



**Case Study:**

Coors Light

Year: 2021



This case study was prepared for the client Coors Light to lobby for Tom Flores, Latino football pioneer, to finally be inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame. It was developed and designed by Alma. In the Mainstream Impact category, it won gold.

## Executive Summary:

When you want to match your competitors' presence in America's biggest sport, but only have a local activation budget to compete against their national sponsorship, what do you do?

You lean into your local audience's grievances to create a national story. Coors Light did just that by championing Tom Flores, one of the most accomplished coaches in National Football League history and first minority to hold that position. Despite Flores' illustrious career as both coach and player, he had endured two decades of being denied American Football's highest honor: inclusion into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Flores had been nearly forgotten by the same league he impacted. By publicly advocating for him, Coors Light parlayed its local budget into a national conversation among Latino football fans and fans of the Raiders (the brand's local team partner in Las Vegas with a following encompassing the western US), giving them a platform to question why the Hall of Fame overlooked the Raiders' deserving, and very chill, ex-coach. As a result, the brand received significant lifts in national recall, consideration, and penetration---while coach Flores was inducted into the Hall of Fame in February 2021, finally vindicated with the recognition he deserves.

## Definition of your Challenge:

As the second largest light beer in America, Coors Light already enjoyed great brand awareness among Latino drinkers. However, it found itself lagging category competitors in *immediate* consideration, therefore struggling to stay consistently "top of mind." To close the gap, the world's "chillest" beer saw a great opportunity: making a splash during the 2020-21 season of America's most popular sports property: The National Football League. Despite Latinos' passion and contributions to the sport, brands and the media rarely acknowledge them as part of it. Representation matters, and Coors Light wanted to make that known.

There was one small problem: even though it wanted to create national impact, Coors Light only had a local partnership with the Las Vegas Raiders—compared to other competitor's nation-wide league sponsorships.

The task, then, was to do something with its Raiders partnership that wouldn't just impact Latino consumers in Raiders markets, but also snowball into national impact.

Accordingly, Coors Light set its business and marketing goals as if this were a national effort:

- The brand wanted national buzz for this local effort: 400 million impressions, with 500 million as the stretch goal, all of course with a reasonable cost per impression.
- This buzz should help close the consideration gap with Latinos (17% lower compared to General Market), and raise the brand's immediate ad awareness with the segment to levels closer to its main competitors.
- Finally, although hard to attribute to one campaign, the hope was to see a sales lift of at least 2.6%

While national attention was our goal, we had to get it by exciting the Raiders fan base enough that it spilled over into national awareness. Accordingly, we segmented fans among Coors Light's target (beer drinkers age 21-34) into two core segments and a "spillover" segment:

- ***Core segment #1, Raider Nation:*** this fanbase is the closest to its own subculture, one always ready to make ruckus for efforts authentic to their team's interests and lore.
- ***Core segment #2, Latino football fans:*** the main source of current NFL fan growth and already 30% of Raiders fans. Although rarely acknowledged as contributors to American Football culture, they presented strong potential as advocates if made to feel specifically appreciated.
- ***Spillover segment, football fans nationally:*** incessantly marketed to, getting their attention without blanketing the national airwaves meant doing something that felt very different from a typical sports partnership.

## The Key Insight & Strategy:

We learned that Raiders and Latino fans both felt disrespected by the larger football world. Latinos saw their history of contributions to the sport as largely ignored, and Raiders fans considered their team persecuted by a biased league.

But there was one particularly painful grievance both shared, which ended up being our “A-ha!” moment: A common cause they’d advocated for years, yet everyone else had ignored. A cause Coors Light could champion.

All it needed to do was partner with an 83-year-old who left the NFL 25 years ago. Enter Tom Flores, a Latino ex-Raider who, despite winning four Super Bowls and being the first minority head coach in NFL history, had been denied entry into the Pro Football Hall of Fame for twenty years.

Or, as Raider Nation put it: “twenty f@%!ing years!”

Raider fans thought it was because the league didn’t like their “bad boy” image. Some Latinos blamed racial bias. Whatever the reason, the yearly wave of discontent from these poor fans during “Hall Season” had become its own twisted tradition.

Despite starting out as a local effort, we saw why backing Tom Flores lent itself to national interest:

- Our core target already cared deeply about him and would amplify our campaign
- His story spoke to larger inclusivity questions that America was thinking about
- No brand had ever backed an individual’s inclusion into a sport’s hall of fame, giving this effort a touch of novelty and even controversy

Though purists could take umbrage to a brand meddling with the Hall, here’s what iced our resolve: Flores was known for being so calm (so “chill”), he was nicknamed the “Iceman.” It fit Coors Light so perfectly, haters couldn’t deny it’s right to get involved. As the champion of chill, it was natural for Coors Light to back the chilliest of champions.

