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Our Own Made in America Story

Team Insight remains committed to team dealers across the country.



Team *Insight* magazine is 100 percent Made in America. Our editorial offices are located in New Jersey and we have writers spread across the country in Florida, Missouri, Ohio and Maryland. Our sales offices are in Atlanta and the headquarters of it all is based on Long Island in New York. To top it off, the magazines are printed in upstate New York and delivered by the good, old reliable U.S. Post Office.

Like I said, we are American-made from the front cover to the back. And proud of it.

I point all of this out to tie in with our Made in America feature that begins on page 60. We researched that section not quite knowing what we would find when we reached out to many of the vendors to team sports to ask them about their Made in America stories. We ended up being overwhelmed by the response and by the diverse

ways manufacturers are making their products domestically. *(So overwhelmed, in fact, that we are making it a two-part series. Part 2 will run in our March 2016 issue.)*

Many are returning to America after manufacturing off-shore, while others never left and have been making their products domestically for years. The reasons vary, but the bottom line is quality and timeliness. No athletic director or coach is going to buy a product simply because it is Made in America; vendors have to offer benefits beyond patriotism to make that sale.

It's different for *Team Insight*, of course. Our own Made in America story is simple — we live here and write about the team sports business in the United States. It is who we are.

And speaking of who we are, as we kick off a new year I want to reiterate our editorial policy and how we view our place in the team sports business.

Formula4 Media, the parent company of *Team Insight*, is in the midst of celebrating its 10th year providing information to our specialized markets — beyond team sports we produce both print and digital publications for general sporting goods retail, footwear, outdoor, textiles and running. I have personally been in this from the beginning — I like to consider myself the Fifth Beatle to the four founding partners.

The editorial staff of *Team Insight* remains dedicated to telling the story of the team business — your challenges, your opportunities, your success stories and, yes, your failures. Much has changed

since we started publishing *Team Insight* a decade ago. We have been here to document it all for you.

Not every reader likes every story we write — believe me, you have let me know how you feel every issue — but our focus will always remain on telling the story of this business. It is an industry that is changing and dealers are getting swept along with the tide. Only you can choose if you will sink or swim.

Team Insight has adapted in our own way. We are now available as a digital publication as well as traditional ink on paper, and you can access our archives 24 hours a day at our constantly updated website — www.teaminsightmag.com. We report breaking news in our new *Inside Insight* sister publication and we travel as much, if not more, than ever before to make sure we keep in touch with our readers and advertisers at every buying group show, trade event or sales meeting that welcomes us.

We love speaking with team dealers; indeed, we like to think of ourselves as the voice of team dealers in America. Our only request is that you spend some time with our writers when they call to talk about trends in team sports.

So we'll see you down the road and we look forward to talking team sports with you when we do give you a call. ●

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Dealer Focus: Embracing Change

Reynolds & Sons invests in a new team and retail environment.



That location is in downtown Grand Rapids, an evolving urban area that is struggling with the influx of big-box stores and suburban malls. Customers weren't interested in heading into town to buy something that they could get within miles of their homes — or even easier online.

Seeing the handwriting on the wall, Reynolds changed its retail focus and shifted its product mix from typical sporting goods into urban shoes/apparel from

By Michael Jacobsen

The demographics of America's cities and suburbs are changing. For team dealers and sporting goods retailers looking to survive, the choice is clear: Change along with them or risk becoming obsolete. The answer will determine their future.

In the case of 89-year-old team dealer and retailer **Reynolds & Sons Sporting Goods** in the rapidly changing city of Grand Rapids, MI, the choice was clear, but anything but simple. The business saw its urban retail clientele changing under its feet, while its team business was in flux in both the city and surrounding suburbs. Current owner **Jeff Reynolds** knew he had a decision to make — either adapt or shut off the lights.

He chose the former. As a result, Reynolds & Sons' quintessential American small business story continues to be told.

The company's roots go way back in Grand Rapids to when the burgeoning automobile manufactur-

A modern look replaces the traditional at the updated Reynolds & Sons in Grand Rapids. The team dealer and retailer has been in the city since the 1920s.

ing business was changing America from an agricultural to a manufacturing society, no where more so than in the upper Midwest.

To service the growing region, Goebel & Brown was founded by Paul Goebel and Thorne Brown in 1926 at 33 Library Street in Grand Rapids and, like every sporting goods stores at the time, it sold all sorts of stuff — hunting, fishing, skiing, tennis and all team sports. The store moved to its current location in the late 1920s.

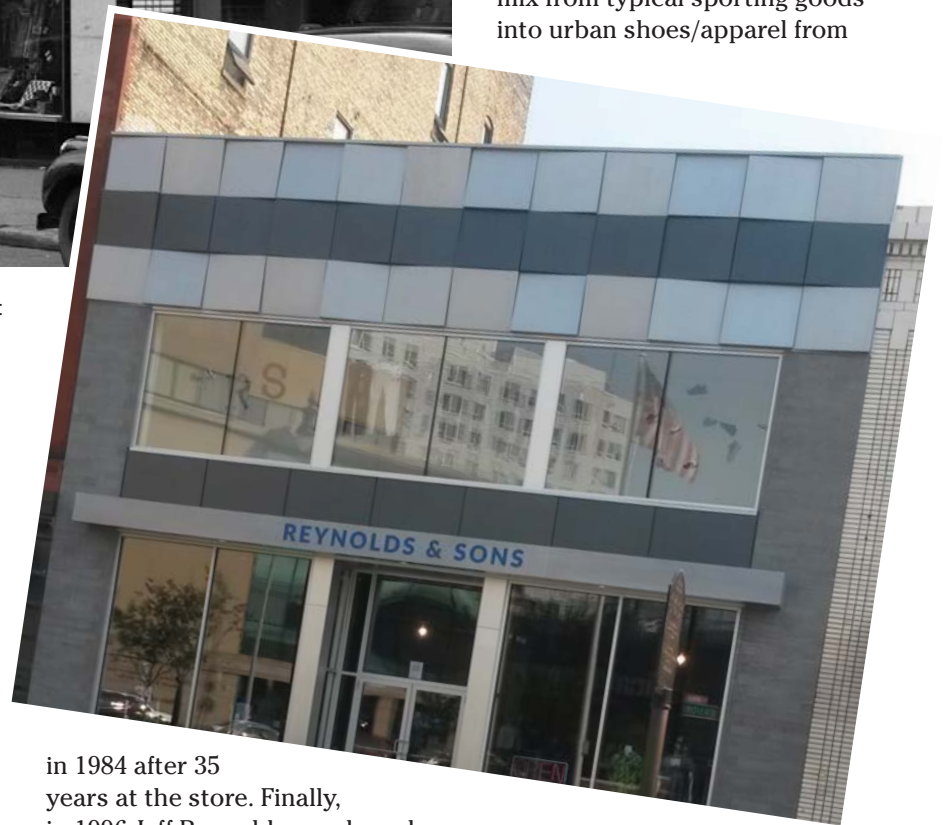
Chapter Two was written in 1961 when the business was sold to Stephen Reynolds (Jeff's father) and Richard Brown (Thorne Brown's son) and the name was changed to Reynolds & Brown. Then in late 1981 Brown sold out to his partner and the name changed again to Reynolds & Sons Inc.

That was also the time that Jeff Reynolds and his brother Stephen bought into the business along with their father, who passed away

in 1984 after 35 years at the store. Finally, in 1996 Jeff Reynolds purchased his brother's share in the business and became sole owner of Reynolds & Sons Sporting Goods.

Now, as the story enters Chapter Three, Jeff Reynolds is confident in the future because of some significant changes he just completed.

"Today we still have retail and team, but they are really two separate sides," he explains. "Our retail business is urban; we changed that back in the late 1990s based on our location."



Nike and others. Soon Jordan and Nike became its best-selling footwear lines. Best-selling apparel is Jordan Craig, Nike and Jordan and New Era for hats.

The linchpin of the new effort is the recently completed renovation of the retail location, at a price tag of more than \$425,000 and six months of hard work. It was money and time well spent, says Jeff Reynolds.

The renovation consisted of a new store front along with a



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gutting and redo of the entire 2500-square-foot retail floor. It went from an out-dated cedar-looking storefront to a contemporary Chicago two-story glass look, complete with architectural metal panels. The back wall is backlit with frosted Plexiglas and hardwood flooring with scattered carpet pods providing the updated look. A large 20 X 10-foot cash wrap with concert counter tops combined with new LED electric on the main floor and offices complete the makeover.

Reynolds explains that the design “is not a sports look, it is more of a boutique feel and look.” One of his goals with the makeover was to attract new lines that were not in the old store. It has worked, he says, and the store has added Under Armour, Lucy and Bearpaws aimed at the women’s business.

Meanwhile, on the team side, football remains its strongest sport, with Schutt, Wilson and Rawlings its primary vendors.

Reynolds & Sons has two full-time roadmen covering lower Michigan. Football is the biggest dollar for sports because of the equipment cost and Reynolds also does a solid business with basketball, baseball and softball.

Sales are 60 percent team, 40 percent retail, with the retail side showing the most growth. But that growth, Reynolds explains, is not because the team side is shrinking — rather, the retail side is stronger than ever.

Yet through all of the changes, the team side remains the foundation of the business. But even there, the strategy has had to change. As Reynolds & Sons was investing in its downtown location, it was also adapting to a rapidly changing team school business.

“The team side is still the same stuff, but you have to do things differently than you used to,” Reynolds says. “It’s not just the AD that has the money, it’s each coach because they raise their own funds. So you now have to

make contact with all of them.”

The changing face of coaches has also forced the dealer to adapt. “The young ones don’t like to talk, they want to text and email only, which makes it hard to build a relationship,” Reynolds says.

The team/retail mix results in a unique business model — urban retail for an ethnic, downtown consumer and traditional team sports for high schools across the state, which themselves are a mix of inner city and suburban. It makes for a distinctly American business model.

This model will be the focus of the next chapter of Reynolds & Sons and the goal is simple: “To grow stronger in the team business and move our retail to the next level,” says Reynolds, who has a son who has shown an interest in taking over the business. Much of the investment in both team and retail is made with family succession in mind.

And what can be more American than that? ■

Jeff Reynolds is obviously not afraid to embrace change, knowing full well the alternative was to not be in business for much longer.

“Our retail clientele has changed from the days this business was started, because back then you could only buy sporting goods at a sporting goods store,” he explains. “Now you can get the stuff in a gas station and people regionally shop.”

A change was necessary; hence, the significant investment in the store and the decision to go with a more modern, urban design rather than merely updating the current traditional look. (Reynolds says he passed on a \$50,000 development grant from the city he could have received if he had maintained the historic design.)

“The reason for the [modern] Chicago look was that I wanted our building to stand out from the ones around me, where people would go by and say, “That is a cool looking building,” he says.

“There are some other stores that sell the same kind of products that we do within blocks of us, but I feel that we can add products to capture other markets that we haven’t focused on before because of the people that are moving down here,” he adds.

Rawlings Goes In-Store With Johnny Mac’s

JOHNNY MAC’S SPORTING GOODS, with headquarters in St. Louis and one of the largest remaining independent team dealers in America, has teamed with its neighbor, Rawlings, on a unique in-store merchandising effort.

For the past year Johnny Mac’s has featured an approximately 3000-square-foot Rawlings concept shop, a common effort at full-line retail but relatively rare in the world of team sports. Rawlings launched its “Mark of a Pro” Shop at Johnny Mac’s in Springfield last April that features the largest Rawlings product selection in the Midwest. The concept shop carries every Rawlings product category, along with a number of interactive features:

- A 20-foot in-store batting cage to test out bats
- A Rawlings glove history timeline wall
- A Rawlings Gold Glove Award
- A glove steamer
- A custom glove kiosk
- Fan gear section
 - A Coaches Corner for team sales

Rawlings says it is looking to replicate the success of its Johnny Mac’s concept shop at other team dealers in separate regions over the next few years. ■



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Is Youth Heading Ban Bad?

In a move that has caused no small amount of debate between soccer purists and child safety and health professionals, the U.S. Soccer Federation (USSF) late last year revealed a player safety campaign that eliminates heading for children 10 and under and limits the amount of heading in practice for children ages of 11 to 13.

The move was part of the resolution of the Mehr soccer concussion lawsuit, whose U.S. defendants were USSF, United States Youth Soccer Association, American Youth Soccer Organization, U.S. Club Soccer and the California Youth Soccer Association:

The no-heading rule is part of what U.S. Soccer is calling “a sweeping youth soccer initiative” designed to improve concussion awareness and education among youth coaches, referees, parents and players; implement more uniform concussion management and return-to-play protocols for youth players suspected of having suffered a concussion; modify the substitution rules to insure such rules do not serve as an impediment to the evaluation of players who may have suffered a concussion during games; and eliminate heading for children 10 and under and limit heading in practice for children between the ages of 11 and 13.”

“The development of a player safety initiative was under way before the current lawsuit was filed,” U.S. Soccer CEO/Secretary General Dan Flynn said in a statement. “We are pleased that the plaintiffs and their counsel recognize the steps we have taken and look forward to sharing the benefits of the youth concussion initiative with players, coaches, officials and parents.”

Interestingly, when it announced the launch of the initiative, two medi-

cal experts instrumental in creating the program were non-committal concerning the use of protective headgear in soccer.

“There’s been a lot of marketing and media as it relates to headgear,” said Dr. Margot Putukian, a member of U.S. Soccer’s Medical Committee and director of athletic medicine at Princeton University. “There’s a lot of concern as it relates to the media hype around some of these products without having good research to tell us, number one, that they’re effective and, number two, that they’re not harmful. Or that they might change the game in a way that we’d hate to see.

“You don’t want players to have a false sense of security with a product that might not only not prevent concussion but might actually make things worse. And there’s some data that suggest that the acceleration forces that you see with headgear may be increased, especially in girls.”

U.S. Soccer chief medical officer George Chiampas pointed out that, “Currently across all sports headgear has not shown to prevent a concussion.”

New Helmet on the Way?

There just may be a new football helmet design and company on the horizon as the University of Washington and its commercial partner, Vicis, Inc., claim to have developed a helmet designed to mitigate the forces likely to cause concussions. Adding a bit of gravitas to the claim, the design and the company were recently named one of the winners of Head Health Challenge II. UW researchers founded Vicis and developed the innovative new helmet.

A collaboration between the NFL, General Electric and Under Armour, the Head Health Challenge is a search

for solutions that help prevent, measure and detect brain injury. First launched in 2013, this year’s second global challenge will award up to \$8.5 million for innovations and materials that can protect the brain from traumatic injury.

The technology UW and Vicis are developing has shown a reduction in linear and rotational acceleration, the forces likely to cause concussion.

Per Reinhall, professor and chair of the Department of Mechanical Engineering, and Jonathan Posner, associate professor of mechanical engineering, will lead the team on the project, including making sure all helmet safety standards and considerations are met that could influence design and manufacturing. A mechanical engineering research team will design, model, develop a prototype and run impact testing on the new helmet.

hown to prevent a concussion.”

Is The ‘Band’ the Answer?

With the controversial “Concussion” starring Will Smith making an impact at movie theaters in the recent



holiday season, discussion about head trauma and how it impacts athletes at all levels rages on. “60 Minutes” addressed the topic in a piece late last year, weeks before the family the late NFL Hall of Famer Frank Gifford revealed that he suffered from Chronic traumatic encephalopathy. CTE is a progressive degenerative disease found in people with a history of repetitive brain trauma.

Performance Sports Group, parent

of Bauer, Maverik and Easton baseball/softball, thinks it’s onto something that will effectively address mild traumatic brain injuries (mTBI) suffered by athletes — a band worn around the neck to address movement of the brain known as the “slosh theory.”

When the head experiences an impact, or sudden, extreme movement, the brain sloshes inside the skull and can rotate or strike the inside walls of the cranium, often tearing brain fibers and sometimes producing mTBI.

The band is designed to address movement of the brain via its light application of pressure on the neck, which in turn mildly increases blood volume in the brain’s vein structure and thus minimizes its sloshing inside the skull.

PSG recently gathered experts in neurology and medical research in New York who support the science behind the band technology. One participant was Dr. Julian Bailes, chairman of the Department of Neurosurgery and Co-director of the NorthShore University HealthSystem Neurological Institute. In “Concussion,” Dr. Bailes, who was the first to recognize CTE in former NFL players, is played by Alec Baldwin.

Separate peer-reviewed research studies published in medical journals *Neurosurgery* and *Journal of Neurosurgery* discovered an 83 percent reduction in the number of torn brain fibers in a standard concussion model when the band was utilized.

PSG hopes to begin marketing the device to athletes of all sports, helmeted or not, within the next 12 to 24 months. The Montreal company, which has yet to establish a price for it, is currently going through a product approval process with the Food & Drug Administration in the U.S. and Health Canada as it continues to refine the product’s development. ■

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DIAMOND OR DUST

By Mike May / If Abner Doubleday was alive today and given a birds-eye view of the game he allegedly invented, he would be shocked, thrilled and proud of the way it has grown. But, as the old saying goes, you can't judge a book by its cover. While baseball has the reputation of being America's Pastime, the game doesn't attract as many participants as it once did and its demographics are trending older. For the sport – and for the team dealers who sell it, which is basically everyone – this doesn't bode well for the game's future.

Fortunately, the baseball community is doing something about it because the numbers don't lie:

- There are 13.2 million baseball players in the U.S., making it the second most popular team sport in the U.S., according to SFIA. (Basketball, with 23 million players, is number one.) As recently as 2012, participation in baseball dropped as low as 12.9 million — down from 14.4 million in 2009.
- The good news is that of the 13.2 million players, nearly 70 percent of them (8.9 million) are considered core players, those who play baseball more than 13 days a year. (Again, basketball is the only sport to have a higher percentage of core

big boost to the sport.”

Geographically, the four most popular regions for baseball players in the U.S. are the South Atlantic (8.3 percent of all players), Middle Atlantic (17.9 percent), East North Central (17.1 percent) and the Pacific (15.7 percent).

One demographic change worth mentioning is the number of girls playing the game. According to SFIA, 83.6 percent of all baseball players in the U.S. in 2009 were male. By 2014, that percentage fell 80.9 percent.

“Girls’ and women’s baseball are growing at an unprecedented rate,” reports **Justine Siegel**, founder, **Baseball for All**, Great Barrington, MA. “Women’s baseball was included for the first

and hats, while players are walking into his store to buy matching pants, belts, cleats, gloves, socks and a few bats. The local travel teams are fewer in number, but they are spending more per capita.

