

**Project Canada 2000 Press Release #1 - January 23, 2001**  
**CFL and NFL Interest in Canada**

*Interest in CFL Continues to Exceed NFL*

With the Super Bowl coming up this Sunday, many football fans in Canada may be thinking NFL. But, generally speaking, slightly more adults continue to be interested in the Canadian Football League than the National Football League.

A new national survey carried out by sociologist and trends pollster Reginald Bibby of the University of Lethbridge has found that some 15% of Canadian adults continue to say they are following the CFL, compared to 12% for the NFL. The figures are almost the same as what Bibby found in both 1995 and 1990.

**Table 1. Interest in NFL and CFL**

*% Indicating Follow "Very Closely"  
or "Fairly Closely"*

	CFL	NFL
2000	15%	12
1995	15	13
1990	16	11

Source: Reginald W. Bibby,  
Project Canada Survey Series.

**Regional Variations**

- Contrary to widespread belief, almost an equal percentage of some 15% of Canadians who live in Ontario follow both the NFL and CFL — virtually unchanged since 1990.
- The CFL's largest regional following over the past decade has continued to be on the Prairies, where one in three people in the land of the Bombers, Roughriders, Eskimos, andStampeders say they closely follow the Canadian league.
- With the rebirth of the Alouettes, the CFL has experienced an increase in interest in Quebec over the past decade. However, the league has encountered a decrease in interest in both B.C. and the Atlantic provinces; still, the level of interest in the CFL in B.C. remains higher than that of the NFL, while the interest level for the two leagues is similar in the Atlantic region.
- NFL interest is up marginally in Quebec; elsewhere, despite the NFL's extensive television and marketing efforts in Canada during the 90s, the level of interest in the U.S. league remains essentially the same as it was in 1990. Ironically, the slight increase in interest in the NFL in Quebec might be largely due to the presence of the CFL in Montreal.

**Table 2. Interest in the CFL and NFL  
by Region: 1990-2000**

	CFL		NFL	
	2000	1990	2000	1990
BC	14%	21	10	10
Prairies	31	33	11	9
Ontario	16	14	15	15
Quebec	10	4	11	8
Atlantic	7	13	7	8

Source: Reginald W. Bibby, Project Canada Survey Series.

## Grey Cup and Super Bowl TV Audiences

Consistent with reported interest in the two leagues, the latest survey — completed in August of 2000 — found that more Canadian adults say they watched the 1999 Grey Cup game between Hamilton and Calgary than watched the January 2000 Super Bowl between St. Louis and Tennessee. Such a finding suggests that Global’s audience estimate — that 4 million Canadians saw that game, compared to the close to 2.9 million who watched Hamilton defeat Calgary — was on the high side. Unlike the survey, however, the TV ratings for both championship games did include viewers under the age of 18. Global typically doubles its audience to account for Canadians who watch the game on U.S. networks. The 2000 Grey Cup, incidentally drew a total audience (CBC and RDS) of some 3.7 million.

**Table 3. Viewing of 1999 Grey Cup and 2000 Super Bowl (XXXIV) by Region**

	1999 Grey Cup			2000 Super Bowl		
	Total	Most	Some	Total	Most	Some
Nationally	39%	20	19	27	13	14
BC	39	18	21	25	11	14
Prairies	60	39	21	28	15	13
Ontario	38	19	19	32	16	16
Quebec	23	7	16	25	11	14
Atlantic	25	7	18	22	11	11

Source: Reginald W. Bibby, Project Canada 2000

## Age and Gender Variations

It is clear that adult football fans in Canada are primarily males. However, a growing proportion of adults under 35 as well as over 55 tend to be following the CFL rather than the NFL: 30% of males 18 to 34 say they are CFL fans compared to 15% who say they follow the NFL.

This age finding stands in sharp contrast to 1990, when 19% of male adults under 35 reported that they were interested in the NFL, and only 18% said the same about the CFL.

**Table 5. Male Interest in the CFL and NFL by Age Cohorts: 1990 & 2000**

	CFL		NFL	
	1990	2000	1990	2000
18-34	18%	30	19	15
35-54	26	22	18	20
55+	22	22	15	14

Source: Reginald W. Bibby, Project Canada Survey Series.

**Table 4. Interest in NFL and CFL by Age and Gender: 2000**

*% Indicating Follow “Very Closely” or “Fairly Closely”*

	CFL	NFL
<b>Men</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Women</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>18-34</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>10</b>
Men	30	15
Women	4	6
<b>35-54</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>
Men	22	20
Women	4	4
<b>55+</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>10</b>
Men	22	14
Women	12	6

Source: Reginald W. Bibby, Project Canada Survey Series.

## ***Overlap in Football Interest***

Obviously many football fans follow both the CFL and NFL. An examination of interest across leagues shows that, over the past decade, about 7% of Canadians have followed both leagues, while about 8% have been CFL die-hards and around 4% “pure” NFL fans. Overall, the proportion of Canadians following pro football has remained at about 20% since 1990.

This means that about two in three people who follow the NFL also follow the CFL; conversely, close to one in two CFL fans are also fans of the NFL.

**Table 6. CFL Fans, NFL Fans, and Fans of Both Leagues: 1990 and 2000**

*% Indicating Follow “Very Closely” or “Fairly Closely”*

	<b>Both</b>	<b>CFL Only</b>	<b>NFL Only</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Totals</b>
2000	7%	8	4	81	100
1990	6	9	5	80	100

Source: Reginald W. Bibby, Project Canada Survey Series.

## **Conclusion**

These survey findings for 1990-2000 suggest that, despite the heavy exposure that the National Football League has had in Canada during the 90s, interest in the Canadian Football League remains very stable. What is particularly noteworthy has been the growing interest in the CFL among adults under the age of 35. These findings indicate the league has grassroots support among adults eighteen and over that not only continues to match that of the NFL but actually slightly exceeds it.

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**The interest item in 1990, 1995, and 2000 read:** *“How closely do you follow....”*

The author of this report, Reginald Bibby, was born and raised in Edmonton and has his Ph.D. from Washington State University. A sociologist at The University of Lethbridge, he has been monitoring Canadian social trends since the mid-1970s, making his findings available through numerous media appearances and seven best-selling books. His newest book is his third book on Canadian youth, *Canada’s Teens: Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow*, due to be released by Stoddart in April. He also is an avid sports fan who really wanted to be a sports writer but somehow ended up buried in research.

The latest in Bibby’s ongoing national surveys was completed in August of 2000, with 1,729 Canadians participating. In weighted form, the sample is highly representative of the Canadian population and provides results that are accurate within approximately three percentage points of the population figures, 19 times in 20.

***This is the first of two Project Canada 2000 releases on sports. The second, to be released shortly, includes findings on interest in other pro sports in Canada, highlighting the decline in the popularity of Major League Baseball, the slow growth in interest in the NBA, and the resistance to government funding for***

*either the NHL or the CFL.*