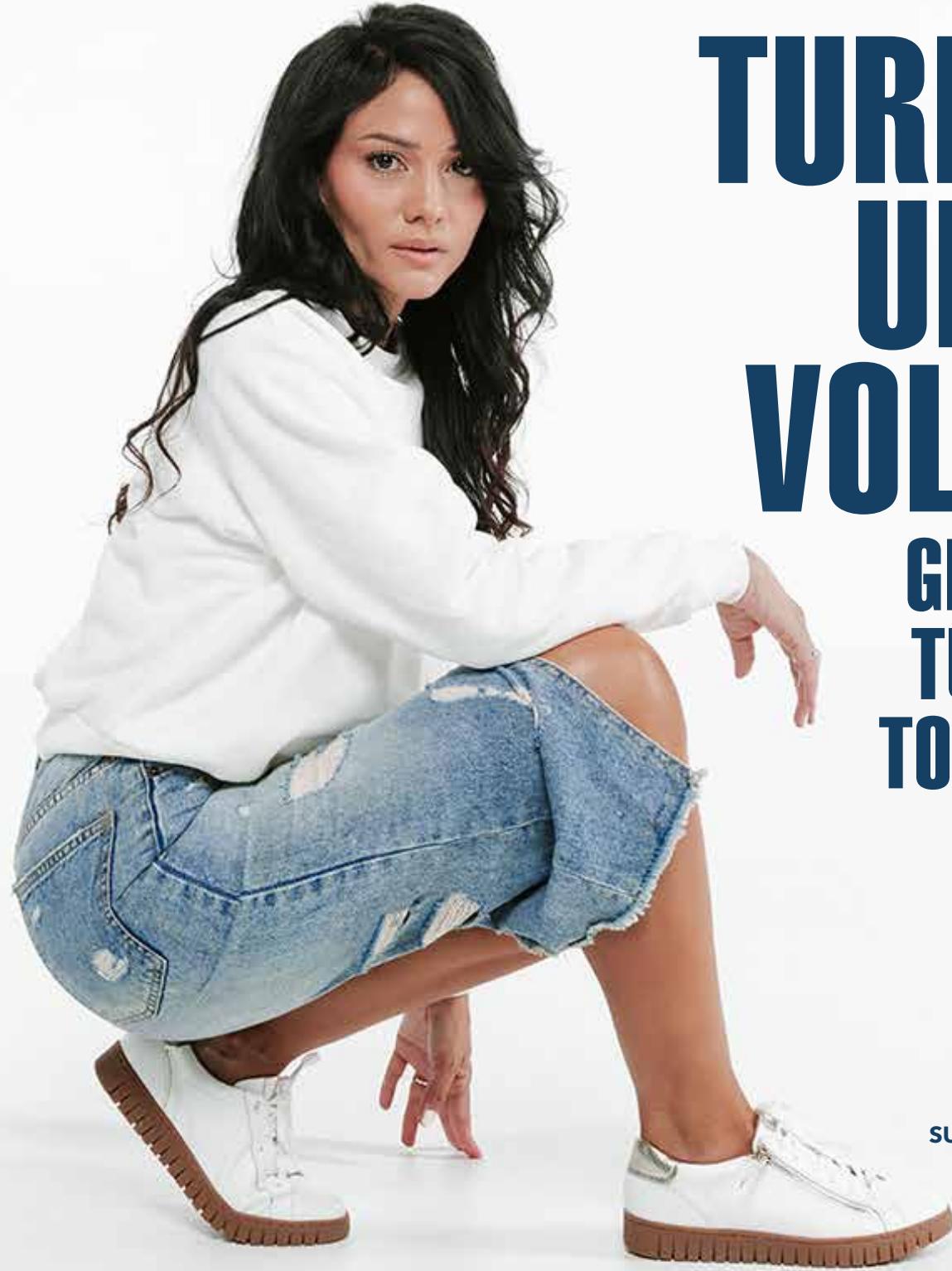


NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2025

sportstyle[®]

INSIGHT + TRENDS



TURNING UP THE VOLUME

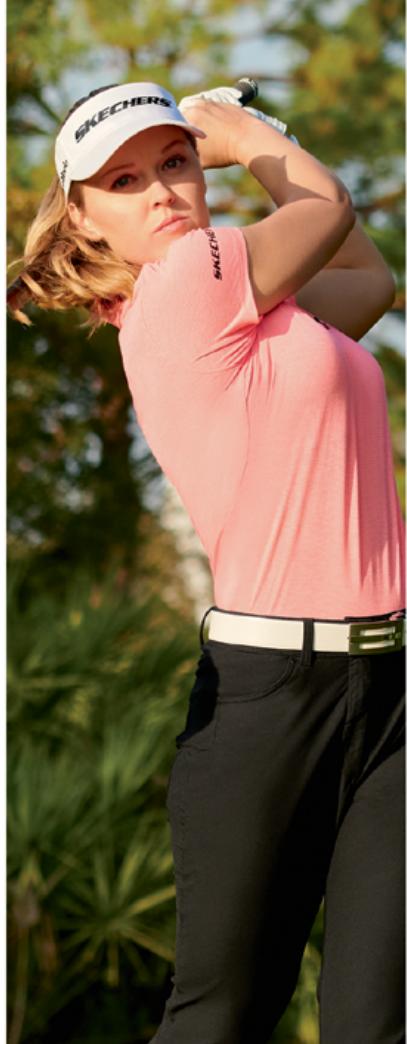
GETTING IN
TUNE WITH
TOP TRENDS
FOR 2026



FOOTWEAR
THE RACE IS ON

DESIGN
SUSTAINABILITY IN SPORTS

TEAM SPORTS
LOOKING BACK,
LOOKING AHEAD
FOOTBALL IS
GOING GLOBAL



BROOKE
HENDERSON



JULIUS
RANDLE



CATHERINE
PARENTEAU



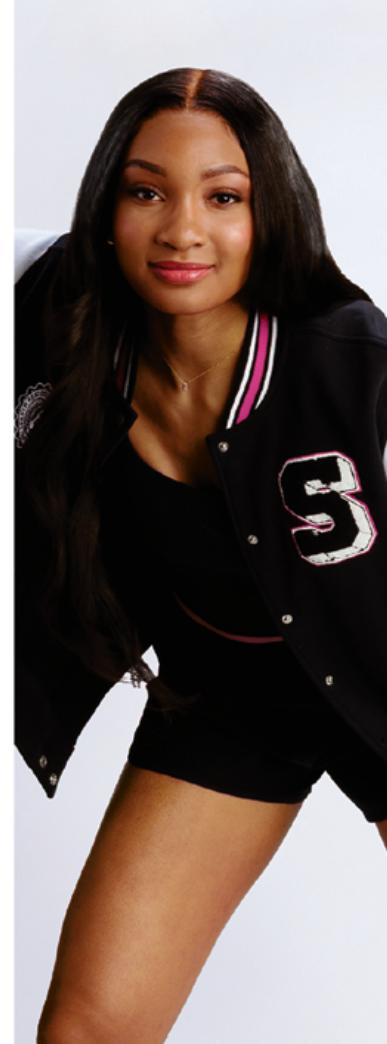
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RICKEA
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KIKI
IRIAFEN



JOEL
EMBIID

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SKECHERS
HANDS FREE
Slip-ins

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FOOTWEAR

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Football is going global – and America's team dealers are benefitting at home.

On the Cover: Mia Vita Luna sneakers are easy to slip into and have polished style with structural support.

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OS1ST 10 YEARS OF OS-FIRSTS

FROM BOLD NEW LAUNCHES TO MEANINGFUL COLLABORATIONS,
2025 WAS A YEAR OF MILESTONES FOR OS1ST.



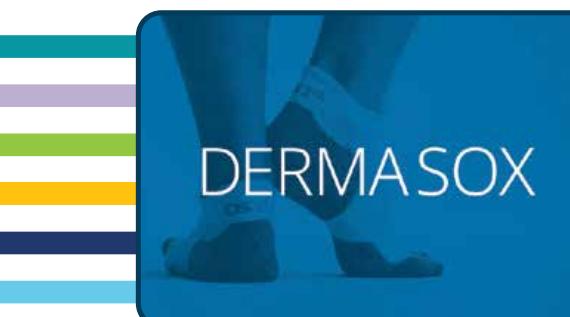
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Our inaugural Advisory Committee connected us with retailers nationwide, shaping better products and programs through shared insights.



Celebrating 10 years of performance, innovation, and service—thank you to our community for being part of the journey.

10 YEARS OF PUTTING OUR RETAILERS 1ST

2025 became a year of true milestones, proof of how far passion and partnership can carry us. **We introduced Thin Air New Colors, Wicked Merino, Met Pads & Toe Caps, and Dermasox:** innovations designed to elevate comfort, protect every step, and keep your feet feeling their best all day.

Our inaugural Advisory Committee brought retailers into the heart of our process, helping shape smarter products and stronger programs. And together, we celebrated a decade of OS1ST; ten years made possible only by the community that believes in what we do.

As we look toward 2026, we'll continue to evolve, expand, and create solutions that help runners, and the people who support them, move, recover, and excel.



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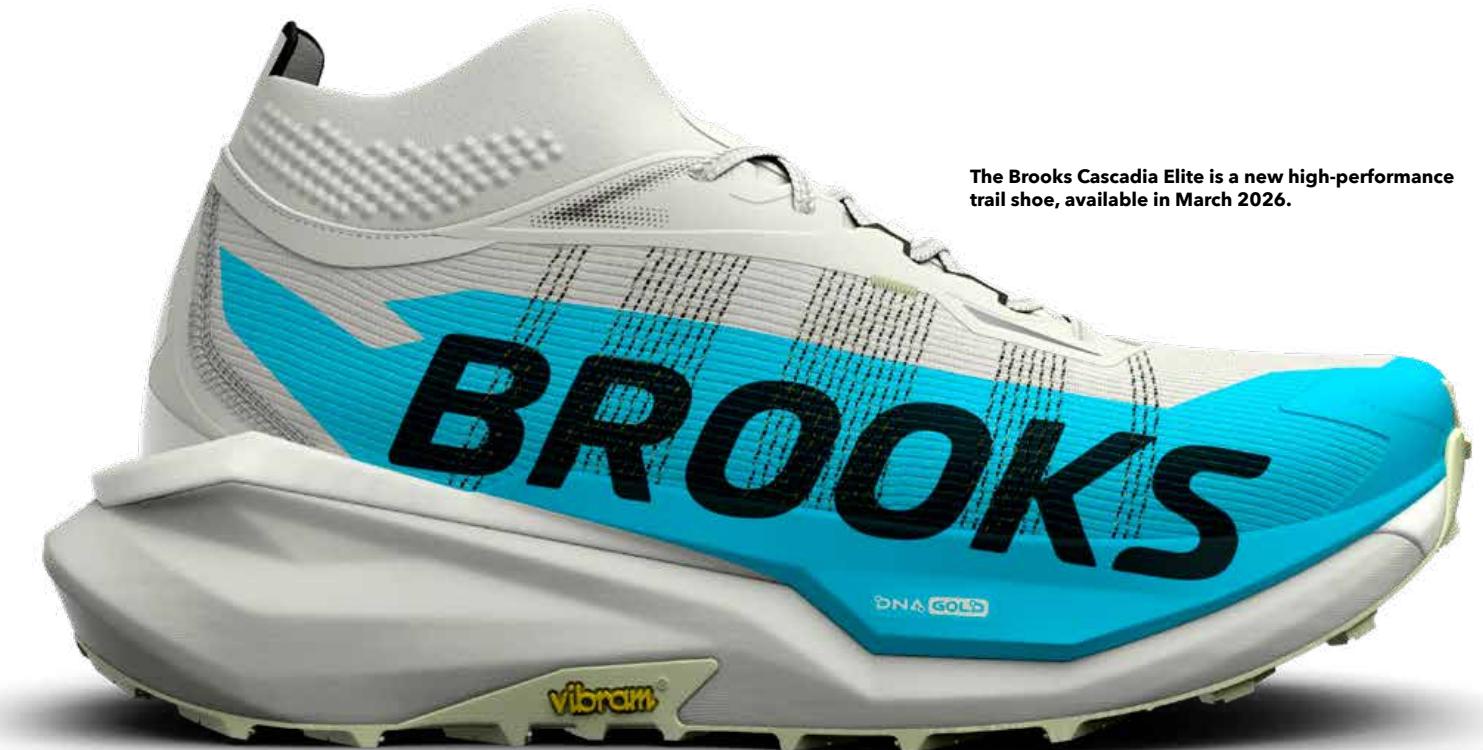
THE RACE IS ON. HOW BRANDS ARE DIFFERENTIATING IN A CROWDED FIELD.

