



## **61% Agree with Athletes' Right to Speak Out for Social Justice; But More than a Third Say It Hinders Desire To Watch Games, Ruins Sports as 'Escape'**

South Orange NJ, November 23, 2020 -- While 61 percent of Americans say that athletes have a right to free speech and it is their decision to speak out for social justice, 35 percent call sports their "escape" and don't want to see any commentary other than sports. In addition, 36 percent say that athletes speaking out hinders their desire to watch games.

These were the findings of a Seton Hall Sports Poll conducted November 13-16 among 1,506 American adults, geographically spread across the country. The Poll has a margin of error of +/- 3.2 percent.

On the question of athletes exercising free speech and making their own decision to speak out, only 15 percent disagreed compared to the 61 percent who agreed that players held that right. Among self-described sports fans, those who agreed that players held that right to speech was 69 percent.

On the question of sports being an escape and not wanting to see any commentary on subjects other than sports, almost an equal number agreed and disagreed. While 36 percent said they saw sports as an escape and did not want to hear commentary from athletes outside of sports, 37 percent felt otherwise. Among sports fans, however, 46 percent said they saw sports as an escape and would rather not see commentary outside of sports, while 34 percent felt otherwise.

### **Does Social Justice Commentary from Athletes Hinder the Desire To Watch Sports?**

Does social justice commentary from athletes hinder the desire to watch sports? For 35 percent the answer was yes, but 39 percent said that athletes speaking out on social justice issues is not a hindrance. The rest - about a quarter of the population in each case - neither agreed nor disagreed.

"It marks a fine line for many sports fans, probably across the political spectrum," said Professor Charles Grantham, Director of the Center for Sport Management within the Stillman School of Business, which oversees the Seton Hall Sports Poll. "What many Americans seem not to understand is that despite their fame, our black athletes, male and female, have their own

histories and experiences with police, mourn the losses of those who look like them and feel the potential dangers of forthcoming encounters. They are committed to raising the consciousness of America with regard to systemic racism and social injustice.”

“Leagues really need to note the fact, however, that about a third of the population is uncomfortable with these displays of free speech,” said Stillman Professor of Marketing and Poll Methodologist Daniel Ladik. “That’s a minority, but it’s sizeable if you are trying to sell a product. A number of the leagues have already taken some action but need to continue to explain to consumers why this speech is important.”

### **Why Are TV Ratings Down?**

Television ratings for both the NFL regular season and the NBA finals are and were down this year, and respondents were asked their opinion why. Twenty-eight percent said they thought that fans are turned off by the social justice efforts by athletes and their leagues, and 24 percent said it was because attention was focused on the November elections. Twelve percent said it was because too many sports were available while 35 percent had no opinion or did not know.

### **As To the Strange NBA Season...**

The shortened NBA season, with the playoffs staged before no fans and in a bubble, elicited fan reaction in the poll. Asked if the finals were just as entertaining as in previous years, only 22 percent agreed, with 21 percent disagreeing. Fifty-seven percent neither agreed nor disagreed, a large number perhaps reflected by the decline in viewership this year. Asked if the finals were dull with no fans in attendance, 25 percent agreed and 15 percent disagreed. Again, a large percentage of the respondents (59 percent) neither agreed nor disagreed. Asked if it was difficult to follow the NBA Finals because there were too many other sports on TV, only 15 percent agreed while 21 percent disagreed and 62 percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

### **Only 26% Think NFL Will Make it To Super Bowl**

Asked if they thought it doubtful the NFL will make it through the playoffs and complete the Super Bowl in this year of Coronavirus, 26 percent agreed. Among self-described sports fans the number of those who doubt that the NFL will successfully complete the season moved up to 29 percent; however, an equal number of sports fans (29 percent) felt the opposite and did not doubt the season will successfully conclude. The remainder neither agreed nor disagreed.

