

A FORMULA4 MEDIA PUBLICATION • SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025

sportstyle[®]

INSIGHT + TRENDS

WINNING TIME

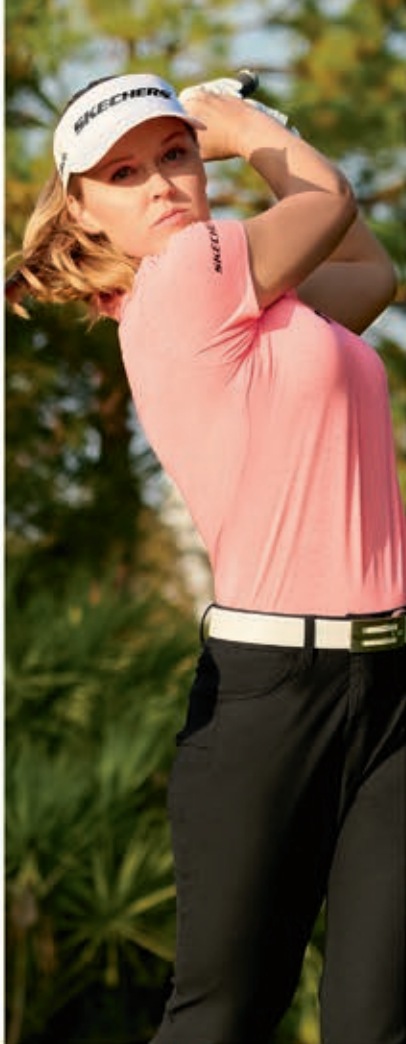
TEAM UNIFORMS
STYLE
STANDOUTS

TEAM SPOTLIGHT
SPECIALTY
SPORTS



RUN SAFETY GEAR
FEEL GOOD FOOTWEAR
SHOP TALK

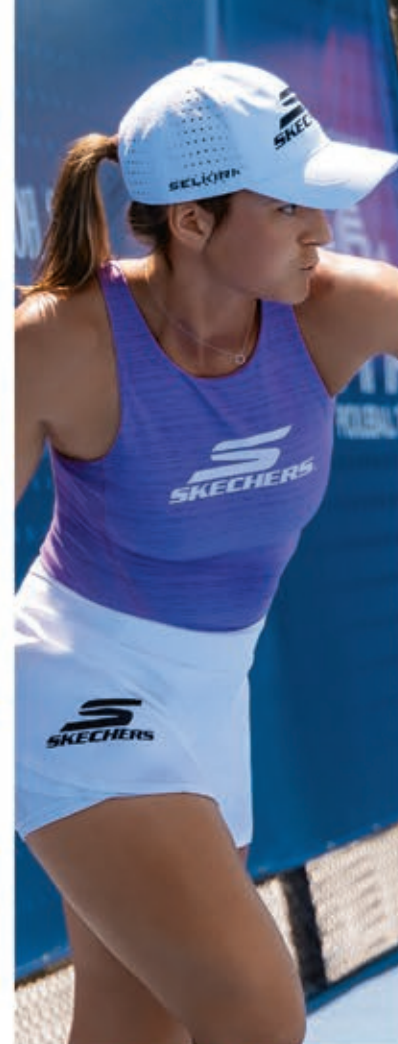
SPORTSTYLEMAG.COM



BROOKE
HENDERSON



JULIUS
RANDLE



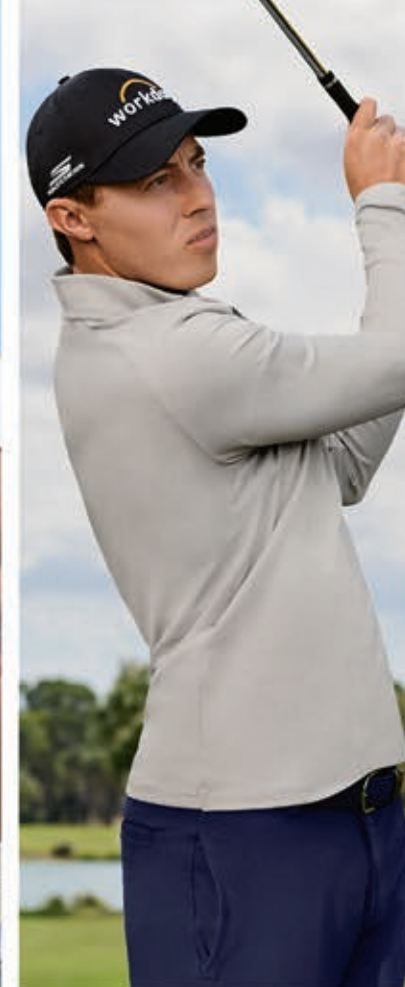
CATHERINE
PARENTEAU



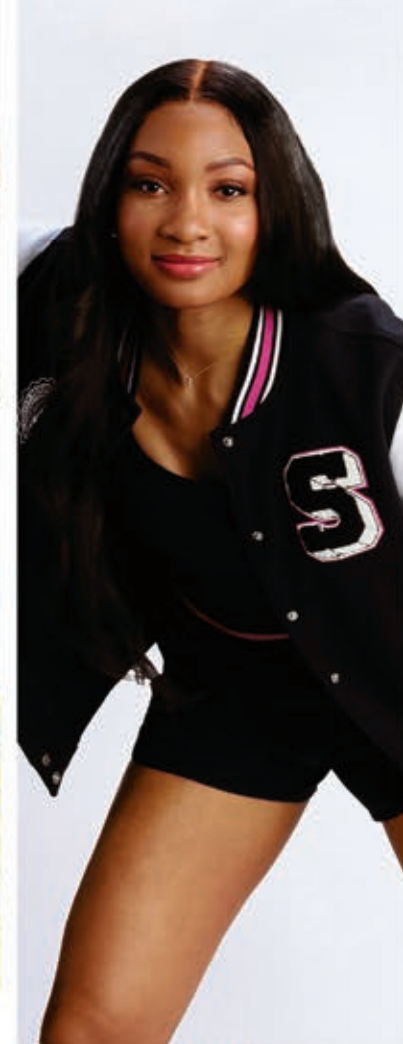
HARRY
KANE



RICKEY
JACKSON



MATT
FITZPATRICK



KIKI
IRIAFEN



JOEL
EMBIID

WE ALL WENT **HANDS FREE.**



SKECHERS
HANDS FREE
Slip-ins

SKECHERS.COM



NEWS & ANALYSIS

Around the Industry 6
Topo’s new HQ; Helly Hansen gets to work; Fox River is acquired; plus more.

FOOTWEAR

Comfort One’s Big Picture 10
Retailer bolster’s reach with recent acquisition of Happy Feet Plus.

Making Waves in Newport 14
New store Sprezzus joins Run Newport and Sole Desire in RI-based “family” of shops.

The Importance of Feeling Good 24
Wellness and recovery shoes promote comfort and encourage healthy habits.

RUNNING

Run Safety: Ready to Run 16
Protection from the elements keeps the run productive and comfortable.

TEAM SPORTS

Apart from the Crowd 30
The specialty sports remain key markets for team dealers headed into 2026.

Uniform Looks 38
New team sports styles that will help players look and feel good in the seasons ahead.

On the Cover: Momentec: Runners can race ahead with the Ladies Chromagear Track Jersey from Momentec. Chromagear helps create a custom look that will stand the test of time in just a few clicks. Team colors will stay vibrant wash after wash and wear after wear and custom elements like names and numbers will never crack or peel as they’re a part of the garment itself.

sportstyle®

Editorial Director
Cara Griffin

Art Director
Francis Klaess

Contributors
Suzanne Blecher
Michael Jacobsen
Judy Leand
Bob McGee
Emily Walzer

Publisher
Jeff Nott
jnott@formula4media.com
516-305-4711

Advertising
Senior Account Manager
Troy Leonard
352-207-2347
tleonard@formula4media.com

Digital
Erica DeSimone
edesimone@formula4media.com

Subscriptions
formula4media.com

Formula4Media®

Footwear Insight
runstyle
sportstyle
Team Insight
Textile Insight
PO Box 23-1318
Great Neck , NY 11023
www.formula4media.com

sportstyle® is published 6 times
each year: Jan/Feb; Mar/Apr;
May/Jun; Jul/Aug; Sep/Oct; Nov/Dec

sportstyle® is a registered trademark of
Formula4 Media, LLC. ©2025
All rights reserved. The opinions
expressed by authors and contributors
are not necessarily those of the editors or
publishers. sportstyle is not responsible
for unsolicited manuscripts, photographs
or artwork. Articles appearing may not be
reproduced in whole or in part without the
express permission of the publisher.



SUBSCRIBE
HERE!

www.sportstylemag.com



MERINO REIMAGINED
FOR THE MODERN ATHLETE.

WICKED COMFORT™ and MERINO WOOL combine to create a soft, sustainable powerhouse that delivers next-level coziness, breathability, and peak performance.



WITH **FREE SHIPPING** ON QUALIFYING ORDERS.
FILL OUT THE FORM TO LEARN MORE.



COMPANY NEWS

TOPO EXPANDS HQ; BRAND TOUTS 'MONUMENTAL' GROWTH



Tony Post cuts the ribbon on the new Topo Athletic HQ.

