

Premier League's American Boom

Analyzing Growth Patterns and Fan Dynamics Across the American Market

Patrick Ellison

Brock School of Business

MARK431: Advanced Sports Business/Analytics

Dr. Darin White

May 25, 2025

Executive Summary

Introduction

With the recent announcement from the United Soccer League regarding the implementation of promotion and relegation within its league structure, many have speculated that it could be a watershed moment for American enthusiasm towards soccer. While the idea of promotion or relegation is new for the American league system, there is a significant number of Americans who support a foreign club, mainly in England, where such a structure has always existed. While a decline in attendance is commonly observed in American sports following declines in performance, it remains to be seen whether a system of promotion and relegation will spur fans' support for their teams, or if it will force fans away to more successful teams.

This report analyzes the evolution of American Premier League fanbase from 2020 to 2024, examining trends in fan growth, correlations with league performance, and conducting detailed case studies of three notable teams. The analysis is based on fanbase estimates, weighted for 276 million Americans aged 13 or older, using data collected in the January following each listed year, and final league positions for each season (usually in May).

The study encompasses 25 teams across the Premier League and English Football League pyramid and provides insight into how American soccer fans engage with English soccer, and how team performance impacts international following. The purpose of this study is to gauge whether the threat of relegation, the dream of promotion, or prolonged stability and success, will influence support from American fans towards their clubs in the future.

Methodology

Methodology Overview

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of promotion, relegation, and league performance on American fans who support English soccer clubs. With promotion and relegation now on the horizon, it is important for both leagues and fans to understand the implications of this new structure. To do this, SBRNet's studies of American soccer fans were utilized. These studies focused on fans who support foreign teams and specifically asked if respondents supported a specific Premier League club. Each study used an identical survey over the course of five years, which ensured consistent data collection and reliable results. The data extracted from this survey is specifically related to Premier League support for each club. The data is adjusted for roughly 270 million people to

estimate total support across the American population aged 13 or older. It was gathered in January following the listed year (e.g., data for 2020 was gathered in January 2021).

“Pyramid position” reflects the team’s final position in the corresponding season (e.g., 21st in the pyramid = 1st in EFL Championship). With the timing of the surveys, it is possible to analyze how fans react to the most important aspect of the club’s season, which is the final league position. With assistance from Claude AI, a Pearson Correlation was then used to measure the effect of league position on American support, measured in thousands of fans. Because “1” reflects an English Premier League title, a negative correlation between change in league position and change in support actually suggests that an improved pyramid position results in greater American support, and that a positive correlation suggests that support wanes as pyramid position worsens. Teams are also divided by league position for group comparisons, and further detail on this is available below.

Data Collection and Sources

Fanbase Data:

- **Data Source:** SBRnet’s study of American soccer fans who support foreign teams
- **Sample Size (by year):** 3,475 respondents in 2021+ 6,426 in 2022 + 6,330 in 2023 + 6,666 in 2024 + 7,064 in 2025
- **Collection Period:** January of each following year (e.g., January 2021 for 2020 calendar year)
- **Units:** Thousands of American fans (e.g., 1,000k = 1 million fans)
- **Scope:** Adjusted for ~277 million Americans aged 13 or older

Performance Data:

- **Sample Size:** 25 teams across the English soccer pyramid
- **Metric:** Final league position at the end of each previous season (2019-20 through 2023-24)
- **Timing:** Final positions correspond to the same calendar year as the January fan data
- **Coverage:** Premier League positions (1-20) and Championship/League One positions (21+)

Statistical Methods

Correlation Analysis:

- **Method:** Pearson correlation coefficient
- **Formula:** $r = [n(\sum xy) - (\sum x)(\sum y)] / \sqrt{[n(\sum x^2) - (\sum x)^2][n(\sum y^2) - (\sum y)^2]}$
- **Interpretation:**
 - $r > 0.7$: Very strong correlation
 - $r > 0.5$: Strong correlation
 - $r > 0.3$: Moderate correlation
 - $r < 0.3$: Weak correlation
- **Group Analysis:** Separate correlations calculated for team subsets (Big 6, position tiers, growth categories)

