



🔍 #sport on search

League Tables 2023



introduction

Chris Argyle-Robinson, Research & Strategy Director

Dear friends and colleagues

Welcome back to #SportOnSearch, the only report that uses search traffic to compare interest in 44 of the world's biggest sports properties against the previous 4-year average.

It's our continued belief that search volume is a simple indicator of the interest in a sports property.

The most alarming results from 2022 are the dramatic decreases in interest for some of the largest, well-established sports properties.

The LIV effect has clearly kicked in and the PGA Tour and PGA European Tours have taken big hits because of it.

Meanwhile, cycling is crying out for a new star to capture people's attention as its biggest tours struggle to maintain interest levels.

Best wishes

Chris



leagues & series – league table 2022

based on 2022 search data vs previous 4-year average

position			leagues & series	sport	2022 vs previous 4-year average (% change)	position			leagues & series	sport	2022 vs previous 4-year average (% change)
2022	2021	change				2022	2021	change			
1	1	-	FA Women's Super League	football	+92%	15	18	▲	Major League Soccer (MLS)	football	+8%
2	5	▲	Formula 1	motorsport	+41%	16	22	▲	World Surf League (WSL)	surfing	+8%
3	9	▲	Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA)	basketball	+40%	17	-	-	EuroLeague	basketball	+8%
4	12	▲	ONE Championship	combat sport	+31%	18	15	▼	Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC)	combat sport	+7%
5	4	▼	Premier League	football	+29%	19	10	▼	National Basketball Association (NBA)	basketball	+7%
6	-	-	EuroLeague Women	basketball	+28%	20	15	▼	National Hockey League (NHL)	ice hockey	+3%
7	8	▲	National Women's Soccer League (NWSL)	football	+25%	21	7	▼	Bundesliga	football	0%
8	2	▼	Ligue 1	football	+24%	22	19	▼	NASCAR	motorsport	-4%
9	-	-	Diamond League	athletics	+21%	23	-	-	World Rally Championship	motorsport	-5%
10	3	▼	Serie A	football	+17%	24	14	▼	PGA Tour	golf	-9%
11	20	▲	Formula E	motorsport	+14%	25	21	▼	Bellator MMA	combat sport	-21%
12	13	▲	Major League Baseball (MLB)	baseball	+13%	26	23	▼	MotoGP	motorsport	-28%
13	16	▲	National Football League (NFL)	American football	+10%	27	24	▼	World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE)	combat sport	-31%
14	6	▼	LaLiga	football	+9%	28	17	▼	PGA European Tour	golf	-33%

leagues & series | top 4 properties 2022



+92%

interest in women's football keeps growing

as a result of the success of England's Lionesses at a home European Championships and the WSL's (FA Women's Super League), new viewers to women's football increased

27% of the 15.8 million new viewers in 2022 came via the Women's Euros, with 46% of those watching more women's football as a result

+41%

"Formula 1 keeps key markets gripped"

interest in F1 increased in key markets despite the title race being less dramatic than the 2021 finale

Max Verstappen retained his crown and a new generation of drivers, along with the ongoing popularity of Netflix's 'Drive to Survive,' continued to captivate a vital audience

+40%

"an historic WNBA season full of storylines"

2022 was WNBA's most-watched regular season since 2006 (post season since 2007), with big on-court storylines such as the retirement of legend Sue Bird

off the court, the ongoing detention of Brittney Griner added to search interest in the league/sport as a whole

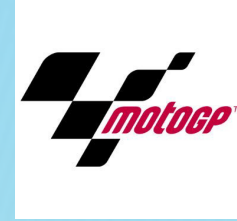
+31%

"full stadiums in a revitalised Premier League"

2022 saw the climax of the first full season with fans in stadiums since the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020. A 2021-2022 campaign of full stadiums therefore provided a more appealing product to sports fans with an improved viewing experience

title race decided on final day of season which added to the excitement

leagues & series | bottom 4 properties 2022



-33%

PGA Tours under threat from LIV

the rise of Saudi-backed LIV Golf impacted interest in the sport's traditional PGA/European Tours

high-profile players such as Phil Mickelson have moved across to LIV and discussed how they see LIV on the rise and traditional PGA Tours trending downward

-31%

"WWE on the slide"

superstars have increasingly left WWE in recent years

with the company losing mainstream interest, 'pink slips' have been handed out because of what WWE refer to as "key budget cuts"

-28%

"a downward trend for MotoGP"

with a huge drop in crowd figures at key events such as Silverstone, MotoGP's downward trend is also reflected online

this was compounded by the absence of top-level rivalry following the retirement of Valentino Rossi and the continuing injury woes of 6-time World Champion Marc Márquez

-21%

"combat sports' duopoly"

the global duopoly of UFC/ONE Championship has made it increasingly hard for Bellator to compete for an audience within combat sports