Massachusetts-based footwear brand Topo Athletic recently expanded its headquarters with a move to a new office space at 39 Grant St., Suite 300, in Framingham, MA. The company says the move reflects Topo’s “rapid growth and momentum following a landmark year for the brand, marked by record sales, new product launches, and increased industry recognition.”

“This expansion marks an exciting new chapter for Topo,” said Tony Post, founder and CEO of Topo Athletic. “Over the past couple years, we’ve seen excellent growth across all channels, and our new space will allow us to keep pace with that momentum and growth. Most importantly, it provides our team the resources and environment needed to serve our customers and grow the brand.”

The new headquarters is in the very same campus as the old one, now in a building that offers more room to grow.

Founded in 2013 by industry veteran Post, Topo was acquired in late 2022 by Designer Brands Inc. (DBI), whose portfolio also includes footwear brands Vince Camuto, Kelly & Katie, Jessica Simpson, Lucky Brand, Mix No. 6, Crown Vintage and others. ■

NEW LINE

HELLY HANSEN GETS TO WORK



The Norwegian brand Helly Hansen is getting serious about the work boot category in the U.S. The brand’s new Workwear footwear collection, developed specifically for the U.S. market, is available for Fall ’25.

Known for its performance offerings for the snow, sea and trail, Helly Hansen was acquired in June by NC-based Kontoor brands, which also owns the Lee and Wrangler brands. Helly Hansen’s new Workwear collection is launching with six new footwear styles, each tailored to a different line of trades and conditions with dialed-in technical details.

The highlight of the newline is a boot with BOA Fit tech — Helly Hansen’s Bifrost Winter Tall BOA HT EH (\$325) is designed to be a rugged, convenient, blizzard-ready boot that’s rated for use down to –40°F. The Bifrost is engineered for extreme cold and high-performance job sites. It has Solarcore Sc_Foam—a thin, soft and flexible insulation based on the NASA developed Aerogel that delivers enhanced thermal performance with less bulk, HELLY TECH waterproofing, 400g PrimaLoft Gold insulation, and a Dual BOA

fit system that dials in the fit. At 25.4-ounces, the Bifrost Winter Tall BOA is lightweight compared to others in its class. A non-BOA variation with Composite Toe Protection (\$250) is also available.

Other boots in the line launch include an outdoor-style influenced work boot with athletic comfort and work boot tech, the Oslo Hiker Mid (AL) HT EH (\$165/\$175).

Another highlight is the Barcode Low (AL) EH (\$120/\$130) with optional Aluminum toe. It is a low-profile, ultra-functional safety shoe with athletic-quality comfort, designed for indoor environments and precision trades like finishing carpentry.

“After years of development and dialing in the high-performance tech specific to each unique style, we are thrilled to see this first-of-its-kind collection come to the U.S. market,” says Gary Porter, director, workwear footwear, Helly Hansen. “The quality of materials and attention to safety detail that went into each and every one of these designs is a reflection of Helly Hansen’s professional-level standards and commitment to tradesmen and women across multiple fields.” ■

DESIGN

MANITOBAH REINVENTS ITS WINTER BOOTS THIS FALL



Indigenous-rooted brand Manitobah’s new Fall ’25 Two Rivers Collection introduces “Two Rivers Fit,” featuring distinct left and right footwear designed for enhanced stability and a modern fit.

The new line expands on Manitobah’s traditional fitting mukluks. For thousands of years, Indigenous footwear has been crafted without left and right lasts, and Manitobah has carried this tradition in its Heritage Fit mukluks and slippers, known for their soft and adaptable feel. With the introduction of the Two Rivers Collection and anatomical fit, the brand now expands its offerings to

include distinct left and right footwear while continuing to offer its Heritage Fit in classics like the best-selling Snowy Owl Boot, the Tipi Slippr, and the seasonal Artist Series launching later this fall.

Styles available in the Two Rivers Fit include the Hunter, Micro Mukluk, Dibé Mid, Ziibi Ankle, Bear and Little Bear Mukluks. The footwear is built on a new footbed with a grip pattern of deeper grooves and micro-textured pads, delivering traction on ice and snow while preserving the traditional artistry and underfoot softness the brand is known for. ■

NESTER ACQUIRES FOX RIVER



Farm to Feet parent Nester Hosiery

is acquiring the assets of Iowa-based sock manufacturer **Fox River Mills.**

Following the official completion of the transaction, Fox River Mills will begin to wind down its production operations in Osage, Iowa, and manufacturing assets will ultimately be relocated to Nester’s headquarters in Mount Airy, North Carolina.

Nester Hosiery says it plans to open a new product development and customer service center in Osage.

The company also intends to employ most of Fox River’s sales, marketing,

and design staff, as Nester Hosiery expands its brand and product portfolio. Nester Hosiery plans to integrate the Fox River, Pistil, and Anywear Essentials brands into its growing lineup of socks and accessories, which includes its own Farm to Feet brand and other private label and licensed offerings. ■

ASICS PARTNERS WITH NEURUN ON AI-POWERED RUN CONCIERGE



A SICS and Boston-based startup Neurun Inc., have launched Run Concierge, an AI-powered platform designed to assist runners, coaches, and spectators in optimizing their race readiness. The Run Concierge platform’s features, powered by Google Maps Platform and Google Cloud, include: **Interactive Course Previews:** Interactive, immersive course previews let runners visualize the route in detail—building familiarity, confidence, and mental readiness before race day. **Real-Time Weather Insights:** AI-generated responses adapt to each course’s weather—providing personalized answers to key race-day planning

questions, and connecting runners with relevant products and services. **Smart Search Capabilities:** Curated recommendations for hotels, dining, and local experiences help runners and spectators plan a smooth, memorable, and uniquely local race weekend. ASICS has previously made its mark in the digital space through acquisitions like the fitness app Runkeeper and the race registration platforms Race Roster and Njuko. Run Concierge will integrate into this ecosystem, further connecting the running community with advanced digital tools. Runners can benefit from immediate

access to all information about the event as well as assistance from a variety of different AI agents on topics like gear, fueling, recovery and more. For races, RunConcierge acts like a race director’s assistant, answering any questions runners have about an event, from route details to race start times. Brands and run specialty stores who partner with RunConcierge can get unique access to race participants and their supporters, acting as gear experts and local guides, connecting runners with resources personalized for their race. ■ **More information is available at runconcierge.ai.**

THE BUZZ



Diadora USA appointed **John Moloznik** as its new Director of Sales, where his role will include driving Diadora’s sales strategy and deepening relationships with key wholesale partners across the United States. Moloznik brings over a decade of experience in the sporting goods industry, most notably from his senior leadership roles at Fleet Feet, where he led strategic sales growth initiatives, executed successful omnichannel strategies, and spearheaded the opening of over 100 retail stores nationwide. **SCARPA North America** added Parallel 45 Sales Group as its sales agency representing the Great Lakes and Midwest territories, representing SCARPA as of July 1 in Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin. Beginning in January 2026, the agency will also represent the brand in Indiana, Michigan and Ohio. **Rossignol** is getting serious about the trail category with a new collection of trail-running shoes and apparel. And the brand is also investing in events, most recently signing on as title sponsor of the 2025 Birkie Trail Run, put on by The American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation (ABSF). The event is the second trail-running race for which Rossignol has signed on as title sponsor this summer season. **Garmin** acquired **MYLAPS**, a Dutch company that specializes in sports timing and race management systems. With operations in North America, Europe, Asia and Australia, MYLAPS supports brands and race management companies around the world with easy-to-use data-driven technology solutions for competitions.

ON OPENS LIGHTSPRAY FACILITY

Swiss brand On formally opened the first production facility for its innovative LightSpray technology in Zurich on July 2. On’s three co-founders, Caspar Coppetti, David Allemann, and Olivier Bernhard, unveiled the new LightSpray Factory, which features four robots. The facility will enable On – for the first time – to manufacture all the uppers for its performance running shoes directly in Switzerland using fully automated and industrially scalable processes and procedures. More production facilities are planned worldwide. LightSpray, first introduced by On last summer, is a technology for the manufacture of high-performance shoe uppers, which enables production by robots in a fully automated single-step process. While traditional shoe upper production involves some 200 steps and various locations (from the manufacture of the yarn to the final assembly), LightSpray uses a robot arm and 1.5 kilometers of filament to produce an ultra-light one-piece upper in just three minutes. The process saves both space and time, minimizes waste and produces an upper with 75% fewer carbon emissions than On’s other racing shoes. ■



COMFORT ONE'S BIG PICTURE



RECENT ACQUISITION
OF HAPPY FEET
PLUS BOLSTERS
RETAILER'S REACH.

By Bob McGee

Garrett Breton, 45, is a 'big picture' independent shoe executive who knows more than a thing or two about the industry. With over thirty years of experience, he has served as the president and owner of Comfort One Shoes for the past five years. He started working in the business with his dad, Maurice, in 1994 as a 14-year-old stock boy in a single 850-sq.-ft. store.

Breton oversees and strategizes for a retail portfolio of 20-plus stores that includes not only Comfort One's stores, based in VA, MD, and DC, but also Richmond, VA-based Saxon Shoes, acquired in late 2023, and Happy Feet Plus, a nine-location chain

based in So. Florida, whose acquisition was finalized on January 31. While 71-year-old Saxon is a large, 22,000 sq. ft. family footwear store; Happy Feet Plus is a chain with nine smaller doors that average 2,800 sq. ft. and cater to an older audience, tourists, and seasonal residents with a sharp focus on the orthopedic side. There are plans to make the Happy Feet Plus chain more focused on comfort footwear.

