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SUBLIMATION 4.0
Speed and customization sell to teams in an Amazon world. Page 46

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TEAM INSIGHT

Trends	8
10 Degrees of Team Sports Separation; Aasheim, Plank To Join the Hall; PHIT America Awards GO! Grants	
Safety Blitz	16
Specialty sports are thriving in the U.S., but the opportunities vary according to region.	
Not-So-Free Safety	24
Two of the leading football associations talk current events that will impact the team business in 2017.	
A Beautiful American Game	28
Soccer has certainly made its mark on the team business in the United States.	

A New Goal	35
Safety and performance team up to score for dealers.	
Socks For Jocks	40
Dealers appreciate the category as performance, prices and margins continue to rise.	
64	TECH ADVICE
Online Training Takes A Leap Don't Be Uberized I Spy, You Spy Less is More The Loss of Soft Skills.	
End Zone	74
BSN In With National IPA; Mizuno's Puccini To Retire; Efinger Closing Its Doors; Under Armour Names LaRose	

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The Cloudy Crystal Ball

Some thoughts on where the team business is headed in 2017.



2016 was a typical crowded, busy, disruptive year in team sports. It was good to be along for the ride.

It all went by so fast — 2016 is almost in the books, the holidays are right around the corner and a new year looms. The turning of the calendar always puts me in a reflective mood and brings to mind some of the major team sports events of the past 12 months.

Most of these events are covered in the clever (if I do say so myself, although with apologies to Kevin Bacon) 10 Degrees of Separation article that starts on page 8, so turn the page and take a read — 2016 was a typical crowded, busy, disruptive year in team sports. It was good to be along for the ride.

Now it is time to look ahead, so with my cloudy crystal ball and more than 25 years of covering the sporting goods industry, here are some of my projections.

1. BSN will keep buying up its rivals, but with few big-name (and big-territory) dealers out there — and with the digestion of its biggest competitor already underway — Adam Blumenfeld and his crew are going to have to settle for scooping up smaller dealers to fill in gaps in their national network. Unless, of course, one of those big dealers decides to cash out in 2017.

2. There will be no industry-changing breakthrough on concussion protection, but all of the money being poured into research will begin to bear fruit in less obvious ways. While any advances in safety will not make any sport significantly safer, it will provide some measure of comfort to players — and their parents — that something is being done to protect them.

3. The greatest growth in football is going to come from its flag football cousin, being promoted as a way to keep younger kids in the sport without the concussion concerns. In my area almost every town is transitioning from tackle football for kids under 10 to a safer flag alternative.

4. Consolidation among vendors is inevitable. Many will follow the blueprint being successfully followed by United Sports Brands, which is seamlessly bringing together the McDavid, Shock Doctor, Cutters and XO

brands in team sports under one corporate umbrella. To dealers the transition has been smooth and shows others it can be done.

5. Wearable technology will begin to make its way into team sports. There will be baby steps at first as the team business, led by the apparel innovators, will incorporate technology into their uniforms and workout gear in partnership with tech companies. Not in 2017, but soon, laptops will be as ubiquitous on sidelines as clipboards

6. The NSGA Management Conference and Team Dealer Summit in May in Arizona will have a significant Under Armour presence as the company's founder Kevin Plank is inducted into the Sporting Goods Hall of Fame. Expect a bunch of Universal Athletic folks there as well, as Larry Aasheim shares the stage for his much-deserved induction into the Hall as well.

Finally a word about why my photo this month has me in a bright yellow shirt. I felt it was only appropriate in an issue that features a Sublimation 4.0 section to model the new sublimated New Jersey soccer referee uniform, from Cliff Keen.

There was certainly some initial grousing among my fellow officials about this fancy new technology, but I was able to use my vast knowledge of sublimation technology — learned primarily from reading Nancy Baeder's Sublimation reports over the years — to assure them the logo won't fade, the color will remain true and the seams won't fall apart — because there are few seams. I'm not sure they believed me, but at least there was a lot less complaining.

