

Don't take me out to the ball game: Sports fans eager for empty arena games, hesitant to attend in person

Asked if they would go and sit in a crowd in October or November one-quarter of avid fans say 'no way'

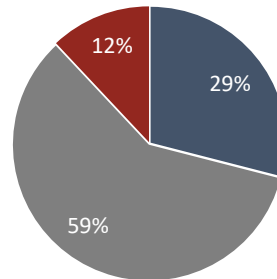
May 7, 2020 – As the German Bundesliga prepares to resume football matches, [the first major sports league in Europe to do so](#), sports fans in Canada continue to pine for the resumption of hockey, basketball, baseball, and other major league sports that abruptly paused after NBA All-Star Rudy Gobert [tested positive](#) for COVID-19 on March 11.

With conversations in this country [now shifting](#) to the mechanics of playing games in a safe and largely isolated capacity, a new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Canadian fans itching for the return of their favourite sports, undeterred by the possibility of watching athletes play without fans.

Indeed, among hard-core fans, approximately one-in-three say playing games in empty arenas is “great”, while more than half say it’s fine and “better than nothing”.

That doesn't, however, mean that fans are ready to cheer on their teams in person any time soon. Asked about attending a game live next October or November, for free, only 35 per cent of the most ardent sports fans say they would go without reservation, while one-quarter say absolutely not. The rest, two-in-five (40%), say they would do some deliberating before making up their mind.

There have been some discussions about some sports returning with no fans in the arenas. How do you feel about that idea when it comes to watching your favourite sport? (All respondents, n=1,527)



- It's great, whatever gets the games back on TV
- It's fine, not the same but better than nothing
- It's terrible, they might as well not even play

METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from May 1 – 4, 2020 among a representative randomized sample of 1,527 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

More Key Findings:

- Canadians miss the NHL far more than any other professional sports league. Three-in-five (59%) say they are missing hockey, compared to 31 per cent who miss baseball and 28 per cent who miss basketball.
- While Canadians are equally likely to say they would be disappointed with the cancellation of either the upcoming CFL or the NFL seasons (33% in each case), the loss of the CFL season

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would sting most in the Prairies, where three-in-five residents say they would be upset upon cancellation.

- Golf generates the largest generational gap of any sport canvassed. Canadians 55 and over are twice as likely as their younger counterparts to say they miss watching the PGA (18-34 – 13%, 35-54 – 11%, 55+ – 28%).

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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Hoping for hockey's return

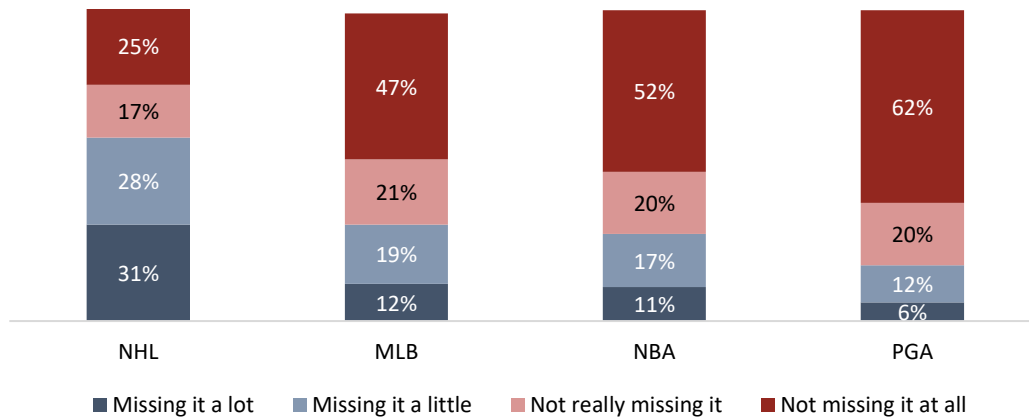
By early May in most "normal" years, Canadians across the country would be packing bars, going to games, or at home watching post-season NHL action. The National Basketball Association, too, was scheduled to begin its playoffs on April 18, with the Toronto Raptors defending their first-ever championship. This year, if the Raptors do get their chance to repeat, it won't be until the summer.