"Happy Feet Plus reached out to us, and from the beginning, they were organized, professional, and clear about their expectations. They knew what they wanted and had reasonable expectations for the valuation, which made for a very fast and smooth sales process," recalls Breton.

"What attracted us most to the chain

were several factors: the quality of their locations, the current mix of footwear (both what was selling and what was missing), and their strong sales team and support staff. Most importantly, there was a clear alignment in culture and core values. Their team was already trained to analyze feet and deliver a very high level of service, which fits seamlessly with our own 10-step selling process. Even more compelling was the culture they had built. Culture is the hardest thing to change, and theirs was already aligned with ours: they celebrated helping customers live more comfortable and healthy lives, they worked as a tight-knit team that consistently supported each other, and they showed resilience in adapting to customers' needs.

That combination made it clear to us that Happy Feet Plus wasn't just a good business fit — it was a cultural fit as well."

Comfort One, whose Washington, D.C. area stores are about 2,300-sq.-ft. in size, also operates two Birkenstock doors where more than half the SKU total and 50 percent of sales are from the German brand.

All buying is centralized with a main warehouse in Manassas; VA. Additionally, Happy Feet currently has its own warehouse in Florida. If there is to be additional store growth, most likely through acquisition, it will likely be focused on the Southeast U.S. where local governments are friendly to retailers in terms of taxes and regulations.

The expanding Comfort One business has maintained its concentration on growth, core values, and a family-focused management style via a leadership team of eight using EOS (Entrepreneurial Operating System). Breton's business partner and 28-year company veteran Shawn O'Neill spearheads day-to-day operations for a team of approximately 150 employees across all three banners.

Breton's ascension to Comfort One ownership began with a journey through

the ranks, starting as a sales associate, a decade-long transfer of ownership deal, and a startling beginning in early 2020 when the Covid pandemic struck. Stores had to be closed for two to six months, 95 percent of staff had to be jettisoned for a time, and a limited cash flow from the online segment had to be managed. It would take a year and a half for sales to rebound and reach the 2019 sales level again.

The ordeal taught Breton a valuable lesson. "Tough times made the team stronger," he reminisces. "It (Covid) brought everyone together. When the chips are down, you really know how people react and who you can count on...and we counted on each other. That sort of thing we can do, a resilient attitude permeates through this company."

A New Generation of Independent Retailers

When he broadens out his perspective on the entire independent retail shoe industry today, Breton addresses the trend of key regional retail chains like Comfort One and Beck's Shoes on the West Coast getting stronger and bigger, and an emerging trend of collaboration between retailers that perhaps wasn't as typical in the past.

"There is a shift in the younger generation where we are a little more collaborative

real competition."

Breton notes that the newer generation of independent retailers tend to be "a little more collaborative and open to sharing." He says, "We're all facing the same challenges, so sharing just makes us as a group stronger and faster. This is opposed to trying to be secretive and figure everything out on your own, which is a little bit harder path. There was a little bit of scarcity mentality, where if something's good for someone else, it's bad for me. I think that thinking has lessened as we've become more collaborative. It's like, 'Hey, you've got a good idea. I've got a good idea.'"

Handling Economic Uncertainty

Comfort One, like most, if not all, of its competitors, has faced economic impacts on its business that have included higher prices due to tariffs. But through late August, sales were up 30 percent despite largely higher prices on key athletic styles. The men's business, currently picking up momentum, is a key indicator of any economic shift, as men are often the first group to stop spending when the economy slows. People's growing desire to dress up for a concert, a festival, or a trip has fueled a resurgence in dressier styles. The trend is happening slowly, giving Comfort One more time to test looks and expand on opportunities when they emerge.

The tariff factor has not impacted the company's attention on high-touch service and product introductions. All three banners offer private label and direct-to-consumer segments, with the three sharing a unified website and integrated online and in-store sales channels.

"The biggest problem over the last year has been uncertainty," Breton reminds. "There's been so much change so quickly, like whiplash in one direction or another. We sat down and tried to plan everything



out to account for the tariffs, and then in a week, it was all worthless work."

"I don't want to be an ostrich, right? But there's stuff I can control, and there are some things that I just have no control over. So, we just double down on stuff we can control and effect change on, and keep moving," he adds.

For Comfort One, that work includes everything from always being nice to customers to introducing new products



Shawn O'Neill

The expanding Comfort One business has maintained its concentration on growth, core values, and a family-focused management style via a leadership team of eight. Shawn O'Neill spearheads day-to-day operations.

than the last generation," he says. "We grew up with the internet... If Beck's sells another pair of shoes in California, it's not going to hurt my online business. It's the 99 percent of the shoes that are sold on Zappos, Amazon, and standard websites, that's our



Garrett Breton

"Happy Feet Plus reached out to us, and from the beginning, they were organized, professional, and clear about their expectations. They knew what they wanted and had reasonable expectations."

to them that they might not be aware of yet. Even with its larger portfolio of stores, Comfort One's objective to flood its stores with exciting experiences remains, ones that keep customers returning for the nostalgic feel of a family shoe store. ■



 **PowerStep®**



**CUR
REX®**

PROVEN SELL-THROUGH, TRUSTED BY EXPERTS



FLAT SOCKS®



foot  *petals®*

 **FOUNDATION WELLNESS**
— FAMILY OF BRANDS —
foundationwellness.com

MAKING WAVES IN NEWPORT, RI

By Bob McGee

With the launch of Sprezzus, their third specialty retail business this past spring, partners Ben Barlow and Adam Stadel are making waves in Newport, RI, a seaside community rich in maritime and harbor traditions, some 70 miles southwest of Boston.



Business partners Ben Barlow, 35, and Adam Stadel, 40, inside their Run Newport store.

The business duo celebrated the 10th anniversary of their Run Newport specialty store in 2025, recently opened Sprezzus next door in an 800-sq.-ft. space, and also operate the independent shoe store Sole Desire in Newport. The new banner, Sprezzus, Stadel contends, is the only independent, sustainable store in the U.S. focused on footwear and apparel.

“We are aiming to take an authentic

approach to the sustainability category and working hard with key partners to present their products in the manner that they want,” says Stadel. “It’s something we believe in strongly,” he adds while also admitting that it has been a “big learning experience” for him, Ben, and their staff.

The product mix in Sprezzus, a variation of the Italian word “sprezzatura,” which means maintaining a nonchalant demeanor while performing complex tasks, is a blend of performance and lifestyle products, much like Run Newport. One example of a sustainable lifestyle product is Re-Run Hats, where a Montreal manufacturer turns returned and defective hats into one-of-a-kind headwear.

“OUR APPROACH HAS BEEN TO STAY SERVICE-FOCUSED, CUSTOMER-DRIVEN, AND AUTHENTICALLY COMMUNITY-OBSESSED.”

Seven brands – Asics, Brooks, Hoka, On, UGG, UYN, and Veja – dominate the footwear assortment at Sprezzus, which also includes a namesake brand for apparel, along with items such as Ciele hats and apparel, and an ALWRLD biodegradable men’s vest at \$185 retail. Other brands include Oka, Save the Duck apparel, Seaav and more.

While Barlow and Stadel are excited about the prospects for their new retail venture, they buy for all three of their retail ops, including not only Sprezzus and Run Newport, but also Sole Desire, the 41-year-old independent shoe store founded by the Barlow family. On its Instagram account bio, Sprezzus is described as “the lovechild of Run Newport and Sole Desire.”

Sprezzus and Run Newport are located beside each other in Newport, with Sole Desire a short 30 seconds away. Barlow and Stadel also have a Sole Desire x Run Newport storefront in Providence, RI.

What’s Happening at Run Specialty

At the run specialty shop Run Newport, Stadel says they continue to see brand momentum from the likes of On and Hoka,



Run Newport celebrated its 10th anniversary this year. The owners recently opened up a new shop next door called Sprezzus.

which remain focused on “continuous long-term organic growth” with the retailer. Run Newport is also seeing growing demand for Kane recovery footwear.

“And Mizuno has seen a re-emergence of great products with the Neo Zen and Zen Vista, which has a great fit and feel,” comments Stadel, adding, “We have been late compared to others with Asics’ growth nationally, so we are excited to see where that brand takes us.”

Run Newport has experienced minimal price resistance from customers, many of whom are tourists in the summer months. The retailer also hasn’t had to escalate or reduce orders, or dramatically raise any prices due to potential tariff impacts.

“Overall, the running industry does seem to have a bit of a buffer from broader economic swings,” proclaims Stadel. “When people are stressed, running, walking and being outdoors tends to be one of the things that they lean into, not away from... Our approach has been to stay service-focused, customer-driven, and authentically community-obsessed.”

The Burning Issues

Stadel is resolute when asked if he and Ben had a “burning issue” that can keep them up at night as retailers.

