

A FORMULA4 MEDIA PUBLICATION • JULY/AUGUST 2025

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IN THE TRENDS



**SUN SAFETY
INNOVATIONS**

**EVERYDAY
COMFORT
BOOTS UP**

**SNEAKERS
MAKE A
STATEMENT**

**SOCKS &
INSOLES:
TECH TIME**

**DIAMOND
DANDIES ON
THE FIELD**

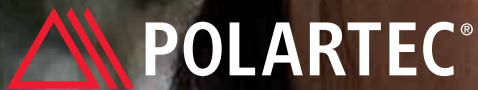
**TEAM DEALERS,
FAMILY LEGACIES**

**SPORT REPORT
PICKLEBALL
IN THE SPOTLIGHT**

**CONSUMER
SURVEY OF
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JULY
AUGUST
2025



Above: Arcopedico Diamond, launching in Spring '26, honors Arcopedico's Diamond Jubilee (60th anniversary).
On the Cover: Skechers pickleball pro Catherine Parenteau in the Skechers Viper Court Pro footwear.

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RETAIL

CLASH OF THE TITANS

By Bob McGee

The trajectory of the global retail sporting goods business, dominated by sales of athletic footwear and apparel, is moving to a higher playing field dominated by two behemoths that have the potential to take it to still greater heights worldwide.

Once Dick's Sporting Goods' \$2.4 billion merger with Foot Locker is completed before the end of 2025, barring any regulatory delays, this retail segment will be dominated by two players – U.S.-based Dick's/Foot Locker and U.K.-based JD Group, whose entry into the U.S. market began with its June 2018 acquisition of The Finish Line and has followed with subsequent purchases of DTLR, Shoe Palace and lastly Hibbett

Sports in July 2024.

Combined, the two titans of retail sporting goods will have annual global revenues of nearly \$37.2 billion, control more than 8,340 doors worldwide, and operate 16 separate banners in North America, not to mention multiple direct/online businesses. The latest deal most certainly will drive international expansion for Dick's and Foot Locker, possibly putting pressure on JD's current European dominance.

But who will have the competitive edge at the first tip-off, or when the soccer ball is dropped to begin the match? Dick's or JD? It really depends on who you ask. Certainly, home-field advantage should not be understated for either rival. But the first scorers in this high-stakes matchup may very well be large vendors such as Nike, Adidas, Puma, and Under Armour, who most certainly will have more

say on how their respective brands are purchased, merchandised, and sold. There has been some market concern that the emerging Dick's-Foot Locker group could spark higher competition in the lifestyle area, potentially hurting JD's access to top brands and shelf space for these products.

Some market analysts contend the ultimate success of a Dick's-Foot Locker marriage will hinge on a product and growth turnaround at Nike. The Swoosh has underperformed for some time but appears to have a stronger game plan in place under CEO Elliott Hill that should land some key scoring plays and revenue growth in 2026 via new product innovations and a retail refocus that has a reduced reliance on direct-to-consumer sales.

For sure, the merger will enable Dick's to segment the overall footwear/apparel market more effectively by catering to

THE PENDING DICK'S/FOOT LOCKER MERGER AMPS UP A RIVALRY WITH JD SPORTS.



RETAIL

POWER PLAYERS

JD Sports

Leadership: CEO Régis Schultz

Founded in 1981, Based in Manchester, England.

Presence in 49 countries with 4,850 stores. 1,652 doors in North America, including 73 JD banners, and 569 locations in the European Union.

North American banners: JD Sports (305), Finish Line (257), Hibbett Sports (1,000), City G.E.A.R. (200), Shoe Palace (200), and DTLR (250)

Annual Sales: £11.5 billion (\$15.6 billion) for 12 months ended Feb. 1, 2025. Footwear revenues stepped up 15.2% last year to £6,819 million (\$9.27 billion), and apparel sales increased by 4.2% to £3,550 million (\$4.82 billion).

Dick’s Sporting Goods

Leadership: Edward W. Stack, Executive Chairman; Lauren R. Hobart, President & CEO

Founded in 1948, Based in Coraopolis, PA

Presence in U.S., Europe, and Asia after the merger with Foot Locker with 3,490 stores. 856 Dick’s and 2,410 Foot Locker doors across 20 countries and 224 licensed Foot Locker stores in the EU, Middle East, and Asia.

North American banners: Dick’s, Foot Locker, Champs Sports, Kids Foot Locker, WSS, Atmos, Dick’s House of Sport, Golf Galaxy, Gamechanger, and Going, Going, Gone.

Annual Sales: \$13.6 billion (2024), up 1% y-o-y. Footwear revenues rose 13% to \$3,829 million, and annual apparel sales increased by 2.2% to \$4,425.4 million. Foot Locker’s FY24 total revenues fell by 2.2% y-o-y to \$7,971 million.

Operating income: Dick’s: \$1,154.3 million, up 2% y-o-y; Foot Locker’s FY24 operating income declined by 27.5% to \$103 million.

different categories, price tiers, and usage occasions. But there are notable concerns and risks. Most notably, “execution risk,” as pointed out by more than one analyst. The complexity of integrating two large retail businesses with different operational models is a major concern that will undoubtedly take time to complete.

“There can be problems bringing together disparate systems, cultures, and operations in retail mergers,” UBS analysts recently pointed out, adding, “Retail integrations tend to be challenging with a far longer list of retail mergers that were not successful than those that were.”

Peel Hunt analysts have suggested the Dick’s-Foot Locker merger could benefit JD given the execution risk, further suggesting that while Dick’s is overseeing a consolidation of operations, its rival could capitalize on the situation and gain market share in both the U.S. and U.K.

Out of the gate, Dick’s senior management will be charged with helping Foot Locker reverse its recent struggles that have prompted softer sales and low operating margins. The retailer’s proponents see it as a “highly capable and efficient operator” that can effectively utilize its customer data and omnichannel capabilities to improve Foot Locker’s operational efficiencies and sell-through rates.

In Foot Locker, Dick’s will obtain access to new customer demographics, largely urban and international markets, that present customer bases it currently does not reach.

JD CEO Régis Schultz initially called Dick’s acquisition of Foot Locker “a positive” for the market and expressed confidence in

the British company’s growth strategy through differentiation and customer engagement.

Over the last two years, key developments at JD have included adding 405 profitable stores, acquiring both Hibbett and France-based retailer Courir, divesting 30 non-core businesses, developing a franchise model, and enhancing its omnichannel capabilities and profitability.

Running and retro basketball dominate JD’s footwear business, which has grown at a compound annual growth rate of 9 percent over its last five fiscal years. Sales of athletic shoes, which represent more than 40 percent of its footwear business, grew 17 percent in 2024 and fueled a 5 percent gain in sports apparel sales. Meanwhile, JD’s apparel segment, where core sport and outdoor garb are the majority, has grown sales at a 12 percent compound annual growth rate since FY20.

Nonetheless, recent analyst ratings on publicly traded JD Sports ranged from “Buy” and “Hold” to “Sell” with some seeing the stock as undervalued and poised for growth, and others expressing concern about potential headwinds and impacts from supply chain constraints. The company’s long-term prospects are solid, according to Shore Capital analyst David Hughes due to its strong balance sheet and cash generation.

As for Dick’s-Foot Locker, most market analysts appear to see the marriage as a long-term play rather than one that will yield immediate returns. The deal’s ultimate success will rely heavily on Dick’s ability to effectively integrate Foot Locker and stimulate its business.

Let the Battle of the Titans begin. ■

RETAIL

BIG 5 SPORTING GOODS GOING PRIVATE

Big 5 CEO Steven Miller hailed the pending deal as an “exciting new chapter” for the company that will allow it to continue its legacy of providing customers with a cache of quality, value-focused sporting goods.



After 23 years as a publicly traded retailer, 70-year-old Big 5 Sporting Goods is going private again later this year. Worldwide Golf and private equity firm Capitol Hill Group have offered \$1.45 for each BGFV share. The value of the transaction, slated to close before year-end, is approximately \$112.7 million and includes the assumption of \$71.4 million in debt.

Big 5 CEO Steven Miller hailed the pending deal as an “exciting new chapter” for the company that will allow it to continue its legacy of providing customers with a cache

of quality, value-focused sporting goods.

Based in El Segundo, CA near Los Angeles, more than half of Big 5’s 414 doors are in the Golden State. Over the last five years, the chain has seen its soft goods grow as a percentage of overall revenues to 46.2 percent from 39.8 percent in 2020. During the same period, the retailer’s hard goods sales have shrunk to 53.8 percent of total from 60.2 percent.

During its most recent quarterly results, Big 5 reported a 7.8 percent drop in same-store sales with all categories experiencing year-over-year declines. Footwear sales tumbled

by 11.8 percent with apparel (-8.7%) and hard goods (-4.7%) also down. At the same time, the retailer reported a 6.5 percent increase in inventories due to earlier merchandise deliveries and a likely Q2 same-store sales decline due to macroeconomic challenges.

The company’s two suitors are a Bethesda, MD-based private equity firm with diversified holdings, including retail, and a national specialty retailer of golf equipment and soft goods. Big 5 will remain an independent company within the Capitol Hill Group portfolio once the transaction is closed.

—Bob McGee

DESIGN

SMART SOLUTIONS FOR SUN & SAFETY

By Emily Walzer

Back in the day, textile execs would joke that to be 100 percent dry in wet weather runners should outfit themselves in a Hefty trash bag; a long-sleeve, dark denim shirt was optimal for runners seeking summer sun protection; and for safety purposes, a sure bet was a hi-viz workwear vest. There was truth in these quips, but thankfully material science has evolved, giving way to high-performance UPF 50 fabrics, cooling yarns and advanced reflective technology.

Technical textiles featuring protective elements found early adopters in fishing, hunting and camping. As these fabrications became lighter in weight, softer against the skin and incorporated stretch, high-tech functionality gained traction in activewear. The latest run apparel from Janji, Foehn, Miler

Runner and Rossignol's new trail line reflects this trend, with brands showcasing product designed to compete with whatever Mother Nature has in store for summer.

Sun Safety

According to Dr. Jan Beringer, a senior scientific expert at Hohenstein, a textile innovation and testing hub, the best material to provide sun protection in the fabric is polyester. "There is no additional finish required; polyester provides very good UV absorbance," states Beringer, who has extensive knowledge in textile UV protection. "For extreme scenarios which we will have more and more based on changing climate and increased heat, polyester is the best choice," concludes Beringer. Why? The molecular structure of the polyester polymer has functional groups in terms of the chemistry that absorbs the UV light. "All protectiveness is built into the

polyester fabric," Beringer confirms. Fabric weight, density of fabric weave and the color of the yarn all factor into the performance of sun protective textiles. Beringer asserts, "Every fabric has a UPF but the only way to achieve a higher UPF is with a polyester."

Everyday Cool & Urban Heat

"What we have to offer in our technology is super relevant in the run and outdoor space," states David Ludd, VP sales & marketing at brrr, an Atlanta-based firm specializing in cooling performance for textiles. "Runners workout in a variety of different environments – trail, road, cross training – and brrr's cooling is a fit."

The brrr technology, referred to as the "Triple Chill Effect," uses natural cooling materials, active wicking and rapid drying to draw heat and moisture away from the skin. The cooling sensation is immediate and continuous, with

HIGH-TECH
FABRICS THAT
CHALLENGE MOTHER
NATURE AT
HER OWN GAME.

Miler Running Base Running Tank utilizes Coolmax technology to enhance breathability and moisture management for warm and humid conditions.



DESIGN



Royal Robbins Salathe Sun Hoody combines tested and certified UPF 40+ protection along with Mosquito Protection Technology based on weave and fabric construction.



Janji Sunchaser 50 Hooded Long Sleeve is equipped with UPF 50 protection inherent in a lightweight, breathable fabric that is cool to the touch and cling-free.

the ability to lower skin temperatures 1-3degrees. All brrr fabrics have this technology built in; it’s permanently in the yarn and won’t wash out.

“The world is getting warmer, and brands and governments are looking for solutions,” Ludd comments. “In running it’s all about performance; brrr’s cooling technology allows individuals to run longer and feel better.”

Peak summer training in urban

Foehn Cortes Delta Long Sleeve employs Polartec’s Delta fabric engineered for high-performance cooling in a knit construction designed to beat the heat.



locales is especially challenging. New York City-based Miler Running is on track with pared-back styles designed for the hottest moments of summer.

The new Base Running Tank combines Coolmax mesh fabric with a sleeveless silhouette creating a high-performance top for running that doubles as a modest tank for casual summer wear. “Coolmax is a time-tested and trusted yarn, to create incredibly breathable and

moisture-wicking garments,” states company founder Ben Morrow.

Temps Tailored for Trail

Rossignol’s new Sapa Collection, designed for trail running, takes advantage of HeiQ Smart Temp, a thermoregulating fabric technology with the ability to dynamically respond to body heat.

“Runners are typically in the mountains

where weather can change drastically from start to finish. Since the thermoregulation properties of Smart Temp react to a person’s body heat, it helps cool them down when it’s hot and conversely slows down heat loss when temperatures drop,” shares Chazz Ogden, category manager for softgoods, Group Rossignol North America. “This is a great application for any stop-and-go sport, but because trail

running is particularly high intensity, it makes perfect sense for that application, which is why we decided to use it in the Sapa collection.” Ogden adds that recycled polyester, the material of choice in the Sapa collection, maintains the same performance as virgin polyester. “And then we go a step further by adding HEIQ technologies to supercharge the fabric performance.” ■

Smartwool Active Tee blends Merino wool with Tencel Lyocell to offer natural odor regulation, moisture wicking, and sun protection.



Rossignol Sapa Tee features HeiQ Smart Temp thermoregulating ultra-light fabric, and mesh panels to boost breathability.



PICKLEBALL NEWS

PICKLEBALL
STILL ON THE
UPSWING,
BIG TIME

Pickleball remains hot, hot, hot. For the fourth consecutive year, pickleball is America’s fastest-growing sport, according to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) **2025 Topline Participation Report**. There are 19.8 million pickleball participants in the U.S.—up 45.8% from 2023 and up 311% over the past three years. The SFIA research reveals that both casual and core participation in pickleball are surging, with 13.6 million casual players (1-7 times per year), a 55.6% increase from 2023; and 6.2 million core players (8+ times per year), a 28.2% increase from 2023.



