



 SPONSORPULSE | **FRONT OFFICE SPORTS**

9 Things You Should Know About Connecting with Youth Through Sponsorship in 2022





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Sport and its sponsors are facing more competition than ever before in engaging youth.

Social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok), video games and gaming websites (fantasy, gaming titles, professional esports), online streaming services (Netflix, Amazon Prime, Apple TV) and major entertainment brands (Disney, Marvel, DC Comics) are all jostling for attention from the high-lifetime-value youth segment, spurring an increasingly competitive market that demands creativity and innovation.



Across the sport and entertainment industry, brands, properties, and agencies are doubling down their efforts on ways to make their products and marketing strategies more appealing to youth in an attempt to reignite a spark and capture share of mind, heart and wallet.

Youth interest, participation and engagement in sport continue to be hot topics, so we decided to take a deep dive into the 13-18-year-old youth segment in America to provide context to this debate and simplify sponsorship decision making.





1) Youth are interested in sports, but competition beyond sport is heating up.

As generations come and go, so do societal interests and trends. Once upon a time (in 2005) the largest social networking site on the internet was Myspace; Livestrong bracelets were one of the most popular fashion trends; and video games were generally viewed as a pastime for children. Oh, how the world has changed. **One of the biggest questions facing sponsorship decision makers is ‘what are youth interested in?’** So, what are the most powerful sport and entertainment properties today among youth in America?

Ranked by [SponsorPulse’s](#)™ Opportunity Score (refer to glossary for definition), it’s clear that there are differences between the interests of youth and the general population. We can see that youth have a strong affinity towards entertainment properties that make up 5 of the top 10 sponsorship opportunities, while the general population leans more heavily toward the world of sport. The NFL on Nickelodeon was a start, but what property will successfully crack a partnership with one of the entertainment juggernauts?

Property Name	SponsorPulse Opportunity Score
Disney	71
Marvel	51
NFL	49
NBA	45
Star Wars	42
Recycling	39
4th of July Fireworks	37
American Idol	36
The Voice	36

US Consumers Aged 13-18

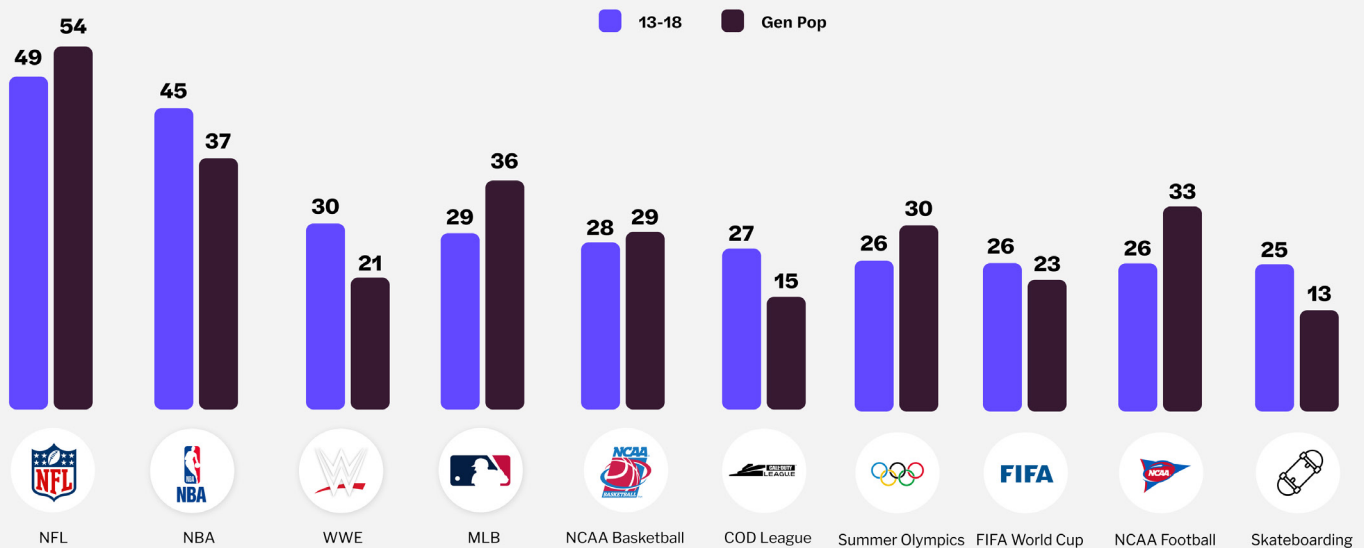


2) Wrestling, gaming and skateboarding are posting strong relevance.