## Execution:

Our tactics focused on the four-week “Hall of Fame window.” January falls between the Hall’s finalist announcement (a stage Flores consistently reached in previous years) and the committee’s final vote on Super Bowl weekend (which he consistently lost). We planned our media accordingly, sacrificing presence during the NFL regular season (Sept-Dec), but maximizing our local budget by compressing it into a short window and speaking to a topic that no other brand would own. An online petition served as the central hub, the most natural choice for channeling public pressure in favor of Flores. To amplify participation, signees were encouraged to recruit others via the hashtag #FloresToCanton (Canton, Ohio being home to the Hall of Fame, which we couldn’t name—love you, lawyers!).

In key Raiders markets, we released a special “Iceman Can” featuring Flores’ face and Coors Light’s statement of support. We knew this would accelerate regional sales, but most importantly drive additional national conversation from people trying to hunt it down. It also served as a great unboxing prop during influencer engagement. We announced the petition through a TV/OLV spot featuring Flores with his namesake can, where you see him shrugging when asked why he wasn’t in the Hall of Fame. Though it aired just twice during the NFL playoffs, it was enough to drive an initial wave of conversation.

We then ramped up online engagement closer to the vote through online “Iceman vignettes” and had a celebratory spot “in the can,” for when (and if) he finally made the Hall. Finally, we made the cause front and center to the committee for the final vote during the fourth and final week of our window. As the committee gathered to vote, we executed two acts in the Hall’s hometown, Canton, Ohio, to keep Tom top of mind:

- Created and displayed an "Ice Bust" of Flores, a fun nod to the bronze busts Hall of Famers get *and* to Coors Light's ice-cold brand equity
- A mobile LED truck displaying the tweets and signatures supporting Tom, reminding the committee of the many people who were behind the Iceman



**Results:**

We hit a nerve and yielded national fame beyond all expectations, doubling our impressions STRETCH goal:

- 1 billion impressions
- Spent 84% less per M impressions than projected
- PLUS 76.9 M earned social media impressions
- The petition also achieved 10.5k signatures, growing Coors Light's email list

We sparked debate and earned placements in 95 national media outlets, which fueled the additional (and overwhelmingly positive) attention. Questions such as *"Was there bias against Flores in the past?"* and *"Should a brand be taking sides in the Hall of Fame process?"* proved enticing storylines for sportswriters and publications that usually ignore advertising.

Despite the debate the brand sparked, the reaction regarding Coors Light was overwhelmingly positive:

- Press mentions were 94% positive or neutral, surpassing the 75% goal
- Mentions of the brand on social media (half of which alluded to the campaign) reached a peak of 92% positivity during the campaign's first week, 11 pts above Coors Light's average positives
- 35% of "Tom Flores" social posts during the period mentioned Coors Light by name

Brand recall also tripled among Latinos, helping Coors Light achieve a larger year-over-year brand ad awareness jump within the segment than any direct competitor:

- 28% ad awareness and 31% brand recall among 21+ Latinos.
- Growth of 75% YOY, a 9-point rise that helped the brand pass Michelob Ultra and put them on par with Bud Light

Additionally, national recall almost doubled the brand's 2020 average:

- 15% ad awareness and 20.8% brand recall among age 21+ Americans; up from 8% and 11%, respectively.

All of this resulted in a 75% consideration increase among ALL 21+ drinkers, while positive perceptions of Coors Light also increased by 50%. The campaign's TV asset even achieved strong penetration lift despite only airing three times in four weeks:

- A .23% penetration lift overall, second among the brand's TV assets in driving penetration among all Americans aged 21-34
- It was also the top performer among Latinos of the same age

The campaign also contributed to a rebound in sales lift:

- 3.12% in January—the best performing month since the pandemic began
- The special Iceman cans did their part, enjoying widespread adoption among accounts in key Raiders markets (such as selling out in a single day in Flores' hometown of Sanger, CA)
- Cans also cropped up on eBay within days after the campaign, fetching up to \$27 for one can

All of this was great for Coors Light, but at the end of the day we were doing this for Tom. And while business success may be fleeting, we wanted his legacy to live forever. That was the best result: after 20 years, the Hall of Fame finally stopped giving The Iceman the cold shoulder and voted to grant the Latino legend his rightful place in football history. Not bad for a brief meant to impact only one local market.

## **Industry Impact:**

### ***Meaningful specificity drives universal fame***

No story is too "local" for national attention if the people who care about it care deeply enough to make a lot of noise. Despite the campaign being for the Raiders on paper, we correctly bet that their fan's motivation to amplify Tom's story would make it national.

### ***People respect when your brand gambles on uncertain outcomes***

There's a reason most branded sports partnerships are forgettable: they don't put anything on the line. If brands act like real fans, they face the possibility of losing like real fans. Most brands fear that possibility.

Tom Flores could have been rejected by the Hall, even after Coors Light's campaign. And yet, being willing to be on the "losing" side of a cause is what made the brand's gesture feel extra notable—and meaningful—to audiences.

### ***Steady, short yardage gains score you the touchdown***

We launched early (four weeks before Hall voting) and paced subsequent brand acts closer to the HOF vote. This helped drive additional impressions by making every new story about Tom a reminder of our campaign.