Growth Calculations:

- **Year-over-Year Growth:** $[(\text{Current Year} - \text{Previous Year}) / \text{Previous Year}] \times 100$
- **Total Growth:** $[(\text{Final Year} - \text{First Year}) / \text{First Year}] \times 100$
- **Absolute Change:** Final Year Fans - Initial Year Fans

Team Categorization:

- **Big 6:** Manchester United, Manchester City, Liverpool, Arsenal, Chelsea, Tottenham Hotspur
- **Position Tiers:** Top (1-6), Upper Mid (7-10), Lower Mid (11-14), Bottom (15+)
- **Growth Groups:** High (>50%), Moderate (0-50%), Negative (<0%)

Sample Composition

- **Valid Teams for Correlation Analysis:** 18 teams with complete position and fanbase data
- **Total Teams in Dataset:** 25 teams
- **Missing Data Handling:** Teams with insufficient data points are excluded from specific analyses but are included in overall trends where applicable

Key Assumptions and Limitations

Data Quality Assumptions:

- Fanbase estimates represent reasonable approximations of American support

- Timing of January collection captures fan reactions to major events from previous season
- Final league positions provide objective performance indicators and do not leave room for bias

Analytical Limitations:

- **Sample Size:** Limited to 5-year period, constraining long-term trend analysis
- **External Factors:** Analysis doesn't account for specific events (ownership changes, major signings, scandals) beyond their reflection in final positions
- **U.S. Population:** Sample size relatively small when compared to the number of potential fans
- **Promotion/Relegation Effect:** Teams' data availability varies based on survey sample and may not account for all English clubs with American support

Statistical Considerations:

- **Outlier Impact:** Manchester United's exceptional fanbase relative to performance significantly affects overall correlations
- **Small Sample Bias:** Some team categories have limited observations, reducing statistical reliability
- **Temporal Alignment:** Six-month lag between January fan data and May position finalization may affect correlation strength

Sensitivity Analysis:

- Alternative correlation calculations performed with and without outliers
- Group definitions tested with varying threshold boundaries

This methodology provides the foundation for analyzing the complex relationship between team performance and American fanbase development in the Premier League ecosystem.

Key Findings

- **Total Market Growth:** American Premier League fanbase expanded by **62.3%** from 2020-2024, growing from 18.6 million to 30.2 million fans

- **Growth Pattern:** Peak expansion occurred in 2022 (+35.0%), followed by stabilization and the first decline in 2024 (-1.0%)
- **Performance Correlation:** Strong negative correlation (-0.676) between league position and fanbase size, indicating American fans strongly favor successful teams
- **Market Concentration:** Top 6 teams dominate with average fan bases of 3.8 million vs. 245k for mid-tier teams
- **Notable Performers:** Newcastle United achieved extraordinary growth of 970% following ownership change, while relegated teams like Leeds United and Sheffield United suffered severe losses of American fans

Data Analysis

Overall League Trends

Year Total Fans YoY Change YoY %

2020	18,575k	-	-
2021	21,580k	+3,005k	+16.2%
2022	29,136k	+7,556k	+35.0%
2023	30,462k	+1,326k	+4.6%
2024	30,151k	-311k	-1.0%

Overall 2020-2024: +11,576k fans (+62.3%)

Correlation Insights by Team Groups

The overall position-fanbase correlation of -0.676 masks significant variation across different team categories:

1. Elite Tier Dynamics: Within the Big 6, there is virtually no correlation (-0.031) between position and fanbase size. Manchester United's massive fanbase (8.5M on average) despite inconsistent performance (4.4 average position) exemplifies how brand power can transcend recent results. This suggests that at the elite level, historical success, marketing investment, and global brand recognition matter more than current performance.

2. Mid-Tier Paradox: Interestingly, teams in the 11-14th position range show a moderately *positive* correlation (+0.383), meaning worse-performing teams in this tier tend to lose fans as performance degrades, but there are outliers. Established clubs with historic Premier League status (like Everton, who have played continuously in the top-flight since 1954) retain fans despite poor performance, while newly promoted teams in similar positions have struggle to gain and keep support.

