



**A Warning to MLB: 30% of Fans (and 44% of Avid Fans)
Say ‘Less Interest’ When Games Resume**

**Fans Divided on Baseball Rule Changes
But by 6 to 1 Avid Fans Say Both Leagues Should Have DH,
By 2 to 1 Fans Say Extend Wild Card to Series; Support Shorter Season**

South Orange, NJ, December 15, 2021 – Even with Major League Baseball shutdown due to a labor lockout – and the traditional hot stove turned cold – the nation’s sports fans are not without strong opinions on matters being negotiated with the Players Association.

These were the findings of a Seton Hall Sports Poll conducted December 8-13 across the United States using a national representative sample weighted according to gender, age, ethnicity, education, income and geography based on U.S. Census Bureau figures. The Poll had 1,570 adult respondents with a margin of error of +/- 3.2 percent.

Despite the contract impasse, negotiators on both sides should take heed of the 44 percent of avid fans (and 30 percent of all fans) that say a stoppage would make them feel less interested in MLB once the games resume.

“That is a large percentage of the MLB fan base,” said Charles Grantham, Director of the Center for Sport Management within Seton Hall’s Stillman School of Business, which sponsors the Poll. We know from previous work stoppages, whether initiated by management (lockout) or labor (strike), that fans tend to come back. Today, however, there is immense competition in entertainment. These numbers are not encouraging and should be very concerning for a sport attempting to reverse a steady decline in ratings and attendance.”

By contrast, in what can be seen as good news for baseball, 46 percent of avid fans (and 41 percent of fans in general) say that the stoppage will not make them less interested in MLB. Among the general population, however, only 19 percent said they’d be less interested whenever baseball resumes while 27 percent will retain their current level of interest. Perhaps most concerning for baseball is that across the board among the general population 54 percent said they are currently not interested in MLB.

DH All Around

In a finding that may be of particular interest to negotiators and the league, among those who call themselves “avid sports fans” 62 percent to 10 favor both leagues employing the designated hitter (DH) rule. Among all who identify as fans (avid and otherwise) 42 percent favor the DH in both leagues versus only 12 percent who disagree.

The support for the designated hitter in both leagues seems to have turned following the 2020 “all DH” Covid-rule change. In April 2021, the Seton Hall Sports Poll found avid fans favoring the addition of the DH in the National League by a 57-17 percent margin.

As recently as April 2019, however, when asked by the Poll whether the DH should be extended to the National League only 22 percent of those who follow baseball supported it – with 61 percent saying it should be left alone.

Other Rule Changes

Pitching

Asked whether relief pitchers should be required to face three batters (unless an inning ends), avid fans said yes by 46-23 percent while sports fans in general said yes by 34-22 percent.

Don't End Interleague Play

Ending interleague play was supported by only 38 percent of avid fans with 45 percent opposed. Among all fans, it was supported by even less, with only 27 percent in favor of ending interleague play and 40 percent opposing.

Shorter Season

Perhaps counterintuitive, when avid fans were asked about shortening the season by 8-12 games, they said yes by 49-34 percent. Sports fans in general said they would like the shorter regular season by a margin of 39-27 percent.

Extend Division Series?

As for lengthening the Division Series from best of five to best of seven, avid fans supported that by a 49-38 percent margin. Sports fans in general, however, narrowly opposed it, with 34 percent saying yes to a longer series while 36 percent said no.

Extend Wild Card Play

Similarly, respondents were asked about extending the wild card round (currently one game) to best of three. Avid fans supported that extension by an overwhelming 57-24 percent margin, with sports fans in general also supporting more wild card games by 45-22 percent.

“The support for an extension of Wild Card games is greater than 2 to 1 and for the division series significant as well,” said Seton Hall Marketing Professor and Poll Methodologist Daniel Ladik. “Couple the desire for more playoff baseball with the fans’ desire for a shorter regular season, and the script for a more viable gameplan for MLB writes itself.”

End the Shift?

