

ON SPORTS FANS

BY SEAN GREGORY

Williams has all that information. He's spent the past three years developing new camera software that scans facial expressions to identify fan behaviors—think cheering, jeering, talking on a cell phone—in real time at a stadium. So a company can measure, for example, how many eyeballs are attached to a Jumbotron ad (are fans looking?) *and* how well it's being received (are they laughing? Smiling? Fiddling on their phones and ignoring it?).

In other words, it's like Nielsen ratings for crowd behavior at a sports event. Says one NFL executive, who watched Williams unveil his creation at the annual MIT Sloan Sports Analytics conference in early March: "That information is incredibly valuable."

Naturally, the tech raises privacy concerns. But Williams says stadiums that use it won't be recording actual footage of fans—at least not more than they already do for TV. The data appear more like a heat map, with different color splotches indicating different behaviors. Getting that kind of detailed feedback could encourage team owners to improve their ads and promotions—and, heck, even their teams—to create a more engaging experience and ultimately sell more tickets.

Williams says his service will get a slow rollout starting with one pro-sports organization in late summer. If that works well, it's not hard to imagine the program spreading to most stadiums—and similar tech popping up in airports, concert venues and even your local shopping mall.

CHEERING

This crucial metric allows teams to reward excitement: encourage the most enthusiastic section with a discount. Perhaps that noise can inspire the home team to victory

WHAT THE TECH CAN SEE

STANDING

Too many fans standing in a section, especially during mundane moments, may signal an obstructed view. This info can help improve architectural design

EATING

If fans in certain sections tend to chow down more than others, stadiums can send servers over to take orders and increase profits

TEXTING

For fans who are addicted to their smartphones, a team can take advantage by offering interactive apps or creating trivia contests that people can enter via text

TALKING ON THE PHONE

Unless they're bragging to their pals about their seats, this is likely a sign of fan indifference. But strong in-stadium mobile coverage can create customer loyalty

SITTING

Fanalytics gurus label this a low-sentiment activity; this is sports, not the theater. Stadiums could shoot more T-shirts toward these areas in order to raise hype

DRINKING

When are fans more likely to pick up an ice-cold soda or beer? Stadiums can dispatch vendors depending on what they find