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SPECIAL TOPIC REPORT:  
**WOMEN'S PRO & COLLEGE SPORTS**

**5 Opportunities to  
Increase Engagement  
with a Growing Fan Base**

## WOMEN'S PRO & COLLEGE SPORTS: 5 Opportunities to Increase Engagement with a Growing Fan Base

- There are **123 million Americans** who identify as **fans of Women's Pro or College Sports today**.
- The fan base is almost equally split by gender (53% female, 47% male). It is more diverse, younger, and more educated than the US population.
- As strong as the fan base is today, there is still room to grow. In this report, we highlight **five opportunities** to increase engagement:

Sustain fandom  
with females  
over a lifetime

1

Provide fans with  
greater access to  
women's sports on TV  
and streaming

2

Promote  
social viewing  
of women's  
sports

3

Build greater  
connections between  
fans and female  
athletes/teams

4

Create more opportunities for  
"non-traditional" sports that  
young females love (especially  
volleyball, gymnastics, and  
softball)

5

All data in this report is from the Sports Poll, a nationally representative study that samples over 20,000 Americans 12 and older each year on their sports and free time interests.



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# Women's Pro and College Sports Fans Today

# A Diverse, Young, and Educated Fan Base

The 123 million fans of women's pro or college sports represent a more diverse, younger, and more educated group of people than the US population today.

## KEY STATS:

### Split by Gender

- The fan base is almost equally split by gender: 53% female, 47% male

### Under 35

- 40% of fans and 52% of AVID fans are under 35 (vs. 35% of US Pop)

### Ethnically Diverse

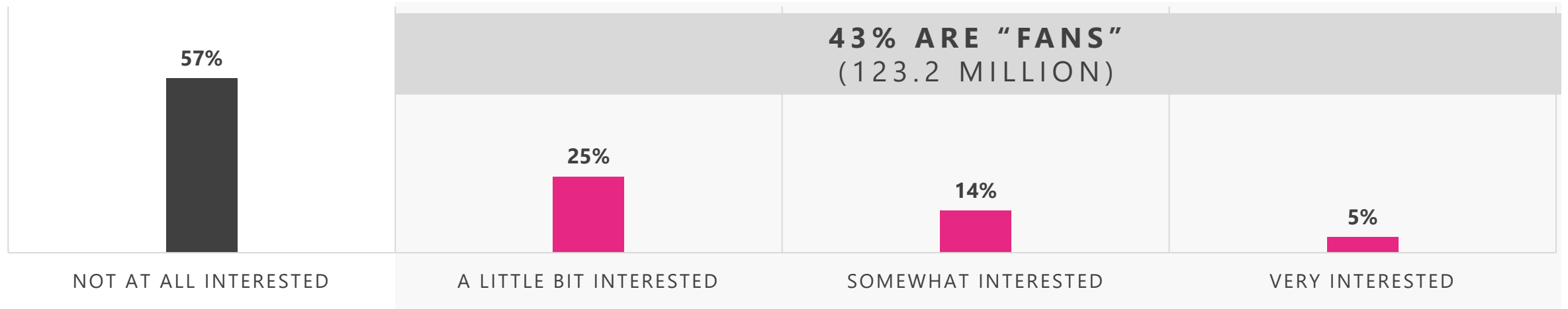
- 47% of fans and 55% of AVID fans are a racial or ethnic minority (vs. 39% of US Pop)

### College Educated

- 42% of fans and 41% of AVID fans have a college education (vs. 35% of US Pop)

# 123 Million Americans Identify as Fans of Women's Pro or College Sports Today

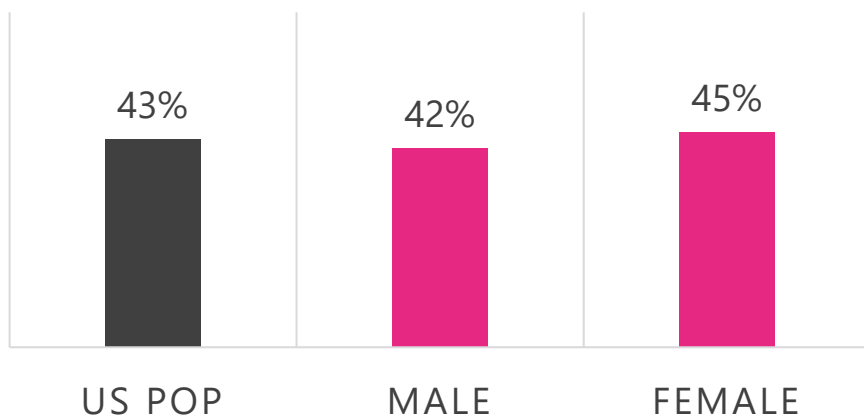
HOW INTERESTED ARE YOU RIGHT NOW IN FOLLOWING WOMEN'S PRO OR COLLEGE SPORTS?



