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FOR RUNNERS.**



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**INNOVATION & STYLE IN OUTDOOR FOOTWEAR.**

**FOOTBALL REMAINS NO. 1 FOR TEAM DEALERS.**

**TEAM SPORTS: TALKING THE SOCK MARKET.**

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Above: Ciele spring/summer 2025 apparel. On the Cover: Recover + Go Sport Elite Collection apparel is made from 100% post-consumer plastic and features micro waffle knit technology.

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# THE WEARABILITY FACTOR

HOW PERFORMANCE FOOTWEAR IS LEANING INTO LIFESTYLE ATTRIBUTES.

BY EMILY WALZER

The footwear landscape is dotted with fresh takes on performance this season with brands showcasing new approaches to material selection and design direction that are proving a good fit for a wide range of categories, from tactical to on-trend athleisure and active styles to recyclable running shoes. This current field of value-added innovative footwear offerings reflects a broader interpretation of performance. In the past, fabric functionality talking points focused mainly on breakthrough technology achievements often described in quantitative and scientific terminology. These days, wearability is central to the performance story. Attributes derived from new and different ways textiles are used and how footwear is constructed to enhance fit, feel, fashion flair and sustainability are conversation starters. As high-tech solutions like waterproofness and breathability become “expected” functionality in footwear, lifestyle benefits like versatility and ultra-comfort are front and center.

Material considerations and design concepts gaining ground in today’s pursuit of performance include use of natural fibers, undyed fabrics, digital processes, and eco-forward manufacturing practices.

**Material Matters**

Innovation in wool footwear this Spring and Summer comes in the form of digitally knit sneakers and slip-on styles that look, feel and function beyond traditional boiled wool or sheet stock formats. The brand Woolloomooloo spins Australian Merino wool into a superfine thread that is digitally knit to create a lightweight material that features strength, durability and elevated comfort, both in upper and lining applications. Sustainable materials drive design to build shoes that are better for your feet and the planet, according to the company, adding that the wool used in the Woolloomooloo product is renewable, washable,

# DESIGN

and biodegradable.

Developments in the tactical footwear sector highlight advanced fit-for-purpose functionality. The newest T8 Defense model from Garmont Tactical, a specialist in multi-terrain tactical footwear, incorporates D30, a soft, flexible protective shock absorbing membrane, strategically placed in the boot to reduce impacts and increase comfort. “The idea was to build a boot that is structurally sound and also gives a lot of support, and protection,” explains Garmont Tactical sales manager Kyle Ferdyn. “The D30 is used on both sides of the ankle bone areas and the entire tongue piece to reduce tension above the foot when descending or moving forward.” He adds that the D30 foam under the ball and heel foot offers impact resistance and mitigates fatigue during long periods of standing.

Garmont Tactical is one of the first to apply this material to tactical footwear; D30 is an established ingredient often used in Formula1, cycling and motorcycling racing markets. .

Looking ahead, Garmont Tactical sees increased opportunities for advancements in the law enforcement category and in the women’s side of the business across categories with strategic use of the D30 performance membrane and curated design details. “Evolving more versatile footwear is important to the growth of the brand,” Ferdyn shares.

### Design Developments

The INDEX.03 is Salomon’s latest and most advanced version of its INDEX shoe. It features a comprehensive, detail-focused ecodesign approach that results in significant impact reduction.

Marc Peyregne, Salomon’s ecodesign & circularity senior manager, explains that a number of improvements were made from the previous model, including the use of a lighter midsole material, 100 percent recycled polyester for the tongue, and a more efficient cutting process for the upper parts, reducing wasted material from 40 percent to just 26 percent. “The core concept endures—a fully recyclable shoe crafted from two key components: TPU for the lower section below the distinctive red line, and polyester for the upper part.”

The ability to recycle materials across categories is a good example of eco-efficiency. States Peyregne: “During the recycling of our shoes, we are particularly interested in the TPU foam of the sole. To determine where we would use this material, we looked at our products where we already used TPU and tested its application. It turned out that the collar of our ski boots was the

most relevant application, as some models already used TPU.”

“Materials teams worked with our suppliers to improve the foam characteristics for more cushioning and comfort, and our designers to create a more desirable design,” says Peyregne. “Throughout the creation process, the teams focused on making a recyclable running shoe, which required rethinking the way we design the shoe and simplifying it as much as possible.”

Redefining an original by “pushing boundaries, balancing performance, comfort and style,” is the case with the new R.A.D ONE V2 shoe, according to Tom Berend, head of footwear design at R.A.D. The buzzy training brand R.A.D was founded by former Cross Fit athlete Ben Massey with industry vet Berend, with the R.A.D ONE launching in 2022. The brand’s new V2 shoe uses “power mesh” for better breathability and features a new SwellFoam BIO EVA midsole for improved cushioning during long training sessions. The upper has additional padding in the collar and tongue, plus an anatomical sock liner to elevate comfort.

Improved fit to enhance performance factored in the design of the new Head Motion Pro BOA pickleball shoe, the first of its kind in the U.S. to feature BOA’s PerformFit Wrap upper.