Although entertainment properties capture 5 of the top 10 sponsorship properties among youth, that doesn't mean that youth aren't interested in sports like the generations that preceded them. When looking at sport leagues specifically (omitting other entertainment, cultural and causal properties), it's clear that many sport organizations still fare well with the younger demographic. When compared among the general population, WWE, COD and skateboarding climb the ranks demonstrating strength with the youth demographic.

Top Sponsorship Opportunities by Opportunity Score

SponsorPulse Opportunity Scores for each property; general population vs consumers aged 13-18 years old.



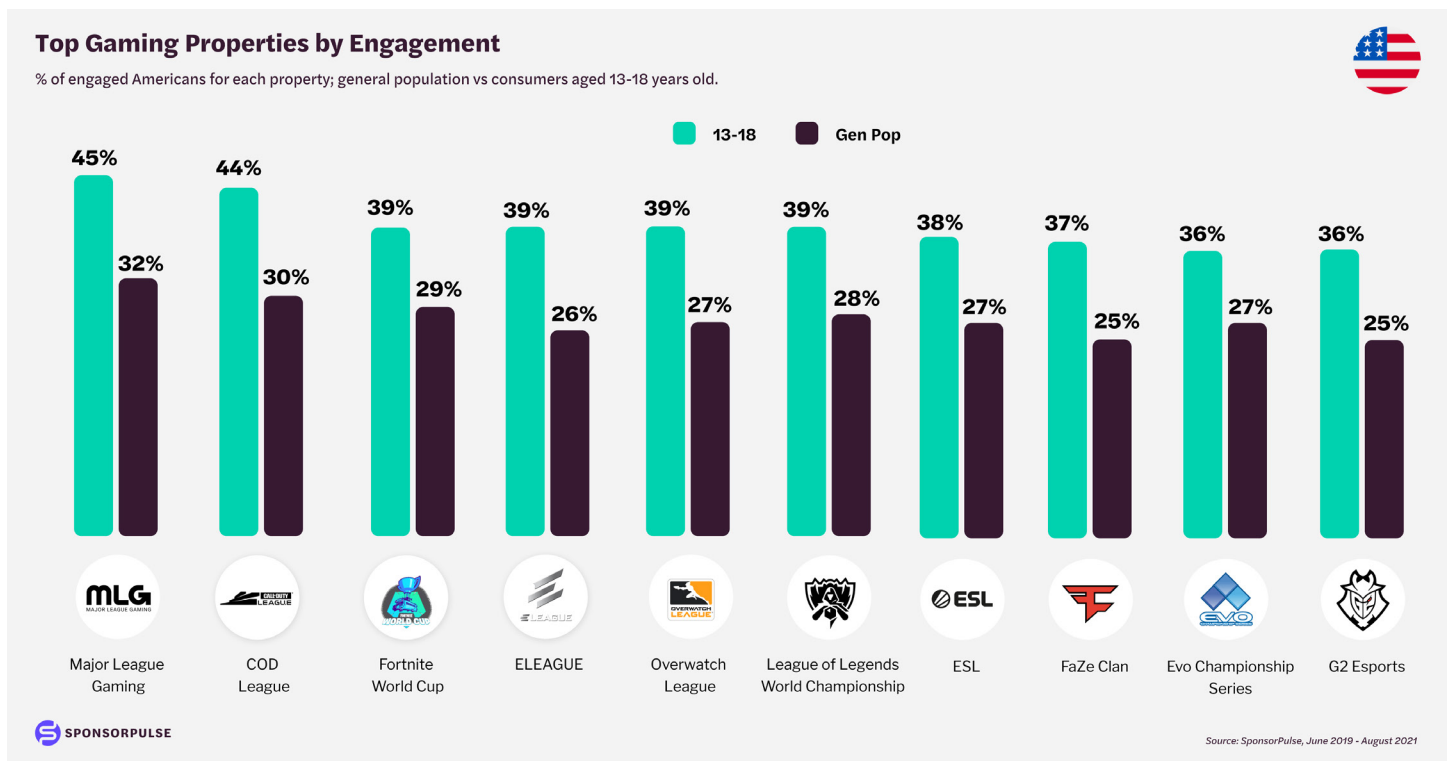
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Source: SponsorPulse, June 2019 - August 2021