Plus, it was decided that with the bright safety yellow color we could always stop by some road construction and help direct traffic on the way home from a game. ●

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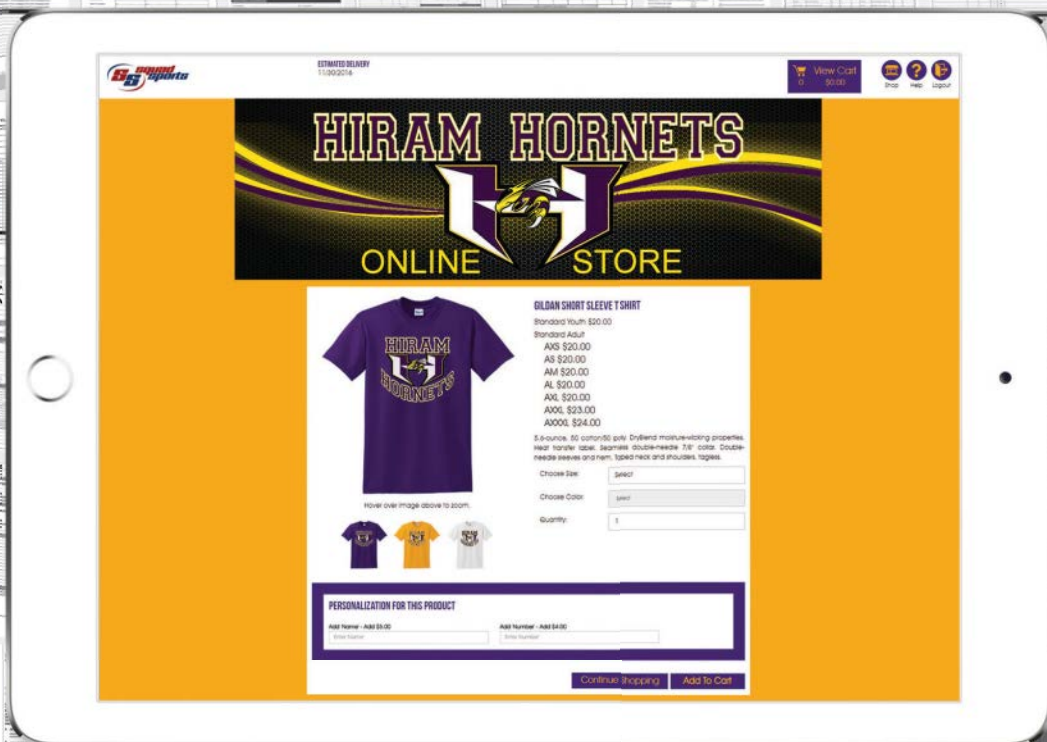
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10 Degrees of Team Sports Separation

Everything is related in the team sports business as we head into 2017.

By Michael Jacobsen

Everyone knows the party game, “Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon,” in which movie buffs challenge each other to find the shortest path between an arbitrary actor and the prolific movie star. It rests on the assumption that anyone involved in the Hollywood film industry can be linked through their film roles to Bacon within six steps.

Well, the team sports game is somewhat like that, where everything that happened in 2016 and is going to take place in 2017 can be connected in some manner to another industry event. So while we may be stretching the concept a little bit, we did find a way to link the multi-million dollar question of where the business is headed in 2017 as it deals with the disruptions caused by technology, ongoing participation challenges and financial moves by major players.

The one constant is that the past is a prelude to the future, so all of these inter-connected events and trends can tell us a lot about our future. So with apologies to Kevin Bacon, here are our 10 Degrees of Team Sports Separation.

1. PARTICIPATION PROBLEMS

The Crystal Ball: As recently as 2011, the average child was playing 2.11 sports a year. In 2015, that child was playing 1.89 sports a year. The reason: Sports specialization at a young age. This trend to picking a single sport and sticking with it is not going to change — for better or worse, depending on your point of view.