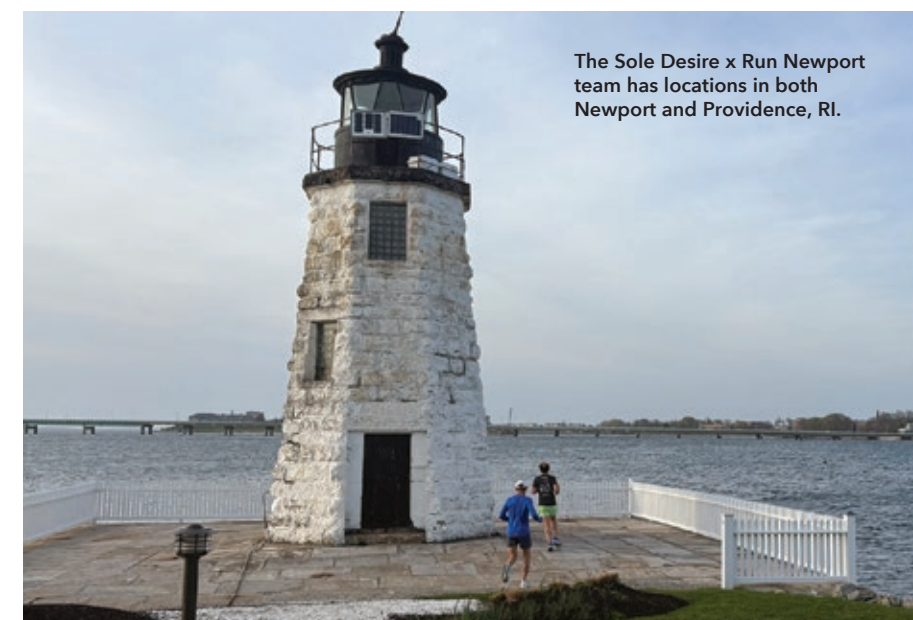
“We’re afraid that the retail industry has dehumanized the customer due to over

quantification, sales driven on price, average price per customer, and unnecessary add-ons. This approach, if not done perfectly, could scare customers away from the industry. We believe the modern customer wants to be guided, not told...

“On a micro level, our burning issue continues to be to always make sure we’re delivering a great experience every day—especially now. It’s easy to get caught up in inventory, vendor meetings, and logistics, but at the end of the day, it’s about that person

walking into our store feeling seen and supported. This includes keeping our team energized, heard, and empowered.

“Our goal is to make sure our staff feels appreciated and equipped to keep doing what they do best, have fun, and keep that local, authentic feel. As an independent, we know that we must keep pushing and keep being grateful for being in such a great industry with great customers, every customer is a gift, and we will keep pushing for them. We are up for the challenge.” ■





In warmer climates, the Brooks Run Visible Short Sleeve and Short Tight offer sweat-wicking and breathable comfort. These lightweight pieces minimize chafing in humid conditions.

RUN SAFETY READY TO RUN

PROTECTION FROM THE ELEMENTS-DARKNESS, RAIN, SUN & WIND-KEEPS THE RUN PRODUCTIVE AND COMFORTABLE. BY SUZANNE BLECHER

“Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night” may be a saying associated with the United States Postal Service, but it also holds true with those dedicated to the run. When the elements are iffy, it doesn’t mean having to give up on going outside. Innovation in sun protection, visibility and temperature regulation plays a role in keeping runners confident and safe. When we asked brand execs what the most important run safety features are to their customers, many replied that visibility is extremely vital. With that in mind, we asked:

How are you designing for and marketing products with visibility features?

“Runners don’t want to sacrifice performance when shopping for high-vis gear. A reflective jacket that doesn’t function on the run will eventually be taken off and rendered useless. The Brooks Run Visible Collection includes specific color usage and powerful retro-reflectivity. Not all runners live in colder climates and being visible isn’t just a winter need – that’s why we offer a robust collection of warm weather and cold weather Run Visible clothing.”

– **Mike Orton, senior apparel product line manager, Brooks**

“All of our branding tags on our hats include reflective safety elements on the side and back of the hat. When it comes to standing out, our iridescent collection has set the bar in reflective style. Also, for safety, a secret inside pocket comes standard in all of our running hats and can be used to store an Apple Air Tag.”

– **Matt Izzo, Founder, Alter Ego Running**

“As part of our ‘Be Seen. Be Safe.’ initiative, we design reflective vests, clip-on strobe lights, and reflective vests and bands that work together to make runners visible from every angle. We’re

seeing more people adopt this gear not just in low light, but in fog, rain, and even sunny conditions when shadows or backlighting can reduce visibility. The new Siren LED Safety Alarm is ideal for runners who want peace of mind when training early, late or in more remote areas and it is rechargeable.”

– **Jennifer Rust, senior product line manager, Nathan Sports**

“Customers want bright, high-luminosity durable lighted gear and boosted reflectivity. Every year our design and engineering team continues to push the envelope with brighter, better and longer-running lighted solutions that are lightweight, durable, breathable, weather-resistant, versatile and offer the best quality at value driven price-points – things we’ve found that customers expect to find in specialty stores.”

– **Keith Willows, co-founder, Amphipod**

“Our customers are looking for high quality products that complement their lifestyle and solve everyday problems. From our focus on rechargeability for our LED visibility and safety products to having 100% waterproof product

to protect your devices while out on the trail, we always strive to keep our customers seen, safe and ready for their run.”

– **Brenda Isaac, VP of marketing, Nite Ize**

“Run safety is built into everything we do at SPIbelt—we’re always evolving based on what real runners need in real-world conditions. We’ve got reflective SPIbelts with high-visibility accents for those early morning or evening runs, weather-resistant materials to keep your stuff dry from sweat or rain, and a custom, no-bounce fit that stays put.”

– **Kristi Torres, marketing project manager, SPIbelt**

“A big part of our design process for safety is around visibility. Reflective fabrics, additional reflective threads in our webbing, and bright colors all help us meet this need. Because we are also designing for dogs, we think a lot about their comfort and making sure we support their natural, smooth movement while giving control and communication through our leashes and harnesses.”

– **Angela Hook, partner, Stunt Puppy**



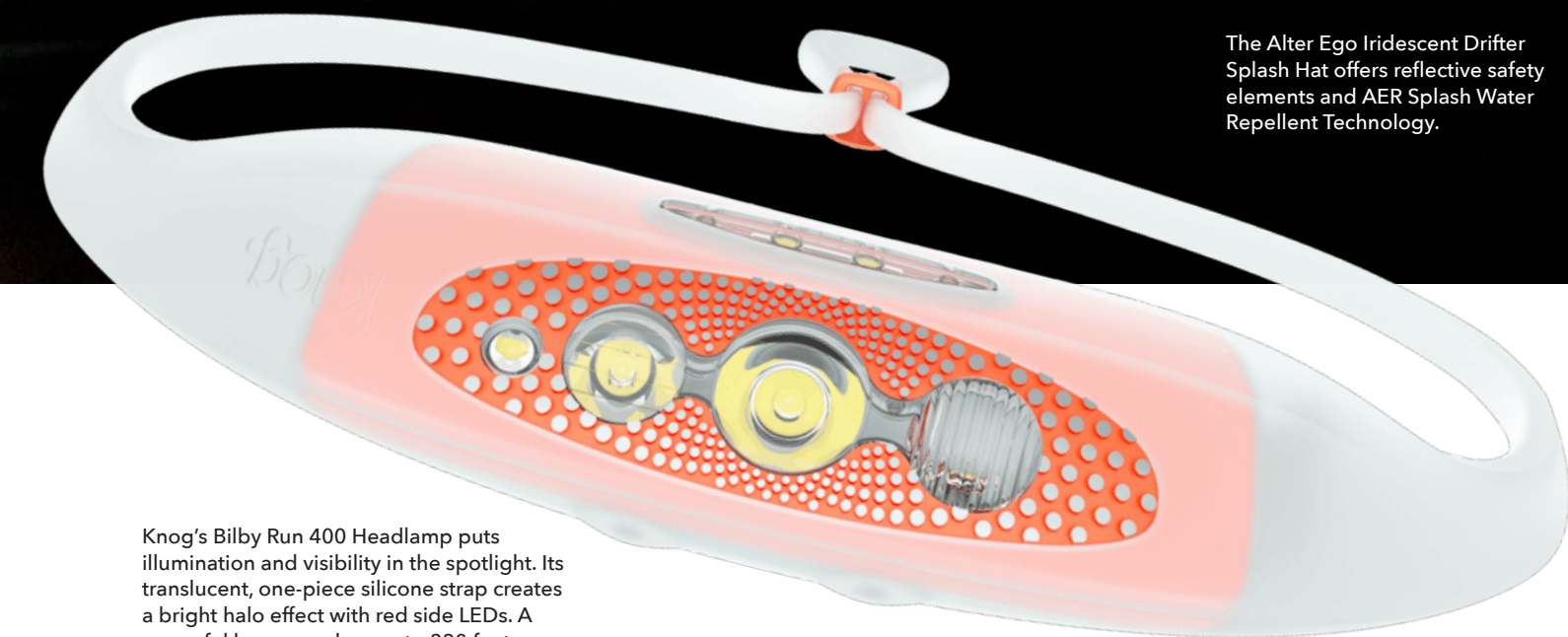
Amphipod's newly engineered USB-C Rechargeable reflective and lighted gear collection boosts visibility and safety. The series includes durable and powerful multi-mode rechargeable lights, and 8-mode power-boosted flashing and reflective rechargeable vests.

Suunto Wing Bone Conduction Headphones feature an open-ear design for comfort and safety when running, along with LED lights for better visibility and a head movement control to free hands from fidgeting.