As we prepare to exit 2025 and look ahead to 2026, the dynamics in the running industry appear to be shifting. Brands that have lost momentum in the run specialty channel are regrouping and jockeying for stronger positioning in 2026, even as the segment's market leaders aim to expand their dominance.

As more footwear brands aim to divide their respective running segments in two — performance and lifestyle — market observers are calling for specialty run retailers and brands to continue to broaden their approach to the younger generation. Brands committed to growing the 20- to 30-year-old set, along with beginners, may be well-positioned to thrive in the run specialty consumer base.

Differentiated offerings and a commitment to run specialty are also key. Here, *sportstyle* takes a closer look at what's on tap with some key running brands.

BY BOB MCGEE



The Brooks Cascadia Elite is a new high-performance trail shoe, available in March 2026.

Brooks Running

Of note, Brooks is introducing the Glycerine Flex in 2026 — the tech will bring more flexibility and control to the cushioned run category. Also, the brand intends to amplify three partnership programs in 2026 that focus on community, expertise, and experiences. The company generated 17 percent global sales growth in Q3 and retained its top dog status in the U.S., according to Circana, with three of the six best-selling models in adult performance running footwear.

Brooks is elevating its Sports Med Ambassador program to make it easier for professionals in the program to align with the local retailer and build a connection. Meanwhile, the Brooks Run Club, focused on connecting runners with experiences, is being ramped up to promote events and drive runners to experiences in their own communities in partnership with local retailers.

"When it comes to addressing retail segments, we always keep the runner at the center," said Dave Patterson, Brooks' senior manager of specialty sales. "We're focused on winning with our industry-leading cushion products, while investing in innovation across trail and speed... And we're thrilled to be launching an innovative new line of apparel and sports bras that re-centers that business around the runner."

Adidas

The brand is focused on a return to the run specialty channel, and working to build up its credibility and business in the segment. Notably, Fleet Feet announced in November that it would add Adidas to its roster of performance footwear vendor partners. In the announcement, Fleet Feet lauded Adidas for its flagship models such as the Adizero Adios Pro Evo 2, Adizero EVO SL and Adizero Boston 13, along with headline performances from elite athletes and standout appearances at major marathons.

As detailed in its most recent earnings call, Adidas is looking to build off the success of its racing and speed shoes, taking those innovations and scaling them into every day and comfort running. Adidas says parts of its "lifestyle running" business, including its SL 72, have been strong for the brand.

"We will grow in running lifestyle in 2026, no doubt about it," commented CEO Bjorn Gulden. "Will we be a market leader in any other segments? I think that's too early to say... You must remember we went out of running specialty, meaning we didn't have any activities and relationships with the segment because previous management thought we could go DTC with it. To build that back again – to hire people to be in the running



Diadora's Cellula 2 builds on the success of the original with a wider toe box and more traditional tongue for improved fit and feel.



Topo Specter 3 is a long-distance up-tempo trainer with a RevFoam midsole for rebound.

communities and get the specialty (segment) to buy into you again, is something that takes time... And as we're building more innovative products and creating more visibility, we see huge potential in running."

Asics

The Japanese brand, which reported 4.7 percent growth in its performance running business to approximately \$566.4 million in the quarter ended June 30, made organizational changes to its Asics North America unit in October. Mike Dougherty, previously VP of Commercial, was promoted to Chief Operating Officer, and Kevin McHale was elevated to VP of Run Specialty. North American sales for the six months increased by 9.2 percent to ¥73.9 billion (\$482 million), trailing double-digit growth rates in Japan, Europe, and Greater China.

For the first time in its history, Asics' H1 sales exceeded the ¥400 billion mark (\$2.6 billion), and the company raised its annual revenue forecast to ¥800 billion (\$5.2 billion).

Diadora

The Italian brand is sharpening its focus on product development in 2026 – enhancing both comfort and performance across its running assortment. The new Cellula 2, for example, builds on the success of the original with a wider toe box and a more traditional tongue for an improved fit and feel. Diadora intends to approach the run specialty channel with

"greater intentionality and discipline" by narrowing where it sells while deepening its support for partners. Beyond product, the company intends to continue investing in the next generation of runners through programs like its High Mileage Summer Camp in Flagstaff, AZ and will expand that model with strategic retail partners nationally.

Nike

Amid a turnaround under CEO Elliot Hill, Nike is convinced a resurgent running business will help them get there faster. Nike Running sales grew more than 20 percent in the quarter ended Aug. 31 as Swoosh staff reset more than 1,300 running retail spaces in the U.S., ranging from Nordstrom to Boston's Heartbreak Hill run specialty shop.

"It turns out," Hill told analysts recently, "runners mostly want three things from the running shoes, big cushioning, stability, or an everyday shoe that returns energy in response. We've moved with a sense of urgency."

Looking to the future, Nike's Project Amplify, unveiled last month, is described as "the world's first powered footwear system for running and walking, designed to help everyday athletes go a little bit faster and farther – all with less effort." Built on motion algorithms, and still in early testing, products will be introduced to consumers in the coming years. Created alongside robotics partner Dephy, Amplify is focused on making slower running, jogging, and walking easier, and more fun for

athletes running at a 10- to 12-minute mile pace.

Saucony

The Wolverine Worldwide-owned brand is making strides in both the performance and lifestyle running segments, across global geographies, especially with women. Saucony's Q3 sales rose 27 percent year-over-year to \$133.1 million, and the brand took market share in U.S. Run Specialty, the company reported. Gains in that channel were paced by four franchises—the Ride, Guide, Hurricane, and Triumph. Saucony's Endorphin franchise targets elite runners with the Speed for serious training, Pro for race day, and Elite for ultimate performance.

Saucony will introduce the Endorphin Azura, a premium non-plated trainer targeting a larger consumer segment, in 2026. And the brand is using collabs to fuel growth in lifestyle running.

Hoka

Parent company Deckers Brands' business, which saw its Q2 sales increase 11 percent to \$634.1 million in the period ended June 30, is heavily focused on aggressive Hoka growth outside the U.S. and expanding beyond the road and trail with lifestyle and fitness products. Hoka's FY25 domestic sales grew 17 percent year-over-year to approximately \$1.5 billion, and the brand gained two points of market share in the overall U.S. Road running category.

"We're committed to building sustainable growth for HOKA and are confident in the strategy we're executing to achieve this

goal," Deckers President and CEO Stefano Caroti told analysts. "As we enter the second half of FY26, our priorities are driving healthy sellthrough and gaining market share, leveraging our enhanced DTC loyalty program to drive consumer engagement, preparing the marketplace for Spring 2026 updates to the Gaviota, Mach, and Speedgoat franchises, and investing in marketing."

Mount to Coast

In its first two years since launching, the performance brand "has almost solely focused" on introducing itself to the industry and retailers across the country. In 2026, the brand will expand into Canada. And Doug Rosenberg, Mount to Coast US Country Manager, tells us, "We'll be implementing strategies that will deepen our existing retail partnerships and facilitate community-focused events. Our goal in the upcoming year is to bring Mount to Coast's unique culture and brand identity to familiar places for runners, from creative in-store POP and co-branded merchandising to supporting our partners at local Ultra races, race expos, and run groups in their communities."

On Running

The Swiss brand, which has had a phenomenal run (no pun intended) over the last few years, is intent on expanding its reach beyond running as it maintains its premium positioning status. Tennis and apparel are two key initiatives. The brand's strength is said to be over-indexing with Gen Z consumers and On's



Skechers AERO Burst Slip-ins are lightweight, responsive and well-cushioned. New colorways are arriving in Spring '26.

awareness in the U.S. has more than doubled in a year as more teens have sought the brand. As of mid-August, the company's FY25 outlook called for annual sales of about \$3.59- \$3.6 billion, a 28% year-over-year increase.

In 2026, On will introduce a structural engineering breakthrough, combining its newly-created superfoam Surreal with the CloudTec cushioning system. Also, On will expand its groundbreaking LightSpray tech into everyday offerings.

ESSENTIAL STRATEGIES

OS1st

The brand's focus for 2026 is translating real-world retail feedback into product innovation, merchandising tools, and marketing support that resonates on the sales floor. OS1st's ongoing investments in recovery and foot wellness will include expanding its lineup with Met Pads and Toe Caps – new additions that provide targeted relief and skin protection for active feet. By refining packaging displays and education resources, the company is working to strengthen its retail partnerships and make it easier for store staff to leverage the OS1st brand in-store.

New product DermaSox is the brand's first comfort sock infused with slow-release moisturizing technology.

PowerStep/Currex

The independent retail channel is the most strategic channel for Foundation Wellness brands PowerStep and Currex. The company has made supply chain reliability a core part of its strategy to strengthen retail partnerships. "By owning our own manufacturing plants and distribution center, we're able to control quality, improve product availability, and respond quickly to customer orders."

stated Nicholas Adams, Chief Sales Officer, Foundation Wellness.

Cadence

The insole brand distinguishes itself, in part, by offering specialty retailers exclusive models that are not available to purchase online. "We never undercut our retail partners; we maintain consistent pricing across all channels, and we always direct customers to their local retailers," stated John Hinds, PT, Founder, Owner, Cadence, who added that the brand has also done a good job holding the line on pricing for over 14 years, despite rising costs.

