Tennis participation grew significantly in 2020, according to research by the Physical Activity Council (PAC Study). After nearly a decade of flat participation, a total of 21.64 million Americans ages 6 & older played tennis at least once in 2020, nearly 4 million more (a 22% increase) from 2019.

According to the PAC Study, this is consistent with changes in participation among other sports during 2020, where gym/health-based activities and organized team sports saw declines in play, but outdoor and individual activities showed big increases. Before 2020, the overall U.S. participation rate (percentage of population age 6 and above playing) was relatively constant for the past nine years.

Among the positive trends were large increases in play occasions, Core participation, and youth participation. (“Core” participants are defined as playing at least 10 times a year.) In addition, “latent demand” for tennis remains strong. The PAC Study shows that more than 11 million non-players intend to play tennis within the next year, and another 17 million Americans “consider themselves players” (also known as “intermittent participants”) but may not have been on court in the last two years.

Although 2020 turned out to be a banner year for the industry in terms of tennis participation, long-term trends still indicate a number of challenges. Core participation continues to decrease, while non-core play is increasing. Public parks, schools and colleges—while important play locations for growth in 2020—are less likely to have organized programs, which are critical to player retention and development. Aside from 2020, there was a decrease in average play occasions for players in the 25- to 44-year-old and 55+ age groups.

Like tennis participation, 2020 was a resurgent year for tennis racquet unit shipments, especially lower-end racquets commonly sold in mass merchants that remained open during the pandemic. There was a double-digit increase in wholesale racquet unit shipments, and pro/specialty racquet unit sales bounced back quickly from peak-COVID declines.

You can view more detailed results by purchasing the 2021 TIA Participation Report. The most recent industry research is available from the TIA at various membership levels. Visit TennisIndustry.org or call 312-596-5281.

2021 TIA Tennis Industry Participation Report

Latest research shows tennis participation in 2020 surging in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Long-term trends still highlight ongoing challenges such as declining play occasions and fewer core participants.
The 2020 tennis participation rate of 7.1 percent is 1.3 percentage points higher than 2019 and the highest ever recorded in the PAC Study. Prior to 2020, tennis participation was fairly stable over the last nine years, with the average annual change rate from 2010 to 2019 at -0.4 percent. Total play occasions grew to 495.1 million in 2020, an increase of 27.8 percent from 2019. Core participants—who play 10 or more times in a 12-month period and account for 93 percent of all play occasions—increased 27 percent, from 9.15 million players in 2019 to 11.63 million in 2020. Non-core players (those playing less than 10 times a year) increased 17.4 percent.

The longer term trend from 2009 shows core participation has increased 2.3 percent, while non-core participation has increased 39 percent, which should be a concern to this industry.

Youth participation saw a particularly large increase, with the total number of players ages 6-17 growing 36.6 percent in 2020 to 6.23 million players.
Total U.S. Youth Tennis Participation (ages 6-17)

Total U.S. Tennis Play Occasions (millions) by Play Frequency

Tennis Players and Latent Demand (Millions)

Total U.S. Tennis Players in 2020 by Age