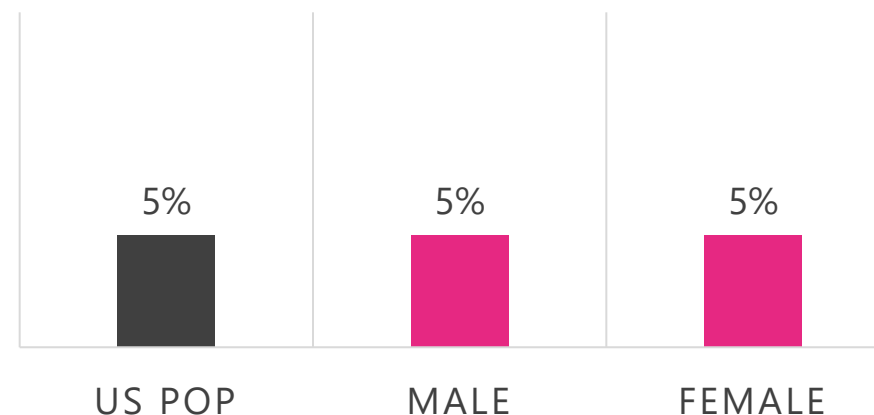
- Sports Poll asks Americans 12 and older about their general interest in Women's Pro or College Sports.
- Among the US population, 43% identify as fans of Women's Pro or College Sports (defined as at least a little bit interested right now) and 5% identify as AVID fans (very interested right now). The total fan base projects to 123 million.

# Both Males and Females are Fans of Women's Pro/College Sports Today

**% WHO ARE FANS OF WOMEN'S PRO/COLLEGE SPORTS**



**% WHO ARE AVID FANS OF WOMEN'S PRO/COLLEGE SPORTS**



- Females are slightly more likely to be fans of Women's Pro/College Sports today, but both males and females are interested (45% of females 12+, 42% of males 12+).
- Note that we define fans as Americans who are at least a little bit interested in Women's Pro/College Sports right now. AVID fans are very interested right now.

# The Women's Pro/College Sports Fan Base is Younger, More Diverse, and More Educated than the US Population

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	% COMPOSITION	US POP	WOMEN'S PRO/ COLLEGE SPORTS FANS	WOMEN'S PRO/ COLLEGE SPORTS AVID
Gender	Male	49%	47%	46%
	Female	51%	53%	53%
Age	12-17	9%	11%	16%
	18-34	26%	29%	36%
	35+	65%	60%	48%
Race / Ethnicity	White Non-Hispanic	61%	53%	45%
	Black Non-Hispanic	12%	17%	25%
	Hispanic	18%	21%	21%
	Other or mixed Non-Hispanic	9%	9%	9%
Income (18+)	Under \$30K income	16%	14%	13%
	\$30K-\$49K income	14%	12%	13%
	\$50K-\$99K income	41%	42%	41%
	Over \$100K income	29%	31%	34%
Education (18+)	Some High School/Current student	9%	7%	8%
	High School graduate	29%	25%	23%
	Some College / Associate's degree	27%	26%	28%
	College graduate+	35%	42%	41%
Parental Status	Parent of child under 18	23%	27%	31%
LGBTQ+ Identity (18+)	Identify as LGBTQ+	9%	10%	11%

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# 5 Opportunities to Increase Engagement in Women's Sports

