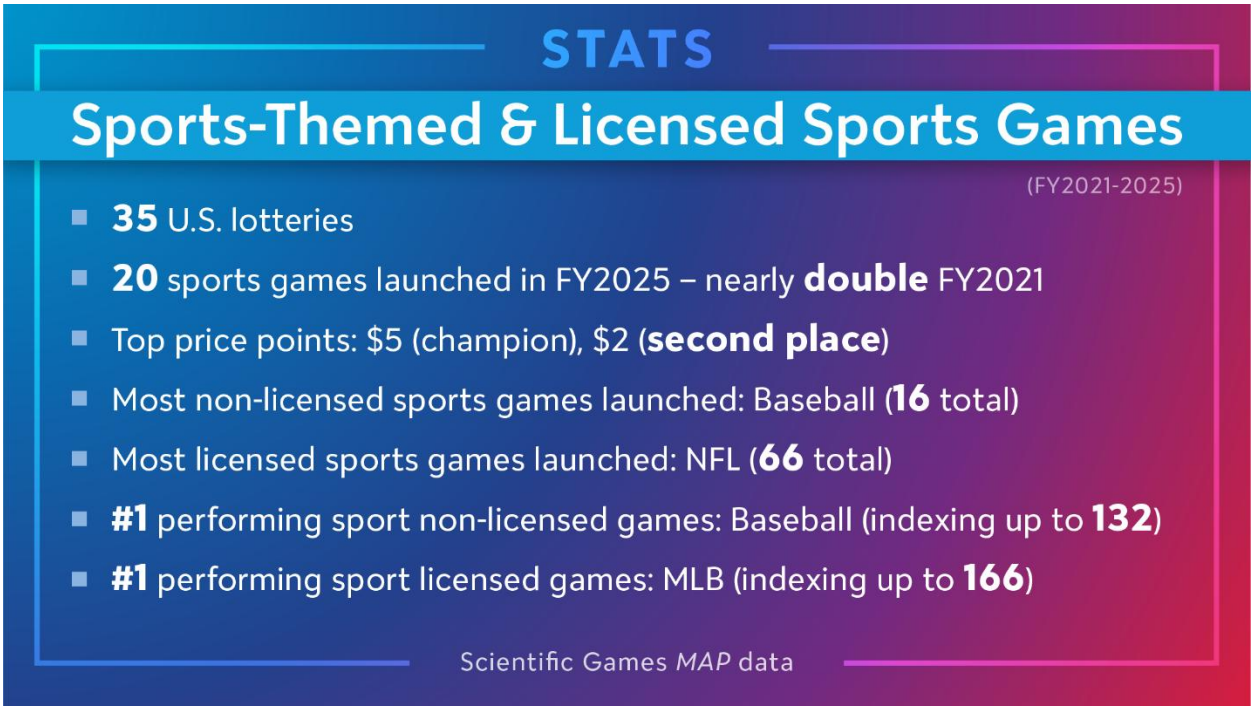
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For decades, sports-themed lottery games have been among lottery's most successful product categories.

From hometown rivalries and championship celebrations to Opening Day at the ballpark and football season kickoffs, lotteries have long tapped into one of the world's most powerful emotional connections—sports fandom. Whether through instant scratch games, Fast Play games or more recently, eInstants and digital lottery experiences, sports-themed products have consistently demonstrated their ability to engage players and generate meaningful returns for good causes.

Scientific Games' *MAP* data reinforces that success. Between FY2021 and FY2025, **35 U.S. lotteries launched sports-themed games**, with the number of lotteries nearly doubling during that period. The highest-performing non-licensed, sports-themed game, indexing as high as 132, was baseball-themed, while an NFL-licensed game reached a performance index of 166.



Those numbers answer one question.

Sports-themed lottery games work.

But they raise another.

How should they evolve to meet the expectations of today's sports fans?



“The sports category has evolved dramatically over the years. Fans everywhere are more engaged both in and out of season, and the excitement never cools off. Pennsylvania is no exception, with the fandom of two major teams reaching every corner of the state. That evolution and the rise in fan engagement are exactly why our sports category, especially football, keeps *scoring big* with our players. Football carries a level of intensity and tradition that keeps players coming back year after

year. Even as the broader sports world expands and changes, football remains the centerpiece of our lineup because the passion behind these teams is simply unmatched."

– Kara Sparks, Director of Products, Pennsylvania Lottery

Sports Fans Have Changed

The passion for sports hasn't changed.

The fan experience has.

Today's fans don't simply watch games. They stream highlights, follow athletes and teams on social media, participate in fantasy sports, consume behind-the-scenes content, purchase merchandise, attend fan festivals, and seek experiences that bring them closer to the action.

The remarkable growth of sports wagering reflects that broader evolution. It hasn't created sports fandom—it has reinforced consumers' desire to engage more deeply with the sports they already love.

For lotteries, that's an important distinction.

The opportunity isn't to compete with sportsbooks by becoming sportsbooks.

It's to build on what lotteries have always done well: creating fun, accessible entertainment that allows fans to participate in the excitement surrounding sports while supporting programs that benefit their communities.

"Sports have always been one of lottery's strongest emotional themes. What's changed isn't the passion fans have for sports—it's their expectations. Today's players want experiences that extend beyond the ticket. The lotteries seeing the greatest success are thinking about sports as an engagement strategy, not simply another game launch."

– Kyle Rogers, SVP, Instant Game Strategy & Licensing, Scientific Games

More Than a Great Game

The best sports-themed lottery products have never succeeded simply because of a team logo or an image of a football or baseball.

They succeed because they capture emotion.

The anticipation before kickoff.

The excitement of Opening Day.

The pride of wearing hometown colors.

The shared experience of cheering for the same team.