3) Gaming and esports continue to resonate.

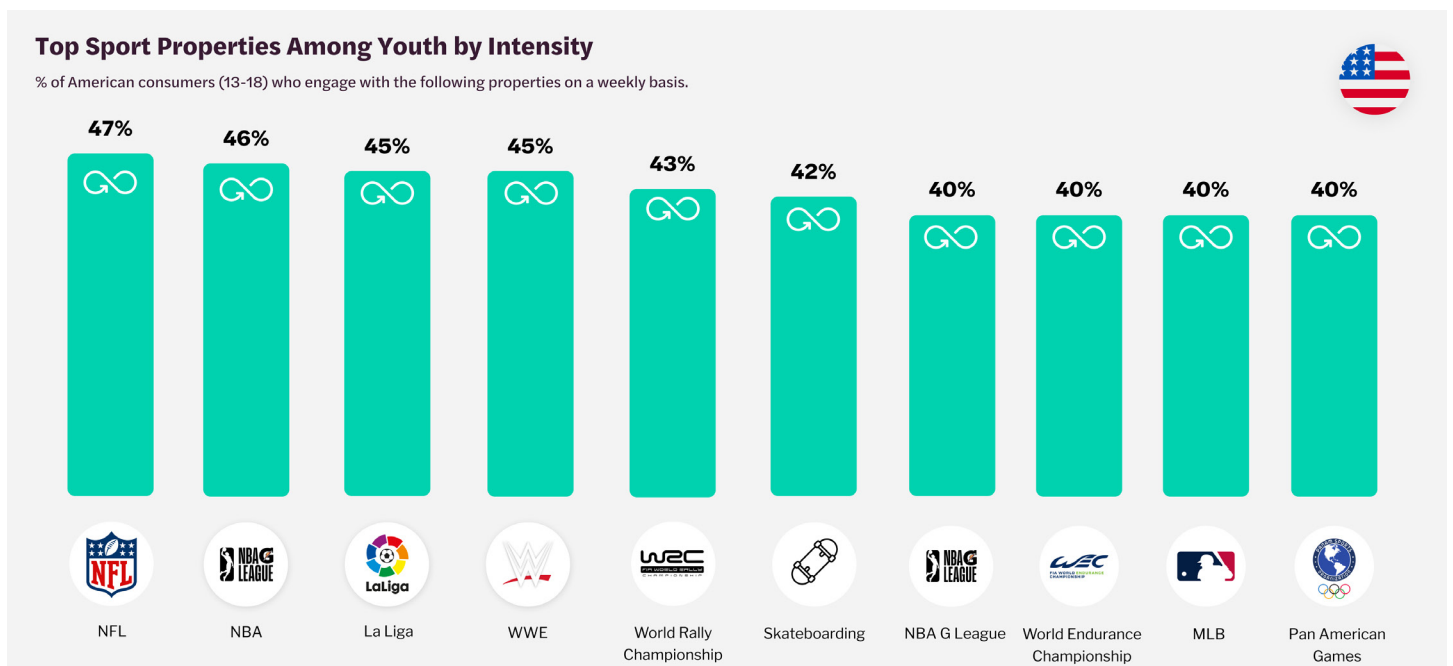
When breaking down esports properties by Engagement among youth in the US, the top 10 properties receive Engagement scores no less than 36%. In fact, of the 20+ esports properties that SponsorPulse currently collects data on, all receive a minimum Engagement score of 33%, meaning that each esports property is engaged with by a minimum of 1-in-3 Americans aged 13-18 each year.

