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INSIGHT + TRENDS



**A NEW
PERSPECTIVE**

- DESIGN**
WOMEN'S ACTIVE STYLE
- FOOTWEAR**
RAISING THE BAR ON COMFORT
- TEAM SPORTS**
BASEBALL HITS IT BIG

SPORTSTYLEMAG.COM



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THE BUZZ

OS1st announced the appointment of **Cape Capener** as VP of New Categories. In this newly created role, Capener will lead the development and expansion of new product categories and market opportunities, with an initial focus on golf, performance accessories, and strategic footwear adjacencies. He will partner closely with the OS1st leadership team to identify white-space opportunities, build strategic partnerships, and bring new category concepts to market in a way that aligns with the brand's technical credibility and consumer trust.



Capener brings more than 20 years of experience building and scaling brands across athletic footwear, performance apparel, outdoor, golf, and wellness. Throughout his career, he has held senior leadership and advisory roles with both global and emerging brands, driving category creation, wholesale and direct-to-consumer growth, and retail expansion across domestic and international markets.

“Cape brings a rare balance of product insight, commercial strat-

egy, and deep industry relationships,” said Josh Higgins, President of OS1st. “As we expand into new categories and retail environments, his leadership will help ensure we do so with focus, credibility, and a clear consumer benefit.”

Adidas is launching work and safety footwear later this year under the **adidas pro work** label in partnership with **GLO**, a business unit of Bunzl plc, a company that offers high-quality personal protective equipment (PPE) and safety solutions to global markets. The new line of products from adidas will be designed for construction, maintenance and logistics. The line combines functional protection with comfort and aesthetics, ensuring professionals don't have to compromise on style or safety.

The first models are expected to debut in Q2 2026 through select distribution partners and channels.

Distributors and wholesalers interested in partnering on the launch are invited to contact sales@glolicensing.com or register interest at www.glolicensing.com or www.adidasprowork.com.

SureWerx, a provider of safety, tool & equipment products, announced the upcoming launch of **Dickies Safety Footwear**, a new footwear platform set for delivery in the fourth quarter of this year. The lineup will include a broad range of safety-toe and soft-toe

options engineered for construction, warehouse, industrial, and service environments.

Hibbett is partnering with **Door Dash** to bring on-demand access of the retailer's footwear, apparel and accessories offerings to consumers. With approximately 1,000 stores nationwide, Hibbett's availability on DoorDash offers convenient retail access, particularly in the retailer's regional strongholds in the Southeast and Southwest. Shoppers can have items delivered to their door with same-day service.

OrthoLite has promoted Marty Greenwald to Vice President of Sales. In his new role, Greenwald will oversee global sales strategy and key account management. Greenwald joined OrthoLite in 2018 and most recently served as Global Sales Director. With more than 30 years of sales and managerial experience in the footwear and sporting goods industries, he brings a proven track record of building high-performing teams and long-term, value-driven customer relationships.

Additionally, OrthoLite has appointed Doug Nickerson as Sales Manager, Performance East. Nickerson brings deep technical knowledge and strong commercial expertise to OrthoLite; most recently, he worked closely with teams at Timberland and Timberland PRO, where he played a critical role in compound development, material

innovation, and soling system performance for demanding end-use applications.

PUMA appointed Nadia Kokni as Vice President, Global Brand Marketing. She will oversee brand marketing strategy, brand marketing creative direction, integrated marketing and communication globally. Kokni has held senior leadership roles at JD Sports, H&M, adidas, Tommy Hilfiger, and most recently at Hugo Boss as Senior Vice President of Global Marketing & Communications. Her appointment follows PUMA's recent decision to put Brand Marketing, Product, Creative Direction, Innovation and Go-To-Market into a single global organization led by Chief Brand Officer Maria Valdes. Kokni replaces Richard Teyssier, who left PUMA to pursue other opportunities.

Jared Carver, the former president and CEO of **Converse**, is the new CEO of Boston-based run brand **Tracksmith**. Matt Taylor, the founder and decade-long CEO of Tracksmith will step into a new role leading global brand strategy as Tracksmith's Chief Creative Officer. Taylor founded Tracksmith over a decade ago as a brand inspired by New England's running culture and has since scaled Tracksmith's business to become a global apparel and footwear player with a robust ecommerce presence complemented by a growing retail footprint. ■

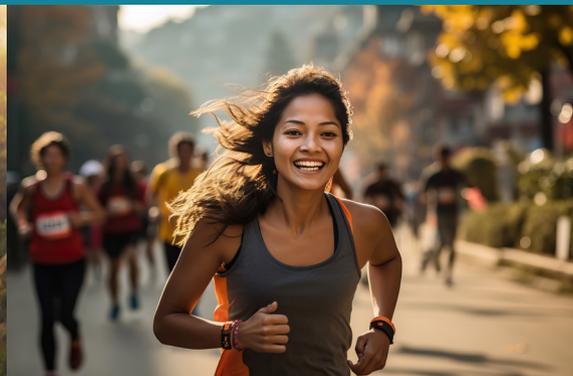
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A NEW PERSPECTIVE

By Emily Walzer

It may not be a new day for women's run apparel, but it's certainly a season of new perspective. A women-first design ethos is gaining traction and discussion on how women's clothing is represented at retail is front and center.

Women are the majority of the running population, yet according to industry estimates, fewer than 15 percent of independent running specialty stores are owned by women, and the number of women's-specific apparel brands available hovers around 25.

