

As CFL (literally) moves the goalposts, fans call for league to embrace its uniqueness rather than align more with NFL

But overall attention to CFL drops as under-55 crowd continues to watch more of American game

November 12, 2025 – When CFL fans congregate in Winnipeg for Grey Cup festivities this week, the league's future will not be the only thing tackled.

The championship game between Montreal and Saskatchewan will be the last played before a new set of "[tweaks](#)" to field dimensions and game rules are introduced (over the next two seasons).

These changes attempt to walk the tenuous line between honouring the tradition of the Canadian game and inching it closer to the American product — all in the name of expanding the fanbase.

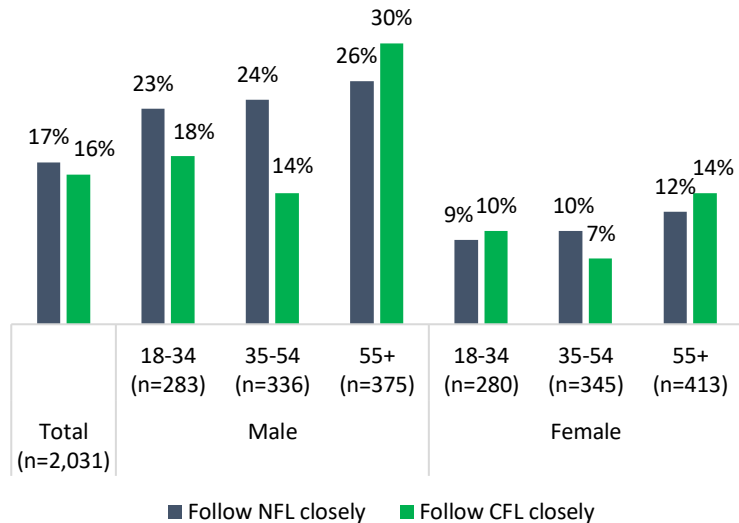
New data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds the CFL's attention landscape does appear to have declined. In both 2014 and 2018, 21 per cent of Canadians said they followed the league closely or very closely. In the 2020's, however, in three different iterations of this survey (2021, 2023, and 2025) attention has peaked at 17 per cent – this time recorded at 16 per cent.

This, and the league's strength among older viewers rather than younger, is perhaps cause for recently announced rule changes that will roll out over the next two seasons. For the league's gamble to pay off, it must not alienate those who support it already, while trying to draw in new fans. It's a risky bet.

Consider that half of those who follow the CFL (47%) and three-quarters who follow most closely (74%) shun the idea of moving more toward the American style. That said, among those who are fringe followers, the split is much closer, with 38 per cent saying the CFL should remain as unique as it can, while 30 per cent would align more with NFL rules. Many in this group are also unsure (31%) suggesting that there may be a window to draw more interest with changes.

One red line, however, appears to be changing the CFL's larger field. Asked about recent changes to the play clock, [the rouge](#), and the placement of the goal posts from the front to the back of the endzone, fans

Percentage who follow each league closely



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Oct. 7-11, 2025, among a randomized sample of 2,031 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). The sample was weighted to be representative of adults nationwide according to region, gender, age, household income, and education, based on the Canadian census. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2 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.

For more information on our polling methods, [click here](#).

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are generally more supportive than opposed. However, the idea of reducing the field size from 110 to 100 yards is opposed by two-thirds (64%) who follow the league very closely and half who follow it closely.