“It is a different kind of year,” said Grantham, the former executive director of the the National Basketball Players Association. “That which seemed certain in years past now is the subject of doubt. The Super Bowl is the most watched sporting and media event in the United States. The fact that 29 percent of sports fans think the Super Bowl itself may be in question is astounding.”

### **ABOUT THE POLL**

The Seton Hall Sports Poll, conducted regularly since 2006, is performed by the Sharkey Institute within the Stillman School of Business. This poll was conducted online by YouGov Plc.

using a national representative sample weighted according to gender, age, ethnicity, education, income and geography, based on U.S. Census Bureau figures. Respondents were selected from YouGov’s opt-in panel to be representative of all U.S. residents. This poll release conforms to the Standards of Disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls. The Seton Hall Sports Poll has been chosen for inclusion in iPoll by Cornell’s Roper Center for Public Opinion Research and its findings have been published everywhere from USA Today, ESPN, The New York Times, Washington Post, AP, and Reuters to CNBC, NPR, Yahoo Finance, Fox News and many points in between.

*Media:* Michael Ricciardelli, Associate Director of Media Relations, Seton Hall University [michael.ricciardelli@shu.edu](mailto:michael.ricciardelli@shu.edu), 908-447-3034; Marty Appel, [AppelPR@gmail.com](mailto:AppelPR@gmail.com)

**The Results:**

**November 2020 SHSP Tables**

**Q1** The National Basketball Association (NBA) recently completed its playoffs with the Los Angeles Lakers defeating the Miami Heat for the title. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Please select **one** option on each row.

a.) The NBA Finals were just as entertaining as previous years

N=1,506	General Population	Sports Fan	Non-Fan	Avid Fan	Avg Fan	Casual Fan	Not a Fan	No Opinion
<b>Agree</b>	22%	31%	6%	54%	32%	21%	5%	9%
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	57%	44%	81%	21%	41%	57%	82%	72%
<b>Disagree</b>	21%	25%	13%	25%	27%	22%	13%	19%

b.) The NBA Finals were dull because there were no fans in attendance

N=1,506	General Population	Sports Fan	Non-Fan	Avid Fan	Avg Fan	Casual Fan	Not a Fan	No Opinion
<b>Agree</b>	26%	34%	8%	49%	35%	27%	8%	12%
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	59%	47%	82%	31%	45%	57%	83%	70%
<b>Disagree</b>	15%	19%	10%	20%	20%	16%	9%	18%

c.) It was difficult to follow the NBA Finals because there are too many other sports on TV

N=1,506	General Population	Sports Fan	Non-Fan	Avid Fan	Avg Fan	Casual Fan	Not a Fan	No Opinion
<b>Agree</b>	16%	24%	3%	43%	22%	16%	3%	6%
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	62%	49%	86%	23%	49%	61%	87%	69%
<b>Disagree</b>	22%	27%	11%	34%	29%	23%	10%	25%

**Q2** During the 2020 sports season, both the NFL’s live TV content and the NBA’s live TV finals had lower ratings compared to last year (i.e., during the 2019 sports season). Which **one** of the

following statements do you think best describes the main reason for the overall drop in ratings?

N=1,506	General Population	Sports Fan	Non-Fan	Avid Fan	Avg Fan	Casual Fan	Not a Fan	No Opinion
<b>TV ratings are down because there are too many sports available</b>	12%	16%	5%	40%	13%	9%	5%	5%
<b>TV ratings are down because people are paying attention to the November elections</b>	25%	28%	18%	27%	30%	27%	17%	19%
<b>TV ratings are down because fans are turned off by the social justice efforts by athletics and the leagues</b>	28%	32%	21%	21%	35%	33%	22%	12%
<b>Don't know/no opinion</b>	35%	24%	56%	12%	22%	31%	56%	64%

Q3 In recent years, professional athletes and the leagues they play in have taken a strong stand supporting social justice causes. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Please select **one** option on each row.

a.) Sports are my “escape” and I don’t want to see any commentary other than sports