Megan Searfoss, owner of CT Run Co. is well aware of the opportunities and the difficulties encountered in selling women's running clothes. I recently visited her store in Darien, CT, one of three CT Run Co. locations in the state. The shop is directional in its approach. When I visited the store, a female mannequin stylishly outfitted in the latest technical run wear was stationed by the front door;

immediately to the right of the entrance is an entire wall featuring a colorful mix of women's leggings, shorts and tops, all facing outward for maximum impact; and apparel is surrounded by a mix of performance and lifestyle shoes and accessories. Overall, the presentation reflects a modern view of a women's run apparel as a "wardrobe" not a "uniform."

The store carries a variety of brands including Craft, rabbit, Oiselle, On, and Rhone, the CT-based brand that leans into high-end recovery and activewear, in addition to apparel from major footwear brands. "Merchandise is updated often to keep product selection looking fresh," says Searfoss, who adds that there's always a woman on staff. "Women come here to buy clothes," noted a female sales associate working the floor. "Women like shopping and talking with salespeople. They appreciate our help with purchasing decisions."

Design & Material Innovation

"Today, the needs of women runners are broader and more nuanced across road, trail, race, and everyday training. The garments that rise to the top are intuitive,

Branwyn Seamless Merino Essential Compressive Leggings blend sustainability, comfort and performance in addition to being PFAS-free, BPA and forever chemical-free.

comfortable, and quietly technical” explains Monica DeVreese, co-founder and CEO of rabbit and co-founder with her husband of Santa Barbara Running Company. “The right textile can quietly elevate performance

“Selling apparel well requires time on the floor, confidence in fit and function, and clear product storytelling. Many of our retail partners do this exceptionally well, and when they do, women’s apparel performs.”

**MONICA DEVREESE,
RABBIT**

without the runner needing to think about it. For us, the best fabric innovations enhance performance without adding stiffness, weight, or unnecessary complexity. The goal is always to balance function and comfort while creating garments that feel intuitive, lightweight, and reliable on the run.”

She highlights the need to break the false choice between femininity and performance.

“Women are still too often presented with fashion-led product that underperform or highly technical gear that ignores how women actually want to feel wearing it,” said DeVreese.

In running circles, a current conversation starter is whether women’s active apparel is on par with men’s. “Women have access to the same fabrics and technologies as men, and today, women are largely designing for women,

“Fast Fashion along with markdowns and promotions on apparel from online sales present purchasing trends that make in-store retail more challenging.”

**MEGAN SEARFOSS,
CT RUN CO.**

which is real progress. But access to materials isn’t the same as innovation,” states Deanne Buck, CEO, Branwyn, remarking that, “what’s still missing is the framework most products are built from.”

She explains: “Historically, performance apparel has been designed from the outside in—focused on weather, movement, and activity—without fully

accounting for the unique physiological realities of women’s bodies. True innovation requires building from the body out, starting with health, temperature regulation, and what actually sits next to the skin. That gap is exactly why Branwyn exists.” Branwyn activewear features merino wool, a natural fiber loaded with inherent performance properties.

Elizabeth McGarry, interim chief brand and product officer, Oiselle, explains that in many cases men’s and women’s design teams are thinking about performance features and benefits that are tooled to the body they are intended for and generally coming from similar starting points. However, McGarry states, “many women will experience a broader range of transitions in her body in her lifetime, which presents more opportunity for innovation and development for our team. That is something that we are obsessing about for our upcoming collections.”

Challenges and More Challenges

Apparel can be a complex category for running stores, especially when footwear naturally takes priority. According to DeVreese, selling apparel well requires time on the floor, confidence in fit and function, and clear product storytelling. “Many of our retail partners do this exceptionally well, and when they do, women’s apparel performs,” she remarks.

Searfoss expands on these factors, noting that Fast Fashion along with markdowns and promotions on apparel from online sales present purchasing trends that make in-store retail more challenging. “As a whole, very few people buy apparel at full price anymore — consumers in the U.S. are now conditioned to buy on sale.”

“The cost of doing business presents a real challenge in allowing us to bring all the solutions we have for women of all paces and phases of life,” comments McGarry. “Too many women are being left out of the offering of performance run apparel, but we are finding creative ways to solve for that.”

McGarry concludes, “Most brands that exist today started with the intent to solve a ‘niche’ problem, and we see that across our whole industry. Athletes, and especially runners, have been hacking their way to comfort, utility, and style for as long as we can remember and some of those hacks spawned multi-billion dollar brands. Women’s brands will become more and more prevalent thanks to this approach and some of them will scale so big that it will be hard to remember their ‘niche’ origins.” ■

Showers Pass Women's
Cloudburst Jacket incorporates
the brand's eliteAIR technology,
PFAS-free fabric with durable,
high-performance breathability and
waterproofing and a soft hand feel.



DESIGN / WOMEN'S STYLE

rabbit's new trail colorway Leggy Smashem short features engineered, functional storage solutions that allow runners to carry fuel, keys and a phone without bounce, bulk or distraction.



Artilect Women's Sprint Tee, with slightly relaxed fit, is made with a unique Merino wool/nylon blend for superb breathability, quick drying and odor-resistance.



DESIGN / WOMEN'S STYLE

Oiselle Cross Bra has a high neckline and adjustable strap configuration offering support and a little more front coverage, whether training in the gym or on the trails.