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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Part One: The CFL's attention landscape

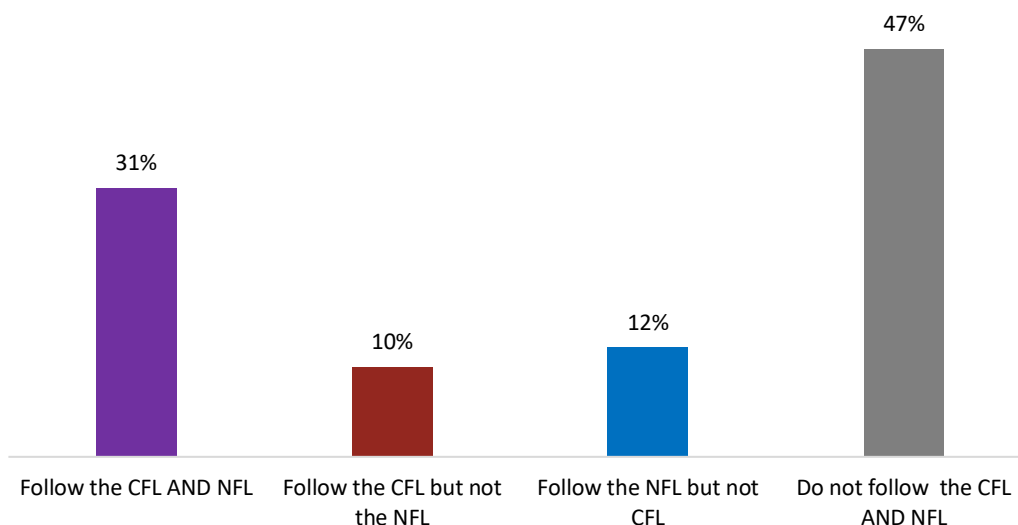
The overall football fan landscape

Football fandom in Canada is relatively wide-reaching at its most broad level. When asked if they follow either the CFL or NFL at all, fully half of Canadians say they pay at least some attention one or the other. The intersection of these two historic leagues is considerable, with three-in-10 (31%) saying they follow both (even if not very closely). A similar number notably say they follow one but not the other. Thus, it appears that the bulk of fans are amenable to both variations of the game:

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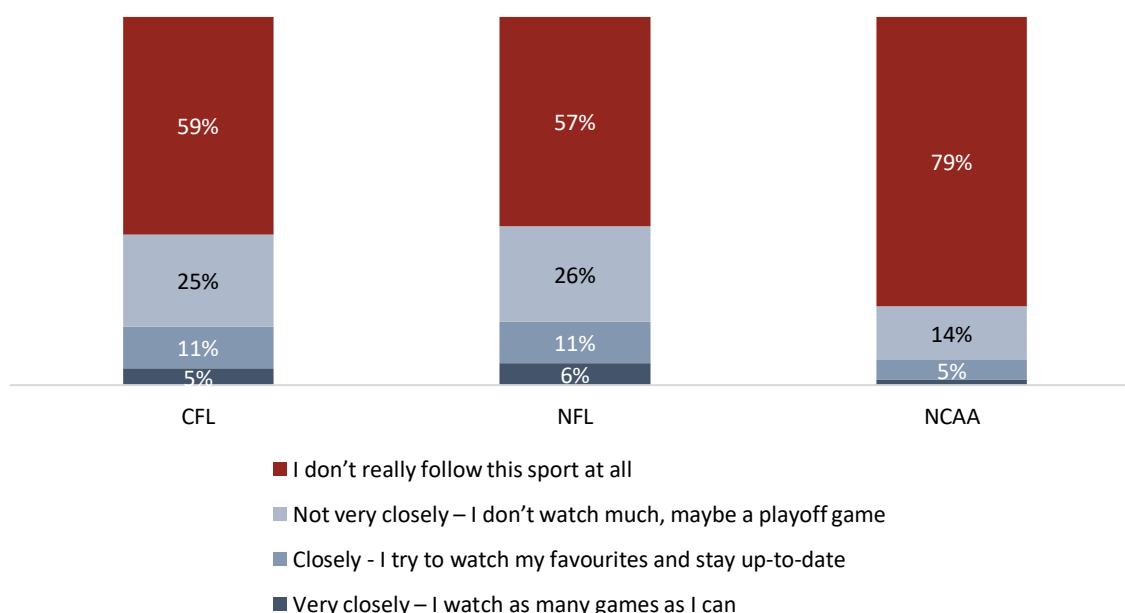
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How closely do you follow each of these professional sports leagues?



