



**ST. BONAVENTURE
UNIVERSITY**
Jandoli School of Communication

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**Siena/St. Bonaventure Annual Sports Fanship Survey: Part 1 – March Madness
Half of Americans, 49% Plan to Watch March Madness; 28% Will Fill Out a
Bracket & 25% Plan to Bet Online**

Duke, Michigan Top Picks in Men’s Tourney; UConn Women Lead the Field
**62% Approve Direct Payments to College Athletes Through NIL; 58% Say
Colleges Should Place Hard Cap on Salaries**

NOTE: This is First of Three Releases – “March Madness”

Release 2 – Online Sports Betting – Mon 4/13

Release 3 – Sports Fanship and Issues in Sport – Mon 4/20

March 16, 2026 – Nearly half of Americans say they have plans to watch college basketball games during March Madness, according to a new survey of United States residents released today by the Siena Research Institute (SRI) and St. Bonaventure University’s Jandoli School of Communication. Over a quarter, 28%, will fill out at least one bracket for the men’s tournament while 18% will fill out a women’s bracket. Similarly, 28% of Americans plan to join a pool with friends, family, or at the office and a quarter of Americans will bet on tournament games through online sportsbooks.

“March Madness is upon us. Half of us will watch the games and over a quarter will fill out a bracket or two, join a pool, or place bets online,” said Don Levy, SRI’s Director. “Of those planning to watch the games, nearly 40% say that they will take time off from work or other activities to watch the games. While the country won’t stop for the ‘Madness,’ many, especially young men, will watch, stress over their bracket, bet, and play hooky.”

Ahead of the announcement of the full lineup of teams on March 15, respondents were asked to predict the winner of the men’s and women’s tournaments. Out of more than 300 teams across the country, the most popular pick for a men’s tournament winner was the Duke Blue Devils, selected by 5% of respondents, and for the women’s tournament, the UConn Huskies, predicted by 6% of respondents.

“Although Duke is mentioned most often as a probable winner in the men’s tournament, other teams, including the University of Michigan, UConn, Michigan State, Ohio State, and the University of Arizona all draw support from fans,” said Aaron Chimbel, dean of the Jandoli School of Communication. “And as always, Cinderellas can surprise us and bust brackets. On the women’s side, UConn is the favorite, but Duke and South Carolina, according to fans, are teams to watch.”

Men, 61%, are more likely than women, 37%, to watch the games. Younger men, 18 – 49 years old, will watch at a rate of 69%, and half of those younger men will fill out a men’s bracket, join a pool, and bet on games through a sportsbook. A quarter of younger men will not only watch the games but take time off from work to do so.

Forty-two percent of respondents say that they are ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ familiar with the recent changes to the policies governing how college athletes can be paid for the rights to their names, images and likenesses (NIL). A clear majority of 62-20% of Americans say that they approve of allowing college athletics to pay student athletes directly, and a plurality of 42% say that college athletes being allowed to sell their NIL rights is good for sports, a trend which continues from the previous two years of the survey. However, a significant 58-16% add a caveat, agreeing that college athletics programs should be required to place a hard cap on the salaries paid to individual athletes through revenue-sharing / NIL rights.

A majority (59%) say payments for college athletes do not make a difference towards their level of interest in college sports, though if anything, they are likely to make a respondent ‘more’ or ‘somewhat more’ interested (24%), rather than ‘less’ or ‘somewhat less’ interested (16%). Still, majorities say that recent NIL policy changes have had no effect on their loyalty to a college athletics team (59-29%), the frequency with which they attend games in person (66-24%), or their financial contributions to college athletics (66-22%).

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This American Sport Fanship Survey was conducted February 16 - 27, 2026 among 3,084 responses drawn from a proprietary online panel (Lucid/Cint) of United States Residents. Interviews conducted online are excluded from the sample and final analysis if they fail any data quality attention check question. Duplicate responses are identified by their response ID and removed from the sample. Three questions were asked of online respondents including a honey-pot question to catch bots and two questions ask the respondent to follow explicit directions. The proprietary panel also incorporates measures that “safeguard against automated bot attacks, deduplication issues, fraudulent VPN usage, and suspicious IP addresses.” Coding of open-ended responses was done by a single human coder. Data was statistically adjusted by age, region, race/ethnicity, education, and gender to ensure representativeness. The probability of being included in any given online survey sample is unknown, very difficult to ascertain, or simply zero (non-internet users). Further, the nature of use of the internet is not uniform within the population, so this limits one’s ability to calculate the likelihood of reaching a person through an online poll. Instead of a margin of error, we calculate the credibility interval. In this case, the poll has a credibility interval of plus or minus 1.9 percentage points. Statistical margins of error are not applicable to online polls. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error and measurement error. Where figures do not sum to 100, this is due to the effects of rounding. The Siena Research Institute, directed by Donald Levy, Ph.D., conducts political, economic, social, and cultural research primarily in NYS. SRI, an independent, non-partisan research institute, subscribes to the American Association of Public Opinion Research Code of Professional Ethics and Practices. For more information or comments, please call Dr. Don Levy at 518-284-3551. St. Bonaventure University’s Jandoli School of Communication offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in sports media, journalism, communication and related fields. For more information or comments, please contact Aaron Chimbel at 716-375-2040.