

UMass Lowell Center for Public Opinion

2017 Sports Poll – Youth Sports and Football

August 14, 2017 – August 21, 2017

N=1,000 American adults
Margin of error +/- 3.7% for all respondents

See <http://uml.edu/polls> for full questionnaire/topline results and detailed methodology disclosure.

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HIGHLIGHTS

In partnership with the Washington Post, the UMass Lowell Center for Public Opinion surveyed 1,000 American adults on their attitudes about sports. This, the third release in a series, focuses on attitudes towards youth sports and concern about the safety of youth football.

FINDINGS:

Half of Americans believe that tackle football is not an appropriate sport for children under the age of 14

- Asked at what age it is appropriate to introduce tackling into football, 30% say between the ages of 14 and 17, 12% say at 18 or over and 8% say never – netted together, that is 50% of respondents who say that football should not be introduced at age 13 or younger. This is compared to 2% who say that tackling is appropriate at any age, 12% say under age 10 and 30% say between ages 10 and 13, for a net of 44% who think that it is appropriate to introduce tackling for children who are at least 13 (and in some cases younger). 6% of respondents are undecided on this issue.
- Women are more likely to say that football is not appropriate at ages 13 or younger (54%) than men (46%). Men, interestingly are divided, with 48% saying that football is appropriate at ages 10-13, and 46% say it is inappropriate. Additionally, only 34% of those with post-graduate or college degrees say that football is appropriate to introduce at age 13 or younger, compared to 48% of those without a college degree. Young people (those 18-29) are also much more likely (54%) than those who are older to say that football is appropriate at age 13 or younger, compared to only 38% of those 50-64, and 31% of those 65 and over (those 30-39 are at 48%, and those 40-49 are at 51%). We also see divisions by race, with white respondents less likely to say that football is appropriate at 13 or younger, compared to 55% of Black respondents and 67% of Latino respondents. There are also large differences by sports fans. A majority of NFL fans (51%) are supportive of those at age 13 playing football, compared to 33% of non-football fans. Interesting, a significant percentage of pro football fans (45%) are not in favor of children 13 and younger playing tackle football.

- These findings stand in an interesting contrast the findings released last week as part of the same survey about attitudes towards head injuries and CTE in professional football. Despite the fact that 83% of respondents say that it is probably (37%) or certainly (45%) true that there is a settled science that playing football causes brain injuries, a majority of respondents say that it is appropriate for those 14 and over to play tackle football, and almost half (45%) say that is appropriate for those 10-13 years old.

A majority of American Adults think football is not safe before high school, but safe during high school

- Respondents were also asked whether tackle football was a safe activity before and during high school. A majority (53%) say that it is probably (23%) or certainly (30%) false that football is a safe activity for children before they reach high school; this compares to 41% who say that it is probably (26%) or certainly (16%) true that football is safe for children before high school. Another 6% are uncertain.
- When asked if tackle football is a safe activity during high school, a 57% majority say that it is probably (35%) or certainly (22%) true; this compares to 37% who say that it is probably (21%) or certainly (16%) false that football is a safe activity during high school. 6% of respondents remain undecided.
- Being a football fan appears to divide the public on whether or not football is safe during high school. Among those who identify as football fans, 66% say that it is probably (40%) or certainly (25%) true that football is safe during high school, while 44% of non-fans say that is probably (28%) or certainly (16%) true.
- Respondents were also asked if heading the ball in soccer is a safe activity for children before they reach high school. Americans are similarly divided on this question. 44% say that is it probably (27%) or certainly (18%) true that heading the ball is safe, while an equivalent 44% say that is probably (24%) or certainly (20%) false.