One of the myriad effects of the COVID-19 outbreak has been the shutdown of all sports, amateur and professional alike. Asked which major sports they are missing, three-in-five Canadians (59%) say this of the NHL. Significant minorities also say they miss Major League Baseball (31%) and the NBA (28%):

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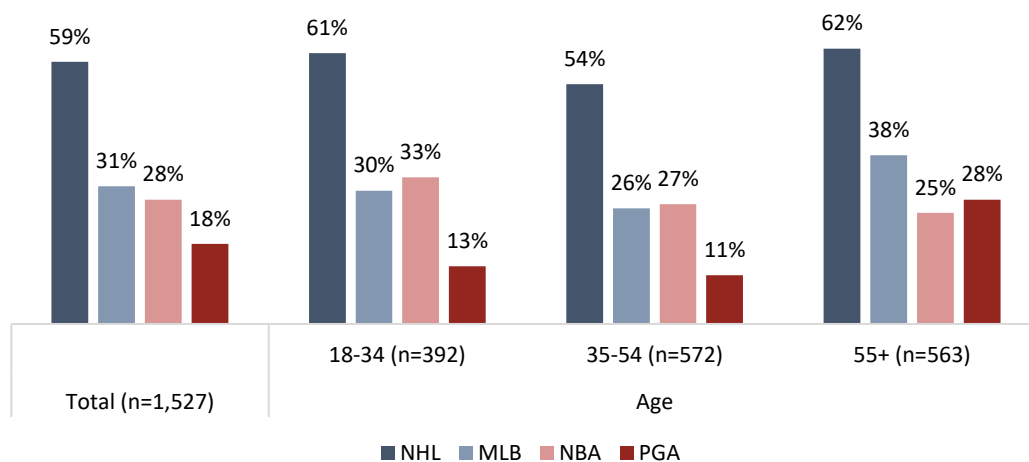
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**How much would you say you're missing each of the following:
(All respondents, n =1,527)**



The NHL is missed by majorities of all age groups, while other sports have more obvious generational differences. Younger people are most likely to miss the NBA, while those 55 years of age and over are twice as likely as other age groups to long for the PGA, which rescheduled its April Masters tournament for the fall:

**Percentage of Canadians saying they miss each sport 'a lot' or 'a little'
(All respondents)**



A fall without football?

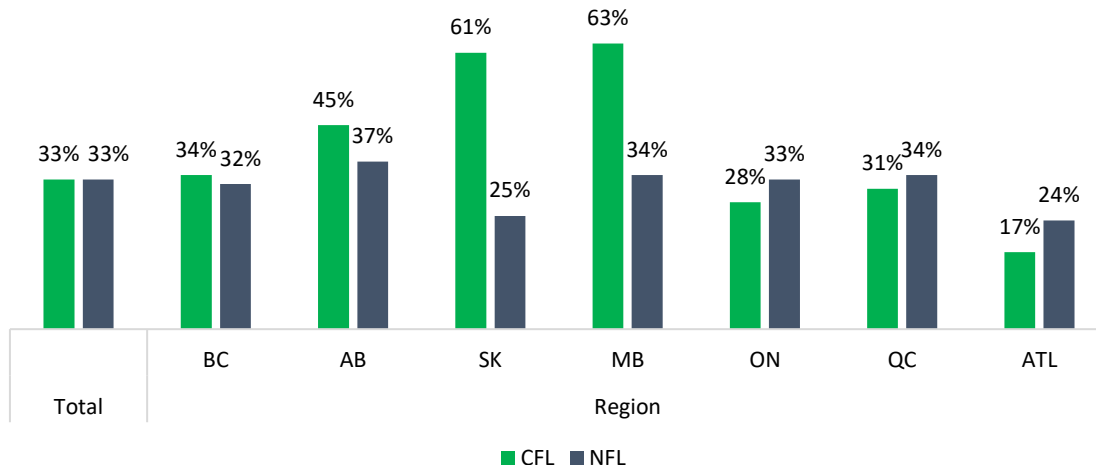
While each of the aforementioned sports have been paused indefinitely, two other major leagues are sorting out what to do with seasons that have yet to begin. The Canadian Football League season was originally scheduled to begin on June 11 but has been pushed to [July at the earliest](#). The league has [requested federal aid](#) of up to \$150 million to deal with expected and potential losses. Meanwhile, south of the border, the National Football League season has a yet unchanged anticipated start date of [September 10](#).

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If either league did cancel its season, the impact on Canadian fandom would differ regionally. One-in-three Canadians (33%) say they would be upset if the CFL or NFL did not go forward this year, but the level of disappointment is considerably higher in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba in the case of the CFL, and distributed more evenly for the NFL:

Percentage of Canadians saying they would be disappointed if each season was cancelled (All respondents, n=1,527)



Canada's sports fans and a new normal

To understand the Canadian sports landscape and the expectations and enthusiasm of fans going forward in this unprecedented period, respondents were grouped based on their interest in professional sports leagues.