Their purchases are head to toe, according to Licata, who notes that travel teams are buying as many as three uniforms (home, away and practice), hats, batting helmets, baseballs, protective gear and custom bags.

“I am also selling all sorts of training devices,” adds Licata.

At the high school level, the team orders are similar to what travel teams are buying. The one big difference is that some high school teams order team jackets as well.

IT IS A CRUCIAL TIME FOR AMERICA'S PASTIME TO KEEP ITS HOLD ON ATHLETES.

players than baseball.)

- A little more than half of all baseball players and 66 percent of all core players are between the ages of six and 17

• While baseball remains a game dominated by players younger than 17, there's proof that the game is growing in popularity with adults, as nearly 25 percent of all baseball players actually have a college degree or higher.

• According to the SFIA's Manufacturers Sales by Category report, wholesale sales of baseball gear (bats, balls, protective gear, uniforms and cleats) were \$1.113 billion in 2014, up from \$1.067 billion in 2013.

Observers have different explanations for the stories the numbers tell, but it all comes back to participation.

“While baseball has plenty of structured, sanctioned leagues for its players, the one missing aspect is the lack of sandlot play among children in their neighborhoods,” observes **SFIA** president **Tom Cove**. “If sandlot baseball play can make a comeback, then that will be a

time in the 2015 Pan Am Games. Of course, we all remembered when Mon'e Davis captured the hearts of millions as she pitched her way through the Little League World Series in 2014.”

Diamond Talk

After all of the numbers are analyzed, it comes down to sales at schools and local programs and here team dealers are looking forward to a strong year. While national participation numbers are down slightly, these dealers remain cautiously optimistic that baseball's popularity will rise again.

In south Florida, baseball is in season January through December. The great weather has something to do with the Sunshine State's year-round commitment.

“Every weekend there seems to be some type of tournament action in south Florida,” says **Kevin Licata**, manager at **Medallion Sporting Goods**, Jupiter, FL. Licata's baseball clients include local recreation leagues, travel teams, high school teams and a few adult baseball teams.

At the rec level, teams usually buy the jerseys

In south Florida, real stirrup socks are making a comeback with high school varsity teams, reports Licata.

The one area where sales are “so so” is in baseball bats.

“I can't keep the inventory like the online guys,” admits Licata. “Every year there are always two or three hot bats. It's not easy knowing which bats will be more popular than others from year to year.”

Frank Powell, VP-team sales for **Hibbett Team Sales**, Birmingham, AL, sells baseball to teams in Alabama, Georgia and the Florida panhandle. He admits that business is merely steady, but knows it could be worse.

“We are weak in the youth market, but strong with middle schools and high schools,” says Powell. “Overall, we sell lots of baseball apparel, team bags, batting helmets, catcher's gear, accessories and spirit packs, which usually include a T-shirt, shorts, a long sleeve shirt and possibly a lightweight jacket. Our cap business is quite strong, too.”

Sales of bats and cleats by Hibbett Team Sales are weak, adds Powell.

"When the price of bats increased, schools stopped buying them," he says. "It's now a retail thing. And batting gloves are often sold online, though occasionally they are placed in spirit packs. As for cleats, we sell them, but it's a weak category for us."

The issue of sublimation is also affecting baseball, which is positively impacting the profit margins. "Sublimation in baseball is growing," Powell reports.

At **Al's Sporting Goods** in Wilmington, DE, baseball is the biggest selling category, according to general manager **Ed Knapper**.

"We sell baseball to teams that range from Little League to local colleges," says Knapper. "Teams are buying everything from basic moisture management undergarments to custom sublimated jerseys. The travel teams are buying items that are customized and personalized. That's the biggest part of that business as well as the hardest part of that business."

One of the difficult aspects of selling baseball is making sure that you have everything that a team or a player will need. "Baseball has lots of accessories," points out Knapper.

As for individual baseball product categories, Knapper says his company sells baseball bats, but "it's tougher and tougher to sell because with the click of your mouse, you can see a wide variety of bats on your computer screen."

But Knapper says players like his selection of fielders' gloves, and like to try them on before purchasing. "Our glove business is good," he says. "We have a wide selection of brand name gloves and mitts."

As for batting helmets, Knapper says all local recreational leagues and most high school supply them for their teams. At the travel level, players buy their own.

A significant part of the high school business is done through spirit packs, according to Knapper. "It's the wave of the future," he predicts. "Our baseball spirit packs will contain practice shorts, a hoodie, practice pants, a practice shirt and sometimes a set of spikes."

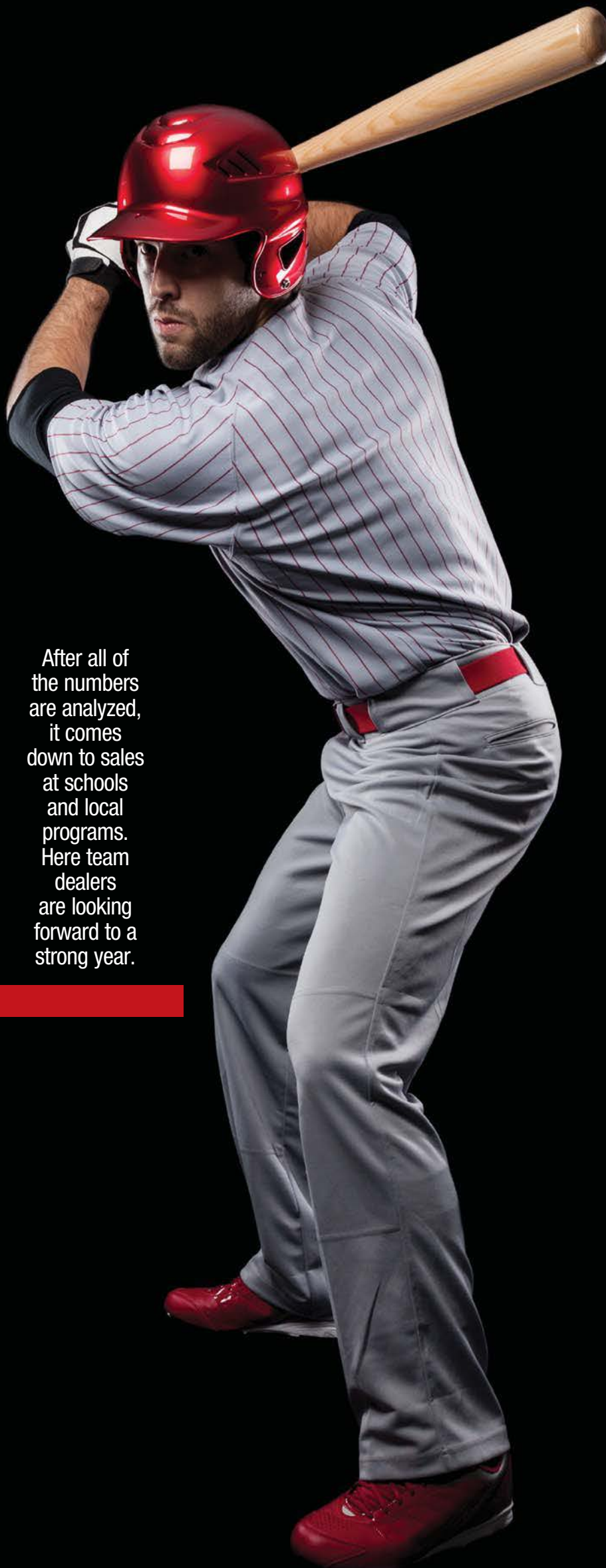
While Medallion's Licata says traditional stirrup socks are popular with high school students in south Florida, that's not the case with players in Delaware. "The throwback look will not come back," states Knapper.

In northern Ohio, baseball remains big business for **Adler Team Sports**, Euclid, OH, but interest has been stronger in the past.

"Baseball is one of my top two categories, but playing interest is dropping," reports Adler's **John Domo**. "There are too many kids playing Xbox."

For those that do play recreational baseball in the greater Euclid area, teams are buying hats,

After all of the numbers are analyzed, it comes down to sales at schools and local programs. Here team dealers are looking forward to a strong year.



shirts, pants and socks.

Business is helped by children as young as seven playing travel baseball in northern Ohio and Domo points out that the per capita spending is greater at the travel level because the purchases are customized.

As for what is sold in high school baseball spirit packs, it varies from school to school. "I let the coach pick what goes in the high school baseball spirit pack," Domo says.

In Michigan, baseball remains an important sport, but it may have lost its title – for the time being – as the top sport in town.

"Here, baseball is no longer America's pastime," states **Joe Pearl**, owner of **Jack Pearl's Sports Center**, in Battle Creek, MI. "It's a concern that dads are not playing catch with their children and teaching them about baseball. Still, it's my number two selling category, right behind football."

Pearl sells baseball to anyone and everyone at all levels. "It's a good healthy mix of recreational youth baseball, travel ball and the local schools," adds Pearl. "But, we really work to promote participation in youth baseball in our community." He is hoping that Major League Baseball's Play Ball program impacts interest in the game locally.

While travel ball is only played in May, June, and July in Michigan, the local travel teams turn to Pearl for their gear. "I am selling uniforms, hats, accessories, bags, baseballs and protective gear to the travel teams," Pearl says.

He readily admits that his sales of baseball bats, cleats and gloves are "horrible" because of the competition from the Internet.

"I'm not losing the battle on price as much as I am on selection," says Pearl.

There's a real baseball success story out west in Coeur d'Alene, ID, where it is now the number-one selling sport for **Greg Crimp**, owner of **Sports Cellar**. "I think baseball has now surpassed football as my leading category," says Crimp, who points out that Coeur d'Alene's isolated location means there's less competition for baseball, which means rec baseball and travel baseball are co-existing.

"It's a 50/50 business split between sales to Little League and travel ball teams," he says. "We do



Augusta Sportswear's Series Knee Length Baseball Pant is an 11-ounce 100 percent polyester double knit, reinforced knee length baseball pant with elastic waistband.

sell to our local schools, but there are not that many."

With local recreational baseball, Crimp says that teams are buying Major League Baseball replica shirts from Majestic and replica hats from OC Sports. The local recreational leagues are also buying baseballs, catcher's equipment and bases.

At the travel level, parents are not restricting their spending to just their sons' baseball needs. "The

travel teams are often buying more items simply because they have bigger budgets," says Crimp. "And, parents are buying secondary items with the color and logo of their child's team, aka baseball spirit wear."

Crimp says the majority of his baseball sales are soft goods. "It's scary for me to bring in bats and shoes," he says, admitting there's a strong chance that those items will

just collect dust because players are buying online.

The one hard goods exception: gloves. "I do sell some gloves and mitts because many players still like to try, touch and wear the gloves before buying them," adds Crimp.

In northeast Texas and southeast Oklahoma, baseball is thriving, according to **Jim Davis**, owner of **Williams Sporting Goods**, Paris, TX.

"We sell baseball to local leagues, high schools and several junior colleges," says Davis, who reports that sales were up in 2015 from 2014, a trend he expects to continue in 2016.

Local teams are buying uniforms, caps, balls, catcher's equipment, batting helmets, batting gloves and various field equipment items such as pitching screens, bases and scoreboards.

Davis is using technology to increase his business in baseball, which ranks as his third best sales category behind football and basketball. And he is now starting to sell online.

The Big Picture

Despite the overall concerns about declining participation levels in some parts of the country, many of baseball's leading figures off the field are bullish about the sport's future.

"High school baseball participation is on the rise," reports **El-liot Hopkins**, director of sports, sanctioning, and student services, **National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)**. "It is not meteoric, but it is slow and steady."

While baseball is traditionally a sport played in the spring and summer, Hopkins points out that it has now spread into the fall. "Fall baseball is popular in a lot of states, especially for the non-varsity age/skill players," says Hopkins. "They can hone their skills during the fall season and place themselves in a perfect situation to try out for the varsity team in the spring."

Another benefit of fall baseball at the high school level is that it provides an athletic outlet for the student-athlete who is not interested in any other fall sports. "Keeping children active and busy is always a good thing for their physical and mental health" notes Hopkins.

A major concern of NFHS is the

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THE BASEBALL BAT CONFUSION IS not over. Not by any means.

Team dealers may not be aware that in August USA Baseball announced that the current performance standard on youth baseball bats (for players 12 and under) would change to a more conservative standard. The current performance standard – known as Bat Performance Factor (BPF) – had been in existence for more than 20 years.

The new performance change will be to more of a wood-like performance standard, which is very similar to the BBCOR performance standard in effect in high school and college.

While more change is on the way, it won't officially take effect until January 1, 2018, giving the industry two years to exhaust current supplies before the new bats take over and the old ones become obsolete. It's worth noting that the new bats will be allowed to appear on retail shelves and be used in competition as early as September 1, 2017.

The ramifications of this mandate will impact everybody in the baseball pipeline — manufacturers, retailers, team dealers, coaches, players and their parents.

While the decision to make the change has been made and manufacturers are committed to designing the new bats, many are still questioning the decision.

"This is a huge mistake and I have gone on record many times stating that," states **Marucci's Kurt Ainsworth**. "Kids don't quit playing baseball because they can hit. They quit because they can't and a new standard will be put in place to take hitting away from the majority of youth players." He saw what it did to hitting in the college game and is concerned that will happen to the casual player in baseball.

"Travel ball will completely dominate when these rules go into effect," Ainsworth says. "With failure, kids could easily turn to more video games and physical inactivity. I really think it is a shame that USA Baseball has turned this new standard into a

money maker for them at the expense of the game of baseball."

"The USA Baseball standard change is going to impact the industry in a different way than the college/high school BBCOR standard change a few years ago," states **Combat Sports' Tim Lord**. "The similarities are that both had no grandfathering and there will be a period where consumers will not buy as many of the current standard bats."

Then, he points out, everyone who plays in USA Baseball must buy a new bat, although a lot of youth players grow out of their bats each year anyway.

"This will impact a lot more bats," Lord says. "And how many more players play youth than high school and college baseball? It is a much more complex standard change than the NCAA/NFHS change."

The lack of offensive production in high school and collegiate play with the implementation of BBCOR has been noticeable and has left many buyers puzzled as to why the change for younger players is necessary. Many have asked if a ball change is also on the horizon to offset lower bat performance. At the end of the day, however, retailers understand the change is happening and will lean on bat manufacturers to help navigate through the transition.

"This decision will have consequences for everybody," predicts **Baden's Jay Helmick**. "You'll likely see manufacturers opting to save their newest technologies for their 2017 youth bats because they don't want to invest during the transition year and retailers and team dealers will be carrying less inventory."

He also predicts there will be confusion as the change is communicated. Equally concerning, the new bat performance standard could make it more difficult for players to experience success.

"If only the best players can drive the ball to the gaps or get it out of the infield, the game becomes less fun and that's counterproductive to growth," Helmick says. "That's why, more than ever, it's important for bat makers to innovate."

The bottom line is that the rules changes are inevitable and the industry must be ready to adapt.

"Team dealers and retailers are tired of regulation changes, but everyone will manage their way through it," says **Wilson's Jim Hackett**. ■

issue of player safety — specifically the health of pitchers' arms. "Pitching overuse injuries are on the rise and more young people under the age of 18 are experiencing more ulnar collateral ligament – better known as Tommy John – surgery than ever in the history of baseball," adds Hopkins. "We have to take a very hard look at the existing pitching restrictions and see if science and research can provide some alternatives for managing a young person's arm."

The NFHS is also keeping a close eye on new products and how technology is affecting the game of high school baseball.

"Monitoring equipment and its performance will be a new challenge for all of us," notes Hopkins. "We (the NFHS Baseball Rules Committee) have to make sure that what the product says it can do and really can fulfill its promise to the consumer. We have to make sure that it does not provide one team with such a huge competitive advantage over other programs."

Hopkins is not the only baseball executive who feels that baseball's future is positive, but the industry must work together to get more children to choose baseball as one of their sport of choice. Manufacturers feel that baseball is currently at a crossroads, but if they, team dealers and baseball's many governing bodies are able to work together to promote the game, then demand for more baseball facilities and baseball products will eventually grow.

"Baseball has an opportunity to thrive in the coming years," says **Jim Hackett**, general manager of baseball/softball at **Wilson Sporting Goods**. "The negative impact of performance enhancing drugs is no longer dominating the conversation. Players are more athletic than ever. Commissioner Rob Manfred has dedicated the attention and resources of Major League Baseball toward growing the game among your players."

"Overall, our outlook on the state of baseball looks promising," says **Lindsey Naber**, director of marketing, key accounts at **Rawlings Sporting Goods**. "We're seeing certain age segments grow, specifically the 10-12-year-old demographic, which tells us that kids are becoming more serious about the game at an earlier age."

"We're at a pivotal time for youth baseball in America," agrees **Jay Helmick**, VP-sales and marketing for **Baden Sports**. "Participation has been declining for many years and the

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The Travel Ball Debate



WHEN CHILDREN START PLAYING baseball, it begins with a game of pitch and catch in the back yard. It gravitates to local recreational programs such as T-Ball, Coach Pitch and then Kid Pitch. But at some point in the not-too-distant past, all-star teams started to appear as a post-season complement to the local recreational experience.

Now, these all-star/travel teams in some areas threaten the very existence of local recreation programs.

For team dealers their emergence is a mixed blessing — these players like to buy lots of gear, but their existence is having a negative impact on rec programs for children who just want a chance to play ball.

“Baseball has changed with the introduction of travel ball and there are fewer opportunities for the casual/rec player to play on teams as they get older,” points out **Tim Lord**, director of key accounts and branding strategy at **Combat Sports**. “Baseball is in a healthy state, but is changing. The core players are playing more as they get older and they are very serious about their game and equipment.”

Travel ball has made the true baseball players better, but it has really created a gap between the casual player and the competitive player, agrees **Kurt Ainsworth**, of **Marucci**. “Baseball has become somewhat of a country club sport with all of the travel ball and private lessons, which are good for sales of high-end products,” he says, but not as good for the recreational player.

“Travel ball has increased the popularity of the game among dedicated players and that’s driven a need for more apparel,” notes **Baden’s Jay Helmick**. “Dealers still can do well in this category.”

