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PDF version; crosstabs; website: [American Sports Fanship Survey](#) / sbu.edu/communication

Siena/St. Bonaventure Annual Sports Fanship Survey: Part 2 – Issues in Sport Today

61% Say Football Promotes Values Making America Better; By 57-14% Football Does More to Overcome not Perpetuate Discrimination; Strong Support for ‘Rooney Rule’ and Displaying ‘End Racism’ on Helmets

4 in 10 Say NFL Not Doing Enough Penalizing Domestic Abusers or Players that Committed Sexual Assault; 79% Support Rule Changes to Lessen Brain Injuries; Only 26% Say NFL Doing Excellent Job Protecting Athletes

NIL Good for Sports, 44-33%; Americans Mixed on College Transfer Portal; Majority Think Streaming Services Good for Sports; 55% Have Subscribed

NOTE: This is Second of Three Releases – “Issues in Sport Today”

Release 3 – Online Sports Betting – Tues 2/18

February 11, 2025 – By 61-14% Americans say that professional football promotes values that make the United States a better country according to a new poll of residents released today by the Siena College Research Institute (SCRI) and St. Bonaventure University’s Jandoli School of Communication. A large majority, 57-14%, say that professional football does more to overcome racial discrimination in America than it does to perpetuate it and by 61-24% they support athletes having slogans including ‘End Racism’ on their helmets. By 54-15% they think the Rooney Rule requiring teams to conduct interviews with minority candidates for vacant coaching jobs is good for sports.

“As the politics of DEI – diversity, equity and inclusion – are being heatedly debated, this survey finds respondents think football promotes core American values and the sport works to overcome not perpetuate discrimination,” said Aaron Chimbel, dean of St. Bonaventure University’s Jandoli School of Communication, “A decided majority support a policy that some might consider DEI that promotes minority coaches getting an opportunity to be hired for the top jobs and an overwhelming majority supports players or teams displaying slogans including ‘End racism’ on the back of their helmet or on the field.”

Respondents identify several issues on which the NFL still needs to improve. Significant pluralities say that the NFL is not penalizing athletes enough where there is evidence of them committing domestic violence (39%) or sexual assault (40%). Only 26% of Americans say that the NFL is doing an excellent job protecting athletes from concussions and related brain injuries and there is overwhelming support, 79-8%, for rule changes that are aimed at lessening the possibility that players in the NFL suffer from neurological injuries. By 74-8%, respondents are in favor of requiring the NFL to have independent doctors decide whether or not an injured player can continue to play.

College Sports – NIL and the Transfer Portal

When asked to consider current issues in college athletics, Americans think that college athletes being allowed to sell the rights to their names, images and likenesses (NIL) is good, rather than bad, for sports, 44-33%. However, support flips, with only 31% thinking athletes appearing in endorsements and other publicity materials by licensing the usage of their likenesses to generative AI is good for sports. Americans overall are split on the NCAA's transfer portal with 35% saying it is good for sports and 37% saying it is bad. Interestingly, among the most 'avid' sports fans, support for the transfer portal is 58-32%.

"Change has certainly come to college sports," said Don Levy, SCRI's director. "A plurality thinks it's good for sports that college athletes are compensated through NIL including two-thirds of hardcore fans. On the transfer portal, the jury is out but again, 'avid' fans strongly support it while pluralities of 'involved' or 'casual' fans do not. A big winner is the expansion of the college football playoffs with 65-7% saying it is good for sports."

Streaming Services

As nearly 60% of Americans are watching live sports on television or on another platform daily or at least several times a week, we find 55% are subscribing to streaming services like Hulu or Peacock in order to watch, and 19% are subscribing to league-specific streaming services such as NFL+ or The Red Zone. By 56-21% they say these streaming services are good for sports.

Sports Fanship

Fifty-eight percent of Americans say they watch live sports on the television or another platform at least 'once or twice a week', and a similar amount, 54%, say they watch or listen to sports news on the television, radio, or another platform just as regularly. Involvement extends even further with one-in-four Americans saying they check the scores of live sporting events using a mobile device (24%) or check social media for news or updates on athletes, teams, and other sports figures (23%) 'every day or almost every day'.

“The data clearly shows sports is central to American life,” Chimbel said. “Sixty-eight percent of Americans say they are sports fans but based on what they do – watching, checking scores, playing fantasy, betting and talking with friends about the games – we find that 76% are actually fans. Twenty percent are avid fans – all sports all the time, 32% are involved fans – they watch, talk and check scores but not every day and 24% are casual fans – they watch the games but don’t live and die with the sports clock. Only 24% of Americans, 33% of women and 15% of men, are truly non-fans neither watching or in reality caring very much about sports.”

Transgender Athletes

A majority, 58%, has given some or a lot of thought to the issue of whether transgender people should or should not be allowed to participate in organized sports with others that share their gender identity. Americans express opposition towards the participation of transgender athletes with others who share their gender identity 65-35%, both when asked to consider high school athletics as well as college or professional sports.

“As with many social issues, acceptance often changes over time and there is an indication that this could be the case for transgender athletes, as well,” Chimbel said. “Younger respondents are significantly more likely to support transgender athletes participating with others who share their gender identity. Forty-seven percent of 18-34-year-olds support transgender athletes participating in high school sports based on their gender identity compared to 27% of those 50 and older.”

Odds & Ends

- Americans are split on how well professional sports is addressing the gender pay gap between male and female athletes. While 39% say that professional sports is doing an ‘excellent job’ (16%) or ‘just enough’ (23%), nearly the same amount, 37% say it is not doing enough. Twenty-three percent say ‘don’t know.’
- Caitlin Clark has star power with an overwhelming 58% of Americans saying her fame is good for sports to just 9% who say it’s bad.
- There is some support and some uncertainty for the NFL’s new “Dynamic Kickoff” rules for the 2024 NFL Season, which states that no one except the kicker and returner(s) may move until the kickoff has been fielded: 48% say it’s good for sports, 21% say it’s bad; 31% aren’t sure.
- Looking towards Major League Baseball, the proposed “Golden-at-bat” rule, which states that once a game, the manager can pinch-hit with any player, is supported by 37-27% of Americans; nearly as many, 36%, say ‘don’t know’ when asked to consider the rule.

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The American Sports Fan ship Survey was conducted January 6 - 11, 2025, among 3047 responses drawn from a proprietary online panel (Cint) of United States Residents. Interviews conducted online are excluded from the sample and final analysis if they fail any data quality attention check question. Duplicate responses are identified by their response ID and removed from the sample. Three questions were asked of online respondents including a honey-pot question to catch bots and two questions ask the respondent to follow explicit directions. The proprietary panel also incorporates measures that “safeguard against automated bot attacks, deduplication issues, fraudulent VPN usage, and suspicious IP addresses”. Coding of open-ended responses was done by a single human coder. Data from collection modes was weighted to balance sample demographics to match estimates for New York State’s population using data from the Census Bureau’s 2023 U.S. American Community Survey (ACS), on age, region, race/ethnicity, education, and gender to ensure representativeness. It has an

overall margin of error of +/- 1.9 percentage points including the design effects resulting from weighting. Sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error and there may be other unmeasured error in this or any other public opinion poll. 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 Tess Zuchowski at 518-782-6995. St. Bonaventure University's Jandoli School of Communication offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in sports media, journalism, communication and related fields. For more information or comments, please contact Aaron Chimbel at 716-375-2040.