ONE has a cumulative television reach of 406 million, UFC 259 million, Bellator only 11 million

our 2022 forecast vs actual results



2022 forecast **women's sport will continue to grow**



result

the FA Women's Super League benefitted from the exposure of a hugely popular UEFA Women's Euros alongside a new TV deal with Sky and the BBC making the sport easily accessible

the WNBA also saw great growth as we predicted, not only jumping 6 spots in our league table but smashing their own records too – 2022 was the most-viewed season for the league in 14 years and saw WNBA social media accounts rack up 186 million video views (+36% vs 2021)



comeback for American leagues



NFL has seen double-digit uplift of interest, securing a move up our league table

MLS saw an uptake in interest and a jump of 3 places in the standings following an impressive FIFA World Cup campaign for the USA

NBA and NHL also saw increases in interest in 2022 but at a lower rate in comparison to their 4-year averages, both dropping league rankings

a positive year overall for American sport as predicted



interest will drop in European football leagues



we predicted interest in European leagues to drop in 2022 due to star players moving/the FIFA World Cup interrupting the domestic season

what we saw was that interest grew in Ligue 1, Serie A and LaLiga compared to their 4-year averages; interest in the Bundesliga remained constant

nevertheless, all of these leagues dropped in our league table compared to a successful 2021 that saw them finish 2nd, 3rd, 6th and 7th respectively



motorsports will climb



F1 continued to be the shining star of Motorsport with an increase in interest that we had anticipated last year

we also predicted the growth of interest in Formula E

but other areas of Motorsport saw a decrease in interest, contrary to expectations, especially MotoGP

this could be linked to the absence of a top-level rivalries/ big attention-grabbing stories

leagues & series – growth outlook



women's sport will continue to grow

we expect the growing interest in women's football to continue into 2023: the FIFA Women's World Cup takes place in the summer, and should boost interest in the sport just as the Euros did last year

we predict increased interest in the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) specifically, with [soccer in general increasing in interest in the USA](#) following its performance in the men's World Cup in 2022



increasing gap between combat sports

we predict an increasing gap between those combat sports that rose in interest levels in 2022 and those in decline

we expect ONE Championship to continue growing even if the rate decreases

UFC has been fairly consistent in its growth and, though not dramatic, we expect interest to continue to increase in 2023

WWE has been on a downward trajectory over the past 4 years – with stars leaving/reported budget cuts, we can't see this trend turning around in 2023

the Professional Fighters League (PFL) has been given a boost by the [signing of influencer Jake Paul](#) and this could play a significant role in combat sports in 2023



F1 interest to plateau

F1 has had a great 4 years of growth - minus a small dip at the height of the pandemic in 2020 - but we question how long this rate of growth can continue

we predict that interest in the sport will grow again in 2023 but that the rate of this growth will slow down as we see the impact of the popular 'Drive To Survive' Netflix series dwindle



golf to rebound

with specific events such as the Masters/The US Open having grown in interest in 2022, we expect the PGA/PGA European Tours to see an uplift compared to last year

another key factor to growing the sport's reach could be the new Netflix documentary 'Full Swing' that follows golfers on and off the course, including during the PGA Tour – we predict this could encourage new audiences to search for information around the tours/series included

events & tournaments – league table 2022

based on 2022 Google search data vs previous 4-year average



Credit: @TheMasters

2022	2021	change	events & tournaments	sport	2022 vs previous 4-year average (% change)
1	4	▲	 Masters	golf	+54%
2	-	-	 UEFA Europa League	football	+43%
3	7	▲	 The US Open	golf	+32%
4	2	▼	 Indian Premier League (IPL)	cricket	+24%
5	-	-	 UEFA Champions League	football	+19%
6	-	-	 Big Bash League	cricket	+13%
7	1	▼	 Wimbledon	tennis	+12%
8	11	▲	 Six Nations	rugby	+2%
9	5	▼	 The Open	golf	+1%
10	9	▼	 Vuelta a España	cycling	0%
11	3	▼	 French Open	tennis	-2%
12	12	-	 Tour de France	cycling	-7%
13	6	▼	 US Open Tennis	tennis	-8%
14	10	▼	 Australian Open	tennis	-14%
15	-	-	 CrossFit Games	fitness	-35%
16	8	▼	 Giro d'Italia	cycling	-36%

events & tournaments | top 4 properties 2022



+54%

the Tiger effect

the return of 15-time major winner Tiger Woods to golf's most iconic tournament revitalised Masters

Augusta National Golf Club also welcomed full capacity crowds to the year's first major championship since 2019

+41%

UEFA reforms elevate Europa League's value

reforms to UEFA club competitions, including the introduction of the UEFA European Conference League, gave greater importance to the Europa League as the continent's second most prestigious tournament after the Champions League

+32%

major competition, major prize money

at golf's third major of the year, a record high purse for a golf major was awarded at The US Open - this increased interest for neutrals as the PGA Tour/traditional tournaments sought ways to compete with the newly introduced LIV Golf Series and its huge incentives

+24%

record IPL streaming rights deal

the streaming/TV rights for the IPL were sold for a record \$6.02bn (£5.13bn)