Competitions such as Major League Gaming (MLG), Call of Duty League (CDL), Fortnite World Cup, ELEAGUE, Overwatch League (OWL), League of Legends (LoL), ESL, and Evolution Championship Series rank among the top 10 esports properties for both youth and general population, however all see a significant uptick in engagement levels among youth. Make no mistake about it, esports are extremely salient with the youth and are one of the many areas flourishing among this generation.



4) 'Sleeper' properties with high intensity of engagement present unique opportunities.

Intensity is defined as the percentage of the engaged population that interacts with a property on a weekly basis or more. Of course, a property with strong engagement and intensity is a more valuable opportunity overall; however, looking at Intensity provides some interesting food for thought on other opportunities for brands to connect with youth with a high frequency.



Beyond some of the expected properties like the National Football League (NFL), National Basketball Association (NBA) and Major League Baseball (MLB), there are some other properties that may engage a smaller base, but do so with high intensity. Properties such as La Liga, World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), World Rally Championship (WRC), skateboarding, and the NBA G League all present unique opportunities to connect with youth on a weekly basis. Moreover, these unique opportunities generally don't come with the same premium as some of the majors.



With Lionel Messi recently leaving FC Barcelona to go to Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), it will be interesting to see how the frequency of engagement is affected among youth consumers of La Liga or whether France's Ligue 1 will start to climb the ranks.

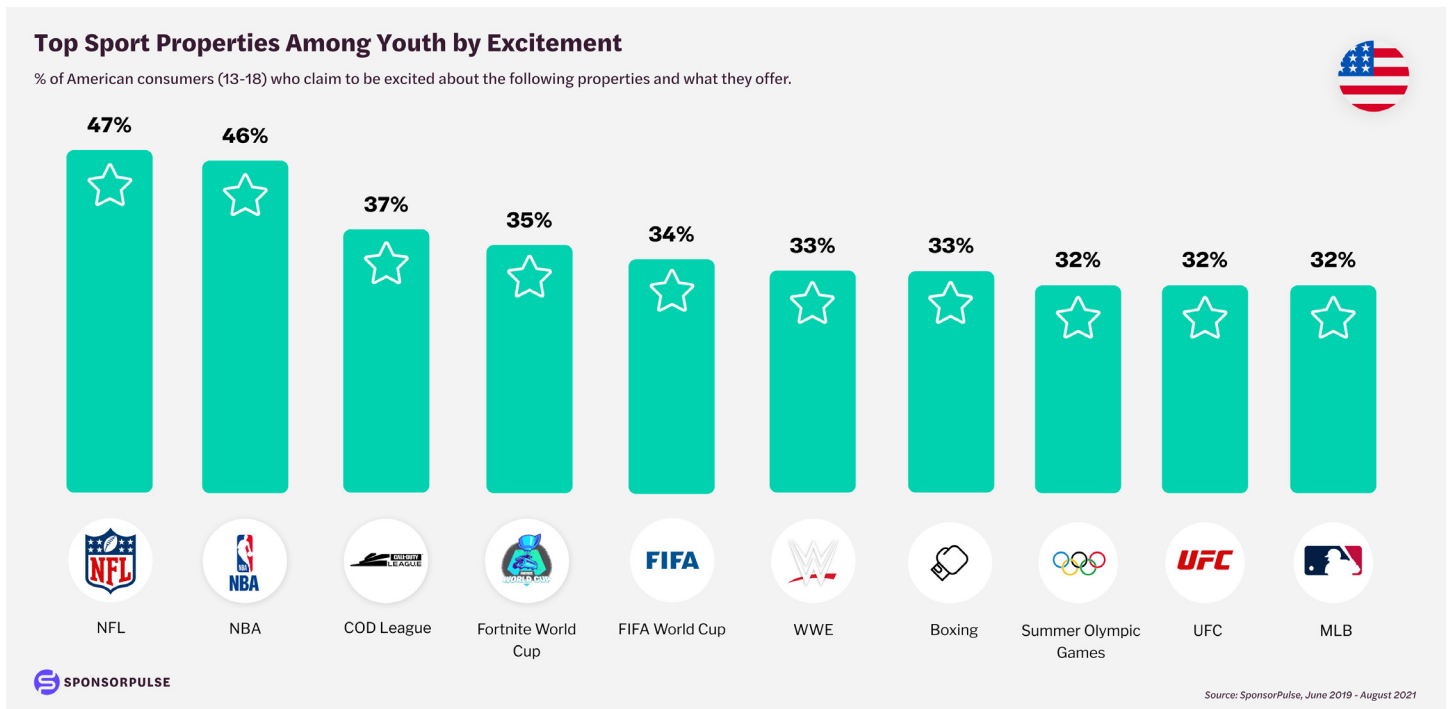
Skateboarding's recent success at the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympic Games may result in greater overall engagement of the sport and even higher levels of Intensity, which would make it one of the top ranked sports among this population.