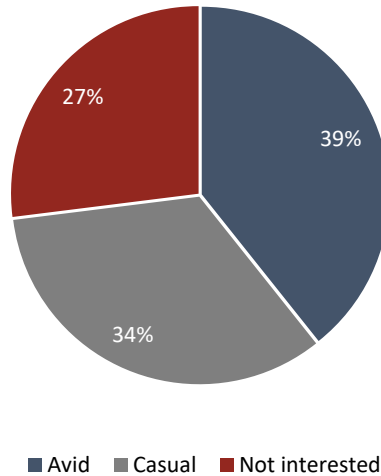
Related: COVID-19 Tracking. All our data in one place

Any person who said that they followed a league “very closely” is considered an Avid fan, while those who say they follow sports more generally (but not an individual league in particular) are considered Casual fans. Those who do not follow any sport closely are labeled as Not Interested.

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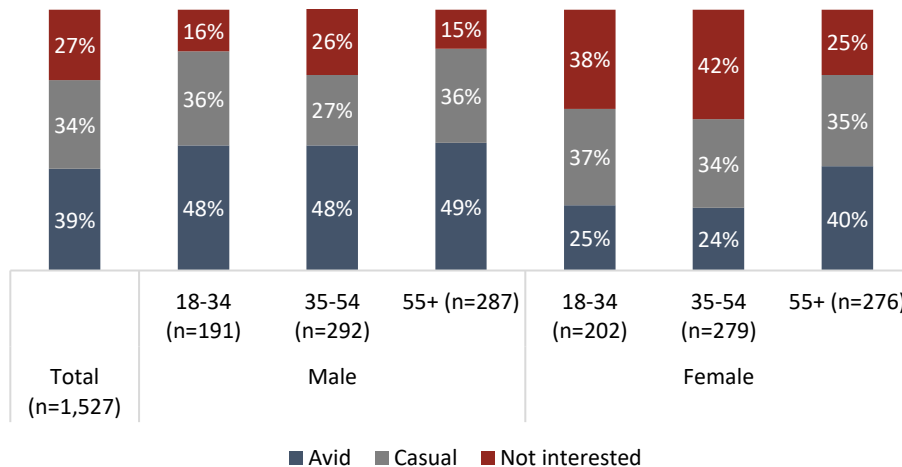
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Canadian Sports Fandom



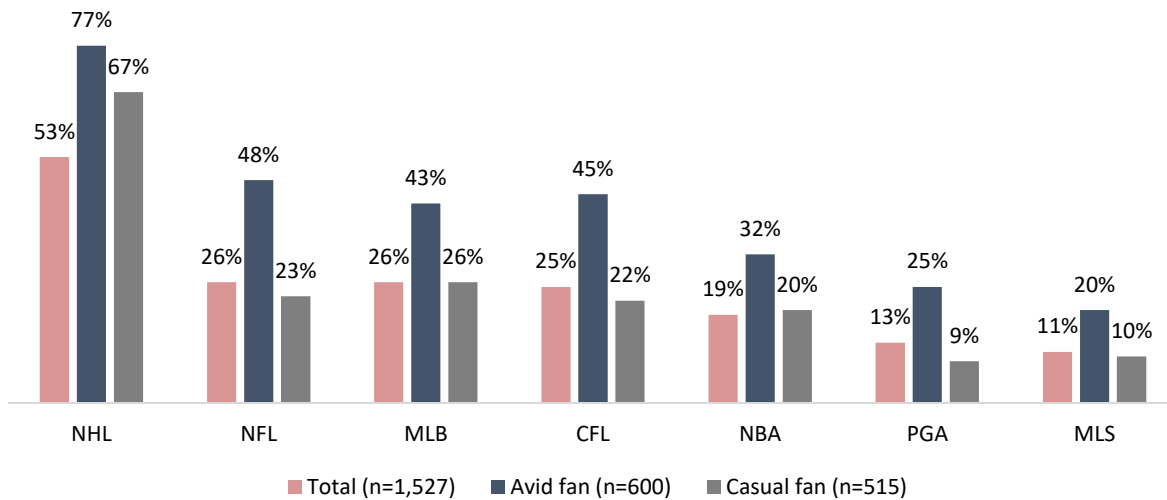
Age and gender play a considerable role in Canadian’s sports fandom level. Half of men in all age groups are in the Avid group. Older are more likely to be Avid fans than their younger counterparts:

Age and Gender composition by level of Sports Fan



To further develop the distinction between Avid and Casual fans consider that at least two-in-five Avid sports fans in Canada follow the NHL, NFL, MLB and CFL at least ‘closely’ if not ‘very closely’:

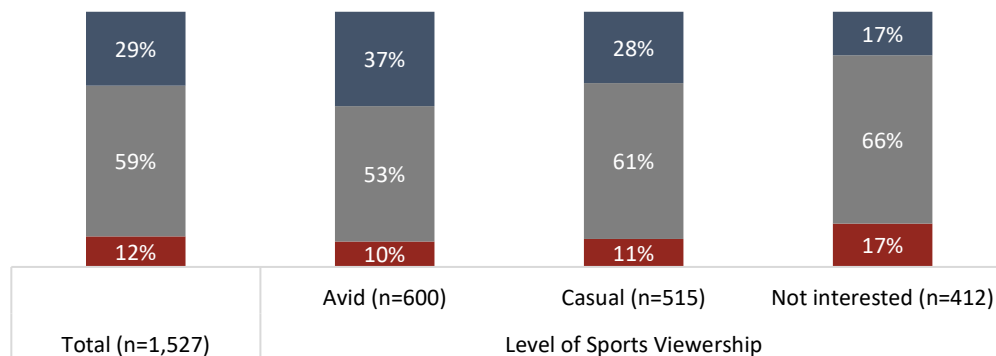
**Percentage of Canadians who follow each sport either 'closely' or 'very closely'
(All respondents)**



Empty arenas not discouraging many viewers

So, how do fans feel about the potential of professional leagues returning without fans? For most, anything is better than nothing. For close to two-in-five Avid fans (37%) this sounds like a great prospect.

There have been some discussions about some sports returning with no fans in the arenas. How do you feel about that idea when it comes to watching your favourite sport?



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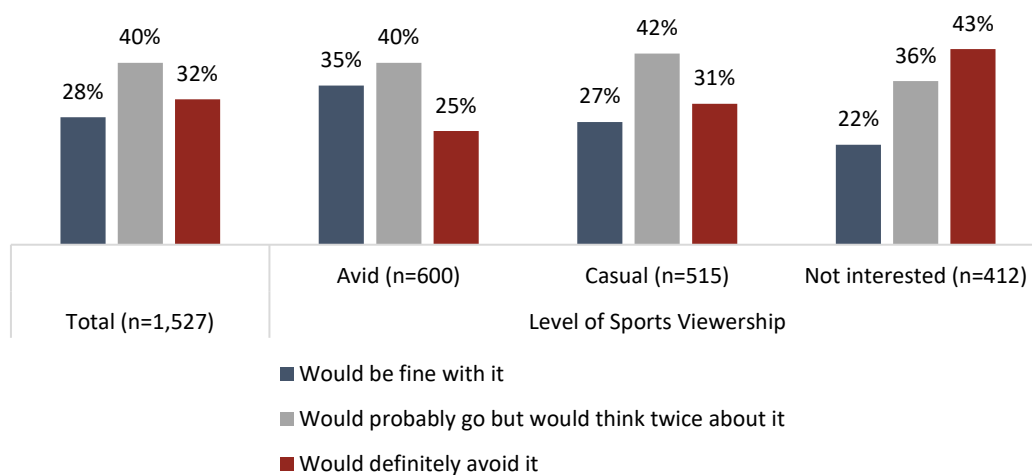
Would Canadians fill arenas in October/November?

Every indication appears to suggest that regardless of when games resume, it will be longer until fans fill arenas and stadiums again. To gauge their level of confidence about sitting among fellow fans, the Angus Reid Institute asked Canadians whether they would attend a game live in October or November, when the NHL and NBA seasons typically begin, if they were given a free ticket.

Overall, 28 per cent of respondents and 35 per cent of Avid Fans say they would be fine attending a game live in the fall. For 40 per cent of both the total population and Avid fans, uncertainty remains. They would “probably” go but would need to reconsider it again at the time.

One-in-three (32%) say they would definitely not even consider it. Notably, one-in-four (25%) Avid fans and 31 per cent of Casual fans say they would not go to the game.

Suppose this fall, say in October or November, you were given free tickets to a game of your favourite team. How would you feel about going to a live game and being there with a crowd?