3 ARCH PROFILES

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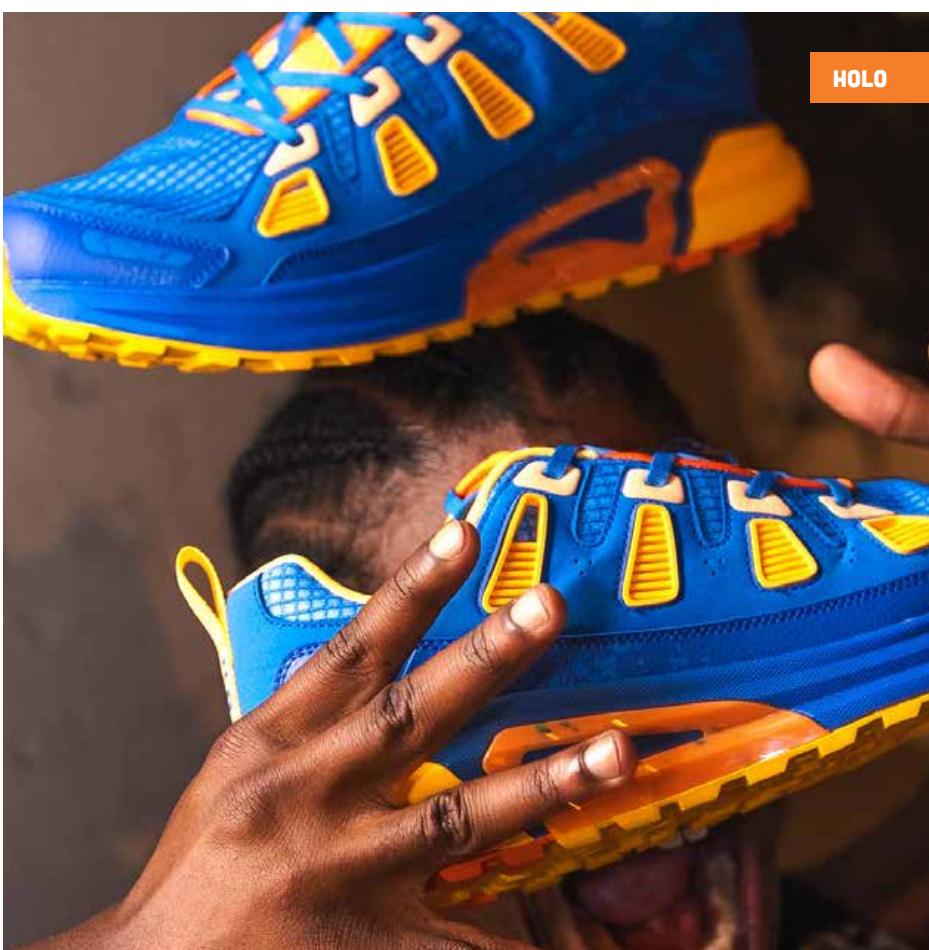
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ONES TO WATCH



HOLO

New for 2026, the HOLO RUN Collection is designed as an expression of performance, comfort, and style. The collection features four silhouettes that reflect HOLO's outdoor heritage and modern edge. The Rebel Runner delivers comfort for city miles, while the Rebel Runner TR offers enhanced traction and a bold, color-changing upper. Finishing the lineup, the Artemis LS and Artemis TR bring trail-ready stability and durability for any terrain. At left: Artemis 2.0 LS, MSRP \$130.



KIPRUN

French retail giant Decathlon is launching its Kiprun brand into the U.S. market in April 2026, with eyes on wholesale distribution in the run market. The brand's name is a take on the phrase "keep running," and the company is aiming to deliver performance technology, sustainable materials, and innovative design at prices that will come in a bit under the cost of many other performance brands. Already available in 70 countries, Kiprun's entry to the U.S. market includes wholesale partnerships in place with Running Warehouse and Maryland-based specialty shop Run Moore. The launch will include footwear from three of its product franchises — Kipride (everyday run); Kipstorm (training and racing); and Kipsummit (trail running.)



MADE PLUS

The USA-made brand, founded in 2021, has launched its first-ever performance running shoe, the RIPPL. Featuring Fluxcore, a running platform that blends performance with sustainable, American manufacturing, RIPPL is available in two versions: RIPPL Fluxcore — a lightweight, neutral-performance trainer with a dual-foam midsole, 5.3mm heel drop, 32mm stack height, and a breathable knit upper made from recycled plastic water bottles; and RIPPL X1 Fluxcore+ —

a race-day model with a full-length Carbitex G1 GEARFLEX carbon fiber plate for propulsion and responsiveness, a 5.3mm heel drop, and a 32mm stack height. "Performance is at the core of everything we're building," said Alan Guyan, founder and CEO of Made Plus. (Guyan's background includes previously serving as Director of 3D Design and Manufacturing Innovation for Under Armour's Manufacturing Innovation Center, Lighthouse.)



PAHI

The new brand from industry vets is launching its products into the market in 2026, with styles utilizing a patented design delivering shoes with balance and stability. Shawn Powell, GM of PAHI, tells us, "PAHI is excited to enter the world of footwear as a solution for anyone requiring improved balance. PAHI's goal is to get people back on their feet so they can take the next step toward a healthier lifestyle. Before you can run, you need to be able to walk, and without balance you cannot do either."

KEEP AN EYE ON THESE FOUR BRANDS AND WHAT THEY ARE AIMING TO BRING TO THE RUN MARKET.



Polartec AirCore performance outer layer keeps out wind and rain while remaining highly breathable.

FORWARD MOTION

The performance textile industry has thrived on new ideas and possibilities for decades and the market has long faced a myriad of challenges when it comes to sustainability and circularity. There's no one remedy for current challenges facing those aiming to design truly sustainable products; recycling alone is not the answer many expected. Now execs are paving the way forward with strategies crafted to move the needle beyond speculative development to scalable sustainable solutions.

Bright spots are on the horizon. The bio-synthetic category is finding traction with brands and suppliers, despite its premium

status and some performance shortcomings. There is also a heightened momentum in the textile-to-textile recycling camp. Plant-based chemistries and concepts that don't compromise functionality are coming of age. Natural fibers like hemp have made significant inroads and "regenerative" has settled into the textile lexicon as a beacon of future development.

Circular solutions are a high priority, and while textile-to-textile technology is advancing, more is needed. Infrastructure and long-term investment to support companies working to integrate new solutions in existing supply chains is key for future success, according to the *Textile Exchange Material Market Report 2025*. The Report reveals that less than one percent of the global fiber market was from pre-and

post-consumer recycled textiles in 2024.

In a recent episode of the Circularity Economy podcast, Matthew Fraser of Circle Economy and David Rakowski of Deloitte discussed insights from *The 2025 Circularity Gap Report*. "Our economy is 9.1 percent closed loop, meaning that 9.1 percent of the inputs to the economy are coming from secondary resources," states Fraser, adding that "recycling globally is measured to be only 27 percent. There is enormous room for improvement." Rakowski observes, "Circularity is seen in the domain of sustainability, but is more than that, it's a driver of innovation, resilience and value across the world of business." But, he points out, policy is often locked into silos; bridging the gap between startups and corporate entities is critical.

No Silver Bullets

"Progress in performance textiles is a moving target," states Karen Beattie, director of product management, **Polartec**. "Material availability shifts, regulations evolve, and science opens new doors. Our job is to protect the end user's experience while continuously lowering impact—and to pivot before a good solution becomes a constraint." Beattie offers as an example recycled polyester from post-consumer bottles. "It's been an effective tool: strong performance and lower process energy versus many alternatives. But as the beverage industry builds closed loops for their own bottles, that feedstock tightens. So, we're not waiting for scarcity; we're diversifying." She highlights bio-based pathways, new waste streams, and exploring end-of-life sources like polymer recovery from non-textile waste streams (e.g., tires), and, as

CHARTING A CLEAR PATH AHEAD FOR PERFORMANCE TEXTILES. BY EMILY WALZER

DESIGN

infrastructure matures, for textile-to-textile routes.

Ramesh Kesh, Ph.D, senior VP, managing director, Polartec, describes textile-to-textile recycling as promising, adding, "We're supportive, especially for polyester where quality can be recovered. But circularity only works when three things line up: feedstock you can actually collect, processes that deliver fiber quality equal to first use, and economics that scale beyond pilots. Today, those pieces are uneven by technology and by material."

Polartec's multi-prong approach leads with "Durability first." Kesh explains that the lowest-impact garment is the one that stays in service longest. "We engineer for abrasion, pilling, and wash/wear stability so products avoid premature end-of-life. That reduces waste now, while circular systems mature." Design for future recycling and continued participation in partner pilots to validate textile-to-textile recycling, are fundamental, too. The company endorses system thinking, not silver bullets,



eVent fabrics stormST 3L high-tech laminate is sustainable, waterproof, and windproof.

says Kesh. "Circularity depends on collection infrastructure, policy (EPR), and brand/retail logistics. Textile-to-textile recycling is part of our roadmap, but the north star doesn't change: make gear that lasts, and ensure the next life is real, high-quality, and scalable."

Fit for Purpose

"We look at the application in the most responsible way and take a function-first approach to see how we can convert that into a laminate," explains Chad Kelly, president, **eVent fabrics**. "What we try to achieve is

a product that meets the expectations of performance as we continue to drive toward advancing sustainability."

Corporate strategy is three-fold: fabric sources, responsible make, and built for longevity. "We find that customers are most interested in plant-based products, sourced responsibly from certified supply chains," Kelly observes. The sustainable fabric technology used in eVent fabrics stormST category features a reduced carbon footprint without sacrificing functionality. The light, tough, and flexible plant-based membrane is paired with recycled or smartly sourced face and backer fabrics both in terms of performance and sustainability, and finished with a C-Zero DWR to deliver reliable, breathable waterproof protection.

According to Kelly, the goal is not having to drill for fossil fuels to create a functional product, with a low carbon footprint, that can be continuously recycled during the course of its lifespan. He suggests that the industry mantra "Reuse, Repair, Recycle" be updated with a fourth principle, "Recyclable." "It's not 1985 when textiles had to meet a determined measurement or water column or other metric to define functionality," says Kelly. "Industry has evolved."

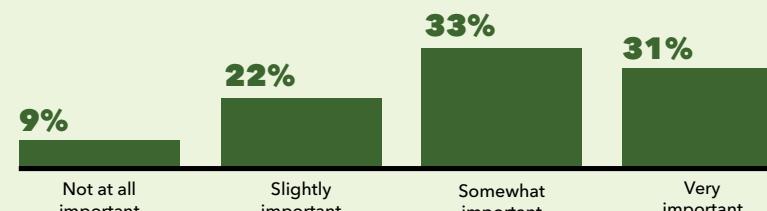
The company's new Circular Collection showcases that outlook. Launched recently, textiles are engineered for recyclability and designed to support closed-loop product systems. Utilizing monomaterial constructions, the laminate fabrics make mechanical recycling more feasible. "Circularity starts with design," states Kelly, who describes the stormST and windstormST fabrics as building blocks in the creation of performance products that align with circular policies and scalable sustainable solutions. ■

CONSUMERS WEIGH IN

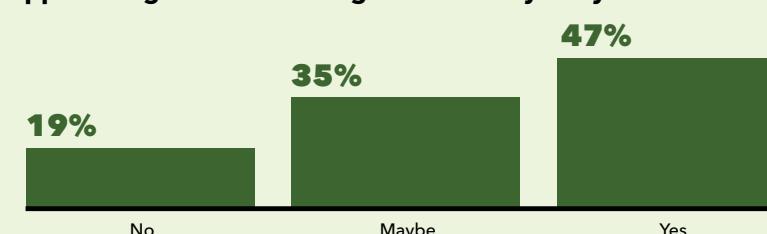
TREND INSIGHT: CONSUMER SURVEY OF RUNNERS

Here's what shoppers had to say in our recent *Trend Insight* consumer survey of 264 runners.