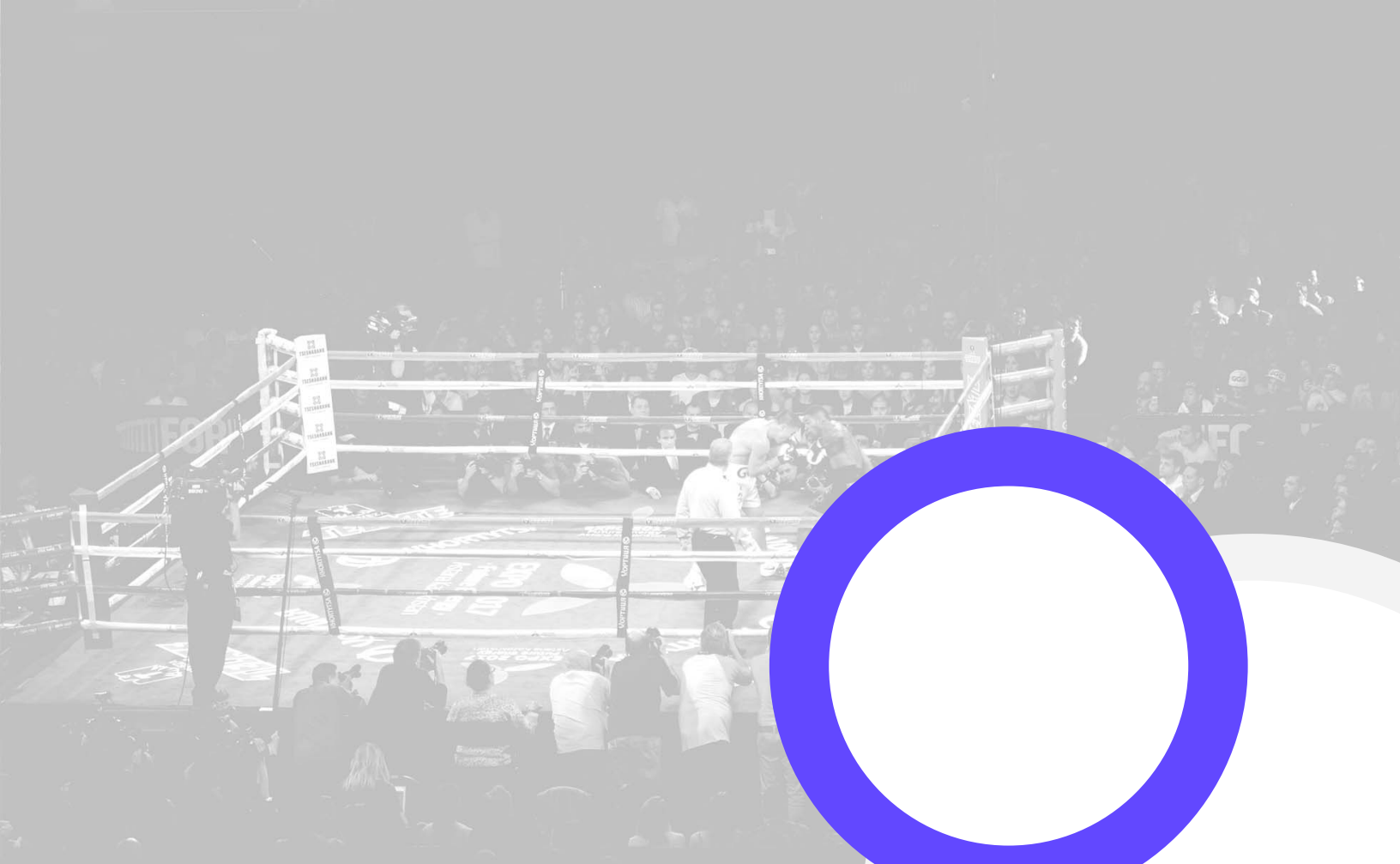
WWE is one of the three wrestling properties that seems to generate strong Intensity among American youth, alongside Impact! Wrestling (41%), and All Elite Wrestling (AEW) (39%). A major area of interest among this cohort, WWE receives the third highest SponsorPulse Opportunity Score (30) across all sport properties.

