



For Immediate Release

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PDF version; crosstabs; website: [American Sports Fanship Survey](https://www.americansportsfanshipsurvey.com/) / sbu.edu/communication

New Siena/St. Bonaventure Survey Reveals: 70% of Americans Say They Are Sports Fans, Nearly Half Engage Daily or Several Times Every Week

Overwhelming Majorities Watch Football to Bond with Family and Friends; Watching Football Teaches Teamwork, Strategy and Leadership; 27% Say Football Is Too Violent

*Dallas Cowboys – America’s Most Liked and Hated NFL Team;
Tom Brady, Joe Montana Most Popular ‘Current’ and Past NFL Players*

NOTE: This is First of Three Releases – “Sports Fanship and Football”

February 3, 2023 – Seventy percent of Americans say they are sports fans, according to a new national survey of more than 3,200 United States residents released today by the Siena College Research Institute and St. Bonaventure University’s Jandoli School of Communication.

Twenty-one percent of Americans are “Avid” fans who watch sports, sports news, talk about sports, check scores and in many cases play fantasy sports almost every single day, while another 26% of “Involved” fans engage with sports at least several times weekly.

Heading into Super Bowl week, 72% of Americans say they are football fans, even if they don’t consider themselves sports fans. Eighty-three percent watch football to bond with family and friends, 81% “because it’s fun” and 65% “because it is exciting.” Eighty-two percent say that they learn about teamwork by watching football, while 79% learn about strategy and 72% learn about leadership. At the same time, more than a quarter of Americans (27%) say that football is too violent.

“Sports in general and football specifically are central to who we are and what we do as a nation and as individuals,” said Aaron Chimbél, dean of St. Bonaventure’s Jandoli School of Communication. “It connects communities, families and friends in ways that no other sport does, and it is important to understand why and how football is part of our social fabric.”

Fan Favorites: Cowboys, Brady and Montana

“America’s Team” is also its most divisive. When asked which NFL team they most like or hate, Americans most often named the Dallas Cowboys for both. Tom Brady is the most popular ‘active’ NFL player, and Joe Montana is the most popular former NFL player. Patrick Mahomes and Aaron Rodgers were tied for second-most popular current player, while Brett Favre, Peyton Manning and Walter Payton finished behind Montana among former players.

“Since this survey was conducted prior to Brady’s retirement announcement, one wonders if Montana’s standing as most popular former player will last with the GOAT now in the former player category. It looks like Mahomes may move into the top spot as current favorite, but maybe Super Bowl LVII will influence how the fans feel,” Chimbel said.

Four Distinct Categories of Sports Fanship Identified

While 70% of Americans – including 81% of men and 60% of women – consider themselves sports fans, the Siena/St. Bonaventure survey also identified four distinct categories of fanship – Avid, Involved, Casual and Non-Fan – based on how often people engage in sports fan activities: watching live sports, listening to live sports, watching sports news or sports talk, checking scores, talking about sports with friends or family and playing fantasy sports.

Avid fans do each of those activities almost every day, while Non-Fans rarely or never do any of them. Twenty-one percent of Americans – 31% of men and 12% of women – are Avid fans (engaged daily). Twenty-six percent are Involved fans (engaged multiple times per week), while 26% are Casual fans (interested, but only engaged occasionally). More than a quarter of all Americans (27%) – 19% of men and 35% of women – are Non-Fans.

“For Avid fans, sports are woven into their lives every day, all day. They watch the games, listen to talk shows, check scores and banter with friends about sports constantly. Involved fans love the games but don’t engage every day, while a casual fan is more likely to check in on the weekends. The remaining quarter of Americans may watch a game infrequently, but sports are just not front and center all the time,” said Don Levy, Siena College Research Institute Director.

In conjunction with the Siena/St. Bonaventure survey, interested people can take an exclusive [“fanship quiz”](#) to determine their own status and how they compare to other Americans across a number of fanship categories.

America Loves Football

Seventy-two percent of all Americans – including 97% of Avid fans and 92% of Involved fans – identify as football fans. Forty-seven percent say football is their favorite sport, including 77% of Avid fans and a

majority of men (52%). For those who said another sport was their favorite, 24% each identified baseball and basketball, 17% said soccer and 10% said hockey is their favorite sport.

Regionally, the Cowboys carry the South (15% of fans), the Giants lead the Northeast (17% of fans), the Bears are the Midwest favorite (14%) and the 49ers top the West (13%). The Cowboys are “most hated” in every geographic region except the Midwest, where the Packers top the list at 14%. Small-market teams – Green Bay, Kansas City and Buffalo – are among the seven most liked teams across the country.