How We Got Here: Participation numbers have been cloudy for a number of years, but there may be a light at the end of the tunnel. Led by an encouraging report in football participation, the number of players in high school sports increased for the 27th consecutive year in 2015-16, according to NFHS. The number of participants in high school sports reached an all-time high of 7.86 million, an increase of 61,853 from the previous year. After a decline of almost 10,000 participants in football the previous year, the number of boys playing 11-player football in 2015 was almost identical to 2014, with a drop of just 309.

The overall participation numbers would look even worse except for the fact that ...

2. GIRLS GOT GAME



The Crystal Ball: The numbers tell the true story of girls' and women's sports in the U.S. heading into 2017 — and this narrative is a good one. The results of research from numer-

ous associations reveal a dozen statistical trends that promise female athletes will continue to drive the team sports business.

How We Got Here: There are six team sports where more than 50 percent of the participants are female — cheerleading, gymnastics, court volleyball, fast-pitch softball, swimming on a team and grass volleyball (SFIA). Between 2009 and 2014 there have been increases in female participation in 19 sports, while there has been a decrease in just five sports. (SFIA). Finally, there were 3.28 million girls who played high school sports in the 2014-15 school year, compared to 4.51 million boys (NFHS).

But even girls' participation has been hampered by ...

3. THE CONCUSSION DISCUSSION



The Crystal Ball: The combined efforts of leading equipment vendors along with some prestigious research institutes have resulted in some promising technologies to combat concussions, but the simple fact remains that there is no way to prevent them. Everyone agrees with that. The only option is to make sports safer through new rules and regulations, in combination with equipment advances to protect the brain from impact. 2017 will certainly yield no breakthroughs, but a template for a progress can be found at the University of Washington which, along

with its commercial partner, Vicis, claims to have developed a helmet designed to mitigate the forces likely to cause concussions. The research has been funded in part by the NFL, General Electric and Under Armour.

How We Got Here: Until more is understood about concussions and how to mitigate their effects, major youth sports organizations in 2016 took some significant steps towards player safety. First, 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 instituted a player safety campaign that eliminates heading for children 10 and under and limits the amount of heading in practice. Then Pop Warner became the first national football organization to eliminate kickoff. The ban, which took effect in its three youngest divisions this fall, is aimed at significantly reducing the amount of full-speed, head-on impact in games.

These are just some of the ...

4. NEW RULES AND REGULATIONS

The Crystal Ball: Concussions are certainly not the only area where new rules will impact the team sports game in 2017. The ever-present NOCSAE continues to tweak its standards to level the playing field for all sports — as well as to make them safer. And the various rules-making organizations, ranging from NFHS to Little League Baseball to Pop Warner Football, undoubtedly will have their voices heard in the next 12 months. Fortunately, all have shown a willingness to work hand-in-hand with sporting goods manufacturers to make sure these rules changes create minimal supply chain havoc.

How We Got Here: Already NOCSAE new standards for team sports equipment implemented in 2016 are having an impact, or will shortly. Chief among them is what is billed

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as the world's first chest protector standard for commotio cordis. The proposed standard applies specifically to baseball and lacrosse players. In addition, the baseball bat confusion is not over — not by any means. Team dealers should be aware that USA Baseball is requiring that the current performance standard on youth baseball bats change to a more conservative standard, effective January 2018 (again, giving manufacturers and retailers time to empty and then fill the product pipeline). It's worth noting that the new bats can be used in competition as early as September 1, 2017.

All of these rules and regulations have been made possible by ...

5. A TECHNOLOGY REVOLUTION



The Crystal Ball: The speed of technological change today touches nearly every aspect of a team dealer's business. One dealer tells us that technology has altered the way he does business more than any single product he's sold for the past 25 years. Another believes that some day dealers will rarely speak directly with a customer and that all communication will be electronic. In this respect team sports is no different than most other industries, but many dealers lament that technology will continue to remove the personal touch.