 **ssrs**  
redefining research

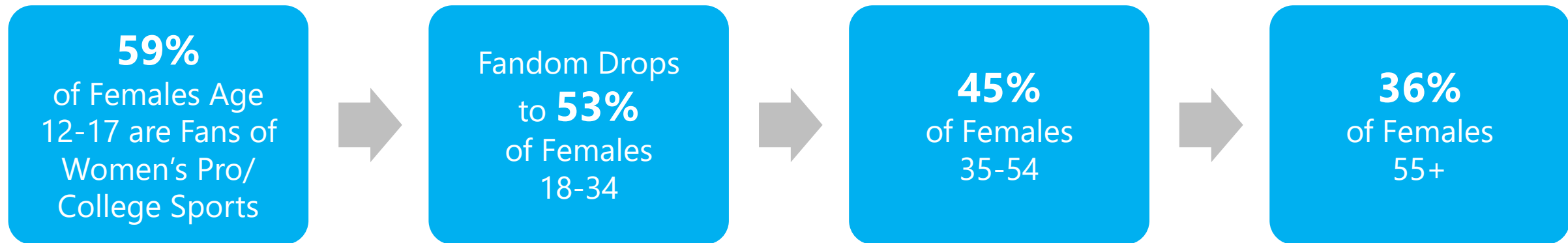




# 1 Sustain Fandom with Females Over a Lifetime

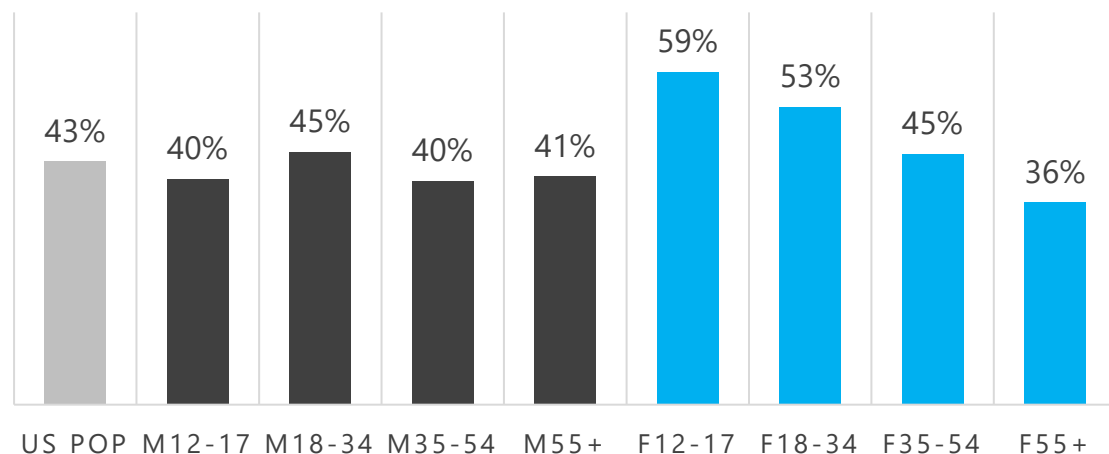
- Over the 30 years that Sports Poll has tracked interest in women's sports properties, young females have consistently been the biggest fans.
- Fandom declines as they mature though. The goal should be to ensure that interest holds over a person's entire lifetime. This could include engaging "lapsed" fans and identifying new ways to keep sports relevant over different life stages.

## KEY STAT

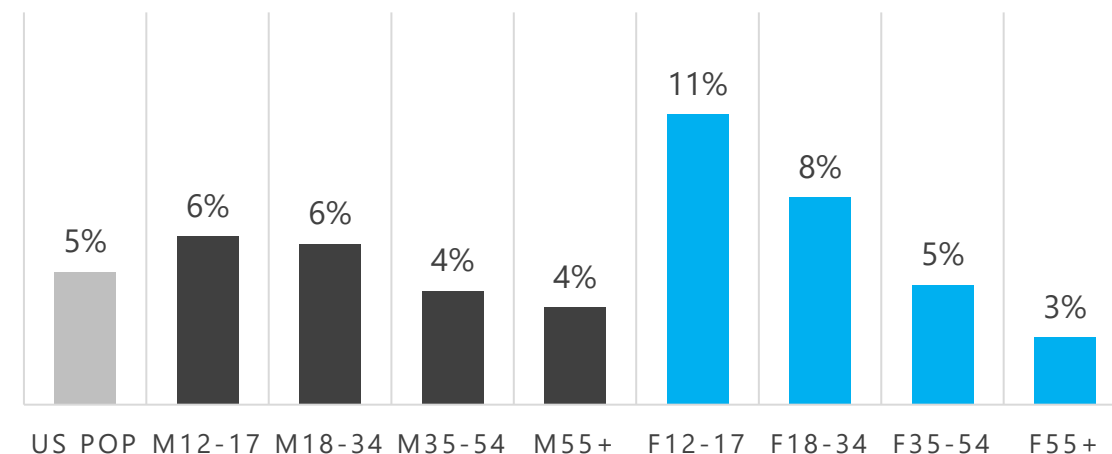


# Young Females are the Biggest Fans of Women's Sports Today

**% WHO ARE FANS OF WOMEN'S PRO/COLLEGE SPORTS**



**% WHO ARE AVID FANS OF WOMEN'S PRO/COLLEGE SPORTS**



- Females who are 12-17 and 18-34 are the biggest fans of Women's Pro or College Sports today with over 50% saying they are fans (at least a little bit interested right now).
- Interest declines with each female age group. Among males, interest is more consistent across younger and older age groups.

2

## Provide fans of Women's Sports with Greater Access to Games

- As more Americans cut their cable and satellite subscriptions, access to sports content is becoming a critical issue for the industry.
- The access problem is even greater for Women's Sports. Fans want to watch, but most of them say they are unable to watch as much as they'd like.