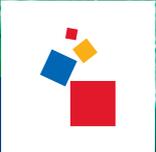


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FOOTWEAR



XELERO/X-GPS WALKER

Xelero offers footwear with stability and motion control built on a firm midsole and mild rocker. The firm has recently updated its uppers to reach a younger customer – both in age and mindset. A water-resistant upper and slip-resistant outsole make this style versatile. MSRP \$169.99.

RAISING THE BAR ON COMFORT BRANDS UP THE FEEL-GOOD QUOTIENT WITH NEW MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGIES.

While initial attraction draws a consumer to a shoe, it's comfort that keeps them wearing it day after day. Thanks to recent advancements in how footwear is designed and manufactured, foot wellness is becoming a larger part of the equation in purchasing behavior. Spending more to get more is an overarching trend. For some additional insight on the subject, we asked execs [—————>](#)

BY SUZANNE BLECHER

FOOTWEAR RAISING THE BAR ON COMFORT

HOW ARE YOU IMPROVING THE COMFORT EXPERIENCE FOR YOUR CONSUMERS?

“With every design, we start by considering the user: what is the purpose of the shoe, who is buying it, what do they need, and how can we exceed their expectations. We focus on features that make their day easier, including adjustability for different foot shapes, reduced weight, and performance elements like waterproofing—all without sacrificing style.”

- **Emily Hagen, designer, Alegria**

“True comfort is rooted in thoughtful design, not just more foam underfoot. Our proprietary foot-beds are at the heart of every pair, delivering structured arch support, a contoured heel cup, and energy-return cushioning that work together to reduce fatigue and promote better support and alignment.”

- **Mike Walker, VP of marketing and ecommerce, Taos**

“We already make the most comfortable shoes in sizes and widths (size 4-16, S-WWW) covering occasions from dress to sandals and slip resistant shoes. Today, we are focused on consumer value and raising the bar on comfort in the aesthetic of our shoes; incorporating luxurious materials and innovative components to elevate the style and increase the versatility of every shoe.”

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

“Advanced knit and engineered mesh uppers are evolving to enhance breathability and reduce weight, with lower environmental impact. Premium leathers remain essential, but there’s a shift toward more durable materials. Midsole platforms are more responsive and energy-returning, aligning with the broader trend toward performance-inspired comfort in lifestyle silhouettes.”

- **Jill Butler, director of merchandising, ECCO**

“Mephisto is responding directly to what today’s customers want. For example, the expansion of our boot assortment this past Fall proves that shoppers are

actively seeking comfort—even at a higher price point. Additionally, our premium cork footbeds deliver the natural comfort and support customers value, without compromising on quality.”

- **Scott McCabe, director, ecommerce and merchandising, Mephisto USA**

“Arcopedico is committed to reinforcing our core values: A supportive sole with non-binding uppers. For Fall 2026, be prepared to see new silhouettes that offer dual arch support and fit the foot like a glove. Our uppers promote circulation and won’t bind or pinch the feet, making all Arcopedico shoes a great option for anyone suffering from bunions, hammertoes, and other foot ailments.”

- **Sydney Simas, CEO, Simco Imported Shoes (Arcopedico)**

“Comfort is about how a shoe feels all day—not just when you first put it on. We use leather-lined, memory-foam cushioned insoles for a soft, supportive feel, along with stable low heels and flexible outsoles that make walking easy and natural. Adjustable details like Velcro straps, zippers, and laces help create a comfortable, personalized fit.”

- **Danny Astobiza, president, Biza**

“The foundation of Waldlaufer shoes comes down to fit. The designers and manufacturers work to ensure styles have a narrow heel and wider toe box. They also offer a variety of widths to guarantee the perfect fit. Proper fitting shoes are the key component to comfort.”

- **Sydney Simas, CEO, Simco Imported Shoes (Waldlaufer)**

“Our shoes prioritize comfort and fit for all-day wear, with wider lasts to reduce pressure, added cushioning for impact absorption, and removable footbeds for customizable support.”

- **Rich Rask, president, Rieker Shoe Corporation**



SOFT VS. SUPPORTIVE- WHICH REIGNS SUPREME?

The precise balance of cushion and support is what footwear dreams are made of. With so many opinions, it's hard to perfect the mix.

"It really depends on the consumer's preference and/or need," explains Comfort Co EVP/GM Liam Bourke. The goal should be for "the entire body to align in harmony," he says. The firm's strategy is to build a foundation of support—using features like perfected arch support, mid-foot shanks and strengthened heel counters—then layer premium cushioning on top. In the Vitasole line, a removable memory foam footbed provides that 'soft' feel, that sits upon a compression-molded EVA mid-sole for structural support. It's that solid foundation that the rest of the house is built upon.

As Made Plus CEO Alan Guyan notes, "support reigns supreme, but only when it's paired with the right amount of cushioning." The Made Plus approach is to engineer what responds to movement rather than collapsing under it. The focus is on a stable platform, securing midfoot lockdown, and employing energy-return foams that provide comfort without sacrificing alignment or durability. "The goal is a shoe that feels plush at step-in, supportive through the stride, and comfortable hours later," the exec suggests.