Viacom18, backed by Indian billionaire Mukesh Ambani, secured the rights until 2027 for \$3.05bn

the 2-month league once more showcased a mix of breakout homegrown players/world stars

events & tournaments | bottom 4 properties 2022



-36%

**lack of stars
impacts the Giro**

as highlighted in our [Giro d'Italia 2022 report](#), a combination of factors saw a decrease in interest in the Giro: a lack of big-name stars, a primarily European field of competitors, and a low-profile winner (Jai Hindley)



-35%

**CrossFit Games
reaching for
former glory**

the CrossFit Games actually saw a year-on-year increase in interest from 2021 to 2022, but that wasn't enough to improve upon their 4-year average which was [boosted by 2 incredibly strong years in 2018 and 2019](#)



-14%

**negative headlines
at the Australian
Open**

the build-up to the Australian Open was impacted as [world no.1 Novak Djokovic, 'The King of Melbourne Park' had his visa cancelled](#) and he was deported ahead of the tournament due to his Covid vaccination status

high-profile absences at the tournament included Roger Federer, and attendances were capped at 50%



-9%

**tennis steps into
a new age at the
US Open**

at Flushing Meadows there were new generation winners – Carlos Alcaraz and Iga Świątek [became the first players both born in the 2000s to win the US Open's singles titles](#)

the decline was also due to Roger Federer missing the tournament as it fell shortly before he announced his retirement

our 2022 forecast vs actual results



**2022
forecast**

**more growth for
biggest events
& tournaments**

**cycling staged
for a comeback**

**Six Nations
will grow**

**golf tournaments
need popular players
to perform**

result



4 out of last year's top 5 still saw increases in interest although the French Open dropped 7 places (-2%)

we predicted Wimbledon/the IPL would maintain top spots in the table, but - despite both recording growth compared to their 4-year average - they dropped 6 and 2 places respectively

although the French Open was unable to reach the levels of its 4-year average, and particularly its peak in 2019, it has seen a small year-on-year increase over the past 2 years

unfortunately, cycling saw its downward trend continue despite regular dates/fixtures returning to the calendar

Vuelta a España maintained last year's search interest; however, the Tour de France/Giro d'Italia both saw a decrease

we predicted that the Tour de France would see an uplift due to a less cluttered global sporting calendar than that of the summer of 2021 but this didn't pan out

we predicted that the Six Nations Championship would grow in popularity by around 10% - although the growth didn't reach that figure, the competition still recorded a positive rise and saw a year-on-year increase in searches

having fans back in stadia alongside free-to-air tv coverage have helped the competition to grow, leaping 3 places in our ranking compared to 2021

the Masters, The US Open and The Open all saw increased popularity based on their 4-year averages - we predicted that big-name players would have a major affect on the rise or fall of golf's popularity either through their participation or absence

although not the most star-studded year at the major golf tournaments, perhaps the biggest name on the circuit, Rory McIlroy, improved on his 2021 form to come second in the Masters and third in The Open

events and tournaments- growth outlook



CrossFit Games on the up

the heights of the CrossFit Games' pre-pandemic success saw it struggle to outperform its 4-year average this year although we saw the competition report year-on-year growth in 2022

we predict that this growth will continue in 2023 and that we will see it surpass its 4-year average

high levels of search interest in 2018/2019 show that there is opportunity for the event to reach/maintain higher levels of interest across consecutive years



IPL to benefit in World Cup year

on the back of a new format introduced in 2022, the IPL's year-on-year growth is set to continue

with the 2023 World Cup held in India in October/November, interest in this year's IPL could increase - despite the tournament being a different format to the 20-over IPL, the same number of teams will engage and many of the tournament's stars will have competed in the summer league just months prior



France to drive Six Nations growth

this year, France - the reigning Six National Grand Slam Champions - will host the Rugby World Cup

in 2022, the tournament saw a 2% increase on the previous 4-year average, despite taking place during the same timeframe as the Beijing Winter Olympic Games

as more casual viewers were drawn in this time around, we expect the Six Nations to grow further



Masters will continue year-on-year increase

golf's most prestigious major has seen year-on-year growth in the last 4 years

we expect this trend to continue in 2023: the Ryder Cup and Netflix feature series will pique interest in golf in general, and the Augusta tournament will retain its importance and continue to interest fans



methodology

why Google data?

Google has over 90% of the search engine market share and almost 4 billion users worldwide. We used Google Trends data to best reflect the searches people make each day.

how does it work?

- each sports property was individually measured by all relevant search terms/phrases during a 5-year period
- an annual index score was calculated by averaging each weekly index score; 2022 was then compared against the previous 4-year period (2018-2021)
- the percentages illustrate direction of change

why a 5-year period?

A 5-year period was chosen so that trends over recent years could be examined and the pandemic disruption of 2020/21 factored in.

which sports have been ranked?

44 of the world's biggest global sports properties were ranked:

28 *leagues & series*
16 *annual events & tournaments*

thank you

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