N=1,506	General Population	Sports Fan	Non-Fan	Avid Fan	Avg Fan	Casual Fan	Not a Fan	No Opinion
<b>Agree</b>	36%	46%	17%	62%	49%	35%	17%	23%
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	27%	20%	39%	20%	20%	22%	38%	56%
<b>Disagree</b>	37%	34%	44%	18%	31%	43%	45%	21%

b.) Hearing an athlete speak out about social justice hinders my desire to watch sports

N=1,506	General Population	Sports Fan	Non-Fan	Avid Fan	Avg Fan	Casual Fan	Not a Fan	No Opinion
<b>Agree</b>	35%	40%	25%	42%	39%	40%	25%	30%
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	27%	20%	39%	20%	21%	19%	38%	48%
<b>Disagree</b>	38%	40%	36%	38%	40%	41%	37%	22%

c.) Athletes have free speech and it is their decision speak out

N=1,506	General Population	Sports Fan	Non-Fan	Avid Fan	Avg Fan	Casual Fan	Not a Fan	No Opinion
<b>Agree</b>	61%	69%	44%	75%	71%	63%	48%	22%
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	24%	18%	35%	17%	17%	20%	33%	48%
<b>Disagree</b>	15%	13%	21%	8%	12%	17%	19%	30%

**Q4** Since the start of the NFL season, multiple players have tested positive for Coronavirus (COVID-19), leading to NFL games being postponed during the season. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Please select **one** option on each row.

**a.)** The shuffling of the NFL schedule takes away the integrity of the season

N=1,506	General Population	Sports Fan	Non-Fan	Avid Fan	Avg Fan	Casual Fan	Not a Fan	No Opinion
<b>Agree</b>	26%	33%	11%	39%	33%	29%	10%	23%
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	47%	36%	70%	27%	34%	42%	70%	61%
<b>Disagree</b>	27%	31%	19%	34%	33%	29%	20%	16%

**b.)** It is not a “big deal” if a game is rescheduled

N=1,506	General Population	Sports Fan	Non-Fan	Avid Fan	Avg Fan	Casual Fan	Not a Fan	No Opinion
<b>Agree</b>	48%	56%	32%	65%	56%	53%	32%	25%
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	38%	28%	57%	24%	26%	33%	57%	61%
<b>Disagree</b>	14%	16%	11%	11%	18%	14%	11%	14%

**c.)** It is doubtful that the NFL will make it through the playoffs and complete the Super Bowl

N=1,506	General Population	Sports Fan	Non-Fan	Avid Fan	Avg Fan	Casual Fan	Not a Fan	No Opinion
<b>Agree</b>	26%	29%	18%	40%	28%	28%	18%	11%
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	52%	42%	72%	28%	41%	49%	72%	70%
<b>Disagree</b>	22%	29%	10%	32%	31%	23%	10%	19%

The “agree” percentage in the release is based on combining those who strongly or somewhat agree.

### November 2020 SHSP

- Which, if any, of the following statements best describes your interest in sports?
  - I am an avid sports fan (i.e., I plan everything I do around sporting events) **(10%)**
  - I am an average sports fan (i.e., I enjoy sports and I watch sports when I can) **(31)**
  - I am a casual sports fan (i.e., if the game is part of a social event, I’ll watch) **(24)**
  - I am not a sports fan **(33)**
  - Don’t know/no opinion **(2)**
- The National Basketball Association (NBA) recently completed its playoffs with the Los Angeles Lakers defeating the Miami Heat for the title. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Please select **one** option on each row.

The NBA Finals were just as entertaining as previous years

- a. Strongly agree (10%)
- b. Somewhat agree (12)
- c. Neither agree nor disagree (57)
- d. Somewhat disagree (8)
- e. Strongly disagree (13)

The NBA Finals were dull because there were no fans in attendance

- a. Strongly agree (11%)
- b. Somewhat agree (14)
- c. Neither agree nor disagree (59)
- d. Somewhat disagree (7)
- e. Strongly disagree (8)

It was difficult to follow the NBA Finals because there are too many other sports on TV

- a. Strongly agree (6%)
- b. Somewhat agree (9)
- c. Neither agree nor disagree (62)
- d. Somewhat disagree (9)
- e. Strongly disagree (12)

3. During the 2020 sports season, both the NFL's live TV content and the NBA's live TV finals had lower ratings compared to last year (i.e., during the 2019 sports season). Which **one** of the following statements do you think best describes the main reason for the overall drop in ratings?