3. Bottom Tier Reality: Teams averaging 15th position or lower show the strongest correlation (+0.607), suggesting American fans quickly abandon teams that consistently struggle or face relegation. The correlation is quite strong, but within this struggling group, the teams closest to mid-table (around 15th-17th) tend to retain more fans than those deeper in relegation territory. Successful relegation battles may rally some American supporters, despite overall poor-performance.

4. Growth Performance Patterns:

- High-growth teams show strong negative correlation (-0.650), confirming that success drives fanbase expansion
- Teams with negative growth show very strong positive correlation (+0.780), indicating that worse performance accelerates fan losses
- Manchester United's removal from the dataset strengthens the overall correlation to -0.798, highlighting how single outliers can significantly impact correlation analysis

Detailed Group Breakdowns

Big 6 Teams – Branding, History, or Performance?

Team	Position (Average)	Fans (Average)	Growth (5- year)	Insights
Manchester United	4.4	8,541k	+73.9%	Brand power exceeds recent performance, 20 league titles = joint-most
Chelsea	5.8	3,788k	+27.8%	Consistent seasonal performance with a recent European title
Liverpool	2.8	3,423k	+61.7%	Strong recent success, 20 league titles = joint-most

Team	Position (Average)	Fans (Average)	Growth (5-year)	Insights
Arsenal	5.0	2,943k	+106.9%	Resurgence drives growth, largely seen as future title-contenders
Manchester City	1.2	2,734k	+85.1%	Massive, sustained success in recent times creating consistent growth
Tottenham	6.0	1,188k	+31.4%	Moderate growth despite frustrations in recent seasons

High Growth Teams (>50% growth): These teams span multiple performance tiers, suggesting American fans are attracted to compelling narratives beyond just league position:

- Newcastle United (970% - ownership story, European push)
- Southampton (505% - Championship “yo-yo” effect)
- Arsenal (107% - return to form)
- Manchester City (85% - sustained success)

Negative Growth Teams: All declining teams (except (West Ham United) average 12th position or lower, confirming the threshold below which American interest wanes:

- Wolves (-76% from 11.4 position)
- Leeds United (-74% from 17.8 position)
- Burnley (-56% from 17.0 position)

Fanbase Growth by Club (All Figures in Thousands)

Team	Avg Pos	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Avg Fans	Total Δ	Total %
Arsenal	5.0	1,654	1,987	3,700	3,954	3,422	2,943	+1,768	+106.9%
Aston Villa	10.6	286	20	295	97	423	224	+137	+47.9%
Bournemouth	18.6	-	-	194	90	152	-	-	-
Brentford	16.8	-	-	316	430	190	-	-	-

Team	Avg Pos	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Avg Fans	Total Δ	Total %
Brighton	11.4	221	45	238	229	166	180	-55	-24.9%
Burnley	17.0	432	57	284	236	189	240	-243	-56.3%
Chelsea	5.8	3,167	3,009	4,817	3,897	4,048	3,788	+881	+27.8%
Crystal Palace	12.2	245	309	455	557	425	398	+180	+73.5%
Everton	14.0	417	169	310	100	296	258	-121	-29.0%
Fulham	17.2	262	101	242	118	385	222	+123	+46.9%
Ipswich Town	46.2	-	-	-	-	477	-	-	-
Leeds United	17.8	275	234	611	177	72	274	-203	-73.8%
Leicester	11.4	182	384	148	251	304	254	+122	+67.0%
Liverpool	2.8	2,699	2,711	3,258	4,083	4,363	3,423	+1,664	+61.7%
Luton Town	27.6	-	-	-	71	-	-	-	-
Manchester City	1.2	1,787	2,164	2,886	3,527	3,307	2,734	+1,520	+85.1%
Manchester United	4.4	5,425	9,006	9,139	9,702	9,433	8,541	+4,008	+73.9%
Newcastle United	9.4	50	111	237	609	535	308	+485	+970.0%
Nottingham Forest	24.2	-	-	167	203	274	-	-	-
Sheffield United	19.2	-	31	123	118	44	-	-	-
Southampton	17.0	22	47	143	5	133	70	+111	+504.5%
Tottenham Hotspur	6.0	974	913	1,247	1,527	1,280	1,188	+306	+31.4%
West Brom	25.0	-	89	-	32	-	-	-	-
West Ham	10.4	204	95	267	284	166	203	-38	-18.6%
Wolves	11.4	292	97	59	165	70	137	-222	-76.0%