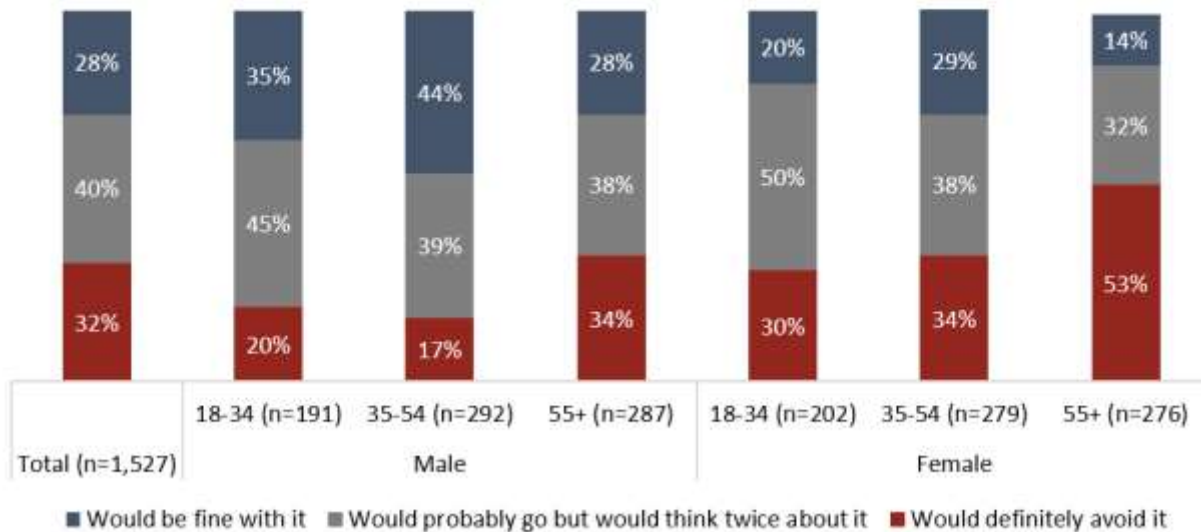


Women are generally more hesitant than men to say that they would be ready to go back to arenas in October or November. Men under the age of 55 are most likely to say that they would go watch their favourite team live:

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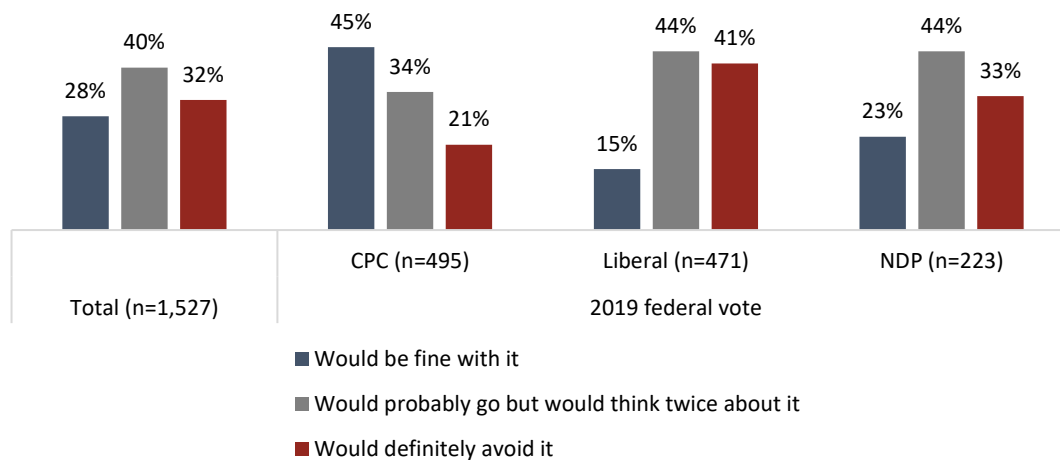
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Suppose this fall, say in October or November, you were given free tickets to a game of your favourite team. How would you feel about going to a live game and being there with a crowd?



Interestingly, and emblematic of [broader opinions](#) regarding the COVID-19 outbreak, the largest factor in determining willingness to attend a live game is political affiliation. Those who supported the Conservative Party in last year's October federal election are three times as likely as Liberal voters and twice as likely as NDP voters to say they would go to a game without hesitation:

Suppose this fall, say in October or November, you were given free tickets to a game of your favourite team. How would you feel about going to a live game and being there with a crowd?



For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).
For detailed results by level of sports viewership, [click here](#).