### KEY STAT

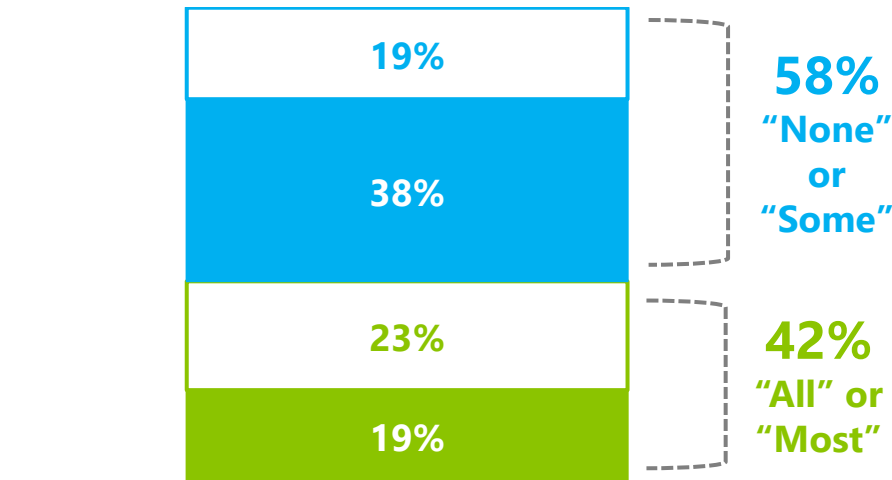
# 42%

**Only 42% of Women's Pro/College Sports Fans**  
Say they Have Access to All or Most of the  
Women's Sports they Want to Watch

# Only 42% of Women's Sports Fans Say They Have Access to "All" or "Most" of the Women's Sports They Want to Watch

DO YOU HAVE ACCESS TO \_\_\_ OF THE WOMEN'S PRO OR COLLEGE SPORTS YOU WANT TO WATCH?

■ All ■ Most ■ Some □ None



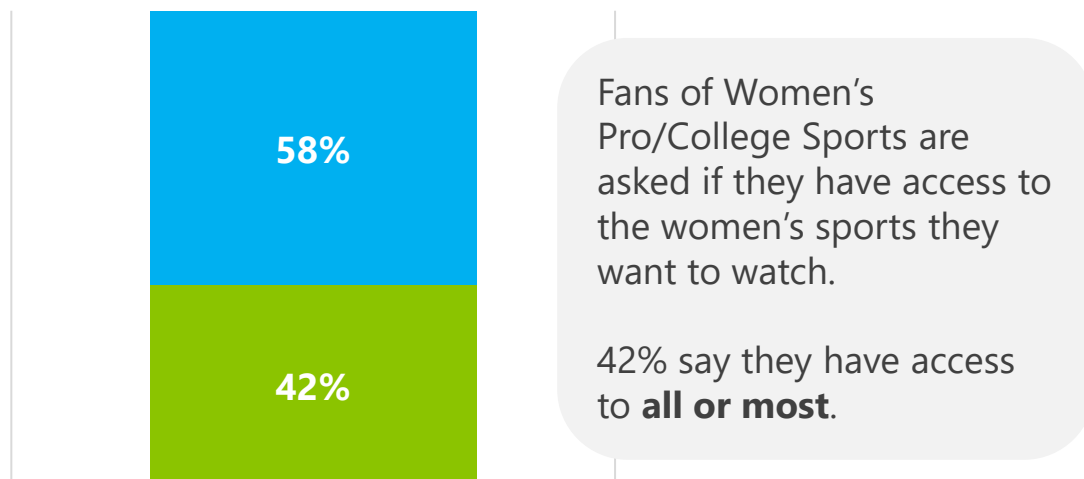
- Sports Poll asks fans of Women's Pro or College Sports if they have access to the women's sports they want to watch. Only 42% of fans say they have access to all or most of what they want to watch. The other 58% have access to none or some.
- In fact, 19% say they have access to "none" of the women's sports they want to watch.
- This is likely to become a greater issue as traditional cable/satellite subscriptions continue to decline.

# Access to Sports is a Challenge for all Sports... but an Even Bigger Issue for Women's Sports Today

DO YOU HAVE ACCESS TO \_\_\_ OF THE SPORTING EVENTS YOU WANT TO WATCH?