SPORTIQE TEAMS WITH MLP

Apparel brand Sportiqe has been named the official apparel partner of Major League Pickleball (MLP by DoorDash). Sportiqe will outfit athletes, staff, and fans of the co-ed, team-based professional pickleball league. Sportiqe will unveil a full range of officially licensed MLP apparel during the 2025 season, designed for both on-court action and off-court lifestyle.



TYROL LOOKS TO EXPAND U.S. FOOTWEAR DISTRIBUTION

Footwear brand Tyrol Pickleball has formed a new sales and distribution partnership with sales agency Kittridge & Associates to help fuel its U.S. expansion. Founded by performance footwear veteran Kevin Huckle in 2018, pickleball-specific Tyrol is built on four foundational pillars — comfort, stability, breathability, and injury prevention. The brand also recently began working with Vibram. “As the sport of pickleball explodes in both recreational and competitive circles, we’re seeing footwear become a true performance differentiator,” says Huckle. “Our partnership with Kittridge gives us extensive reach in the U.S. and ensures retailers can tap into this fast-growing, equipment-hungry customer base.”



FRANKLIN SPORTS UNVEILS VERSATILE C45° PADDLE SERIES

Franklin Sports has released what it describes as the most inventive series of paddles to hit the pickleball world: the Franklin C45°. The Franklin C45° Series is designed to offer versatility across shapes and thicknesses creating a custom feel that allows players to enjoy the game in their own unique way. There are five C45° paddles, each tailored to a distinct style of play. “Pickleball is evolving fast, and Franklin Sports is proud to lead that evolution with innovations that truly change the game,” said Adam Franklin, President of Franklin Sports. “Engineered specifically for players who demand precision, power, and control in every shot, we set out to raise the bar—and this paddle is the result.”



ONIX UNVEILS HYPE X AND HYPE X PRO PADDLES

ONIX Pickleball recently released two new paddles — the Hype X and Hype X Pro — featuring the brand’s patented Power Frame ThermoFused tech, aiming to enable players to achieve peak performance at a quality price. The technology was first released in the brand’s high-end paddles. “As we continue to welcome new audiences to the game, we are thrilled to offer our patented Power Frame ThermoFused Technology to a wider range of players,” said Jay Simmons, Senior Product Manager at ONIX. “This highly advanced technology has elevated our collection since it was first released in 2023 in our high-end paddles, and we are proud to enable a broader range of pickleball players to see the advantages of a unibody construction and how it will improve their game.” *The Hype X retails for \$89.99 and the Hype X Pro retails for \$119.99.*



SELKIRK GOES HEAD-TO-TOE

Earlier this year, Idaho-based pickleball specialists Selkirk Sports released a pickleball-specific court shoe line, completing the brand’s head-to-toe offering. The footwear launch came as a result of three years of testing with an advisory team of 3,500 professional players, coaches and key ambassadors. The shoe line includes the CourtStrike and CourtStrike Pro models, both designed to enhance performance, comfort and safety on the court. The brand’s footwear addresses the specific movements of pickleball, including lateral motion and quick directional changes. The shoes offer cushioning designed to offer shock absorption and fatigue reduction. Both models feature a wide toe box for comfort, high-abrasion rubber soles for durability and a six-month outsole warranty. *The CourtStrike Pickleball Shoe retails for \$100 while the CourtStrike Pro is \$120. Selkirk is also offering a slide (\$40) and a recovery shoe (\$60).*

A NEW ERA OF RETAIL

AMBASSADOR PROGRAM FUELS LOCAL PICKLEBALL GROWTH



Ian, a Pickleball in the Sun Ambassador in Milwaukee.

By Laura Gainor

The world of retail is constantly evolving, but the core principle remains the same: people want to buy from people they trust. In the booming sport of pickleball, this is truer than ever. Millions of new players are joining the courts each year, and the demand for equipment, apparel, and accessories is at an all-time high. Yet, amidst the rise of massive online retailers, local sports shops and specialty stores face the challenge of connecting with this rapidly expanding community.

That's why we created the Pickleball in the Sun Ambassador Program. We're not just building a network of brand representatives; we're building a hyper-local, community-driven ecosystem designed to empower the very heart of the pickleball world: the players and the local businesses that serve them. Our program is a strategic partnership, a way to make local retailers the central hub for their community's pickleball needs, driven by the authentic passion and influence of our Ambassadors.

The program's core philosophy is simple:

empower local players to become champions for their local shops. Our Ambassadors aren't just influencers; they are respected members of their pickleball community. They're the ones organizing weekend games, attending open play events at their local clubs, and offering advice on the best equipment. They know the players personally, understand their needs, and have earned their trust. This personal connection is a powerful asset that traditional marketing simply cannot replicate.

Connecting Brands, Retailers, and Communities

For years, a disconnect has existed. Brands spend millions on national advertising, hoping to reach players who might not even know where to buy their products locally. Meanwhile, retailers struggle to discover and stock the latest gear that their customers are asking for. Our Ambassadors act as the vital bridge, bringing firsthand knowledge from the courts directly to your sales floor.

Instead of a top-down marketing approach, we're flipping the script. Our Ambassadors will be actively visiting local retailers and pickleball social clubs in their communities to introduce them to innovative brands and

products. They will bring with them not just a product, but a story—their own story of why this gear is essential for their game. This is how real-world relationships are built, and it's how we drive genuine, long-term sales.

Let's look at some tangible examples of how this works:

The Case of OS1st Pickleball Socks: Meet Erin, a dedicated pickleball Ambassador in Charlotte, NC and a 3.5 player who regularly attends open play sessions and events at Rally Pickleball, a local club. She recently switched to OS1st pickleball socks, a brand known for its advanced technology that provides arch support and blister prevention. Erin will visit a local pickleball shop, bringing a pair of the socks with her. She'll talk to the store owner not with a corporate pitch, but with a personal testimonial, explaining how the socks have improved her game and alleviated foot pain. "I used to get blisters after every tournament," she'll say. "These socks are a total game-changer. All the players in our open play session are asking me where to get them." This conversation turns an anonymous product on a shelf into a must-have item, backed by the trust of a local hero. Erin will then tell her entire pickleball network, "You can get the OS1st socks at 'A Local Retailer' downtown," driving immediate and targeted foot traffic to that store.

The Paddle Demo Day: Imagine our New York City Ambassador, Kartik, who's known for his powerful drives and strategic plays. He's excited about a new paddle from a brand we've partnered with. Kartik organizes a "Demo Day" at a local court, inviting players from all skill levels to try out the new paddle. He'll set up a small table with information and QR codes that lead

directly to the inventory page of a partnering local retailer. Players get to feel the paddle, hear Kartik's personal feedback, and learn where they can go to purchase it right away. The local pro shop, in turn, sees an influx of informed customers ready to buy. This is more than a sales event; it's a community gathering that builds excitement and brand loyalty right at the source.

Apparel and Accessory Collaborations: Our Ambassadors understand the pickleball "lifestyle" extends beyond the court. They see players wanting to look good and feel comfortable both during and after their games. An Ambassador who is also a fashion-forward player can work with a local boutique to curate a small section of pickleball-themed athleisure wear from a partner brand. They could host a "Pickleball & Prosecco" event, showcasing the new collection and offering styling tips. This helps the boutique tap into a new customer base and positions it as a destination for the pickleball community's entire lifestyle, not just their equipment needs. This model is built on **authenticity and a shared passion for the sport**. It's not about selling a product; it's about providing solutions and enhancing the player experience. By giving Ambassadors the tools and support to visit local retailers, we are facilitating genuine connections that benefit everyone involved.

A Retailer's Perspective: The Power of Personal Influence

The power of this approach is perfectly captured by Maria Nili, Director of Pickleball at The Yards in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida.

"I'm out on the courts with our members every day, so they trust my opinion when it comes to the high-quality products we offer in our Pro



Shop at The Yards," she told us. "Because they trust me, I'm careful to only offer brands on our shelves that are quality brands we trust for the best player experience—I refuse to carry cheap products. We play with each other, we talk, and pretty soon you see everyone with similar paddles and gear because they've seen firsthand how well something works for a friend or a pro. That personal, on-the-court experience is the most powerful endorsement there is, and it's what drives our community directly to our shop."

A Promise for the Future

The pickleball market is projected to continue its explosive growth. Players are getting younger, and the sport is becoming more competitive and fashion-conscious. As these trends accelerate, the need for a strong, authentic link between brands, retailers, and the community will only grow.

Our Pickleball in the Sun Ambassador program is more than just a marketing initiative. It's a commitment to building a stronger, more connected, and more profitable pickleball community. We are excited to partner with brands and retailers who share our vision, and we look forward to seeing the incredible growth and success we can achieve together. By focusing on genuine, grassroots connections, we can ensure that local retailers remain at the heart of this thriving sport for years to come. ■

For more information, reach out to me directly at laura@pickleballinthesun.com.



STYLE INSIGHT



How Independent Retailers Can Tap into the Pickleball Boom with High-Performance Gear

With pickleball rapidly gaining popularity across the U.S., independent retailers have a unique opportunity to capitalize on this trend by offering products tailored to the sport's enthusiasts. Among these, the OS1st Pickleball Sock stands out, trusted by avid players for its thoughtful design and performance.

Pickleball players need gear that supports quick movements, ensures comfort during extended play, and helps prevent injuries. OS1st Pickleball Socks deliver with impact protection using bamboo charcoal cushioning in high-friction areas, temperature regulation using an ultra-thin top panel, and shearing force reduction using light arch compression. For retailers, stocking these socks offers a simple way to enhance the in-store experience, especially as demand for pickleball-specific footwear grows.

"Pickleball players know and love our socks," says Josh Higgins, President of OS1st. "After years of sponsoring national tours, we've seen how much fans appreciate that we understand their needs. Many who tried one pair now tell us their entire sock drawer is OS1st."

By offering trusted pickleball-specific gear, retailers can become key destinations for local players, engaging a dedicated customer base that values the personalized experience independent stores provide.

OS1st

For more information, visit www.os1st.com.

OS1st



The Pickleball Sock

Official Sock of Major League Pickleball



Licensed to customize for your local MLP team

360 blister prevention

Bamboo cushion in the toe & heel

Heat relief top panel

Light compression to stop slipping

Get more Info

www.os1st.com

A PERFECT FIT

Q&A with Ben Stewart, VP of Product Development and Merchandising, Skechers Performance.



Catherine Parenteau and Tyson McGuffin

Skechers is serious about pickleball. We spoke with Ben Stewart, VP of Product Development and Merchandising, Skechers Performance, to learn about the brand’s pickleball footwear and more.

Sportstyle: Tell us about the “Speed, Control, and Versatility” categories of pickleball footwear from Skechers—and what type of player each category targets?

Ben Stewart: At Skechers, we’ve designed our pickleball footwear to cater to the diverse needs of players by introducing three distinct categories: Speed, Control, and Versatility. Each category is tailored to specific playing styles and preferences, ensuring that every athlete finds the perfect fit for their game. With these categories, Skechers ensures that every pickleball player, from the competitive athlete to the casual enthusiast, has the right footwear to elevate their game and enjoy the sport to the fullest.

The Speed Category is crafted for quicker players who compete at higher levels and demand agility and performance on the court. Our pickleball pros, Tyson McGuffin and Catherine Parenteau, rely on the Skechers Viper Court Pro 2.0, a standout in this category, to support their elite-level play.

The Control Category is designed for athletes who prioritize stability and durability. They’re the ideal shoe for those who play pickleball consistently, whether recreationally or competitively. Styles like the Viper Court Reload and Viper Court Elite offer the comfort, support, and resilience needed for regular play.

The Versatility Category is perfect for more casual players as each style is all about blending functionality with style. Shoes like the Viper Court Luxe are great for leisurely matches with friends and seamlessly transition from the court to social outings.

What are elite pickleball players looking for in their pickleball shoes? What's most important to more casual/recreational players?

Elite pickleball players demand footwear that can keep up with the rigorous demands of their sport. They look for shoes that are lightweight, durable, and supportive, as tournaments often span an entire week, requiring them to be on their feet for extended periods, both during matches and in training sessions. Skechers pickleball shoes are designed with these needs in mind, featuring our dynamic Arch Fit removable insoles technology for exceptional support and Goodyear Rubber Outsoles for durability and traction. These technologies ensure that high-level athletes can perform at their best while staying comfortable throughout long days of competition.

For more casual or recreational players, comfort remains a top priority, but they also value reliability, longevity, and versatility. They want shoes that not only perform well on the court but also transition seamlessly to off-court activities. Skechers’ Versatility category pickleball shoes, such as the Viper Court Luxe, combine comfort with style, offering a reliable option that meets the needs of players who may not change their shoes as frequently but still expect durability and performance.

How have you seen the pickleball category and the pickleball consumer evolve over the past 3-5 years? Where do you see the category headed in the next 3-5 years?

Over the past 3-5 years, the pickleball category has experienced remarkable growth, both in participation and cultural significance. We’ve seen a surge in the number of people taking up the sport, driven by its accessibility and appeal as a

fun way to socialize and connect with friends and family. This growth has been supported by the increasing availability of courts across the United States and globally, making the sport more accessible than ever.

From a consumer perspective, we’ve noticed players becoming more adventurous with their style choices, gravitating toward bolder colorways and designs that allow them to express their individuality on the court. This shift reflects the sport’s evolution into not just a recreational activity but also a lifestyle statement.

We know Skechers has strong relationships with some elite players. Can you tell us about that and what role these athletes play in the R&D and product testing/feedback process?

At Skechers, our relationships with elite athletes like Catherine Parenteau and Tyson McGuffin are integral to our product development process. These partnerships go beyond sponsorship; they are true collaborations. Catherine and Tyson regularly visit our offices to provide direct feedback on our pickleball footwear, sharing insights from their experiences on the court.

Their input is invaluable in helping us refine our designs to meet the demands of high-level play. Whether it’s enhancing durability, improving traction, or fine-tuning comfort, their firsthand knowledge ensures that our shoes perform at the highest level. This collaborative approach allows us to create footwear that not only supports elite athletes but also benefits players of all skill levels by incorporating the same performance-driven innovations.