“Rawlings is heavily focused on that travel ball player — they play more frequently and expect a higher quality of gear,” says the company’s **Lindsey Naber**. “We’re offering quality and a performance edge, but tailoring it specifically to the younger athlete. These kids and their parents are more dedicated than ever to the game.”

“Travel ball gives an opportunity for many

young players to pursue their passion for the game year-round,” points out **Wilson’s Jim Hackett**. “In many cases, the travel organizations enhance a young player’s love of the game.”

He says that as local leagues adapt to travel ball, they have an opportunity to develop a league suited for lower-skilled players, pointing out that when the few kids who dominate a local league are off playing travel ball, it can open up more opportunities for other players to play a key role on a recreation team. “Baseball can thrive in popularity in the travel ball era, but it’s a little early to tell how the story will turn out,” he says.

The national governing bodies of youth baseball are in agreement that the growth of travel ball is a sign of the times in the world of baseball.

“It has become the age of the parent who believes his or her kid will have a better chance at earning a scholarship or making it to the pros if they play travel ball,” laments **Babe Ruth’s Steven Tellefsen**. “Some of our leagues have suffered at the hands of folks who peddle dreams to parents of these young players.”

“Travel ball continues to take teams from league-based organizations and many parents still feel that their children are not very good if they are not playing travel ball,” notes **AABC’s Richard Neely**.

While travel ball has a major footprint on the American baseball map, there is a way for rec ball and travel ball to co-exist.

“It’s quite prevalent and it’s everywhere,” says **Pony’s Abe Key**. “At Pony we are focused on making the local recreational baseball experience as positive as possible, where you get to play baseball with friends, neighbors and classmates. We are also restructuring our tournament structure to improve the overall experience.”

“Travel ball has become the evolution in youth baseball,” agrees **USSSA’s Don DeDonatis**. “Children are playing and competing at a much younger age. This has become the family activity and the family vacation. Times have changed.” ■

macro issues driving those trends don’t appear to be going away soon. That’s why, as an industry, we need to do everything we can to ensure youth players have fun, and experience success, playing baseball.

“Changes to the game, such as the adoption of more restrictive bat performance standards, can have the opposite effect and end up turning youth away,” Helmick points out. “We remain optimistic about the future of youth baseball, but believe the game and its governing bodies must embrace change and innovation to ensure the sport remains fun for a new generation.”

The Association View

The leaders of the governing bodies of youth baseball admit that 2015 was a tough year, but they are committed to giving the best baseball experience to their players, coaches, and parents.

“The American Amateur Baseball Congress lost some teams in 2015 from a registration standpoint, but our team totals were pretty close,” reports **Richard Neely**, executive director of the **American Amateur Baseball Congress**. “I feel that 2015 was a tough year for all of youth baseball. Travel ball continues to take teams from league-based organizations and many parents still feel that their children are not very good if they are not playing travel ball.”

“Baseball has been a family tradition since as far back as I can remember,” adds **Steven Tellefsen**, president of **Babe Ruth League**. “But, sadly, things have changed. Not as many children are playing the game anymore.”

He reports that Babe Ruth’s participation numbers have been on the decline over the past several years, but on a positive note in 2015 Babe Ruth League experienced a lower percentage of teams lost compared to the average team decline it has been experienc-

ing over the past few years.

In 2015, **Pony Baseball** president **Abe Key** reports that participation in the younger age groups was up, while participation in the older age groups was down slightly.

“We are focused on giving the entry-level baseball athlete a chance to play and have a great experience so that they will want to return the following year,” admitted Key. “Moving forward, our focus is making the under-8 experience as good as it can possibly be.”

“Our participation numbers were impacted in 2015 by various factors, including travel ball,” reports **Sandy Jones**, commissioner/CEO of **Dixie Boys Baseball**. “In many instances, local youth that previously participated in a local league structure have opted to participate on a tournament team that plays weekend baseball. Of concern is that many kids who don’t play on a travel team are left behind and are no longer participating. This is evident as a growing number of recreation departments and local leagues are no longer involved in youth baseball.”

Despite the struggles of 2015, Jones is optimistic that more teenagers will play baseball in 2016.

“The 2016 season holds promise as our mission remains to provide an opportunity for youths ages 13-19 to participate in the great game of baseball,” predicts Jones.

With USSSA, its most popular age groups are 10-and-under and 12-and-under and the organization reports that its participation numbers are not dropping off after that.

“We offer single age groups with a classification in each age group and teams compete against teams of the same skill level,” explains **Don DeDonatis**, chairman of the board/CEO USSSA. “There are no roster restrictions and teams don’t break up to form all-star teams. They stay together year after year and parents form a family bond. Everyone now is having fun.” ■



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- 12.** The Adidas custom Diesel faux button jersey provides the classic full button look while functioning as a two button jersey.
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- 14.** The Spalding Training Glove line is designed to help enhance overall fielding skills while promoting proper mechanics.
- 15.** Nokona's Bloodline Series Pro-level, position-specific gloves are made almost entirely with kangaroo.
- 16.** The IT! pro maple bat from BamBooBat and Pinnacle Sports comes with a 60-day warranty against breakage.
- 17.** The Clean-Up baseball jersey from Champro features Active Cloth 100 percent polyester Dri-Gear fabric with Pin-Dot mesh inserts and upper back panel.



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CAPS ARE TOPS

Teams go for a unique look with their headwear designs in 2016.



Pacific Headwear's Trucker Legendary Mesh series (left) is being expanded with more styles in the performance categories. The Richardson Cap PTS30 Lite cap (above) comes with extra "cool" factor. It features laser vented panels for extra breathability.

By Nancy Baeder

Caps make a big statement, belying their small size. The options are endless, but the focus is definitely on enhancing performance and looking good while doing it. Each year new caps reflect the latest technology and trending styles. Consequently, there's more to selling headwear than texture and colors, although those remain relevant.

Caps generate a consistent revenue stream for team dealers. "More and more people and teams are wearing hats and every team wants a new cap every year. It's very steady business for us," says **Loren Samuelson**, owner of **Lee's Pro Shop**, Pine City, MN.

Baseball caps, of course, are

the top sellers, going for \$12-20. "Just about every team orders a baseball cap and boosters like to order caps to promote the high school teams and leagues. It's an even split between teams that want a new style and teams that keep the same style year to year," says Samuelson. "We digitize the logo and embroider it on any cap, sometimes adding a name or number on the side or back to individualize the cap. Other times, teams want a name and we help them select a font."

To get the right fit, he sells a lot of flexible fit caps that accommodate sizes six to eight. "What's nice is that you can order three sizes – XS (a youth size), small/medium and a large/extra large – and fit everyone on the team right," says Samuelson. "We also sell the

Universal fit created with a woven spandex sweatband that stretches to fit a range of sizes."

Performance fabric caps are the most popular fabrication. "Teams want the high-tech moisture management, antimicrobial, lighter weight caps for in the field and as team wear," he says. From Pacific Headwear, the M3 Performance cap "delivers the look of the pros that teams seek," according to Samuelson. He also sells a lot of the PTS Series (Performance Team Series) from Richardson Cap, "a flexfit cap that is one of the lightest in the industry and very comfortable, with a vented back rather than mesh."

Wool caps are still available and ordered mostly by baseball teams who still want to achieve a very traditional look. "Even here they

are moving to performance caps because of the comfort," he says.

Girls' teams want an unstructured cap. "The girls want it to fit just right. The unstructured cap fits on the top side of the head and forms to head," says Samuelson. "They like a smaller embroidered logo, pastel colors, pink breast cancer ribbon and adjustable back. Here they prefer an adjustable Velcro closure rather than the ponytail hole. Girls also like the knitted beanies, which we embroider in-house for quick turnaround."

He sells a few bucket hats to coaches. "Coach Jerry Kill (retired, of the Minnesota Golden Gophers) wore a bucket hat on the sidelines, and we still sell a few, but not many," says Samuelson.

He also sells some cap liners.



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CREATING A CAP TAKES IMAGINATION AND INVOLVES MANY DECISIONS — flat bill or pre-curved, fabric selection, crown style, number of panels, piping, button, eyelets, design placement. Fortunately today's online cap designers step through the process with ease and can help speed the approval process.

"A lot of baseball teams order two or three sets of hats to match their uniforms — one moisture management, a wool blend, a lower profile cap, a fitted and an adjustable, a two-tone and a solid," says **Jim Brumfield**, of **Glenn's Sporting Goods**.

Vendor cap builder programs literally fit the bill.

"Cap Builders are great for the end user because it allows them to visualize a lot of options quickly," says **Ryan McKillop**, VP at **Pacific Cap**. "It can also free up valuable time the dealer needs to spend with the customer while finalizing their artwork."

Pacific calls it a Cap Builder. Richardson offers a Cap Designer. The Game invites you to Build A Cap, OC Sports has a Cap Creator and Pukka has introduced an Interactive Playbook Designer. Whatever it's called, online designers drive an end product that meets the teams design aesthetic.

"The obvious advantage to using a Cap Designer is that it gives the end user the ability to build a cap online, add decoration and see what the cap actually looks like," says **Steve Alford**, of **Richardson Cap**. "Our designer is a bit unique because it's a real picture of the cap, rather than a drawing."

It's a visual world and everything is just a click away.

"A lot of our teams like to play around with different looks using the cap builders — make the crown of the cap one color and the back panel to match the bill. They may change the eyelet colors or logos. The goal is to make it unique," says **Loren Samuelson**, of **Lee's Pro Shop**. "The manufacturers have made it friendly for users, but still friendly to dealers because they have to place the order through us."

"Coaches and dealers can easily see the options available within a school's or team's colors," says **Joe Rubertino**, national sales manager at **OC Sports**. "The customer can email their dealer the caps they build, expediting the ordering process. Alternatively, the dealer roadman can proactively build various cap designs before they visit with a team. Either way, a visual of the finished cap helps eliminate mistakes."

"Cap Builders are part of the future and that's why we are creating and releasing a new cap builder program in the new few months," says **Chad Kennedy**, of **The Game**. "The biggest advantage is that it allows coaches to decide on what they want prior to placing an order, which cuts down on processing time and art changes. While it may not cut down significantly on production time, it definitely does on the processing and approval process of orders."

At **Pukka Headwear**, a new Online Interactive Playbook Designer makes the sale easier. "There are three templates available that dealers and coaches can use to mock up headwear," says **Brian Matix**. "It's simple to choose from cap styles, select your team colors and upload your graphic or mascot." ■



ProMax fabric in Pukka's new caps is lightweight, moisture wicking and SPF 50 sun protection; launching in 18 popular team colors.

"These are moisture management material and used mostly for controlling hair and for keeping the sweat from running into the eyes," he says. He sells a few football helmet liners, and in baseball too.

Headgear is also a good performer at **Glenn's Sporting Goods**, Huntington, WV. "The manufacturers are constantly changing up the styles. Materials are advancing and the advantage makes a difference that matters," says owner **Jim Brumfield**. "The performance fabrics are definitely strongest sellers."

On the retail side, he sells a lot of New Era's NFL line. "For men, the knitted beanies with NFL logos sell extremely well, as well as knitted caps with pompoms," says Brumfield. "Baseball caps and bucket hats with college logos also sell well."

Women prefer a lower profile cap; typically cotton, with small lettering. For men, a straight bill is popular, with larger graphics and a wider variation of colors. "In the winter, The North Face head covers are strong sellers," he says.

Team sales are very different. "We are selling more caps year to year, mostly because teams are buying multiple sets," says Brumfield. "We buy a lot from Richardson, Pacific, OC Sport and The Game. Teams will spend more for a hat, ranging from \$15 to the low \$20s for a hat, while youth hats are typically under \$10."

His business includes a lot of youth leagues. "Little League continues to be dominated by Major League replica hats," he says.

Cap decoration is 100 percent embroidery. "Our pre-season orders are completed months

ahead of the season and in that case the decoration is done at the factory," says Brumfield. "We embroider any rush orders in-house."

All the big cap brands sell well at **Sports Locker**, Grove, OK. "Our cap sales are pretty steady year to year as every team gets a new cap every year. We like Pacific, The Game, Richardson, OC Sports and Pukka," says **Walter Crane**, a team salesman. "We mainly do custom caps for baseball teams. Every team wants a different look. Some are old school, some are more trendy. Some solid, some multi colored, all embroidered." Everything is customized from buttons to stitching to panels.

"It's a blank canvas. You can create whatever you want," says Crane. "It's about 50/50 those that want something different every year or so and some that keep the same style."

Flexible fitted hats are a little more popular in his territory, but he also sells a lot of adjustable fits, and flat bill wins out over pre-curved 60 percent of the time. "We still sell a lot of wool caps, not so much of the performance fabrics for baseball caps, but it depends on the coach," he says.

Besides baseball caps, he sells a few bucket hats and beanies are hit or miss, depending on the weather.

At **Hibbett Team Sales**, Birmingham, AL, performance caps dominate sales headed into 2016, according to VP-team sales **Frank Powell**. "The better fabrics are moisture management and we don't really sell nylon or wool caps anymore. We like The Game brand moisture management caps for on-field caps. These are flat-bill style with more perfor-

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Sport

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APPAREL / HEADWEAR

mance fabric then anything else," says Powell. "Sideline caps are cotton/twill with embroidery and pre-curved bill."

Everything is embroidered and most of the decoration is done at the factory. "I can't remember the last time we sold a cap that wasn't embroidered," he says. "We used to do some screenprinting or heat press and tackle twill, but no more."

Performance caps dominate sales at **First Team Sports**, Greenville, SC. "The thing that sells is performance caps from Richardson, Outdoor Cap and Pacific," says owner **Mike Miros**.

Performance is also the go-to cap at **Stayton Sports Store**, Stayton, OK. "Here it's all about getting the look they want. They want the performance cap with flex fit or pro back," says owner **Ron Gower**.

Cap trends are driven by college and pro teams, with year-to-year changes that reflect new technol-

ogy and fabrics for comfort and performance.

Trend Forward

"One trend we noticed coming back is a baseball cap with buckram. We're seeing an increase in the style of caps with higher crown and flat bill for baseball players," says Samuelson. "Baseball players still like the flat brim. The two-tone is very popular and teams like to customize it and make it different. Some add a soutache braid. The pre-curved is still around."

Some teams select one color for the crown and a second color for the back and the bill. "Charcoal is a very popular color to combine with a team color," says Samuelson. "To make it unique and different, they like to change it up with different eyelet colors or logos. One popular design is puff embroidery, where foam backing is placed on the cap to give

it a raised effect. Richardson, OC Sport, Pacific Cap and Pukka all do the puff embroidery."

Baseball drives cap sales, a sport played year round. "We see a trend to order more than one set of caps for pre-season baseball orders to take advantage of manufacturers' incentives," says Brumfield. "A typical order will include two or three sets to complement team

colors. Coaches understand the trends and what kids want."

Teams are also buying knitted caps with a team name on it. "We are selling more of the toboggan hat with team name on it," he says.

Football teams typically include a cap in their spirit pack offering. "Parents are given the opportunity to purchase from the online store as a fundraiser and this typically



With customization and performance fabrics still leading the way, Perforated Panels on performance materials are an option from The Game. Sun protection headwear, whether from a traditional cap or with Boonie/Bucket Caps, is also a focus in 2016.

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The Flexfit 110P Cool & Dry Mini Pique (left) features hybrid technology of moisture wicking and water resistant properties. The Delta (right) is lighter and sleeker and it fuses panels with a seamless, stitch-less finish using Flexfit Bond Taping.

includes a cap. Some schools also ask the kids to purchase an extra hat," says Brumfield. "We see a movement back to the curved bill, along with a trend to lower profiles, away from the high crown."

Vendors continually modify cap lines to address trends and the latest fabrications. Lightweight is a touchstone for performance caps, as it is for other performance gear.

"Our active line features an improved variety of lightweight performance materials, with fibers uniquely engineered to wick away sweat and maximize air flow," says **Ashley Vickers**, director of marketing for **Top of the World**. "We also have reacted to a market preference towards styles that feel authentic and worn. And we see kids and youth styles are a major

source for growth in 2016. Flat bills and buckets continue to trend in this space."

At **Pukka Headwear**, digital camouflage caps continue to trend. "Major League sports have played a role in the continued success of camo and people are asking for all variations of it. We offer many options that are fabric-based, as well as the ability to print just about any type of camo pattern through our custom sublimation process," says national sales director **Brian Matix**. "From the basic army camo to six new digital camo selections and our new snow camo, Pukka can cover just about any need."

OC Sports sees a greater emphasis the performance aspects of fabrics. "OC Sports offers cooling, wicking and antimicrobial options along with the textures and techniques, such as sublimation, to create headwear that not only looks good, but truly performs,"

says **Ramona Watson**, product development director.

Many teams want a baseball cap or other headwear, so dealers should think beyond baseball and football "We see an increased amount of interest from the other, often-less-thought-of sports. The sales call should not end at just the football coach or the baseball coach," says Matix. "More importantly, make sure you ask for the hat sale."

Handling Lead Times

With emphasis on customization of caps, dealers and teams are accustomed to working with lead times.

For Brumfield, it means embroidering shorter lead-time orders in-house. "Our pre-season orders are all custom embroidered at the manufacturer," says Brumfield. "We tend to embroider more caps for travel baseball in-house because of the shorter timeline.



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APPAREL / HEADWEAR

Travel teams have to wait to have their rosters before placing orders, so there is typically less time."

It's important for dealers to get in front of customers early. "This allows you to take advantage of early order and booking incentives which could free up additional buy dollars," says **Chad Kennedy**, national sales manager at **The Game**. "In addition, getting orders in earlier allows time for customers to sell and possibly reorder while still in season."

Samuelson embroiders 98 percent of all caps in-house. "It's what we do. Our process is to do our own digitizing, tweak the size of the logo and deliver it sooner than the manufacturers, especially considering all the emailing back and forth for approvals," he says. "We can turn it around in one to two weeks."

The one exception to embroidery is the loose knit caps. "Here we might glue a piece of tackle

twill onto the hat and sew on the logo," says Samuelson.

Meanwhile, vendors are continually looking for ways to be responsive to deadlines.

Richardson Cap's designer can speed up the design approval process. "The dealer can use the cap design as proof of what the cap will look like because they are looking at a picture of the cap rather than a drawing," says VP-sales **Steve Alford**. "Quality and delivery sells."