Inspired by minimal research available aimed to better understand how the fit of the shoe upper affects performance, a published paper, titled, “Alternative upper configurations during agility-based movements: part 1, biomechanical performance” looked at how BOA’s Performance Fit Configurations can improve the agility and speed of athletes.

Based on athlete participation at the Human Dynamics Lab at the University of Denver, calculations were taken of six key performance variables in sports requiring rapid changes in direction. Results from the study showed that the BOA tri panel and y-wrap configurations improved athlete performance by between three and nine percent depending on the movement and variable tested. Additionally, BOA lace replacement configuration improved performance relative to traditional shoelaces in a few variables as well.

“Pickleball, like other court sports, requires players to change direction quickly and efficiently,” says Kate Harrison, director of the BOA Performance Fit Lab. “The BOA Fit System with PerformFit Wrap used on the Head Motion Pro creates optimal, even pressure across the foot, locking in the heel to deliver improvements in stability and control, power transfer, and energy efficiency, making a meaningful difference during those quick pivots and back-to-back games.” ■



**R.A.D. / ONE V2:** Elevates breathability and durability with lightweight yet strong power mesh. Herringbone tread pattern intensifies grip.



**Woolloomooloo / Suffolk Merino Wool Slip-On :** Created from 100 percent Aussie merino wool and digitally knit from toe to heel including the shoe lining.



DESIGN



**Salomon / INDEX. 03**  
Unisex recyclable running shoes are designed with circularity in mind. Upper is constructed to reduce waste and features undyed fabrics.



**Head / Motion Pro BOA:** Pickleball shoe with BOA Perform Fit Wrap locks in the heel for stability, control and energy efficiency. Reinforced forefoot enhances durability for toe-dragging and sliding.

**Garmont Tactical / T8 Defense:** Features D30, a soft, flexible protective shock absorbing membrane, strategically placed in the boot to reduce impacts and increase comfort.

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## FOOTWEAR / SANDAL SEASON



# HOT

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As a result of cooler than normal temperatures across much of the country for Q1 (plus a late Easter), many retailers reported experiencing a slow winter and early spring season. However, the last few weeks have brought a renewed energy from consumers seeking out spring and summer styles, particularly sandals.

Over the last few weeks, “we’re seeing strong momentum in the sandal category,” said Liam Bourke, EVP/GM for revere. “Consumers are ready to step into something lighter.”

täös is having a record-breaking sandal season, while Vionic is experiencing strong momentum as temperatures rise. “Retailer feedback aligns with what we’re experiencing — demand is accelerating, and the category is heating up,” according to Stephanie Seufert, director, brand marketing at Vionic.

Kelly Dumpson, SAS Head of Sales –Wholesale, commented that sandals represent a “significant opportunity that will drive sales long into the fall season” with warmer temperatures lasting longer and consumers having a “relaxed view on what is acceptable to wear, no matter the calendar date.”

The future is bright for sandals, with fun features that shine. We asked brand execs what’s trending now in sandals, and what to look for moving forward. Here’s what they told us.

SANDAL TRENDS TO WATCH NOW AND IN THE FUTURE. BY SUZANNE BLECHER

**ALEGRIA/IZA & INGRID:** Step back into the ’90s with these comfortable platform sandals. Iza (at right) has two adjustable buckles for a customizable fit. A cork, polyurethane and memory foam footbed brings comfort on a chunky one-inch platform sole. Ingrid (at left) elevates the classic fisherman style with an adjustable buckle and a cushioned footbed. MSRP \$120.

WHAT SANDAL SILHOUETTES ARE RESONATING WITH CONSUMERS RIGHT NOW AND HOW DOES THAT TRANSLATE INTO FUTURE TRENDS?

“We are seeing functional walking sandals selling better than ever; Sandals with support and adjustability that come in versatile materials and colors. Sport sandals, once a purely functional choice, are now a mainstream choice for everyday wear from young consumers to seniors. They are comfortable, functional and versatile. This is new for many consumers this year and we expect this trend to grow this season and through 2026 and beyond.”

*Kelly Dumpson, head of sales – wholesale, SAS*

“Consumers are loving styles that strike a balance between comfort, price point, and versatility. Our women’s styles - Sabina Sling, Kassanda Mule, and Arwell Sun sandals tap into the strappy sandal trend — with comfort never compromised. We’re also seeing this trend reflected in our men’s range, with options like the strappy leather Saltway Cove sandal, which delivers both style and all-day comfort. Looking ahead, we expect to see continued interest in hybrid styling — silhouettes that blend casual comfort with lifestyle design. Adjustable fits, contoured footbeds, and ultra-lightweight constructions will remain central to delivering all-day comfort.”

*Dawn Porto, global head of product, Clarks*

“Sandals always play an integral part on the international stage during summer. The sandal category for kybun and Joya is constantly growing, not just in new colorways. Our new sole technology is called Foreverfoam (a soft-elastic sole with biomechanical construction). *Armin Fürnrohr, international business development, kybun Joya*

“Slides and two-strap styles are flying right now. Brands really have to show what their technology does for the wearer. Today’s comfort footwear consumers are smarter and more discerning

than ever—they’re looking under the hood, so to speak. Aesthetically, there’s a demand for sandals that can move effortlessly between casual and slightly dressier moments—neutral tones with elevated hardware or subtle embossing are hitting the mark. For the future, consumers are craving customization and adjustability—think forefoot straps that accommodate swelling, hidden stretch panels, and more inclusive width options. On the men’s side, we anticipate continued growth in rugged, yet refined sandals that provide a great value because of the versatility — one pair for multiple uses.”

