

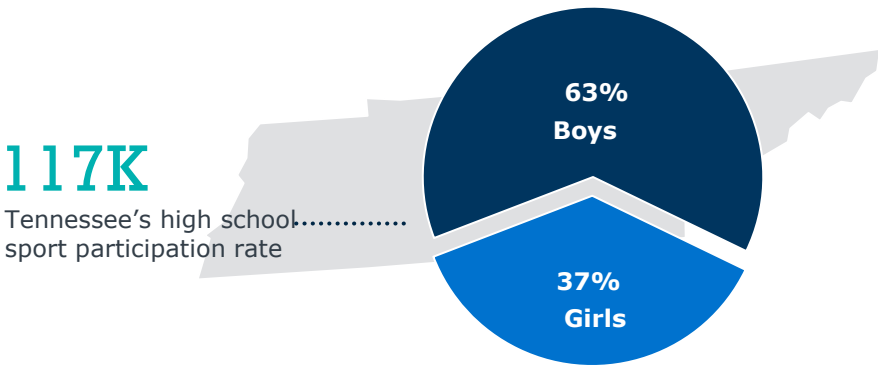
High School Sports Participation State Profile

State Profile: Tennessee

Boys Account for Most High School Sport Participation

As of 2023-2024, the high school sports participation rate was 116,797 in Tennessee. Mirroring the national trend, boys accounted for more than half of participation.

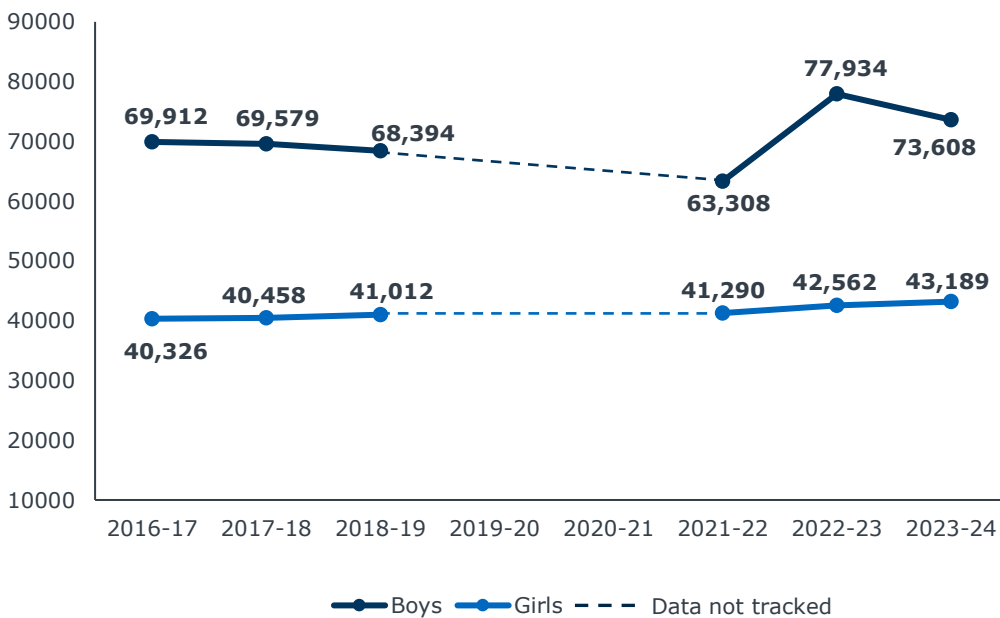
High School Sport Participation, Share of Girls v. Boys, 2023-24
n = 116,797



Gap Between Boys, Girls Persists After Pandemic

Participation in high school sports is growing among boys and girls over the last eight years. While the gap in participation was closing, it expanded again after the pandemic.