Top of the World has launched a domestic program to address dealer needs for smaller order sizes with faster delivery times. "The domestic or quick turn program allows vendors to order hats even if they do not meet the 72-piece minimum. The in-house production team can turn out smaller or more unique hat orders," says Vickers. "The program is used to turn out orders more quickly to meet customer needs, with new orders shipping within three to four weeks of order placement." ■



Top of the World's 30th Anniversary Fall 2016 Collection (top) integrates best fit technology and trend-forward styles, including a growing interest in snapback and visor styles. The OC Sports Style Phenom 1Eighty (bottom) is fully customizable with a Qtech Cooling sweatband.



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to help disperse energy and transfer the energy across the sub-arch making the energy travel over a greater distance. **LEVEL 4 HONEYCOMB** is used here again below the subarch in the top of the lining. It is placed in strategic locations across the shoulder to absorb and disperse the remaining energy across the entire shoulder to minimize any remaining energy. **LEVEL 5 AIR MANAGEMENT** adjustable and removable clavicle pad provide the player with extra comfort and giving the final attack on energy by absorbing and dispersing any remaining energy.



THE COURT REMAINS A HARD YET STEADY BUSINESS FOR TEAM DEALERS.

By Tim Sitek

Although the sport will forever be hampered for team dealers by the relatively small amount of equipment needed – a ball, some kicks and a uniform, perhaps a warmup or shooting shirt – steady participation and strong sales in uniforms and spirit packs have kept the basketball business bouncing this year.

That, of course, often depends on the uniform cycle in each dealer's area, but overall business has been solid, team dealers report. And cycle or not, as primarily an indoor sport basketball produces sales nearly year-round whether in sunny Arizona or freezing Ohio — coupled with equally strong participation for both boys and girls and the hoops business still scores at the team level.

Sales have bounced in double digits for **Egelston-Maynard Sporting Goods**, says **Vance Weigand**, president of the Covington, KY-based business that covers northern Kentucky and southwest Ohio with three roadmen. He attributes this to a strong year for uniforms. In fact, he was still working on late orders before the Thanksgiving holiday.

Footwear remained flat, he adds, but Weigand hopes that shoe sales pick up next year to balance out the cyclical nature of uniform sales.

Kimmel Athletic Supply has also had a decent year, with basketball sales up six to seven percent, says **Jim Kimmel**, owner of the Spokane, WA-based team dealer that covers Washington, Oregon and

HOOPS HEAVEN



Built with moisture-wicking Climalite fabric and fully sublimated graphic options, the Adidas miFuture Star Uniform delivers a stylistic look and a lightweight feel.

Idaho, along with part of Texas, with 30 roadmen. Kimmel notes that more schools cycled uniforms this year and online sales continue to grow.

Kimmel expects next year to remain steady thanks to the sport's popularity. "It's a big basketball community," he says.

Jami Snell, owner of **Rookies Sports** in Edmond, OK, says the success of the Oklahoma City Thunder has spawned interest in her area. "There's been a huge increase in youth basketball," she notes. "We do a lot of fill-ins, so that shows me teams are growing." That's important to her business that focuses on screenprinting, with sales equally coming from the youth, high school and commercial markets.

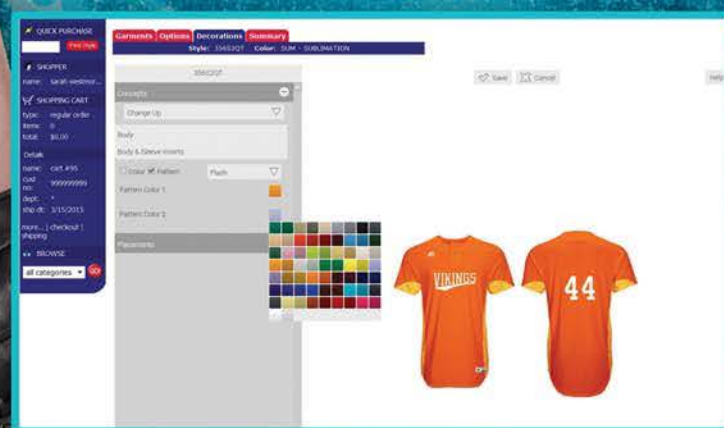
Snell expects more of the same next year. "Most kids stay in basketball and with the prognosis of



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TEAM / BASKETBALL

the Thunder, business should be great next year.” It helps that Rookies has good relationships with the youth organizations, she adds.

“We deal with professionals who run these programs,” Snell notes. “They don’t have much time, so we meet on weekends to fit their schedules.”

Basketball remains solid for **Tuffy Brooks Sporting Goods**, says **Jim Dineen**, owner of the Dayton, OH-based team dealer that travels a 50-mile radius with

its three roadmen. But it could be better if it carried the Swoosh.

“We don’t sell Nike, so it puts us a little bit behind. We have to promote other lines. But if we look at the overall picture, it’s done fairly well,” Dineen notes.

Year-Round Bounce

Interestingly, Tuffy Brooks stopped selling shoes about 25 years ago. The inventory risk was just too much. “We got out of it when at the end of the day, we had inventory left and sold at a



The Porter Orbit-Flex 180 rim is an economical competition basketball goal that flexes around a 180-degree arc and includes powder coated finish.

discount. You booked the shoes six to seven months in advance and by that time, a new shoe came out, you couldn’t get refills.”

Many sports have become a year-round affair in warmer climates or with travel teams, but weather isn’t a factor for the indoor game of basketball.

“Basketball is year-round,” Kim-

mel notes. “It’s endless here. We have a strong AAU program for kids of all ages, strong recreational programs with good facilities and strong school programs for boys and girls.”

Dineen echoes that. The high school market runs from November to March and then April hits with AAU. Those AAU teams have grown, with a local organization now supporting 15 teams from third grade through high school. “Some form of basketball is playing a long time,” he notes.

HARDTIMES

“

Steve Vogelsang

An effective dealer sales rep should see hard goods comprise at least a third of his total volume.

Laura St. George

We have seen that team dealers who focused sales efforts on soft goods while just dabbling in hard goods walked away from sales.

Chris Livingston

When dealers don’t feel comfortable with what they’re selling, they won’t sell it.

”

WHILE SOFT GOODS MAY DRIVE BASKETBALL SALES, THERE are opportunities for dealers to boost business by looking around the gym for replacement needs: wall padding, rims, backboards, systems. Scouting beyond schools may give the basketball business even more bounce. Team dealers who do that expand their sales and add profit. And, yes, it can cement relationships and lead to new ones as well.

Three of the industry’s basketball suppliers addressed the opportunities and challenges team dealers face in expanding and gaining their share of hard goods sales:

- **Matt Wells**, division leader, and **Steve Vogelsang**, VP-sales, **Porter Athletic**
- **Chris Livingston**, national sales manager, **Bison**
- **Laura St. George**, VP-sales and marketing, **Gared North America**

Team Insight: What’s new in backboards and systems for 2016?

Wells: High performance goals are growing in demand, with a focus on goals that flex across 180 degrees. We released a new Orbit-Flex 180 goal focused on the high school and small college market positioned as an economical version of our flagship Division 1 Torq-Flex 180 Goal.

St. George: The development of new backboards and systems have been fairly stagnant over the past few years, but we are focusing on the integration of technology into our equipment. Our most useful invention over the past fiscal year was the Quick Connect Disconnect System (QCDC). We have integrated this system into our outdoor adjustable product line as well. The patented QCDC allows for easy installation and storage of glass backboards. We have all experienced that long delay when a backboard breaks during a basketball game. The QCDC allows the installation of a new backboard in less than 15 minutes.

How well do dealers pursue the business?

Vogelsang: Overall, team dealers do a solid job capturing gym equipment sales opportunities. There are a number of brands competing across this category and dealers typically focus their representation on one or two options. An effective dealer sales rep should see hard goods comprise at least a third of his total volume.

Livingston: We’ve always been fortunate to have a dealer base that has done very well with this type of business. The team dealers we work with understand that the margins are much higher than soft goods. And although soft goods might get them in the door at a local school, the added sales of a backboard, rim and pad might make the overall sale worth the visit in terms of an increased profit.

St. George: We have seen that team dealers who focused sales efforts on soft goods while just dabbling in hard goods walked away from sales. But those that have maintained their hard good focus gain more market share. Research of team dealers that have

excelled through the current trends of consolidation and economic challenges shows that a healthy mix of soft and hard good sales maximizes profit margin attainment. Typically, a team dealer can make the same profit on the sale of one basic basketball rim as a combination of 10 athletic socks.

Where are the opportunities and how can team dealers capitalize on them?

Wells: Schools and athletic facilities are constantly looking for ways to improve their facilities. Changing out old backboards, rims and pads are great ways to improve the quality and look of their gyms. Custom graphic wall pads are great ways to add school spirit in a gym while protecting their athletes. Concentrate on walking through their facility in the early pre-season to determine a needs list and partner with your vendor to develop the best equipment solution.

Livingston: Local schools and colleges are always the obvious target for team dealers, but I’m continually surprised by the number of sales that are to churches and community centers. We ship orders daily to these places and many times they are for very large ticket items.

St. George: Every time a team dealer walks into a school, church, recreation center, hotel, hospital, etc., there is an opportunity for a sale. Understanding that many team dealers don’t have the resources or sales history to justify the purchase of bid service memberships, we send our active team dealer network leads in their communities on a daily basis.

What are the challenges in selling hard goods and what can dealers do to overcome these?

Vogelsang: Often when working with replacement equipment or a small renovation, there is more than meets the eye and the final solution may intimidate both facility director and team dealer. While challenging to sell, the size of the sale is worthwhile to pursue.

Livingston: The biggest challenge is comfort level. When dealers don’t feel comfortable with what they’re selling, they won’t sell it. We encourage our dealers to call us any time – or have the end user call us – so we can ask the appropriate questions to make sure their customers get what they need the first time.

St. George: The largest challenge for team dealers in selling hard goods surrounds proper technical understanding of the product. No one wants to present a product line to a customer with the fear of inability to answer questions. Understanding this challenge was the fundamental reasoning behind the launch of the PLAYRX program in 2011. Gared wanted to give the dealers the ability to assess gymnasiums and playing fields at the same level as a certified installer or inspector. A secondary challenge is installation. Over the past year, we folded this concern into our PLAYRX program with the creation of a certification program targeting installers worldwide. ■

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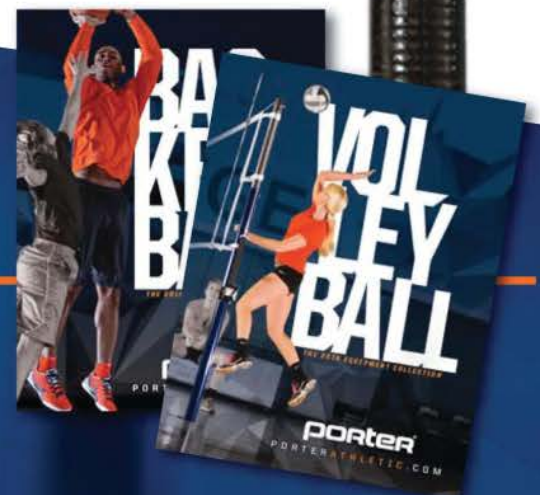
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Tuffy Brooks supports those AAU teams with quick delivery, Dineen notes. "What sets us apart is the printing. Many times these teams aren't picked until the last minute. We only have a short window of 10 days to two weeks. The nice part is the suppliers have the stock. We can turn around sometimes in one to two days."

There may be peaks and valleys, but it's also a year-round business for Egelston-Maynard Sporting Goods, Weigand says. It helps that his territory carries a rich basketball tradition. Consequently, he hits all the markets – school, rec and select teams – with the middle schools and AAU teams driving strong sales this year.

Basketball stands as a key category for Buddy's All Stars,

which covers Southern California and Arizona with 25 roadmen. And business in the Phoenix area remains strong, says Ron Shepro, who manages the team dealer's operations there. "I can tell you basketball, both boys and girls, have equal footing in our market. Between school and club ball, it probably represents about 20 percent of our sales."

Outfitting Teams

Team dealers depend on soft goods for the majority of their basketball business. And it's a branded business to say the least.

"Most of the soft goods sold seem to go with the three big shoe companies if budgets allow," Shepro notes.

In uniforms, sublimation keeps rolling, dealers report. "Sublima-

tion has just exploded because of the options," Weigand reports. "You used to look forward to the new lines, but sublimation is limitless," he adds, which makes it a little easier for suppliers to stock inventory. "I couldn't count the number of suppliers offering sublimation at the Sports Inc. show," which was held in late November.

While sublimation keeps rolling, the only downside is turnaround, Kimmel says. "They all want custom stuff. You have to be real with your customers. Many order late. We often tell them twice that it takes a certain amount of time to get the order done. You can't overpromise. If anybody could figure out how to do it in a timely fashion, they would be quite wealthy," Kimmel notes.

Moisture management and sub-

limation rule the courts, Dineen says. "It just keeps building. It's almost all sublimation at the high school level," he notes. Those schools often get nine to 10 years out of the uniforms by cycling them from the high school to the reserve team and eventually to the middle school.

As in other sports, too, it's lighter weights and mixed polyesters ruling the courts, Snell notes. Camo remains popular as well, she adds. And she can't wait to do vertical designs to mirror the look of the Thunder's uniforms.

Youth programs are looking to stretch their dollars with reversible shorts and tops, Weigand notes.

There's plenty of other soft goods that sell as well. "Socks are huge," Snell says.

Custom and in-stock socks are popular, Kimmel adds. Plus, his roadmen get orders for travel gear, including warmups and personal backpacks.

Those spirit packs push basketball sales at Tuffy Brooks, Dineen says. Hoodies and long-sleeve Ts are popular. Plus, he's done well with compression padded shorts.

Outfitting Gyms

Sure, there's more to the business than apparel, shoes and balls (*see related story on page 42 on state ball adoptions*). Dealers certainly don't depend on it, but they still find hard goods complement their service and extend their business.

Much of that depends on budgets, Shepro says. "The big purchases normally depend on extra monies the schools may have. Priorities always go first."

"We do a lot of that," Kimmel says of outfitting gyms. "We do backboards and winches, goals and padding. We are unique. It's somewhat remote in the Northwest, so we get a lot of that business. We are good at it. We go into a gym and we have someone in town that helps us with installation."

Chasing Hard Goods

While Tuffy Brooks doesn't actively pursue the hard goods side, it's ready to help schools in tight situations by carrying a line of breakaway rims.

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And relationships bring replacement business. "We do get calls from schools for padding and rims. We do some backboards and we service those schools. It's for the replacement business," Dineen says.

Tuffy Brooks works with an installer in Cincinnati to complete bigger jobs such as backboards and padding for a whole gym. "In many schools, they don't want

the maintenance people to do the installation," Dineen says.

And dealers know they need to provide service in a pinch. Egelston-Maynard keeps backboards and rims in stock since a lot of the equipment is purchased on an emergency basis. "I don't pursue it, but I like to have enough to help out," Weigand says. "If we can't supply the need, we have suppliers that help out." ■

TEAM DEALERS SEE STATE BALL ADOPTIONS AS A *FAIT ACCOMPLI*. Suppliers certainly aren't going to stop pushing their brands, so they simply deal with it. Still, team dealers benefit from the ability to better manage inventory.

"As far as state adoptions go, they do help our inventory, or buying concerns, since most schools go with the adopted ball," says **Ron Shepro**, at **Buddy's All Stars**. "This limits your concerns about bringing in a variety of manufacturers' balls."

"It seems the people that benefit the most are the organizations," adds **Vance Weigand**, at **Egelston-Maynard Sporting Goods**. "But it does help predict and work on inventory, especially at the high school level. You always hear comments, though, from the coaches that they prefer another ball but they don't have a choice."

"We are pretty much resigned to it," says **Jim Dineen**, at **Tuffy Brooks Sporting Goods**. Nearly 90 percent of high schools buy the state adopted Rawlings ball, he says. The parochial schools primarily buy Spalding, he adds.

Dineen says he looks at what other team dealers charge for those balls. "We have to be competitive with pricing, but we still make some profit." ■

New On The Hard Court



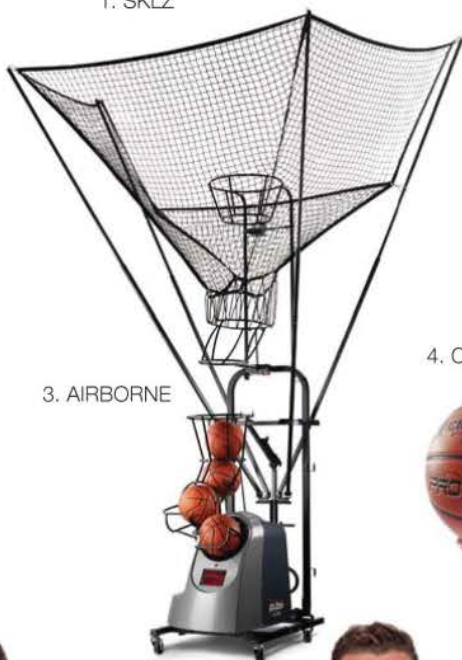
1. SKLZ



2. SHOCK DOCTOR



6. HOLLOWAY



3. AIRBORNE

4. CHAMPRO



7. TRANSFER EXPRESS



8. TEAMWORK



5. ALLESON



1. Three training balls from **SKLZ** perform different roles. The smaller size of the Official Weight Control Basketball improves control by increasing awareness and feel while dribbling; the Lightweight Control Basketball increases hand speed in dribbling drills by forcing quicker responses between bounces; and at three pounds, the Heavy Weight Control Basketball adds intensity and strengthens fingers, wrists and forearms.

2. The **Shock Doctor** Ultra Basketball mouthguard has a low-profile design that protects teeth and gums from injury without hindering breathing or speaking.

3. The **Dr. Dish** Basketball Shooting Machine Rebel from **Airborne Athletics** offers value in a programmable shooting machine, while the **Dr. Dish** Pro and All-Star models take shooting training to a new level with modern technology.

4. **Champro's** Charge uniform has a side panel design for decoration and features Active Cloth 100 percent polyester Dri-Gear fabric with Pin-Dot mesh inserts.

5. **Alleson Athletic's** single ply game uniform features no-pull fabric and a modified collegiate shoulder design, along with pin dot mesh on the back of the jersey and upper back of the short for breathability.

6. **Holloway** custom sublimated basketball uniforms come in four-way stretch fabric or a lightweight Micro-Interlock fabric in seven customizable designs.