Is there another initiative, outside of footwear, that we should know about regarding Skechers’ involvement with pickleball?

In addition to our innovative footwear, we’re excited to highlight our Skechers Performance apparel as a key initiative in our involvement with pickleball. This apparel line brings the same focus on comfort and performance that defines our footwear to clothing designed specifically for the court.

Our athletes, **Tyson McGuffin and Catherine Parenteau**, compete in Skechers Performance apparel, which features advanced technologies like SKECHWEAVE—a lightweight, breathable, moisture-wicking, and wrinkle-resistant fabric that ensures all-day comfort and mobility. Each piece is thoughtfully designed to move with players, providing the perfect balance of style and functionality for both competitive and casual play.

This initiative reflects our broader commitment to supporting the pickleball community by offering products that enhance the overall playing experience, whether through footwear, apparel, or other performance-driven innovations. ■

SKECHERS PICKLEBALL FOOTWEAR IN THE SPOTLIGHT

SPEED

Skechers Viper Court Pro 2.0



The Viper Court Pro 2.0 features Skechers’ signature advanced comfort technologies found in the first iteration in an updated design constructed with the elite-level pickleball player in mind. Key technical features include an innovative mesh upper for breathability with a rubber toe guard for durability, a Skechers Relaxed Fit proprietary shoe design for a roomy fit, plus lightweight, responsive Ultra Flight cushioning for added comfort. The Skechers Arch Fit removable insole system also provides podiatrist-certified arch support and a mid-foot TPU shank for additional stability. Elite players will appreciate the inclusion of a Goodyear rubber outsole for added stability and durability. This uniquely designed compound allows high-impact athletes to perform more advanced, controlled slides into shots on the court surface.

Skechers Viper Court Pro



The Viper Court Pro is designed specifically for the elite pickleball athlete with key technical features that include a breathable mesh upper, a Skechers Relaxed Fit design for a roomy fit, plus ultra-lightweight, responsive Ultra Flight cushioning for all-day comfort. The Skechers Arch Fit removable insole system also provides podiatrist-certified arch support—developed with 20 years of data and 120,000 unweighted foot scans, this dynamic insole helps mold to your foot to reduce shock and increase weight dispersion. The design is complete with a Goodyear Gold compound outsole for enhanced traction, stability and durability.

Skechers Viper Court Rally



Whether you’re a tournament competitor or weekend warrior, the Viper Court Rally is designed for players who need agility, control, and all-day comfort on the court. Engineered specifically for pickleball, this lightweight performance shoe features Goodyear rubber outsoles for traction and stability on any court surface—indoor or out. The breathable mesh upper offers secure support without sacrificing flexibility, while Skechers Arch Fit technology delivers podiatrist-certified arch support for long matches and quick pivots. Offering a responsive feel and confident grip in every step, the Viper Court Rally is a go-to for players who demand speed and versatility, without compromise.

CONTROL

Skechers Viper Court Elite



Built for players who control the pace—and the point, the Viper Court Elite is the perfect choice for someone who dominates through placement, balance, and sharp court awareness. Designed for peak performance in the control category, this

elite-level pickleball shoe features a low-profile, responsive design that keeps players grounded and agile during every rally. The Viper Court Elite also boasts Skechers Hands-Free Slip-ins technology—a patented, heel reinforcement system that lets players step in and out without bending down or touching their shoes. With a durable Goodyear rubber outsole for traction and a lightweight, supportive upper that locks in the foot, this shoe offers a stable platform for confident lateral movement and pinpoint execution. The shock-absorbing, Skechers Arch Fit insole ensures podiatrist-certified comfort through long matches, while the precision fit allows for seamless transitions and quick resets at the net.

Skechers Viper Court Reload



The Viper Court Reload delivers dependable performance for players who prioritize comfort and control—without overcomplicating their gear. Designed with a stable, supportive build and responsive cushioning, this pickleball-specific shoe helps players stay grounded, balanced, and quick on directional shifts. Key performance features include a durable Goodyear rubber outsole for multi-surface traction, a breathable mesh upper that keeps things cool under pressure, and a Relaxed Fit design that offers extra room at the toe box for a more accommodating and comfortable fit. The Viper Court Reload also includes the Skechers Arch Fit removable insole system developed with podiatrist-certified arch support to reduce foot fatigue. The addition of Skechers Hands-Free Slip-ins also allows for easy-on-and-off wear without bending or pulling—perfect for players heading in and out of practice, play, or casual sessions. Offering several of the comfort and performance-driven innovations found in elite-level models, the Viper Court Reload delivers versatile performance.

VERSATILITY

Skechers Viper Court Luxe



The Viper Court Luxe is the go-to pickleball shoe for players who want performance on the court and polish off it. Designed with versatility in mind, this sleek, sport-lifestyle hybrid is ideal for recreational players who enjoy the game but also want a shoe that fits seamlessly into their day. Key features include a lightweight, breathable upper with a clean, modern look that plays just as well at the café or park as it does on the pickleball court. A Goodyear rubber outsole provides dependable grip on a variety of surfaces, while the Skechers Arch Fit removable insole system offers podiatrist-certified support for lasting comfort during play or everyday wear. The Relaxed Fit design ensures plenty of room for an easy, natural feel, and the lightweight ULTRA GO cushioning provides added comfort. From casual matches to post-game errands, the Viper Court Luxe brings a fresh spin to what a pickleball shoe can be.

CONSUMER SURVEY OF PICKLEBALL PLAYERS

We surveyed more than 500 active men and women, asking if they have played pickleball, and for those who have played, we followed up with questions about their playing habits as well as their shopping preferences — what they buy for pickleball and what impacts those buying decisions.

Nearly 60% of the adults we surveyed told us they have played pickleball, with 25% saying they play several times per week and nearly 20% saying they play at least once per week.

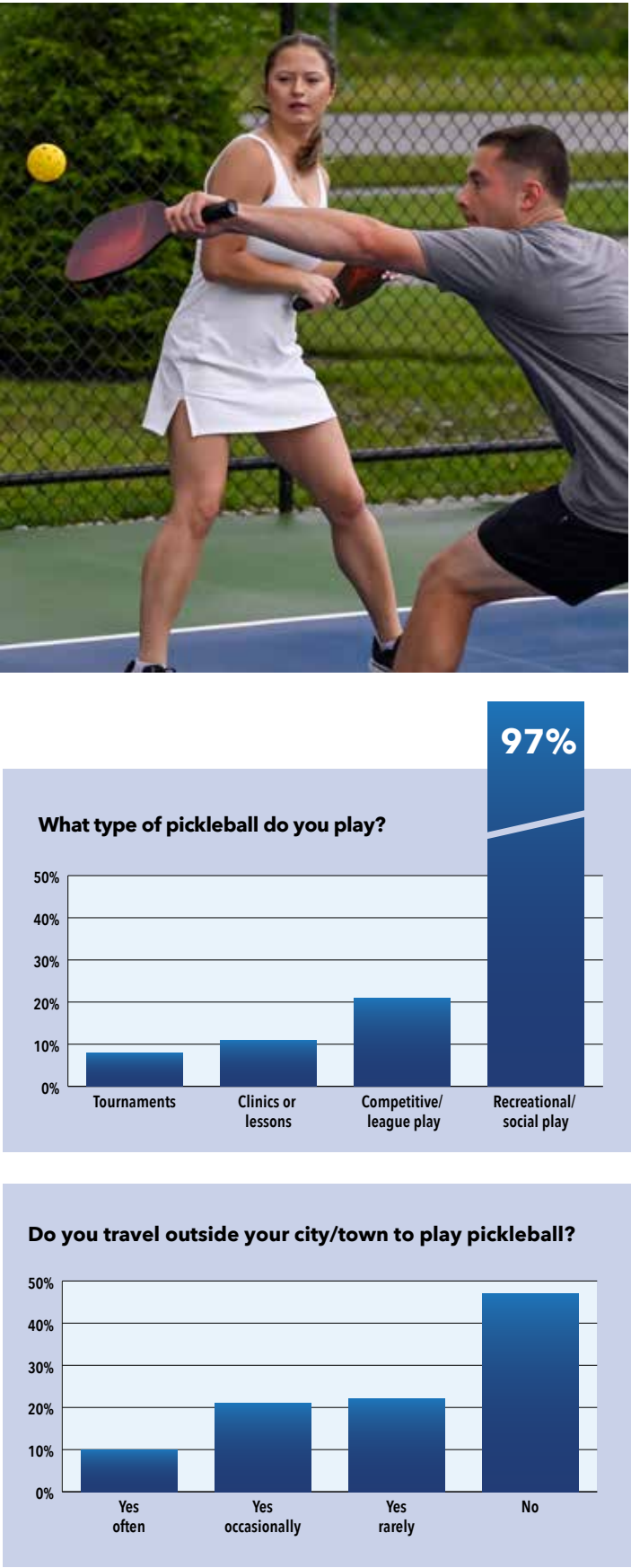
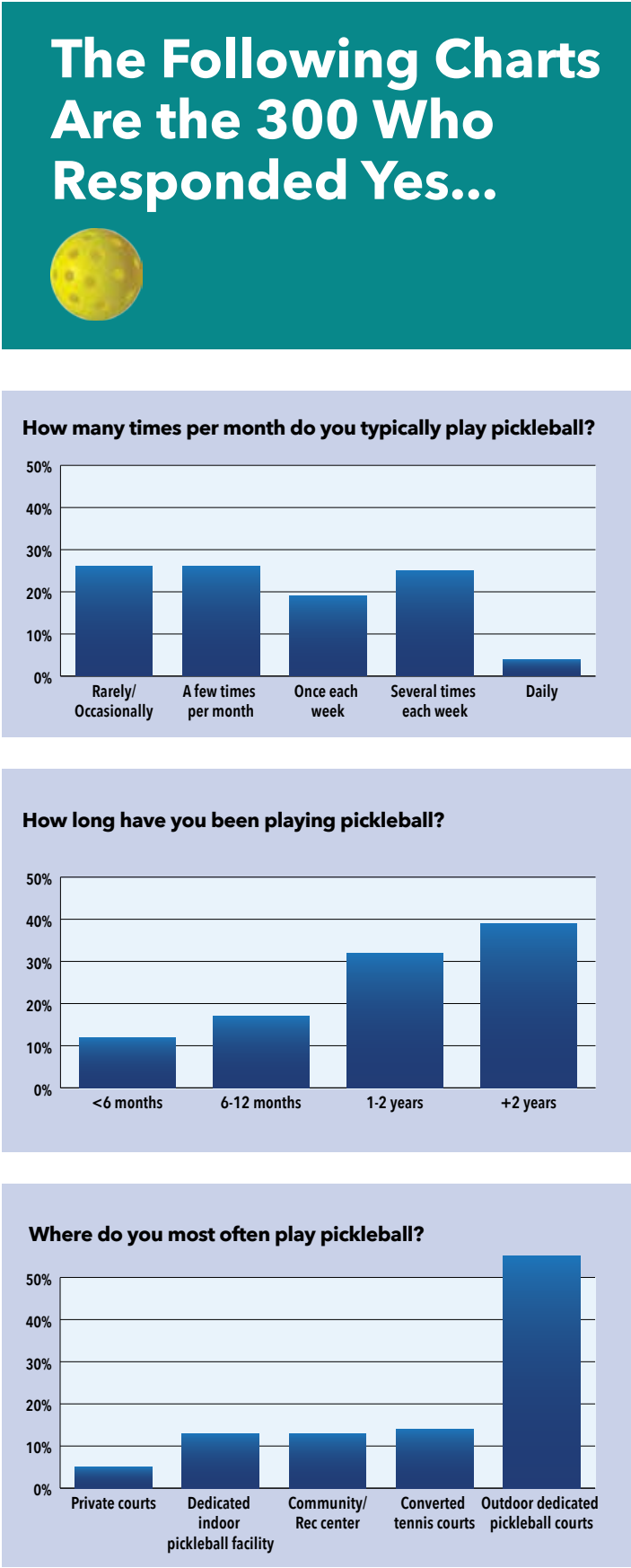
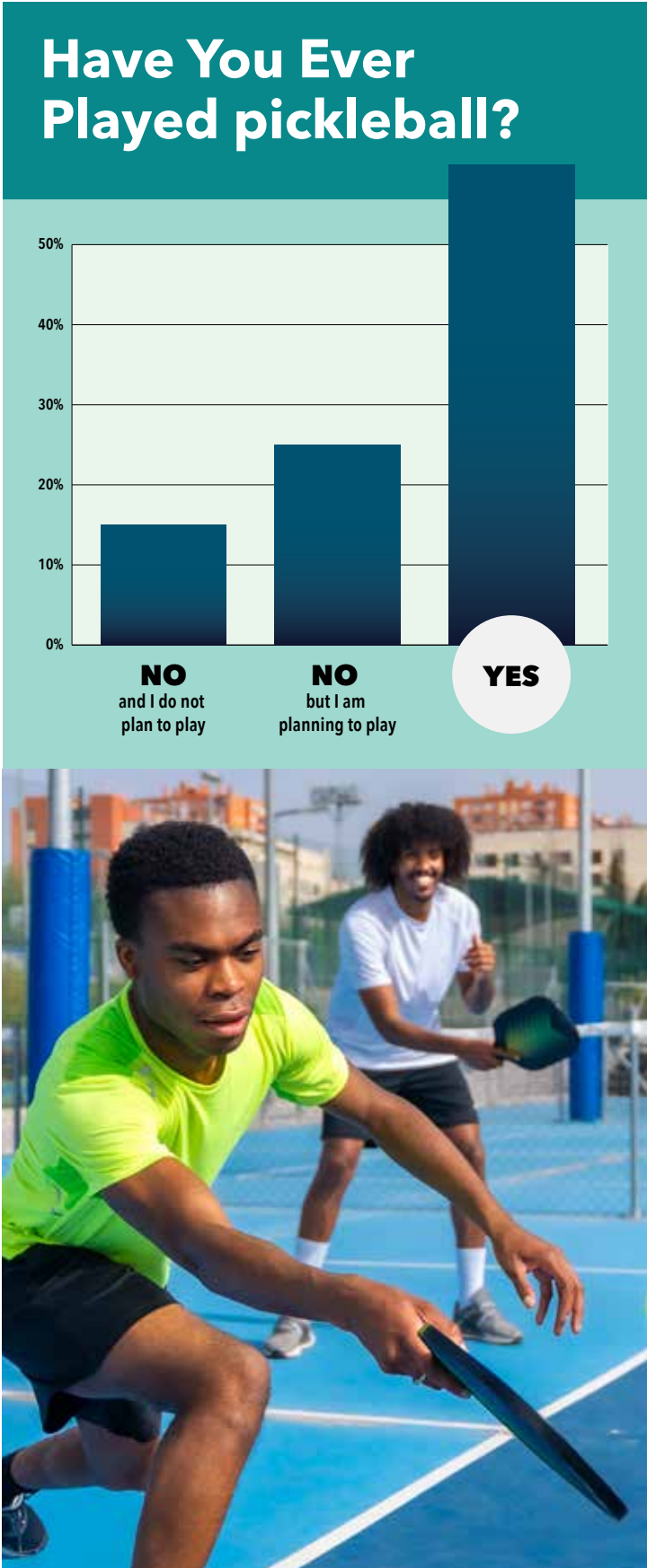
When shopping for pickleball gear, the most likely destination for shoppers is a sporting goods store (59%). The pickleball products consumers tell us they purchased over the past year were led by paddles (68%) and balls (67%), followed by footwear (43%) and apparel (36%). For footwear, 40% of those surveyed say they wear tennis shoes to play pickleball, with 29% wearing running shoes, 16% wearing cross

trainers and just 13% saying they wear pickleball-specific shoes.