How We Got Here: In the world of team sports, where product innovation has been the driver of growth for generations, the technology developed in just the past few years has arguably changed the way business is done more than any new product in the history of the game. Team dealers have somewhat reluctantly embraced these new tools, but it goes even deeper, with software to track every order from purchasing to decorating to delivery. There's a pile of information to sift and sort

to manage inventory, spot trends and boost sales. There's customer relationship software to stay in touch and maximize sales. Let's not forget those smartphones, laptops and tablets. Throw in social media for good measure.

And then there are uniform designers, which have made ...

6. CUSTOMIZATION THE KING

The Crystal Ball: It's a give-me-what-I-want-NOW kind of world — thanks, Amazon — and team sports are no exception. Teams know what they want and are demanding dealers give it to them. Thankfully, vendors have responded with increases in customization that make it all possible. And it doesn't mean just in uniforms, which have long been customized to team specifications. In 2017, caps, socks, bags, warm-ups, shoes — basically anything you can find on a court or field — can be customized.

How We Got Here: Look at just one market within team sports for how far customization has come — caps. Where baseball teams used to have one hat to last all season, the ability of dealers and their vendors to offer custom caps for home, away and even special occasions — not to mention fanwear — has become a huge profit center. Creating a cap takes imagination and involves many decisions and fortunately today's online cap designers step through the process with ease and can help speed the approval process. 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 a team's design aesthetic.

Now custom products have inevitably led to ...

7. THE RISE OF TEAM STORES

The Crystal Ball: To their credit — and to the benefit of their bottom lines — team dealers continue to embrace custom team stores for customers that run the gamut, from colleges to corporations, from schools to booster clubs. Those microsites allow many a team dealer to expand its business and provide a competitive edge and, even better, get paid upfront.

How We Got Here: Online team stores have become a big part of giv-

ing customers a convenient option for buying everything from spirit packs to fan wear. "It's completely revolutionized how everyone should do business," one team dealer notes. Enter two big players that have enabled team dealers to find new levels of service that increase efficiency and expand their sales. TeamUniformOrders and OrderMyGear offer platforms to allow dealers to focus on service while efficiently setting up those team stores.

The team industry's power broker has its own proprietary technology and no one does customization and team stores like ...

8. BSN'S NATIONAL NETWORK



The Crystal Ball: With its major competition for a true national network dealers out of the way, BSN Sports is poised to continue its disruption of the team sports business in 2017. BSN's unparalleled investment in technology gives it the infrastructure to support its goal of placing sales professionals in every zip code in America. As it digests its major acquisitions from 2016, the next 12 months should see more of the same, although there are few dealers large enough to make a significant impact in 2017.

How We Got Here: To understand the BSN impact in the past 12 months, it is necessary to go back to early 2016 when BSN acquired Lids Team Sports, its chief rival in assembling a national network of dealers. This addition significantly enhances BSN's reach across America. In a couple of much smaller moves this year as well, BSN acquired Idaho Sporting Goods, a team dealer in Boise, ID, since 1954 selling in Idaho and northern Nevada; Jerry's Sporting Goods, a 20-year old team dealer in Wichita Falls, TX; and Ultimate Team Sales, based in Albuquerque, NM.

But BSN is not the only player

in the acquisition game, as the mantra for many is ...

8. BUY, BUY, BUY

The Crystal Ball: With economies of scale an attractive option for many vendors, more acquisitions are inevitable. The success of unions such as United Sports Brands (McDavid, Shock Doctor, Cutters and XO) provides a template for others to join forces in a contracting business world. Whether it works for all waits to be seen, but there is little doubt the team sports landscape will look much different — and more consolidated — 12 months from now.

How We Got Here: The industry watched with great interest the process of USB bringing together former competitors under one big, happy family. A move into a new facility in California and the closing or downsizing of offices in Chicago and Minnesota had little visible impact on McDavid's and Shock Doctor's relationships with its customers. In other major acquisition news in 2016, Kollege Town Sports was acquired by Riddell. The Windsor, WI, company, a national apparel firm featuring the Adidas brand, will operate as its own Riddell business unit. Finally, during the summer Badger Sportswear was purchased by CCMP Capital Advisors.