7. **Transfer Express** stock heat transfers allow apparel decorators to screenprint numbers onto basketball apparel with just a heat press.

8. **ProSphere** sublimated reversible basketball uniforms from **Teamwork Athletic** promise fast full sublimation manufacturing times.



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TECH'D OUT

**BRANDED
AND
NON-BRANDED
PERFORMANCE
APPAREL
CONNECTS
WITH
ATHLETES.**



Photo: Under Armour

By Nancy Baeder

Modern athletes continue to fuse with their technology, and nowhere is it more apparent than in performance apparel. The technology of sweat and contact defines every athletic category, from base layers to uniforms, outerwear, hats, socks, shoes and even the protectives that diffuse impact. If it's sold to athletes, it has to deliver dry, lightweight, unrestrictive comfort.

Oh, yea, and it has to look good doing it.

"We're on a rocket ship going forward as companies continue to make progress. From socks to shoulder pads to hats, everything is performance and moisture management," says **Mike Miros**, owner of **First Team Sports**, Greenville, SC.

The game is light years from where it began. The playbook that started 20 years ago with Under Armour and

the once humble T-shirt now rules every aspect of the team game.

"Starting with Under Armour, what surprised me was how well it did as quickly as it did. Before that it was all about how cheaply you could get a T-shirt," recalls **Frank Powell**, VP-team sales at **Hibbett Team Sales**, Birmingham, AL. "It didn't take long to catch on in the institutional market because Nike, Adidas and Russell all saw that the technology had teeth to it and were quickly onboard with their own products."

"I would argue that Nike was actually doing it before Under Armour invented the category. For at least four years we'd been selling a Nike mock neck to football teams that was part of their cross-country winter ski line," says **Ron Gower**, owner of **Stayton Sports**, Stayton, OR. "It came in blue and black, so that's what everyone wore until we saw Michigan wearing it in

gold. We asked for different colors, but Nike said no. They were selling the Swoosh by putting it on college teams, but not selling those products at retail. That is, until Under Armour came out with it and started building their brand."

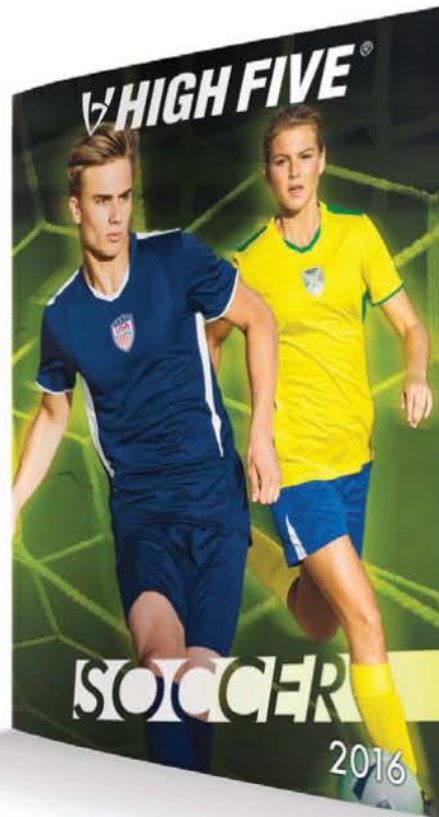
There's no doubt that Under Armour continues to shape the category. "Under Armour is the number one brand and Nike is number two. People come in asking for one or the other and will generally take either one that has the color they want. Those two brands are interchangeable at retail," says Gower. "Performance apparel is getting bigger and bigger and more mainstream now. Everyone is upgrading to the performance T-shirts, a generic version, spending more money to get the look they want."

"One way we've benefited from the moisture management technology revolution is that it has driven up the average cost of an item," says



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Girls Rule

WHILE THE IMAGE OF THE YOUNG, male athlete wearing performance apparel dominates, two other groups of customers are contributing to the growing demand for the category — girls and young athletes.

While guys' apparel has dominated performance offerings (by some estimates double what women buy), more items are being designed specifically for women. Companies have taken notice of this large underserved market to create more gender-specific items and fits.

"The big brands are finally showing the girls some love," says **Mike Miros**, of **First Team Sports**, who sells a lot of gender-specific items such as sports bras and tights in addition to standard apparel offerings. "Overall the purchase is motivated by a combination of look, because they want something cool to wear, and the performance aspects," he says. "Your serious athlete understands the difference it makes. I don't think the girls necessarily buy more, but they definitely want it to fit right. They want T-shirts made to fit them."

In the girls' market, **Ron Gower**, of **Stayton Sports**, sees compression items being more brand driven than the guys. "Volleyball teams, for example, want kneepads, shorts and shoes to be unified under one brand," he says.

Frank Powell, of **Hibbett Team Sales**, notices very little difference between girls and guys, beyond the girls opting for gender-specific fits. "Girls want all the same moisture management that they guys want and overall there are more gender-specific items available," says Powell. "They want something that fits right for uniforms, pants and jerseys, as well as warm-ups. For T-shirts and sweatshirts we still sell a lot of guy sizes to girls."

Meanwhile, selling to younger athletes used to mean less expensive items, but even here the performance option is checked.

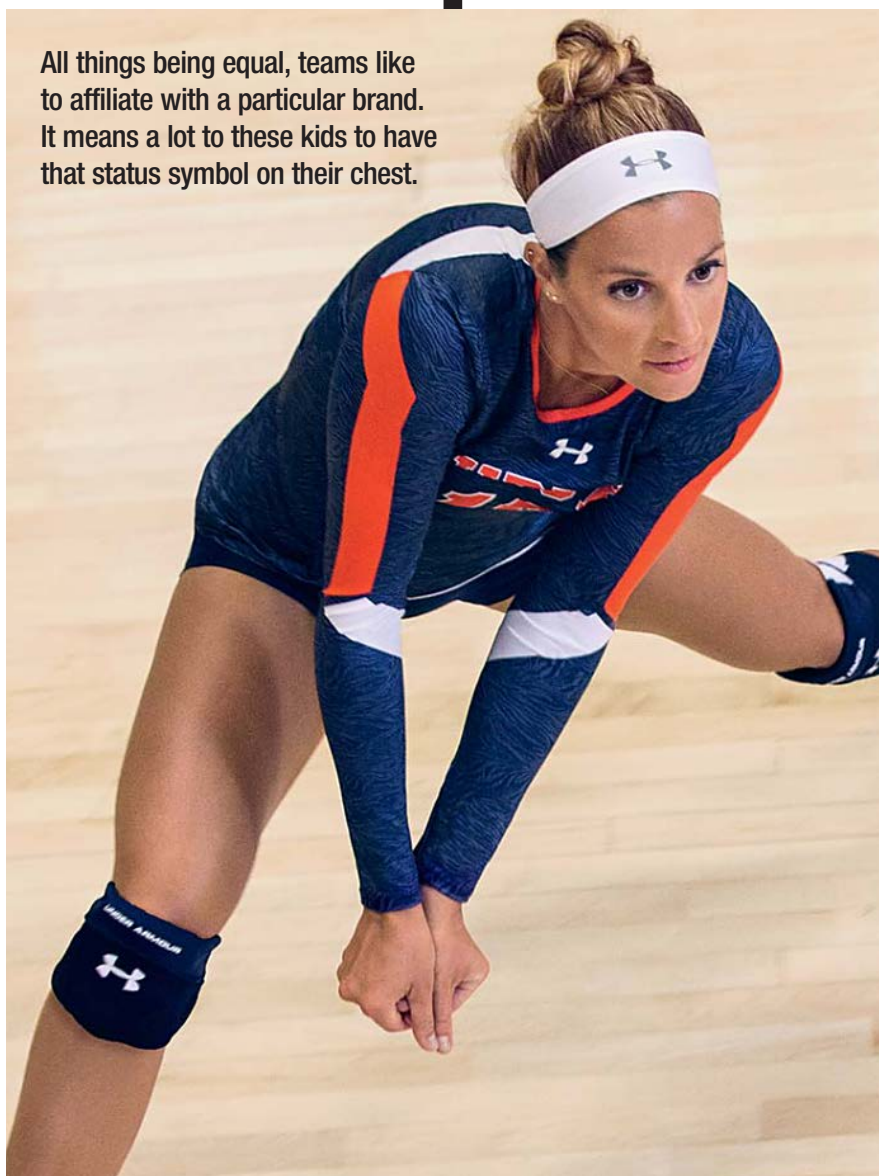
"In terms of the brands, the youth want what looks cool. It's not necessarily brand on base layer items such as compression shirts," says Gower. "We see protectives now for youth football as young as four-year olds. This age has a lot of growth potential and safety issues with football persist."

"Parents will spend the \$40 for the shirt with integrated pads and it's an added sale for us," he adds. "Fear has pushed it to a new level. It won't hurt a kid to wear it, but you have to wonder if

it's necessary for a 50-pound kid."

Young athletes definitely demand base layer performance items. "Young kids and leagues most definitely do not want a regular T-shirt anymore," says Miros. "They want the brands their heroes wear. They want what Clemson is wearing on Saturday and they're asking for it. They

All things being equal, teams like to affiliate with a particular brand. It means a lot to these kids to have that status symbol on their chest.



don't always get it because Badger is okay with the parents as long as it has the performance aspects."

No matter the age, given a choice, all kids want the brands.

"These days coaches are younger and more brand conscious, whereas older coaches don't care as much about that," says Powell. "We don't do a whole lot of youth leagues, but they are definitely wearing moisture management compression shirts and performance garments. Before middle school they become very brand conscious and really want the brands." ■

TECH'D OUT

Powell. "On average, every garment costs more, so even with the same margins, revenues are increased."

The look and feel of performance gear sells. Try it and you're hooked. "For a while I think it was driven by the coolness factor, but in the last five years people have totally embraced the performance aspects. It's everything they

pect of apparel more apparent than in the previously low-tech sport sock. Now, no one wants cheap socks. "People used to complain about spending \$2 for a sock and now they don't blink at spending \$15. Leagues may still buy the cheaper sock, but individuals want the moisture wicking socks and the brand names are definitely their preference," says Miros. "The whole performance garment has helped our business. Instead of a \$4 T-shirt we're selling \$20 T-shirts. All the way down the line the items carry a higher tag. That helps our sales and profits."

Market research shows that activewear as a category is growing faster than the apparel market as a whole. Consumers have absolutely adopted it for comfort and versatility and also as a fashion statement.

"As performance gets more mainstream it's also getting more casual. It's the new basic in fashion. People want fleece hoodies and sweatpants in performance 100 percent polyester, no more cotton/poly," says Gower. "You see people around town wearing stretch pants and warm-up pants seeking comfort. They grew up with performance stuff and want comfort for their everyday clothes. Even I've gotten used to the sweatpants."

While name brands continue to dominate on-the-field sales, non-premium brands have played a large role in mainstreaming performance and making it available to everyone. Dealers sell a combination of branded and off-brand merchandise.

"In general, sales are very brand driven. If you're an Under Armour school, or a Nike, Adidas or Russell school, you try to stay with that brand all the way down to shorts and T-shirts," says Powell. "But when price is an issue, non-premium brands such as Badger, A4, SanMar and Alpha Broder are the go-tos for us."

Whatever the sport, the process starts with uniforms, and custom orders are placed early. Closer to the season, spirit pack selections are made. "We do many online sales with Order-MyGear and that works well. It's more work for us to do all the individual packaging, but

buy," says Miros. "It's now the number one thing we sell in spirit packs. Everyone, including parents, wants performance moisture management apparel. It's very rare now to sell a cotton T-shirt."

As non-premium brands developed similar products at a lower cost, performance became affordable to everyone. "It changed spirit pack orders because there are some very reasonable pricepoints that enable every school to do it," says Powell.

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the coaches love it because they don't have to handle money," says Powell. "We probably sell more that way because the coach has mandatory items and the optional selections also include parent items."

Moisture management and antimicrobial aspects are valuable selling tools. Every company offers it and everyone has to have it. Antimicrobials are especially important for protective garments such as padded girdles and shoulder pads, according to Powell.

"We continue to see new performance aspects as the technology changes and grows, such as thinner, lighter materials that are warm," says Powell. "Here in Alabama we don't have much cold weather. But in the beginning of baseball season in February it's cold and it's a slow game, so you need warmer garments."

"At the end of football season it can also be cold," he adds. "Cold weather performance garments

have an insulating effect and now you can get fleece and other winter type wear with moisture management properties."

There are enhanced products to meet the specific needs of every sport. "The consumer understands that the performance characteristics can help you stay dry and comfortable," says Gower. "The non-premium brands are fine products with similar characteristics that compete on price. I would argue that sometimes the quality is actually better."

He sells a lot of all-weather gear. "It rarely gets that hot or cold here, so moisture wicking is the important thing. All-season gear is interchangeable," he says. "All of the garments are getting lighter and thinner. Even the T-shirts are getting lighter and people like the way they look and feel."

Spirit pack items and fan gear are price-driven, but they still want moisture management and a design with their logo. On the

field, it's all about the brand.

"Brand still matters to people, but they have learned it's not everything. The Nike Elite sock took off because it lived up to the hype, eliminating blisters with padding in the right places," says Gower, who believes Elite sales will taper. "Now people have figured out that it just has to be a performance sock. We order a lot of custom team socks for schools from Twin City Knitting."

He keeps a close eye on new regulations in Oregon that limit logo size for on-field apparel. "The rules committees for different high school sports are getting very particular. One committee has limited volleyball and soccer uniforms to one one-inch logo. This could rule out some of the branded merchandise, so we'll see. So before I decorate any uniform, I am printing out the latest rules," says Gower.

All things being equal, teams like to affiliate with a particular brand. "At the collegiate level it's all name brand, top to bottom," says Miros.

"Some of the bigger highs schools also want to be branded and they try to stay with one brand. It means a lot to these kids to have that status symbol on their chest."

He credits the big brands for a combination of good marketing and good products that really perform. For price performers he looks to Badger and SportTech, a SanMar brand.

He sells some compression garments to football teams. "The 7-on-7 teams like to wear compression under the pads," says Miros. "Girls don't really buy compression garments and adults don't necessarily want form-fitting. But they all definitely want the performance fabrics."

While he doesn't sell a lot of cold gear, he has noticed a trend toward less bulk. "Go back a few years and all the cold winter items were thick and bulky. You couldn't move," he says. "Now it is a lot more streamlined and they still perform to keep you warm." ■

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A TEAM INSIGHT VENDOR ROUNDTABLE

THAT'S A MOUTHFUL

MOUTHGUARDS ARE PLAYING A ROLE IN PLAYER SAFETY.



How can we get more athletes in more sports to wear mouthguards?

Jeff Padovan, Bite Tech: Limited-contact sports such as basketball and soccer account for over 25 million participants and represent the largest source of new users to the category. It quite possibly could double the size of the category in five to seven years. But short of a mandate by NFHS requiring the use of mouthguards in soccer and basketball, it will be up to the coaches, parents, players and elected officials to create new definitions for player safety in these and other non-mandated sports.

Rita Shelley, Sisur: The key is to create better awareness in the sports that do not currently mandate a mouthguard. Sports like basketball, with its highest number of injuries, skiing and snowboarding, several types of martial arts, wrestling and soccer could really use a mouthguard regulation. Our strategy has been to create better awareness in these sports and to advocate for better athletic safety by partnering with key organizations, social influencers, parents and coaches to create better awareness of dental injury rates and the subsequent need for better dental protection.

Bobby Dodd, Mogo: The key is to offer athletes mouthguard options that are both high quality and reasonably priced.

Herb Markwort, Markwort: It is a worthwhile challenge to get more players in the sports of soccer, basketball, volleyball and rugby to wear mouthguards and we need the dealers to help make this push every chance they get.

Jay Turkbas, United Sports Brands: There are several motivations. If use is mandated, such as

in football and hockey, there is compliance. Our goal is to continually offer options for every age and ability level in those and all sports. Otherwise, in sports that don't mandate mouthguard use, such as basketball, there is compelling injury data that shows high incidence of facial and dental injury. It is our job to elevate the awareness to athletes, coaches and governing bodies on the need to wear mouthguards.

Gretta Hawkins, SafeTGard: By keeping innovation at the forefront of the mouthguard industry and offering mouthguards with benefits beyond traditional mouthguards.

In what sports would it make sense for athletes to start wearing mouthguards?

Shelley: The number one answer is basketball. Basketball has the highest rates of dental injury. In fact, one in 10 players will chip or lose a tooth in the upcoming year. Soccer, with the highest number of active youth players, could really benefit from a mouthguard. The rates of injury in these sports is much lower, but the injuries that do occur are a lot more severe, and therefore, expensive. A mouthguard seems like such a small price to pay in comparison. We do see some interest from parents and players, but unless there is strong organizational support for better dental safety, I'm doubtful that it would become a trend in the upcoming year.

Turkbas: Basketball is a logical and demonstrable sport where pro athletes are wearing mouthguards at the highest level in a ratio far greater than the base of youth and adult basketball players. The safety and performance benefits of less injury and more playing time makes incredible sense. The same

VENDOR ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

JEFF PADOVAN, CEO, Bite Tech Sports/Under Armour Performance Mouthwear

HERB MARKWORT, President, Markwort Sporting Goods

BOBBY DODD, President, MoGo Sport

GRETТА HAWKINS, VP-Product Development, SafeTGard

RITA SHELLEY, Director of Marketing, Sisur Sport

JAY TURKBAS, SVP-Product Development, United Sports Brands

Moderated by Michael Jacobsen



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SHOCK DOCTOR

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SISU

The Sisu Aero is made from a high-tech thermoplastic material that is 30 percent stronger and has eight times greater tensile strength than conventional mouthguards.

can be said for soccer and the high incidence of collision injury around the head, as well as baseball and infielder injury in the facial area.

Dodd: It is important that athletes competing in any sport where maxillofacial injury is a risk wear a properly fitting mouthguard. This is especially true in sports like basketball, soccer, baseball and softball where injuries to the mouth are commonplace.

What is the sales pitch to these young athletes — as well as their parents?

Turkbaser: Making the mouthguard a neutral non-issue in affecting performance in terms of comfort, breathing and speaking is key. We understand that they need to breathe and communicate unrestricted during their performance. It is important that they understand that wearing a mouthguard is a small compromise that offers big protection on the playing field. Mouthguards keep athletes in the game and protect against oral and facial injuries — it's worth it to wear it.