The Alter Ego Iridescent Drifter Splash Hat offers reflective safety elements and AER Splash Water Repellent Technology.



Knog's Bilby Run 400 Headlamp puts illumination and visibility in the spotlight. Its translucent, one-piece silicone strap creates a bright halo effect with red side LEDs. A powerful beam reaches up to 330 feet.



CADENCE
insoles

Support Made Comfortable

Offering a variety of options with a unique blend of contoured support and enhanced shock-absorbing comfort.



Now available in prints, the Stunt Puppy Stunt Runner allows for running with your dog in sync and hands free.



This rechargeable, portable light can be strapped around bike bars, bag straps and more. Nite Ize GoLit features Disc-O Tech technology with choose-your-color and color-changing modes.

The Reflective SPIbelt is a running belt with a reflective pocket and logo on the elastic waist band that increases visibility in dusk and dark conditions.



The Nathan Sports Siren LED Safety Alarm (130dB) is a compact hook and clip-on offering an emergency alarm (130dB) with a built-in LED strobe lighting.

Air In. Air Out. Go Beyond.

Polartec® AirCore™.



The Fabric That Breathes With You.



WELLNESS & RECOVERY

THE IMPORTANCE OF FEELING GOOD

WELLNESS AND RECOVERY SHOES PROMOTE COMFORT, INSTILL CONFIDENCE AND ENCOURAGE HEALTHY HABITS.

Consumers want feel-good footwear, in every pair they wear, regardless of the category. As wellness and recovery offerings have broadened to sneakers, clogs, slides and more; options have become more refined and less orthotic in appearance. “People want these wellness features without the clinical look. Clean lines, fashionable colors/textures and silhouettes that can go from casual to dressy,” explains Mike Walker, VP of marketing at Taos. “Much like sneakers replaced dress shoes for everyday comfort, consumers are now looking for footwear that blends performance benefits with versatile style they can wear anywhere,” adds Darren Brown, head of marketing for OOFOS. With that, we asked brand execs: **What are the most important features in recovery and wellness footwear?**

ARCOPEDICO/ARCO

For Spring 2026, Simco Imported Shoes introduces ARCO, an ergonomic walking shoe which features a Dynamic Boost Formula to propel every step forward, and provides a supportive sole with patented Dual Arch Support. The sole itself features three densities of EVA, for a soft and flexible foundation. The knit uppers mold to the shape of the foot. *MSRP \$159.*

“A good piece of recovery footwear should be easy: easy to put on, easy to take off, easy to relax in. You know what it’s going to provide, and that’s the feeling of being nurtured, either before or after physical effort. It’s paramount for recovery footwear to be made of the most premium materials possible.”

Nick Martire, CEO, Norda

“Wellness is as much about getting outside as it is about recovery. The right footwear should support that—cushioning that helps you recharge, slip-on simplicity, and durability that works in the garden, at the park, or chasing kids around.”

Megan Vinton, senior director of product, BOGS

“There are features important to proper footwear – shock absorption, supportive footbeds, materials, breathability – regardless of what new category is created to define it. These features connect to core needs (rest, confidence, healing) and help build a product that doesn’t just look nice, but supports and improves how a person feels.”

Mike Walker, VP of marketing, Taos

“Footwear should feature soft and cushioned footbeds that provide ergonomic support, relieving aches and pains on the plantar surface. The uppers should be soft enough to allow for proper circulation and not pinch sensitive spots on the top of the foot.”

Sydney Simas, VP, Simco Imported Shoes

“All of our shoes have three key features: a roomy toe box, secure midfoot and heel, and low heel to toe drop. These features, The Topo Difference, allow individuals to move naturally and comfortably.”

Russ Stevens, product director, Topo Athletic

“Xelero, being a motion control stability shoe, provides supportive recovery that helps reduce the risk of overuse injuries that allow the feet, ankles, knees, and hips to rest in a more neutral, supported position. Wearing a pair of the shoes triggers the body to start the recovery process.”

Michael Arce, national sales manager, Xelero



MOSHNI/LEAP

The versatile, machine-washable Leap is available in 13 colorways, enough to match any endeavor. Its polyurethane cushioning lasts 3–5x longer than traditional foams, while Dynamic Motion Technology brings enhanced toe spring that naturally moves you forward. A contoured TruComfort Footbed with extended arch support and deep heel cup for improved alignment. *MSRP \$170.*

“It is all about giving your feet the support they need to recover after rigorous activity. Many features that define recovery footwear are ones Alegria has infused into our brand from the beginning: enhanced cushioning, arch and heel support, rocker and ergonomic soles, and lightweight, easy-to-wear designs.”

Emily Pierdinock-Hagen, designer, Alegria

“A thoughtfully engineered footbed provides structure, allowing the foot to relax instead of constantly working to find balance. The shoe should slip on effortlessly and feel like you’re sliding into it, not just standing on top of it (it feels like a cocoon for your feet).”

Jeremy Nelson, CEO, ROLL Recovery

“Built on our proprietary biomechanical platform, each Revitalign style is crafted to keep your body properly aligned. Our Full Contact Comfort Footbed has a deep 360° heel cup, anatomically contoured medial/lateral arches and a patented metatarsal pad.”

Jeff Antonioli, CEO, Waco Shoe Company

“Comfort is our entire design brief. Also, function meets fashion – people want shoes that look sharp enough for everyday wear, not just post-workout. Energizing outsoles, machine contoured footbeds, and machine washable styles with antimicrobial linings keep feet supported and healthy all day.”

Victoria Feldman, marketing director, Latitudes

“The key features for recovery footwear are in three key areas: soft heel cushion with underfoot comfort, proper arch support, and forefoot flex to allow the metatarsals to stretch and relax with each step. The last piece is all of the above on a stable and supportive outsole. Our Tri-Motion technology uses multiple densities of foam, really looking at what the foot needs at each stage of the foot strike motion.”

Tim Bartels, CEO, Velous

“Consumers expect more than just soft or cushioned footwear. Every style we offer is powered by OOfoam, a technology scientifically proven to absorb 37% more impact than traditional performance foams. By reducing stress on joints and distributing pressure more evenly, OOFOS helps people feel better.”

Darren Brown, head of marketing, OOFOS

WELLNESS & RECOVERY

ALL IS WELL

ARE RECOVERY AND WELLNESS ONE IN THE SAME?

In a saturated marketplace, comes confusion. Should this category encompass recovery, wellness or healthy footwear?

“There has definitely been a surge in this category, with more brands entering the space – we’re seeing wellness and recovery increasingly overlap as consumers look for footwear that combines technical support with versatile, everyday style,” notes Alegria Designer Emily Pierdinock-Hagen. With the increase in awareness, the exec sees added opportunity and potential.

Consumers are understanding the link between good footwear and caring for the body as a whole, plus are expecting more – cushioning, arch support, impact absorption and fashion – from the shoes that they buy. “We see more customers who are very

conscious of the shoes they are wearing, and how the shoes might improve their comfort and health, not just for their run, hike or walk, but in their daily life,” explains Russ Stevens, product director at Topo Athletic. Waco Shoe Company CEO Jeff Antonioli adds that “wellness isn’t just a trend—it’s a holistic pursuit that encompasses recovery. While recovery focuses on rest and repair, wellness supports overall well-being through alignment and movement, whether from sports or everyday life.”

Velous CEO, Tim Bartels, is witnessing a lot of crossover, but sees recovery as the front runner. “Consumers are connecting and understanding the features and benefits of recovery footwear like a soft, stable heel for cushion and comfort; arch support take pressure off of your legs and knees; and

great forefoot flex,” commented the exec. While there are specialized recovery shoes for athletes which are designed specifically for that certain purpose, Simco Imported Shoes VP Sydney Simas believes “90% of the population is not buying these styles because they’re an athlete, rather they’re buying shoes because they just feel good.”

When it comes down to the moment of try-on; purchasing shoes solely based on softness can be the wrong move. Xelero National Sales Manager, Michael Arce, warns of this phenomenon, calling it “sensory manipulation.” While soft footwear feels good initially, “long-term soft only exacerbates issues like inflammation, joint pain and Plantar Fasciitis. The softer the shoe, the harder the landing.”

— Suzanne Blecher

SOULFUL SNEAKERS

PRACTICE SELF-CARE BY INVESTING IN A SUPPORTIVE EVERYDAY SHOE.



VELOUS/VERNONIA

Fit for a Fall launch, this slip-on promotes all-day recovery. The style incorporates Tri-Motion technology for comfort, along with features like a soft stable heel, amazing arch, roomy toe box and forefoot flex. Its VELOUS Rethink construction includes bio-based foams and recycled material throughout the soft, stretchy and easy-on upper. *MSRP \$134.95.*



ALEGRIA/REAH

This sporty slip-on presents a juxtaposition between vintage design and modern comfort. Retro Reah is crafted with a leather upper and lining, along with interior elastic bands and a padded heel with counter loop for easy on/off. A removable microsuede footbed and Signature Arch One support bring soft, yet structured, cushioning. *MSRP \$140.*



OOFOS/OOmg+ CLUB

Combining comfort with classic styling thanks to a versatile and lightweight design, with features like a stretch collar, premium leather and no-tie laces. The sneaker combines OOfoam technology with a patented footbed design to absorb more impact than traditional footwear. *MSRP \$140.*

VELOUS FOOTWEAR

RUN. RECOVER. REPEAT.®



Vernonia \$134.95

RECOVERY REDEFINED.