Prohibiting the overshifting of infielders found only 36 percent of avid fans in favor, with 44 percent opposing a rule change that would stop the shifts. Among all sports fans, even less supported a prohibition on shifts, with only 24 percent in favor of a ban and 41 percent opposed.

7 Inning Double Headers?

Maintaining seven-inning doubleheaders (as was the case in 2020-21), drew 47 percent in favor of the shortened games from avid fans vs. 38 percent opposed (in favor of returning to full nine-inning games). For sports fans in general, support for seven inning games was evenly divided, 36-36 percent.

Runner on Second?

Another 2020-21 rule change posed to respondents was starting extra innings with a runner on second base, to which 42 percent of avid fans agreed and 26 percent disagreed. By contrast, almost the complete opposite was favored by general sports fans: only 28 percent agreed with starting extra innings with a runner on second and 42 percent disagreed.

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Questions with charted breakdowns below; an online version of this release may be found at <http://blogs.shu.edu/sportspoll/>

ABOUT THE POLL

The Seton Hall Sports Poll, conducted regularly since 2006, is performed by the Sharkey Institute within the Stillman School of Business. This poll was conducted online by YouGov Plc. using a national representative sample weighted according to gender, age, ethnicity, education, income and geography, based on U.S. Census Bureau figures. Respondents were selected from YouGov's opt-in panel to be representative of all U.S residents. This poll release conforms to the Standards of Disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls. The Seton Hall Sports Poll has been chosen for inclusion in iPoll by Cornell's Roper Center for Public Opinion Research and its findings have been published everywhere from USA Today, ESPN, The New York Times, Washington Post, AP, and Reuters to CNBC, NPR, Yahoo Finance, Fox News and many points in between.

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The Results:

December 2021 Seton Hall Sports Poll

This SHSP was conducted December 8th through December 13th and includes responses from 1,570 US adults with a margin of error of 3.2%. The sample mirrors the US Census percentages on age, gender, income, education, ethnicity, and region.

Q1. Which, if any, of the following statements best describes you?

- I am an avid sports fan **15%**
- I am a sports fan **38%**
- I am **not** a sports fan **47%**

Major League Baseball’s collective bargaining agreement with its baseball players ended December 1st.

As with all professional sports in the US, the union that represents the players meets with the professional sports league and its owners to create a set of rules and regulations that both parties agree upon for the upcoming season.

Since a new collective bargaining agreement was not reached between Major League Baseball and the players union and we are now in a lockout, baseball is currently shut down and the planned start of the season will be postponed until an agreement is met.

Q7. Now that a work stoppage has occurred and MLB’s upcoming season is postponed until an agreement is met, will this reduce your interest in MLB once the games resume?

N=1,570	General Population	Sports Fan	Non Fan	Avid Fan	Casual Fan
Yes, a stoppage would make me feel less interested in MLB once the games resume	19%	30%	7%	44%	24%
No, a stoppage would <u>not</u> make me feel less interested in MLB once the games resume	27%	41%	11%	46%	39%
Not applicable – I am not currently interested in MLB	54%	29%	82%	10%	37%

As part of the negotiation for the new collective bargaining agreement starting with the 2022 season, how much do you agree or disagree with the following rule changes?

Q8a. Designated hitter (DH) in both leagues (i.e. American and National leagues)?

N=1,570	General Population	Sports Fan	Non Fan	Avid Fan	Casual Fan
Agree	28%	42%	12%	62%	33%
Neither agree nor disagree	62%	47%	80%	28%	55%
Disagree	10%	11%	8%	10%	12%

Q8b. Runner on second base to start extra innings (i.e. innings that are held after the regular 9 innings of a baseball game to break a tie)?

N=1,570	General Population	Sports Fan	Non Fan	Avid Fan	Casual Fan
Agree	18%	28%	8%	42%	22%
Neither agree nor disagree	58%	42%	77%	26%	48%
Disagree	24%	30%	15%	32%	30%

Q8c. Relief pitchers must face 3 batters (unless an inning ends)?