*Liam Bourke, EVP/GM, revere*

“Consumers are increasingly prioritizing comfort without compromising on style, and that’s exactly where täös excels. Our focus on premium materials, trend-right design, and our proprietary footbed technologies — found in täös Soft Support and Cork Support collections — continues to resonate with shoppers. These collections are engineered to deliver all-day comfort and support, making them ideal for today’s on-the-go lifestyle. With travel being a major driver of sandal purchases, our sandals are designed with the active, style-conscious traveler in mind. It’s been a great sandal season for us!”

*Michael Walker, VP of marketing, täös*

“It’s been exciting to see customers embrace both our tried-and-true Mini Rocker outsole sandals like our Vienna with its adjustable three-ankle straps, as well as our new Classic Rocker outsole Kelsi that features an adjustable cross-strap across the front. These constructions allow for easy width adjustment with an easy swap of the footbed. With so much happening at the speed that it is happening, we see a focus on inward satisfaction. At Alegria, our Spring 2026 is focused on the themes of ‘re-store,’ ‘re-fresh,’ and ‘re-set.’ Introducing styles that continue

to embrace our core offerings of adjustability, comfort, and durable wearability, but combined with a romantic aesthetic through soft, textural notes, as well as unexpected artisanal accents.”

*Irene Chen, VP of operations, Alegria*

“Molded footbed sandals are among our strongest performers right now. Consumers are drawn to their combination of effortless wearability and elevated comfort. Styles on this footbed offer easy on-and-off functionality, casual versatility, and the trusted support of our Vio-Motion technology, which continues to be a key differentiator. We’re seeing a rising interest in toe-post sandals that blend supportive design with modern styling. Consumers are seeking silhouettes that provide all-day alignment and wearability without sacrificing fashion appeal. We expect this demand to grow as more shoppers prioritize both foot health and aesthetics.”

*Stephanie Seufert, director of brand marketing, Vionic*

“We are seeing that sandals and woods are a very hot category this season, especially with a ‘Western connection,’ showcasing cowhide print and animal prints, as well as true hair on hide.”

*Allison Klein, brand and marketing manager, Dingo 1969*

“For Finn Comfort, sandals are trending near where they should be this time of year, which is to say we are hitting our stride nicely! Our FinnMellow collection continues to gain momentum, specifically the Barbuda backstrap sandal and the Grenada slide. FinnMellow features an extra layer of super soft cushioning in the contoured cork footbed with a dual density outsole. They feel instantly comfortable with stability and support.”

*Justin Orrell-Jones, president, Finn Comfort USA*



**VIONIC/EMMA:** New for 2025, Vionic is putting a modern take on the contoured, molded footbed with a sleek toe-post silhouette. Vio-Motion Technology boosts this style with hidden biomechanical support and dual-density cushioning for added comfort. Emma is offered in five fresh colorways for 2025 and provides stylish support from beach to brunch. MSRP \$125.

FOOTWEAR / SANDAL SEASON



**BIZA/KATE**  
Kate is one of three styles from Biza’s stretch comfort series, which features leather and stretch knit (or stretch elastic) uppers. Adjustable Velcro straps conform to the foot. Each offering is ideal for walking and traveling. MSRP \$124.95.



**SAS/EMBARK**  
Now available in ten colors, Embark boasts three-way adjustability; a dual-density midsole combined with dual density outsole for maximum support and function; plus extended sizes/widths for the perfect fit. Introduced two years ago, sales have increased every year with 2025 being the biggest to date with new colors driving adoption. MSRP \$199.



**CLARKS/BREEZE REYNA**  
Clarks has added three new additions to the Cloudsteppers line for the season which mix athletic details with everyday profiles. Breeze Reyna features a Cushion Soft footbed for targeted, all-day comfort, along with ultra-lightweight materials from sole to upper for cloud-like support, and tailored uppers for a clean aesthetic. MSRP \$55.



**SKECHERS/GO WALK FLEX SD**  
This addition to the Skechers Hands Free Slip-ins collection offers an effortless way for men to wear a sport sandal. GO WALK Flex SD - Easy Entry is designed with the brand’s Heel Pillow so the wearer can step in without bending over, plus it holds the foot securely in place. A Goga Mat footbed offers lightweight, responsive, cushioned support. MSRP \$75.



**TREAD LABS / Redway**  
Featuring advanced arch support for all-day comfort. Durable polyurethane midsoles cushion life’s ups and downs while slip-resistant rubber outsoles provide sure footing. 100% recycled polyester knit uppers and silky-smooth microfiber footbeds create a machine washable masterpiece. MSRP \$130



**KYBUN/TESSIN**  
Tessin has a comfortable kybun Swiss air-cushion sole that relaxes strain on joints and the back. It also features an adjustable instep and front Velcro straps. A velour leather footbed provides comfort. MSRP \$389.