Year-over-Year Growth Rates

Team	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Arsenal	+20.1%	+86.2%	+6.9%	-13.4%
Aston Villa	-93.0%	+1375.0%	-67.1%	+336.1%
Brighton	-79.6%	+428.9%	-3.8%	-27.5%
Burnley	-86.8%	+398.2%	-16.9%	-19.9%
Chelsea	-5.0%	+60.1%	-19.1%	+3.9%
Crystal Palace	+26.1%	+47.2%	+22.4%	-23.7%
Everton	-59.5%	+83.4%	-67.7%	+196.0%
Fulham	-61.5%	+139.6%	-51.2%	+226.3%
Leeds United	-14.9%	+161.1%	-71.0%	-59.3%
Leicester	+110.9%	-61.5%	+69.6%	+21.1%
Liverpool	+0.4%	+20.2%	+25.3%	+6.9%
Manchester City	+21.1%	+33.4%	+22.2%	-6.2%
Manchester United	+66.0%	+1.5%	+6.2%	-2.8%
Newcastle United	+122.0%	+113.5%	+157.0%	-12.1%
Southampton	+113.6%	+204.3%	-96.5%	+2560.0%
Tottenham Hotspur	-6.3%	+36.6%	+22.5%	-16.2%
West Ham	-53.4%	+181.1%	+6.4%	-41.5%
Wolves	-66.8%	-39.2%	+179.7%	-57.6%

Position vs Fanbase Correlation Analysis

Overall Correlation:

- **Correlation Coefficient:** -0.676
- **Sample Size:** 18 teams with complete data

- **Interpretation:** Strong negative correlation between league position and fanbase size

Group-Specific Correlations:

Big 6:

- **Big 6 Teams:** -0.031 (n=6) - *Virtually no correlation within elite tier*

Position Tier Correlations:

- **Top Tier (1-6):** -0.031 (n=6) - *No correlation within elite teams*
- **Upper Mid (7-10):** N/A (n=1) - *Insufficient sample*
- **Lower Mid (11-14):** +0.383 (n=7) - *Moderate positive correlation*
- **Bottom Tier (15+):** +0.607 (n=4) - *Strong positive correlation*

Growth Performance Groups:

- **High Growth (>50%):** -0.650 (n=8) - *Strong negative correlation*
- **Moderate Growth (0-50%):** -0.681 (n=4) - *Strong negative correlation*
- **Negative Growth (<0%):** +0.780 (n=6) - *Very strong positive correlation*

Manchester United Impact Analysis:

- **With Man United:** -0.676
- **Without Man United:** -0.798
- **Insight from Adjustment:** Manchester United's outsized fanbase relative to recent performance weakens the overall correlation

Performance Tiers Averages

Top Tier (Positions 1-6): 6 teams

- Average fanbase: 3,770k
- Average growth: 64.3%
- Teams: Manchester City, Liverpool, Arsenal, Manchester United, Chelsea, Tottenham

Mid Tier (Positions 7-14): 8 teams

- Average fanbase: 245k

- Average growth: 7.4%

Bottom Tier (Positions 15+): 4 teams

- Average fanbase: 201k
- Average growth: -25.1%

Top Growth Performers

1. Newcastle United: +970.0% (50k → 535k)
2. Southampton: +504.5% (22k → 133k)
3. Arsenal: +106.9% (1,654k → 3,422k)
4. Manchester City: +85.1% (1,787k → 3,307k)
5. Manchester United: +73.9% (5,425k → 9,433k)

