

March 19, 2024

BeerBoard: St. Patrick's Day Draft Volume Tanks Without March Madness Boost

Jessica Infante March 19, 2024

Draft beer volume declined -20% during St. Patrick's Day weekend, due in part to this year's misalignment of the drinking-centric holiday and March Madness, according to on-premise data firm BeerBoard.

In addition, St. Patrick's Day itself fell on Sunday, instead of Friday, as it did in 2023, BeerBoard noted in its report comparing March 14-17, 2024 to March 17-20, 2023.

The holiday being on Friday last year meant that "revelers were more apt to celebrate all weekend long," BeerBoard said. Meanwhile, the first round of the NCAA men's college basketball tournament kicks off March 21, so "on-premise retailers haven't seen the lift from fans enjoying that first weekend of wall-to-wall college basketball coverage," the firm noted.

Last year's confluence of events resulted in draft volume increasing +20.8% over 2022, and +81.3% over 2021. Without a basketball-infused boost, those gains seem to have evaporated.

But on-premise draft declines may indicate larger problems than just calendar hiccups.

"When taking a deeper look at on-premise trends, we found that draft volume month-to-date (March 1 through March 17) is down -34% when compared to the same period in 2023," BeerBoard wrote. "This means retailers actually saw a spike in draft volume for the holiday weekend."

During St. Patrick's Day weekend, light lagers' share of draft volume declined -3.7% as consumers gravitated toward "higher-priced, higher-margin product," according to BeerBoard.

Lagers may have absorbed some of light lagers' share loss. The style gained +1.4% in share, followed by stouts/porters (+0.82%) and wheats/hefeweizens (+0.6%).

Driven by Guinness, stouts more than doubled their share of draft volume for the weekend. Diageo-owned Guinness increased its share by 125%, to 2.92%, from 1.3% during non-holiday periods. Stouts increased share by 101%.

In style rankings, stouts were the seventh most popular style poured on draft. Typically the No. 14 brand on draft, Guinness peaked at No. 9 on St. Patrick's Day, according to BeerBoard.

Guinness was the most poured beer in Syracuse, New York – BeerBoard's hometown and host of a raucous St. Patrick's Day parade. The Irish stout accounted for 11.1% of all draft beer sales in Syracuse during the weekend, a +192% increase from its base of 3.79%, BeerBoard reported.

Nationwide, although light lagers have declined in share as a style, one brand posted impressive year-over-year (YoY) share growth during the weekend: Coors Light, which gained 2.17% in share.

Molson Coors-owned Coors Light and its sister brand Miller Lite have been the beneficiaries of Anheuser-Busch InBev-owned (A-B) Bud Light's calamitous share loss, which began a few weeks after St. Patrick's Day last year amid an elongated conservative-led boycott of the brand.

Following Coors Light's share gain, Constellation Brands' Modelo Especial gained +1.01% in share, and Guinness gained +0.73% YoY nationwide.

Among packaged products, lagers accounted for 38.4% of sales, followed by light lagers (34.69%) and hard seltzers and ready-to-drink cocktails (7.67%), which BeerBoard tracks as a combined style.

The top three brands in package were all beers: Constellation-owned Corona Extra (17.95%), A-B-owned Michelob Ultra (12.42%) and Miller Lite (8.15%).

Bourbon/whiskey led spirits, with 26.04% of sales, followed by tequila/mezcal (17.1%) and vodka (17.08%), according to BeerBoard.

Tito's Vodka was the most popular spirit (8.14%), followed by Jameson Irish Whisky (5.72%) and Patron Silver tequila (3.97%).