Velous ReThink Construction
Made from Bio-based foam and recycled materials

WELLNESS & RECOVERY



SKECHERS/GO WALK 8 NADIA

Skechers Slip-Ins: GO WALK 8 - Nadia offers No Tie Fit laces that always stay secured. Designed with a Heel Pillow, this sporty vegan slip-on features a Skechers Air-Cooled Goga Mat breathable insole with high rebound cushioning, along with high-rebound Ultra Pillars combined with Comfort Pillar Technology for added support. *MSRP \$95.*

TOPO ATHLETIC/PHANTOM 4 WP

Phantom 4 WP is the brand's first waterproof road shoe, adding eVent stormST technology to keep feet dry and comfortable. The generous cushioning combines with a roomy toe box, while the ZipFoam midsole offers soft response. *MSRP \$165.*



ELECTRIC SLIDES

FINALLY! FLATS, SANDALS, CLOGS AND SLIDES TO BOOST YOUR MOOD.



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.

1. ROLL RECOVERY/SUPERPLUSH SOLACE

Like the name implies, this collection combines soft, luxurious natural materials with advanced recovery technology for a premium experience. A proprietary Cradle Design delivers comfort, plus stability and support. A SUPERPLUSH footbed is crafted with algae-based BLOOM foam for a sustainability message. Available in adjustable flip flop and slide styles. *MSRP \$110.*

2. NORDA/008

The 008 has a dual-density foam construction, with a denser foam on the footbed and midsole for enhanced arch support, while the foot strap has softer foam for comfort and fit. A custom Vibram ECOSTEP soleplate, made of recycled materials, offers traction and longevity (as many recovery slides have an exposed foam bottom that can wear down quickly). 008 comes with a packable tote bag and in four colorways. *MSRP \$145.*

3. TAOS/BABBLE

Fit for the office or everyday errand-running, Babble is a buttery-soft ballet flat with an added Mary Jane leather strap to keep the shoe stylish and secure. A Curves & Pods premium removable footbed provides balance, stability and amazing arch support. The rubber outsole is both flexible and durable. Babble is orthotic-friendly. *MSRP \$165.*

4. BOGS/BOGA

Spring 2026 brings new marbled colorways of the Boga slip on. Inspired by Bogs boots; Boga is offered in a lightweight, breathable and ultra-comfortable unisex slip on with water-friendly construction. A seamless bio-based EVA upper offers a lightweight and comfortable fit. A lock-in-place foam heel strap keeps the strap in place while not in use. *MSRP \$80 (adults), \$50 (kids).*

5. REVITALIGN/FUSION STRIVE

This performance-driven slide is designed for both active wellness endeavors and recovery. Fusion Strive combines superior cushioning with biomechanical support—ideal for post-workout recovery or long days on your feet. A Revitalign Full Contact Comfort Footbed features a metatarsal dome, deep heel cup, forefoot cushioning, and anatomically designed arch support. *MSRP: \$49.99.*

6. XELERO/SOFIA

Designed to provide a balance of support and cushioning, Sofia features Xelero's motion control technology keeps the foot in alignment and makes walking easier. A supple ergonomic footbed, slip-resistant outsole, and three adjustable straps provide a custom fit. *MSRP \$159.99.*

R
riecker

made by
riecker



W4101-41
Melton, Unisex
• Breathable

NEW MELTON



W4101-60



W4101-41



W4101-52



W4101-00

GO FOR IT!

APART FROM THE CROWD

THE SPECIALTY SPORTS REMAIN KEY MARKETS FOR TEAM DEALERS HEADED INTO 2026.

BY JUDY LEAND



Photo: Wikimedia Commons/Army Athletic Communications

There's no question that football, basketball and baseball/softball are the mainstay sports for team dealers. They consistently bring in the big bucks and can be counted on for solid sales and reliable orders. However, the "specialty sports" such as track and field, volleyball, wrestling, lacrosse, rugby and now even pickleball are also vital to dealers' financial success. Oftentimes, the seasons for these

specialty sports extend far beyond middle school and high school competitive calendars, giving dealers an opportunity to incorporate them into everyday business.

It is especially important to service specialty sports in this current and uncertain economic climate — much like diversifying an investment portfolio. Underscoring that point, in his executive summary in the 2025 SFIA First Half Game Plan, Alex Kerman, senior director and head of research at SFIA, posits: "Cost continues

to be the most cited obstacle for team sports, with 41 percent of parents expressing concern. With potential tariff increasers on the horizon and ongoing tariff uncertainty, affordability may become an even greater challenge, particularly for youth sports programs."

The report also states that Team Sports, which had the second-highest YOY growth in 2024 at more than eight percent, are currently projected to remain flat or decline slightly, with early estimates showing a -0.4

percent change.

"With new tariff rates announced, but specific details not confirmed, budgeting has become a guessing game — one that is clearly influencing consumer purchasing decisions," Kerman adds. Not to mention school budgets, vendors' approach to product pricing and delivery, and team dealers' business strategies.

Here, we take a look at the rewards and challenges that team dealers face when servicing specialty sports in today's dynamic marketplace.

LACROSSE: STICKING AROUND

Small but mighty is an apt description of lacrosse, which originated in the 12th century among various Native American communities in Canada and the eastern U.S. The game served several crucial functions beyond sport, including training for war, settling disputes and providing spiritual healing and connection to ancestors. Games were seen as major events, could feature between 100 and 100,000 participants at any one time, would last for several days and covered miles of open terrain. Today, lacrosse retains its rich heritage while continuing its global expansion — on a much smaller field, of course.

TEAM SPORTS

It is lacrosse’s spiritual element that helps make the sport so appealing to **Dan Sullivan**, owner of **Lacrosse Loft** in Wilmington, MA, which celebrated its 10th anniversary in February. “Lacrosse is the best sport in the world — it’s a soul-driven type of game. It’s about character, fair play and hard work,” he says. “I love dealing with the women’s game and it’s growing faster than the men’s.”

On the sales side, most of Lacrosse Loft’s business comes from hardgoods such as heads, shafts, pads and goalie equipment. Sullivan also has a worldwide customer base for custom stringing. For uniforms, he is partial to Adrenaline Lacrosse, “because they deliver on time and on budget.

“We have lots of private schools in the area and we provide custom gloves and shafts as well as uniform programs,” Sullivan says. “There’s an even split between the men’s and women’s business both in field lacrosse and box lacrosse, but the equipment demands are different. In box lacrosse, more equipment, such as rib pads, are needed because it’s a much more physical game than field lacrosse.”

At **Sports Paradise** in Medford, NJ, owner **Scott Treibe** is seeing the fastest growth in volleyball, “but the sheer volume of lacrosse players [in the area] is big.” Schools are responsible for the lion’s share of his lacrosse sales, but travel teams also figure into the equation. “We have the most demand for uniforms, all sublimation. The ratio of men’s to women’s business is pretty even overall and both are very strong,” Treiber says. “School budgets are getting cut a lot, but hopefully booster clubs will fill the gap.”

Founded in 1990, Lacrosse Unlimited, which bills itself as “The World’s Largest Lacrosse Retailer,” operates 55 locations across 15 states. In April it acquired Throne Lacrosse and Throne of String which specialize in mesh technology, custom stringing and product design. That same month, Lacrosse Unlimited partnered with Kane Footwear to present the Kane Rize, a premier girls’ lacrosse showcase event that is slated to take place in October.

At **Lacrosse Unlimited’s** Franklin, MA, location, sales staffer **Brian Antonio** says the clientele is evenly split between male and female and they’re both mostly looking for

sticks and cleats. “Prices have gone up due to tariffs, but that hasn’t really affected the business,” he observes. “Players ages 10-to-18 are our bread-and-butter customers and there’s a big demand for custom stringing. I’d say the sport in general is growing — more kids are trying it and liking it.”

LACROSSE BY THE NUMBERS

Of the 10 Most Popular Girls Programs in the 2024-25 school year, Lacrosse placed tenth with 99,292 participants. (Source: NFHS) In the 2024-25 school year, 212,988 high schoolers played lacrosse: 113,696 boys and 99,292 girls.¹

In 2024, total Lacrosse sales were \$102.1 million, an uptick of five percent from 2023. Sticks accounted for \$443.8 million, Protective came in at \$42.4 million, and Other/Accessories added up to \$16.9 million.²

Lacrosse participation continues to nudge upward, growing 4.3 percent in the 12 months to June 2025. In 2024, total participation was 1.9 million in 2024, with 1.1 million players being male and 792,000 being female.²

VOLLEYBALL: A WINNING SET-UP

Volleyball is a gift that keeps giving year-round for team dealers, thanks to schools, leagues, travel teams and clubs. The sport offers indoor and outdoor versatility and is supported by a strong base of clubs and regional organizations. In addition to school events, there is a multitude of tournaments held throughout the country that offer strong competition for a broad range of ages and skill levels. In fact, in some locales, tournaments have gone from utilizing local high school gyms to taking over convention centers with 100-plus courts.

The recent formation of women’s pro volleyball leagues such as League One Volleyball (LOVB) and the merging this past August of the Pro Volleyball Federation and Major League Volleyball into a unified league branded as MLV, are helping to fuel the game’s growth, as is the increasing popularity of both men’s and women’s college volleyball.