Worst Growth Performers

1. Wolves: -76.0% (292k → 70k)
2. Leeds United: -73.8% (275k → 72k)
3. Burnley: -56.3% (432k → 189k)
4. Everton: -29.0% (417k → 296k)
5. Brighton: -24.9% (221k → 166k)

Special Case Studies

Newcastle United: The Saudi Effect

Overview: Newcastle United represents the most dramatic fanbase transformation in the dataset, achieving 970% growth following their 2021 ownership change. This impressive growth in American fans further supports the conclusion that success drives American interest, as the club continues to make high-profile signings and push for more European success. Manager Eddie Howe has also brought a very attractive style of play to the club, with Newcastle scoring the 2nd most goals in the Premier League going into the final game of the season. Alexander Isak, the club's main threat in attack, is gaining the attention of fans everywhere, while Sandro Tonali has been nothing short of dominant in midfield since returning from a ban he received for gambling violations just two seasons ago. Below is a

table that showcases Newcastle’s incredible growth and highlights the importance of success and entertainment for American fans.

Year	Position	Fans(k)	YoY Change	YoY %	Key Moments
2020	13th	50	-	-	Pre-takeover baseline
2021	12th	111	+61	+122.0%	Saudi ownership takeover
2022	11th	237	+126	+113.5%	Major signings, improved performance
2023	4th	609	+372	+157.0%	Champions League qualification
2024	7th	535	-74	-12.1%	Champions League campaign and another top-half finish

Key Insights:

- **Investment Impact:** The Saudi ownership change created immediate interest, with American fans likely viewing it as a promise of future success
- **Performance Correlation:** Each improvement in league position corresponded with accelerated fan growth
- **Peak Year:** 2023 saw the largest absolute increase (+372k fans) coinciding with Champions League qualification, the club’s first such achievement since its last Champions League campaign in the 2003/2004 season.
- **Stabilization:** 2024 shows signs of fanbase stabilization despite slight position decline. The club has since secured European competition for the 2025/2026 season and is fighting for another Champions League birth

Leeds United: The Struggles of Relegation

Overview: As a club with three English titles, the return of Leeds United to the Premier League for the first time since 2004 captured the attention of soccer fans globally. Manager Marcelo Bielsa was central to this achievement, with his team playing in a very aggressive manner that was uncommon for newly promoted teams. Normally, newly promoted teams will seek to remain defensively compact, and score goals from counterattacks. After an incredibly successful season in their return campaign, Leeds struggled to replicate the same success. This eventually led to the firing of Marcelo Bielsa in 2022, with American Jesse Marsch taking the reins immediately after and bringing the club back to safety.

However, this safety was short lived, and Leeds were relegated again in 2023 following Marsh's sacking in February. Leeds United demonstrates how relegation and poor performance over time can have a seriously negative impact on an American fanbase, with a 73.8% decline from peak to trough. The club has since returned to the Premier League following a 1st place finish in the 2024/2025 Championship.

Year	Position	Fans(k)	YoY Change	YoY %	Notes
2020	21 st *	275	-	-	Promoted to Premier League for first time since 2004
2021	9 th	234	-41	-14.9%	Solid first season back
2022	17 th	611	+377	+161.1%	Fans interested following successful campaign and in midst of tense relegation battle
2023	19 th	177	-434	-71.0%	Relegated to Championship
2024	23 rd	72	-105	-59.3%	Championship campaign, initially failed to gain promotion back to Premier League

*Note: Position 21 indicates promoted team

Key Insights:

- **Promotion Boost and Success:** The 2022 peak (+161.1%) shows American interest in the "Leeds story," with the team providing an entertaining style to remind of their former success
- **Relegation Collapse:** 2023 relegation caused a 71% fanbase decline
- **Championship Effect:** American fans largely abandon teams outside Premier League, with the team continuing to lose American fans after falling short of promotion

Aston Villa: Volatility and Recovery

Overview: Arguably the most successful club of these three, Aston Villa possess a European Cup, seven English titles, seven FA Cups, and five League Cups. Unfortunately, their success does not coincide with the rise of English soccer in America, having failed to win a major trophy since the turn of the century. The team looks destined to return to its winning roots, securing back-to-back-to-back seasons in Europe and solidifying

themselves in the top quarter of the league table. Aston Villa showcase the extreme volatility in American fanbase, with dramatic swings corresponding to performance fluctuations.