But that's small potatoes in the big picture compared to ...

9. RETAIL AND THE TSA EFFECT



The Crystal Ball: While the impact of the closing of the Sports Authority and its hundreds of stores around the country has seemingly played itself out — the Going Out Of Business signs have come down and the once powerful big-box name is now a part of sporting goods lore — the remaining mega-retailers are consolidating their positions and keeping an eye on the team sports side of the busi-

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ness. The industry's Big Dog, Dick's Sporting Goods, is pushing its Dick's Team Sports HQ, an all-in-one platform that offers youth sports leagues online registration and team/league websites, custom uniforms and Fan-Wear and access to donations and sponsorships. Dick's also recently acquired Affinity Sports, a sports management technology company

that will become a part of the Team Sports HQ platform.

How We Got Here: The TSA bankruptcy had little impact on the team business because the big-boxes have tried with varying degrees of success to sell to schools and leagues, primarily through team rooms. Their reach has been minimal and a minor part of their business.

But it was telling that among the first casualties of Sports Authority's bankruptcy were 16 members of its team sales unit at its Colorado headquarters. On the vendor side, mega-brand Under Armour revealed planned to open 200 stores in 2016. UA operated 144 factory stores at this time a year ago and it also has 29 stores known as "brand houses"

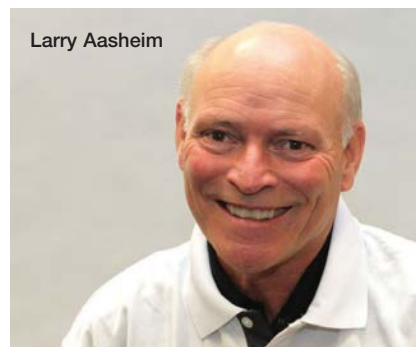
— larger than the factory stores and featuring its best collections. It also has an estimated 127 shops inside major retail partners.

And that leads us to ...

10. UNDER ARMOUR FOUNDER KEVIN PLANK HAS THE SAME FIRST NAME AS KEVIN BACON.

(We did it ... 10 Degrees!) ■

Aasheim, Plank To Join the Hall



Larry Aasheim



Kevin Plank

Two true pioneers in team sports will be inducted into the Sporting Goods Industry Hall of Fame during the NSGA Management Conference and Team Dealer Summit in Arizona in May.

The first, Larry Aasheim (*left photo*), is the founder of Universal Athletic with a resume spanning four decades of servicing the business.

The other guy? Only Kevin Plank, founder of Under Armour and perhaps the most influential person in the sporting goods industry for the past two decades.

Together the two industry icons will join the more than 160 innovative leaders in the sporting goods industry who have received this honor.

"We are pleased to induct two industry leaders who have made, and continue to make, a lasting impact on the industry," says Sporting Goods Industry Hall of Fame Committee chairman **Cathy Pryor, of Hibbett Sports**. "Larry and Kevin embody the spirit of innovation and leadership."

Aasheim, currently president of Universal Athletic, in 1971 founded the team dealer along with his friend Dick Harte. Forty-five years later Universal is a regional retailer and team dealer headquartered in Bozeman, MT. Universal has 13

locations and 50 team salesmen working in 11 Midwest and Western States and has grown into one of the largest independent team dealers in the country.

Aasheim, Universal's first employee and team salesman, made the first sale for the company in 1971. He became involved in all facets of the business and in 1973 became its first stockholder. As the company grew, he took on more management duties and in 1989 Harte sold most of his stock, making Aasheim the company's largest stockholder. He was named president and chairman, a position he has held for 26 years.

Plank founded Under Armour, headquartered in Baltimore, MD, upon graduating from the University of Maryland in 1996 with a Bachelor's Degree in business administration. He has succeeded in redefining the way athletes dress and what started out as one tight shirt ultimately led to the launch of Under Armour. After 20 years of outfitting athletes with performance apparel, footwear and gear, Plank now oversees a global company and the Under Armour Connected Fitness platform powers the world's largest digital health and fitness community through a suite of applications. ■

PHIT America Awards GO! Grants

For the second consecutive school year, PHIT America and the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) have awarded PHIT America GO! Grants. This year, 118 GO! Grants are being awarded to school-based physical activity programs in 29 states.