In June 2025 LOVB launched its pro league and in July announced Skims (co-founded in 2019 by Kim Kardashian and Jes Grede) as its official loungewear, intimates and sleepwear partner, thus underscoring the sport’s marketability and growing cultural impact.

“Volleyball is always strong for me. High school freshman, junior varsity and varsity girls play in the fall and the boys play in the spring. Also, schools around here have after-school programs,” says **Betsy Frye**, owner of **Holyoke Sporting Goods** in Holyoke, MA. “We sell a lot of knee pads, balls, nets and uniforms and schools are buying more accessories than they used to, especially knee pads. Tariffs are not a problem at all.”

Likewise, **Dan Proulx**, buyer at **Stateline**

Sports in West Lebanon, NH, is happy with the category. “Volleyball has been decent for us and the numbers are steady,” he says. “Lots of girls are going out for volleyball – mostly high school – but there are also some middle school programs. They’re mostly buying equipment.”

At Green Bay, WI-based **Home Team Sports & Apparel**, volleyball has been steady but growth has been flat. “We service schools – primarily grades five-to-12 – leagues, youth groups and travel teams. The teams are mostly female — there are not many guys’ teams in our area,” says **Todd Gutzman**, president and CEO.

He continues, “Sales trends are all over the place. High schools are trying to get uniforms to last for four to five years, so there’s not a ton

of business there, but we do very well selling volleyballs. Vendors offer entire systems for equipment and balls are a regular purchase every year. There are a lot of good volleyball companies and a good variety to choose from. We stay away from footwear.”

Gutzman adds, “Volleyball is a relatively inexpensive sport so we mostly handle steady, repeat business. It also helps that the state of Wisconsin has a very good volleyball team – and is part of the Big Ten Conference – and there’s lots of good volleyball on TV.

VOLLEYBALL BY THE NUMBERS

Total participation for Volleyball (Court) increased by 6.7 percent from 2023 to 2024.²

In 2024, the age bracket with the largest participation in Volleyball (Grass) was the 25-to-35 set, followed by ages 18-to-24.²

In 2024, sales of volleyball uniforms totaled \$92.3 million, a jump of 33.9 percent from 2019. Sales of team volleyball shoes stood at \$33.4 million. Total volleyball category sales were \$108.5 million, up 6.4 percent from 2023.²

In 2024, Volleyball (Court) participants totaled 7.36 million. Females comprised 4.98 million and males 2.38 million.²

Of the 10 Most Popular Girls’ Programs in the 2024-25 school year, Volleyball placed second with 492,799 participants, trailing only Outdoor Track and Field.¹

Sources 1. NFHS 2. SFA • Photo: Wikimedia Commons/Army Athletic Communications

Sources 1. NFHS 2. SFA • Photo: Wikimedia Commons/Rajna Grace

TEAM SPORTS

PICKLEBALL: YOUR SERVE

First the good news: For the fourth consecutive year, pickleball remained the fastest-growing sport in the nation in 2024, jumping 45.8 percent from 2023 and soaring an incredible 311 percent from three years ago, according to SFIA’s 2025 Pickleball Single Sport report. Moreover, the 2025 SFIA First Half Game Plan, the organization’s first annual mid-year report, states that among 30 sports with updated participation data, pickleball remains the fastest-growing, with a 14.7 percent increase in participation.

“One sport that continues to defy gravity: Pickleball,” notes SFIA’s Kerman. “It remains the fastest-growing activity in our dataset, capturing the imagination of players across generations.”

Pickleball organizations, notably the Association of Pickleball Players (APP) – which since 2019 has operated the first and only pro and amateur pickleball tour fully sanctioned by USA Pickleball – are working to expand youth development programs, grassroots initiatives and international partnerships to grow the game. For example, this past August the APP joined with seven inaugural national organizations to create a

global professional pickleball tour. At the heart of the alliance is a year-round world calendar boasting at least 30 pickleball tournaments in 2026, greatly enhancing international opportunities for players across the globe from Canada to Vietnam, India to England and Australia to the United States.

But pickleball does have a downside. Despite the sport’s explosive growth and rapidly expanding visibility, it is still struggling to find its footing in the team market. Yes, the game is wildly popular, easy to learn and enjoyed by young and old alike. However, most schools still don’t have pickleball teams, particularly at the middle school and high

school levels. In all likelihood, pickleball will someday become an Olympic sport as well as an NCAA sport, but it hasn’t happened yet. This means that for most team dealers, pickleball is a bit of a conundrum: So many players, but so few teams to service.

“We do alright with pickleball,” comments **Todd Garretson**, owner of **Garretson’s Sport Center** in Greeley, CO (with team sales offices located in Sterling, CO, and Watkinsville, GA). “We’ve seen tennis go down about 50 percent, with pickleball stealing about 30 percent of that total.” Garretson’s pickleball business is primarily retail, but the dealer also services some rec departments and local clubs.

Photo: iStock

“If schools had pickleball teams it would help. And if manufacturers would seed pickleball product such as paddles in high schools, that would also help. Manufacturers should work with dealers to approach schools and promote the sport,” suggests Garretson. “Manufacturers should also work through dealers rather than working directly with consumers.”

At this point, says Garretson, “Pickleball is a grassroots type of sport and now 30-to-35-year-olds are a key market. We’ll start seeing younger age groups down the road, which will lead to more rec departments offering youth programs, helping the sport trickle down to younger participants. It will also help to see some lower prices in paddles to spur interest.”

Garretson’s pickleball sales focus on hard-goods, with paddles and balls being the mainstays. “We tried shoes, but that never really panned out,” he says. “Sometimes we provide awards and T-shirts for rec departments and special events — it’s a good add-on.” Overall, he says, “I hope pickleball continues to grow. We’re a team dealer and a retailer, so we’re always looking for ways to supplement both sides of the business.”

One dealer/retailer scoring with pickleball is **Whirlaway Sports Center** in Methuen, MA. “The pickleball business is good, but very hard,” explains president **Dave Kazanjian**. “We’re starting to see a younger crowd, but it’s not a team sport yet. A few ADs are trying to get it into schools as a sport. We service some college-level club teams and some adult clubs and groups.” He notes that Whirlaway carries more than 500 pickleball paddle models and has 800 court shoes in stock.

“The technology, especially paddles, is changing very fast. Consumers are very knowledgeable and they go online. It’s a big category and a lot of work to keep up with the technology,” Kazanjian explains. He adds that he’s seeing the impact of tariffs in running footwear, a little bit in court shoes, and not much in pickleball paddles.

On the West Coast, Manhattan Beach, CA-based **Super Sports** is happy with the pickleball business. “It’s constantly growing,” says sales associate **Hari Parker**. “We service some country clubs and some teams, primarily

adults and a good mix of men and women.”

He says paddles are by far the top sellers, followed by balls and accessories, apparel and footwear. “Pickleball is still growing and hopefully tariffs won’t affect the business. Prices have gone up a little but not enough to slow sales.”

But not everyone is thrilled with the pickleball business. **Kim Karsh**, owner of **California Pro Sports** in Harbor City, CA, shares, “We discontinued pickleball. The paddles were getting too expensive and there were too many brands. It was really becoming the domain of pickleball and racquet specialty shops.”

Other dealers, including **Stateline Sports** in West Lebanon, NH, handle a little bit of pickleball at retail, but it represents just a small fraction of the overall team business, notes buyer **Dan Proulx**. And at Sports Paradise in New Jersey, Treiber says, “We’re doing a ton for clubs and local courts, but it’s not at the team level yet.”

PICKLEBALL BY THE NUMBERS

Total Participation for pickleball in 2024 was 19.8 million, up from 13.6 million in 2023. ²

In 2024, the age bracket with the highest participation of picklers was 25- to-34-year-olds, followed by the 65-plus set. More than one million children also picked up the sport. ²

As of early 2025, there were an estimated 70,000 pickleball courts in the U.S., with approximately 130 new locations being added monthly. Over 18,000 courts were added in 2024 and the total number of courts doubled between 2022 and early 2025. A projected investment of \$855 million is needed for further infrastructure development to keep up with growing demand. ³

Pickleball paddle sales hit \$240 million in 2024, up nine percent from the prior year. Sales of pickleballs reached \$94.6 million in 2024, up six percent from 2023.²

Pickleball is big business in 2025 and some of the best pickleball paddles now retail for well over \$250. The latest figures from October 2024 show a projected global market growth from \$1.5 billion in 2023 to \$4.4 billion by 2033, for an 11.3 percent compound annual growth rate.⁴



TEAM SPORTS

WRESTLING: NO HOLDS BARRED

Although wrestling doesn’t boast the massive participation of football, baseball and basketball, it nonetheless is a popular sport, particularly at the high school and college levels. And an increase in female participation is making the category more lucrative for dealers.

“We’ve been handling wrestling since our business began 43 years ago,” says Kazanjian, at Whirlaway Sports Center. “We’re one of the top wrestling stores in New England. We carry more than 75 styles of shoes and we offer team uniforms, both singlets and two-pieces.”

He also sees a lot of youth demand for wrestling products, especially shoes. Other popular items include headgear, knee pads, mat cleaners, body wipes, clocks and scorecards.”