Year	Position	Fans(k)	YoY Change	YoY %	Notes
2020	17th	286	-	-	Controversy surrounding their survival
2021	11th	20	-266	-93.0%	Some improvement and general safety
2022	14th	295	+275	+1375.0%	Lower-mid-table stability followed by Unai Emery's appointment and significant ambition in signings
2023	7th	97	-198	-67.1%	Qualification for UEFA's Europa Conference League
2024	4th	423	+326	+336.1%	Return to the Champions League

Key Insights:

- **Extreme Volatility:** Villa shows the highest year-over-year swings in the dataset, which correspond with the extreme volatility in their performances in the early 2020s
- **Recovery Pattern:** Strong correlation between improved performance and fanbase recovery, a trend that is likely to continue as the club proceeds with its ambitions
- **Champions League Appeal:** 2024's top 4 finish generated significant American interest, highlighting that Americans prefer success and will identify with it when possible

Cross-Case Analysis

Common Patterns:

Performance Sensitivity: All three teams show strong correlation between league position and fanbase changes

- **American Fan Behavior:** US fans appear highly responsive to success narratives and trending teams like Newcastle and Aston Villa, and tend to drift away from teams that looked threatened by relegation

- **Breaking Points:** Relegation serves as a critical threshold for fanbase retention, and teams that survive have an opportunity to gain the attention of American fans
- **Recovery Potential:** Teams can rebuild American followings through sustained performance improvements, as well as showing ambition during transfer windows and appointing managers that reflect this ambition

Divergent Outcomes:

- **Investment vs Performance:** Newcastle's ownership changes accelerated growth beyond performance improvements, with foreign investment helping to generate a narrative in the media and, consequently, commercial appeal
- **Volatility Patterns:** Aston Villa shows more dramatic swings than other teams with similar positions. This could be the result of excitement surrounding a successful club's return to power

Possible Explanations for American Preferences

- **Habit:** Americans have never dealt with the idea of relegation for their hometown team. Instead, they just wait for the first pick in the next draft, which brings hope for the future. In soccer, relegation can be detrimental to clubs and even threaten their existence, highlighted by the collapse of once-prominent clubs such as Schalke 04 in Germany. The club was recently threatened with bankruptcy if they were relegated from the 2. Bundesliga. Fortunately, they survived
- **TV Coverage:** Following English soccer as an American is not cheap. For typical fans to watch all their clubs' matches, they will need access to cable networks, as well as Peacock, Paramount Plus, and ESPN+ for all league games additional competitions. Fans may feel less inclined to continue paying to support their teams if performances are not optimal
- **Market Saturation:** Americans have no shortage of professional sports to follow, with most larger cities having multiple professional organizations within or nearby, such as NFL, NBA, MLB, MLS and NHL teams. These seasons often overlap with the Premier League calendar, whereas the clubs in the English leagues have relatively zero competitors within their cities and neighborhoods, except for the occasional rugby club

Conclusion

The analysis reveals a rapidly growing but increasingly sophisticated American Premier League fanbase that has expanded by 62.3% over four years, reaching over 30 million fans by 2024. However, the first decline in 2024 suggests the market may be looking for a new story following a great period of Manchester City dominance.

Key Strategic Implications:

1. **Multi-Tier Market Dynamics:** The correlation analysis reveals fundamentally different dynamics across team tiers. Elite teams operate in a brand-driven market where historical success trumps recent performance, while lower-tier teams face an unforgiving performance-based market where fan loyalty is fragile.
2. **The Manchester United Phenomenon:** As the ultimate outlier with the largest fanbase (8.5M on average) despite inconsistent performance, Manchester United demonstrate that established global brands can maintain American support even through periods of decline. This suggests established marketing investment and historical narratives have lasting power.
3. **Mid-Tier Opportunity and Challenge:** The paradoxical positive correlation within mid-tier teams (11-14th positions) suggests this segment represents both opportunity and danger. Established clubs can coast on reputation temporarily, but newly promoted teams struggle to gain traction even with similar performance levels.
4. **Success Amplification Effect:** High-growth teams show a strong negative correlation with position (-0.650), indicating that success creates significant appeal. American fans not only follow winning teams but amplify their growth in the country through social media and word-of-mouth effects.
5. **Relegation Cliff:** The strong positive correlation (+0.780) among declining teams confirms that relegation or sustained poor performance creates a dramatic falloff in American interest. Teams face existential threats to their US fanbase when performance deteriorates.
6. **Narrative-Driven Growth:** Newcastle's extraordinary 970% growth demonstrates that compelling ownership stories and investment narratives can transcend pure performance metrics (which remain strong), suggesting content and storytelling remain crucial for fanbase development.

Market Structure Insights:

The American Premier League fanbase operates as three distinct markets:

- **Elite Market (Big 6):** Brand-driven, relatively stable, and less performance-sensitive. These clubs have established fanbases through decades of success and high-level performances, with legendary managers, players and moments that define them
- **Mid-Tier Market:** Performance-sensitive fans but legacy effects may exist for established clubs such as Everton
- **Lower-Tier Market:** Highly volatile, performance-dependent, and relegation-averse, fans of teams in the lower tier are highly sensitive to change in their teams' fortunes

Outlook:

The 2024 decline signals a potential inflection point for American Premier League fandom. Continued growth will likely require:

- **Tier-Specific Strategies:** Elite teams should focus on brand maintenance and nation-wide appeal, while lower-tier teams must capitalize immediately on any success windows
- **Performance Threshold Recognition:** Teams consistently below 12th position face severe American fanbase risks, which is a trend that is observed across American sports
- **Narrative Investment:** Given Newcastle's success, teams should invest in compelling storylines beyond pure performance to ensure the growth of support
- **Warning to USL:** Relegation is highly destructive for the American fanbase of English clubs. Maintaining support for USL clubs who are relegated in the future will be critical to the success of the league's new model

The data suggests American Premier League fandom has evolved from casual interest to a sophisticated, multi-tier market that rewards success, punishes failure, and responds to narratives. The correlation analysis reveals this isn't a simple performance-fanbase relationship but a complex ecosystem where position in the hierarchy determines which factors drive American fan engagement. For the USL's newest league model to be a success and for it to rival, or even surpass MLS, it must ensure that relegated teams are not simply left behind and instead are helped by the creation of compelling narratives to retain the attention of supporters.

Sources

Anthropic. (2025, May). *ClaudeAI* (Claude Sonnet 4). <https://claude.ai/chat/939ed5f9-6228-4e34-b968-65f82116b086>

SBRnet. (2021). *Sports Fan 2020 Soccer Non-USA*. Retrieved from SBRnet:
<https://sportsmarketanalytics-com.ezproxy.samford.edu/Sports/Team-Sports/Soccer.aspx>

SBRnet. (2021). *Sports Fan 2020 Soccer Non-USA*. Retrieved from SBRnet:
<https://sportsmarketanalytics-com.ezproxy.samford.edu/Sports/Team-Sports/Soccer.aspx>

SBRnet. (2022). *Sports Fan 2021 Soccer Non-USA*. Retrieved from SBRnet:
<https://sportsmarketanalytics-com.ezproxy.samford.edu/Sports/Team-Sports/Soccer.aspx>

SBRnet. (2023). *Sports Fan 2022 Soccer Non-USA*. Retrieved from SBRnet:
<https://sportsmarketanalytics-com.ezproxy.samford.edu/Sports/Team-Sports/Soccer.aspx>

SBRnet. (2024). *Sports Fan 2023 Soccer Non-USA*. Retrieved from SBRnet:
<https://sportsmarketanalytics-com.ezproxy.samford.edu/Sports/Team-Sports/Soccer.aspx>

SBRnet. (2025). *Sports Fan 2024 Soccer Non-USA*. Retrieved from SBRnet:
<https://sportsmarketanalytics-com.ezproxy.samford.edu/Sports/Team-Sports/Soccer.aspx>