N=1,570	General Population	Sports Fan	Non Fan	Avid Fan	Casual Fan
Agree	23%	34%	12%	46%	29%
Neither agree nor disagree	61%	44%	79%	31%	49%
Disagree	16%	22%	9%	23%	22%

Q9a. The season shortened by 8-12 games (currently 162 games)?

N=1,570	General Population	Sports Fan	Non Fan	Avid Fan	Casual Fan
Yes	28%	39%	17%	49%	34%
No	23%	27%	17%	34%	25%
Don't know/No opinion	49%	34%	66%	17%	41%

Q9b. End of interleague play (i.e. regular-season games played between an American League team and a National League team)?

N=1,570	General Population	Sports Fan	Non Fan	Avid Fan	Casual Fan
Yes	18%	27%	8%	38%	22%
No	31%	40%	20%	45%	37%
Don't know/No opinion	51%	33%	72%	17%	41%

Q9c. Lengthen Division Series (i.e. post-season games) from 5 to 7 games?

N=1,570	General Population	Sports Fan	Non Fan	Avid Fan	Casual Fan
Yes	22%	34%	8%	49%	28%
No	29%	36%	22%	38%	35%
Don't know/No opinion	49%	30%	70%	13%	37%

Q9d. Single-game Wild Card round (i.e. two teams in each of the two leagues – American League and National League – competing against each other to qualify for the post-season despite not winning their division) becomes the best of 3 games?

N=1,570	General Population	Sports Fan	Non Fan	Avid Fan	Casual Fan
Yes	30%	45%	14%	57%	39%
No	18%	22%	13%	24%	22%
Don't know/No opinion	52%	33%	73%	19%	39%

Q9e. Prohibit infield overshifts (i.e. players on the defensive team realigning where they stand on the field in order to have an advantage against the opposing team's batter)?

N=1,570	General Population	Sports Fan	Non Fan	Avid Fan	Casual Fan
Yes	17%	24%	8%	36%	20%
No	31%	41%	21%	44%	39%
Don't know/No opinion	52%	35%	71%	20%	41%

Q9f. Keep 7 innings, instead of the regular 9 innings, for doubleheaders (i.e. two games between the same teams on the same day in immediate succession)?

N=1,570	General Population	Sports Fan	Non Fan	Avid Fan	Casual Fan
Yes	25%	36%	13%	47%	32%
No	28%	36%	19%	38%	36%
Don't know/No opinion	47%	28%	68%	15%	32%

ABOUT SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

One of the country's leading Catholic universities, Seton Hall has been showing the world what great minds can do since 1856. Home to nearly 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students and offering more than 90 rigorous academic programs, Seton Hall's academic excellence has been singled out for distinction by The Princeton Review, U.S. News & World Report and Bloomberg Businessweek.

Seton Hall embraces students of all religions and prepares them to be exemplary servant leaders and global citizens. In recent years, the University has achieved extraordinary success. Since 2009, it has seen record-breaking undergraduate enrollment growth and an impressive 110-point increase in the average SAT scores of incoming freshmen. In the past decade, Seton Hall students and alumni have received more than 30 Fulbright Scholarships as well as other prestigious academic honors, including Boren Awards, Pickering Fellowships, Udall

Scholarships and a Rhodes Scholarship. The University is also proud to be among the most diverse national Catholic universities in the country.

During the past five years, the University has invested more than \$165 million in new campus buildings and renovations. And in 2015, Seton Hall launched a School of Medicine as well as a College of Communication and the Arts. The University's beautiful main campus in suburban South Orange, N.J. is only 14 miles from New York City — offering students a wealth of employment, internship, cultural and entertainment opportunities. Seton Hall's nationally recognized School of Law is located prominently in downtown Newark. The University's Interprofessional Health Sciences (IHS) campus in Clifton and Nutley, N.J. opened in the summer of 2018. The IHS campus houses the University's College of Nursing, School of Health and Medical Sciences and the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine at Seton Hall University.

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