How important is a brand's sustainability commitment to you when making purchasing decisions?



Are you willing to pay more for running shoes, apparel or gear with a strong sustainability story?



This survey conducted by MESH01 included 264 runners, male and female, ages 18-65 on the MESH01 Platform.

Air In. Air Out.

Go Beyond.

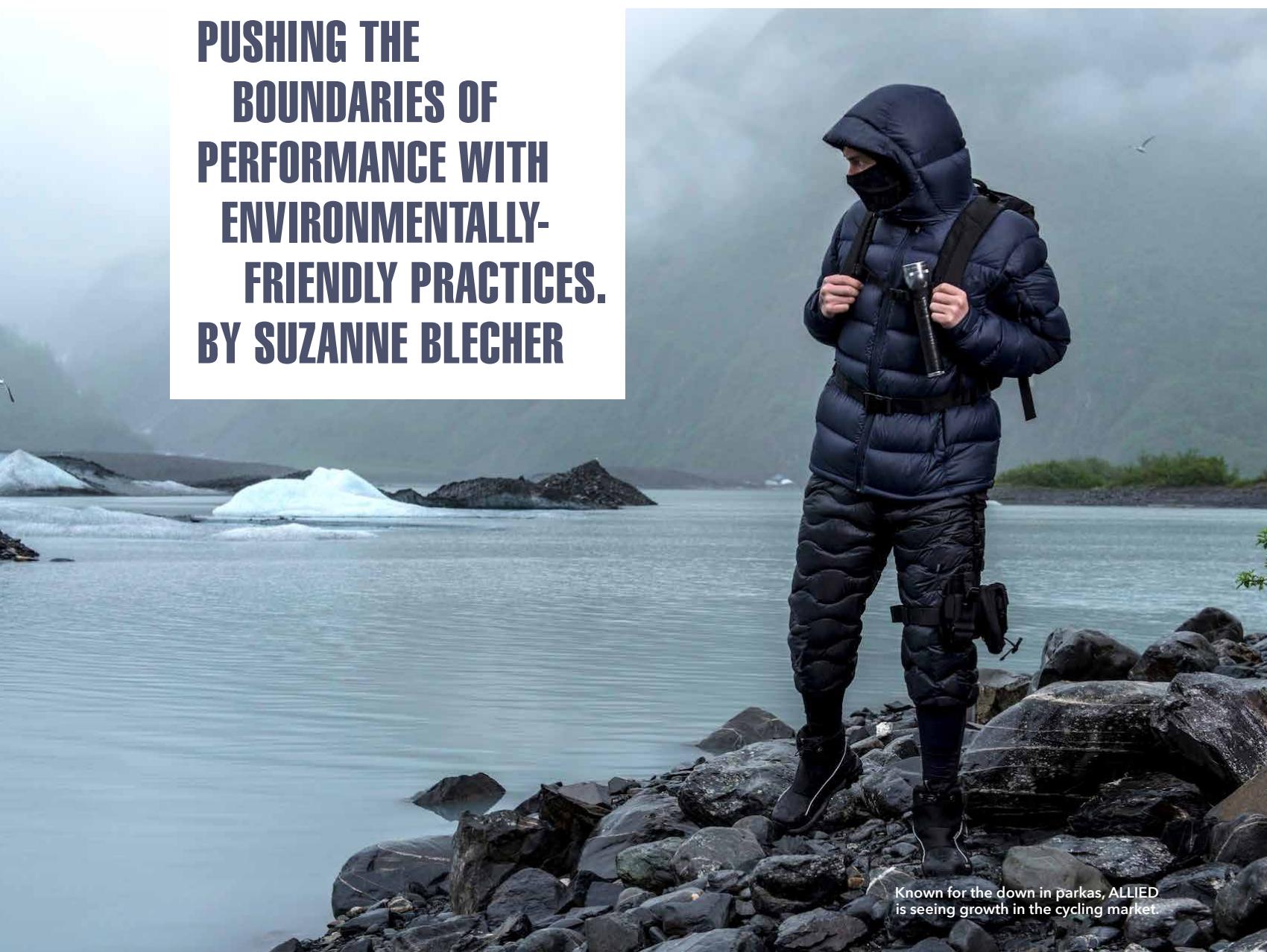
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SUSTAINABILITY IN SPORTS

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF PERFORMANCE WITH ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY PRACTICES.
BY SUZANNE BLECHER



W

hen consumers shop for athletic apparel, performance, price, fit, style – and sustainability – are all factors in the decision-making process. “Conveying a clear, compelling and simple message is critically important,” explained Cheryl Smyre, VP of advanced materials at Parkdale Mills, as “we only have 5-10 seconds to make an impression.”

Ingredient brands are becoming more visible at retail – and more heavily relied upon – to communicate transparency and technologies. Since shoppers may not fully understand complex innovations, Smyre and her team at CiCLO works with brand partners to “avoid scientific jargon and instead emphasize on the benefit: CiCLO fibers are designed to break down naturally in the environment, helping to reduce microplastic pollution.” The message is conveyed with product hangtags, digital campaigns and in retail storytelling. CiCLO teams with outdoor and athletic firms including Bass Pro Shops, Billabong, Champion and Oakley “where performance synthetics are essential, but environmental impact is top-of-mind,” commented the exec.

“Brands do seem to rely more on their ingredient partners to

Big Rock Candy Mountaineering became the first brand to adopt eVent Fabrics' PFAS-free alpineST laminate in its Dawn Wall Jacket.

THINK LIFE CYCLE. NOT WASH CYCLE.

ODOR CONTROL FABRICS REQUIRE LESS WASHING. THE LESS YOU WASH, THE LONGER FABRICS LAST. THIS MEANS KEEPING COLOR AND PERFORMANCE AND EXTENDING THE LIFE OF A GARMENT. WE CALL THIS BEING PLANET POSITIVE.

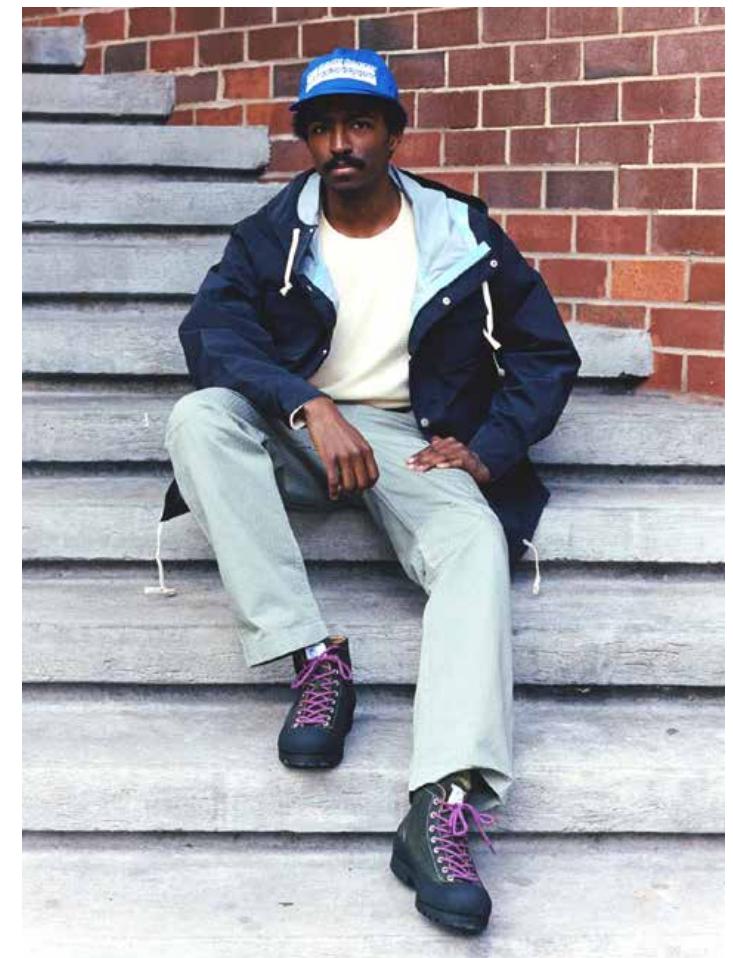
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DESIGN



The Sun Day Red 3L Wind/Rain Half Zip Jacket features Polartec Power Shield Pro.



The Castelli x Polartec Power Shield RPM Rain Cape offers waterproofing and breathability.

do some of the heavy lifting in terms of communications,” shared Matthew Betcher, creative director at ALLIED Feather + Down. “In Europe especially, you see a lot of ingredient branding now and brands are very open to letting their ingredient partners help tell the stories behind their materials.”

Betcher is currently working with Digital Product Passport suppliers at Green Threads DPP on a comprehensive audit of its supply chain. Once the EU requirements come into effect in 2027, partner brands will be able to include all of ALLIED’s down sustainability credentials in DPPS, which will be required on every jacket sold in the EU, and accessible by QR code.

Brand Expansion

Traditionally ALLIED’s down would be reserved for warm winter parkas, but recently the brand has seen a “significant uptake” in cycling, commented Betcher. “Working with the compressibility, warmth to weight ratio and higher thermoregulation capabilities, we are now seeing down used in really interesting high energy activities so the user can remain comfortable in extreme weather and pack more easily in a jacket or jersey pocket.”

As an ingredient brand, Coolcore is focused on “helping

An advertisement for Ionic+ fabric. It features a teal t-shirt on the right. The top half of the ad is dark grey with the text 'LIVING LONGER.' in large white letters. Below it, smaller text reads: 'WE DESIGNED IONIC+ FABRICS TO REMOVE BACTERIA SO THEY DON'T NEED TO BE WASHED AS MUCH. THIS MEANS GARMENTS CAN LAST LONGER WITHOUT NEEDING TO BE REPLACED. WE CALL THIS BEING PLANET POSITIVE.' The bottom half is divided into two sections: 'ionic+ PRO' (yellow background) and 'ionic+' (green background). Both sections list benefits: 'PERMANENT MINERAL ANTIMICROBIAL + ODOR CONTROL' and 'TOPICAL BOTANICAL ANTIMICROBIAL + ODOR CONTROL'. The 'ionic+ PRO' section includes: '+ Permanent Silver Yarn Technology', '+ Professional Athlete Grade Performance', '+ Industrial Wash Rating. Does Not Wash Out', and '+ EPA Registered, OEKO-TEX, Bluesign'. The 'ionic+' section includes: '+ State-Of-The-Art Citric Technology', '+ Commercially Proven and Tested', '+ 50x Wash Durability Rating', and '+ EPA Registered with Pending Certifications'. At the bottom, it says 'NOBLEBIOMATERIALS.COM | LinkedIn | sales@noblebiomaterials.com'.



Outerknown's preferred fibers include Regenerative Organic Certified cotton, organic cotton, hemp, recycled cotton, recycled nylon, and responsible wool.

our partner brands deliver cooling as a true performance advantage," according to its CEO, Eric Schenker. In addition to using recycled and natural fibers, "Coolcore mimics natural fiber design to create synthetic yarns with permanent cooling performance engineered into every fiber." Biomimetic Fiber Geometry employs the fiber shape to help boost performance instead of coatings, additives or finishes that will wash out more quickly.

