

Pro Sports Interest in Canada #1

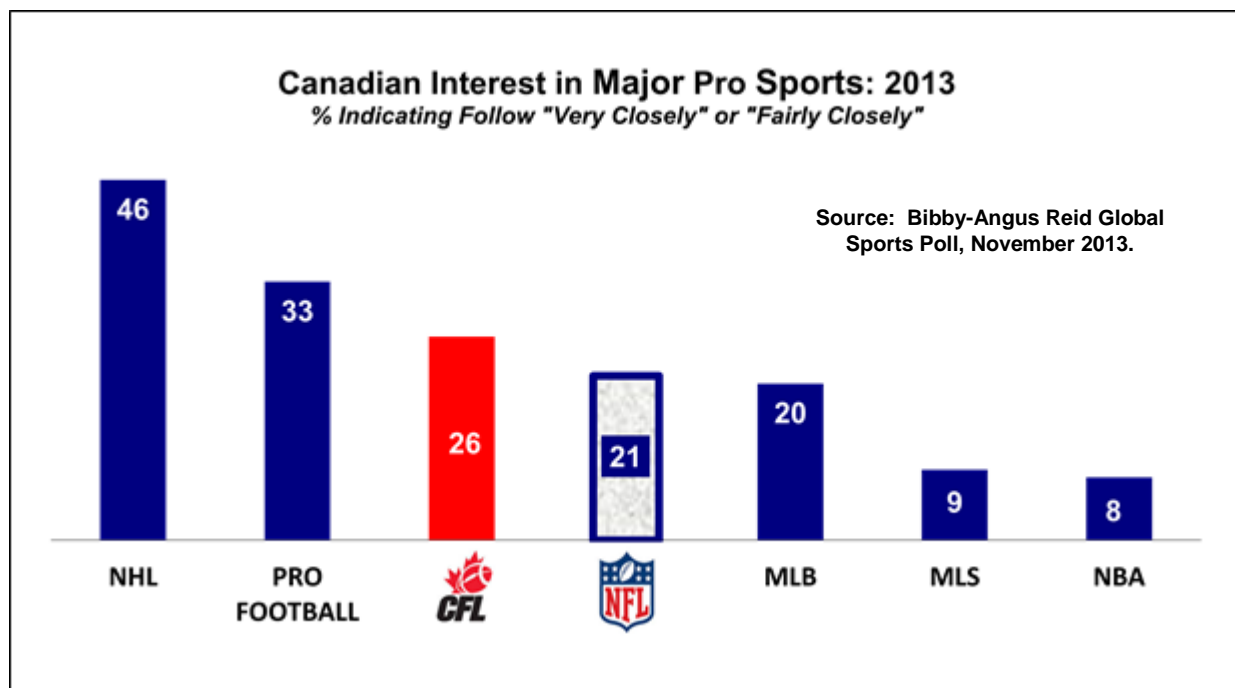
**CFL and Pro Football on a Roll in Year of 101st Grey Cup
*Hockey Still No. 1, but Football Now Entrenched as No. 2 in Canada***

A new national survey has found fan interest in pro football to be remarkably robust as the 101st Grey Cup game approaches this Sunday in Regina.

While hockey continues to be followed by a nation-leading 46% of Canadians, 33% now say that they are close followers of the CFL and/or the NFL – well above the 20% who indicate they follow Major League Baseball. Just under 10% of Canadians report that they closely follow either the NBA or Major League Soccer.

The on-line survey of 1,505 Canadians was carried out in early November by sociologist Reginald Bibby of the University of Lethbridge and pollster Angus Reid Global, as part of their joint research on *The Future of Life in Canada*.

What will surprise many people is the finding that 26% of people across the country say that they follow the CFL, compared to 21% for the NFL. Of these fans, 14% follow both leagues, while 12% follow only the CFL and 7% have eyes for only the NFL.



- Combined with Bibby's earlier Project Canada national surveys, the latest poll shows that, since 2005 and the end of hockey lockout, interest in the **NHL** has jumped from 30% to 46%. In the past decade or so, both the **CFL** and **NFL** have seen their fan bases increase by about 10 percentage points. Key factors influencing the growing interest in all three leagues would seem to include accelerated coverage, led by television, print media, and Internet-related platforms. The CFL's resilience is particularly remarkable and unexpected, given the massive media exposure and corporate support that the NFL receives on both sides of the border.