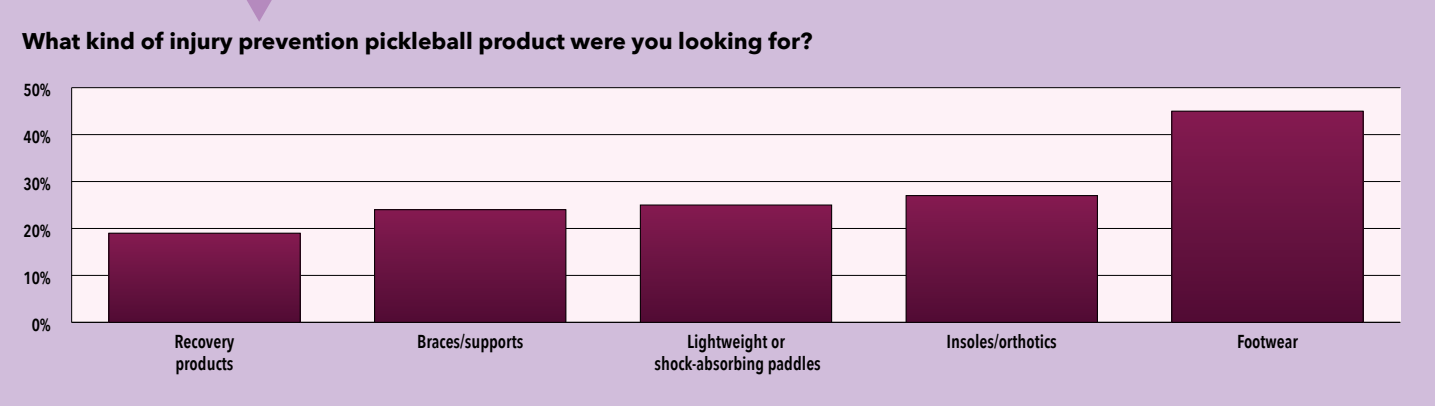
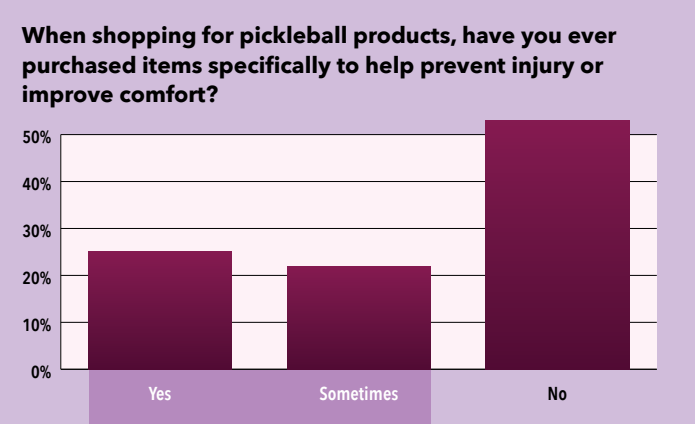
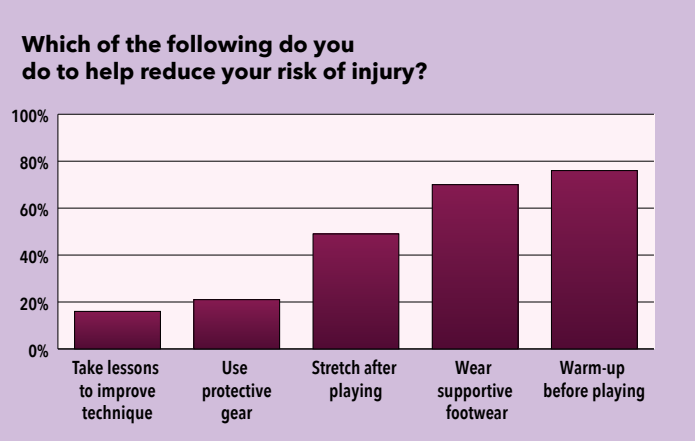
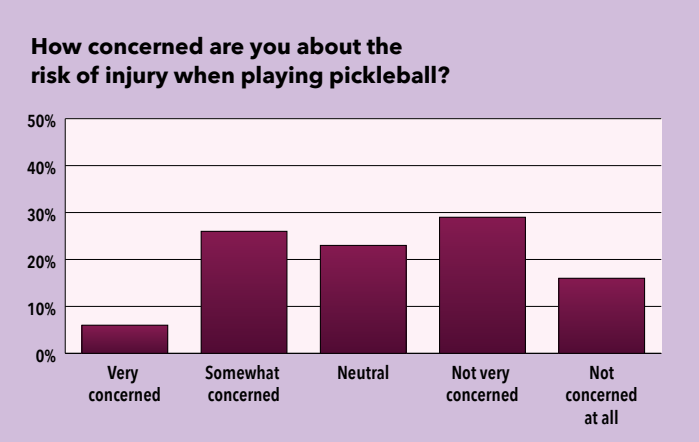
There is room for growth in pickleball product education. More than 80% of our survey respondents say they would appreciate a store sales associate’s recommendation about products designed for pickleball.

We also asked an open-ended question about what pickleball players like most about the sport. “Easy to play,” “Low cost,” and “It’s social and friendly,” are just a few of the responses we got. Check out more replies on the following pages. ■

This survey conducted by MESH01 included 300 respondents, men and women who are active and play pickleball. Trend Insight is a feature within sportstyle that delivers research conducted on the MESH01 Platform. MESH01 collects data from a select panel of active and outdoor enthusiasts.



TREND INSIGHT



MESH01™

BRING THEM OVER THE FINISH LINE

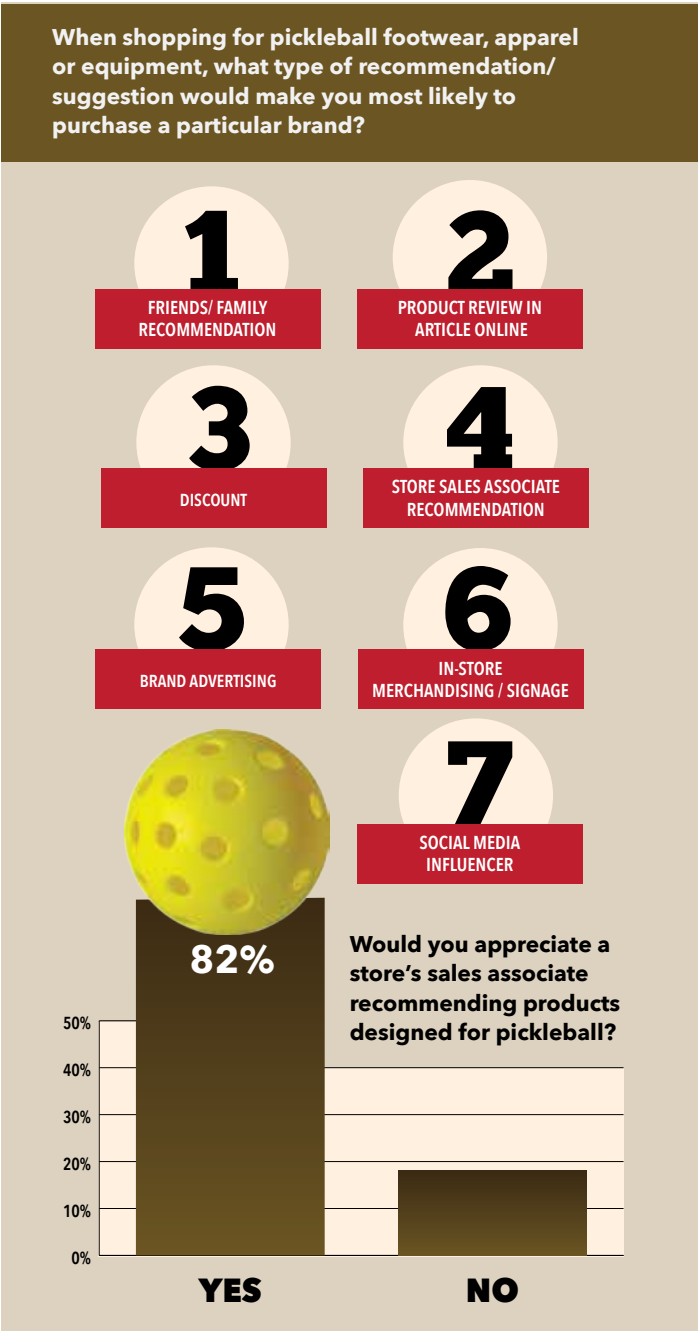
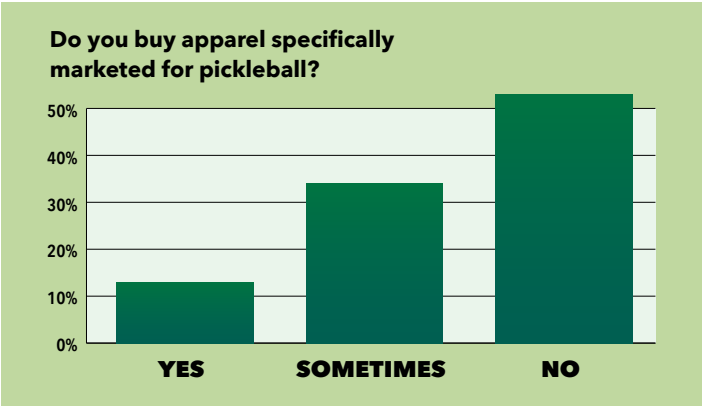
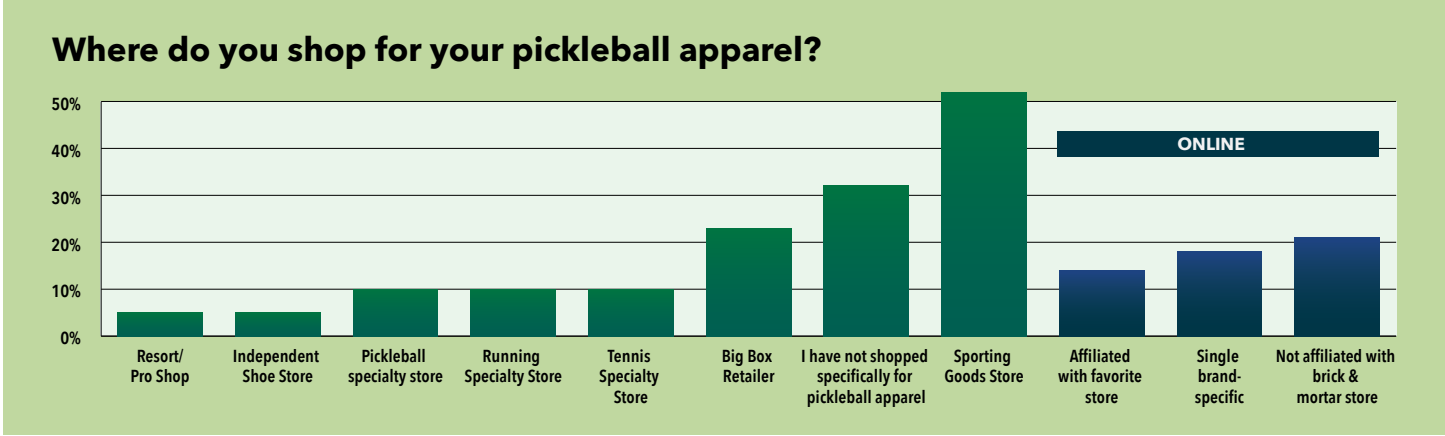
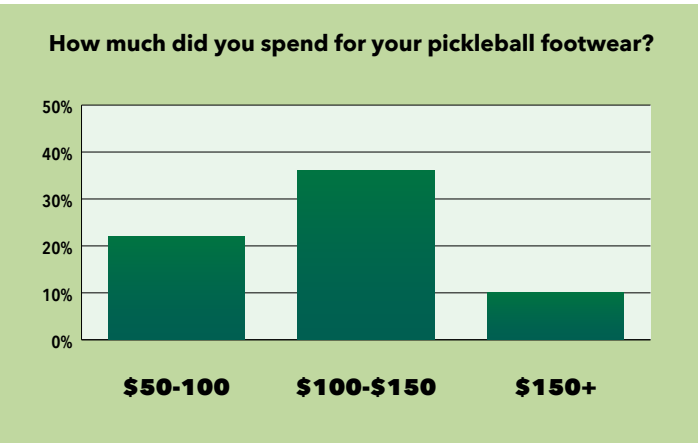
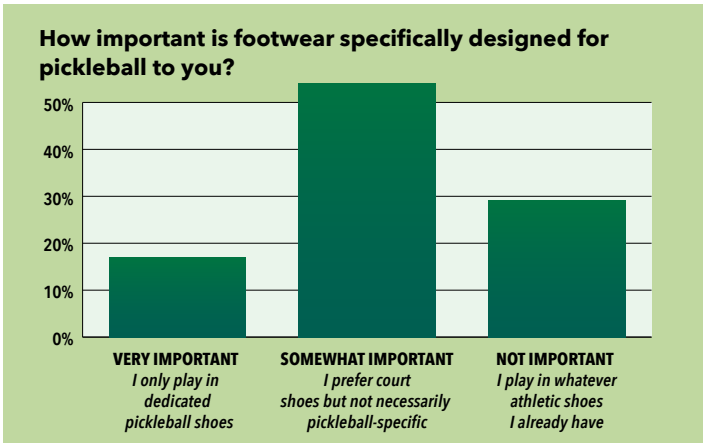
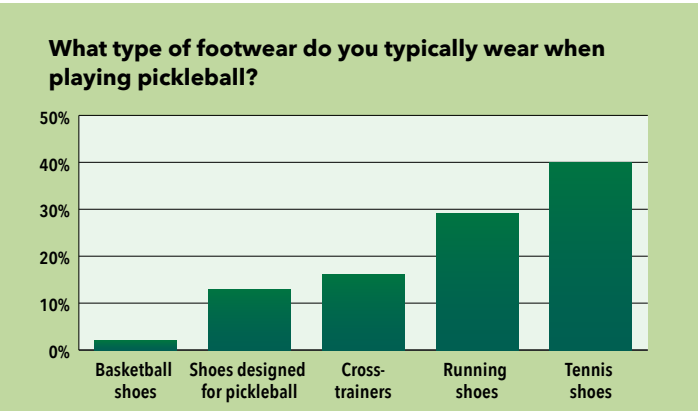
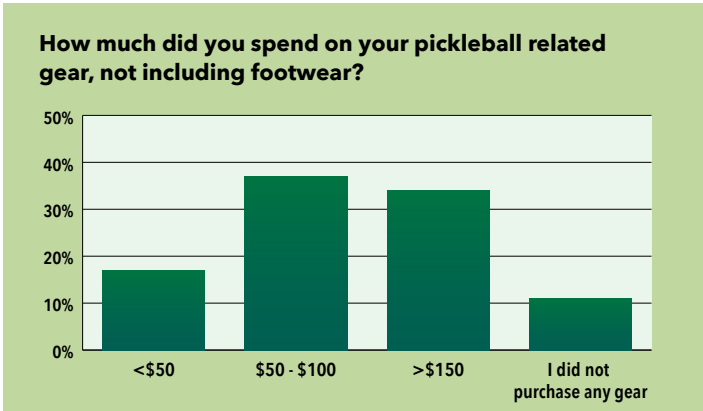
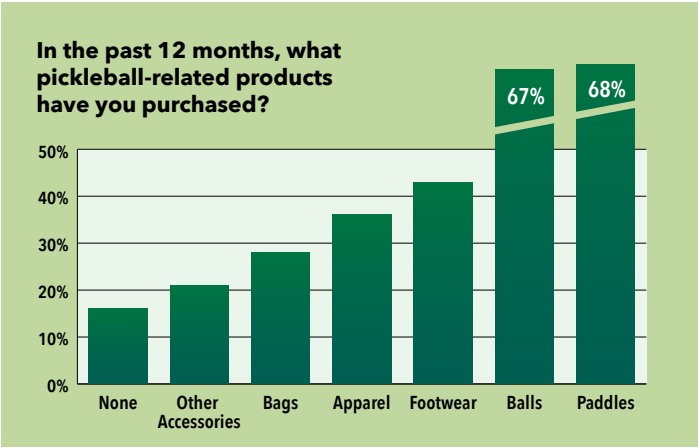
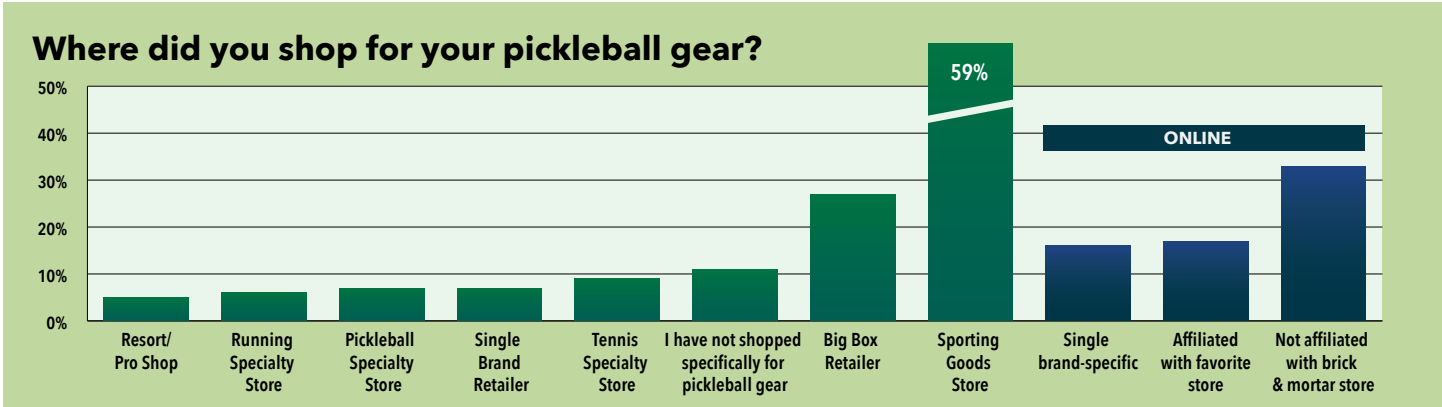
Infuse pre-launch product feedback into your footwear designs and go to market with confidence.