In a collaboration with Australian running brand Fractel, the pair created cooling hats and apparel to support ultra-runner Jimmy Elam at The Mammoth 200 in September 2025 (he won the 200-mile race).

While Polartec set a milestone in 1993 by introducing fleece crafted from recycled plastic bottles, "today the expectation is much higher. Consumers want proof, transparency and credibility behind every claim," communicated Ramesh Kesh, Ph.D, senior VP, managing director, Polartec, adding "Here we don't just make fabrics – we engineer performance ecosystems."

Kesh prides the firm on working with some of the world's most demanding performance brands. Italian cycling brand Castelli's Ultra Rain Cape, powered by Polartec PowerShield RPM, offers non-PFAS waterproofing and premium breathability. 100% recycled and recyclable, Polartec Power Shield RPM is a high-stretch, waterproof breathable fabric designed for high-performance activities in wet and windy conditions.

Castelli – and Italian cycling brand Sportful – both adopted Polartec AirCore, which is a fabric "that breathes with the body – ventilating sweat, stabilizing the core, and sustaining peak performance in

cycling, mountaineering, trekking, and beyond," concluded the exec. Polartec partners with performance-based entities including golf brands Sun Day Red and G/Fore; trail running companies Satisfy and Tracksmith; plus, ski touring firm Dynafit. Next on the agenda is expanding into footwear and optics.

eVent's light, fast, and highly breathable stormburstLT laminate became available to cyclists earlier this year through a partnership with Italy's Ale Cycling. "From a consumer perspective, eVent's mission is first and foremost about weather protection, as we continue to focus on product function, design and price as our primary drivers, however, the sustainability topic continues to be elevated," said Chad Kelly, president, eVent Fabrics.

In May 2025, retro outdoor-inspired Big Rock Candy Mountaineering became the first brand to adopt eVent Fabrics' PFAS-free alpineST laminate in its Dawn Wall Jacket, described as "perfectly vintage in style and futuristic in fabrication." alpineST is a three-layer fabric solution made with a planet-positive textile, offering durable waterproof protection and high moisture vapor transfer rates that last over multiple seasons.

Ionic+ PRISM is a new introduction that marries permanent antimicrobial performance from Noble Biomaterials with permanent color from e.dye's Clean Color System. The fabrics are a fit for athletic and yoga apparel, offering 99.9% removal of odor-causing bacteria on fabric and 90% less chemistry required in the dyeing process. With three current projects in place, "We've gone from concept and small fabric samples to complete finished goods and garments. This could lead us to an entirely new way of manufacturing that offers massive savings in resources," according to Allon Cohne, SVP and CMO, Noble Biomaterials. ■

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BRAND SPOTLIGHT: OUTERKNOWN

In 2015, professional surfer Kelly Slater founded the apparel company on the platform of inspiring change through transparency and a commitment to responsible sourcing practices.

Tell us about one of your sustainability initiatives that consumers really appreciate.

Outerknown Chief of Staff & Sustainability Ann Meyer: “Most of our line is made from organic or Regenerative Organic Certified (ROC) cotton, and/or recycled natural fibers, which not only reduces our environmental footprint but also feels so cozy! One sustainability initiative that has really caught on is our fleece made from recycled wool, called Woolaroo, and the majority of our T-shirts now use ROC cotton.

When synthetics are necessary for performance, we make every effort to source recycled alternatives. One example this year is our new Apex Evolution Trunks. Teaming up with Bureau to utilize their NetPlus material made from recycled fishing nets yielded a more responsibly-made trunk with a little more substance than the first Apex - without compromising any performance qualities. By this fall, over 99% of our entire line will be made from preferred fibers, which is a milestone we're proud of.”

Do you think that the surfing community has a different take on sustainability than other sports?

“Absolutely. Surfers spend so much time directly in the ocean that they see the effects of pollution and environmental damage firsthand. Surfing is deeply tied to natural ecosystems - tide changes, weather, reefs, and marine life, so surfers tend to develop a personal respect for these systems. When the ocean suffers, so does the sport itself. This unique dependence often forms a culture of environmental activism and awareness in these beach towns that our customers typically live in.” ■

Outerknown Founder Kelly Slater wears a Studio Shirt made with 100% Regenerative Organic Certified cotton.



BRAND SPOTLIGHT: RIDGE MERINO

From day one, this outdoor brand has been committed to natural fabrics and a member of 1% for the Planet.

Is the fact that suppliers are taking more of an active role in communicating sustainability throughout the supply chain helpful to you as a brand?

Ridge Merino Founder Jeff Russell: “The easier it is to source responsible materials, the faster we can all move forward. I’m grateful to see suppliers pushing for more responsible options. It makes it easier for brands like ours to stay true to our values while raising the bar for performance and sustainability.”

Tell me about an apparel item that you have which offers eco-friendly attributes.

“Our Send-it Merino Sports Bra is a multisport staple. During the design process, we prioritized Merino wool as the lining for superior next-to-skin comfort and temperature regulation. To achieve the right support, we needed a synthetic for the outer layer. We chose Sensil EcoCare – a recycled nylon whose production process significantly reduces CO2 emissions, energy and water consumption. We were able to create a high-performing product with a smaller environmental footprint.”

What other design initiatives are you working on?

“We continue to focus on using natural materials (mainly Merino wool) in our line. We have some exciting pieces in the pipeline that provide alternatives to the outdoor classic synthetic fleece. Our new fleeces will shed only biodegradable fibers that are harmless to you and to the environment.” ■

The Send-It Merino Sports Bra from Ridge Merino is made from natural and recycled materials.



BRAND SPOTLIGHT: BILLABONG

Billabong was founded in 1973 by surfer Gordon Merchant with the tagline, "Only a surfer knows the feeling."

The statement still guides the brand today in protecting the ocean that its customers enjoy.

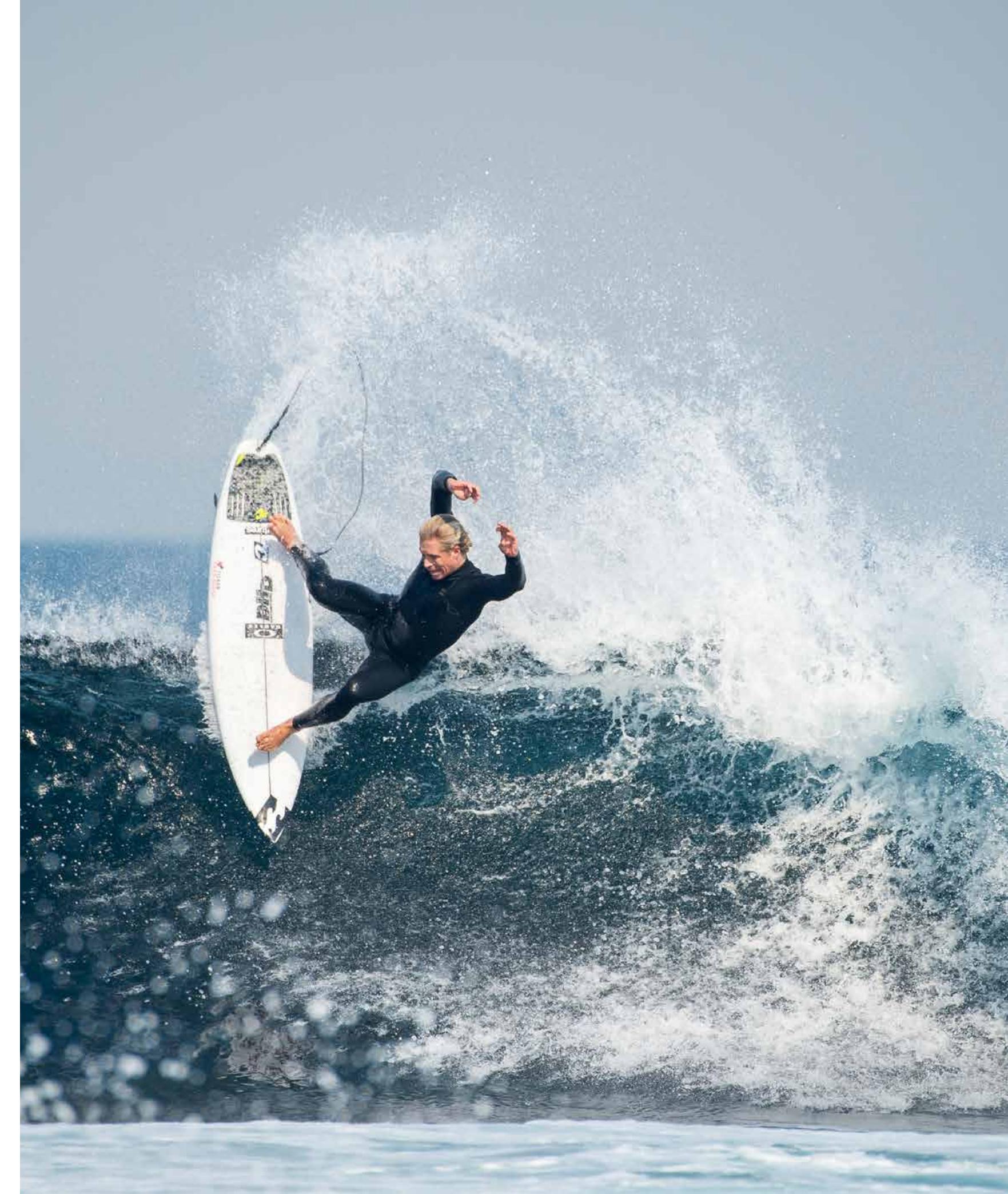
How are you incorporating ingredient brands into your products?

Scott Boot, Global Manager of Wetsuits at Boardriders: “Incorporating CiCLO technology into our products helps reduce microplastic shedding, reinforcing our commitment to cleaner oceans and more sustainable surf gear. We’ve integrated CiCLO into our top-tier wetsuit, the Furnace Natural. We’re extremely proud of the sustainability built into this suit—transitioning from synthetic neoprene to FSC-certified and USDA bio-based natural rubber, and laminating 100% recycled jerseys and linings infused with CiCLO technology. This combination delivers premium performance while reducing environmental impact, bringing the best innovations together in one complete, ocean-friendly package.”

What are your differentiating technologies and features in the surfing space?

“Billabong is deeply rooted in progressive surfing, where lightweight flexibility and performance are essential. Incorporating sustainable materials without compromising performance is a core focus. While other brands have introduced natural rubber, Billabong’s unique combination of advanced technologies—now including CiCLO to reduce microplastic shedding—sets our wetsuits apart as both high-performing and environmentally responsible.” ■

Australian surfer Ethan Ewing in a Billabong wetsuit.





TURNING UP THE VOLUME. GETTING IN TUNE WITH TOP TRENDS FOR 2026.

BY SUZANNE BLECHER

ALEGRIA CELESTE

Ravishing with a pop of ruby red, Celeste is a court-sport inspired sneaker with a leather and mesh upper, slip-resistant outsole, and a durable, canvas-wrapped removable footbed. The bold slip-in shoe makes a fashion-forward statement, while remaining versatile and comfortable. MSRP \$120.