Today's fans expect experiences—not simply themes.

Whether through an instant scratch game, a Fast Play game or an eInstant, sports-themed lottery products should immerse players in the excitement surrounding the sports they already follow.

That starts with compelling design and engaging play experiences—but it shouldn't end there. Unique touches in the game's design and appearance, themed connections to sports or team traditions in the community, extended play, player loyalty club tie-ins, and more ways to win all create opportunities to deepen fan engagement, including:

- Premium product enhancements (like foil, holographics and specialty inks)
- Innovative play mechanics tied to the sport
- Storytelling
- Digital extensions
- Loyalty integration
- Second-chance promotions



And for those lotteries that choose to partner with their local teams, experiential prizes may be one of the greatest opportunities of all.

- VIP access
- Meet-and-greets
- Locker room tours
- Championship trips
- Exclusive merchandise

"To truly stand out and appeal to sports fans specifically, the game should use as many differentiators as possible—bold graphics, specialty enhancements, unique prize propositions and experiences that the average sports fan simply cannot buy."

– Kyle Rogers, SVP, Instant Game Strategy & Licensing, Scientific Games

For passionate fans, these experiences often become just as meaningful as the cash prize because they offer something money alone can't easily buy—a closer connection to the teams and sports they love.

Orange Cash became the Colorado Lottery's best-performing $5 instant game during its first 12 weeks on sale and its strongest-performing $5 licensed game of the fiscal year. The Lottery plans to launch this year's *Broncos Blitz* game in August to capture preseason excitement and extend engagement throughout the season.



"Sports-themed games help us connect with our players through brands they're already passionate about. In Colorado, our partnership with the Denver Broncos resonates with the community in a very authentic way. By extending the experience beyond the game through sponsorship activations, exclusive fan experiences and second-chance promotions—featuring season tickets and a VIP trip to the 2026 Draft—we create value that goes well beyond the cash prizes."

– Tiffany Ramsdell, Scratch Product Manager, Colorado Lottery

Sports as a Portfolio Strategy

Sports-themed games should also be viewed differently.

Rather than thinking about sports as an occasional promotion, lotteries can treat it as a strategic portfolio category.

Unlike many entertainment themes, sports provide a built-in calendar of excitement that returns year after year.

- Opening Day
- March Madness
- Football Season Kickoff

- The Super Bowl
- The Stanley Cup Playoffs
- The World Cup
- The Olympics

These moments create natural opportunities to refresh the portfolio, energize retailers, and connect with players when sports already command their attention.

Whether built around a professional team, a league, a major sporting event or a broader sports theme, the objective remains the same: create timely, relevant experiences that strengthen player engagement throughout the year.





"Sports are ingrained in Massachusetts culture. When the Boston Celtics won their eighteenth championship title, the Mass Lottery acted fast to design and market a scratch game that would not only engage our player base but cast a wide net, attracting basketball fans that want to be part of the franchise's storied history. From commercials featuring team legends to a Second Chance top opportunity for one lucky player to be the first to win $1 million during a Celtics home game, this game's success was measured in more than just numbers; its holistic marketing approach from conception to event executions kept the winning spirit going long after the city's celebrations ended."

– Kate Sutton, Manager, Product & Promotional Development – Scratch Tickets, Mass Lottery

Following the Fans with Data

As lottery portfolios become more sophisticated, selecting sports themes is no longer simply a creative decision. It's strategy.

Analytics help lotteries understand not only whether sports-themed products perform—but why.

- Which sports generate the strongest response?
- Which launch windows consistently outperform?
- Which price points resonate most?
- Which player segments are most engaged?
- How often should sports-themed products appear?
- Where do licensed properties create incremental value?

These insights allow lotteries to optimize sports as a portfolio strategy rather than simply another product launch.

"The strongest sports-themed products start long before the artwork. Whether it's an instant game, Fast Play or an eInstant, success begins by understanding what motivates fans, when excitement peaks and how to create an experience that continues after the purchase. That's where data, design and player engagement come together."

– Kyle Rogers, SVP, Instant Game Strategy & Licensing, Scientific Games

For lotteries investing in omnichannel strategies, sports-themed products offer another opportunity to connect retail and digital experiences while building longer-term relationships with players.





“This is the 18th year that we've partnered with the Baltimore Ravens on scratch-offs and an increasingly popular second-chance promotion that our players eagerly anticipate every year. Every city loves its NFL team, but the bond between the Ravens and their fans is especially strong because a lot of Marylanders remember what it was like to have their NFL team move away. So having the Ravens here means a lot to people, and that relationship certainly has a lot to do with the success of the tickets. And the second-chance prizes we're able to offer also have a lot to do with it. There are game-day packages and the chance to travel to a road game on the team plane, and, of course, Seats For 20 Years — the kinds of experiences you're not going to find elsewhere, and that deepens the connection to the team even further.”

– Kate Airey, Product Development Director, Maryland Lottery

Following the Fans

Sports-themed lottery games have already earned their place in a lottery's portfolio and can be one of the strongest-performing product categories.

The next opportunity isn't simply to launch another football or baseball game.

It's to create experiences that reflect how today's fans engage with sports.

Sports betting may have changed the conversation around sports.

It hasn't changed what fans love.

Fans still seek excitement.

Community.

Connection.

Shared experiences.

That's where lotteries have always excelled.

The lotteries that lead the next decade won't be those that imitate sportsbooks. Rather, it will be the ones that can connect with fans regardless of their willingness to place a stake on the outcome of a game.

They'll be the ones that understand sports fans better than ever before—creating products and experiences that inspire excitement across instant games, Fast Play, eInstants and digital channels while continuing to generate meaningful funding for the good causes they serve.

Because the future of sports-themed lottery products isn't about following sports betting.

It's about following sports fans.



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