Discover the MESH01 product testing platform at MESH01.com



TREND INSIGHT



What do you like most about the sport of pickleball?

FEMALE

TWENTY SOMETHING

The competitive nature. *Female Age 20*

It's a fun way to stay active while being social. *Female Age 23*

I like that it's a sport that anyone can play so I can spend time with my whole family! *Female Age 26*

I love how competitive it is. The league I'm in takes it very seriously, so we all find the best ways to improve our game, whether it be our play style or our gear/apparel. *Female Age 28*

I am a tennis player, but I like that pickleball is much more of a social game and approachable for beginners. This makes it easy for me to hang out with my friends, even if they've never played before. We're also close enough to the net where we could chat and play at the same time, unlike tennis where if we were at the baseline, we'd have to shout. *Female Age 29*

THIRTY SOMETHING

Fun game to play with friends. Easy to learn and anyone can play *Female Age 31*

I love that pickleball is both competitive and social—it's fast-paced enough to keep me challenged, but still lighthearted and easy to enjoy with people of all skill levels. *Female Age 32*

It is a really fun way to socialize and be active. *Female Age 37*

I like that it's quick and promotes a healthy lifestyle but also fun, social, and beginner friendly. *Female Age 31*

Easy for inexperienced people and a good social activity for family and all ages. *Female Age 39*

I enjoy the relationship you can form with both your teammates and the opponents. *Female Age 39*

FORTY SOMETHING

Gives me a decent workout and it's a fun way to get a workout in. *Female Age 40*

It is a game that is easy to pick up recreationally with people of all levels. *Female Age 42*

It works my entire body, and I can include my entire family! *Female Age 44*

It's fun, challenging, and you get plenty of exercise. *Female Age 46*

FIFTY SOMETHING

Pickleball is easy game to learn, competitive and social. It's also very easy to travel with gear to play on vacation. *Female Age 51*

The workout it gives me and the excitement I get altogether, as well as getting to hang out with friends. *Female Age 51*

It is so fun! I love that I can modify the sport as needed for my energy level that day. I can either play really hard on a day I want a good workout or just take it easy on a day I'm more tired. Time flies by when playing and it's a great overall workout. *Female Age 55*



The level of activity and being with people. I can have a challenging game or more of a casual game depending on who I play with. I like the ease of movement and not too dangerous. *Female Age 59*

SIXTY SOMETHING

Not as much running as in tennis. *Female Age 60*

It's such a fun sport. Its great exercise, you meet great people and another way of staying healthy. *Female Age 63*

It is an all-age sport, relatively easy to learn and fun to play. I have many friends that play, and we are loving learning and playing pickleball. *Female Age 64*

Gets me outside with my friends while exercising! *Female Age 69*

It's easier on my joints. It more fun to play. *Female Age 69*

SEVENTY SOMETHING

I love the fact that it's an outdoor activity that allows me to get some exercise and have fun at the same time socially. *Female Age 71*

MALE

TWENTY SOMETHING

It's like a less competitive version of tennis for friends of mine that aren't used to playing tennis at a higher level. *Male Age 20*

It has a very low barrier for entry and beginners can be competitive almost immediately. *Male Age 21*

Fun and easy to pick up for new people. Also easier for my older family members to join in. *Male Age 24*

It's social and friendly. I can play with people of all ages and skill levels. It's a great workout that doesn't feel intimidating, and it combines the best parts of tennis, ping pong, and badminton into one fun, fast-paced sport . *Male Age 24*

What originally got me into the sport was the very low barrier to entry. But now the fast-paced competitive side of the sport is what gets me going back on the court day after day. I am constantly desiring to get better. Another big aspect of the sport is the community cultivated through the sport in my area. *Male Age 25*

It can be competitive, or it can be casual but either way it's fun and social. *Male 28*

It's a fun low-impact racket sport. I really enjoy tennis and padel, but pickleball is a fun alternative that you can play with anyone regardless of their experience level. *Male 29*

THIRTY SOMETHING

I like that I can play it just about anywhere, it keeps me active, and I can make friends doing something that I consider highly competitive. *Male Age 31*

It's another fun way to be active and social at the same time, get a good sweat going, not have to hang at a bar, all while not needing to be good at tennis (because I'm not). *Male Age 32*

Community building activity! *Male Age 33*

It is a great workout and is low cost to get into for beginners as all you need is athletic shoes, a paddle, and a ball. *Male Age 34*

What I like most about pickleball is its unique blend of competitiveness and accessibility—it's easy for beginners to learn yet offers strategic depth for experienced players. The game fosters a friendly, social atmosphere while encouraging teamwork, quick reflexes, and continuous improvement. I'm a 4.5 level player, but I enjoy everything from social games with a newbie doubles partner to highly competitive singles tournament games. *Male Age 36*

The scalability of the sport. It is simple enough for me to go and truly enjoy it with my small daughter and then turn around and put everything in physically to win against some of my guys. *Male Age 36*

Everyone has the opportunity to play, and as you engage more, you naturally develop your skills and feel a stronger desire to compete. I also value the incredible sense of community that comes with it. *Male Age 38*

I can play it any time and it's a good social activity where I can talk to my friends. Pickleball helps me relax after a long day of work and helps me relieve any stress. Unlike team sports, I only need one or 3 other people who can play. *Male Age 38*

It's fun and good exercise. Easier to find a place to play than tennis. *Male Age 32*

FORTY SOMETHING

Playing with others to stay in shape. *Male Age 41*

Good alternative to tennis. Requires less running. *Male Age 42*

I love that most anyone can play it. It isn't as technical as Tennis, and it allows me to be competitive or just have a good time with family and friends. *Male Age 43*

Less of a learning curve vs most sports so it's much easier to find people to play with and make it competitive. *Male 43*

I played tennis for 30 years before playing pickleball. What I like about pickleball are the quick games, the community, and the ease of finding other people to play with. I'm already pretty good because of tennis. It's fun, it's very social, and people of all abilities and age levels can play. *Male 45*

It's easy, and I like that everyone in my family can play and have fun without stressing about not being good enough. Any coordinated, somewhat fit person can become competent and have fun after a couple of sessions. *Male Age 47*

Low cost to get in. Active without being a high stressed effort. Effort scales based on your own intention. Incorporates a variety of skill levels and can make a space for beginners and experts to play together. *Male Age 48*

FIFTY SOMETHING

I play doubles tennis, and I am terrible at the net. I have found that Pickleball has helped me with my agility and quickness. *Male Age 50*

Activity related without being boring, seems to work out both legs and arms, new friends made and a bit of competitive streak but not overly obsessed with winning. It is just fun! *Male Age 55*

Great competition with friends. *Male Age 56*

SIXTY SOMETHING

Fun to play with minimal effort spent learning. *Male Age 61*

The exercise and meeting new people. *Male Age 61*

Active sport but not overly taxing on the body like singles tennis. *Male Age 63* ■



BROOKE HENDERSON



JULIUS RANDLE



CATHERINE PARENTEAU



HARRY KANE



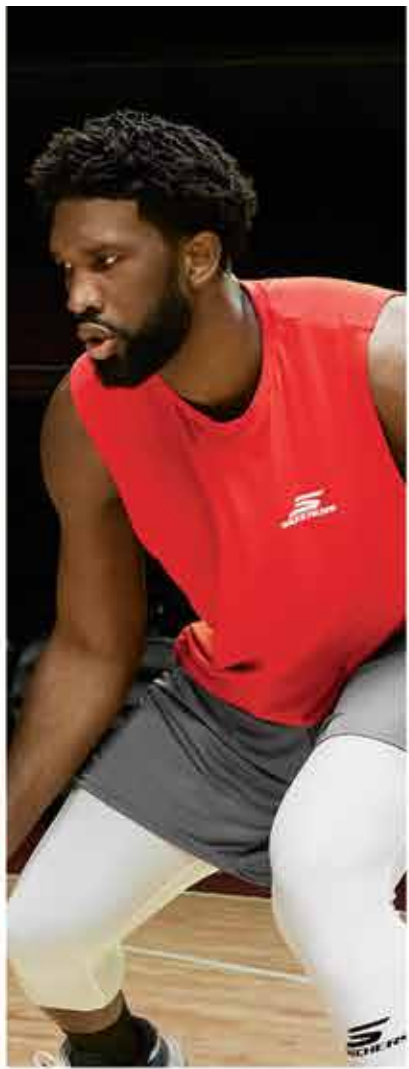
RICKEYA JACKSON



MATT FITZPATRICK



KIKI IRIAFEN



JOEL EMBIID

WE ALL WENT **HANDS FREE.**



SKECHERS
HANDS FREE
Slip-ins

SKECHERS.COM



Glerups / Langdal

The first lace shoe from Glerups, a brand best-known for its wool slippers, the Langdal is designed for year-round, everyday wear with natural comfort as its key element. It features uppers made with 100% pure, natural wool and soft, chrome-free leather, organic cotton laces, and a natural rubber outsole. *MSRP \$250.*

FOOTWEAR

MAKING A STATEMENT

THE SNEAKER CATEGORY CONTINUES TO THRIVE WITH ALL-DAY WEARABILITY.