While about 90 percent of Whirlaway’s wrestling customers are male, Kazanjian

notices that female participation is growing. “There are now more options for women’s-specific products, including shoes, knee pads and singlets. Most of the growth on the women’s side is at the high school level.”

For Karsh at California Pro Sports, high schools are the primary wrestling customers and the category is skewed toward men. “The wrestling business is pretty even and only a few high schools around here offer it. The ladies’ segment is taking off a little bit and we’ve seen a surge in demand for letterman jackets in girls’ wrestling,” he says.

“The real challenge,” says Karsh, “is that there are not enough coaches available. Most schools won’t put in wrestling unless there’s a coach available.”

Home Team Sports Apparel’s Gutzman has a similar outlook. “We’ve seen a little bit of an uptick and we’re targeting middle school and youth programs. We’re seeing more girls and ladies getting into wrestling,” he says. “We offer online stores with uniforms and it’s been very successful.

Singlets are the most in demand. Parents also use our online stores to buy headgear and knee pads.”

At present, Gutzman estimates that 95 percent his wrestling business is male and only five percent female. “Participation is a big factor: either the school is into wrestling or it’s not.”

WRESTLING BY THE NUMBERS

Of the 10 Most Popular Boys Programs in the 2024-25 school year, Wrestling placed sixth with 300,214 participants, ahead of Cross-Country, Golf, Tennis and Swimming & Diving.¹

In 2024, there were 2.3 million Wrestling participants, up 8.6 percent from 2023. Seventy-seven percent of participants were male and 22.5 percent female.² Wrestlers ages 18-to-24 comprised the largest contingency of participants (23.2 percent), followed by ages 25-to-34 (22.9 percent), and ages 13-to-17 (18.6 percent).²

Sources 1. NFHS 2. SFIA • Photo: Wikimedia Commons/K.M. Klemencic

TRACK & FIELD: TO THE RACES

The U.S. has always been a leader on track and field’s global stage, most notably in Olympic years when it attracts millions of viewers. But when the TV cameras turn away and the marketing hype diminishes, the sport, from a visibility standpoint, recedes into the background, at least until the start of the next Olympiad.

“Several Olympic-featured sports, including track and field, are experiencing modest declines, consistent with the typical post-Olympic dip in visibility and public engagement,” notes SFIA’s Kerman. “Despite this, most remain above their pre-Olympic participation levels. Track and field is down by 3.6 percent. These shifts may reflect a natural post-Olympic cooling period, where heightened interest from global exposure begins to normalize.”

But for many team dealers, the steady popularity of track and field, particularly at the high school level, is indisputable and both boys’ and girls’ participation have reached new heights. In the 2024-25 school year, NFHS reports that Outdoor Track and Field was the most popular

Photo: Wikimedia Commons/jenarom94

sport for girls in high school and was second only to football for boys.

“These increases reaffirm track and field’s broad appeal, offering students opportunities across a wide range of events from sprints and distance running to jumps and throws,” states **Dr. Karissa Niehoff**, CEO of the **NFHS**. “Indoor Track and Field, which complements the outdoor season, also experienced steady growth. Participation rose to 89,019 boys and 71,358 girls. Together, these numbers reflect a continued momentum in track and field as one of the most accessible and diverse sports in high school athletics.”

“We’re huge in track and field and have been in that business for 43 years,” exclaims Kazanjian, of Whirlaway Sports Center. “Overall, the growth is pretty good. There are now more races to choose from and participation numbers are up in a lot of schools.”

Regarding sales, “Running is our number one category by far — we have 400 to 500 pairs of spikes in stock,” says Kazanjian. “We provide uniforms and shoes for youth programs, high schools and colleges.”

The store also hosts a big Spike Night, the most recent of which attracted 90 high school kids.

He adds, “Sublimated track and field uniforms are in high demand, and kids also want the latest technology in spikes — which can be tricky because the technology changes so quickly.”

Track and field is a strong category for Stateline Sports, too, and Proulx is pleased with the results. “We get a lot of team business, including jerseys, pole vault poles, landing pads, shot puts, discus and hurdles. We sell more equipment than anything else — we’ve only sold one or two sets of uniforms in the past year,” he relates. “While the retail side has been slow, team has been busy for us. We service mostly high schools plus a couple of youth programs.”

On the West Coast at California Pro Sports, Karsh has seen a 10 percent increase in sales of uniforms. “Our sales are mostly uniforms, half of which are sublimated and the other half basic stock with a screenprinted logo on the front. The demand for uniforms is evenly split between males and females. We also sell hurdles every three to four years, as well as batons. Footwear has dropped off tremendously and seems to be primarily online now.”

He also notes, “I’m seeing more business at the middle school level than in the past and high school is flat. There are some youth clubs in the area that are trying to get started, but they’re not off the ground yet.” Like many other dealers, Karsh doesn’t see the track and field business slowing at all, and believes “slight increases are okay.”

TRACK AND FIELD BY THE NUMBERS

In the 2024-25 school year, outdoor track and field participation reached 644,235 boys and 513,808 girls, making it the most popular high school sport for girls and the second most popular for boys. These numbers represent a record high in participation since the NFHS began its survey in 1971.¹

In 2024, total participation in Track and Field stood at 4.19 million, with 52 percent of participants being male and 48 percent being female. The 13-to-17 age group boasted the most participants, comprising 37.3 percent of the total.²

The two largest geographic concentrations of participants is the South Atlantic section (Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Maryland and Delaware) and East North Central region (Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin).² ■



TEAM SPORTS

UNIFORM LOOKS

While the team sports business is not generally known for its fashion-forward designs, in 2026 uniforms for all sports are combining technology with trend-right looks to make athletes stand out on the field or court. Try on some of these styles from the major uniform suppliers to team dealers to see how players are going to look and feel good in the seasons ahead. **Curated by Michael Jacobsen**

CAP AMERICA CAPPING IT OFF

From sandlots to Little League diamonds, Cap America's i8505 is the original snapback that's always game-day ready. Its sturdy six-panel build and poly/cotton fabric handle every at-bat and diving catch. The comfort-fit sweatband and adjustable snapback keep it easy to wear through extra innings.



REVO SCORING BLITZ

Blitz through the match in style and comfort. The Blitz soccer kit from Revo is available in V-neck or crew neck jersey styles, paired with shorts in seven- or nine-inch inseams for men, and five- or seven-inch for women – with or without pockets. Fully sublimated for bold, durable color and built for speed, Blitz delivers pro-level performance with a tailored fit.



TEAM SPORTS



MOMENTIC
LOOKING,
FEELING COOL

Designed for peak performance, this customizable soccer jersey features Coolcore fabric technology for advanced moisture control, while the garment protects against the sun with 50+ UPF along with unrestricted mobility. FreeStyle Sublimation creates a custom look with the most vibrant colors that stand the test of time wash after wash. Among other attributes: 92 percent polyester/8 percent spandex mesh shoulder and back inserts, four-way stretch, a tag-free label, two piece collar and set-in sleeves.

A4
ON THE REBOUND

New from A4, the Ricochet soccer jersey brings a sublimated look to stock apparel with its sleek tonal design. Featuring a clean V-neck and modern styling, it delivers professional level appearance and performance. Made from premium, lightweight 5-Star fabric, the Ricochet keeps players cool and comfortable on the pitch. Launching Spring 2026.



TEAM SPORTS



27 SPORTS SPIKING IT

27 Sports recognizes the impact all sports have on schools and communities and offers uniforms for volleyball (in photo at left: Volleyball Sleeveless Jersey with Arm Sleeve), rugby, lacrosse, field hockey, wrestling, ice hockey, bowling, shooting sports and more.



CLIFF KEEN OLD SCHOOL, MODERN TWIST

The Throwback Wrestling warm-ups from Cliff Keen bring old-school style with modern performance. Made from heavyweight stretch fabric with a soft, DWR-finish, they're designed for the mat or on the road. Customize with gussets, hoods and collars for fit and finished with sewn-on sublimated tackle twill. They deliver timeless style, durability and that classic throwback look – reimagined for today's wrestlers.

sportstyle • sportstylemag.com

SPORT TEK - TWO FOR ALL

Sport Tek recently unveiled two strong uniform collections designed for today's game. The Club Collection delivers men's, women's and youth options in 13 team colors, available in sleeveless and crew necks with matching shorts. The United Collection provides versatile styles for men's and youth in 14 bold colors. The United Collection has V-neck and crew neck jerseys with matching shorts.



ORIGINAL CONTENT. MARKET SPECIFIC. YOUR NICHE IS OUR NICHE.



FOOTWEARINSIGHT.COM



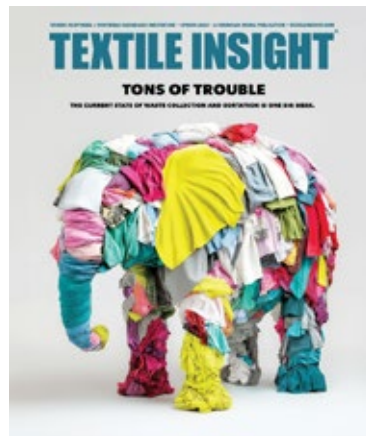
RUNSTYLEMAG.COM



SPORTSTYLEMAG.COM



TEAMINSIGHTMAG.COM



TEXTILEINSIGHT.COM



Formula4Media

SUBSCRIBE: FORMULA4MEDIA.COM