**TAOS/WONDERFUL**  
Everything is wonderful when you combine a supportive cork midsole with an Italian leather upper and intricate woven detailing. Two adjustable hook and loop straps offer a secure fit while the detailed contrast stitching and seam design accent the upper. This elevated everyday option is available in caramel, black and bruschetta. MSRP \$150.



**REVERE/MERMAID**  
Mermaid is a refined two-strap slide that transitions seamlessly from spring to summer, offering everyday elegance and all-day comfort. Crafted in soft premium leather, it features adjustable buckle straps for a personalized fit, a contoured footbed with arch support, and a lightweight, shock-absorbing sole that reduces fatigue. MSRP \$149.



**DINGO 1969/MOO MOO**  
Inspired by the classic style of the American West, Dingo 1969 brings its boot heritage to a new sandal offering. Moo Moo is crafted with luxurious hair-on-hide and is accented with on-trend metallic details. A cushion comfort insole ups its wearability quotient. MSRP \$79.95.



**FINN COMFORT/GRENADA**  
The FinnMellow collection features an extra layer of super soft cushioning in the contoured cork footbed with a dual density outsole. Adjustable hook and loop straps wrap the foot for support and security. MSRP \$255.

# A FUSION OF INNOVATION AND STYLE IN THE LATEST & GREATEST OUTDOOR FOOTWEAR OFFERINGS.

Athletic, sneaker-like style and tech continue to have a strong influence on outdoor footwear styles for the current and upcoming seasons. Trail runners are replacing mid-height boots for many consumers looking for light hiking shoes. Performance options across the board are flashing enough style to crossover as “trail to town” performers. And lifestyle boots with an outdoor vibe are filled with comfort innovation. From lifestyle shoes and boots to light hikers and high-performing trail options, here we shine a light on some of the standouts catching our eye!

## MERRELL / SPEEDARC MATIS

An innovative SpeedARC midsole system delivers cushioning and energy return to this hiking sneaker. It fuses dual FloatPro foam layers with nylon FlexPlate engineering for comfort and energy return. Also has a Vibram Megagrip outsole for all-terrain control and grip from rugged trails to city streets. *MSRP \$180.*





#### ARCOPELICO / MALIBU

This Fall '25 outdoor lifestyle boot is ready to take cold weather by storm. The durable outsole provides all day support, while the water-resistant upper keeps feet dry and warm. The Lytech upper is vegan and hand washable, while an inside zipper provides ease for slipping on and off. *MSRP \$165.*



#### DANNER / EASTWOOD CHELSEA

This recraftable boot is eligible to be resoled and reconditioned by Danner. It is lightweight and features women's Precision Fit technology for lasting comfort on all-day outings. A Danner Resurge midsole offers comfort, and a GORE-TEX waterproof lining delivers protection on rainy days.



#### ARC'TERYX / KOPEC GTX

A hiking shoe for fast and light travel on shifting terrain, the Kopec GTX's PFAS-free GORE-TEX protection seals out water and snow. The CORDURA mesh upper is durable and light, and the wide toe box offers toes room to play. The Vibram Megagrip outsole delivers a secure grip. *MSRP \$180.*



#### CHACO / CANYON WOVEN CLOG

Delivering comfort and style, this clog has the footbed support of Chaco's Z/Sandal with a softer, more flexible compound. The handwoven jacquard webbing is breathable and durable, while the grippy traction, suede mudguards and 3mm outsole lugs make the clog adventure-ready. *MSRP \$130.*



#### ALIGN / ENZO HIGHTOP SNEAKER

A fusion of old-school high top and hiking sneaker, the Enzo has a padded ankle and heel collar, plus the brand's Wavz massaging insole for comfort. Align is a new brand from H.H. Brown designed for everyday adventures and active lifestyles. *MSRP \$179.95.*



#### ECCO / BIOM C-TRAIL NOVA SNEAKER

The Biom C-Trail Nova Sneaker in Amber is a crossover style with a retro sneaker design, a rubber outsole and a rugged tread pattern for traction and stability. It also features a lightweight ECCO PHORENE midsole that helps to absorb shock and delivers cushion with every step. *MSRP \$195.*



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### ZAMBERLAN / METROPOLIS

Designed for versatile performance without sacrificing style, Metropolis blends the rugged durability of hiking footwear with the sleek look of urban sneakers. Its technical components perform well in a variety of terrain. *MSRP \$180.*



### RIEKER SPORT / ANTHONY 73

This mid-height (9 cm) hiker has a synthetic upper with a drysport membrane lining ("TEX") making it water resistant. Also features a removable soft insole and has a lightweight EVA and rubber outsole. *MSRP \$155.*



### HOKA / SPEEDGOAT 2

HOKA tapped the archives to bring back the Speedgoat 2, the trail runner that became synonymous with the HOKA brand. This new version has the original Speedgoat 2 silhouette, plus an engineered mesh upper and Vibram Megagrip outsole. *MSRP \$160.*