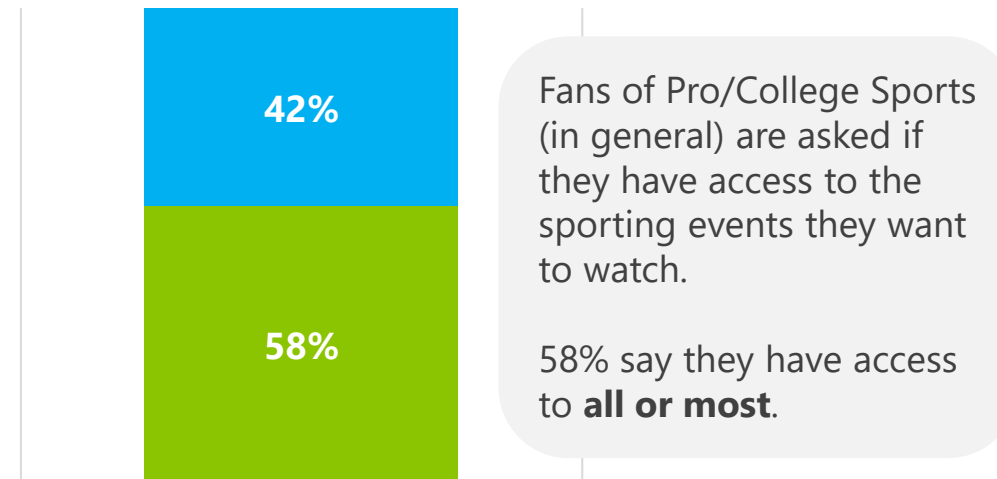
## WOMEN'S PRO OR COLLEGE SPORTS

■ All or Most ■ Some or None



## PRO OR COLLEGE SPORTS (IN GENERAL)

■ All or Most ■ Some or None



## 3 Promote Social Viewing of Women's Pro/College Sports

- When asked what is most important to their enjoyment of sports, AVID fans of Women's Pro/College Sports say, "watching with family" and "watching with friends".
- Although it's easier than ever to watch sports (or other shows) in isolation, greater opportunities for social viewing could help boost engagement in women's sports. Especially multi-generational engagement.

### KEY STAT

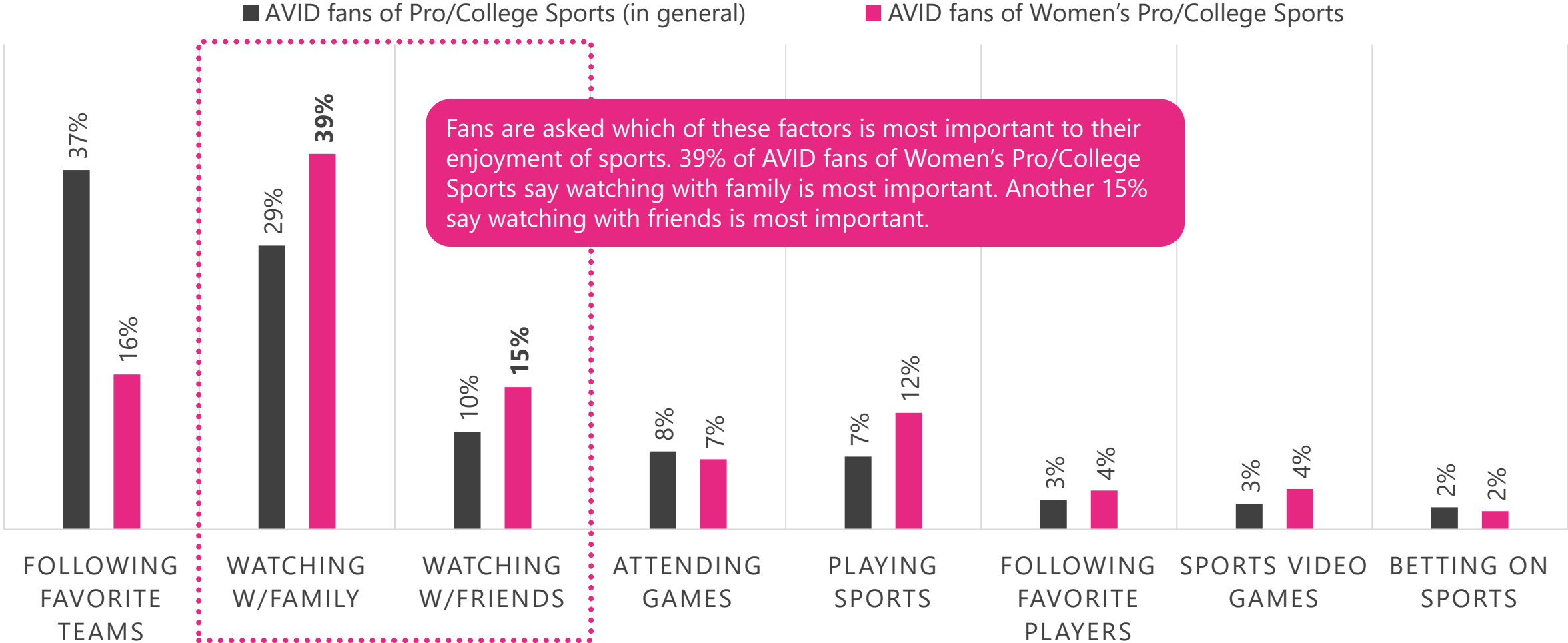
# 53%

53% of AVID Women's Pro/College Sports fans say **watching sports with family or friends is most important to their enjoyment of sports.**

Only 39% of AVID fans of Pro/College Sports in general say the same.