When it comes to casual sneakers for wearing at work or around town, consumers are “looking for sneaker footwear that is comfortable and transitional,” says Sydney Simas, VP, Simco Imported Shoes. She adds, “We are seeing more and more executives wearing their suits with sneakers, and that trend doesn’t seem to be going away anytime soon.”

The rules for workplace footwear have changed “dramatically” in recent years, asserts Dan Leonardi ECCO’s head of sales; Americas. “Dress or lifestyle sneakers are now widely accepted—so long as they’re styled in a clean, professional way. ‘Clean’ is the keyword here: minimal logos, neutral tones, and free from visible wear and tear.”

Execs at active lifestyle brand Mykos state that “today’s consumers are looking for sneakers that can seamlessly transition from casual outings to more polished settings like the office.” Key features consumers care about include: minimalist, versatile design; breathable, flexible materials; protection and durability; and tech details such as comfort details or water-resistance.

At H.H. Brown, parent company of brands such as Align and Sofft,

the company reports seeing consumers become more intentional with their purchases, and buying “fewer pairs of shoes overall but expecting more from each one — more comfort, more versatility and greater longevity.”

Materials matter. Shoppers are drawn to premium leathers and high-quality textiles that look refined and are built to last. Clean, modern silhouettes and timeless colors are in demand, with consumers seeking designs that transition seamlessly from work to weekend.

The white leather sneaker continues to be a core closet essential, notes Liam Bourke, EVP/GM, revere, but he adds, “consumers are upgrading to premium materials and quiet luxury styling. Minimal stitching, off-white tones, and comfort-first construction are driving purchasing decisions.”

At Finn Comfort USA, health and wellness is a key focus, notes Justin Orrell-Jones, the company’s president and CEO. “All of the components in our footwear are designed to enhance comfortable and healthy walking, so our customer clearly appreciates that we have incorporated those components into a sneaker style that makes them look on-trend and feel comfortable!”

MAKING A STATEMENT

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DAN LEONARDI, HEAD OF SALES, AMERICAS, ECCO



ECCO/ Soft 11
This women’s lace up sneaker is a classic lifestyle option, and will launch in late Q4 of 2025 as part of the brand’s SS’26 collection. New styles in this segment from ECCO feature a fresh manufacturing approach and a more modern aesthetic—ideal for a new segment ECCO is calling the “Functional Lifestyle Enthusiast.” *MSRP \$170.*



Söfft/ Faro
Designed with sustainably made knit uppers and a comfortable fit, Söfft’s new classic knit sneaker is a feel-good addition for any wardrobe. Offered in recycled knit mesh, it has a padded heel collar, a heel tab for easy on and off, and is unlined for lightweight, breathable comfort. The Faro also has a leather-lined footbed, cushion for extra comfort and arch support. *MSRP \$114.95.*



Mephisto / Dayana
A classic white style, this women’s cupsole trainer offers a touch of metallic fun. It features details such as the brand’s Soft-Air technology, a leather lining, and removable foot beds. Plus, it is crafted with ultra-soft leathers, and has couture stitch details, along with understated, stamped branding. *MSRP \$329.*



Xelero / Nellie
Available in Spring 2026, Xelero’s new Nellie features patented Swiss technology making walking easier. The internal rocker and control plate combines stability and cushioning with a dynamic forward motion. Euro sizing. Available in Medium and Wide widths. *MSRP \$249.99.*



Rieker / Nash
Sleek and stylish with a court shoe silhouette, Rieker’s Nash sneaker offers a classic look for dressing up or down. The sneaker has a suede leather upper and also features a removable soft insole, delivering on all-day comfort. *MSRP \$160.*



Alegria / Reah
This Fall ’25 style has a Retro Sport outsole, a leather upper and interior elastic bands for easy on-and-off. The clean silhouette has a removable microsuede footbed inside, along with an Arch One single-density footbed and built-in arch support. Reah also boasts a slip-resistant outsole. *MSRP \$130.*



**W4101-41
Melton, Unisex**
• Breathable

NEW MELTON



W4101-60



W4101-41



W4101-52



W4101-00

GO FOR IT!

MAKING A STATEMENT

When it comes to casual sneakers for wearing at work or around town, consumers are “looking for sneaker footwear that is comfortable and transitional. We are seeing more and more executives wearing their suits with sneakers, and that trend doesn’t seem to be going away anytime soon.”
SYDNEY SIMAS, VP, SIMCO IMPORTED SHOES



Arcopedico / Diamond

Launching in Spring '26 to honor Arcopedico's Diamond Jubilee (60th anniversary), this simple laced sneaker embodies the foundational elements of Arcopedico footwear with its supportive sole and non-binding upper. The lightweight, comfy style can be paired with skirts and/or jeans for the office, or be worn around town. *MSRP \$145.*



Taos / Pop Soul

A limited release, the leather lace-up Pop Soul boasts sporty suede accents and on-trend color combinations, along with the brand's signature Curves & Pods premium removable footbed featuring arch and metatarsal support for all-day comfort and style. The footbed is treated with Antimicrobial Shield. *MSRP \$170.*



Mephisto / Oskar

This men's cupsole trainer offers a fresh take on everyday luxury. Seen here in the off white colorway, Mephisto's Oskar sneaker is crafted with ultra-soft leather, and features couture stitch details and understated, stamped branding. Other details include the brand's Soft-Air technology, a leather lining, and removable foot beds *MSRP \$349.*



FINN / Interlagos

Crafted with premium vegetable-tanned leather on the upper and lining and a dual density outsole made with polyurethane and latex, the Interlagos also features a contoured cork, jute, and latex footbed topped with suede. This will form to the foot over time, creating a customized fit. *MSRP \$450.*



Biza / Anita

This casual sneaker style from Biza's Spring '26 collection features leather and suede uppers with a full leather lining. The Anita combines all-day comfort with a stylish, versatile silhouette. The sneaker boasts a memory foam cushioned removable insole and stretch elastic laces for easy on and off. *MSRP \$139.95.*



Mykos / Nigel

The Nigel casual sneaker is ready for wherever the road takes you. Designed for all-day wear, Nigel features a knit upper with suede eyestay, a breathable mesh lining and a removable molded Ortholite foam footbed. *MSRP \$69.99.*



Made Plus / skiff2

This USA-made brand focuses on premium, sustainable manufacturing with less waste. The skiff2 blends maritime performance with sustainable innovation — it has a sturdy insole cushion and non-marking, high traction tread soles by Michelin. Uppers are made with 100% recycled Repreve yarn for a quick-drying, lightweight upper. *MSRP \$180.*



Skechers / Slip-ins Work: Skech-Lite Pro Slip Resistant - Exdown

Athletic style in a shoe suitable for work or play — the Skechers Hands Free Slip-ins offer an easy fit and have a Heel Pillow that holds the foot securely in place. A Skechers Air-Cooled Memory Foam cushioned insole ensures comfort. The shoe is also Electrical Hazard (EH) safe design tested ASTM-F2892, and features a mesh upper with no-tie fixed stretch laces.



Revere / Los Angeles

This women's sneaker offers style without sacrificing function, combining sport-inspired aesthetics with the brand's signature comfort architecture. A butter-soft leather upper in neutral tones keeps things refined and wardrobe-friendly. Removable footbeds support orthotic wearers. *MSRP \$169.95.*



Marc Fisher LTD / Teddy

Sporting casual comfort in a light pink suede, the Teddy Laceup Sneaker from Marc Fisher features an almond shaped toe and sleek design. This everyday style is designed to become a perfect wardrobe staple. *MSRP \$120.*



Align / Verano

This “go-to” retro sneaker comes in suede with a choice of leather or mesh accents to help keep things cool when the temps are blazing. It has a slip-resistant rubber outsole, Cloud heel counter and Align Dual Density Arch Support Insoles. *MSRP \$164.95.*



Earth / Netta

A casual sneaker with a round toe, Netta features an easy to wear lace-up design with an additional easy zipper closure, a lightweight outsole and removable cushioned footbed with a plush layer of memory foam. *MSRP \$109.*

RIEKER/HEIKE

Practical and stylish, this smooth leather lace-up boot (\$145) has an optional side zip closure and an ultra-light shock absorbing sole.



LIVIN' THE LIFE

COMFORTABLE EVERYDAY OPTIONS ARE MEANT FOR MAKING A STATEMENT.

In the lifestyle market, there's a shift toward "value-driven decision-making: buying fewer pairs, but expecting more from each one — more comfort, more versatility and more longevity," notes David Mondrick, senior footwear designer at H.H. Brown, which recently launched a new men's brand called Align. In the boot category, he explains that means "spending on boots that serve a clear purpose — for work, daily wear or all-weather protection; expecting premium materials and all-day comfort, not just style; often waiting for sales or promotions, but willing to pay full price if the product feels truly worth it; and prioritizing craftsmanship and quality over country of origin."

The Align brand brings offerings like the waterproof Align Rangley Chelsea boot (\$199.95), which is crafted with a seam-sealed construction to keep the foot dry and comfortable. A slip-resistant rubber lug outsole offers traction, while a signature made-to-move Align footbed is designed for all-day support, balance and body alignment.

"Comfort and value are the two most important things in footwear right now. With having to make dollars stretch, consumers are expecting to find added value items, like our HydroGaard water resistant treatment or Ortholite insoles as standards" explains Jerry Breig, COO at Mykos. The Mykos Maria (\$119.99) offers both, along with a microfiber lining and mixed material suede and knit upper.

Rich Rask, President of Rieker Shoe Corporation emphasizes that "consumers shopping for boots want fashion and expect comfort and function!" The Rieker Heike (\$145) is a lace-up boot that has an optional zipper closure on the side. Smooth leather provides a style component, while an ultra-light and shock absorbing sole makes it a practical option. When it comes to fashion, Allison Tiller, brand and marketing manager at Dingo 1969 is witnessing "bold patterns and a vintage-meets-modern vibe." Customers are "really drawn to that nostalgic feel but with a fresh twist. They're loving distressed leather, detailed stitching and those retro toe shapes that somehow manage to feel both vintage and totally current." The Dingo 1969 Vagabond (\$169.95) gives a nod to the 1970s with clean lines, a sleek profile and colorful leather options including merlot, plantain, tan and brown. A 2 ½ inch heel height keeps the boots wearable and comfortable. ■



MYKOS/MARIA

Comfort and value rise to the forefront in the Maria boot (\$119.99), which features HydroGaard water resistant treatment and OrthoLite insoles.



ALIGN/RANGLEY

The Rangley Chelsea (\$199.95) is waterproof and slip-resistant and has a footbed designed to offer all-day support, balance and body alignment.



DINGO 1969/VAGABOND

The sleek, retro-influenced Vagabond boots boast rich, colorful leather and a wearable, comfortable heel height.

INSOLES



INNOVATIVE TIMES

BRANDS ARE KEEPING TECH AT THE FOREFRONT IN THE INSOLE CATEGORY.

Sorbothane Ultra SOLE

The Ultra SOLE Performance Insoles (\$36.99) are designed to absorb shock, return energy and provide long-lasting comfort. Since a successful introduction, The Ultra SOLE has been modified since and combines a supportive molded air-infused base with a larger Sorbothane heel inlay for shock absorbing comfort and impact protection. The brand's gel forefoot pad adds cushioning and returns fluid energy.

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insoles

***With support made comfortable in eleven different styles,
your customer will find the perfect fit.***



INSOLES

There's been no shortage of news in the insole category so far in 2025. Most recently, UK-based **Coats Group** announced it has signed a definitive agreement to acquire **OrthoLite**, as well as **Cirql**. With Coats, a global leader in industrial threads, structural components, and performance materials in the footwear and apparel markets, OrthoLite and Cirql will gain the global scale, infrastructure, innovation and resources to drive impact to the next level.

"I'm excited to merge OrthoLite, the footwear innovation business that I founded 28 years ago, with Coats Group plc.," stated Glenn Barrett, founder and CEO of OrthoLite. "This alliance forms a powerful

OrthoLite SloMo

The brand is expanding its range of memory foam insoles with two newly developed SloMo insole formulations that are designed to expand the functional and sensory dimensions of memory foam technology for footwear. Engineered with specific Asker ratings, recovery rates, and tactile responses, each is precisely tuned to enable targeted customization across a broad range of footwear categories. This will offer footwear brands greater versatility in memory foam offerings, dialing in targeted and customized performance characteristics to meet evolving consumer expectations—enhancing comfort, customization, fit, and feel.

partnership of industry leaders to provide a platform for OrthoLite and Cirql to continue to serve our customers with the most innovative and sustainable footwear components in the world."

On the product side, OrthoLite will be launching an expanded memory foam collection next month with two new SloMo insole formulations—designed to expand the functional and sensory dimensions of memory foam technology for footwear.

In other category news, in May of this year, **Superfeet** unveiled a brand refresh that introduced a new logo, refreshed visual identity, and an updated marketing approach that celebrates "real" athletes who pursue progress across every arena, from courts and trails to job sites and city streets. The brand

announced several new planned introductions for late 2025 and 2026, including the Run Pacer Elite featuring Carbitex and a Puncture Resistant Support work insole with a puncture-resistant plate that shields against sharp hazards, without bulk or restriction.

Meanwhile, in addition to the upcoming Superfeet Run Pacer insole, **Carbitex** is also featured in **Blumaka's** Carbon Elite insole that is designed to defend against turf toe and supercharge propulsion.