### OBOZ / HYALITE

This everyday hiker features debossed suede leather upper panels, a nubuck leather rand for protection, and mesh panels for breathability. The midsole provides responsive cushioning. The eco-friendly outsole does not sacrifice on traction or durability. *MSRP \$155.*



### SALEWA / WILDFIRE NXT

Designed to go from door to summit, this approach shoe has an outstanding lightweight-durability ratio. It features a seamless Kevlar-reinforced Matryx fabric upper for hiking comfort and durability with climbing performance plus an oversized heel for softer cushioning and smoother landings. *MSRP \$169.95.*

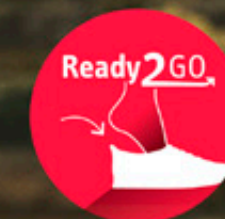


### CRAFT / PURE TRAIL PRO

This performance trail shoe has an upper made from durable ripstop polyester, a Cr Foam Pro midsole with 15% PEBA for responsive cushioning and a Vittoria high-traction outsole inspired by the Syerra tire. And the Pure Trail Pro's Ortholite high-rebound insole is made from 30% recycled materials. *MSRP \$189.99.*



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### **Branwyn Compressive Collection**

The seamless Merino activewear from Branwyn Performance Innerwear's new Compressive Collection is engineered for movement and built for performance. Items include Compressive Leggings, Shorts and Racerback Sports Bra.

### **SPIbelt Endurance PRO**

This running belt is race ready. It holds a Race Number Bib, Energy Gels, and essentials for race day - whether that be a 5K, Half Marathon, or Triathlon. Built for comfort and durability, the SPIbelt Endurance PRO has a weather-resistant zipper and pocket. The spacious pocket will hold any phone on the market and has four gel loops on the elastic band to hold energy gels and attached race toggles for a race bib. *MSRP \$34.99.*

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# Support & Style in every season

## **BOCO Gear / Ventilated Endurance Hat**

A foldable front bill, and lightweight, performance materials make this the brand's most stowable hat. With highly breathable side panels and a more solid top for protection, this hat is ideal for longer runs on the trail or road. *MSRP \$32.*

## **Recover / Recover + Go Sport Elite Collection**

Made from 100% post-consumer plastic and featuring micro waffle knit technology, Recover + Go garments dry fast, wick moisture, and drape perfectly with the right amount of stretch to keep its shape while providing a full range of motion. Offering versatile style and performance for any activity. Recyclable at end of life through Recover's 360 Closed Loop program. *MSRP \$25-\$55. ■*

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TEAM SPORTS

## PASSING GAME

# FOOTBALL REMAINS NO.1 FOR TEAM DEALERS AS PARTICIPATION GAINS YARDAGE AHEAD OF THE 2025 SEASON.

BY JUDY LEAND

In the 2023-24 season, more than eight million boys – and girls – competed in high school sports — an all-time record for total participation, according to the 2023-24 NFHS High School Athletics Participation Survey. One of the biggest storylines was the increase in all forms of boys’ and girls’ high school football. The total participation for 2023-24 was 1.12 million — a jump of almost 30,000 from 2022-23.

TEAM SPORTS

A particular bright spot continues to be the growth of flag football, particularly on the female side. “We see the tremendous growth of girls’ flag football for the next five years, as high schools and middle schools implement varsity programs across the country. With the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics featuring women’s flag football for first time, the wave is poised to build,” notes **Tom Cove**, recently retired president and CEO of **SFIA**.

While flag football will make its debut in the 2028 Los Angeles Summer Games, touch football is not currently on the Olympic docket. However, a proposal to include touch football at the 2032 Brisbane Olympics is in play but has not been officially approved. And in really big news, in April the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee designated USA Football as the official national governing body for American football, becoming the sport’s first NGB (see story on page 22).

USA Football states that its and its partners’ efforts to grow the sport “have resulted in the expansion of high school girls’ flag football, which is now

recognized as a varsity sport in 14 states. The NCAA is also exploring flag football as part of its ‘Emerging Sports for Women’ program, a clear indicator of the sport’s growing presence in collegiate athletics and beyond.”

The Team Dealer Playbook

With football participation numbers ticking steadily upward, many dealers are optimistic.

“We had a good season and we saw a ton of increase in flag football, especially women’s,” says **Julia Sherman**, president of **Bashor’s Team Athletics** in Portland, OR. “Parents are more apt to let kids play flag because it’s safer and overall participation is getting better.” She adds that one local flag youth league boasts more than 800 kids — a 20 to 30 percent increase from last year.

**Mike Bruno**, GM of Mansfield, MA-based **Grogan-Marciano Sporting Goods**, is also enthusiastic. “Last season was solid both at the high school and youth levels. We had an uptick in shoulder pads at the youth

level and we had a good uniform year with more sublimated being ordered. Basic protective was also in good shape,” he reports. “This fall looks good — we’re ahead of pace from last year with helmets and fall gear will start arriving in May. Early returns look solid for high school and youth, so it will be a good fall.”

Regarding local participation, Bruno believes the numbers are actually a little lower than usual. “More kids are going into flag, especially at the younger level, and schools don’t seem to have quite as many kids in the programs as they used to. We’re selling fewer units but the dollar amounts are higher — nobody is looking for entry-level stuff anymore,” he explains.