General attention is one thing, but intense connection puts people in the seats, sells merchandise, and drives TV ratings. On this measure, many football fans would not be considered hardcore. About five per cent follow each league *very closely*, while 11 per cent follow each closely.

How closely do you follow each of these football leagues?



CFL and NFL continue to generate interest from a similar number of Canadians

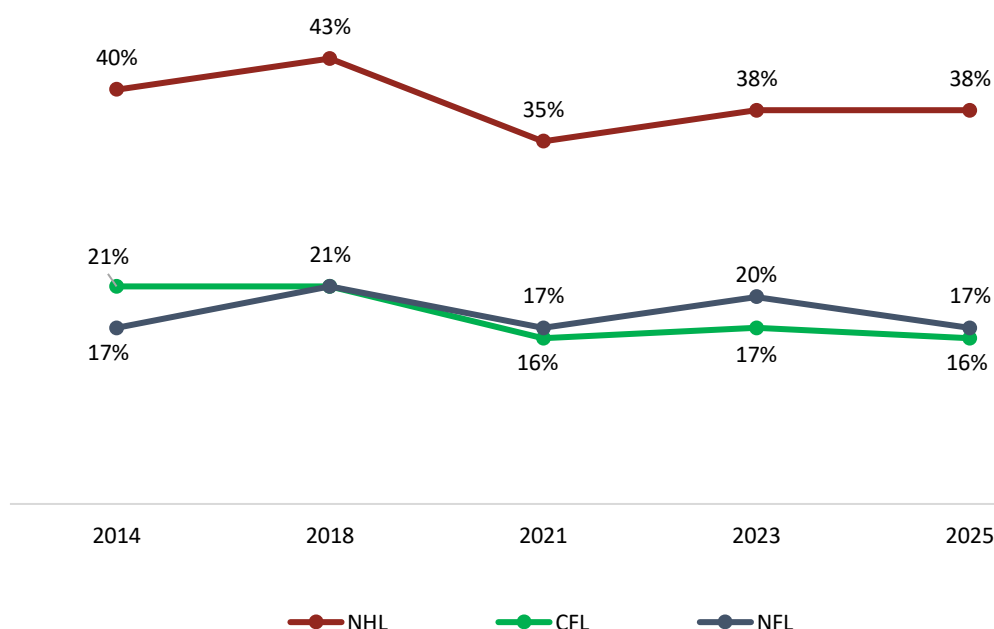
Interestingly, while the CFL and NFL jockey for Canadian eyeballs, the number of those who follow each game either closely or very closely has remained similar over the past decade. The potentially troubling

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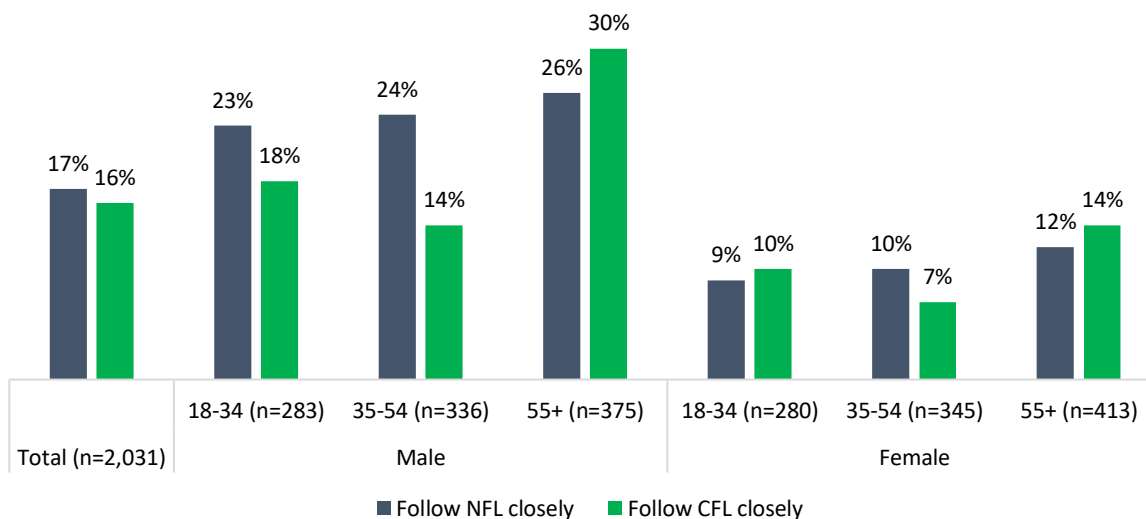
trend for the CFL, however, is that over the past three surveys on this topic their reported followers have diminished by four to five points from 2014 and 2018. NHL fandom is included here for comparison purposes, as the nation's unquestioned top sport generates double the attention of either football league:

Percentage of Canadians who follow each league very closely or closely:



The other challenge for the CFL is that the audience tends to skew older. The NFL has a much firmer foothold among men younger than 55 compared to the Canadian league, allowing it to transition younger fans into older ones. The CFL is twice as popular among men over the age of 54, for example, than those 35 to 54 years of age:

Percentage who follow each league closely

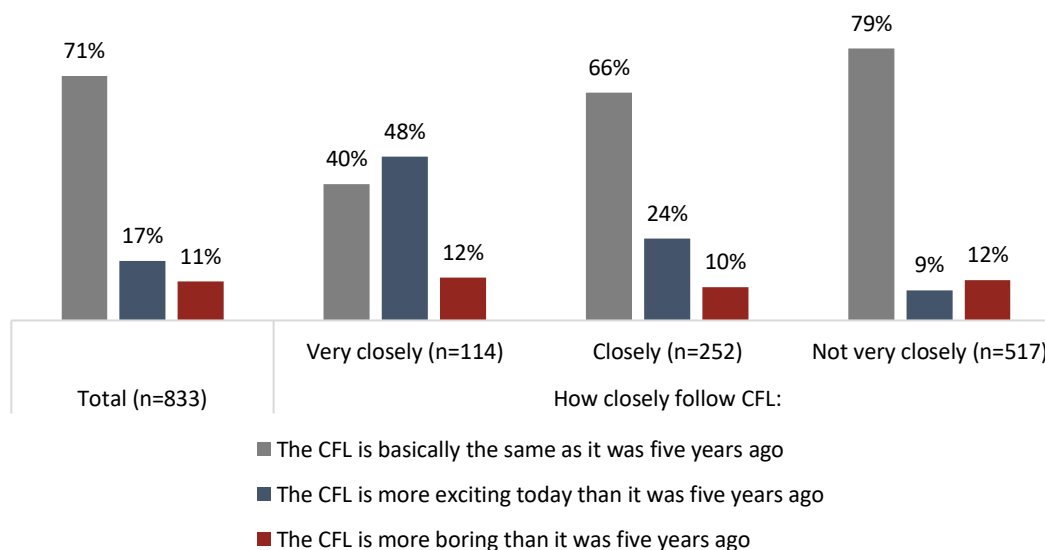


Part Two: The game and its future

Biggest CFL fans say the game has been improving

While significant attention has been placed on changing the CFL game to make it more exciting and marketable, those who love the game say it has already been improving. Conversely, few fans in any subgroup say the league has been going the wrong direction:

Thinking about the Canadian Football League over time would you say :