- a. TV ratings are down because there are too many sports available (12%)
- b. TV ratings are down because people are paying attention to the November elections (24)
- c. TV ratings are down because fans are turned off by the social justice efforts by athletics and the leagues (28)
- d. Don't know/no opinion (35)

4. In recent years, professional athletes and the leagues they play in have taken a strong stand supporting social justice causes. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Please select **one** option on each row.

Sports are my "escape" and I don't want to see any commentary other than sports

- a. Strongly agree (23%)
- b. Somewhat agree (12)
- c. Neither agree nor disagree (27)
- d. Somewhat disagree (9)
- e. Strongly disagree (28)

Hearing an athlete speak out about social justice hinders my desire to watch sports

- a. Strongly agree (24%)
- b. Somewhat agree (11)
- c. Neither agree nor disagree (27)
- d. Somewhat disagree (9)
- e. Strongly disagree (29)

Athletes have free speech and it is their decision speak out

- a. Strongly agree (43%)
- b. Somewhat agree (18)
- c. Neither agree nor disagree (24)
- d. Somewhat disagree (5)
- e. Strongly disagree (10)

5. Since the start of the NFL season, multiple players have tested positive for Coronavirus (COVID-19), leading to NFL games being postponed during the season. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Please select **one** option on each row.

The shuffling of the NFL schedule takes away the integrity of the season

- a. Strongly agree (11%)
- b. Somewhat agree (14)
- c. Neither agree nor disagree (47)
- d. Somewhat disagree (14)
- e. Strongly disagree (13)

It is not a “big deal” if a game is rescheduled

- a. Strongly agree (20%)
- b. Somewhat agree (27)
- c. Neither agree nor disagree (38)
- d. Somewhat disagree (8)
- e. Strongly disagree (6)

It is doubtful that the NFL will make it through the playoffs and complete the Super Bowl

- a. Strongly agree (10%)
- b. Somewhat agree (16)
- c. Neither agree nor disagree (52)
- d. Somewhat disagree (14)
- e. Strongly disagree (8)

## **ABOUT SETON HALL UNIVERSITY**

One of the country's leading Catholic universities, Seton Hall has been showing the world what great minds can do since 1856. Home to nearly 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students and offering more than 90 rigorous academic programs, Seton Hall's academic excellence has been singled out for distinction by The Princeton Review, U.S. News & World Report and Bloomberg Businessweek.

Seton Hall embraces students of all religions and prepares them to be exemplary servant leaders and global citizens. In recent years, the University has achieved extraordinary success. Since 2009, it has seen record-breaking undergraduate enrollment growth and an impressive 110-point increase in the average SAT scores of incoming freshmen. In the past decade, Seton Hall students and alumni have received more than 30 Fulbright Scholarships as well as other prestigious academic honors, including Boren Awards, Pickering Fellowships, Udall Scholarships and a Rhodes Scholarship. The University is also proud to be among the most diverse national Catholic universities in the country.

During the past five years, the University has invested more than \$165 million in new campus buildings and renovations. And in 2015, Seton Hall launched a School of Medicine as well as a College of Communication and the Arts. The University's beautiful main campus in suburban South Orange, N.J. is only 14 miles from New York City — offering students a wealth of employment, internship, cultural and entertainment opportunities. Seton Hall's nationally recognized School of Law is located prominently in downtown Newark. The University's Interprofessional Health Sciences (IHS) campus in Clifton and Nutley, N.J. opened in the summer of 2018. The IHS campus houses the University's College of Nursing, School of Health and Medical Sciences and the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine at Seton Hall University.

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