Hawkins: So much of your overall health is tied to dental health. We are learning more and more about preventing and reducing incidence to teeth

Padovan: The primary pitch to the youth sports athlete and the parent is the same — player safety and the avoidance of injury so you can stay in the game. If that's not compelling enough, self-expression with color, style, flavor and new pad printed images will help to keep compliance high. In addition, performance-enhancing mouthguards such as the lipshields with breathing holes that we see with collegiate and NFL players will, in turn, inspire young athletes to role model these behaviors.

Dodd: First, communication to the parent is key, helping the parent make the best decision at the point of purchase. Second, making it fun for the athletes with new flavors and new colorways to keep offerings fresh and new on the shelf.

What role can team dealers play

in the effort to get more players to wear mouthguards?

Padovan: We would encourage them to merchandise mouthguard styles, colors and designs year-round as add-on sales to every sports participation category. The American Dental Association recommends the use of mouthguards in 30 sports in addition to football, lacrosse and hockey. Given the sheer size of basketball and soccer player participation and the presence of high-profile athletes wearing mouthguards, it seems an additional focus would be a great opportunity for team dealers to make better margins and build year-round sales.

Turkbaser: Team dealers can, and need to be, advocates for safety. They can fulfill that advocacy through merchandising mouthguards in specific sport locations in-store, such as the basketball, soccer and baseball sections. Team dealers can also suggest the use of mouthguards while assisting any athlete or parent in their shop. Additionally, team dealers can advocate to governing bodies to mandate mouthguard use in more sports.

Hawkins: Team dealers offer a higher level of service and can use this opportunity to explain the benefits of the different levels of protection offered.

Dodd: Team dealers need to stop being afraid of asking for the up-sell to a better quality mouthguard. The appetite for better performing products is out there and I have seen a great willingness of booster clubs and parent groups that are more than willing to fund the better performing mouthguards.

Markwort: The Vettex mouthguards are big and noticed by the kids and the dealers who pay attention and this exposure helps make the whole mouthguard category bigger every year.

What are some of the technical advances in mouthguards that are helping to grow the category?

Dodd: Flavor, better fit, better

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breathability and comfort, along with new materials that feel good in the mouth.

Turkbas: There are new ideas and advancements all the time. What's most important to us are credible materials that can be formed at different profiles and that provide choices to athletes at all levels. In the range of available technologies that we have been developing, we are offering new material blends and profiles that provide higher retention and lower volume, which in turn allows for unrestricted speaking and breathing.

AURs that are higher than the category average.

Markwort: Our Vettex lip protector mouthguards with breathing channels are the granddaddy of the industry going back to the 1960s. The competition is fierce and new competitors seem to appear on the field every season with fancy packaging and wild performance claims.

Hawkins: We have introduced products that offer more jaw stabilizing features, helping keep the mouthguard in place when the ath-

Dodd: Great flavors, cool colors and good looks.

Turkbas: They want a diverse selection and range of choices for sure. They are also looking for a mouthguard that is comfortable and protective, while still allowing them to perform. A football player has choices that work for short interval play, while basketball players and hockey players prefer a mouthguard with a different kind of fit. Team colors are always important and having a mouthguard with a cool design and color is also key.

Are flavored mouthguards gaining a niche in the overall category?

Dodd: Flavored mouthguards are here to stay. We introduced a wide breadth of flavor technology in 2012 and now three other major manufacturers have followed by offering their versions of flavor technology.

Turkbas: Yes. Flavor is popular and can increase compliance in terms of keeping the mouthguard in the mouth because it tastes good. It's also a fun factor as kids try different flavors and find a favorite. As athletes get older and mature, flavor becomes less of a factor, but for younger athletes they are popular.

Padovan: Flavored mouthguards currently represent more than 17 percent of the category — they are here to stay and could reach 30 percent in the next three years as flavors are incorporated into all levels.

Shelley: In 2014, when mouthguards flavors were gaining popularity in some areas, we did a consumer research study and the segment of population interested in purchasing flavored mouthguards was not large enough, compared to other opportunities we had available to us, for us to consider it as viable. Additionally, we ran an internal survey with our customers to see if there was a demand for more flavors. What we learned is that... our customers were not concerned with masking the flavor.

Finally, in what direction are mouthguards headed in 2016 and

beyond in terms of performance, safety and design?

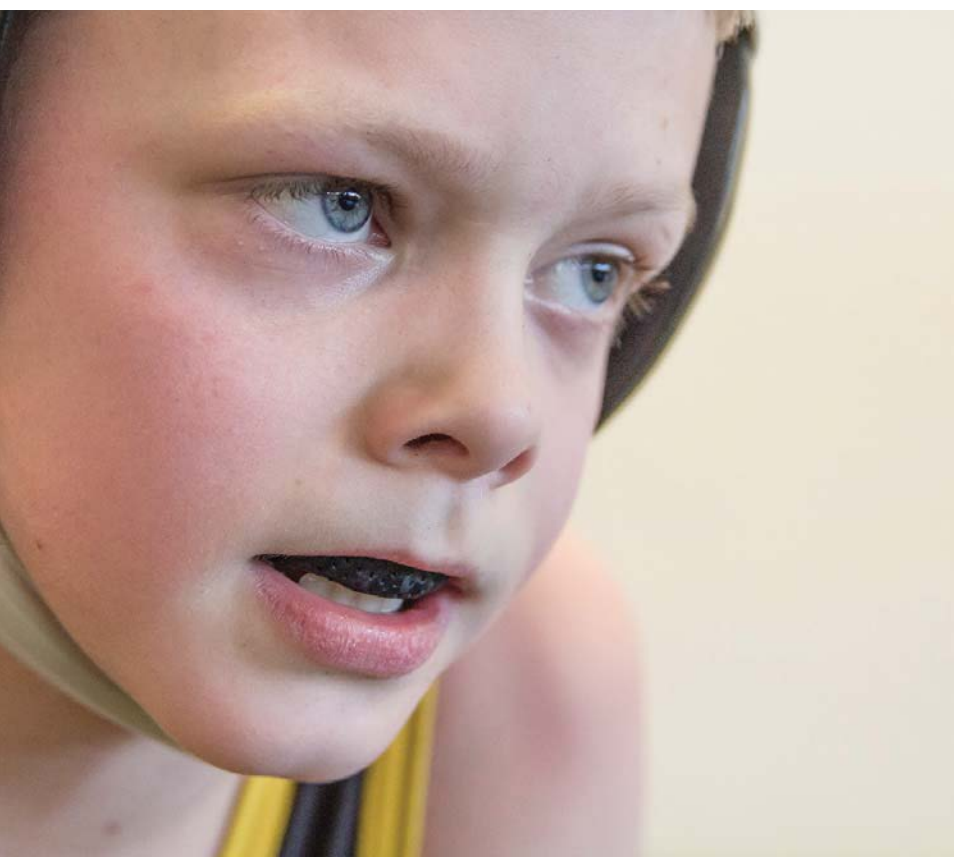
Dodd: In 2016, look for a trend toward high-performance technology at a price affordable to the average consumer. Look for new products that offer new materials with greater impact reduction properties as well as better fit capability.

Padovan: Over the past five years, the category has grown substantially in both unit and dollar sales. This is testament to the athlete positively responding to the evolving availability of better quality, better designed, flavored, colored, antimicrobial and now individual self-expression mouthguards. We don't see the category losing its growth trajectory in the next three years and, in fact, it will likely increase more substantially if mouthguards become mandatory for basketball and soccer, as we believe they should be.

Hawkins: We are going to continue to develop the idea of a mouthguard with electrolyte tablets. We want to add benefits beyond tooth protection and we feel replacing electrolytes while playing is huge in aiding performance and recovery with proper hydration.

Turkbas: Creating models that have relevance for evolving segments of athletes preferences will continue, while the kinds of mouthguards that a basketball, soccer, football or baseball player wear may be of different designs. The important thing is to maintain a level of protection and performance that athletes can count on.

Shelley: Wearable technology and responsive features are the future of mouthguard technology. There are some new promising models that incorporate sensors. The first to win the race here to dominate the market of wearable technology that can actually be comfortable, unaffected by saliva, unobtrusive and, most of all, accurate, will lead the tech in mouthguard developments. Our science department is making great strides in creating the next generation of mouthguards that will combine advances in nanotechnology to create a mouthguard that acts like a seatbelt. ■



Padovan: With amazing new materials, new technical molding processes, patented designs and the fusing of various materials and flavors, mouthguards provide protection beyond anything most adults ever wore as kids — and with the introduction of flavor some of them even taste good, too. Additionally, new pad printing techniques are allowing for personalized mouthguards with very high quality resolution. These improved materials and designs have higher AURs and are driving double-digit category growth. The braces/orthodontics and flavored mouthguard segments now account for 35 percent of total category sales and have

lete receives a hit to the mouth and jaw area. We want to offer as strong a level of protection as possible. In 2015 we introduced a mouthguard that releases electrolytes while playing, helping the athlete fight cramps and fatigue.

What are kids looking for in their mouthguards these days?

Hawkins: Parents are looking for protection, kids are looking for comfortable fit and cool colors that follow the trends in athletic wear.

Shelley: Protection, performance, comfort, appearance, customer reviews and peer network recommendations.

Mouthing Off

What role do mouthguards play in the ongoing concussion discussion?

Padovan: There is a significant amount of misinformation in the public domain about mouthguards being able to prevent concussions. Study after study continues to show that claims of mouthguards being able to reduce concussions are factually inaccurate. While there is work being done by a couple of companies to create a mouthguard that contains sophisticated electronic sensors, there is no concussion preventing mouthguard on the market today. Mouthguards still provide the most effective way to protect the teeth, jaw and gums from facial impact injuries.

Turkbaser: There are, doubtless, a number of studies regarding concussions. In order to study the effectiveness of mouthguards in preventing concussions, the impact variables that cause a concussion need to be sorted out in order to understand in what ways these impacts need to be reduced. Until then, we remain focused on stressing mouthguards protect against teeth and oral tissue injury.

Dodd: A mouthguard can play a big role in impact protection to the face and head; however, there is no empirical evidence or data to prove that mouthguards in any way reduce the incidence of concussion.

Shelley: The misconception here is that mouthguards protect against concussions. That statement is absolutely false and no conclusive evidence exists that mouthguards can protect against concussions. What they can do is protect players' teeth. As much as we wish there was this added benefit of a mouthguard, there is no conclusive evidence that allows us to make these claims.

What is driving buying decisions these days — price, performance, style, performance claims?

Padovan: Today athletes have more mouthguard selections to choose from than ever before. While the overall category is up in units and dollars, over the last 52 weeks the "under \$10" segment has declined 30 and 45 percent, respectively. This trend clearly indicates athletes are buying less on price

and more on design, performance, protection and style that are only available at the higher price points.

Turkbaser: We have found that price is less of an issue. We believe performance has always been important. The increasing segmentation of choices, such as lip guards and lower teeth mouthguards, has also been an important area. Braces are a huge driver in preference, which is really a unique need.

Shelley: Objectively, it's a little bit of everything, which is what a brand image is all about. Building a brand around a product that we can really get behind without any gimmicks or pretend science is what we are about.

Dodd: Our panel data has shown us that consumers are most interested in performance, fit/comfort, price.

Hawkins: Parents are becoming more and more astute about performance and protection. They want the best protection their personal budget will allow. ■

“

The misconception here is that mouthguards protect against concussions. That statement is absolutely false and no conclusive evidence exists that mouthguards can protect against concussions.

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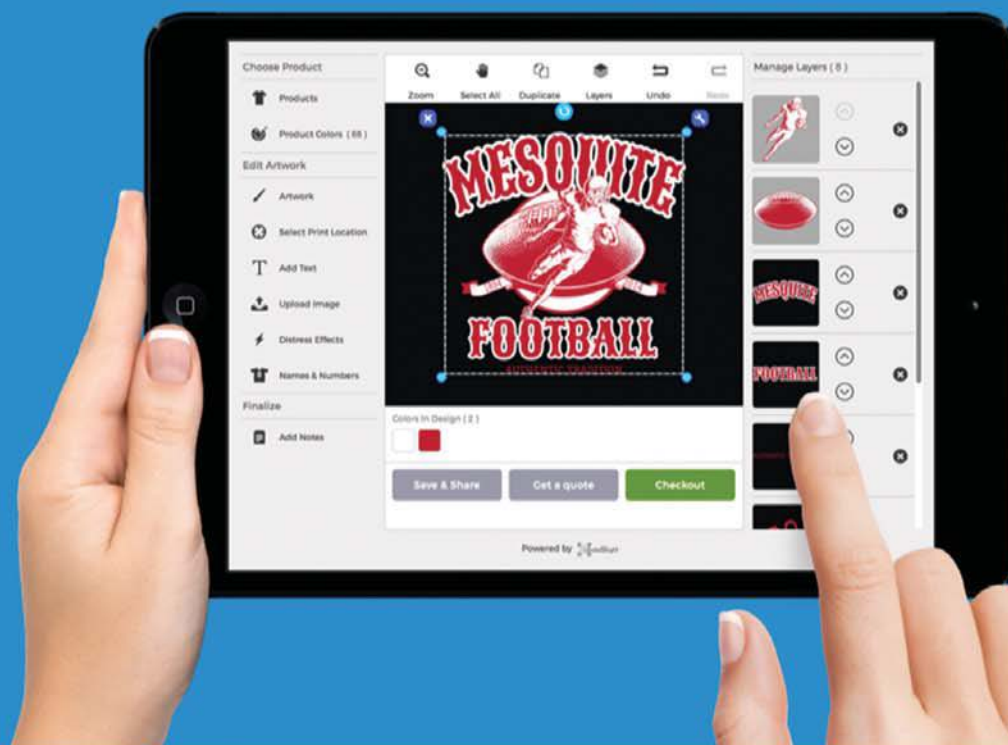
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THREE INSIDERS PIN DOWN THE STATE OF WRESTLING IN 2016.

By Michael Jacobsen

It takes three seconds for a pin in wrestling. So it is only natural that it would take three experts in the sport to provide an insider's look at wrestling as it heads into a pivotal year in America. The insights of these three men – a respected team dealer with deep roots in wrestling's heartland, a leading vendor that has led innovation in apparel and gear, and a national association official charged with tracking the state of the game – provide an idea of what it will take for the sport of wrestling to get off the mat and into the victory circle.

WRESTLING WITH TEAM SALES

Randy Nill, Owner, Nill Bros. Sporting Goods, Kansas City, KS

How would you describe the state of the wrestling business these days, especially compared to past years?

At least in my calling area, wrestling is slightly

down from years' past. One reason for this is that in the past football coaches were very encouraging to football players to wrestle in the off-season and try to stay in shape. Now, as football continues to be the huge revenue builder, the football coach would rather the player immediately enter into the football off-season program for lifting and running and hopefully put some weight on the kid.

Although wrestling has done a good job of regulating how much weight a kid can lose during the season, kids that wrestle in a well-run program have a hard time putting on any weight; constant movement and exercise, drilling, and wrestling in practice keep a kid very fit and very lean.

Also, if a kid has not wrestled in a youth program, he is immediately behind in development at the high school level.

What are the challenges of selling wrestling at the team level?

The challenge is simply trying to find the person responsible for ordering product and apparel for that club. These youth club coaches are usually

working a full-time job somewhere outside the high school and they are hard to find.

In our area, not many stand-alone high schools have their own youth clubs, but rather have community or county wrestling teams or you find a few clubs for the elite wrestler. You have to start by asking the high school wrestling coach where the younger kids are going to wrestle and hopefully he has a name as the person in charge.

Where do the opportunities lie for team dealers looking to sell wrestling?

There are opportunities out there if they can simply reach out and find the head coach for the high school or the youth club. You have to let them know you understand the wrestling code and show the coach you want their business badly.

Make them know how important they are in regards to helping building character, whether they are ever a successful wrestler on the mat or not. Wrestling coaches are no different from the football, basketball, baseball/softball, or soccer coaches — they like to deal with a salesman that knows something about their sport.

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Teams can customize the sublimated Performance Mesh panel on the back of the new Cliff Keen singlets, which also feature accent color stitching and Compression Leg Bands.

Who is the major competition to team dealers selling wrestling?

The biggest competition in wrestling comes from the catalog/Internet vendors. There are other team dealers that sell wrestling, but the catalog/Internet companies have an advantage as most go to wrestling tournaments every weekend and set up booths to sell apparel, equipment and accessories and get to talk face-to-face with coaches and buyers.

As I stated earlier, wrestling coaches like to deal with someone who knows a lot about wrestling and most of these catalog/Internet vendors have extensive background in either youth, high school or collegiate wrestling.

What are the main products you sell into wrestling at different levels?

We mainly sell singlets and warmups, spirit

wear to the parents, headgear, shoes, knee pads, mat tape and cleaning and disinfecting products for the mat as well as the wrestler. Fight gear is now very popular for practice and to wear to meets and tournaments.

The wrestling mats are usually sold on a direct basis with little margin even if you did sell one.

Who are your primary vendors for the team wrestling business?

Our primary vendors are Cliff Keen, Brute, Matman, Kennedy Industries and many mainstream apparel companies that can supply hoodies, tees, shorts and the like.

Are there any new products helping to drive your wrestling business?

Sublimated singlets and fight shorts are very popular these days and the cleaning/disinfecting supplies are more popular today than 10 years ago as awareness of ringworm and MRSA have grown over time.

Finally, where do you think the wrestling business is headed in the next few years?

I know right now in our area, high school wrestling numbers are down a bit. I don't see anything to immediately grow the numbers very quickly, although I think we will see a spike in participation after the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro in August are televised to a national audience. We just have to get the networks to put Olympic Wrestling on more prime-time viewing than their typical 2:00 a.m. time-slots.

KEEN ON WRESTLING POTENTIAL

Chad Clark, Senior VP, Cliff Keen

How would you describe the state of the wrestling business these days, especially compared to its position in past years?

The wrestling business is relatively strong, although it depends on the geography and on the level of competition. Growth areas are youth wrestling clubs and women's wrestling. The high school team business is down a bit, although leaders in the sport are hard at work marketing it and attempting to attract new competitors.

We also have seen some growth in urban markets as young athletes are hitting the mats rather than more expensive sports.

What factors are impacting the wrestling business in 2016?