# AVID Women's Sports Fans Say Watching with Family and Friends is Most Important to their Enjoyment of Sports

## % WHO SAY FACTOR IS MOST IMPORTANT TO ENJOYMENT OF SPORTS



## 4 Build Greater Connections Between Fans and Female Athletes/Teams

- Relatively few Americans name female athletes or women's sports teams as their overall favorites.
- Even among young females, their favorites are typically from traditional men's leagues.
- There are greater opportunities for athletes and teams to connect directly with fans today.
- These connections could help make female athletes and teams a higher priority with younger generations than they've been in the past.

### KEY STATS

#### No women's sports teams

rank among the top 100 favorite overall sports teams for Americans today.

#### No female athletes from traditional team sports

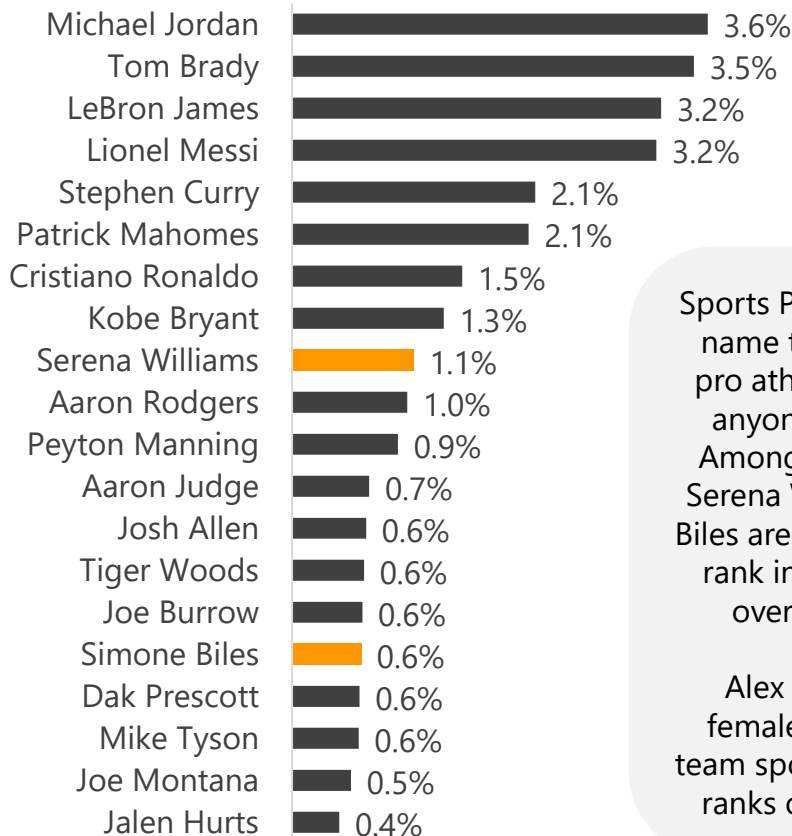
rank among the top 100 favorite overall athletes for Americans today.



# Male Athletes Remain the Most Popular for Americans, Even Among Young Females

## FAVORITE OVERALL PRO ATHLETES

### US POPULATION 12+

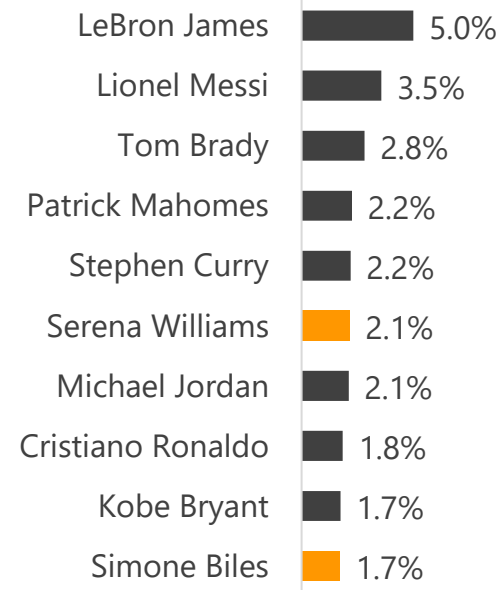


Sports Poll asks Americans to name their favorite overall pro athlete. They can name anyone, active or retired. Among the US Population, Serena Williams and Simone Biles are the only women who rank in the top 20 favorite overall athletes today.