The funding is coming from PHIT America and 23 of the leading brands in the sports and fitness industry.

The purpose of the GO! Grants is to jumpstart increased physical activity in schools, increasing physical literacy skills, health and academic performance among students aged five to 12. The grants range from \$1000 to \$5000 per school. Last year's PHIT America GO! Grants touched more than 50,000 U.S. school-age children.

In every PHIT America GO! Grant application schools indicated the need for their students to develop their motor skills, reduce obesity and increase physical literacy and fitness through school programs.

From an economic perspective, based on research from Sports Marketing Surveys USA, physically active people spend more on sports products than physically inactive people. Based on the investment of \$840,000 in GO! Grants in two years, which is impacting the lives of more than 100,000 students, it's estimated that there will be an additional \$70 million in consumer spending in the sports and fitness industry from in two years through Spring of 2017.

"When you consider that physical inactivity is the fourth leading cause of death in the world, 33 million American children are not active to healthy standards, and less than 50 percent of American schools offer P.E., it is time to intervene to help support physical activity in American schools," says Jim Baugh, founder of PHIT America. "This is a national team effort and we invite companies and organizations in the private and public sector to join us as we educate America about the power and importance of physical activity, especially for our students in elementary school." ■

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BLITZ SAFETY

Whether it's first and 10 early in the game or third and 25 yards late in the fourth quarter, football's future is a matter of perspective. Team dealers certainly see the former, so the sport's future remains manageable. The media and other pundits often point to the latter, questioning its long-term viability.

Both may be correct as the sport's safety continues to be questioned and scrutinized, albeit with more than a bit of hyperbole on the media's part. One thing remains clear, though: Football drives a key, if not the key, part of any team dealer's business — and dealers aren't real happy about how the sport is portrayed some times.

"It's a continuation of what's been going on for the past few years," says **Mike Bruno**, general manager of **Grogan-Marciano**, Mansfield, MA, of the sport's safety concerns filling the headlines. So while the pro games continues to be the Alpha male in team sports and the sport continues to prosper on the college level, he adds, the high school market has its share of haves and have nots, as some smaller schools wrestle with finding players and the bigger, successful schools "have players coming out of the woodwork."

Overall, the game is static, Bruno concludes, and his four roadmen and two inside salespeople covering eastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island keep moving the sales ball forward. "We've made our reputation over the years with football," Bruno notes.

Part of the problem centers around football's popularity and the media's coverage with a microscope, notes **Mike Weir**, one of the owners of **Red Weir Athletic Supplies**, which covers central Missouri from its base in Columbia, MO. "The media hones in on football but never says anything about injuries in soccer." (This despite a recent study that shows a big spike in emergency room visits and concussions as soccer gains popularity.) "Even cheerleading has its share of injuries," he adds.

Despite all the concerns, football sits atop the sales list for Nill Bros., says **Randy Nill**, president and CEO of **Nill Bros. Sporting Goods**, Kansas City, KS. "It's our number one category by far."

High schools and colleges rely on football to produce revenue, he adds. Plus, the focus on safety has had a positive impact on team sales as schools and parents want the best equipment possible.

"Schools recondition now every year instead of every other year because they don't want to miss anything. They are letting the professionals look at it," Nill notes. "We also see more purchases of new helmets. Schools want to be compliant. They want to be cutting-edge."

Don Coffey, a roadman with **T&B Sports**, San Rafael, CA, concurs

that football carries the sales ball in team sports. His biggest concern is that several schools in his region aren't drawing players and may drop football. "I believe that football will be a sport mainly for larger schools in the future," Coffey says.

This focus on safety means roadmen need to up their game, adds **Tom Pippo**, another roadman with **T&B Sports**. "Coaches, parents and the players are more knowledgeable regarding the new helmet technology and testing standards and you must be able to provide them with the right equipment and information."