The factors continue to be elements somewhat beyond our control, such as Title IX. Although cuts have slowed in recent times we continue to see programs eliminated in places due to the misinterpretation of the law. On the flip side of this, however, we've seen women's wrestling clubs and

overall female participation in the sport on the upswing. This is in large part due to the fact that women's wrestling is now an Olympic sport.

What are the unique challenges for team dealers selling wrestling at the team level?

I've said this frequently over the past few years, but a growing challenge for the team dealer is simply accessibility to the wrestling coach. They no longer are predominantly teachers in their school.

Additional challenges include the recent popping up of direct-to-consumer brands, selling inferior quality at artificially low retail prices for the most part. Team dealers need to be able to sell wrestling coaches on their level of service they can provide. We hear nightmare stories from coaches all the time, telling us how they got totally burnt by one of these fly-by-nighters and so now they're coming back to us, taking advantage of their local team dealer rep who calls on them and takes good care of them.

Where do the opportunities lie for team dealers looking to sell wrestling?

Definitely hit the youth wrestling clubs in your local markets you serve. They're out there. Talk to your wrestling coaches. Wrestling is such a tight-knit community that these guys all know each other. They know who coaches Club X, Y or Z and they can often open those doors for you. Sell them on quality, on service, and that you will take care of them. The fly-by-night Internet companies cannot provide that level of service.

What are wrestlers and their coaches looking for in terms of product and technology these days?

Value. Budgets are tight; we understand that. You need to be able to provide a durable, dependable product, but at a good price.

For technology, wrestlers aren't real finicky, but they definitely appreciate moisture-wicking materials and breathable fabrics. A lot of our garments include antimicrobial agents as well, which cut down on odor build-up and other nasty organisms that thrive in warm, moist places. Some of our newest singlets even incorporate technical Lycra mesh panels, which offer even further breathability and comfort, yet provide new customization options for customers.

What new products are helping to drive your wrestling business?

Headgear continues to be a very strong line. That's how our company was founded and built and is a big part of what keeps us going today. However, new wrestling singlets and workout gear allow us to thrive each season as well. Singlets, warmups, workout gear and even lifestyle apparel are all very strong categories for us.

What advice would you have for team dealers looking to do more wrestling business?

Keep working your connections. A lot of times—the wrestling coaches are helping out with local football teams, baseball or lacrosse programs in the spring. It's just a matter of tracking them down and then team dealers need to be able to sell wrestling coaches on the level of service they can provide.

Finally, where do you think the wrestling business is headed in the next few years?

We will continue to see wrestling really grow in some places, and struggle a bit in other areas. Areas of growth are women's wrestling and in youth wrestling.

Some high school programs around the country have done a very good job of convincing football players that they will become better football players by wrestling. This is key. But it all depends on the personnel involved and the local leadership.

I'll share a true story with you. I coach youth hockey in Michigan. As our kids are moving up to body checking next season, we are trying to get them prepared to be more physical, to be able to give and take a check. One of the ways we're doing this is we've brought in a couple of friends of mine who are local wrestling coaches and they've worked with the kids on strength and agility drills, as well as body contact and wrestling drills. Kids learn to know their physical capabilities. It's really helping to toughen them up and making them stronger. More and more athletes are seeing the benefits they can achieve by participating in wrestling.

HIGH ON HIGH SCHOOL

Elliot Hopkins, Director of Sports (baseball and wrestling), Sanctioning and Student Services, National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), Indianapolis, IN

How would you describe the state of high school wrestling these days, especially compared to its position in past years?

There are lower participation numbers and the increase of communicable skin diseases has impacted participation.

What other factors are impacting the sport in 2016?

The concern is similar to what we are facing in other sports — children are not getting time off from the sport. The NFHS has always subscribed to the concept of the two- or three-sport athlete, where the young person can participate in several sports and not burn out in just one endeavor. We feel that participating in multiple sports makes them well rounded. Providing time away from the sport provides perspective to the child.

Are there any significant efforts underway by youth organizations to increase participation in wrestling at all levels?

Youth organizations need to continue to develop wrestling fundamentals and make it fun for the participants. If the students are not having fun and it becomes tedious and stressful, then they will not stick with it.

Has female participation increased?

Female participation is on the rise. As reported by our member state associations, in 2013-14 we had 9904 girls wrestling and in 2014-15 we have 11,496. On the boys' side, we had 269,514 wrestle in 2013-14 and 258,808 in 2014-15. That is a difference of 10,706, which equates to one less wrestler in every wrestling school.

What are the unique challenges for team dealers selling wrestling at the youth and high school level?

The challenge is to make and sell products that meet the specific rules codes. A popular look or style is for naught if it is not compliant with the rule codes.

Where do the opportunities lie for team dealers?

Differentiate yourselves through creative and safety-infused products. As one example, offer a

comprehensive mat and wrestle room cleaning system. Showcase the uniqueness of the sport in style, color offerings and utilizing sublimation designs. Provide accoutrements that make others want to live and celebrate the wrestling lifestyle.

Finally, where do you think the sport of wrestling is headed in the next few years?

The forecast for the sport is very bright. Our obstacles are really small speed bumps — we simply cannot ignore them, but must accept and adapt.

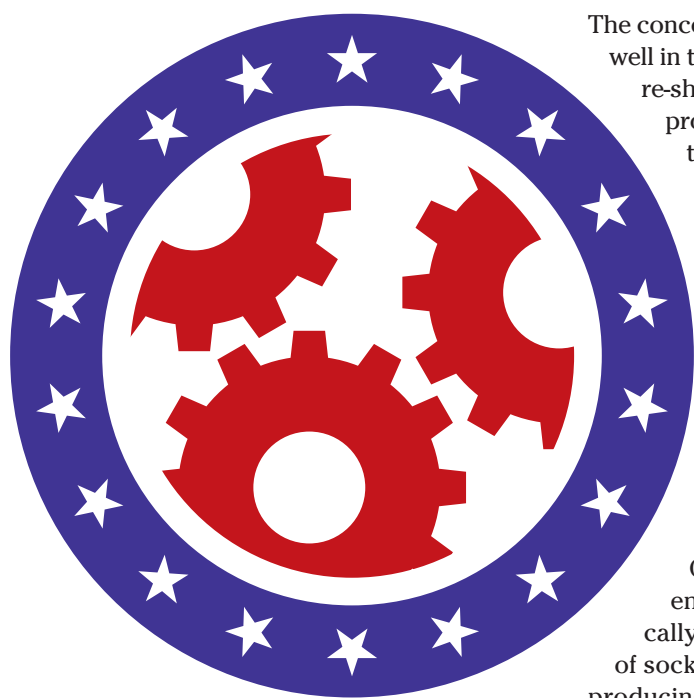
Young people want to belong and through wrestling they have an opportunity to represent their school and themselves. While very few students would admit it, they welcome the discipline of wrestling and the determination to always be working to get better and develop more grit and toughness. We have very committed young people who have found their niche on the wrestling mat.

I expect female participation to grow because they are finding success within the sport. The young women are also finding opportunities to represent our country in national and international competitions. ■

The advertisement for Bison Inc. is divided into two main sections. The top section shows an indoor gymnasium with various equipment labeled: "Y-Beam Ceiling Suspended Structure", "Gym Upgrade Package", "Clamp-On Official's Platform", "Centerline® Elite Aluminum System", "Sport Pride™ Graphic Scorers Tables", "Sport Pride™ Graphic Team Chairs", and "NORTHSTAR NAVIGATORS". The bottom section shows an outdoor soccer field with a goal labeled "PerfectGoal™ Gooseneck Football Goalpost", "ShootOut™ No-Tip™ Portable Soccer Goal", and "DuraSkin® for Soccer Safety Padding". In the foreground, there is a soccer game in progress. At the bottom, the Bison Inc. logo is displayed along with the phone number "800-247-7668" and website "www.bisoninc.com". A large banner at the bottom reads "A GOAL FOR EVERY GAME" and lists various sports: BASKETBALL • VOLLEYBALL • FOOTBALL • SOCCER • LACROSSE • FUTSAL • TEAM HANDBALL • RUGBY • TENNIS • TETHERBALL • BADMINTON • HOCKEY. A "MADE IN THE USA" logo is also present.

MADE IN AMERICA STORIES

Companies Tell Us Why Domestic Manufacturing Is Alive and Well in 2016.



The concept of “Made in America” is alive and well in the world of team sports. Some call it re-shoring, as companies return to domestic production when they realize the advantages outweigh any other benefits they may have achieved by making their products overseas. Others never left, having built their companies over generations on the strength of their commitment to domestic manufacturing that has allowed them to survive in an increasingly challenging global business environment.

Either way, the team sports business has a host of Made in America success stories – from the footballs Wilson has always made in Ohio ... to track and field equipment engineered and manufactured domestically based on local talent ... to a number of sock companies that remain committed to producing their top-of-the-line products here

in the good, old USA.

Sure, no one can remember the last time a coach or athletic director placed an order simply because a vendor’s products were Made in America. The reasons these products sell are more subtle — rapid turnaround and delivery, quicker response time to complaints or problems and improved quality, not to mention the simple act of supporting local communities. Basically, it is better product and better customer service that keeps MIA relevant.

So we thought we would run the idea of Made in America up the flagpole and see who saluted. We asked vendors to the team sports business to tell us their own Made in America stories and why they continued to make products in the U.S. The response was overwhelming. The following pages tell the stories of these companies, while at the same time telling the story of domestic manufacturing in 2016. Enjoy Part 1. Part 2 will appear in the March 2016 issue of *Team Insight*.

700,000 Footballs a Year

History: Wilson Sporting Goods was founded in 1914 in Chicago, making tennis rackets, basketballs and footballs. It has grown to make products for football, golf, tennis, soccer, basketball, baseball, softball and volleyball.

Made in America: “It is strategically important to us to manufacture here in the U.S. and we strive to manufacture as many of our products as possible domestically,” says Kristina Peterson-Lohman, director of corporate communications. Wilson makes 700,000 leather game footballs in Ada, OH, including every game football used by the NFL. Wilson has produced leather game footballs in Ada since 1955. Its Louisville Slugger partner Hillerich & Bradsby makes one million bats a year in Louisville, KY, DeMarini assembles bats in Hillsboro, OR, and its ATEC baseball and softball training equipment in Reno, NV.

Pros and Cons: “Manufacturing domestically allows us to support



our local economies and communities, provide new and sustainable job opportunities and meet the turn-around needs of our U.S.-based customers in a very timely fashion,” says Peterson-Lohman. “Also, there’s a emotional connection people have with products made in the U.S.”

Selling MIA: Wilson markets

its MIA story in a variety of ways, from experiential activities to content marketing to social media engagement. For football, it recently created a video telling its Ohio story to mark the start of football season. At every Super Bowl it creates a mini factory at the NFL Experience. Louisville Slugger has a museum and factory that base-

ball players and fans visit to learn more about the brand’s roots. DeMarini recently invited writers and influencers to its facility in Portland to see its custom bat manufacturing process first hand.

The Sales Pitch: “The products we manufacture in the U.S. are made by experienced craftsmen that take a great pride in their work,” says Peterson-Lohman.

Does It Matter? “Manufacturing products domestically gives us great flexibility in production and, often, better control over quality,” Peterson-Lohman says. “This creates shorter lead times for reorders, the ability to customize products and reliable product performance.”

Going Forward: “We continually evaluate our manufacturing processes as it relates to our people, our communities, our consumers and our customers to ensure that we are serving all stakeholders in the right way,” she says. ■

“American manufacturers are increasingly becoming more competitive with offshore sources.”

Nick Cusick, Bison

90 Percent and Counting

History: Bison, located in Lincoln, NE, has been in the team sporting goods equipment business for more than 30 years and its marketing tag line “A Goal For Every Game” communicates the broad segment of the team sports business it serves.

Made in America: More than 90 percent of its products are manufactured domestically, including all basketball goals, backboards and stanchions, volleyball systems, football and soccer goals and other team sports related goals and accessories.

Why MIA: “We have for more than 30 years had primarily a domestically manufactured product line,” says CEO Nick Cusick. “Although we have in the past tested the waters with various offshore manufacturing partners, we have found that quality, delivery, inventory control, freight costs and most recently significant price increases have made import of most of our products not in our customers’ best interests. At this point, we see our domestic manufacturing as stable or growing from the

current 90 percent target.”

The Sales Pitch: “Bison goes out of its way to highlight its Made In USA culture and its dedication to creating jobs for American workers,” says Cusick. It does this at every opportunity in its catalogs, print and digital ads, its dealer newsletter and even on its phone message when customers are on hold.

Does It Matter? “Clearly workers in our American factories are our neighbors, friends and family,” Cusick points out. “In addition to superior quality, American manufacturers are increasingly becoming more competitive with offshore sources, especially when considering freight, delivery times, inventory carrying cost, quality and, most of all, customer satisfaction.”

Going Forward: “We intend to continue our strong commitment to domestic manufacturing and the use of domestic raw material vendors and suppliers. We don’t expect to see any significant change to our 90 percent domestic strategy,” Cusick says. ■



MIA at TCK

History: As a young Coca-Cola route driver, Dewey Houston delivered Coke to all the local knitting mills. He used this opportunity to make connections and learn about the hosiery business and in 1961, with only a formal sixth grade education, Houston used what he learned to open Twin City Knitting. In 1963, Houston was asked to knit a baseball stirrup and the course of Twin City, based in Conover, NC, was set. Since then the company has grown into producing product for all team sports.

Made in America: TCK produces all of its performance socks, custom socks, wristbands, headbands, knit hats and scarves in the U.S.

Why MIA: TCK has been making products domestically since 1961 and in the past three or four years it has seen domestic knitting increase, driven by consumer desire for customized product as well as high-quality, performance products.

Pros and Cons: Pros – Better



quality control, shorter lead times, lower MOQ's and, most importantly, USA jobs. “It’s been a great feeling to add to our workforce over the last few years,” says national sales manager Brad Davis, who says it is a stretch to come up with a list of cons other than the difficulty in acquiring raw materials.

Selling MIA: TCK labels every

product made domestically with a USA made logo and includes it on its displays and other marketing material as well.

The Sales Pitch: “We certainly highlight the products that are produced domestically and share with our customers the benefits that accompany product made in the USA,” says Davis.

Does It Matter? Davis believes Made in America does matter to the team sports business, for its custom capabilities, better quality, lower minimums, faster lead times and job creation. “It matters when you can create distinction and separation from products sourced overseas,” he stresses. “When the benefits outweigh the focus on price, it’s all about creating additional value in USA-made products.”

Going Forward: The history of TCK has always been centered on producing product in the U.S. and that is not going to change. “Over the last two years we have been able to increase our employee count by nearly 30 percent,” reports Davis. “We have also invested heavily in new equipment and have increased production levels to a similar percentage. We plan to continue our investment in both people and equipment over the foreseeable future.” ■

“Domestic capabilities with high-quality manufacturing standards have always been of paramount importance.”

Jim Pisani, Majestic Athletic

A Majestic Commitment

History: Majestic, a division of VF and part of Licensed Sport Group based in Tampa, FL, and Easton, PA, was founded in 1976 in Bangor, PA, with a goal of being more than just another jersey manufacturer.

Made in America: Majestic makes all of its MLB player uniforms – jerseys and pants – domestically. It has been manufacturing in the U.S. for 40 years and supporting Major League Baseball with domestic garments for 34 seasons.

Why MIA: “Demand dictates production rates and vary each year,” says president Jim Pisani, adding that growth trends have been positive in recent years.

Pros and Cons: The primary benefit is quick response – “Majestic can manufacture custom garments and ship in the same day,” Pisani says – along with a talented, skilled and experienced workforce. Among the cons are the costs associated with domestic manufacturing.

Selling MIA: “Domestic capabilities



ties with high quality manufacturing standards have always been of paramount importance,” says Pisani. “The colors, fabric and

thread of our jersey designs are meticulously woven together by our craftspeople with the tenacity and determination of the teams

that wear them on the field. Our attention to detail and pride in workmanship show in every stitch. That’s why we’ve been entrusted by major sporting leagues for more than 38 years and how we earned exclusive Major League Baseball Authentic Collection rights.” Majestic’s domestic manufacturing capabilities find their own marketing, as evidenced by a recent feature on ABC World News Tonight — <http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/video/majestic-athletic-boasts-star-american-workers-32455567>.

The Sales Pitch: Quick response and turn times, high-quality domestic manufacturing.

Does It Matter? “Customers understand they are getting high-quality product manufactured in our home country,” Pisani points out. “There’s a sense of pride associated with this.”

Going Forward: Majestic plans to continue to make MLB uniforms in the United States. ■

On Track in America

History: Litanía Sports Group (LSG), known to the team business as Gill Athletics and Porter Athletic, Champaign, IL, was founded as the Harry Gill Company in 1918. Gill makes track and field equipment, PowerMax sports performance equipment and Upper 90 field sports equipment. Founded in 1868 as the J.E. Porter Company, Porter Athletic makes gymnasium equipment. In 2006 Gill acquired Porter and in 2009 the companies were organized under the LSG umbrella.

Made in America: LSG manufactures 80 percent of its volume in the U.S., including all of its overhead basketball backstops, divider curtains, wall pads, basketball goals and portable backstops, playground basketball systems; all volleyball systems and padding; track and field equipment; field sports equipment, soccer goals, football goal posts, bleachers and benches.



Why MIA: Gill and Porter have manufactured domestically since their founding. While importing some products is a relatively new strategy, VP-sales and marketing Steve Vogelsang says its blend of domestic manufacturing to product imports has remained steady for more than 20 years.

Pros and Cons: Pros — Higher inventory turns, consistent quality control, shorter lead times and greater planning flexibility. Cons — Higher labor costs and increasingly onerous federal and state regulations.

Selling MIA: Country of origin rarely matters to a coach or team dealer, Vogelsang says. “However, making equipment in our own factory allows us to most effectively deliver the factors the coach most desires — safety, durability, highest standard of competition.”

The Sales Pitch: “The only way to deliver on our mission consistently is to predominantly design,

develop and manufacture domestically,” Vogelsang says. “This message is built into the trusted relationships we have with our dealers and coaches and is encapsulated in our promotional messaging.”

Does It Matter? LSG believes that better quality, faster delivery and in-stock positions all benefit the dealer and coach. “With that said, the world has become flatter and therefore goods from abroad have become better quality but at increasing costs,” Vogelsang says. “If managed properly, quality should not be sacrificed when sourcing abroad, but in practicality more consistent high quality typically comes from U.S. factories.”