Change in Participation Rates, 2016-17 to 2023-24

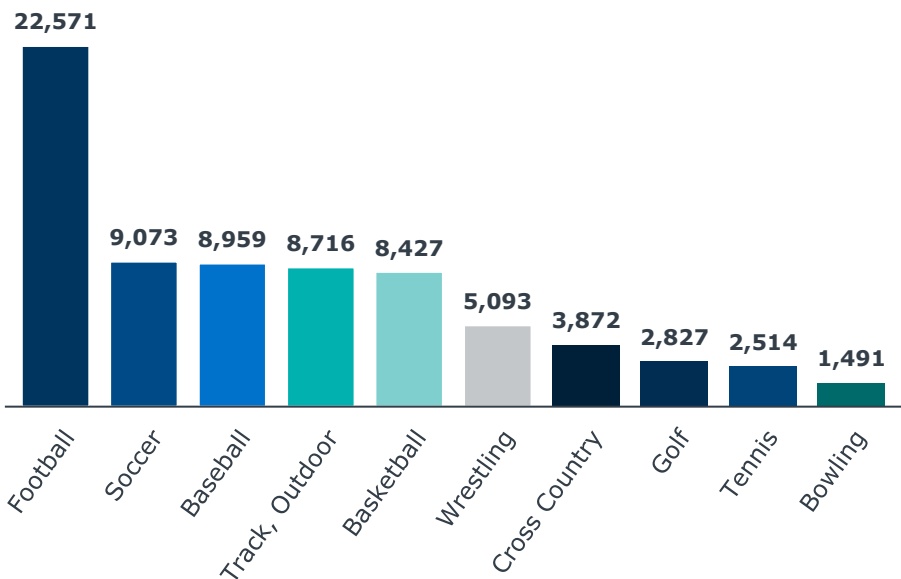


Top Boys' and Girls' Sports

Most Top Boys' Sports Follow National Trends

Like most states, football was the biggest boys' sport as of 2023-2024. The remaining sports also largely reflect national trends. The biggest deviation was bowling, which is the 10th largest sport in the state and not in the top 10 nationally.

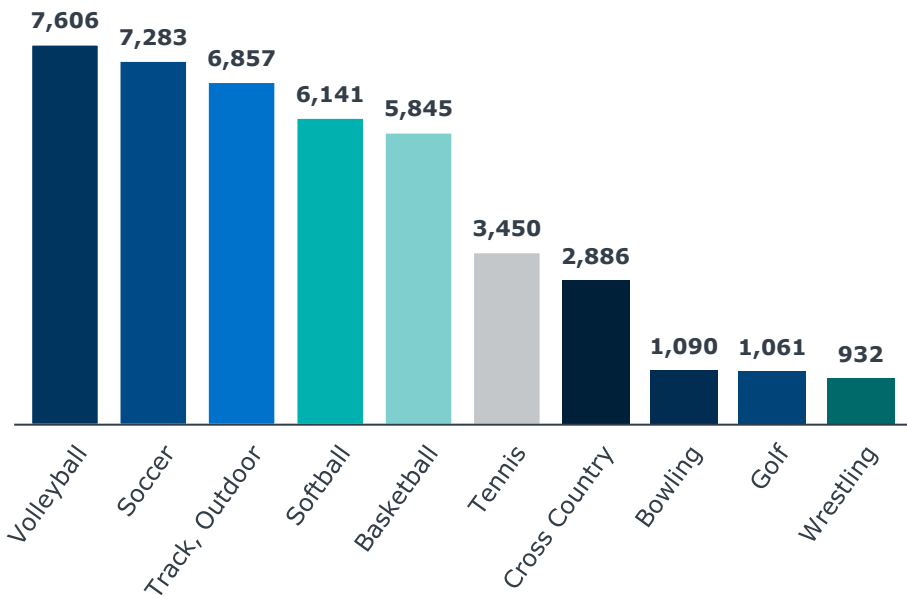
Top 10 Boys' Sports by Participation Rate, 2023-2024
n = 73,608



Wrestling Emerges As Top 10 Sport for Girls

The top girls' sports in Tennessee also largely reflect national trends. The biggest deviations were bowling and wrestling, the eighth and 10th largest sports in the state, respectively.

Top 10 Girls' Sports by Participation Rate, 2023-2024
n = 43,189



Source: EAB analysis of National Federation of State High School Association data.