- Major League Baseball**

had a following of some 25-30% of Canadians when the Blue Jays were winning World Series in 1992 and 1993. The fan base dropped to below 15% by 2005 but, fuelled perhaps by expanded coverage and new hope for the Jays in recent years, now stands at 20%.

	NHL	PRO FOOTBALL	CFL	NFL	MLB	NBA	MLS
2013	46%	33	26	21	20	8	9
2005	30	24	20	13	13	7	-
2000	30	20	15	12	17	8	-
1995	38	21	15	13	28	6	-
1990	36	21	16	11	24	4	-

Sources: Bibby, Project Canada Surveys and Bibby-Angus Reid Global Sports Poll, November 2013.

- The **NBA** had a following of 4% of the population in 1990. With the arrival of the Raptors and Grizzlies in 1995, that figure increased slightly to 6% and then nudged up to 8% by 2000 – the same year Vancouver lost its team to Memphis. Today the NBA's national fan base remains at 8%.

- Major League Soccer**, in Toronto since 2007 and now in Vancouver (2011) and Montreal (2012), is followed closely by 9% of Canadians – about the same percentage of fans as the NBA.

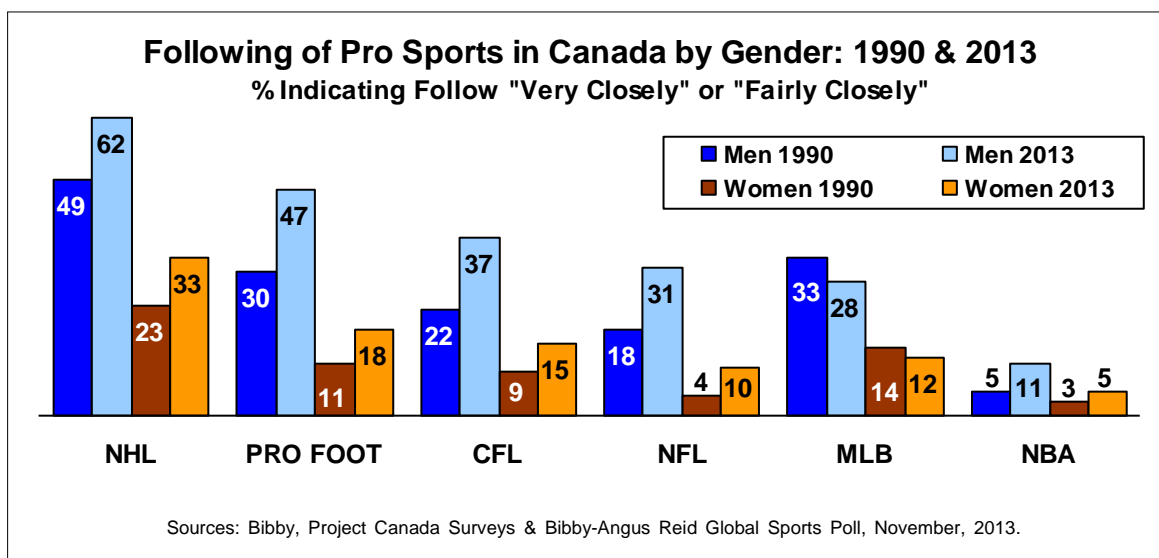
- Regionally**, *west of Ontario and in Quebec*, interest in the CFL is *second only to hockey*. *In Ontario and in Toronto* specifically, hockey reigns and interest in Major League Baseball is considerably higher than in the rest of the country and there is slightly more interest in the NFL than the CFL. That said, combined interest in pro football is slightly higher than baseball – even in Toronto (35% versus 32%). In Toronto and the rest of Ontario, NBA fans number under 15%, with the figure under 10% for Major League Soccer. In the *Atlantic region*, hockey is no. 1 with baseball and football close to even but a distant no. 2.

	NHL	PRO Football	CFL	NFL	MLB	MLS	NBA
NATIONALLY	46%	33	26	21	20	9	8
British Columbia	56	36	32	16	19	8	6
Prairies	42	44	42	21	16	8	7
<i>Alberta</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Saskatchewan</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Manitoba</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>3</i>
Ontario	44	32	22	25	27	7	10
<i>Toronto</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>13</i>
Quebec	49	28	24	18	13	15	7
Atlantic	40	16	8	14	18	3	6

*Cases for SK (47) & MB (54) too small for reliable percentaging; including for heuristic purposes.