Yes, the reports have caused pause for concern from parents, says **Steve Kelly**, president of **Kelly's Sports**, West Chester, PA. "The numbers are down, especially in youth," he reports. "When the NFL came out with the concussion settlement, it triggered concern from parents."

Kelly quickly adds that "you can't prevent concussions and never will be able to. It's just part of the game."

He points to the changing rules, though, that should have a positive impact. Limited contact during practices, concussion protocols, even doing away with kickoffs at the youth level and moving the kickoff forward in the NFL to limit returns have played a part in improving safety and limiting contact. "It's a trickle-down thing," he adds. "It will take time for these and other new rules to take effect in minimizing the issues."

The big push is less contact, he notes. Every level now limits the amount of contact during practice, Kelly says. That and not sending any player out that appears to have a concussion during a game, a rule in place at all levels of the game.

Repercussions and Responses

All of the media coverage has neither fallen on deaf ears nor had minimal impact on football.

Kelly says one local high school actually cancelled its season when only 20 kids showed interest. Conversely, some other districts have seen an uptick in interest.

Safety isn't the only factor here, Kelly adds. Some districts just don't have the money; other schools simply haven't been competitive. And there's always a matter of choice, especially as many athletes now play one sport year-round. Besides focusing on a sport, Kelly wonders as well if some parents push a sport or two that has less contact than football.

There's certainly more focus on education and buyers armed with information, Nill says.

"It's an ongoing song," he notes of interest from all concerned. "The youth organizations are doing more due diligence. More parents are involved and there's more education."

In fact, the youth leagues often come to Nill Bros. with their equipment list. Plus, there are more presentations to the organizations to make sure they understand the differences in equipment.

TEAM / FOOTBALL

At the high school level, booster clubs continue to play a big role in providing funding. It enables many schools to ensure that players have the best protection possible. "Parents won't let their kids do without," Nill notes.

Awareness helps, Bruno adds. "I don't hear complaining, but more awareness." Schools certainly worry about player safety but also know liability issues are always looming.

Team dealers also point to a wealth of responses from schools and organizations to further the game's safety. First and foremost, rule changes continue to highlight the need to minimize injuries and enhance safety. Chief among these are concussion protocols, mandated baseline testing for athletes in many states, doctors and trainers at games, and more.

Coaches are getting better educated, with certification required at the high school and youth level, Nill notes. "You can see the results since it's been a few years. Those younger kids have better awareness and techniques."

It still is a challenge, Pippo says. "There is concern regarding the media blitz on concussions and being able to offset those concerns is a challenge. Most coaches are aware of the concerns and are trying to provide the latest safety equipment."

Additionally, schools and organizations have done a better job in communicating with parents, Coffey says.

The situation isn't dire, but all the talk on safety has dampened enthusiasm for playing football, team dealers often say. It's a mixed bag, but one that bears watching in the coming years.

T&B Sports has seen a reduction

at all levels. Some youth programs have had to combine with others and some have completely dropped out of football. At high schools, it varies, Pippo says. Overall, he says participation has dropped an average 10-15 percent, with some schools dropping their freshman teams.

Safety may be part, but not all, of the reason. "It seems that there are the haves and the have-nots when it comes to successful programs," Pippo notes. "The private schools and charter schools are able to entice the best players in an area to their programs, diminishing the fringe programs."

High school football participation is stable in Red Weir's territories, but middle schools have seen a dip, Weir says. The local Columbia youth league decided to drop tackle until fourth grade after trying a modified version of 7-on-7 with everybody eligible and playing on a half field. "Parents wanted 11-on-11 so the league went back to flag football for the younger ages," Weir notes.

Doing Their Best

Team dealers aren't immune from all the talk about the sport's safety. They pitch in as best they can to address the issue.

"I tell people that I'm a salesman, not a scientist," Bruno notes. His toughest job is to stay on top of all the new products from manufacturers. "It can be daunting. I'm looking at next fall and know it's going to be tough to learn about all the new products."