Short- and Long-Term Changes in Participation

Boys

Areas of Consistent Growth

Three sports grew both in the last year and across the last eight years. This trend may signal emerging and/or sustainable recruitment areas. They included:

- Outdoor Track & Field
- Soccer
- Wrestling

Areas of Steady Decline

In comparison, no sports declined in both the last year and across the last eight years.

Sport	2023-2024 Participation	Change, 2022-23 to 2023-24	Change, 2016-17 to 2023-24
Football, 11-Player	22,571	2%	0%
Soccer	9,073	3%	9%
Baseball	8,959	-1%	0%
Track & Field, Outdoor	8,716	1%	19%
Basketball	8,427	0%	-3%
Wrestling	5,093	14%	38%
Cross Country	3,872	3%	-7%
Golf	2,827	-67%	16%
Tennis	2,514	-1%	7%
Bowling	1,491	0%	0%
Unified Track	65	76%	N/A

Source: EAB analysis of National Federation of State High School Association data.

Biggest, Fastest Growth, Largest Decline

Boys

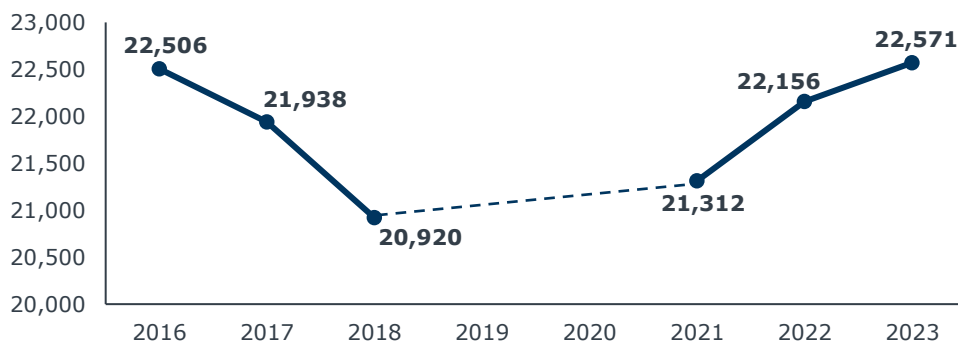
Biggest Sport

Football Participation

Recovering After Large Drop

Participation in football is up slightly from 2016 levels, despite a 7% decline between 2016 and 2018.

Change in Boys' Football Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24

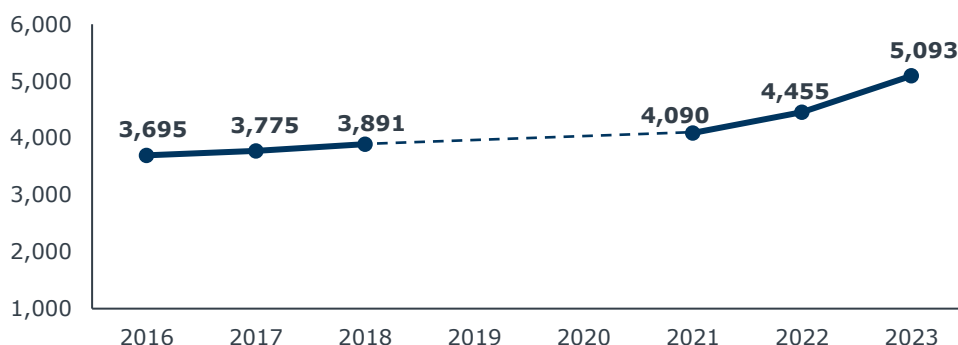


Fastest Growth

Steady Growth in Wrestling

Participation in wrestling increased every year between 2016 and 2023, for 38% total growth.