5) The impact of influencers on property excitement is real.

Excitement measures the percentage of those engaged that claim to be excited about the property and what it has to offer. **This is where consumers start building psychological connections with leagues and competitions and begin self-identifying as fans of the properties.** Excitement is seen as critical for reaching new audiences and driving Passion.

Similar to the Intensity charts for American youth, the NFL and NBA remain at the top of the table. However, new to the scene are esports properties CDL and the Fortnite World Cup (FWC), as well as combat sports Boxing and the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC).





Considering that the event has not taken place since 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the FWC is an interesting inclusion in the top 5 as it generates the fourth-highest levels of excitement among the youth. Boxing as a sport has received increased interest and excitement surrounding recent bouts involving celebrities such as Logan and Jake Paul, retired legends Mike Tyson, Floyd Mayweather and Roy Jones Jr., and former UFC champion Connor McGregor. The sport generates similar levels of excitement to that of the FIFA World Cup, arguably the largest sporting event in the world.

Another property looking to make inroads with youth in America is the PGA Tour – currently ranked 104th among all sport properties among this group. Whether it be Phil Mickelson’s reference to ‘hitting bombs’ on social media, the Tour’s recent announcement of a social incentive, or the ‘beef’ between Brooks Koepka and Bryson Dechambeau, only time will tell if these tactics increase youth engagement with the sport.



6) Diversification of the sponsorship portfolio beyond sport is critical.

At first glance, it appears that many of the same properties show up on both the male and female lists. The NFL, NBA, MLB, Winter Olympic Games, and NCAA Basketball rank in the top 10 for Engagement among both groups. The major difference, however, is in the Engagement levels themselves. Each of these properties sees an increase in Engagement among males vs females. Although many female youth are still actively engaging with the same sports as males, the properties seem to reach a larger percentage of the males overall.

When analyzing Opportunity Scores for youth males and females across all sport and entertainment properties tracked through SponsorPulse, the charts highlight some key differences.

Rank	Male 13-18 Year Olds		Female 13-18 Year Olds	
	Top Properties	Engagement	Top Properties	Engagement
1	NFL - National Football League	67%	NFL - National Football League	57%
2	NBA - National Basketball Association	63%	Winter Olympic Games	53%
3	MLB - Major League Baseball	58%	NBA - National Basketball Association	53%
4	NFL Pro Bowl	58%	NCAA Basketball	49%
5	NCAA Basketball	55%	Summer Olympic Games	48%
6	Winter Olympic Games	55%	MLB - Major League Baseball	48%
7	WWE - World Wrestling Entertainment	55%	FIFA World Cup	44%
8	X Games	53%	WTA - Women's Tennis Association	44%
9	MLB World Series	53%	Boxing	43%
10	NCAA Football	52%	Special Olympics	43%

Top Sport Properties by Engagement



The male list consists of exclusively sport and entertainment properties such as the NFL, NBA, Disney, Marvel, Star Wars, and the 4th of July Fireworks; meanwhile the female list includes five music properties, a massive increase in property health for Disney, and only two sport properties (NFL and NBA). Some interesting food for thought on the importance of diversifying your sponsorship portfolio across property types.