Comfort is the foundation of the Fluchos brand, and has been since 1962. What has evolved is how the company achieves it. "In recent seasons, we have incorporated lighter materials, advanced technical engineering, more efficient cushioning solutions, and

ergonomic insoles—all while maintaining the brand's core identity. These enhancements are focused on reducing fatigue and improving well-being during prolonged wear," comments Louis-Philippe Roy, Fluchos territory and sales manager, Canada/USA. The Fluchos approach is based on balanced construction, where the shoe's structure (heel, counter, lateral stability) is just as vital as the cushioning. The shoes are handmade in Spain.

Consumers from different regions can have varying expectations. According to Finn Comfort USA CEO Justin Orrell-Jones, "We believe offering support is consistent with our primary objective, which is to encourage health and wellness. However, we are aware that some consumers especially in the USA like cushioning." To meet the needs to this consumer, the FinnMellow collection offers support through the use of differing PU densities in the outsole and extra foam in the footbed for increased cushioning.

Choosing the correct shoe for your body is the key to avoiding pain, inflammation and inefficient gait. A well-trained staff can guide the consumer in the right direction through education. "The store that does the educating wins the war and usually a customer for life. In short, the easy sell usually turns out to be the last sell," explains Michael Arce, National Sales Manager for Xelero. For an easy sales anecdote, Arce shares:

"If you and I were walking on the beach and we had one mile to get to the pier, would we walk down the middle of the beach on the soft sand or along the water on the firm sand? Everyone would acknowledge that walking down the middle of the soft sand would be exhausting and that walking along the firm sand by the water would be less taxing on the body."



VITASOLE/ICARUS

Ideal for walking, jogging or an everyday active lifestyle; Icarus has a VX Rebound Midsole (with ETPU) that provides up to 65% rebound for more energy with every step. A Glide in Heel with Smart-Glide technology makes for effortless hands-free entry. A 10mm heel-to-toe-drop reduces strain on the Achilles. MSRP \$129.95.

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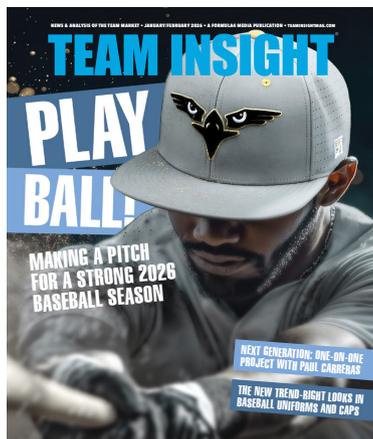
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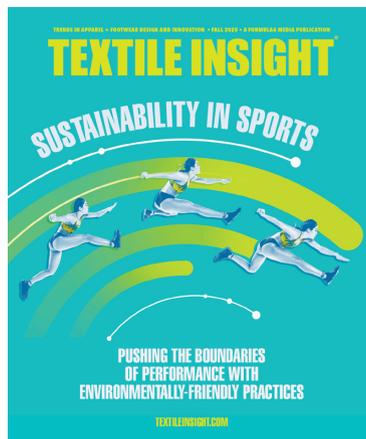
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FOOTWEAR / RAISING THE BAR ON COMFORT NOW TRENDING

Feeling good and looking good go hand-in-hand. We highlight some key trends in 2026 that allow for holistic wellness to be obtainable, keeping feet healthy and happy, while also expressing personal style.

WILD CHILD

A hint of leopard and a dose of cheetah turn up the fashion quotient.



ARCOPEDICO/DUORO

Duoro offers a personalized fit, thanks to two adjustable Velcro straps. The Lytech upper is vegan and hand-washable. A PU outsole features the brand's Dual Arch Support with two lengthwise supports in the sole to evenly distribute weight, improve posture and gait, and supporting both arches. MSRP \$149.95.



ALEGRIA/FAE

A new Essence outsole updates the brand's classic rocker with an EVA midsole for improved comfort and recovery, without sacrificing its signature support. Fae includes a removable soft-touch microsuede footbed that is interchangeable for medium to wide width. An inside zipper adds accessibility. MSRP \$150.



RIEKER/REVEL

Available in colorways for men and women, Revel low-top sneakers are crafted from high-quality, smooth leather. An arch-shaped Swing2GO insole supports the natural shape of the foot and provides shock absorption and energy with each step. MSRP \$140.

SERENITY NOW

Playing into Pantone's 2026 color of the year – Cloud Dancer; the look is clean and quiet.

ECCO/SOFT 11

Retro-inspired Soft 11 draws from 1990s handball styles and is crafted with leather from the brand's own tanneries. ECCO FLUDIFORM Direct Comfort Technology builds the sole directly onto an anatomically designed last, for a cushioned feel promoting natural foot movement and offering superior rebound. MSRP \$170.



TAOS/DELTA

Delta is the newest addition to Tao's active-inspired sneaker collection. The premium leather walking sneaker is designed for balance, support and all-day movement. Carefully calibrated cushioning feels plush on step-in, yet holds its shape to support all arches of the foot. MSRP \$200.

FINN COMFORT/PRATO

Part of the FinnMellow collection, Prato features great support, using differing PU densities in the outsole. Extra foam in the footbed pumps up the cushioning. Laces and a side zip provide convenience. MSRP \$445.



FOOTWEAR / RAISING THE BAR ON COMFORT NOW TRENDING

FASTENED FIT

Whether buckled in or zipped up, these options are locked-in.