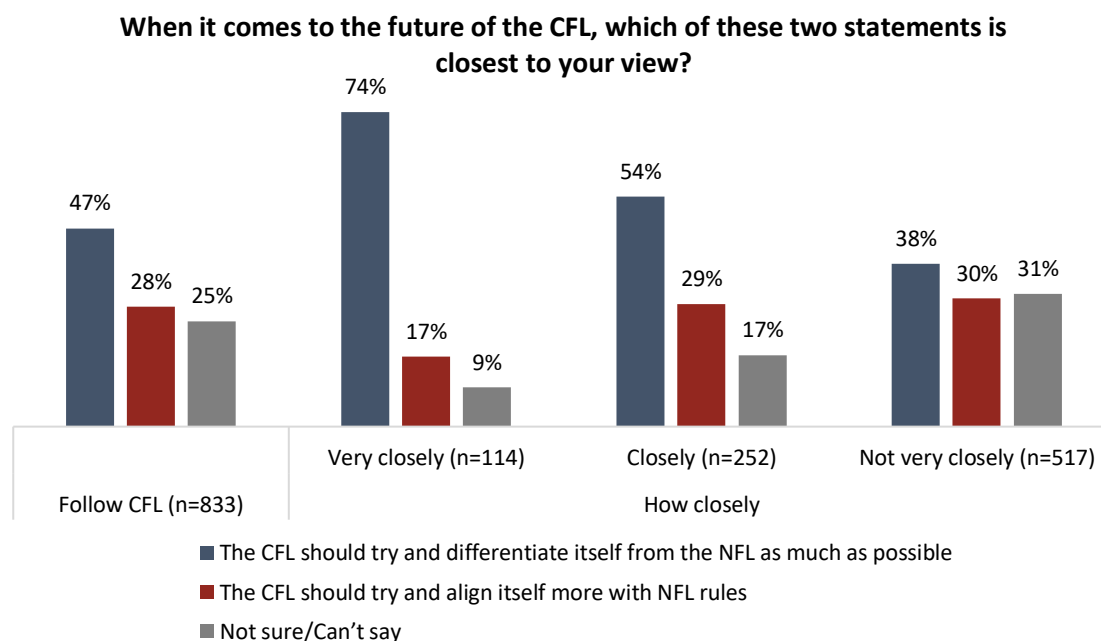


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More would keep the game unique from the American version

For this reason, among others, the idea that the CFL needs to move to more closely align itself with the NFL rules is not a popular one among close fans. Half of those who follow the CFL closely (47%) and three-quarters who follow very closely (74%) push back against the idea of moving more toward the American style. That said, view are much closer among those who watch less frequently, with 38 per cent saying the CFL should remain as unique as it can and 30 per cent wanting to align more with NFL rules. Many in this group are also unsure (31%) suggesting that there may be a window to draw more interest with changes.



Some changes supported, but fans oppose changing field size

As for the changes that the league has announced, some are viewed as a positive step, while others are a cause for pushback. Billed as “[tradition meets innovation](#)” these, and other smaller changes, will be made over the next two years:

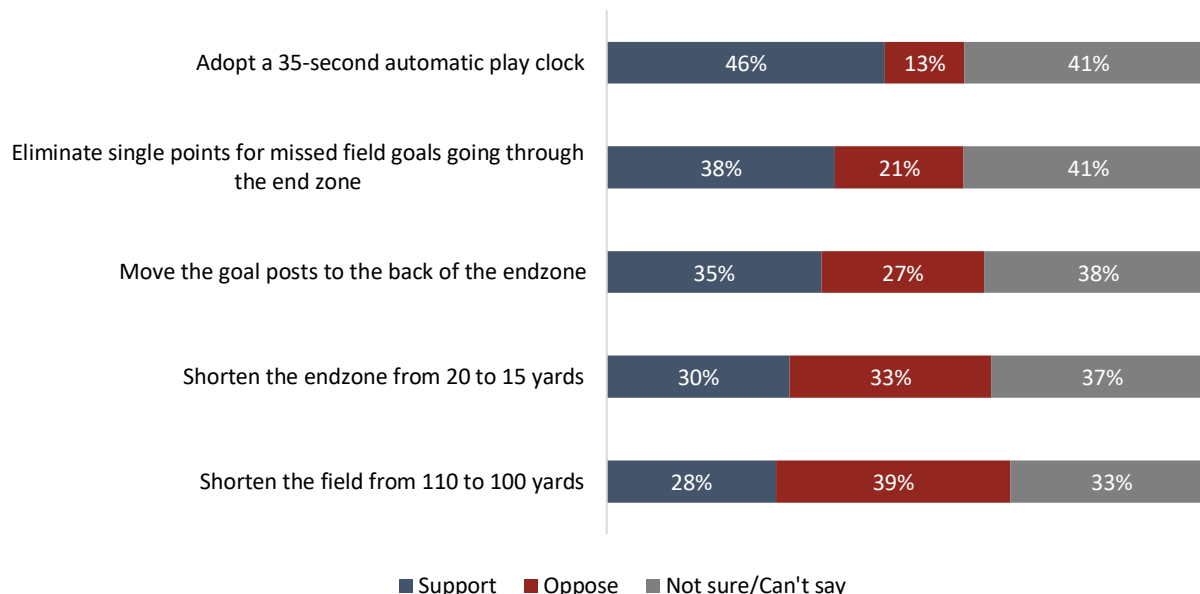
- The field will be shortened from 110 yards to 100 yards.
- The end zones will be shortened from 20 yards to 15 yards.
- The goalposts will move from the goal line to the back of the end zones.
- The single point awarded for a missed field goal that goes through the endzone will be removed.
- A new, automatic 35-second play clock will start after each play, replacing the manual system.