Rank	Male 13-18 Year Olds		Female 13-18 Year Olds	
	Top Properties	Opportunity Score	Top Properties	Opportunity Score
1	NFL - National Football League	62	Disney	80
2	Disney	62	The Voice	44
3	NBA - National Basketball Association	55	4th of July Fireworks	40
4	Marvel	54	Grammy Awards	39
5	Star Wars	54	NFL - National Football League	37
6	Monday Night Football	45	NBA - National Basketball Association	35
7	WWE - World Wrestling Entertainment	39	Billboard Music Awards	35
8	Thursday Night Football	39	Coachella	35
9	American Idol	38	Dancing with the Stars	33
10	4th of July Fireworks	36	BET Awards	32

Top Sport & Entertainment Properties by Opportunity Score



7) Nike runs away as the #1 brand associated with sport sponsorship.

Perhaps it's not surprising that Nike is the #1 unprompted brand Americans aged 13-18 associate most to sport; however, the margin with which it ranks #1 is staggering.

1-in-3 young Americans name Nike as the top unprompted brand in sport sponsorship. That's more than double that of the next apparel company (Adidas) and 10 times that of the 3rd and 4th ranked apparel companies (Under Armour and Puma).

On the beverage side, both Coca-Cola and Pepsi are equally named as top brands in the sport sponsorship. Interestingly, Pepsi's flagship sport beverage brand Gatorade is also tied as a top brand in sport, versus Coca-Cola's Powerade that has relatively no recognition as a top brand in sport sponsorship. The next beverage company challenging these two juggernauts is Red Bull, who has managed to build a strong reputation with American youth with its unique portfolio of owned sports properties and athlete partnerships.

Rank	Brand
1	Nike
2	Adidas
3	Pepsi
4	Gatorade
5	Coca-Cola
6	Under Armour
7	Budweiser
8	Red Bull
9	Puma
10	AT&T

US Consumers aged 13-18



8) Only 4 athletes crack the 'top 10 unprompted athletes you follow' list.

The top ten celebrities that American youth follow (unprompted) reveals a variety of interesting insights.

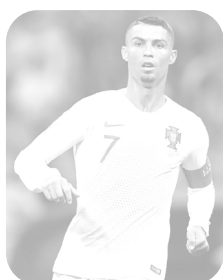
To begin, only 4 of the top 10 mentioned are sport celebrities – reinforcing the importance of integrating other passion points into the world of sport. The top 2 athletes on this list (Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi) both play their sports outside of the United States, demonstrating how connected the US youth is with international sport.

Both LeBron James and Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson have significant portfolios that go beyond sport and bring them into the world of entertainment through the likes of entertainment properties such as Space Jam and Ballers (among other endorsements).

All sport celebrities on this list are males, with virtually no female athletes making the extended list.



Ariana Grande



Cristiano Ronaldo



Justin Bieber


Rank	Celebrity
1	Ariana Grande
2	Cristiano Ronaldo
3	Justin Bieber
4	Beyonce
5	Lebron James
6	Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson
7	Lionel Messi
8	Taylor Swift
9	Kim Kardashian
10	Jennifer Lopez

US Consumers aged 13-18

9) Youth care deeply about the impact brands and properties make on their community.

As time has progressed over the past few decades, so too has the importance placed on various causes and charities. Mental health, domestic violence, global warming, and recycling are just a few causal territories that are recognized and appreciated more now adays than ever before. **The importance of cause among the youth demographic is crystal clear and can be illustrated through SponsorPulse’s impact metrics.** Consideration and Favorability showcase the % of youth that are more likely to consider buying products/services from or be more favorable toward brands who sponsor causes and charities.