BIZA/WINONA

Biza pairs memory-foam cushioning for softness with stable construction and balanced outsoles for support that perseveres. Winona features an adjustable instep Velcro strap with a faux buckle for an adaptive fit. A rubber stacked heel provides durability and flexibility. MSRP \$159.95.



WALDLAUFER/H-BRUNI

Fun and functional for fall, H-Bruni features a durable outsole and wool insole. Dual zippers offer easy access. The fit is roomy, making it an option for wider feet. MSRP \$220.

MEPHISTO/BERRIE

Mephisto offers a fresh take on its iconic cork footbed. The youthful Berrie has a platform construction with enhanced flexibility, personalized fit and signature Air-Relax technology. A supportive heel counter protects your feet and back. MSRP \$249.

NEUTRAL TERRITORY

The current men's vibe is everyday refined.



MADE PLUS/RIPPL

This U.S.-made, neutral-performance trainer features a breathable, lightweight engineered knit upper made from 100% recycled materials. A blown-rubber outsole and expanded rubber foam midsole give a fast, energetic feel under-foot, along with a responsive cushioning platform. MSRP \$225.



SAS/JOURNEY ML

This is a new spin on a best-seller which offers all-day comfort and versatility. Like all SAS styles, the Journey Men's Luxe starts with the creation of a unique last for every pattern, size and width to ensure that the foundation is ideal. MSRP \$255.



FLUCHOS/ROCKY

Rocky is designed with a wide last, offering freedom of movement. The fit is secure and ankles are protected thanks to ample padding. Rocky includes the brand's patented slip-in technology for easy on/off. MSRP \$225.

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"Xelero has proven to be the ultimate recovery shoe, effectively reducing pain in the foot, ankle, knee, and hips. The innovative technology keeps the foot in alignment making walking easier and improving people's lives."
Donna Robertson, C. Ped, ATC-MS



TEAM TRENDS

Although it's the heart of winter in most of the country, springtime is drawing closer and America's Pastime is again on the minds of team dealers, school athletic directors, players, coaches, leagues and travel teams. In 2024, total participation in baseball reached 17.3 million, an uptick of 3.8 percent from 2023 and a jump of 9.4 percent from 2019 to 2024, according to the SFIA 2025 Topline Participation Report.

In the youth market, the news is also positive. The NFHS reported that Baseball claimed the number three spot on its list of 10 Most Popular Boys' Programs for the 2024-25 school year, trailing only Basketball and Track and Field, respectively.

To help grow the game at the youth level, many major baseball organizations, including MLB, USA Baseball and Little League International, are continuing their efforts in community outreach, equipment access, coaching development and inclusive programs, all aimed at making baseball accessible, safe and fun for diverse youth. And many of these efforts are finding new ways to prove the adage that diamonds are a girl's best friend.

Little League International's Girls With Game initiative, which launched in 2019, is still going strong. "The program is dedicated to honoring all the girls and women who have made the Little League program what it is today and those who inspire the future generation of female participants at every level," states the organization. Each March, in coordination with National Women's History Month, Little League celebrates its own women's history with Girls With Game month across all its social media channels and at LittleLeague.org/GirlsWithGame.

MLB and USA Baseball are also doing their part to promote women's baseball with the MLB GRIT: Girls ID Tour that will host five stops in 2026. The program is designed specifically for female athletes ages 18 and under. The event format is similar to a pro-style workout where athletes are evaluated on their talent. Top performers will be selected to participate in the Girls Baseball Elite Development Invitational, a one-week program geared toward providing elite training and instruction, as well as the annual Girls Baseball Breakthrough Series.

In other initiatives, MLB is continuing to invest money and resources into growing the game. For example, the Nike RBI program, Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities, is designed to provide kids ages 5-18 from underserved and diverse communities with equipment, training and access to camps. MLB Play Ball, a partnership with USA Baseball and USA Softball, encourages casual play and participation. MLB's Pitch Hit & Run is a free event that provides boys and girls ages 7-14 an opportunity to showcase their skills while earning a chance to attend and perform during the MLB World Series.

The Breakthrough Series, a joint effort between MLB and USA Baseball, focuses on developing players on and off the field through seminars, mentorship, gameplay, scout evaluations, video coverage and high-level instruction, all while providing a platform for players to perform for scouts and collegiate coaches. Meanwhile, USA Baseball Fun At Bat is a free program bringing baseball fundamentals into elementary school physical education classes for kids in grades K-5.

RIGHT OFF THE BAT



**DEALERS ARE READY TO HIT IT BIG WITH
BASEBALL IN 2026. BY JUDY LEAND**

TEAM TRENDS

In other developments, the Women's Professional Baseball League (WPBL) is now on deck. Still in its early days, the league held tryouts and a draft in 2025 ahead of its inaugural season this August, which will feature four teams: Boston, San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York. It is the biggest attempt to organize pro baseball for women since the All-American Girls Professional League in the 1940s and '50s. The new league has already signed substantial partnerships with media production house Freemantle, as well as iconic cap brand New Era.

Ready to Go Yard

From a team dealers' viewpoint, the upcoming baseball season is looking solid. "Last season, sales were up and although it's still early this year, we're projecting we'll do well," says **Keith Manning**, owner of **Jack Pearl's Sports Center** in Battle Creek, MI. "We're pretty consistent in baseball and we're busier in the spring than we've been in the past. More travel teams are popping up, which helps provide steady growth for us."