“Flag is pretty solid, but there’s not much in the way of equipment,” he points out, adding that the growth will still be there, especially with younger kids.

On the women’s side, Bruno notes, “There’s a women’s tackle football team in the area [part of a national semi-pro league] and many of the players come here to get outfitted for gear.”

“Football is always strong, and this year looks stronger than last,” agrees **Scott Treiber**, owner of Medford, NJ-based **Sports Paradise**. “Girls’ flag is absolutely huge and will only get stronger as a varsity sport in our state.” While he acknowledges that women’s flag football will keep getting bigger, “they don’t purchase much beyond uniforms, other than some spirit wear in online stores.”

At **Capitol Varsity Sports** in Oxford, OH, owner **Bob Fawley** hasn’t noticed any huge growth in traditional football among local women.

“Women’s flag is big, but not in this area,” he says. “However, concerns over concussions have been tempered. Manufacturers will lighten up youth helmets, which is a very good thing, safety-wise. All of this will help keep football vibrant.”

Fawley affirms that supply issues improved last season and vendors restocked. “We had a decent year. This year is a little bit slower, but (as of mid-April) our five-year average is ahead of any of the previous three years.”

He also points out that overall, “football participation has been good — we still have a lot of youth groups, and traditional tackle youth groups are going strong.”



“THERE’S A WOMEN’S TACKLE FOOTBALL TEAM IN THE AREA AND MANY OF THE PLAYERS COME HERE TO GET OUTFITTED FOR GEAR.”

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TEAM SPORTS

Nevertheless, Fawley is keeping close tabs on the economy. “The economy will drive the business. I sense that schools are more hesitant to cut loose with purchasing. We haven’t circled the wagons, but we’ve drawn them in a little closer.”

**Chad Vickers**, manager of **Team Sports & Performance Apparel** in Dallas, TX, reports that last season was good. “We’re still building up since COVID, but the business normalized since last year.

Although tariffs are looming, we’re optimistic for next season.”

A particular bright spot is that “one of our leagues had larger-than-normal 7-on-7 football and our spring sales are up for 7-on-7.” As for girls’ football, “We’re in North Dallas and the ‘little girl bubble’ for flag hasn’t hit here yet.”

Supply Problems Wane, Tariffs Loom

While most dealers agree that supply chain issues are no longer the primary migraine-inducing problem of past seasons, there is great angst about the possibility of tariffs and their potential negative impact on business.

“Tariffs are going to be ugly,” says Sherman, of Bashor’s Team Athletics. “They will be a bigger issue going forward and schools are conscious of what pricing will be like in the next couple of months. People are terrified of helmet prices rising and schools were trying to buy before tariffs kick in.” She expects that product coming out of China will have dramatic increases, particularly for molded plastic hardgoods.

Capitol Varsity Sports’ Fawley concurs. “People are tentative with tariffs and schools are running out of COVID money,” he says.

Tariffs will have an impact across the board, particularly helmet liners and parts from China, he points out, since lots of gear comes from China. “The question is how quickly [tariffs] will happen and how long can we withstand it?”

He also observes that reshoring factories to the U.S. won’t be quick or easy. “For example, skilled sewers are hard to come by, especially since no one is teaching

young workers the needed skills.”

“Tariffs and price increases cause uncertainty and we’ve already gotten notices from manufacturers warning of possible price increases,” says Treiber, of Sports Paradise. “The supply chain is better overall, but there are still some companies that are having issues.”

“There is always concern with the supply chain and we keep getting emails [regarding pricing and availability] from our vendors,” comments Bruno, of Grogan-Marciano. “When we get into fill-in season it’ll be chaos pricing-wise.”

When asked which product categories will be most affected by tariffs, he believes it depends on where manufacturers are getting product made. “Uniforms and apparel will probably be hurt the most,” he says, pointing out that “our hardgoods are already ordered and should be on their way to delivery, so we’ll be okay on that. The situation is very volatile and people recognize that, but we have to take things day by day.”

As Vickers of Team Sports & Performance Apparel puts it: “Tariffs! There are lots of unknowns out there which always cause anxiety and we still have inventory issues with certain vendors. It’s hard to guess the impact of tariffs on pricing and availability, but they’ll affect anything coming from China for sure.

“Guessing just makes it worse, so we’ll just wait and put a game plan together,” he adds. “Let’s just hope for a great season with strong sales.”

Reconditioning Challenges Remain

Although many dealers avoid the reconditioning business like the plague, citing complications, inconvenience and expense, others have figured out how to profit from it.

Capitol Varsity Sports’ reconditioning business is solid, claims Fawley. “Schools know what they need to do.” But, he adds, “We have to buy our parts and we’re paying through the nose for insurance. It’s hard for small guys to stay in the business.”