Slimmed-down, high-functioning and powered with performance – this is what we're seeing in lifestyle sneakers for 2026. From the outside, the shoe is refined and the aesthetic quiet, yet inside, technology and premium materials speak volumes. The goal is to up the comfort quotient and contribute to the consumer's overall wellness. Seeking a broader look into 2026, we asked brand execs what trends are driving the lifestyle, crossover sneaker style market. Comfort, cushioning, quality materials and multi-functional style are among the sought after traits that top the list.

Q **WHAT ARE CONSUMERS LOOKING FOR IN A LIFESTYLE SNEAKER THAT CAN BE WORN FOR A VARIETY OF OCCASIONS?**

"Consumers want comfort and support; sustainability and longevity; versatility and styling adaptability to go all day from work to play; and quality materials for better wear over time."

– Debbi Kravetz, wholesale manager, USA & Canada, Camper

"No. 1 is all-day comfort with durability. Consumers are seeking comfort shoes that look athletic, but aren't full running shoes. Universally wearable neutral color blocking (cream, navy, slate) aligns with the 'quiet tech' aesthetic. Statement animal prints return in small doses for 2026, while metallic accents are forecasted as a strong micro-trend, plus we'll see refined suedes and micro-perforation."

– Logan Bird, VP omni-channel sales, Mephisto

"For 2026, we're embracing the marketplace trend of sneakers built with more material underfoot in our own, sustainable way. Our motto is: 'Wellness for the individual. Wellness for the environment.' Consumers are looking for comfort and support and are turning more to footwear they won't have to throw away after three to six months."

– Justin Orrell-Jones, CEO, Finn Comfort

"For those who want one pair to do it all, the priorities are clear: cushioning that won't pack out and support that keeps feet feeling fresh; versatile styling; and features like slip-resistant traction and easy-clean, water-resistant

materials that don't make the shoe look like a work shoe. Consumers want proof of durability—lab testing, third-party validation, and care guidance matter."

– Victoria Feldman, marketing director, Latitudes

"Comfort is still the most important element consumers are looking for, but comfort doesn't have to be a boring shoe anymore. We're seeing many fashion outfits paired with funky sneakers for the office, and color can bring a sense of individuality to the consumer. Almost everyone is moving toward synthetic materials in the sneaker category."

– Sydney Simas, CEO, Simco Imported Shoes

"Consumers want a sneaker that can keep up. A multifunction shoe has to deliver: all day cushioning and support (pressure-relieving footbeds, arch contouring, and responsive midsoles); lightweight, breathable comfort (mesh-knit uppers and airy, shock-absorbing soles); versatility in styling (minimalistic, modern design); and easy on/off features."

– Liam Bourke, EVP/GM, The Comfort Co

"Performance, protection and comfort are important in a multifunctional shoe. For Spring, we are seeing more outdoor and trail inspired silhouettes. Also, woven knit uppers that abrasion resistant and water resistant."

– Rich Rask, president, Rieker Shoe Corporation

"On the innovation side, the end consumer wants running shoe comfort built into a Euro walking sneaker. The consumer has also made it abundantly clear that they want a shoe that adds value to their lives. In many cases, the ability to stand all day and work and provide for your family is taken for granted when your feet, knees, and lower back don't hurt."

– Michael Arce, national sales manager, Xelero

"Consumers want one pair that can go everywhere. All-day support (robust arch cushioning, a more forgiving toe box), true slip resistance for work environments, and light, flexible constructions are key requirements. For Spring 2026, we're seeing lifestyle sneakers continuing to blur the line between sport and lifestyle, along with soft, mood-boosting tones like blush, ruby, vanilla, and navy."

– Chelsea Smith, marketing coordinator, Pepper Gate Footwear

"Consumers are pairing sneakers with everything from dresses to tailored work pants, reflecting a growing acceptance of athletic-inspired footwear across office and off-duty wardrobes. Expect to see more material mixing, texture play and visually interesting details, all delivered in low-profile silhouettes that remain versatile and easy to wear for 2026."

– Kelsey Jayne, VP of design, Dansko



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NEW MELTON

W4101-41
Melton, Unisex
• Breathable

W4101-60

W4101-41

W4101-52

W4101-00

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“Premium, durable materials (nubucks, tumbled leathers, second-skin suede) and clean, versatile design (fewer decorative overlays) make a shoe appropriate for everything from work to weekends. For ECCO, this means blending comfort technology with refined Scandinavian styling so each pair works across the full spectrum of daily life — from dressed-up moments to everyday wear.”

- Matt Feiner, CCO, ECCO US

“The line between performance and lifestyle is gone. The right outsole is what allows a shoe to adapt to different environments – city streets, wet pavement, light trails – while maintaining stability and style. Durability and longevity are also increasingly valued, especially among younger consumers embracing repair, customization, and sustainability.”

- Fabrizio Gamberini, global chief brand officer and president, Vibram

“When you pair classic style with maximum comfort, you win. If you can design something that looks sharp while supporting the body, that balance becomes a no-brainer for consumers. The industry is heading toward fewer, better shoes that deliver both function and meaning. Though sustainability isn’t the headline anymore, it still motivates the buyer in a lot of ways.”

- Jake Hexberg, founder, SUBTXT

“She is demanding multifunctional sneakers that deliver three things: All-day comfort, style versatility and supportive features that promote long-term wellness, not just aesthetics. We are prioritizing anatomical footbeds with arch and metatarsal support (removable for custom orthotics), shock-absorbing midsoles, refined materials and flexible silhouettes.”

- Mike Walker, VP of marketing, ecommerce, Taos

HITS FOR 2026

Slim silhouettes, easy entry offerings and sneakers packed with performance—this is what we’re seeing in the lifestyle category for men and women.

1. KEEPING A LOW PROFILE

“Consumers seem to be responding to newness across the board,” says Matt Feiner, CCO, ECCO US. This includes “more premium leather variations and elevated minimalism with cleaner lines, premium materials and fewer decorative overlays.” Similarly, Dansko VP of Design, Kelsey Jane, expects “more material mixing, texture play and visually interesting details, all delivered in low-profile silhouettes that remain versatile and easy to wear.”



ARCOPEDICO DIAMOND

Coming Spring 2026, Diamond honors the history and innovation of Arcopedico for the brand's 60th Anniversary, their “Diamond Jubilee.” Great for travel, Diamond is soft, flexible and lightweight. This multipurpose sneaker offers all day comfort, along with a machine washable Lytech upper. MSRP \$145.



Cadence provide a unique balance of contoured support and enhanced shock-absorbing comfort, especially under the heel and forefoot.

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ECCO SOFT 10

The men's ECCO Soft 10 blends a sporty aesthetic with premium materials. Featuring a mix of suede and leather for textural variety, this modern sneaker is extremely versatile. Soft 10 is set on a durable rubber outsole and is comfortable for work and weekends. MSRP \$170.



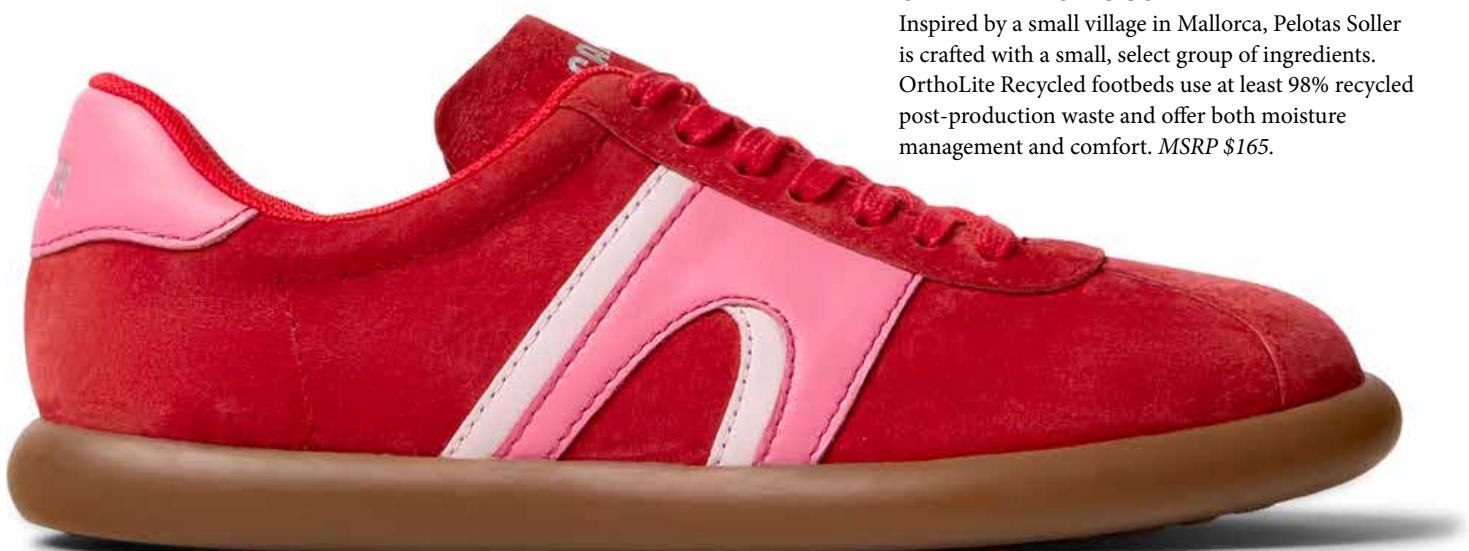
MEPHISTO WITNEY

Both elegant and active, Witney is a full package. The SOFT-AIR midsole and SHOCK-ABSORBER integrated into the outsole guarantee a smooth walking experience. AIR-RELAX technology prevents arch collapse. Its leather lining provides a healthy climate inside for the feet. MSRP \$299.



DANSKO MILANA

Milana starts with a soft, flexible ballerina-inspired base and is enhanced with internal support for lasting comfort. The low-profile silhouette is designed with a refined, feminine shape. A removable footbed incorporates Dansko Natural Arch technology for all-day support. MSRP \$155.



CAMPER PELOTAS SOLLER

Inspired by a small village in Mallorca, Pelotas Soller is crafted with a small, select group of ingredients. OrthoLite Recycled footbeds use at least 98% recycled post-production waste and offer both moisture management and comfort. MSRP \$165.

2. ALL ACCESS PASS

Easy on/off is rising as a key feature, according to The Comfort Co's Liam Bourke. "Slip-on entries, stretch panels, and functional zippers are becoming increasingly important for a grab-and-go lifestyle, and we are adhering to these wishes," the exec suggests.



KIZIK VEGAS 2

This premium leather refined classic combines superior comfort with HandsFree Labs technology that compresses down, then instantly snaps back for a secure fit. A soft responsive foam midsole offers high rebound and all-day cushioning. Its removable insoles are machine washable. MSRP \$139.95.



SKECHERS STREET ARCH FIT ARCADE

This easy-wearing design features a canvas upper with faux laces. A removable Arch Fit insole system provides podiatrist-certified arch support and molds to the foot to reduce shock. The sneaker is machine washable and vegan. MSRP \$75.



MIA VITA LUNA

Luna is polished, supportive and has an effortless feel about her. A Mia Vita CushionCore Footbed contours to the foot, offering targeted arch support, heel cushioning and pressure diffusion. Easy Entry Design includes a padded collar and smooth lining. The shoe is simple to slip into, while the lace-up structure offers personalized, secure fit. MSRP \$159.95.

