Seton Hall Sports Poll Examines LeBron James Popularity

AMERICANS TO LeBRON: ‘OK TO CHANGE TEAMS, BUT WHAT A MESS YOU MADE OF IT’

“Favorable” Impression By Fans Ranks Below Kobe, Tiger, Other Sports Stars

S. Orange, NJ, October 20, 2010 – Americans accepted LeBron James’s decision to change teams by nearly a 2-1 margin, but strongly rejected aspects of his process, according to a poll conducted this week by the Seton Hall Sports Poll in conjunction with ESPN.

James’s move, from the Cleveland Cavaliers to the Miami Heat on July 9 in a televised announcement on ESPN, was viewed favorably by 41% of the 923 respondents to the national telephone survey, with only 22% thinking that his decision to switch teams was not a good one.

His handling of the free agent process however, seems to have cut into his popularity quite deeply, with only 2% saying they now view him more favorably, and 22% less favorably. 52% registered no difference.

Asked whether they are more likely or less likely to buy LeBron James merchandise this season, only 3% said more likely while 21% said less likely despite his new uniform. Asked about whether more or less likely to watch him on TV, 14% said more likely and 15% said less.

“LeBron seems to have had some missteps in a process that could have gone much more smoothly,” noted Rick Gentile, director of the Seton Hall Sports Poll, conducted by The Sharkey Institute. “It’s a shame, because few begrudged him his chance to take advantage of his free agency.”

Among those who viewed him less favorably, 64% said his decision to announce on a one-hour televised special had a large impact on their feelings and 73% felt not telling the Cavaliers about his decision before the announcement had a large impact.

In simply “favorable vs. unfavorable” impressions of current sports stars, the poll found 36% viewing James favorably, vs. 19% unfavorably. For Tiger Woods, the result was 40%-38%. For Kobe Bryant it was 48%-26%. For Derek Jeter, it was 45%-11%. For Brett Favre, it was 53%-13%. (The poll was conducted last week, prior to the report by Deadspin.com of Favre’s flirtation with a female sideline reporter when he played for the New York Jets in 2008).
The poll has a margin of error due to sampling of 3% for most estimates. Other factors also may affect the total error.

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- QUESTIONNAIRE -

YOUR OPINION OF SEVERAL PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES: FAVORABLE, UNFAVORABLE OR YOU DON’T KNOW ENOUGH?

1. Tiger Woods?
   1 – Favorable 40%
   2 – Unfavorable 38

2. LeBron James?
   1 – Favorable 36
   2 – Unfavorable 19

3. Kobe Bryant?
   1 – Favorable 48
   2 – Unfavorable 26

4. Brett Favre?
   1 – Favorable 53
5. Derek Jeter?

1 – Favorable 45
2 – Unfavorable 11

6. Tiger Woods recently competed in the Ryder Cup international golf tournament. Given the recent controversy about him, do you think it was appropriate that he represented the United States in the competition?

1 – Yes 62
2 – No 19

7. How likely are you to buy LeBron James merchandise this season as compared to last season: more likely, less likely or about the same likelihood?

1 – More likely 3
2 – Less likely 21
3 – About the same 54

8. How likely are you to watch a televised game involving LeBron James this season as compared to last season: more likely, less likely or about the same likelihood?

1 – More likely 14
2 – Less likely 15
3 – About the same 52

9. Thinking back to last season, would you say LeBron James was your favorite player, one of your favorites, not one of your favorites, one of your least favorites or least favorite player?

1 – Favorite 2
2 – One of favorites 25
3 – Not one of favorites 28
4 – One of least favorites 7
5 – Least favorite 6
10. As an NBA free agent, LeBron James announced that he was leaving Cleveland to join Miami during this past off-season. Do you think his decision to switch teams was a good one?

1 – Yes 41
2 – No 22

11. After he made his announcement would you say he was your favorite player, one of your favorites, not one of your favorites, one of your least favorites or least favorite player?

1 – Favorite 1
2 – One of favorites 20
3 – Not one of favorites 25
4 – One of least favorites 10
5 – Least favorite 8

12. Did the way LeBron James handle the entire free agent process and eventual signing with Miami make you think of him more favorably, less favorably or did it make no difference?

1 – More favorably 2
2 – Less favorably 22
3 – No difference 52

(IF “LESS FAVORABLY” TO ABOVE)
To what degree did the following aspects of his decision making process impact your unfavorable feelings towards him:

13. His decision to make his announcement on a one-hour televised special.

1 – Large impact 64
2 – Some impact 21
3 – No impact 11

14. Him not telling his former team (the Cleveland Cavaliers) before making his announcement on television.

1 – Large impact 73
2 – Some impact 17
3 – No impact 8
15. His statement “I’m taking my talents to South Beach”.

1 – Large impact  41
2 – Some impact  16
3 – No impact  37

16. The decision to join Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh on a “super team”.

1 – Large impact  26
2 – Some impact  23
3 – No impact  44

17. The big spectacle reception in Miami.

1 – Large impact  39
2 – Some impact  20
3 – No impact  36

18. His statement that Miami would win “not one, not two, not three, not four” championships.

1 – Large impact  41
2 – Some impact  19
3 – No impact  28