

Sports Participation Increases Again, Tops 7.8 Million for First Time

The number of participants in high school sports increased for the 26th consecutive year in 2014-15 – topping the 7.8 million mark for the first time – according to the annual High School Athletics Participation Survey conducted by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS).

Based on figures from the 51 NFHS member state high school associations, which includes the District of Columbia, the number of participants in high school sports reached an all-time high of 7,807,047 – an increase of 11,389 from the previous year.

While boys participation dipped 8,682 from the previous year, girls participation increased for the 26th consecutive year with an additional 20,071 participants and set an all-time high of 3,287,735. The boys participation total of 4,519,312 is No. 2 all-time behind the 2013-14 total of 4,527,994.

Six of the top 10 girls sports registered increases in participation this past year, led by competitive spirit squads (5,170 additional participants) and cross country (3,495). While track and field remained the No. 1 sport for girls with 478,726 participants, volley-

TEN MOST POPULAR BOYS PROGRAMS

Schools

1. Basketball.....	18,072
2. Track and Field – Outdoor	16,358
3. Baseball	15,899
4. Cross Country	14,635
5. Football – 11-Player.....	14,154
6. Golf.....	13,528
7. Soccer	11,838
8. Wrestling.....	10,597
9. Tennis	9,725
10. Swimming and Diving	7,156

Participants

1. Football – 11-Player	1,083,617
2. Track and Field – Outdoor	578,632
3. Basketball	541,479
4. Baseball.....	486,567
5. Soccer.....	432,569
6. Wrestling	258,208
7. Cross Country	250,981
8. Tennis.....	157,240
9. Golf	148,823
10. Swimming and Diving.....	137,087

TEN MOST POPULAR GIRLS PROGRAMS

Schools

1. Basketball.....	17,653
2. Track and Field – Outdoor	16,309
3. Volleyball	15,619
4. Softball – Fast Pitch	15,115
5. Cross Country.....	14,287
6. Soccer	11,502
7. Tennis	10,099
8. Golf.....	9,824
9. Swimming and Diving	7,526
10. Competitive Spirit Squads.....	5,358

Participants

1. Track and Field – Outdoor	478,726
2. Volleyball.....	432,176
3. Basketball	429,504
4. Soccer	375,681
5. Softball – Fast Pitch.....	364,103
6. Cross Country	221,616
7. Tennis.....	183,376
8. Swimming and Diving.....	166,838
9. Competitive Spirit Squads	125,763
10. Lacrosse.....	84,785

ball (432,176) moved ahead of basketball (429,504) to secure the No. 2 spot. Ten years ago, basketball was No. 1 for girls, followed by track and field, and volleyball.

Among the top 10 boys sports, soccer registered the largest gain with an additional 15,150 participants, while wrestling (11,306) and 11-player football (9,617) had the largest declines in participation. Besides soccer, other top 10 boys sports that had increases in the number of participants were baseball (3,938) and basketball (425).

"Overall, we are pleased with this year's participation report indicating an increase for the 26th consecutive year," said Bob Gardner, NFHS executive director. "And while football participation dropped this past year, the decrease is not that significant when you consider more than 1.1 million boys and girls are involved in the sport at the high school level.

"Despite other out-of-school opportunities that exist in some sports, this year's survey is yet another confirmation that our model of education-based sports within the high school setting is the No. 1 choice for boys and girls nationwide. We applaud the more than 19,000 high schools across the country for continuing to provide these important programs despite the funding challenges that exist in some areas."

Eleven-player football remains the runaway leader in boys participants with 1,083,617, followed by outdoor track and field (578,632), basketball (541,479), baseball (486,567) and soccer (432,569). The remainder of the top 10 is wrestling (258,208),

cross country (250,981), tennis (157,240), golf (148,823) and swimming/diving (137,087).

After outdoor track and field, volleyball and basketball, the remainder of the top 10 girls sports are soccer (375,681), fast-pitch softball (364,103), cross country (221,616), tennis (182,876), swimming/diving (166,838), competitive spirit squads (125,763) and lacrosse (84,785).

Among some of the non-traditional high school sports on this year's survey, archery and riflery registered significant increases in participation. An additional 2,877 participants (boys and girls) in archery brings the overall total to 7,744 with schools in eight states sponsoring the sport. Riflery was up 1,010 participants for a total of 4,238 with competition in 10 states. Also, while boys wrestling was down by more than 11,000 this past year, the number of girls participating in the sport increased by 1,592 for a total of 11,496.

The top 10 states by participants remained in the same order as last year, with Texas and California topping the list with 804,598 and 797,101, respectively. The remainder of the top 10 was New York (389,475), Illinois (340,972), Ohio (319,929), Pennsylvania (319,562), Michigan (295,660), New Jersey (279,377), Florida (267,954) and Minnesota (235,243).

The participation survey has been compiled since 1971 by the NFHS through numbers it receives from its member associations. The complete 2014-15 High School Athletics Participation Survey is posted on the NFHS website at www.nfhs.org. ©

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