

The Star-Ledger/**Eagleton-Rutgers Poll**

The *Newark* Nets--A Tough Sell

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New Jersey's most innovative urban revitalization project may be hard to pull off.

The NJ Nets basketball team was sold in the off-season to an ownership group that wants to move the Nets to Newark and, with an unprecedented philanthropic focus, would have the Newark community benefiting in the success and financial profits of the team. But an initial reading of statewide public opinion in New Jersey indicates how difficult this goal may be to achieve.

The most recent Star-Ledger/Eagleton poll conducted earlier this month indicates the Nets' new ownership faces two serious problems in bringing their vision to fruition: First, New Jerseyans have great identification and familiarity with, and affection for the Meadowlands--the Nets current home. Second, there may be a great resistance among the team's fans of a move to Newark based on a fear the state's largest city.

These findings come against a backdrop of Newark's renaissance led by the Performing Arts Center. Public perception of the value of the PAC appears to be running ahead even of the high expectations of its promise and contribution to the rebirth of the city of Newark.

The Meadowlands have developed from the late 1970s to the present in such a way as to have become an icon of state pride. (The Nets, Devils, Jets and Giants professional sports teams play their home games at the Meadowlands, which is also home to horse racing and special attractions.) Four-in-five of all state residents say the Meadowlands has been good for the state and good for the state's image--how outsiders see the state; three-quarters say the Meadowlands is at least somewhat important to New Jersey's unique identity as a state, with one-third of Garden State residents saying it is "very" important to the state's identity. Almost two-thirds of all New Jersey adults report having been to the Meadowlands, including one-third of all state residents and one-half of all Northern New Jersey residents in the last year.

The Nets' plans to move to Newark are far from universally known, but are greeted with an initial scepticism. Less than half of New Jerseyans (47 percent) say they have heard anything about the Nets' proposed move to Newark, and public opinion is far from crystallized. At the time the survey was taken (between January 7 and 13), 23 percent said they thought the move was a "bad idea" and 16 percent said it was a "good idea." The remaining 61 percent either said they did not know or did not care. But by a wider margin of 44 to 25 percent more self-described Nets fans described the move as a "bad" rather than "good" idea, with the remainder expressing no preference.

Additionally, even if the Nets do move to Newark, just eight percent statewide--(and 10 percent of self-identified Nets' fans--think they should change their name from the "New Jersey" to "Newark" Nets.

State residents were also asked about their opinions of a possible Nets' move from the Meadowlands to Newark under a variety of conditions. Far more disapproved than approved if it meant:

- The Meadowlands indoor sports arena might be closed down as a consequence--71 disapprove to 10 percent approve.
- The New Jersey Devils hockey team, with whom the Nets share the Meadowlands arena, would leave the state--61 percent disapprove to 10 percent approve.
- The State would have to build a new stadium for the Nets in Newark--71 disapprove to 15 percent approve.

However, the jury is still out about public assistance for a Nets move to Newark if the Nets were to build their own stadium, with the State paying for some transportation improvements for fans to reach a Newark stadium (48 percent approve, 36 percent disapprove, with the remainder expressing no opinion).

A move from the Meadowlands to Newark clearly represents a big gamble for the new owners of the Nets. At this point just seven percent say they would be more likely to attend a Nets game if they moved to Newark, while 29 percent say they would be less likely to do so. A large number of self-identified Nets fans say they are less likely to go to Newark than more likely to do so, by a considerable margin of 44 (less) to 10 (more) percent.

There is clearly a climate of fear about going to Newark among New Jersey residents that the new Nets owners will have to deal with if they are to move the team and be successful. Those saying they would be less likely to go to Newark to attend a Nets game were read a list of reasons why this might be so. Somewhere between 60 and 70 percent of this group indicated that each of the following was a "major" reason why they would be less likely to attend a Nets' game:

- Worry about driving and parking in Newark

- Worry about safety in Newark
- Newark being a less attractive venue than the Meadowlands
- Feeling "uncomfortable" in Newark
- Newark being less convenient than the Meadowlands

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton survey takes place against the backdrop of a Newark renaissance, let by the recently-opened Performing Arts Center. Fully one-tenth of all New Jerseyans report having been to the PAC since it was opened. According to Poll's initial read, the PAC has been a clear success and has even bettered public expectations. In November of 1996 Poll Ledger asked what people throughout the state expected from the opening of the PAC. This January state residents we asked how they had evaluated the PAC so far. The early results are positive:

- In November of 1996, 40 percent of those having heard or read something about the PAC thought it would become a major benefit for "the *state* of New Jersey." Now, in January of 1999, 52 percent of those having heard or read something about the PAC say that they think it actually has become a major benefit.
- In November of 1996, 43 percent of those having heard or read something about the PAC thought it would be a major benefit for "the *residents* of New Jersey." Now, a slightly higher percentage of 49 percent of those having heard or read something about the PAC think it has become a major benefit.
- While in November of 1996, 56 percent of those having heard or read something about the PAC thought it would be a major benefit for "*the city of Newark*," 80 percent of New Jersey residents now feel it has become so.

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BACKGROUND MEMO — RELEASE SL/EP71-2 (EP121-2), SUNDAY, JANUARY 24, 1999

The latest Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll was conducted between January 7 and 13, 1999, when a scientifically selected random sample of 800 New Jersey adult residents was interviewed by telephone. All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. The sampling error for the total sample size of 800 is + 3.5 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jerseyans were found to have a favorable opinion of the Governor, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 46.5 and 53.5 percent (50 + 3.5) had all New Jerseyans been interviewed, rather than just a sample. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such separate figures reported for men and women, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. Click [here](#) for a [chart](#) that shows the relationship between sample size and sampling error. Sampling error does not take into account other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording or context effects. The verbatim wording of all questions asked are reproduced in this background memo. The sample has been stratified based on county and the data have been weighted on age and education to insure an accurate proportional representation of the state. Two versions of the questionnaire were used in this study. Not all questions were on both versions.

"On another topic, one recent development in New Jersey has been the Meadowlands Sports Complex in Northern New Jersey. Overall, do you think the Meadowlands has been good or bad for the state?" [SP1]

	<u>Good</u>	<u>Bad</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January, 1999	80%	4%	16%	100%	(800)
May, 1985	86	4	10	100	(500)

"And has the Meadowlands been good or bad for the state's image--that is how others see New Jersey?" [SP2]

	<u>Good</u>	<u>Bad</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January, 1999	81%	5%	15%	101%	(800)

"How important do you think the Meadowlands is to New Jersey's unique identity as a state--something that people living here take pride in. Is it very important, somewhat important or not too important?" [SP3]

	<u>Very</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Not Very</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January, 1999	32%	43%	19%	6%	100%	(800)

Region

--North	40	43	14	4	101	(345)
--Central	30	48	19	3	100	(205)
--South	20	42	27	11	100	(219)

"Have you ever been to the Meadowlands for a sporting event or concert?" [SP4] AND Have you been there at least once in the last 12 months? [SP5]

	<u>Yes, in last 12 months</u>	<u>No, not in last 12 months</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January, 1999	36%	28%	36%	1%	101%	(800)
May, 1985	45	15	40	0	100	500

Region

--North	49	30	20	1	100	(345)
--Central	38	35	26	1	100	(205)
--South	15	19	65	0	99	(219)

"How interested are you in PROFESSIONAL sports --someone who follows a particular sport or a team in the paper and on TV? Are you very interested, somewhat interested, a little interested or not at all interested in pro sports?" [SP6]

	<u>Very</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>A Little</u>	<u>Not at All</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January, 1999	34%	26%	19%	21%	100%	(800)

Gender

53	42	32	45	58	53	53	33	<u>answered</u> <u>"Yes"</u> 47%	<u>(n)</u> 800
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"Just your first reaction, on the whole do you think this is a good idea, a bad idea, or don't you care one way or the other." [SP15]

	<u>Good</u>	<u>Bad</u>	<u>Don't Know/ Don't Care</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January, 1999	16%	23%	61%	100%	800
<i><u>Race</u></i>					
--White	13	23	65	101	595
--Black	30	17	53	100	80
<i><u>Region</u></i>					
--North	20	29	51	100	345
--Central	15	18	67	100	205
--South	11	17	73	101	219
Nets Fans	25	44	30	99	116
Nets County*	21	33	46	100	223

* Lives in County Near Meadowlands: Bergen, Essex, Passaic, Hudson

"If the Nets were to move to Newark do you think they should change their name to the Newark Nets, or keep the name the New Jersey Nets?" [SP16]