Going Forward: For two decades LSG has maintained the same ratio of domestic to import products and it intends to continue this approximate 80/20 blend of domestic to international manufacturing. ■

“Manufacturing creates jobs and those jobs create an economy that will allow for domestic spending.”

Taylor Wilson, Pro Feet

Feet First

History: Pro Feet, located in Burlington, NC, was founded in 1979 and continues today as a primarily domestic manufacturer of team, military, uniform and public safety socks.

Made in America: Pro Feet currently manufactures 92 percent of its SKUs domestically, and 100 percent of its custom programs are made domestically. The company has been manufacturing in North Carolina for its entire 37 years and it reports a sharp increase in its domestic manufacturing over the last five years.

Pros and Cons: “We don’t see many cons for manufacturing domestically,” says president and co-owner Taylor Wilson, who points out that the only reason Pro Feet imports any sock product is to compete within the price sensitive markets. “The pros outweigh the cons by far, mainly because manufacturing creates jobs and those jobs create an economy that will allow for



domestic spending,” he says. “The jobs created in China, India and elsewhere only strengthen the domestic spending in those countries.”

Selling MIA: Pro Feet features a Made in USA logo in its catalog, on its website and on its order forms to raise awareness that its socks are Made in America.

The Sales Pitch: The Pro Feet sales pitch is two-fold. “Made In America means providing domestic

jobs and creating domestic spending, which is an economics option that should resonate with all Americans needing an income,” Wilson says. “Secondly, we pride ourselves on the Made In America Quality and Made In America Innovation. China is great at making what we need and then great at knocking us off and making their own cheaper version. But China can’t innovate the way we do in America.”

Does It Matter? “If we make it in America, we are paying Americans a salary to work,” Wilson says. “They will then spend that dollar here in America. That helps every dealer, so you bet it matters.”

Going Forward: Pro Feet plans to continue to grow its domestic manufacturing in North Carolina and as feasible will bring products that are manufactured off-shore back to North Carolina. ■

Nothing But American Net



History: Carron Net Company, located in Two Rivers, WI, is a fourth generation, family-owned netting manufacturer that has been making sports nets since 1934. The company is currently headed by Bill Kiel Jr., president and CEO.

Made in America: Carron Net manufactures approximately 95 percent of the nets it sells – tennis, volleyball and basketball nets, goal nets, batting cages as well as made-to-order nets like backstops and gym dividers – in its two production facilities in Two Rivers.

Why MIA: “We’ve been American-made as long as we’ve been in business,” says Kiel. “It’s who we are and who we’ll continue to be.” Carron Net also manufactures nets for other companies and it has seen a trend of this OEM business being re-shored over the last five years.

Pros and Cons: “We can be ultra-responsive to our customers,” Kiel says. “Whether it’s quick turnaround on standard items or the ability to manufacture custom products, we’re able to deliver precisely what they need.” As for the cons, “catering to

the customer who shops strictly on price point will always be a challenge when competing with foreign-sourced products,” he says.

Selling MIA: The Made in America message is an important part of all of its branding and marketing initiatives.

The Sales Pitch: Kiel admits there are a lot of options for its customers due to the availability of foreign-made products. “However, given the consolidation we’ve seen in the industry, in some ways customers’ choices are becoming more limited

than ever,” he says. “The big players do a lot of direct sourcing so that brands that customers have always relied on get squeezed off the shelves.”

Does It Matter? Settling for foreign-made products for the sake of price is penny wise and pound foolish for team dealers, Kiel stresses, pointing out that American manufacturers provide good-paying, family-sustaining jobs. “These employees’ children attend schools and participate in team sports. No jobs equals no families equals no kids playing sports.” Team dealers depend on vibrant, growing communities to support their businesses and that will almost always include a significant manufacturing base. “Supporting this by buying American whenever possible is not only patriotic, it makes good business sense,” he adds.

Going Forward: Carron Net plans to remain in Two Rivers, where it has always been. ■

“Manufacturing in our own facility ... has a positive impact on our product development process.”

Chip Sivak, Nokona

A Domestic Glove Story

History: Nokona has been producing leather goods in the U.S. since 1926 and gloves since 1934.

Made in America: “Dad said he’d rather go fishing if he had to import Nokona gloves,” says Bobby Storey, past president of Nokona, about his

father’s commitment to American Made. Adds director of sales and marketing Chip Sivak: “Today, every single Nokona glove is produced by American workers in our factory in Nocona, TX.”

Pros and Cons: “Manufacturing

in our own facility not only allows us to control quality more closely, but it has a positive impact on our product development process,” says Sivak. “Doing our development domestically allows us to work on new concepts and field test more quickly.” The cons are all related to labor availability and cost. “We are focused on offsetting those added costs with the benefits domestic production provides,” Sivak says.

Selling MIA: “Although Made in America is a significant part of our marketing message, we do not rely on our American manufacturing to be our key selling feature,” Sivak says. “Being made in Texas at our own factory and having tight control on everything from sourcing domestic materials to creating the final product, helps us achieve our goals.”

The Sales Pitch: Since more than 90 percent of its leather is sourced domestically, Nokona does not need to build in lead-times for importing

materials. Also, Sivak stresses, no other ball glove company can say that its customers can have their gloves serviced in the same factory where they were handcrafted.

Does It Matter? Sivak points to a recent study that showed 78 percent of Americans would rather buy American-made when given a choice and that the majority are willing to pay 10 percent more for American-made products. “This data supports our view that Made in America has a real impact on purchasing decisions, especially when consumers are aware of where a product is made,” he says.

Going Forward: Manufacturing in the U.S. is a significant part of who Nokona is and it will remain that way. “We have recently re-branded Nokona with a more modern look to send the message that while we are proud of our roots and our heritage, including being committed to domestic manufacturing,” Sivak says. ■



An American-made Goal

History: Goal Sporting Goods has been making goals, nets, trainers and equipment since 1983. While headquartered in Essex, CT, it has three manufacturing and distributing warehouses across the country. Goal started as a metal fabricator of goals for many sports as well as metal basement entry doors and has made products ranging from sporting goods, building and aquarium products to display racks.

Made in America: Goal manufactures all of its goals, trainers, rebounders, custom netting, pads, mats, benches and bleachers in the U.S.

Why MIA: Goal has always made its goals and equipment in the U.S. and plans to increase its domestic production as it adds new products. “Our plan is to maintain our strategy of being a true U.S. manufacturer and to continue supporting our country and economy by hiring

U.S. employees and using U.S. suppliers for our materials,” says GM Jon Fishman.

Pros and Cons: “We are helping our local economy and country by employing U.S. workers while at the same time giving back to the area,” Fishman says, adding that the company has retained many of the same highly skilled and trained employees for more than 20 years. “By having the same employees for so many years we are able to make high-quality products at a high rate of efficiency and consistency.” In addition, replacements and rush orders are simpler when manufactured in the U.S. “By being a U.S. manufacturer we can switch gears if a customer needs a rush order. If we run out of stock, lead times are always shorter.”

Selling MIA: Goal mentions its Made in America message at trade shows and during presentations and often in its advertising, but



is careful not to overuse the message.

The Sales Pitch: “Customers can talk directly to the manufacturer who is making the product in the U.S. warehouse with U.S. materials and U.S. employees,” Fishman stresses. Goal also offers shipping from east and west coast warehouses.

Does It Matter? “Made in America should matter because we are using U.S. materials with U.S. employees to make American products,” Fishman says. “Manufacturing products is the backbone of the U.S. economy. Customers see the added value by purchasing domestically made products because they stand the test of time.”

Going Forward: Goal plans to continue its high-end domestic manufacturing and Fishman says that “growing our range of products and service in the U.S. is the wave of the future.” ■

PRODUCT SHOWCASE / ADVERTISEMENT

Under Armour



Armourfuse Uniforms

Under Armour will "Push The Game" with its Armourfuse line of team uniforms. Its focus is to leverage the best technology and deliver innovative fabrications and designs by expanding its color, print and assortment options while offering a wider performance textile selection.

Porter



Backboard Padding

Porter's Pro-Pad is a durable pad manufactured with a tough molded urethane skin that is painted in the mold with a color matched urethane paint to provide the exterior with uniform colored appearance. Meets all competition requirements of the NBA, NCAA, NFHS and International requirements of FIBA.

Teamwork Athletic



Basketball Jersey

New ProSphere sublimated reversible basketball uniforms are now available with the fastest full sublimation manufacturing times in the industry. Give your teams what they want, when they want it. www.ProSphereSports.com

Sisu



Mouthguard

The Official Mouthguard of National Lacrosse League, Sisu Guard is a slim profile mouthguard that offers 50 percent more protection. Custom fit, remoldable Sisu Guards allow players to talk and breathe naturally and stay hydrated during the game. Mention Team Insight for additional discount.

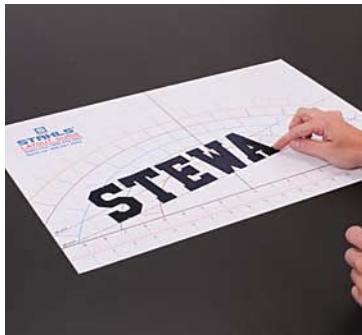
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Backboard Padding

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Stahls'



Lettering Guide

Stahls' repositionable Lettering Layout Guide allows you to easily align straight, arched, and slanted text, as well as 5/8-inch and one-inch circle text.

Champro



Baseball Jersey

The Clean-Up baseball jersey features Active Cloth 100 percent polyester Dri-Gear fabric with Pin-Dot mesh inserts and upper back panel. The unique style is perfect for every team and the jersey is available in 12 team color combinations.

Game



Varsity Jacket

Made with the finest quality Melton wool, this Varsity jacket is perfect for on and off the field. Featuring quilted lining, set-in leather sleeves and coordinating pockets. Available in 23 stock colors in Adult XS-5XL. Make it your own with an endless selection of customizable options.

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BSN Acquires Ultimate Team

Adding strength in the Mountain West region, **BSN Sports** recently acquired **Ultimate Team Sales (UTS)**, based in Albuquerque, NM. UTS, in business as a team dealer since 2003 and under previous ownership of Matt McKinley, Clark Jordre and Jerry Brown since 2008, sells to teams in New Mexico, South Dakota, North Dakota, Colorado, Wyoming and parts of Minnesota and Arizona.

Stahls' Opens Texas Plant



Stahls' celebrated the grand opening of a location in Irving, TX, in November with an event dedicated to all things heat printing. The Stahls' Texas Open House kicked off with a ribbon-cutting ceremony with executive chairman Ted Stahl, his wife Mary, and representatives from the Dallas Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Irving/Las Colinas Chamber and the Irving Hispanic Chamber of Commerce participating. Attendees then had the opportunity to tour the facility and attend classes on heat printing basics, along with hands-on workshops and demos.

Roar Enters The Team Game

Roar Athletic Performance has developed an ultra-thin, carbon fiber performance insole, called the XG4, that it claims allows athletes to run faster, jump higher and train more efficiently. The company, which launched in 2015, recently utilized a Kickstarter campaign to move its production to the United States.

Research conducted on the XG4 at the Human Performance Laboratory at Southern Connecticut State University showed athletes using the XG4 experienced improvements such as increases of up to 1.5 inches in vertical jump height, improvements of up to 0.3 seconds in 10-yard

sprint time and increases of up to five percent in running economy.

Riddell Goes To Kollege

Kollege Town Sports, co-founded by Tom Handlen, the founder of Impact Sports in 1990 that was later sold to Lids Team Sports, has been acquired by **Riddell**. The Windsor, WI, company, a national apparel firm featuring the Adidas brand, custom screenprinting, embroidery laser and etching to the team and corporate markets, will operate as its own Riddell business unit and continue to be led by Handlen and his son, Jeff.

Riddell says the purchase will provide it with access to new sales channels while expanding its capabilities, customer service and product offering.

Kollege Town's sales, production and warehousing are based in Windsor, near the Wisconsin state capital Madison. The product range includes fan and spirit wear and an online store to support program fundraising efforts.

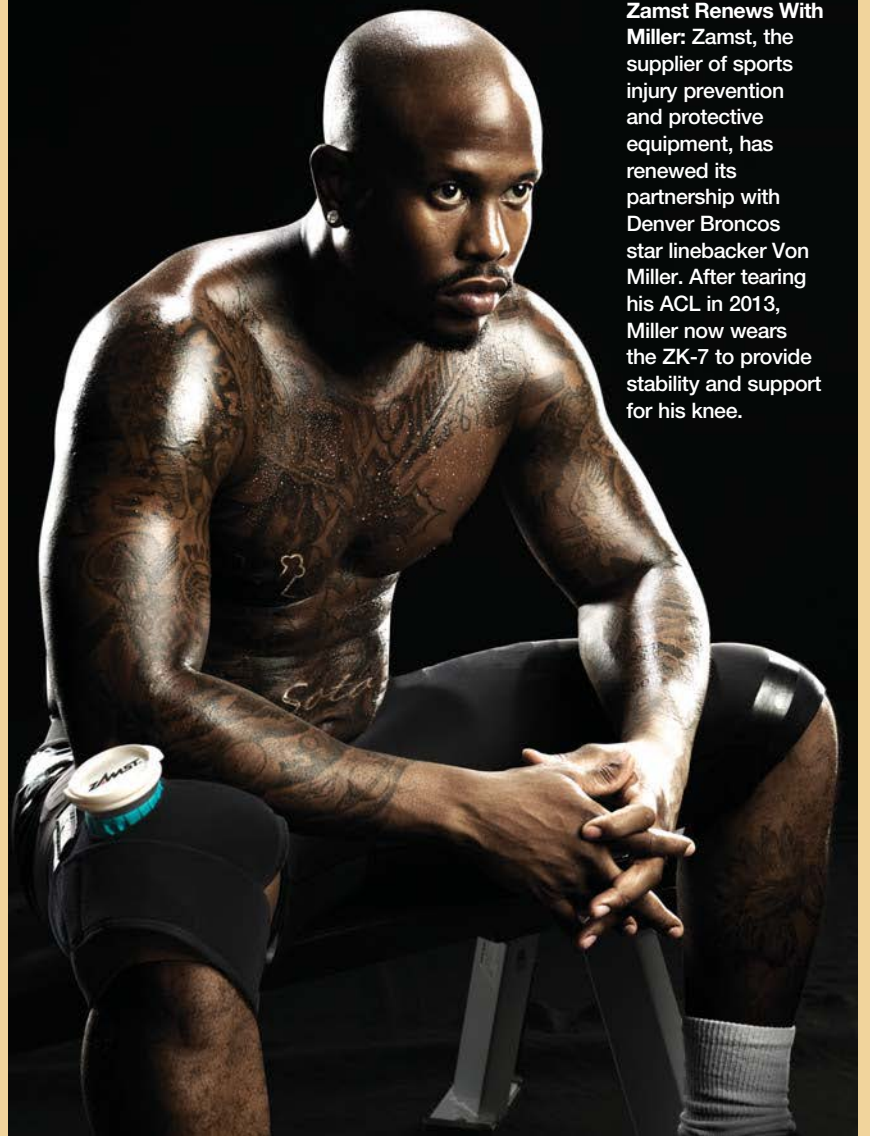
USB Buys Nathan Sports

United Sports Brands, whose portfolio of brands already includes McDavid, Shock Doctor, Cutters and XO Athletics, has acquired Philadelphia-based **Nathan Sports**, a maker of hydration systems and related accessories.

Nathan principal owner and chairman, Jon Reichlin, will be an investor in United Sports Brands and continue as a contributor to the Nathan brand. Nathan CEO Bridgit Lombard and CFO Tricia Papil will continue as consultants to support the transition.

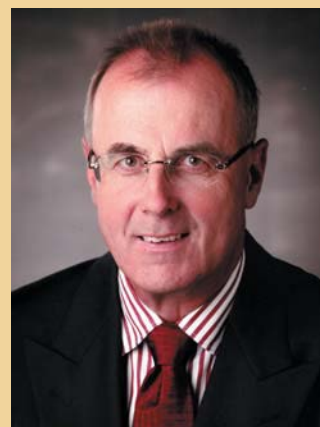
Nathan, which currently distributes its product range into 45 countries, will relocate its operations to Minnetonka, MN, and California in phases.

In late August, USB said it would open a 120,000-square-foot distribution center in Fountain Valley, CA, and also relocate its sales, marketing and product development teams there in early 2016. At the same time, Shock Doctor's Minnetonka, MN, headquarters will become home to all finance, customer service, operations and information technology operations. ■



Zamst Renews With Miller: Zamst, the supplier of sports injury prevention and protective equipment, has renewed its partnership with Denver Broncos star linebacker Von Miller. After tearing his ACL in 2013, Miller now wears the ZK-7 to provide stability and support for his knee.

Hall of Famer Joachim Schröder Passes Away



One of the true pioneers of global sporting goods retailing, **Joachim Schröder**, former director of sports for German retail giant Karstadt and a 2006 inductee into the Sporting Goods Hall of Fame, died Nov. 10 at the age of 65.

Following his more than 100 trips to the U.S., Schröder blended the best parts of American and European retailing into a concept that changed German retailing. The sporting goods sections of Karstadt stores were a blend of the big-box concept being pioneered in the U.S. by Sports Authority and Dick's and the fledgling retailtainment concept. The result was the Karstadt Sporthouse Concept, stores up to 70,000-square feet, an unheard-of concept in Europe at that time. He also developed the Runners Point Chainstore concept, similar to Foot Locker. Among his marketing efforts that put Karstadt on the retail map: sponsorship of a \$1 million shot during an NBA basketball game; a par 3 competition with Tiger Woods and nine other top golfers from the roof of the Karstadt Sporthouse in Hamburg across the street to the next building; and bringing American brands such as Nike, Reebok, New Balance, Columbia, Eastpak, Callaway and Titleist to Germany.

Schröder, retired since 2002 after a 28-year career at German sporting goods giant Karstadt Sports, was the first European sporting goods retailer to be inducted into the Hall of Fame.

As an aside, Schröder was a personal friend, a golfer with perhaps the worst swing this side of the Atlantic Ocean, a whirl of motion and passion for anything he happened to be doing at the moment, and a true sporting goods retail visionary who spent many hours explaining to me how he was going to take what he learned during his U.S. trips back home to Germany to stay ahead of the competition. At the time of his retirement, Karstadt was the leading sporting goods retailer in Germany. — Michael Jacobsen

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