More specifically, Manning says that travel ball is up — particularly 8U to age 14 — but recreation play is down a little bit. "Total participation is steady, but we're seeing a shift from rec to travel. We're also seeing more year-round play, fall ball and spirit orders for winter training and travel teams. Sales are now happening three to four times a year instead of just once," he explains. "For travel teams, the top sellers are apparel and uniforms. For high schools, it's equipment and training aids — the schools only buy uniforms every three to four years."

At Oxford, OH-based **Capitol Varsity Sports**, baseball and softball are big business, especially regarding online stores. "Last year was okay. We had a little inventory left over — we didn't sell through as many gloves as usual," says owner **Bob Fawley**. "Now, travel and club baseball are dominating and are overshadowing Little League. A lot of little local community and rec youth leagues are suffering as travel and club teams continue to grow. But travel teams and clubs are big and they spend a lot of money. We got our baseball shipments in for this season and we went heavy in batting helmets."

Fawley also reports that in his area, baseball seasons are running longer, and late-summer/fall ball are popular, especially for travel teams. "Travel ball has become very popular, but it's

challenging for kids that want to play other sports because there's lots of overlap with other sport seasons now."

For **Dave Whipp**, who with wife Becky co-owns **Dave's Sporting Goods** in Vero Beach, FL, the baseball category is booming. The family-owned store, which was established by Whipp's parents in 1973, is now turning 53. Whipp attributes part of his business' recent success to its immediate proximity to a four-field sports complex located right behind the store, and to a girls' Little League complex in the middle of town that serves more than 100 kids. The store relocated to its current site a couple of years ago.

"The upcoming season is looking very strong and being next to the field makes it easy for us. We're doing lots of business with hardgoods, balls and bats," he reports.



To better serve customers, the store has more than 120 glove models on the wall and 220 models in stock and glove oil and conditioner are kept near the register. To satisfy kids' demands for customization, there's a wood burner that's used to burn names or initials into gloves and a hand engraver that can carve initials onto the ends of bats. "Kids all want their initials on gloves and we try to make it more exciting for them," Whipp says.

Whipp has seen the local Little League blossom and currently 500 kids are registered. Although the girls' league had fallen apart, it has managed to come back in the past two years. "Not everything is about travel ball. By getting the right people involved, we're seeing more local play, and rec

and local leagues are very strong here," he says.

Whipp has also noticed that professional female baseball and softball players hold a lot of sway over young girls. "Girls want to emulate the clothing, equipment and style of the pro women and they want the same shoes, gloves and even hair ribbons that they see the pros using," he says. "This will become more pronounced with big events such as the Olympics, and on social media."

At **Bashor's Team Athletics** in Portland, OR, the news is also positive. "Last season was good — we worked with 17 Little League teams, as well as high school and club teams, and more leagues have been added for the upcoming season," says **Christina Barrett**, a sales and customer service specialist. "This year, we're servicing about 20 Little League teams and participation within each team has also increased. Baseball participation is up in general and we're seeing more youth baseball and more club teams."

She adds that gloves and bats are doing well, especially because of the bright colors that kids love.

On the female side, Barrett is seeing a small increase in participation, but overall softball is growing faster than baseball for girls. She posits, "We'll probably see more female growth on the youth side, and having a women's pro league will help drive girls' and youth participation."

Across the country in West Lebanon, NH, baseball is a steady category for **Stateline Sports**. "Last season was very good and we're hopeful for this year," reports **Bud Hill**, who handles baseball buying for the retail part of the business. "We do glove relacing and glove repair and the season is already looking promising. We service retail customers as well as local rec programs, high schools and middle schools. Last fall we had some travel ball, which is new for this area, and we hope it'll continue in 2026." He adds that gloves and helmets are top sellers.

Budget & Margin Challenges

Many dealers have found that the environment is getting tougher when it comes to school and team budgets, and the problems are exacerbated by more manufacturers looking to sell direct to consumers online.

"Budgets are going down every year," says Manning. "Teams and schools are relying more on boosters and fundraising. However, as long



BASEBALL BY THE NUMBERS

Sales of baseballs totaled \$64.7 million in 2024, up 0.4 percent from 2023. Also in 2024, sales of bats hit \$339.3 million (up 5.8 percent from 2023); batting gloves climbed to \$50.5 million (up 2.0 percent); glove and mitt sales totaled \$203.2 million (up 1.8 percent); and protective/other sales dipped slightly to \$125.6 million (-0.2 percent). Baseball team uniform sales hit \$527.3 million in 2024, an increase of 5.6 percent from 2023, and a 34.3 percent rise from 2019 to 2024. In the baseball footwear category, sales climbed to \$303.4 million, up three percent from 2023, and a spike of 9.8 percent from 2019 to 2024.¹

Families replace gear most often in baseball and soccer, according to the SFIA

2025 Team Sports Parents' Insights report. "Sporting goods stores remain central to these purchases, but hybrid shopping – combining in-store and online – is most common, while online-only is less frequent," states the report. "Affordability remains the primary concern for parents when making youth sports purchases, but it is not the only factor influencing their decisions. Access and convenience also play significant roles, with families seeking simpler ways to find, evaluate and replace equipment." Total participation in baseball totaled 17.3 million in 2024, up 3.8 percent from 2023, and a rise of 9.4 percent from 2019 to 2024.²

At the high school level, 116,110 schools offered baseball for boys (472,598

participants), and 1,342 schools offered the sport for girls (1,381 participants) in the 2024-25 school year. Baseball was also No. 3 on the list of 10 Most Popular Boys Programs, trailing only Basketball and Track and Field-Outdoor, respectively.³

Out of 17.3 million total baseball participants in 2024, males comprised 80 percent and females the remaining 20 percent.³

Interestingly, the biggest cohort of male baseball participants in 2024 was the 6-12 age group (400,577 players, accounting for 33.1 percent of all male players.)