Change in Boys' Wrestling Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24

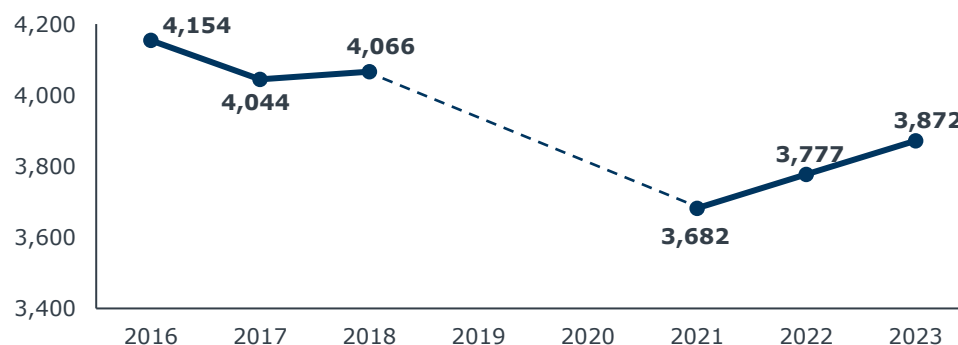


Largest Decline

Cross Country Participation Down but Rebounding

Participation in cross country fell 7% between 2016 and 2023. However, it is showing signs of growth, with a 5% increased between 2021 and 2023.

Change in Boys' Cross Country Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24



Source: EAB analysis of National Federation of State High School Association data.

Short- and Long-Term Changes in Participation

Girls

Areas of Consistent Growth

Four sports grew both in the last year and across the last eight years. This trend may signal emerging and/or sustainable recruitment areas. They included:

- Outdoor Track & Field
- Tennis
- Volleyball
- Wrestling

Areas of Steady Decline

In comparison, participation fell in the last year and across the last eight years in one sport.

- Basketball

Because the participation rate double counts multi-sport athletes, it is possible this decline may be attributed to growing specialization.

Sport	2023-2024 Participation	Change, 2022-23 to 2023-24	Change, 2016-17 to 2023-24
Volleyball	7,606	2%	18%
Soccer	7,283	0%	2%
Track & Field, Outdoor	6,857	3%	17%
Softball	6,141	1%	-1%
Basketball	5,845	-2%	-4%
Tennis	3,450	6%	15%
Cross Country	2,886	0%	-7%
Bowling	1,090	2%	-9%
Golf	1,061	0%	15%
Wrestling	932	17%	217%
Unified Track	38	111%	N/A

Biggest, Fastest Growth, Largest Decline

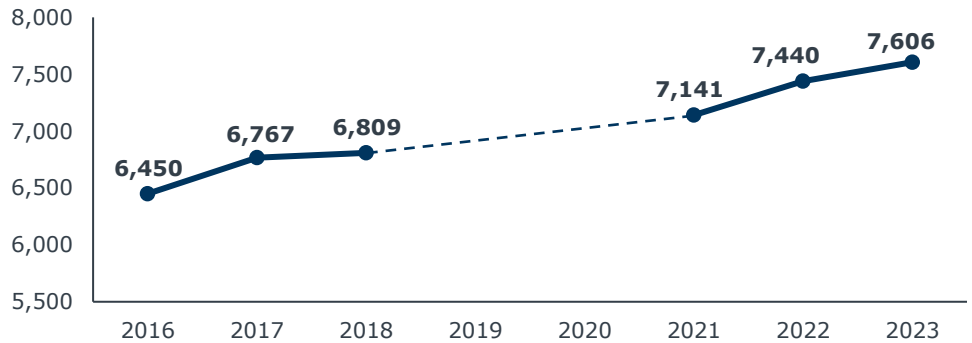
Girls

Biggest Sport

Steady Growth for Volleyball in Tennessee

Participation in volleyball increased every year between 2016 and 2023, for total growth of 18%.