“Do we watch football? Absolutely. Seventy-two percent of Americans watch live NFL games, including more than 90% of Involved and Avid fans, nearly 80% of men and even 27% of Non-Fans. A majority – 58% of all Americans – watch NFL games live more than two hours a week and 35% of Avid fans watch six or more hours of NFL football every week,” Levy said.

“These findings underscore the National Football League’s success in making its sport truly national, with fanship transcending traditional geographic boundaries and population centers,” said Chimbel. “The league has made its product perhaps the last remaining bit of ‘Must-See’ television programming.”

Why Do We Watch Football? Let Us Count the Ways

Watching football brings Americans together – even when they don’t enjoy other activities with their friends and families. Eighty-three percent of Americans enjoy watching football with their families, followed closely by 81% who say that watching football with friends is fun. Seventy percent say that watching their favorite team is very important to them, two-thirds (67%) say watching football is one of their favorite activities and 65% say it is more exciting than many other things they could be doing. Fifty-nine percent say watching football gives them a chance to eat and drink.

People Watch Football for Many Reasons							
	Total	Avid	Involved	Casual	Non-fan	Men	Women
<i>Enjoy with family even if we can't do much else together and enjoy each other</i>	83%	93%	86%	79%	67%	82%	85%
<i>Watching with friends is fun</i>	81%	93%	85%	74%	59%	81%	81%
<i>Watching favorite team is must see TV</i>	70%	94%	81%	54%	23%	74%	65%
<i>It is one of my favorite activities</i>	67%	95%	77%	50%	21%	75%	59%
<i>It's more exciting than many other things I could be doing</i>	65%	91%	72%	52%	23%	70%	60%
<i>Gives me a chance to eat and drink</i>	59%	80%	62%	49%	32%	60%	59%
<i>Watch to keep track of my fantasy team</i>	33%	72%	32%	12%	3%	38%	28%
<i>Enjoy pretending to be the coach while watching</i>	33%	65%	32%	16%	7%	39%	27%
<i>Watch to keep track of my bets</i>	30%	62%	28%	12%	5%	35%	23%
Siena / St. Bonaventure American Sports Fanship Survey - February 3, 2023							

What Football Does For Us: Big Pluses, and Some Minuses

Large majorities of all Americans think that football brings people and families together (82%), that you can learn about teamwork (82%) and strategy (79%) by watching football and that the game teaches leadership (72%) skills.

A majority (52%) say that NFL players serve as good role models – though that number varies greatly by age group: 60% of those between 18-34 years old agree, while only 37% of those over 65 years old do.

“Despite majorities of Americans saying that many core American values including teamwork, family togetherness and leadership can be learned from football, some are concerned about elements of the game. More than one-third (37%) say that football is too dangerous for young people to play and just over a quarter of Americans – including nearly 40% of non-fans – say that football is too violent,” Levy said. (Note: The survey was conducted the same week that Buffalo Bills player Damar Hamlin suffered cardiac arrest after making a tackle during a nationally-televised game.)

“Although about a third of Americans are both concerned about football being too violent and too dangerous for kids to play, and that professional football players are being exploited for our enjoyment, majorities of all Americans disagree,” Levy said. “Football is a sport that most people say they love to watch with family and friends and not only does it thrill them, but it teaches important life lessons as they enjoy the excitement.”

Siena and St. Bonaventure will release findings specific to America’s love affair with the Super Bowl on Monday, February 6. Survey findings specific to societal and cultural issues related to sports and football will be released on Wednesday, February 8.

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The American Sports Fanship Survey was conducted January 3 - 8, 2023, among 3201 responses drawn from a proprietary online panel (Lucid) of United States Residents. Data was statistically adjusted by age, region, race/ethnicity, education, and gender to ensure representativeness. It has an overall margin of error of +/- 1.8 percentage points including the design effects resulting from weighting. The Siena College Research Institute, directed by Donald Levy, Ph.D., conducts political, economic, social, and cultural research primarily in NYS. SCRI, an independent, non-partisan research institute, subscribes to the American Association of Public Opinion Research Code of Professional Ethics and Practices. For more information or comments, please call Dr. Don Levy at 518-783-2901. St. Bonaventure University’s Jandoli School of Communication, offers multiple undergraduate and graduate degrees in sports journalism, marketing and related fields. For more information or comments, please contact Dean Aaron Chimbel at 716-365-2040.