	<u>Newark</u>	<u>New Jersey</u>	<u>Don't Know/ Don't Care</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January, 1999	8%	73%	19%	100%	800
Nets Fans	10	84	6	100	116

"Would you approve or disapprove of the Nets moving from the Meadowlands to Newark if each of the following also happened? If you don't have an opinion just say so." [SP17]

January, 1999

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
If it meant that state money would have to be used to build a new stadium in Newark	15%	71%	13%	99%	800
If it meant that the New Jersey Devils hockey team	10	61	29	100	800
Left the state					
If the Nets built their own stadium but state money	48	36	16	100	800
Paid for some transportation improvements					
If it meant that the Meadowlands indoor sports arena	10	71	20	101	800

might be closed down

"Thinking about yourself, do you think you would be more likely to go to a Nets game if they moved to Newark from the Meadowlands, would you be less likely, or would there be no difference?" [SP18]

	<u>More Likely</u>	<u>Less Likely</u>	<u>No difference/ Don't know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January, 1999	7%	29%	65%	101%	800

Race

--White	5	31	64	100	595
--Black	22	11	67	100	80
Nets Fans	10	44	46	100	116
Nets County*	11	37	52	100	223

* Lives in County Near Meadowlands: Bergen, Essex, Passaic, Hudson

"And what do you think about most people you know who are basketball fans--Would they be more likely to go to, less likely, or would there be no difference?" [SP19]

	<u>More Likely</u>	<u>Less Likely</u>	<u>No difference/ Don't know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January, 1999	18%	27%	55%	100%	800

Race

--White	13	29	58	100	595
--Black	51	16	33	100	80
Nets Fans	20	36	44	100	116
Nets County*	22	33	45	100	223

* Lives in County Near Meadowlands: Bergen, Essex, Passaic, Hudson

ASKED OF THOSE WHO SAID THEY WOULD BE LESS LIKELY TO GO TO A NETS GAME IF THE TEAM MOVED TO NEWARK [SP18]

I'm going to read you some reasons why you might be less likely to go to a Nets game in Newark. For each please just tell me if you think it is a major reason, minor reason or not a reason why you might go to fewer games. First... (ROTATE)...is this a major reason, a minor reason or not a reason?" [SP20]

January, 1999

	<u>Major</u>	<u>Minor</u>	<u>Not a Reason</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
You would be worried about safety in Newark	69%	19%	9%	4%	101%	235
You would feel uncomfortable in Newark	61	19	16	4	100	235

The games would be less convenient for you to get to in Newark	63	18	15	4	100	235
Newark is a less attractive place than the Meadowlands	67	15	12	6	100	235
You would be worried about driving and parking in Newark	72	17	8	4	101	235

"Have you heard or read anything about the performing arts center that recently opened in Newark?" [SP21]

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January, 1999	54%	46%	100%	800
November, 1996*	33	67	100	1021

Region

--North	69	31	100	(345)
--Central	64	36	100	(205)
--South	25	75	100	(219)

*Asked: Have you heard or read anything to build a performing arts center in Newark?

"Have you been to the performing arts center in Newark?" [SP22] OF THOSE WHO ANSWERED "YES".....

January, 1999

<u><30K</u>	<u>Income</u>		<u>North</u>	<u>Region</u>			<u>Total</u>
	<u>30-50K</u>	<u>>50K</u>		<u>Central</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>Essex Bergen Hudson Passaic</u>	
3%	7%	14%	15%	7%	3%	17%	9%
(145)	(152)	(387)	(343)	(204)	(219)	(222)	800

"Please tell me if you think the performing arts center in Newark has been a major benefit, a minor benefit or no benefit at all for each of the following:" [SP23]

January, 1999

	<u>Major Benefit</u>	<u>Minor Benefit</u>	<u>Not a Benefit</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
The state of New Jersey	52%	33%	7%	8%	100%	(476)
--Nov 1996 Prediction*	40	40	16	4	100	(383)
The residents of New Jersey	49	36	7	7	99	(476)
--Nov 1996 Prediction*	43	35	16	6	100	(383)
The city of Newark	80	12	2	6	100	(476)
--Nov 1996 Prediction*	56	26	10	7	99	(383)

*Asked: Have you heard or read anything to build a performing arts center in Newark?