Source: Bibby-Angus Reid Global Sports Poll, November 2013.

- **Gender-wise**, far more men than women continue to follow each of these six sports leagues. That said, there has been a noteworthy jump since 1990 in the interest that women as well as men have in both hockey and football. The popularity rankings of the various sports for women have remained the same as for men: the NHL is first, pro football and the CFL second, Major League Baseball is third, followed by the NBA and now, Major League Soccer.



- **Age** differences for both males and females are relatively small in the case of the NHL, CFL, NFL and Major League Baseball. One exception is that the CFL – while having similar proportions of younger male fans as the NFL – nonetheless has a larger following among older males.

- The **NBA's** fan base tends to be disproportionately young – a pattern that dates back to the 1990s. The league's challenge lies with sustaining interest among both men and women as they get older.

- The popularity of **Major League Soccer** also tends to be highest among younger adults, but shows signs of having a broader fan with respect to both age and gender.

Interest in Major Pro Sports by Gender and Age: 2013
Follow "Very Closely" or "Fairly Closely"

	NHL	CFL	NFL	MLB	MLS	NBA
NATIONALLY	46%	26	21	20	9	8
Men	62	37	31	28	12	11
18-34	59	31	29	27	19	21
35-54	62	36	33	27	11	10
55 & over	60	45	31	32	9	5
Women	33	15	10	12	6	5
18-34	36	15	12	14	9	12
35-54	32	15	11	9	3	1
55 & over	30	15	8	13	5	1

Source: Bibby-Angus Reid Global Sports Poll, November 2013.

Concluding Thoughts

These survey findings offer a reading on the interest in professional sport in Canada that help to clarify reality.

- ✓ Contrary to rumour, not everyone is a wild-eyed hockey fan. Nonetheless, close to 1 in 2 Canadians are closely following the **National Hockey League**.
- ✓ Enthusiasm about the **Canadian Football League** is not limited only to Grey Cup week; some 1 in 4 people across the country follow the league closely all season long.
- ✓ The massive media exposure and corporate support of the **National Football League** has contributed to growth in interest in the NFL. But, as something of a cultural miracle, the CFL nonetheless has a greater national following. Ironically, the intense marketing of American football may be helping to “sell” football, Canadian-style.
- ✓ **Major League Baseball**, as with the NFL, has a fan base that consists of about 1 in 5 Canadians. To a large extent, the popularity of MLB will undoubtedly rise and fall with the success of the Blue Jays. But its following of some 30% in the early 1990s will be difficult to match, given the increasingly crowded sports marketplace and the growth of fan interest in both the NHL and pro football. Losing all our Triple-A clubs, along with the Expos, hasn’t helped.
- ✓ When the Raptors arrived in 1995, David Stern allegedly said something to the effect that the **NBA** hoped to be fourth in the Toronto sports market – “after hockey, hockey, and hockey.” Now, close to two decades later, the NBA remains well behind not only hockey but also pro football and baseball, in Toronto and elsewhere. Young people are clearly playing more basketball. But the NBA’s market share in Canada is scarcely above what it was when the Raptors and now-defunct Grizzlies arrived. Things may change; but they haven’t yet.
- ✓ **Major League Soccer** is exploding with expansion. In addition to the MLS teams in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, interest in soccer is being fuelled further by NASL teams in Edmonton and now Ottawa – as well as international “friendlies” and extensive TV coverage of British and other European competition. And then there are all those kids playing soccer. Currently, MLS’s Canadian fan base is about the same size as that of the NBA. That may be a good thing, providing that it too does not remain stagnant.

We will continue to work on where sports and Canadian life more generally will be by around 2050, drawing on past surveys and carrying out some important new ones. Keep an eye on forthcoming releases via www.reginaldbibby.com.

NEXT UP: A RELEASE NEXT WEEK AS TORONTO HOSTS BUFFALO & ATLANTA
How Canadians Feel About the Possibility of the NFL Coming to Canada

Dr. Reginald Bibby is a best-selling author and professor of sociology at The University of Lethbridge who has been monitoring social trends in Canada now for four decades.

The trends research is continuing in collaboration with pollster **Angus Reid Global** and **Andrew Grenville**. The findings on pro sport will be part of Bibby and Grenville’s new book, *The Future of Life in Canada*, which will be released in late 2014.

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