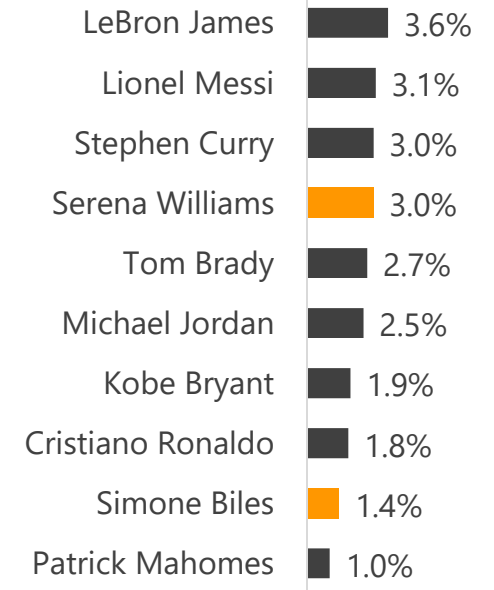
Alex Morgan is the top female among traditional team sports, but she currently ranks outside the top 100.

Even young females are more likely to name male stars as their favorite overall athletes. Once we begin to see more female athletes prioritized on these lists, we should see even greater engagement in their sports.

### FEMALES 12 - 17



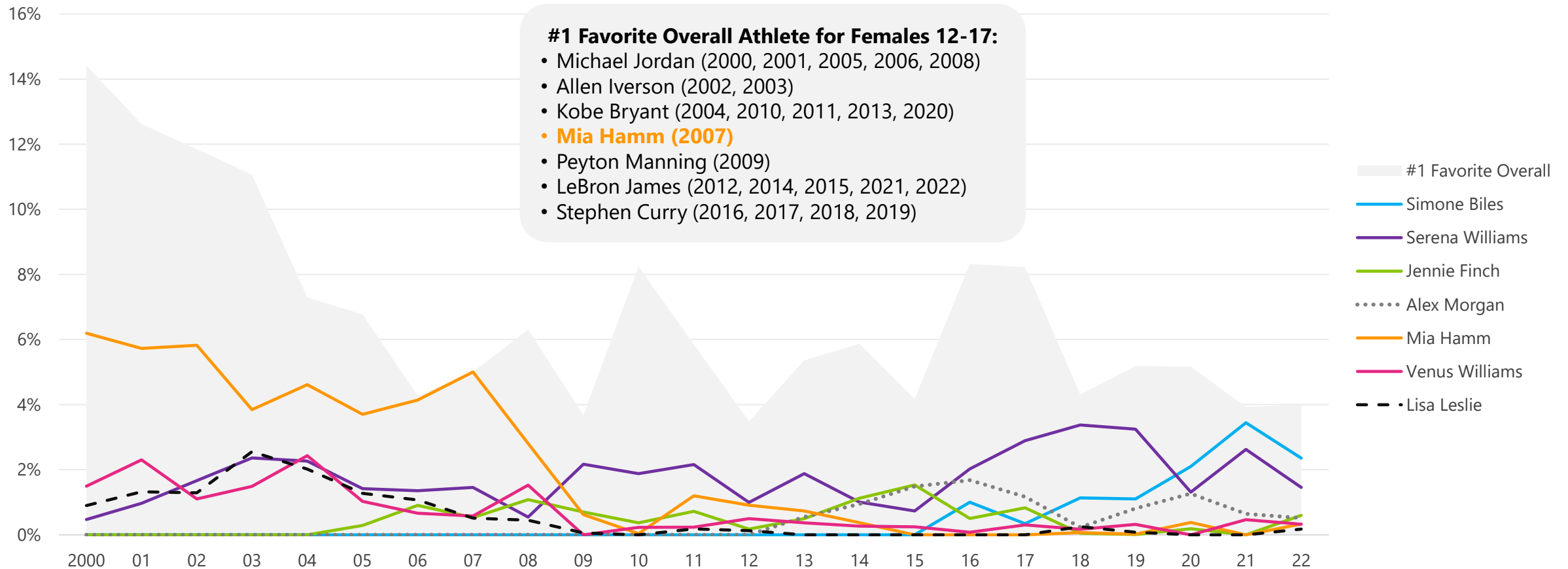
### FEMALES 18 - 34



# Female Teens Have Only Named a Female Athlete as Their Favorite Overall Once Since 2000

Americans are asked to name their favorite overall pro athlete. They can name anyone, active or retired. This chart shows the trends for the most popular female athletes of the past 20 years among female teens. The gray line indicates the #1 overall favorite for that year.