Change in Girls' Volleyball Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24

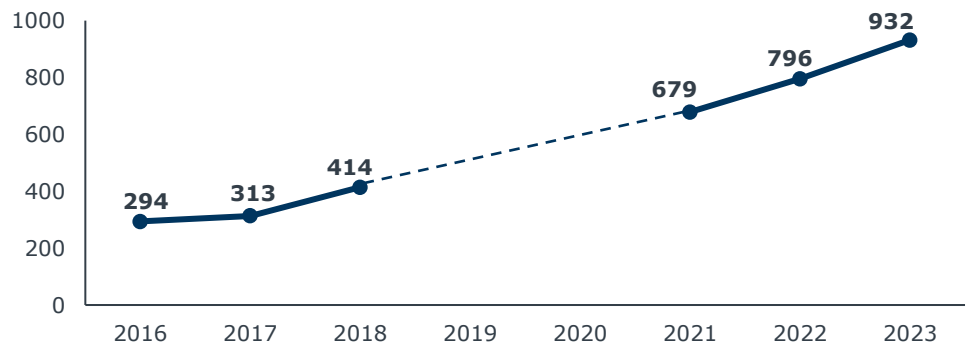


Fastest Growth

Wrestling Small But Growing Fast

Participation in wrestling increased every year between 2016 and 2023, for 217% total growth.

Change in Girls' Wrestling Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24

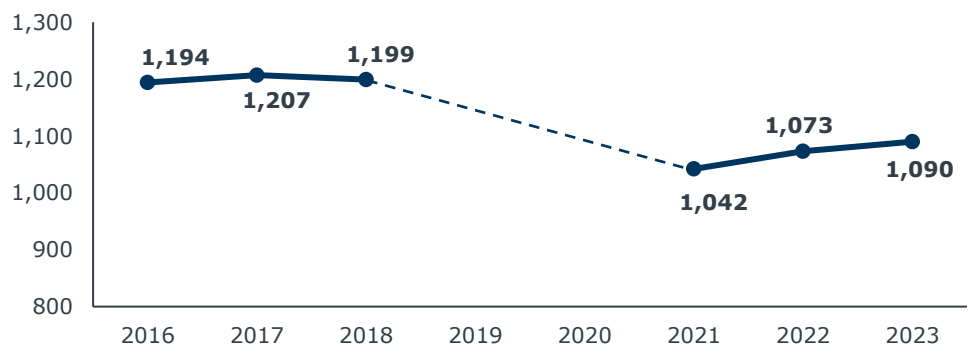


Largest Decline

Bowling Recovering Slowly After Pandemic Drop

Participation in bowling is down 9% since 2016. However, it is showing signs of growth, with a 5% increase between 2021 and 2023.

Change in Girls' Bowling Participation, 2016-17 to 2023-24



Source: EAB analysis of National Federation of State High School Association data.

Appendix: About the Data

Data in this report come from the National Federation of State High School Association's "[High School Athletics Participation Survey](#)."

Limitations of the Data

- The numbers cited in this report reflect the "participation rate." An individual who participated in two sports is counted twice, three sports – three times and so on.
- Participation rates are not adjusted for population changes.
- Most states exclude data from independent schools, unless they are part of the state league, which varies by state and sport.
- Data do not include club sport participation.
- Some states did not report data for all years included in the report. Meanwhile, others appear to have reported duplicate data in a few cases. These cases are called out in the report when applicable.

Definitions

"Adapted" refers to sports that are modified (e.g., rules, equipment) for special-needs students.

"Unified" refers to sports that are open to special-needs students but aren't adapted to meet their needs.

Appendix: National High School Sports Participation

2023-2024 Top 10 Sports in USA by Participation

Top Boys' Sports

1. Football – 11-Player	1,031,508
2. Track and Field – Outdoor	625,333
3. Basketball	536,668
4. Baseball	471,701
5. Soccer	467,483
6. Wrestling	291,874
7. Cross Country	239,874
8. Tennis	157,835
9. Golf	155,174
10. Swimming and Diving	116,799
Total Boys' Participation	4,638,785

Top Girls' Sports

1. Track and Field – Outdoor	506,015
2. Volleyball	479,125
3. Soccer	383,895
4. Basketball	367,284
5. Softball – Fast Pitch	345,451
6. Tennis	195,766
7. Cross Country	192,969
8. Competitive Spirit	181,023
9. Swimming and Diving	138,174
10. Lacrosse	101,204
Total Girls' Participation	3,423,517

Source: EAB analysis of National Federation
of State High School Association data.