And another standout product, **PowerStep's** Morton's Extension insole, offers full-length support and cushioning with a carbon fiber plate to reduce pain and stabilize the big toe joint.

Here, we take a look at several standout products in the insole category.



PowerStep / Morton's Extension

Offering full-length support and cushioning with a carbon fiber plate to reduce pain and stabilize the big toe joint, the Morton's Extension (\$85) features PowerStep's signature arch shape that cradles the arch and heel. The insoles help treat discomfort from bunions, hallux rigidus/limitus, sesamoiditis, arthritis, turf toe, and other conditions affecting the MTP (big toe) joint.

EVERYDAY
RELIEVES & ^{FOOT} HEALTH
PREVENTS PAIN WORK
ARCH HEIGHTS PERFECT FIT
COMFORT IN EVERY STEP RUNNING
RUN MOVE **#1 PODIATRIST**
ARCH HEEL **RECOMMENDED**
DEEP HEEL ADVENTURE PAIN STRETCHING
CUP ORTHOTICS PULSE RELIEF ACTIVITIES
PERFORMANCE HIKING REBOUND
INJURY PREVENTION PINNACLE CUSHIONING
 **PowerStep** CUSTOMIZED SUPPORTIVE
WALKING FOOT HEALTH ENERGETIC STAY ACTIVE
PODIATRIST HIGH-MEDIUM-LOW SHOCK ABSORB
CLINICALLY PROVEN CONTROL
WELLNESS SPORT

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CUSTOMIZED FIT
PICKLEBALLPRO INSOLES STANDING
DYNAMIC ARCH STRETCHING
TECHNOLOGY STRIDE RUNPRO
DUAL-LAYER STABILITY HEALTH
CUSHIONING HIKEPRO FOOT
ORTHOTICS **CUR REX** WELLNESS
ARCH HEIGHTS RUNNING
ZERO HEEL DROP ENERGY
STAY ACTIVE ACTIVE SPORT
PODIATRY **#1 RUN** ACTIVITY SPECIFIC
INSOLES **SPECIALTY** PERFORMANCE
IMPROVED COMFORT CUSHIONING
SCIENTIFICALLY PROVEN
PREVENT INJURIES EVERYDAY
CLEATPRO ATHLETIC
ADVENTURE



Insoles Made To Move.

Whether a seasoned athlete or just staying active, our insoles are **Made to Move**. Offering unmatched comfort, support, and performance, **our insoles relieve pain, reduce fatigue, prevent injury, and enhance natural movement.**

INSOLES



Cadence Performance MP
A slim full-length total contact insole that provides contoured support under the midfoot, the Performance MP (\$49.95) has a built-in metatarsal pad for enhanced pressure distribution and support under the transverse arch of the forefoot, and an unstructured heel counter for greater relief and shock absorbing comfort under and around the heel. It also has a durable hi-rebound polyurethane foam for heel-to-toe comfort, and an antimicrobial top cover for moisture control and odor protection.

Superfeet Run Pacer Elite

The pinnacle offering in Superfeet's line of trim-to-fit running insoles, this Fall '25 product features a Carbitex plate paired with high-rebound SuperRev foam to power dynamic propulsion and long-lasting comfort. Built for 20% more energy return with every stride so runners can go further, faster, and feel better doing it. ■



FLOAT INTO
COMFORT

With high energy rebound and lightness like never before, OrthoLite® Float™ delivers unprecedented comfort to perform at your best all day.



#ChooseComfort

SOCKS

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

A GOOD RUN STARTS WITH GREAT SOCKS.

As any runner can attest, the right pair of socks is a key part of any successful run. It's not something they want to even think twice about. "These days, people are on the move all day, and they need gear that can keep up without getting in the way," notes Josh Higgins, president, OS1st. "We're seeing more consumers gravitate toward simple, high-performing essentials that quietly do their job mile after mile."

With the brand's Wicked Merino socks, OS1st innovated by taking the natural comfort of merino wool and blending it with technical yarns to make something that's breathable, tough, and ready for whatever the day brings. Higgins says, "It's the kind of sock you forget you're wearing in the best way."

Swiftwick CEO Mark Chou says the brand has seen a demand for higher cuff heights, which, he says, is one of the reasons Swiftwick is continuing to design and release new mid-crew and crew height styles. "In addition, with the increasing popularity of plated, high-stack supershoes for both race day and training, we know that customers are searching for ways to ensure they're locked in securely." The brand's Flite XT sock, with its proprietary stability technologies, is becoming more and more sought after by runners, he says, to meet that need.

"The sock market is interesting right now," asserts Tanya Pictor,

co-founder, Jogology. "We are seeing that consumers in different age groups gravitate to different sock heights, though we are also seeing the trend being influenced regionally."

"Also, given price increases in the market with footwear, I think that the consumer buying a pair of running socks right now wants to make sure it is of a high quality, great performance and fit," adds Pictor.



Swiftwick Flite XT
The design team integrated grip fibers directly into the knit structure of the Flite XT, and blended moisture-wicking Olefin with nylon for a secure feel. Flite XT is engineered with a precision-knit construction that works to enhance midfoot stability through a supportive arch band, while open-knit zones boost ventilation on the upper. It's a technical sock built to complement the most advanced footwear on the market. *MSRP starting at \$20.*

SOCKS



◀ **Balega**
UltraGlide with Lycra Dry
The all new Balega UltraGlide features friction-reducing Lycra Dry Technology, and is designed to keep feet drier, cooler, and more comfortable. Built to deliver blister-free protection, moisture control, and a custom-like fit, the sock features Drynamix Moisture-Wicking Technology built into the yarns, and strategic cushioning at the heel, toe, with an added metatarsal pad to absorb impact. *MSRP \$21.*

◀ **FITS**
Performance Trail
Knit with fine gauge merino wool for temperature regulation and softness, the Performance Trail sock also has a Free Range Toe Box and a Deep Heel Pocket that wraps the foot, holds in place, and prevents blisters. A high cuff helps keep out trail debris while trail running or moving fast. The sock also has strategically-placed LIGHT cushioning zones, and the ‘custom-fit-feel’ of the brand’s patented ‘Y-Line’ knitting structures. *MSRP \$23.*

◀ **Jogology**
Medium Cushion
The brand’s sock lineup includes the fan-favorite medium weight design, which includes the recently introduced Quarter length socks, as well as the new Jogology Crew and the original No-Show. The medium cushioned model offers a cushioned heel and toe with no cushioning around the midfoot area. Built with a second-skin fit and a design that cradles the contours of the heel for comfort and slippage prevention, Jogology’s socks also have seamless toes to prevent friction.



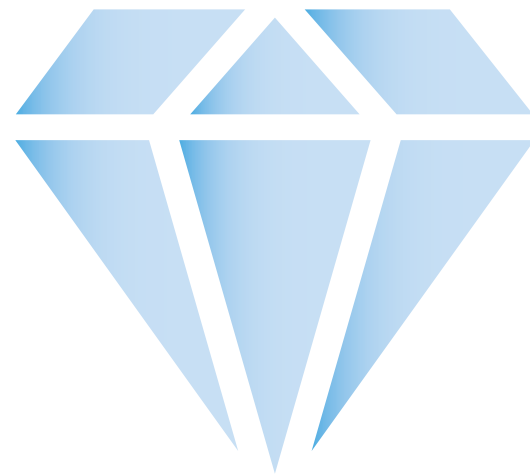
◀ **OS1st**
Wicked Comfort Merino Wool Crew
Made in the USA, these performance socks have a Wide Toe Box, 360 Blister Protection, Dry1st Moisture Wicking Technology and feature a Merino Blend that naturally regulates temperature. The “reinvented” merino wool delivers natural comfort, lab-tested durability and unmatched moisture wicking. *MSRP \$19.99 - \$21.99.*

◀ **Feetures**
Illuminate Collection Elite Tab Socks
Designed for movement, these socks feature a blister tab, targeted arch compression, and iWick fibers to keep feet cool, dry and supported. The new Illuminate Collection includes four bold colorways, in three cushion styles. New colors include Midnight Woods, Crisp Mint, Pink Orchard and Future Dusk (pictured). *MSRP \$18.*

◀ **Darn Tough Vermont**
Men’s Limited Edition Run No Show Tab Ultra-Lightweight Running Sock
These moisture-wicking, blister-resistant, ultralight run socks make use of yarns in the brand’s overstock inventory –using up leftovers to create unique designs and keep raw materials out of the waste stream. A performance fit means no slipping, no bunching, no blisters. Heel tabs offer extra protection behind the heel from friction and keep debris at bay. *MSRP \$19.*



DIAMOND DANDIES



BASEBALL, FAST-PITCH SOFTBALL & SLOW-PITCH SOFTBALL ARE THREE ALL-AMERICAN SPORTS.

BY MIKE MAY

If there are any three team sports that represent the sporting spirit of summer in the United States, they are baseball, fast-pitch softball and slow-pitch softball. (Yes, slow-pitch is a distinctly different sport than fast-pitch, with radically different participants, rules and equipment.) All three start their seasons in the spring and continue well into late summer — and increasingly playing right into the fall.

Of these traditional, ball-related team sports, baseball is dominated by

young males, slow-pitch softball participation continues to be a sport of choice for adult males and fast-pitch softball is in its own unique niche dominated by young females ages six-to-17 years old. Let's take a look at each of them in the eyes of America's team dealers.

Girls' fast-pitch softball is trending positive with some headwinds, as interest and participation are solid. Baseball, too, has its unique challenges but remains strong. And the good news for team dealers is that spending on

TEAM SPORTS



both is on the upswing, too, based on comments from dealers in Florida, Indiana, Delaware, New Hampshire, Michigan and Texas.

In Vero Beach, FL, baseball participation is very strong and fast-pitch participation is not.

“In this part of Florida, I am witnessing the daily decline in participation in girls’ fast-pitch softball. For the most part, it’s been reduced to a travel sport,” reports **Dave Whipp**, co-owner of **Dave’s Sporting Goods**. “Whereas, our baseball remains very popular and business is great.”

According to Whipp, the opportunities for girls to play other sports such as bowling, lacrosse and beach volleyball is causing many to think twice about playing softball.

One of the reasons why Dave’s Sporting Goods is doing well with baseball is because the store is adjacent to a five-field baseball complex. “Our store backs up to the Vero Beach Little League complex and we generate a great deal of walk-in business, especially on Saturday mornings,” says Whipp. “Players always need a belt, a pair of socks or a new set of pants because of a rip or a tear.”

The level of seriousness of today’s travel baseball player has been a big boost to Whipp’s business, which he runs alongside his wife, Becky. “So many of today’s young travel players show up with a bat bag filled with four bats, three gloves, two sets of cleats and at least two hats.”

One of Whipp’s biggest business challenges these days is keeping up with coaching changes.

“Just when you think you have the baseball business from a certain school, there’s a coaching change, I’m not notified, and the new coach starts buying product from one of his buddies,” Whipp laments. “The business model has definitely changed.”

In addition to strong business with local rec baseball leagues, school-based teams and travel teams, Dave’s Sporting Goods generates a great deal of business from the large number of baseball tournaments held each year at the nearby Jackie Robinson Complex in Vero Beach. (The complex is actually the old Dodgertown, the long-time spring training home of the Los Angeles Dodgers, and is about two miles from Dave’s Sporting Goods.)

Another of Whipp’s big-picture observations is how product buying patterns have changed

for local youth leagues. “Our rec baseball leagues are spending more money by ordering 3D embroidered hats and sublimated jerseys,” he points out. “Times have certainly changed.”

Interesting note: One baseball product that gaining popularity is the sliding mitt. “When players are getting to first base, they are now taking off their batting gloves and putting on these mitt-sized sliding mitts,” says Whipp.

Meanwhile, in Clarksville, IN, **Kratz Sporting Goods** is selling fast-pitch softball and baseball year-round. According to owner **Allen Krebbs**, business is consistent with local rec leagues, travel teams, middle schools and high schools and some college programs in southern and central Indiana. The college business is usually restricted to decorating uniforms.

The one part of his baseball and softball business that has had the greatest statistical surge in recent years is with travel teams. “Our travel business is huge,” says Krebbs.

The success Kratz has in selling baseball and softball is twofold — having all the necessary equipment along with an in-depth knowledge of the sport.

“Baseball and fast-pitch softball have become year-round categories for us,” says Krebbs, adding, however, that “fast-pitch softball has become a niche sport. You have to know it to sell it. It’s important to know the sport and I think we do.”

According to Krebbs, the high school baseball and softball teams are buying new uniforms once every three to five years, whereas travel teams are purchasing new uniforms every year. And while he and his associates are selling softballs, baseballs, uniforms, belts, socks, bat bags, batting helmets, catcher’s gear, bases, scorebooks and field paint, the number of bats, cleats and fielding gloves/mitts is on the decline.

“More and more of players are buying bats, cleats and fielding gloves from websites on the Internet,” he explains.

Baseball Is Strong in Delaware

In Wilmington, DE, the combined baseball-softball category for **Al’s Sporting Goods** is strong and getting stronger, especially when the Philadelphia Phillies are winning.

“After you break it down, our business is roughly 70-30 in favor of baseball,” reports



owner **Bob Hart**. “And, when the Phillies are winning, our licensed product sales are very good.” His business has two components – a team division and a retail division.

“We sell to both teams and individuals who play baseball and softball,” says Hart. “Our team sales are to local rec leagues, travel teams and school teams and we sell product to 20 different local youth baseball and softball leagues along with very few colleges.”

Local rec baseball and softball leagues are buying socks, a hat and a T-shirt from Al’s, and the T-shirt is either a MLB-licensed shirt with the logo of a certain team or a sublimated jersey. If the shirt is an MLB version, then Al’s will screenprint the name of the sponsor on the back along with a number.

When it comes to cleats, gloves and bats for baseball and softball, the majority of sales are to individuals walking into the retail store.

Overall, Al’s does its best to be a one-stop shopping experience for both teams, leagues, parents, fans and individual players.

Up in West Lebanon, NH, **Stateline Sports**

has a strong business selling both baseball and softball through its team division and retail store.

