

## **Football is America's Favorite Sport as Lead Over Baseball Continues to Grow**

### *College Football and Auto Racing Come next*

**NEW YORK, N.Y. – January 25, 2012** – For two months every year, sports fans have to make a decision – watch football or baseball on Sundays? Based on the numbers of Americans who say it's their favorite sport, one would have to assume that football wins hands down. Over one-third of adults who follow at least one sport (36%) say professional football is their favorite sport while just 13% say baseball is their favorite. The gap between the two sports has widened in the past year – last year 31% said pro football was their favorite while 17% said baseball was their favorite sport.

These are some of the results of *The Harris Poll* of 2,237 adults surveyed online between December 5 and 12, 2011 by [Harris Interactive](#).

Looking at how other sports fared, just over one in ten sports fans (13%) say college football is their favorite sport while 8% say it is auto racing, 5% each say men's professional basketball, men's college basketball and hockey. All other sports are favorites for 2% or less of sports fans.

There are some fluctuations in favorites over time. Since this question was first asked in 1985, professional football has gone up 12 points from 24% of sports fans saying it was their favorite sport then to 36% saying so now. Baseball, on the other hand, has gone down 10 points from 23% in 1985 to 13% today. College football, auto racing and hockey have all gone up 3 points while men's tennis has gone down 3 points

### **Who likes football and baseball... and who really doesn't**

When it comes to the top sports, different groups are more likely to cite them as favorites. African Americans (48%), those aged 30-39 years (46%), and those with some college (42%) are more likely to say professional football is their favorite sport while those with a post-graduate education (28%), Born-again Christians (30%), and those aged 65 and older (30%) are less likely to do so. When it comes to baseball, those aged 50 – 64 (21%), Hispanics (19%), and Easterners (17%) are more likely to cite it as their favorite sport. African Americans (6%), those aged 30-39 (6%) and households with children (9%) are least likely to say baseball is their favorite. Looking at college football, those with a post-graduate degree (22%), college graduates (19%) and Midwesterners (18%) are more likely to say it's their favorite sport while Easterners (4%), those with a household income of under \$35,000 (8%) and those aged 50-64 (8%) are least likely to say so.

### **So What?**

As we got closer to the beginning of the football season there was a sense of gloom that it might not start. However, the talks succeeded and the season began on time. This scare did not seem to drive fans away from the sport, but rather, moved more people to it as the gap between football and baseball is now the largest it's ever been at 23 points. The question is why? Is it that football is doing everything right and baseball is doing something wrong? Or, is the draw of one sport just that much larger than the other. Next year, it is possible that college football could overtake baseball and what would that say about America's pastime?

**TABLE 1  
FAVORITE SPORT**

"If you had to choose, which ONE of these sports would you say is your favorite?"

Base: All adults who follow one or more sport

	1985	1989	1992	1993	1994	1997	1998	2002
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Pro football	24	26	28	24	24	28	26	27
Baseball	23	19	21	18	17	17	18	14
College football	10	6	7	8	7	10	9	9
Auto racing	5	4	5	6	5	5	7	10
Men's pro basketball	6	7	8	12	11	13	13	11
Hockey	2	3	3	3	5	4	3	3
Men's soccer	3	2	2	1	3	3	4	3
Men's college basketball	6	10	8	8	8	6	4	4
Men's golf	3	4	4	6	5	6	4	4
Track & field	2	2	1	1	2	2	3	1
Bowling	3	5	2	2	1	1	2	2
Men's tennis	5	4	4	4	3	3	4	1
Boxing	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Horse racing	4	3	3	2	2	2	2	1
Women's tennis	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	3
Swimming	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Women's pro basketball	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	*	1
Women's soccer	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Women's college basketball	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	1	1
Women's golf	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Not sure	*	1	4	1	2	2	1	3
<b>Pro football's lead over baseball</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13</b>

Note 1: NA = Not asked in that year. Men and women's sports were not always distinguished

Note 2: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Note 3: "\*" indicates less than 0.5%

**TABLE 1 (continued)**

**FAVORITE SPORT**

"If you had to choose, which ONE of these sports would you say is your favorite?"

Base: All adults who follow one or more sport

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	CHANGE 1985-2011
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Pro football	29	30	33	29	30	31	35	31	36	12
Baseball	13	15	14	14	15	16	16	17	13	-10
College football	9	11	13	13	12	12	12	12	13	3
Auto racing	9	7	11	9	10	8	9	7	8	3
Men's pro basketball	10	7	4	7	4	6	5	6	5	1
Men's college basketball	6	6	5	5	4	5	3	4	5	-1
Hockey	3	4	5	4	5	5	4	5	5	3
Men's tennis	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	-3
Boxing	NA	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	NA
Horse racing	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	-2
Swimming	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	2	1	1	2	NA
Men's golf	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	2	2	-1
Track & field	3	1	*	2	1	1	1	2	1	-1
Men's soccer	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	4	1	-2
Bowling	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	-2
Women's tennis	2	2	1	1	*	1	1	1	1	NA
Women's pro basketball	1	*	*	*	*	*	*	-	*	NA
Women's soccer	NA	1	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	NA
Women's college basketball	*	1	*	1	1	*	*	-	*	NA
Women's golf	1	*	*	1	*	*	*	*	*	NA
Not sure	1	2	2	3	2	1	2	3	1	NA
<b>Pro football's lead over baseball</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>22</b>

Note 1: NA = Not asked in that year. Men and women's sports were not always distinguished

Note 2: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Note 3: "\*" indicates less than 0.5%

**TABLE 2**

**DEMOGRAPHIC VARIATIONS IN FAVORITE SPORTS**

"If you had to choose, which ONE of these sports would you say is your favorite?"

Base: All adults who follow more than one sport

Sport	All Adults	Highest		Lowest	
	%		%		%
Pro football	36	African Americans	48	Post-grad	28
		Those aged 30-39	46	Born-again Christians	30
		Some college	42	Those aged 65+	30
Baseball	13	Those aged 50-64	21	African Americans	6
		Hispanics	19	Those aged 30-39	6
		Easterners	17	Households with children	9
College Football	13	Post grads	22	Easterners	4
		College graduates	19	Income less than \$35K	8
		Midwesterners	18	Those aged 50-64	8
Auto Racing	8	Income \$50K – \$74.9K	12	African Americans	1
		H.S. or Less	12	Post grad	1
		Those aged 65+	12	Liberals	4

## **Methodology**

This **Harris Poll** was conducted online within the United States between December 5 to 12, 2011 among 2,237 adults (aged 18 and over), 1,466 of whom say they follow at least one sport. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

***These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.***

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