3. ELEVATED EVERYDAY PERFORMANCE

Moshn Marketing Director Victoria Feldman suggests “lifestyle sneakers are hitting a new harmony between performance tech and everyday style—streetwear looks with true comfort engineering underneath.”



MOSHN RHYTHM

A subtly refined blend of berry and navy that looks polished enough for the office, but still feels sporty and effortless. A Dynamic Motion Technology outsole ensures smooth forward motion and built-in heel stability. The machine-washable SmartKnit upper is flexible, soft, breathable, and water- and stain-resistant. *MSRP \$169.95.*



XELERO NELLIE

The Xelero Nellie perfects the balance between support and cushioning on a slip-resistant outsole. Hidden inside is Motion Control Technology, which limits excessive foot motions by decreasing the extent of pronation. A removable Cork EVA contoured footbed provides support under the foot. *MSRP \$259.99.*



FINN COMFORT PICCADILLY

Available in over 30 colors (for women and men), the Nut Nomad colorway for men is crafted with a premium, vegetable-tanned leather upper. The Piccadilly features a contoured dual-density polyurethane sole for shock-absorption and a structure that doesn't lose its integrity over time. A replaceable contoured cork, jute, latex, and leather footbed and full leather lining complete the package on a long-lasting, eco-friendly shoe. *MSRP \$405.*



RIEKER SPORT SKYLAR

Designed for the outdoors, this sneaker features an extra-wide heel base for stability. A woven knit upper, which is strong and abrasion-resistant, has a water-resistant membrane. An added extra foam layer for cushioning and shock absorption, while a molded removable insole supports the foot. *MSRP \$160.*



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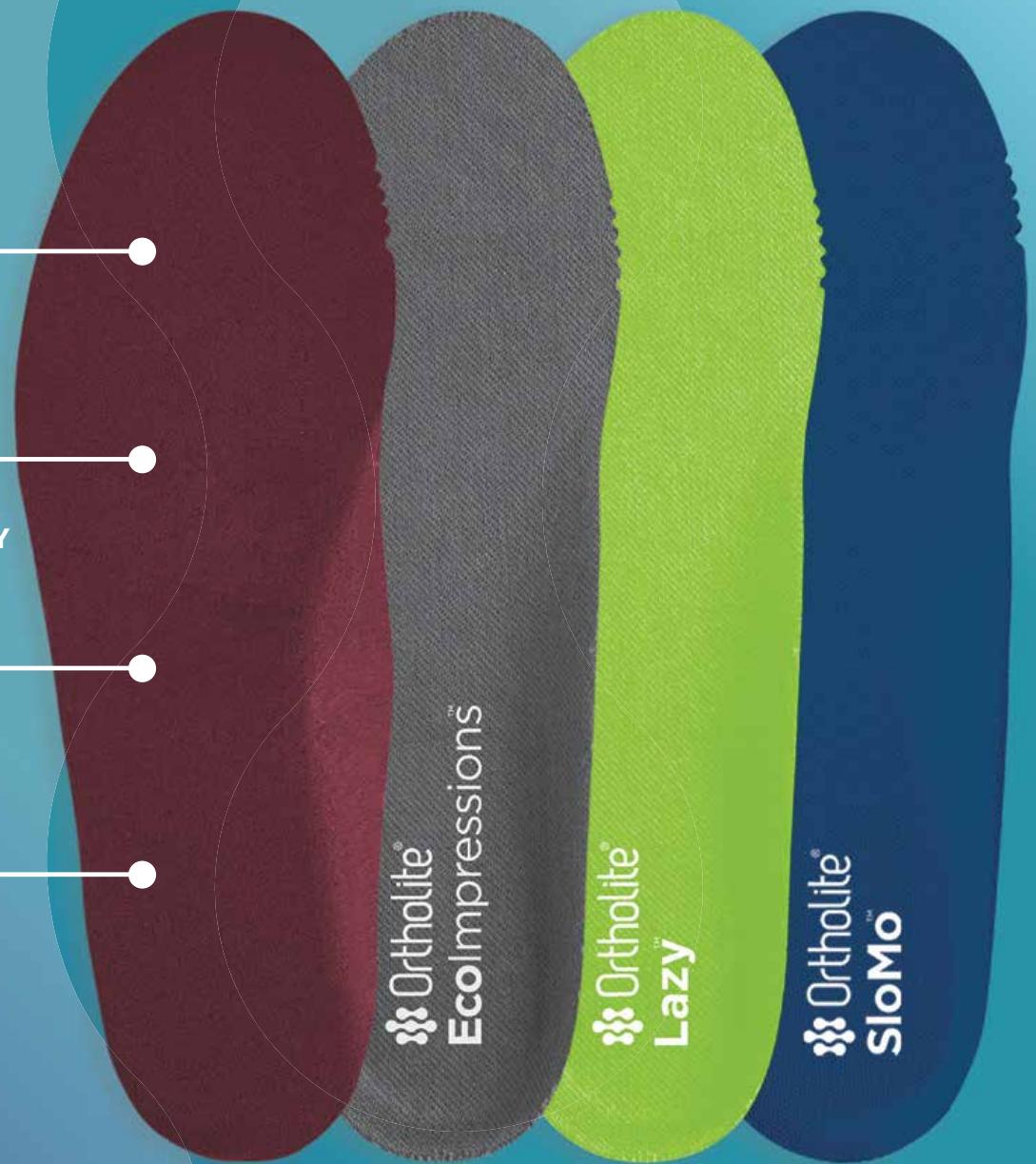
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Girls took the wrestling mat in record numbers in 2025, fueling rapid growth in grappling at all levels.

TEAM TRENDS

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD

FROM GIRLS' WRESTLING TO FLAG FOOTBALL, FROM TARIFFS TO AI, IT WAS QUITE A YEAR IN TEAM SPORTS. BY MICHAEL JACOBSEN

Our editorial staff scoured through our notes and past issues to come up with a list of the 10 most important trends and events impacting team sports in the past 12 months.

1. Girls On The Mat

The strong growth of youth, high school and collegiate wrestling as a whole is easy to pin down — girls' wrestling now ranks as the fastest-growing high school sport in participation in the U.S. Need proof: Last November, Indiana became the 46th state to sanction girls' wrestling at the high school level. The growth is also told in one simple statistic in 2025: Girls now make up 18 percent of high school wrestlers.

Then in 2025 came news that the NCAA added women's wrestling as its 91st championship sport, providing another opportunity for female athletes to compete. That means that women's wrestling now advances from the NCAA Emerging Sports for Women program to become a national collegiate championship, featuring female athletes from all three divisions competing against one another. The NCAA's first women's wrestling championship will be in 2026. There were 76 women's wrestling programs at NCAA schools in 2023-24, with projections pointing to an additional 17 programs in 2024-25.



More than 1200 women wrestlers competed at NCAA schools in 2025.

2. AI Is Real

You can't turn on a computer or listen to a news report without hearing of the impact and potential of artificial intelligence (AI) and team sports is certainly no different. Clubs, high school teams and families are increasingly using artificial intelligence as the analytics that dominate pro and college sports are now trickling down to younger levels — or at least for those who can afford the investment. The growing sports technology industry is increasingly selling computer vision algorithms, wearable biometric sensors and predictive analysis services through AI to youth clubs and high school athletic departments. For better or worse, it's supercharging the dynamics of some club and high school teams.

3. Get Up and Play

The bad news is that physical activity among U.S. youth continues to trend downward. That was the finding of The Physical Activity Alliance's latest U.S. Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, which showed another year of C and D grades. Overall physical activity received a D- grade — the same as in 2022 and 2014. Today, only 20-28 percent of youths ages 6-17 meet the 60 minutes of daily physical activity guideline

— and that has not increased in the past decade. The C grades mean the U.S. is succeeding with about half of children. The D grades mean there's success with less than half.

4. Get PHIT

On the plus side of the activity ledger, though, is news that PHIT America, a nonprofit providing solutions to end the inactivity pandemic among America's youth, in collaboration with the Brownsville (TX) Independent School District, opened an innovative fitness facility — the first ever PHIT Center — at the Garden Park Elementary School earlier this year. Deemed the "future of physical education," PHIT Center and related programs from PHIT America currently serve 31 public schools in a city found to be the "Most Unhealthy City in America." The PHIT center is a 150 X 90-foot open-air facility that gets up to 60 kids moving and having fun with music while learning 10 different sports and fitness skills, from soccer to pickleball to running. Kids move around the facility in a circuit training fashion with the goal of building healthier, happier and more academically engaged students.

5. Pickleball Anyone

Pickleball became a legitimate varsity high school sport in the past 12 months. In fact, "Pickleball for all" is the slogan used by Montgomery County (MD) Public Schools, which launched pickleball in high schools last year to lead the vanguard into the kitchen. Montgomery County laid claim as the first school district in the country to offer pickleball as a varsity sport, but that was only the tip of the youth pickleball iceberg. Pickleball participation increased 45 percent for children ages 6-12 and 86 percent among youth 13-17 between 2022 and 2023, according to the SFIA.

6. Toll of the Years

In 2025 we lost three old friends who were significant contributors to the business of team sports.

• **Don Pfau, who founded the Sports, Inc. buying group in 1965, passed away on April 10, in Lewistown, MT, at the age of 97.** His first venture, Don's Store, a local sporting goods store that was owned and operated by three family generations over 70 years, led to Pfau starting Sports, Inc. From the original seven members, the group has grown to more than 600 members selling billions of dollars of sporting goods from coast to coast. Pfau served as the CEO of Sports, Inc. for 30 years, stepping down in 1995 to become chairman. Pfau also served on the NSGA Board of Directors from 1987-90 and 1992-95 and was inducted into the Sporting Goods Industry Hall of Fame in 2006.

• **Trevor Swangard, 85, the first executive director of the former Team Athletic Goods (TAG) buying group, passed away on June 27 in Redmond, WA, from complications related to pancreatic cancer.** In 1965 he began working at Luby's Sporting Goods, which specialized in both retail and team sporting goods sales. Swangard would eventually become a dealer for TAG and in 1984 he became their first executive director, a position he held until 2005. The company grew significantly under Swangard's leadership, including launching a line of football shoulder pads, which has become one of the top-selling brands in the industry. He remained an owner of TAG until 2009 and returned briefly in 2010 as a consultant.

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Of the \$10.3 billion worth of sporting goods imported into the U.S. in 2024, \$6.27 billion, or 61 percent, originated from China.

8. Capture the Flag

One of the biggest storylines in youth sports participation in 2025 was the increase in the growth of flag football, particularly on the female side. The biggest gains in high school football came on the girls' side, especially with the emerging sport of flag football. The number of participants in girls' flag football more than doubled from 2022-23 to 2023-24. A total of 42,955 girls participated in flag football in 2023-24 compared to 20,875 the previous year — a 105 percent increase. Numbers from 2025 promise to be even more impressive. Note: There also was an increase in the number of girls competing on 11-player football teams — from 3,654 to 4,094. USA Football states that its efforts to grow the sport "have resulted in the expansion of high school girls' flag football, which is now recognized as a varsity sport in 14 states." The NCAA is also exploring flag football as part of its Emerging Sports for Women program, a clear indicator of the sport's growing presence in collegiate athletics and beyond.