“In our team business, leagues, schools and teams are buying uniforms, baseballs, softballs, batting helmets, socks and some less expensive team bats for baseball and fast-pitch softball,” reports team buyer **Dan Proulx**.

And in the retail business, players are purchasing fielding gloves, batting gloves, batting helmets and expensive bats, according to **Bud Hill**, a baseball/softball sales specialist for Stateline Sports.

While Stateline Sports sells slow-pitch softball gear, equipment and accessories, the business is not as brisk as it used to be. “Our slow-pitch business is down to one local co-ed league in our area,” says Hill.

Interestingly, one factor that limits more sales of baseball and fast-pitch softball is the existence of ice hockey season. “When it’s hockey season, everybody plays hockey,” explains Proulx.

Steady Business in Michigan

In Battle Creek, MI, spending is strong for

baseball and fast-pitch softball throughout the year, but especially in the months leading up to spring and summer.

“Uniform sales are steady,” reports **Cam Bortell**, a sales associate at **Jack Pearl’s Sports Center**. The primary baseball and softball clients start with youth baseball leagues and conclude with a handful of local college baseball teams.

“While we do sell product to some travel teams, we have more business with high school baseball teams,” says Bortell.

When it comes to sales of actual baseballs, Rawlings may be the official ball of high school baseball in Michigan, but Jack Pearl’s also sells baseballs from Wilson, Champro and Diamond.

While cleats, bats, and gloves are product staples of the sports, Jack Pearl’s does not sell cleats, its bat business is minimal and it only generates business for fielding gloves when teams place an order.

“For the most part, kids are on their own when it comes to bats and gloves,” he says.

Still, according to Bortell, Jack Pearl’s does sell a variety of items that pertain to both baseball

and fast-pitch or either one on its own such as bases, softballs, pitching screens, hitting tees, batting gloves, socks, belts, hats for boys, visors for girls, protective masks for girls and practice apparel.

Down in Fort Worth, TX, **Carey’s Sporting Goods** remains a school-oriented team dealer for both sports. “About 98 percent of our business is with schools,” explains owner **Dan Carey**. “We know what we do best. We have great relationships with our area schools and coaches.”

The popularity of baseball and fast-pitch softball in Texas is reflected in sales of those two categories. “We sell baseball and fast-pitch softball across the board,” says Carey. “We sell uniforms, practice apparel, socks, belts, baseballs, softballs, batting gloves, catcher’s equipment and all types of field equipment.”

The high level of interest in fast-pitch softball in Texas was reflected in the fact that the two finalists in this year’s Women’s College World Series in Oklahoma City were a pair of teams from the Lone Star State — the University of Texas and Texas Tech University. ■

FAMILY PLANNING

There has been a long tradition of family-owned and family-operated businesses in the world of team sports, oftentimes going back generations. But over the past decade or so, many team dealers have sold or merged with other companies — or have closed their doors for good. Succession planning can be tricky — owners eventually want to retire, their kids might not want to be involved with the enterprise, or the business climate might become too challenging. For a business to last for two or more generations is the exception, not the rule. In fact, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that

only about 25 percent of small businesses survive for 15 years or more, about five percent manage to stay open for 30 years — the probability of surviving for 50 years-plus is a rarity. The May/June issue of our sister publication *Team Insight* featured a profile of Al's Sporting Goods in Wilmington, DE, which is celebrating its 90th anniversary this year as a family-run business. That gave us the idea to profile other family-owned team dealers and in Part I of this two-part feature (with Part 2 scheduled for the September/October 2025 issue), four of the team market's most venerated dealers discuss their legacy and future plans. Here are their stories.

MULTI-GENERATIONAL DEALERS SERVE UP TOP-NOTCH SERVICE AND LONGSTANDING COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS.

BY JUDY LEAND



Cook's Sporting Goods



Johnson-Lambe Company



MVP Athletic Supplies



Sportsman's

NORTH WILKESBORO, NC

COOK'S SPORTING GOODS

Owner: Mark Cook, president and CEO
History: Mark grew up in his family's business, Cook's Sporting Goods, which was started in 1946 by his grandfather, Flake Cook. After attending college and moving out of state to work at Lowe's Companies, Mark returned to Wilkes County in 1996 to work at Cook's alongside his father, James Cook, and grandfather until Flake's passing. Father and son continued to work together until James' unexpected passing in 2018. Throughout their time together, Mark and James each brought unique talents to their business and both helped it to develop through the changing industry landscape. After James' passing, Mark continued to grow Cook's to more than 60 employees who currently serve more than 300 schools and recreation departments covering western North Carolina and Brunswick County.

"In the beginning, we sold a lot of automotive supplies, tires and appliances," recalls Cook. "In the 1960s, my father bought out my grandfather's partner and in 1974 my father bought



Team sales, decorating and retail make up the business these days at Cook's Sporting Goods.

a 30,000-square-foot building in one of the first shopping centers in the county. Heading into the 1990s, the shopping center became desolate, so the store moved in 1996 — this is our 29th year with the [relocated] store and 2026 marks Cook's 80th anniversary."

Most Gratifying Aspects: "We very much appreciate our vendors. We try to take care of the community here. I was adopted so to me, family is who loves you and who helps you — we don't hire, we adopt and have created a work family. Our employees are our family. You also have to do your part with customers and the community and we try to be fair, equal and wise with resources, building trust over time. If you don't have those relationships, there's nothing there. We're building something together and that's what makes it worth the effort. The business allows me to have an impact on and

relationship with our employees and the community — they're all important to me."
Challenges: "It's not easy working for family, but it's an amazing blessing to have that time with them. Financially, the main challenges are the uncertainty of tariffs, rising costs, the economy and nationwide competition as well as massive corporations with lots of resources."
Looking Ahead: "We have three parts to our business: team sales, decoration and the retail store. Team sales is the biggest portion of our business and we see an opportunity to grow. I have two amazing girls and I'd love for someone to come join me, but they have to have a love and a passion for the business. I still need to set up a board of directors and come up with a long-term plan."
The Future of Family-Owned Team Businesses: "Small family businesses are built on service and relationships, and they're the heart and soul of the team business and the people they're serving. The future will be harder — you need resources to survive. There are fewer family businesses today because they're being bought up by larger entities."



A look back at the beginnings of Cook's Sporting Goods.

TEAM SPORTS

LANGLEY, B.C., CANADA

MVP ATHLETIC SUPPLIES

Owners: The day-to-day operations are currently run by Shawn Hancheroff and his brother-in-law, Matt Wilcott. Hancheroff’s mother, Carol Hancheroff, and his two sisters, Ashley Renaud and Kyley Wilcott, are also involved. Shawn’s uncle, Jim Poynter, has retired but still retains shares in the business. The business is still and has always been entirely owned within the family. As of right now, the shares are held by Shawn, his uncle, mother and Shawn’s two sisters.

History: “The business started in 1973 with my father, Harold Hancheroff, selling team sporting goods – mostly softball/ baseball and institutional sporting goods – out of my grandparents’ garage, supported financially by my grandfather, Ross Poynter,” says Shawn Hancheroff. “My mother, Carol Hancheroff, and my grandmother, Doreen Poynter, were also involved from the beginning and became more involved as the business grew. At the time, we were more of a team and institutional dealer selling mostly to schools and community leagues. Other members of the extended family became involved, such as my mother’s siblings, Jim Poynter and Barb Mynott.”

Most Gratifying Aspects: “Although it can be trying at times, it is extremely gratifying to be working together as a family to grow and succeed as we have been doing for more than 50 years. We get to work together as a family every day, spending the day with customers and vendors talking about sports.”

Challenges: “One of the biggest challenges, especially as we have grown, is keeping that family feel and unity. Now, there are more family members involved in the business, but with our growth we now have a lot of other staff members who are not related and sometimes integrating them into the business where there is so much family can



A lot of the key staff at MVP Athletic is still young, which bodes well for the future of the team dealer.

be challenging.

“Another challenge we faced over the years is that we were not able to be profit-able in the Institutional/School business, which was a huge part of our business for the first 30 years of the company’s existence. We made a decision as a family that we would move out of that business to concentrate on softball, baseball and football and we recently added lacrosse. These sports are mostly club sports in our area as there is no high school softball or baseball and only about one-quarter of our high schools have football. All of these sports are primarily run by associations/ leagues outside of the schools. Walking away from the institutional business was a big gamble for our business at the time, but in the end, it proved to be the right decision and is one of the key reasons we are where we are at today.”

Looking Ahead: “For the future we are hoping to continue our growth and expansion; while we have some of the family that are getting older, a lot of our

key staff are still pretty young. We currently have a couple of the next generation of the family working for us and I would like them to stay involved. We are also considering how to get a few of our long-term employees who are not relatives, but definitely are part of the family, more involved from both a management and ownership perspective.”

The Future of Family-Owned Team Businesses: “Those of us that have been successful over the years have been able to partner with our customers and vendors to offer better knowledge, knowhow and service than they can get elsewhere, but we have to continue to change and evolve to stay competitive with the larger corporate team dealers and retailers. The constant consolidation in this industry and the increase in direct sales by vendors are issues that concern me. We are trying to do everything we can to be great partners and offer value. I think that would be a prudent course of action for any family-owned and -operated team dealer going forward.”

RALEIGH, NC

JOHNSON-LAMBE COMPANY



The Johnson family continues to run the business at Johnson-Lambe.

Owners: Rhett Johnson, president; sons Cole Johnson and Grey Johnson. Rhett’s wife, Marci, is also involved in the business.

History: The company was founded in 1935 by Rochelle “Red” Johnson and his partner, Francis “Sheep” Lambe. “The Johnsons bought out the Lambes in the 1960s but kept the name,” says Rhett. “My father, Phil Johnson, took over until I took the reins in early 1990s. My brother, Josh, joined me a few years later and has recently retired. My two sons, Cole and Grey – the fouth generation – have been in the business for 10-plus years now and are currently building their leadership roles.”

Most Gratifying Aspects: “You are betting on yourself and your company every day, that’s what gets you out of bed early every morning. The people you work with are what keeps you moving forward, knowing they are counting on you and you are counting on them. The Johnson’s are the name in this company, but the

family are all of those that work with us. That has to be genuine or it doesn’t work.”

Challenges: “Letting the small things keep you from the big things. I learned that from Josh Baker (Bakers Sports), one of my closest friends and partner in The Alli Sports Group and Pro Gear Shoulder Pads. You wear a lot of hats in a family business and you need to find and trust others to take a share of that load in order to move forward. And you always need to be moving forward.”

Looking Ahead: “Great things ahead, one of my favorite sayings. But those details always remain in the family.”

The Future of Family-Owned Team Businesses: “There will always be room for family businesses, especially in industries that still rely on relationships with the customer. Each generation will have its own challenges, but that’s what creates each generation’s success.”

TEAM SPORTS

JOHNSTOWN, PA

SPORTSMAN'S



The plan at Sportsman's is to have a third generation own and manage the business, which was founded way back in 1948.

Owners: Greg Heider, president; Matt Heider, vice president
History: Sportsman's of Johnstown, PA, was founded by George Heider in 1948 after he returned from WWII. He transformed his mother's small hardware/candy and fishing supply store into one of the largest independent family-owned and family-operated team sports

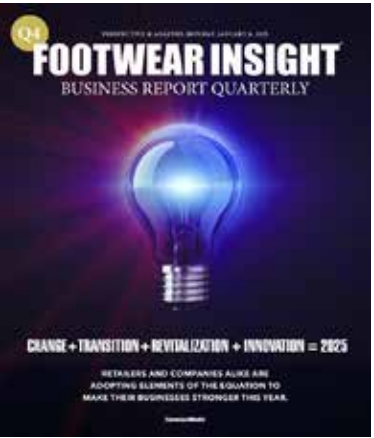
suppliers in the nation. His dedication to hard work, long hours, and being known for reliability, honesty and integrity has been key to the business' success for the past 77 years, and his knowledge of representing athletic team items of quality has not changed for three generations.
George's sons, Greg and Matt, have

continued their father's teaching of core values and have successfully moved the business forward with the addition of in-house football reconditioning and their own brand of team sports uniforms and equipment that bear the logo, 'TEAM 48' — that stands for the year Sportsman's was founded.
Most Gratifying Aspects: "Seeing our third generation producing for the companies and being able to make quick business decisions that affect all aspects of running a team business," says Greg Heider.
Challenges: "Tariffs! This is first and foremost this year. They have affected cost of goods as well as having a sound presence in the digital world."
Looking Ahead: "Our plan is to have our third generation own and manage the business after my brother, Matt, and I retire. But retirement at this time is not in our vocabulary. Regarding expansion plans, we are always soliciting new business as well as new markets with existing customers, such as inside gym equipment sales and installation. We have three siblings that can, and may, join our business at any time in their lives. Fortunately, they are all college graduates in business, marketing and accounting — we'll even have a lawyer in the family who is soon to graduate from law school."
The Future of Family-Owned Team Businesses: "Hard to say, except I always tell my nephews and sons to continue doing business the way we do it now and to provide the best service we have to our customers."

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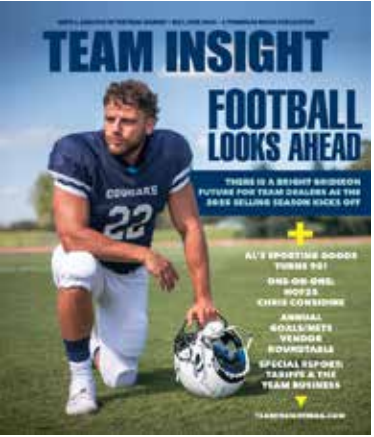
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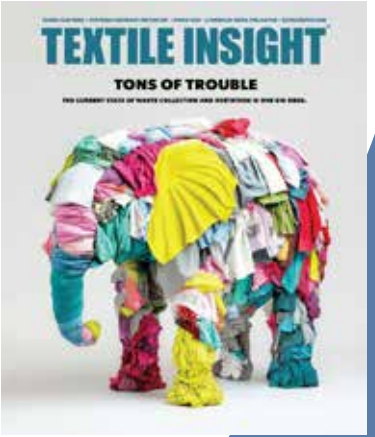
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