On the female side, the largest group was the 25-34 set (900,000 players, accounting for 26 percent of all female players).⁴

¹SFIA 2025 Manufacturers' Sales by Category Report. ²Source: SFIA 2025 Topline Participation Report. ³SFIA 2025 Baseball Single Sport Report.

⁴SFIA 2025 Baseball Single Sport Report. ⁵NFHS High School Athletics Participation Survey, 2024-25 School Year.

as vendors have everything in stock, we're not having any problems. Forecasting sales is the biggest challenge, especially for equipment. Last year, we sold more baseballs than we anticipated, which is a good thing."

For Stateline Sports, shrinking budgets are also a concern. "Tariffs and price increases are stressing everyone's budgets," says Hill. "Luckily, we haven't seen any significant challenges so far for 2026. Baseball is a steady category for us and for the last couple of years it has been consistent, not growing but also not decreasing."

Fawley agrees that high school budgets are under fire, but even more troublesome is the DTC situation. "Uniforms are the biggest challenge because there are too many import direct sublimators in China, Pakistan and Vietnam — they have low price points without a lot of margin. We have our own direct import source, but dealing with our domestic suppliers is really the way to go. You have more security and it's easier to solve problems with domestic sources."

As Fawley sees it, the main issue is that more

manufacturers are going DTC and this hurts dealers. "Our inventory is substantially up across multiple sports and a lot of dollars are tied up on the shelf. It's difficult to take the risk of bringing in too much, especially when manufacturers are undercutting dealers via DTC and lower pricing," he says. "All of this cuts into margin and margin is king for survival. We never take our eyes off margin."

On a positive note, "The supply chain has gotten pretty good recently. All of our deliveries arrived on time in early January and we're doing a lot of quotes and pricing," Fawley reports. "There's no real uptick in any particular product category — we continue to hold our margins."

For Dave's Sporting Goods, manufacturers selling DTC is also a major headache. "Everybody thinks they know best so they go online to design their own caps and sublimated uniforms, often with less than stellar results. DTC sales and the Internet are cutting out the

middleman," laments Whipp. "The Internet makes everything more challenging — it's all about price and service is going by the wayside for many companies. Fortunately, a lot of people still want to touch and feel the goods." As is the case with most dealers, shrinking budgets are a challenge for Whipp, but offsetting this is the

fact that his business services a lot of private and charter schools that have healthy budgets, as well as booster clubs.

For Bashor's Team Athletics, league budgets are healthy but there have been lots of cuts to school budgets, meaning that schools are buying a little less than

in years past. While the supply chain is good, Barrett still sees a challenge in working with so many leagues and retaining the ability to accommodate everyone. "The growth has been nice with all the leagues and we're seeing an upward trend in participation as a whole," she says. ■



TEAM TRENDS





BASEBALL UNIFORM/CAP FASHION SHOW

UNIFORM LOOKS

Baseball uniforms have come a long way from heavy wool pants and sized caps. Today's looks combine technology with trend-right styles to make players stand out on the field. Diamond stars won't just be playing this season, they will also be looking good!

CURATED BY MICHAEL JACOBSEN

MOMENTEC / MOBILE EFFORT

Built for mobility, Momentec's J5180A full-button custom jersey features buttons spaced for easy embellishment, set-in sleeves and fishtail bottom.

TEAM TRENDS

UNIFORM LOOKS



CAP AMERICA / STAYING FLEXIBLE

Cap America's i8503 Flexfit Perforated Performance Cap is built with a mid-profile, six-panel structured crown and a shapeable flat round visor for an on-field look with off-field versatility. Perforated sides and back enhance breathability, while the moisture-wicking fabric keeps players cool. Offered in With Flexfit sizing from XS to XXL.

A4 / NO RESTRICTIONS

A pro-level look is offered by A4's sublimated Full Button Baseball Jersey. Made from its advanced Dynatek fabric - a high-performance 92 percent polyester/eight percent spandex pointelle mock mesh - the jersey delivers a balance of durability, stretch and breathability. The full-button front, set-in sleeves and athletic full-cut design deliver a timeless ballpark silhouette and unrestricted fit.



TEAM TRENDS

UNIFORM LOOKS



THE GAME / TIME FOR A CHANGE

The Game's GP521 cap features its GameChanger Perforated Performance, is extremely lightweight and is perforated for enhanced breathability, along with a performance sweatband.

RICHARDSON / HEAD-TO-TOE

Richardson focuses on modern fit and function and its new PTS75 cap debuts a bold Full Pro2 shape – wider front panels, deeper back panels and System 5 stretch-fit sizing – for a clean, athletic profile and next-level comfort. Paired with its PTS Baseball Faux Full-Button Jersey, teams get a head-to-toe look that plays as good as it looks. This easy-wear jersey combines Stay-Dri moisture control, faux button styling and full Custom Ultra capabilities, including full sublimation and HYPR Twill embellishment.