“The majority of our reconditioning is done through Schutt,” says Bruno. “So far, it’s gone better this year than in the past few years, but it’s a lot of work for not a lot of money. We don’t particularly like being involved with reconditioning.” ■

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TEAM SPORTS



# TEAM SOCKS CONTINUE TO PLAY AN OVERLOOKED ROLE IN AN ATHLETE'S UNIFORM AND PERFORMANCE. BY MIKE MAY

**STAYING  
IN STEP**

**T**he athletic sock is the one part of an athlete's uniform that too often gets overlooked, is underappreciated and is often considered simply as just a commodity. Well, in 2025 that is far from the truth — the athletic sock has evolved with the times and it's now an absolute necessity that plays a vital role in athletic performance.

Clearly, the sock is not just a sock anymore — in terms of performance, styles, colors and, dare we say, personal expression. Gone are the days of plain white. Today's colors include such trend-right options as aqua, maroon, fuchsia, sky blue and teal.

Food for thought: In order to play the vast majority of the top 10 most popular high school sports for either gender, each participant needs a pair of socks. That adds up to demand for A LOT of team socks and that's great news for team dealers who sell them.

TEAM SPORTS

Talking the Sock Market

The team sock may have a reputation as a commodity, but in reality it’s an important component of team dealer sales, especially for sports such as football, basketball, baseball, softball, soccer and volleyball.

At **Al’s Sporting Goods** in Wilmington, DE, which has been in business for 90 years (*see story on page 30*), owner **Bob Hart** has a diverse inventory of athletic socks and that business can best be described as vibrant.

Hart points out that the business of selling socks has significantly evolved. At Al’s, the basic team athletic socks come from Pearsox and Pro Feet and the team dealer/retailer stocks 10 colors of socks for local baseball, softball, and soccer teams. At retail, socks from Wigwam, Thor-Lo, Nike and Pro Feet are on the shelves.

“The Wigwam socks tend to appeal to older customers,” says Hart, while the Thor-Lo socks have special padding for extra comfort and socks from Nike and Pro Feet are sold in six packs.

In south Florida, **Joel Dunn**, a salesman for Jacksonville-based **Baker Sporting Goods**, has noticed a transition in athletic sock sales in recent years.

“Not too many years ago, there was a big interest in customized athletic socks for baseball and softball,” he says, and many schools were ordering stirrup socks with stripes. “But, those custom socks cost more money, take more time to make and there’s always a minimum number of socks for each order, which is usually more socks than a team needs.”

Now, he adds, “many baseball and softball teams don’t want to the most expensive athletic socks nor do they want the least expensive athletic socks. Instead, they just want a standard, affordable, durable, comfortable athletic sock.”

According to Dunn, the one sport where teams do tend to spend extra money on socks is for soccer. Here, each team must have a pair for home games – usually one of the darker school colors for home games – and for away games, each player must wear a lighter colored pair, usually white.

“In soccer, the socks are worn high so they can hold the shin guards in place,” Dunn explains. “And since the soccer is played with the feet, there’s more attention on the lower legs of the athletes than in any other sport.”

Meanwhile, at **D.H. Sports** in Bastrop, LA, the main sock brand is from Twin City Knitting, where at least 13 colors of socks are always in stock for baseball, softball, football and cheerleading.

At **Kratz Sporting Goods** in Clarksville, IN, baseball and softball teams are buying socks from Twin City Knitting, soccer and basketball teams prefer Adidas and individual purchases of socks inside the

retail store come from Wigwam. According to sales associate **Paula Kratz**, some teams often buy socks in spirit packs from the dealer.

At **Coaches Corner** in Terre Haute, IN, Twin City Knitting, Pro Feet, Champro, Nike, and Adidas are the main brands and, according to manager **Doc Claussen**, socks are sold in many different ways.

“We sell custom socks to teams in football, soccer, baseball and softball,” he says. “Without a doubt, most of our sock sales are for baseball. In addition to high school and travel teams, we sell lots of socks to youth baseball leagues and to junior high teams.”

The Age Difference

An interesting trend in sock sales relates to the age of the head coach.

“Older coaches, specifically those who are in the mid-40s, tend to buy socks for their teams through our store,” said Claussen. “Younger coaches will buy socks from the Internet or tell their players to go online to purchase their socks.”

The online purchasing does present a revenue issue for Coaches Corner. “Due to the Internet, customers can order socks just as quickly as we can get them,” laments Claussen.

In basketball, black and white are still the most popular sock colors and Claussen says that players in Indiana tend to buy more black than white. The sock brands of choice are Nike and Adidas. Small fashion factoid: “Basketball players are wearing crew socks,” adds Claussen.

Looking back, Claussen feels that the arrival of Michael Jordan into the NBA in the mid-to-late 1980s seemed to coincide with the emergence of the popularity of black socks for basketball players.

In Cedar Falls, IA, **Iowa Sports Supply** has a strong sock business selling to high school baseball, softball, soccer and basketball teams. Their key brands are Champro and Twin City Knitting.

According to sales associate **Everett Eggleston**, high school soccer teams are buying two different colored pairs of socks – white and also a darker, school color – and basketball teams are, for the most part, buying white socks.

Out in Las Vegas, NV, a variety of athletic socks are sold nearly every day by **Turf Sporting Goods**. “We have every color of athletic socks under the sun,” says sales associate **Mark Tervelt**, pointing to Champro and Twin City Knitting as their key brands.