9. High School Records

The most positive report in 2025 came from the NFHS High School Athletics Participation Survey, which found that high school athletics participation increased by nearly 200,000 in 2024-25, continuing an upward trajectory since the pandemic and registering an all-time high for participation. The survey indicated that 8.3 million participants were involved in high school sports in 2024-25, which is up 198,589 from the previous year and tops the previous record of 8.1 million set in 2023-24. The total includes 4.7 million boys and 3.5 million — both record highs — according to figures obtained from the 51 NFHS member state associations, which includes the District of Columbia. The 2024-25 total marked the third consecutive notable increase after numbers fell during the pandemic.

10. Big Money Reaches High Schools

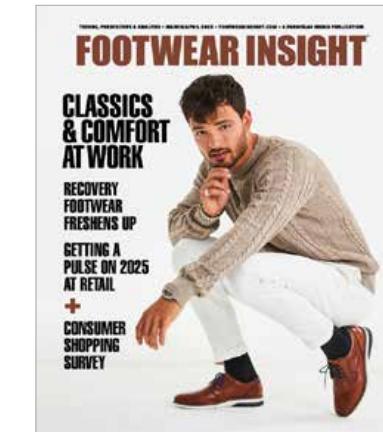
With all of this positive news comes word of a disturbing trend that should concern team dealers and their suppliers as a major brand has reached into the high school ranks for an all-apparel deal. Adidas this year signed a \$13 million contract with Miami-Dade County (Florida) Public Schools to outfit every student-athlete from the 40 high schools that make up the Greater Miami Athletic Conference. According to reports, the deal is worth \$13.5 million for five years. "We provide an amazing pipeline of talent into sports, not only at the state level, but also at the national level, so we are again, promoting, validating, embracing the incredible talent that we have in MDCPS," said Miami-Dade County Public Schools superintendent Dr. Jose Dotres in announcing the deal. Added Kelly Morris of Adidas: "It's about the athlete, the student athlete, it really is, our commitment to investing in sport, this is really the epitome of our strategy and our mission, which is really serving athletes from the brand perspective, we're about sport and serving the kids." ■

• Thomas Doyle, who made a significant impact in numerous areas with the National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA) during his 39-year career in the industry, passed away on April 22 at age 86. Doyle was NSGA's VP-information and research when he retired in 2010. He was responsible for the growth of NSGA's research products and its team dealer division and was also president of the National Ski & Snowboard Retailers Association (NSSRA), an independent association managed by NSGA, from its inception in 1987 until 2010. NSGA created its Team Dealer Division in 1975 and Doyle was its first managing director until 2006.

7. Trade War Games

The trade war that took shape in 2025 promised a heap of disruption for the team dealer space heavily reliant on imports — and it delivered, sort of. While the tariff situation remained extremely fluid, skepticism remained high among industry executives that they'll fulfill Donald Trump's vision of revitalizing the U.S. manufacturing sector. Many of the industry's product components, including yarn for team uniforms, are also largely based in the Far East. Todd Smith, CEO of the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), told us that with little time to react, U.S. importers and their factory partners could only absorb a portion of the tariff costs, with consumers ultimately facing higher prices. Although the situation remained extremely questionable throughout the summer and fall, the biggest uncertain impact on the team industry is the tariffs imposed on China, which remains a major producer of sports equipment, athletic apparel and athletic footwear despite diversification efforts in recent years.

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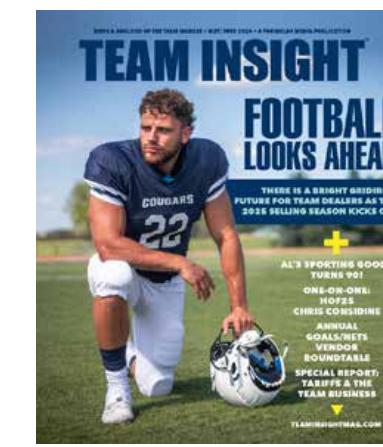
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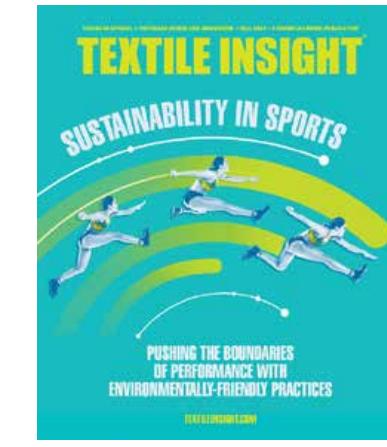
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THE SPORT OF FOOTBALL IS GOING GLOBAL – AND AMERICA'S TEAM DEALERS ARE BENEFITTING AT HOME. BY MIKE MAY

The sports of tackle football and flag football are taking on the world. Now is the world ready for them? Team dealers in America are counting on it as the sport expands well beyond our borders.

Take tackle football's international popularity in Dublin, Ireland – dubbed the college football capital of Europe – that continues to host a college football game in August to kick off the college football season. (This year, Iowa State and Kansas State met in Dublin on Saturday, August 23. Iowa State prevailed, 24-21.) It was the 11th U.S. college football game to have been played in Dublin since the first in November, 1988.

And then there are the Big Boys of American football. The National Football League continues to be aggressive in promoting the game overseas, especially with games in

The Champro End Zone Football Jersey features Optima Flex fabric that allows for freedom of movement and its breathable Pro-Micro Mesh panels keep the athlete cool. The pro V-neck collar and collegiate fit create a gridiron presence. The Game Day pant's four-way stretch enables agile movement, while its five-panel construction and cover stitched seams make it a reliable team uniform.



TEAM TRENDS



27 Sports specializes in sublimated uniforms and accessories for all levels of football, including reversible jerseys and waist length reversibles.

London, England. Need more international flavor? The second game of this year's NFL regular season featured the Los Angeles Chargers playing the Kansas City Chiefs down in Brazil. Yes, Brazil, home of the Beautiful Game (that would be soccer, to most Americans.)

And here comes flag football, a sport where teams from around the world traveled to Finland to decide the International Federation of American Football's Flag Football World Championships in August

2024. At that event, USA Football's U.S. Men's and Women's Flag Football National Teams successfully defended their crowns.

Undoubtedly, flag football is much more than just a recreational sport any longer. USA Football produced a documentary, "Champions Rising," that followed Team USA Football from training camp to those 2024 World Championships in Finland.

And, of course, flag football will generate global interest in 2028 when the Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles will be the

backdrop for international competition. It will mark flag football's debut on the Olympic stage.

This all adds up for both tackle and flag football riding waves of participation momentum, which is great for sales for team dealers.

Dealers Talk Football

For the most part, the 2025 football season was a strong one for team dealers around the country — and most dealers we contacted

believe that momentum will continue into 2026.

In Wilmington, DE, **Al's Sporting Goods** sells football to youth programs, local high school teams and adult squads year-round.

"We are selling football to youth and high school programs in the fall and we are selling football to local leagues for youth and young adults in the spring," reports owner **Bob Hart**. "In our area, we have youth football in the fall and the spring."

Al's boasts both a strong team business

and retail business for football. "Our team division sells footballs, helmets, shoulder pads and team uniforms," says Hart. "In our retail area, parents will come in to buy a new helmet if their son doesn't like the helmet provided by his school or team."

The one football category which Al's does not sell is footwear.

"We don't sell football cleats anymore," says Hart, with those lost sales made up by selling lots of tape and a set of goal posts from time to time.

In Battle Creek, MI, football sales have been better than average for **Jack Pearl's Sports Center**.

"Even though our youth helmet and shoulder pads business was down this year, it's been a really good year for football," says owner **Keith Manning**. "Our online spirit wear business has been strong this year, too."

According to Manning, high school and youth football programs are buying complete uniforms, shoulder pads, helmets, girdles, undershirts, socks, mouthguards, whistles,



practice cones and even first-and-ten chains.

"The lighted digital down markers from Champro are especially popular with teams once they seem them being used along the sidelines," added Manning.

While Jack Pearl's Sports Center doesn't have an in-house reconditioning division, Manning and his associates collect the helmets and shoulder pads at the conclusion of each season and make sure a third-party vendor gets them reconditioned in time for spring football.

In Terre Haute, IN, **Doc Claussen**, the manager of **Coaches Corner**, feels that personalized customer service is what sets the team dealer apart from its football competition.

"We do it the old-fashioned way here at Coaches Corner," says Claussen, who points out that all of its football clients are located within a two-hour radius of Terre Haute.

"We sell football merchandise to high schools, middle schools and youth sports leagues," he adds. "We sell it all in football, with the exception of footwear. We don't sell cleats. That is an Internet-driven category."

In Marietta, OH, **Zide's Sporting Goods** takes pride in its helmet-fitting business, a unique service that it provides to high school football teams in West Virginia and Ohio. That service helps Zide's Sporting Goods stand out from the competition.

"My father was focused on fitting helmets for every one of our football clients," explains owner **Rod Zide**. "Today, we have five teams of people who travel around from high school to high school fitting helmets."

And it's been a profitable year selling football for Zide's Sporting Goods. "We sell lots of football uniforms and everything from head-to-toe in football," Zide says.

In Fort Worth, TX, **Carey's Sporting Goods** is also busy throughout the year selling football. "We sell everything from head to toe to the junior high and high school football teams here in the metroplex area of Dallas and Fort Worth," says owner **Dan Carey**. "It's been an okay year for selling football, but I've been in this business for 47 years so you're going to have an off year from time to time."

In addition to selling the apparel and protective gear worn by the players, Carey sells field equipment such as cones, tackling dummies, blocking sleds and the occasional set of goal posts.

Out west in Las Vegas, NV, most of the football business for **Turf Sporting Goods** is with local youth football programs, although it does have a few high school football as well.

According to owner **Jerry Ocuda**, buying gear for the youth football programs is done by the individual families. "We sell a special package to youth football players," explains Ocuda — a helmet, shoulder pads, a pair of pants and a mouth piece."

Inside The Football Numbers

According to the latest research from the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), participation in tackle football is on the rise and on the upswing for flag football in the U.S. In 2024, there were 6.1 million tackle football players in the U.S. Of those, the vast majority are young males — 89 percent are male and 57 percent were between the ages of 6-17.

Another 17 percent of all the tackle football participants are ages 18-24, a reflection of both the large number of college football players and growing number of young adult males playing in semi-pro/amateur (age 18-plus) adult football leagues across the country.

At the high school level in the U.S., the 2024-25 NFHS Athletics Participation Survey indicates an overall total of 1.14 million participants (boys and girls) in all variations of football (11-player, nine-player, eight-player, six-player and flag).

The number of participants in 11-player football has increased three of the past four years — a trend not seen since the mid-2000s.

Finally, to further illustrate the health of the most popular high school sport for boys, the number of schools offering tackle football was the second-highest all-time in 2024. With 14,269 schools sponsoring 11-player tackle football in 2024, only the 14,279 schools in 2010-11 topped last year's number in the 55-year history of the NFHS Athletics Participation Survey. ■

Built for the trenches, Revo's Blitz Football Jersey combines eight-panel construction, reinforced shoulders and breathable Impact Mesh for durability and comfort. Fully sublimated for unlimited design freedom, it pairs seamlessly with its Blitz football pants, which feature triple-stitched seams and strategic reinforcement.