TEAM TRENDS

UNIFORM LOOKS

REVO / PICK UP THE BLITZ

Revo Sportswear Group now offers next-level decoration that adds depth and impact with twill and embroidery – and can finish the set with embroidered hats. Its Blitz Quick Ship jersey can be produced in as little as five business days from artwork approval.

CHAMPRO / JOIN THE SHOW

Own every moment on the field with Champro's Show Two-Button Jersey and Triple Crown 2.0 Open-Bottom Pant, crafted to withstand tough play. Top off the look with the MVP Cap, embroidered in bold team colors.



TEAM TRENDS

UNIFORM LOOKS

PUKKA / ALL SEASON LONG

From spring training through the postseason, Pukka's custom headwear is built to perform for baseball teams at every level. Engineered to meet the demands from rec leagues to elite travel ball programs, its caps deliver a consistent, comfortable fit that holds up all season long so creating a unified, on-field look is easy.





NIKE TEAM / CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT

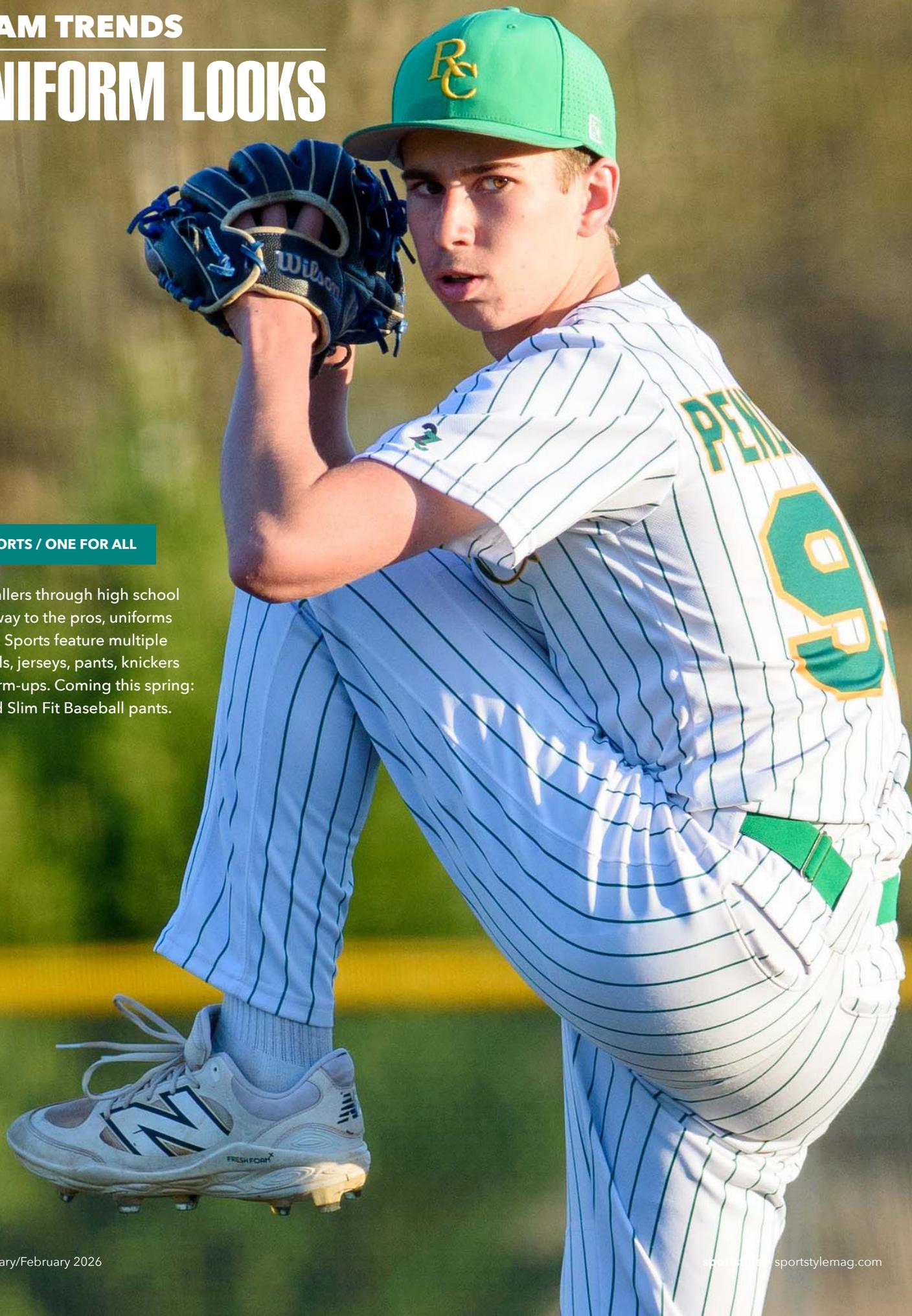
Nike Team's Pro Cap High is an authentic on-field cap for competitive athletes featuring a structured high-crown fit, engineered with Dri-FIT fabric and laser-perforated ventilation to stay locked in through every inning.

TEAM TRENDS

UNIFORM LOOKS

27 SPORTS / ONE FOR ALL

For T-ballers through high school all the way to the pros, uniforms from 27 Sports feature multiple materials, jerseys, pants, knickers and warm-ups. Coming this spring: Tapered Slim Fit Baseball pants.



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