None of these rules are supported by a majority, but much of that is due to a large group who express no opinion. The support-oppose ratio is positive for the play clock change, eliminating the rouge (one point) for a missed field goal that goes through the endzone, and for moving the goalpost. Negative ratios, however, are noted for both changes to field length:

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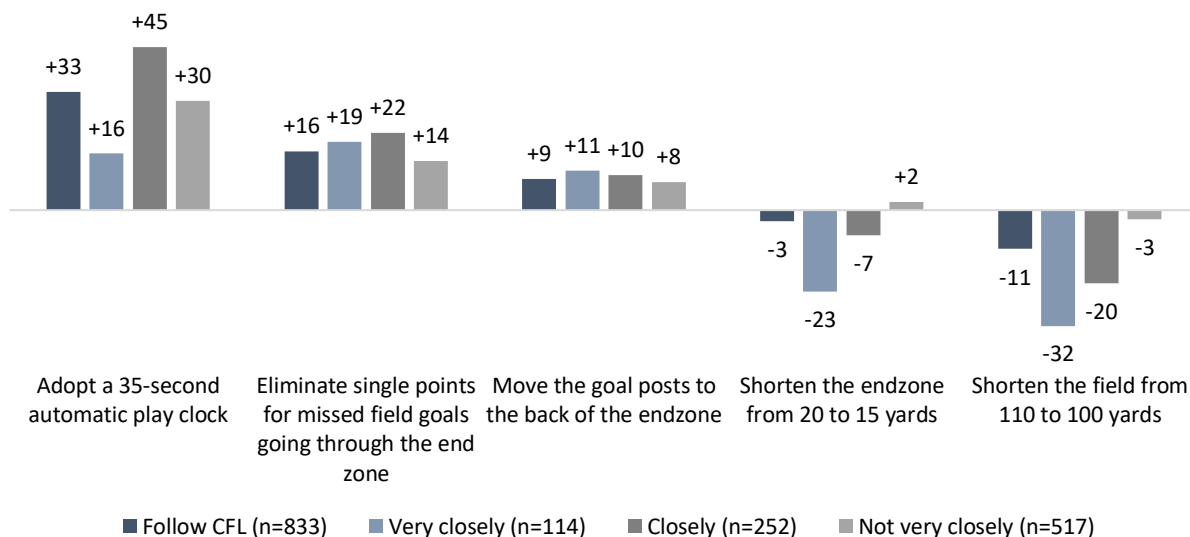
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**Do you support or oppose each of these changes?
(among those who follow CFL, n=831)**



Changes to the field length draw significant opposition from the league's closest fans. Using a support minus opposition score, the idea of changing the length of the field from 110 to 100 yards, for example, scores a negative 20 among those who follow closely and a negative 32 among the league's biggest followers:

Net Support for each change (support minus oppose)



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

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