**FEMALES 12-17: FAVORITE PRO ATHLETE BY YEAR**





## 5 Create More Opportunities for “Non-traditional” Sports that Young Females Love (Especially Volleyball, Gymnastics, and Softball)

- Female teens are more likely to name sports like gymnastics, volleyball, and softball as their favorite spectator sport.
- Yet opportunities for fan engagement are more limited for these sports today than the traditional US leagues.
- Beyond viewing, engagement could include video games, fantasy, purchasing merchandise, and more.
- The fan bases for these sports are already sizable and poised to do more if given the opportunity.

### KEY STAT

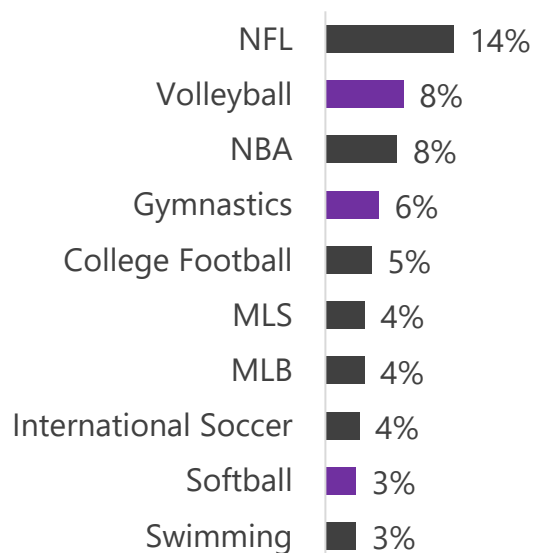
TOP  
10

Volleyball (#2), Gymnastics (#4), and Softball (#9) all Rank Among the **Top Ten Spectator Sports for Females Ages 12-17**

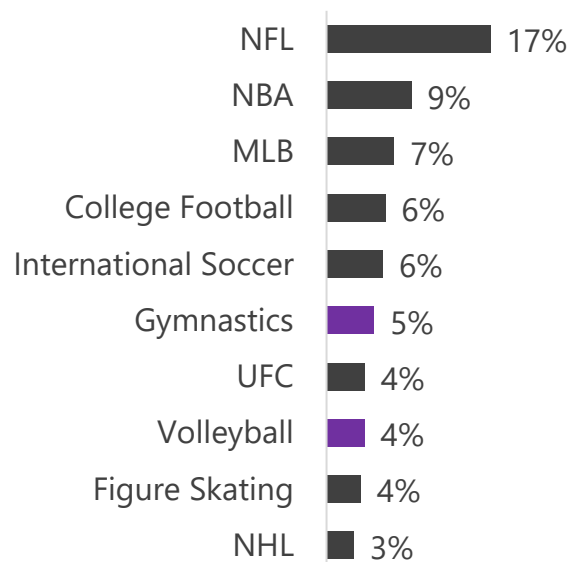
# Volleyball, Gymnastics, and Softball Provide Potential Areas for Growing Fan Engagement Today

## TOP 10 FAVORITE SPECTATOR SPORTS

### FEMALES 12 - 17



### FEMALES 18 - 34



- Sports Poll asks Americans to name their favorite spectator sport. Among females 12-17, volleyball ranks second and gymnastics ranks fourth. Softball also ranks in the top ten.
- Even with the older 18-34 female group, gymnastics and volleyball rank in the top ten today.
- Participation and major events like the Olympics drive the popularity of these sports, but opportunities for fan engagement are more limited than the major US leagues today. There is a foundation of interest to build on for future engagement though.



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# Methodology

Beginning in 2021, Sports Poll is conducted using a unique, all-Web hybrid methodology that combines the methodological rigor of address-based probability sampling with the convenience of opt-in online panels. Approximately 25% of the sample is sourced from the SSRS Opinion Panel, a nationally representative panel of Americans who are recruited randomly via an address-based sample. The remainder of the sample is sourced from opt-in online panels.

The probability and nonprobability samples are blended and weighted using SSRS's hybrid calibration methodology, which applies cutting-edge data science techniques to identify the customized benchmarks needed to ensure that the blended sample adequately represents the U.S. population. The approach maximizes data quality and avoids mode effects by collecting all interviews via a single mode (Web).

Sports Poll is representative of the US Population age 12 and older by gender, age, education, race/ethnicity, and Census region.

More than 600,000 Americans have been interviewed since 1994. Surveys are collected in both English and Spanish. Interviews are conducted approximately 350 days per year to minimize seasonality. Approximately 1800 interviews are collected each month (sample size of nearly 20,000 per year).

For More Information Contact

**CHAD MENEFFEE**

[cmenefee@ssrs.com](mailto:cmenefee@ssrs.com)