For the most part, Turf Sporting Goods attracts a huge percentage of athletic sock sales in the greater Las Vegas area. “We sell socks to every school, travel team, and youth league here in Las Vegas,” said Tervelt, whose biggest sock clients are baseball and softball teams. ■

WHAT ATHLETES WANT

*sportstyle* conducted an informal poll of a group of young athletes around the U.S. and found that Nike is the preferred brand of choice in athletic socks, though not the only brand of choice.

Eloise Tackett (photo at right), 16, a sophomore at Second Baptist High School in Memorial, TX, has at least 20 pairs of athletic socks in her sock drawer. Tackett is a three-sport athlete who plays volleyball in the fall, basketball in the winter and soccer in the spring.

Tackett’s favorite athletic sock colors are white and green. Her favorite brand is the Nike Elite and she wears two pairs while playing hoops.

“I like the comfort level of the Nike Elite socks,” says Tackett, who plays travel basketball for a team called Just Play. “They provide a bunch of cushioning, which I need when playing basketball.”

When she works out with long-distance runs, Tackett wears socks from Thor-Lo.

While Nike is her favorite brand, she is open to change as she just recently bought a pair of WNBA athletic socks to try and test.

Mackenzie Teuton (photo on previous page), 15, a sophomore at William B. Travis High School in Richmond, TX, is a point guard on her high school basketball team and her travel basketball team. Typically,

Teuton has quite a few pairs of athletic socks at home.

“I have 20 to 25 pairs of athletic socks,” Teuton says. “I have many colors of socks such as white, black, red, pink, navy blue and turquoise from Nike and Under Armour.”

Teuton has specific needs in her athletic socks. “I’m looking for a sock that feels good, is comfortable, is durable and is not too thick,” she says, adding that she wears her socks so much that the lifespan can be as few as three or four months.

Mateo Aristizabal, 17, a junior at Berean Christian School in West Palm Beach, FL, has more than 20 pairs of athletic socks at home in his bedroom. Aristizabal is the quarterback of the football team and a goal-scoring center forward on the soccer team.

His school’s soccer team wears a team sock – either white or navy blue – from Adidas. In football, he wears socks from Nike that have a specific grip on the bottom. On an everyday basis, he prefers to wear socks that are size-specific.

“At school, I like to wear a white sock from Nike that covers the ankle, but doesn’t cover the shins,” Aristizabal says.

At Westminster Christian School in Miami, FL, senior Kelsie Kenney plays



both varsity basketball and softball. She, too, considers her socks as a big part of her game, pointing out that her sock drawer is filled with at least 14 pairs.

“That gives me one pair of socks for each day of the week for each sport,” she explains. Her basketball socks tend to last longer because they are not exposed to dirt and sliding like the softball socks are.

Kenney’s color and brand preferences tend to vary, based on the sport she is playing.

“I prefer wearing white socks for basketball and for softball I wear whatever socks that match with the uniform,” she says. “I use Nike socks for basketball and Under Armour socks for softball. My two biggest needs from my socks are comfort and durability.” ■

# NSGA FINDS GOOD NEWS FOR YOUTH SPORTS

There are encouraging signs that team sports in America continue to thrive. **By Michael Jacobsen**

**E**ncouraging growth in youth team sports participation is one of the highlights of the 2025 edition of the National Sporting Goods Association's (NSGA) Sports Participation in the U.S. report. The participation study saw increases in nearly all youth team sports (ages 7-17) tracked by NSGA in 2024 compared to their three-year averages. The leader is flag football with an increase of 21 percent, followed by basketball and tackle football at 12 percent.

"It is exciting to see more and more kids taking advantage of the mental and physical benefits of participating in a team sport," says Nick Rigitano, NSGA director of insights and analysis. "These increases in youth team sports are also encouraging for retailers, team dealers and manufacturers because this segment is the foundation for lifelong sports participation."

Some other key takeaways from NSGA's 2025 participation report:

- Most sports/activities tracked (35 of 56) experienced increases in participation for 2024 compared to the previous year.
- Pickleball's boom continued as it increased



56 percent to 15.4 million participants. It is the third consecutive year the sport has seen an increase of more than 50 percent year-over-year.

- Most sports segments tracked experienced increases in participation points compared to the previous year (2023). Participation points are used to characterize segment increases/decreases because they include both the reach (the number of people participating

in the segment) and depth (the number of sports/activities those people are playing) of participation.

- The individual sports segment saw the biggest increase (+7.4 percent) in participation points, led by pickleball, bowling, golf and swimming.
- Indoor sports were up 6.9 percent, with table tennis, dart throwing and billiards/pool all experiencing increases of five percent or more year-over-year.
- Personal Contact sports were up 6.5 percent, led by boxing.

The 2025 editions of the Sports Participation in the U.S. report are available on the research page of NSGA's website — [www.nsga.org](http://www.nsga.org). The report tracks 56 sports and recreational activities and features easy-to-understand, quick-view snapshots for each, which allows users to easily see a 10-year participation trend (when available), as well as demographic details regarding age, income and U.S. region. NSGA's participation research also includes Cross Participation, Lifecycle Demographics and Single-Sport reports. ■

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**SPORT REPORT:**

# PICKLEBALL



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