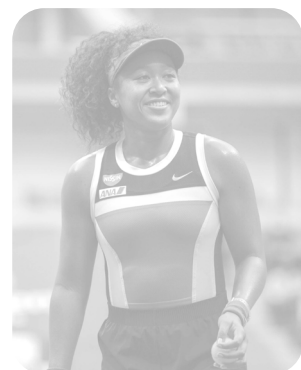
Americans 13-18 Years Old

Rank	Top Properties	Consideration
1	 St. Jude Children's Research Hospital	23%
2	 Disney	23%
3	 Marvel	22%
4	 Anti-bullying	21%
5	 Animal Welfare	20%
6	 NBA - National Basketball Association	20%
7	 NFL - National Football League	19%
8	 Star Wars	19%
9	 Child & Youth Domestic Violence	19%
10	 Children's Hospitals	19%

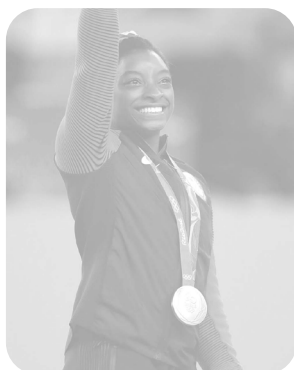


When filtered by Favorability, 9 of the top 10 properties are causes or charities. St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, Anti-bullying, Animal Welfare, Children and Youth-domestic violence related causes, and Children’s hospitals or other services for children with illnesses all fall into the top 10 when filtered by Consideration. When we dig further at what drives these opportunities to be so significant, it is their power to resonate with the youth. **Although charities may struggle with reach, there is no doubt that they dominate on delivering brand impact.**

Another salient cause among American youth is that of Mental health research and support, which engages 45% of youth (and a Favorability metric of 18%). Most recently, celebrity athletes Naomi Osaka and Simone Biles both experienced challenging periods with their mental health and were forced to bow out of their respective competitions. Unfortunately, very few brands (if any) capitalized on the opportunity to stand up in the sport space to take on this challenge with these athletes.













Naomi Osaka



Simone Biles

Americans 13-18 Years Old

Rank	Top Properties	Favorability
1	 St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital	25%
2	 Disney	23%
3	 Food for the Poor	22%
4	 Anti-bullying	22%
5	 Animal Welfare	21%
6	 Child & Youth Domestic Violence	21%
7	 Children’s Hospitals	21%
8	 Reducing Air Pollution & Developing Clean Energy	19%
9	 Women’s Domestic Violence	19%
10	 The Red Cross	19%



Conclusion

So there you have it, the top **9 Things You Should Know About Connecting with Youth Through Sponsorship in 2022**. By taking a deep dive into youth consumer data on a national level, we were able to uncover some powerful insight that adds context to the debate on how to engage and connect with youth through sponsorship.

There's no question that youth remain interested and engaged in sport, but there's no denying that there are competing interests that make connecting with youth one of the most interesting and exciting business challenges facing sponsorship professionals today.

To learn about additional sponsorship opportunities with youth from a list of thousands of properties, visit SponsorPulse™ to [begin a free, no obligation trial](#).





Glossary

Opportunity Score: Relative index score to get an immediate comparison between sponsorship opportunities. This score accounts for all key metrics.

Engagement: Percentage of people who have engaged with the property over the past 12 months.

Intensity: Percentage of people who engage with the property on a weekly basis, among engaged.

Momentum: Percentage of people who expect their interest in the property to grow over the next 12 months, among engaged.

Excitement: Percentage of people who are excited about this property, among engaged.

Passion: Percentage of people who have a strong emotional connection to the property, among engaged.

Purchase Consideration: Percentage of people who are more likely to purchase a brand due to its sponsorship of this property, among engaged.

Favorability: Percentage of people who will be more favourable toward a brand due to its sponsorship of this property, among engaged.

Unprompted or Unaided question: Open-ended, non-leading question asked to respondent to avoid building a predisposition in the answer. (i.e. “which 2 brands do you associate most with sport?”)



About SponsorPulse™

SponsorPulse™ provides actionable insight-based solutions at your fingertips for progressive properties and brands looking to be at the forefront of building strong connections with consumers through sport and entertainment. SponsorPulse™ has been collecting proprietary consumer and fan data monthly across 18 countries since July 2018. Consumer data is at the core of all that we do, but we're far more than just an insights company.

To learn more, visit www.sponsorpulse.com

