

A recent IBM survey of U.S. sports fans highlighted the importance of digital experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. IBM and USTA partnered to reimagine the tennis fan experience through innovative Watson technologies, underpinned by IBM's open hybrid cloud that bring the tournament to life via digital platforms.

Sports Survey + Key Findings

Methodology: IBM conducted a survey on sports and tech, in partnership with Morning Consult. This poll was conducted between July 30–July 31, 2020 among a national sample of 2000 sports fans in the United States. The interviews were conducted online and stratified to ensure a representative sample of US adults. Results from the full survey have a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points.

The Current Landscape

Live sports are a trending topic in media conversation right now, as professional sporting leagues (basketball, hockey, etc.), are all facing new challenges in starting their respective seasons without fans present.

Key Takeaways:

- A plurality say it would be difficult for technology to replicate the live experience of several sports, including football, baseball, soccer, and extreme sports.
 - While 45% miss watching live sports on TV the most, 43% miss being in the atmosphere of stadiums.
 - Nearly half of sports fans (45%) think replicating the live experience of extreme sports would be very or somewhat difficult to do with technology.
- 40% of sports fans think events should only resume under strict circumstances/protocols.
 - A small percentage (17%) of sports fans think all sporting events should be canceled for the time being.
 - One-third of sports fans (34%) say a vaccine will help them feel comfortable attending a live sporting event in-person. The majority of sports fans (52%) emphasized the importance of disinfecting high touch areas, while 46% of respondents say they would want masks to be required for attendees, before returning.

Digital Content to Stay Connected

There is a generational difference regarding where sports fans get news.

Key Takeaways:

- Gen X, Baby Boomers and Millennials all search for sports news at traditional media outlets, whereas Gen Z is more likely to discover sports news on Sports Apps (38%).
- Over half (54%) of sports fans said they usually get their sports news and information from traditional news outlets (broadcast TV, newspapers, etc.)
 - The second destination for fans to consume sports news and information is Facebook (29%) and Sports Apps (27%).
- Nearly half (48%) of sports fans said having an interactive digital experience has become more important to them as a fan since the COVID-19 outbreak.
 - The favorite features on sport apps include highlights (30%), live streaming (30%) and sports news (29%).
 - During the pandemic when live sports were not available, fans were staying connected to sports by re-watching old sports (38%) and exercising (37%), an interesting combination of virtual and physical engagement.

Digital Experiences and Innovative Solutions

Sports fans are looking to push for more digitally driven sports content and transformation, given the lack of live and in-person sporting events.

Key Takeaways:

- Nearly half (48%) of sports fans think having an interactive digital experience, including streaming, video content, highlights, stats, etc. has become more important since the Coronavirus outbreak.
 - Younger generations, more specifically, have a desire for increased digital experiences: Gen Z (64%) and Millennials (61%)
- One third (33%) of sports fans think in-depth player data would make the viewing experience more compelling.
 - A higher percent of tennis fans (46%) agree that player data increases the experience of live sports.
 - 43% of tennis fans also believe having a probability of outcomes would add to the experience.
- Over two thirds of sports fans think creative camera views to put the fan virtually on the pitch (70%) and live streaming on social media (66%) would be valuable digital enhancements for their engagement with live sports