As part of the sales process, Weir knows the importance of calling on customers. "We are trying to do more face-to-face calling and spend more



time with the schools. We also find the booster club person and go to his or her office."

Part of that education is offering the safest equipment possible, Pippo notes. He also believes it's important to get accurate information out to the players.

Kelly agrees that dealers must sell products that they feel are safe. "The best thing that has happened is awareness. It may not be great press, but now everyone is focused on the issue."

Years ago, Nill Bros. held concussion seminars to educate coaches and athletic directors. It stopped doing this a few years ago when the schools and organizations started their own programs to address the

Teamwork's ProSphere custom football uniform (left) includes free custom colors, free graphic upload and instant online proof, with a standard manufacturing time of 10 days. Under Armour's first fully sublimated football line includes the Youth Jersey (right) built with signature UA fabrics and offered in four design silhouettes

issue and to help coaches learn and teach better techniques.

As for the latter, it will take time. "Can these older coaches change their techniques to make the sport safer?" he questions.

Manufacturers also are playing a role in making the game as safe as possible.

"I think the industry is doing what it can," Nill says. "It really comes down

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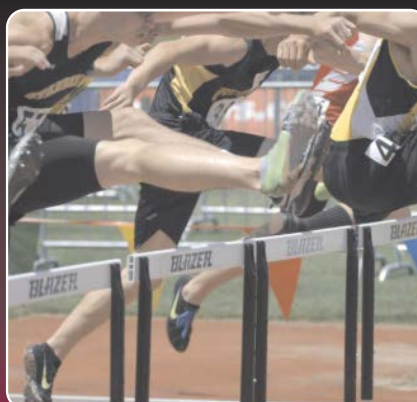
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to the helmet guys as they look for better materials and construction. They do a good job.”

Bruno adds, “I don’t think they are paying it lip service. They are trying to find the happy medium.”

Manufacturers are doing their best to design equipment, Kelly agrees. Awareness also leads to more education, but he feels more can be done. “We need to continue to research and get a better understanding of what causes concussions and how to minimize the possibilities.”

He sees progress as well with new devices to measure impact, better chinstraps and even a thermom-

eter that a local college developed to track how players are reacting to heat. There’s a new tackling wheel as well to teach better technique and eliminate contact. High schools are videotaping practices to further ensure that players are learning proper techniques.

“It’s gone from the back of the mind to the front of the mind as far as safety,” Kelly says.

As part of this, coaches, organizations and parents are paying attention. In particular, the Virginia Tech annual study of football helmets carries weight, along with the National Football League Player Association’s review. “These are

becoming widely accepted by parents and coaches as a baseline for the safest helmets, Pippo notes.

Such technology is all relevant, Nill cautions. “How long does it take to prove out? It drives everything, but is it correct?” he asks. While the Virginia Tech 5-star ratings on helmets provides guidance, he wonders if the testing really mimics actual field conditions and a wealth of other variables such as size, speed, number of hits, type of hits, etc. “Anything new and exciting grabs sales, but you really don’t know until it’s used on the field and really tested,” Nill says.

Future efforts will continue, Pip-

po adds. “I believe that safety and technology will be a growing trend in the development of new football equipment.”

In the end, the game will survive, but not without many trying attempts to cross the goal line.

Bruno says it succinctly: “Football will stay popular.”

The whole safety issue makes Grogan-Marciano’s service even more valuable. “We have an advantage because we are a brick-and-mortar store that can fit kids with helmets and shoulder pads. We have people who travel 50-60 miles. That’s our bread and butter. We take care of our customers.” ■

Sideline Challenges



While dealers are painfully aware of the challenges presented by media coverage of football’s safety, they know there are bigger challenges to tackle.

Mike Bruno, at Grogan-Marciano, tackles inventory and equipment issues. “Besides trying to be psychic in understanding what people will buy, we have to keep up with the technology, especially in helmets and now in pads.”

Manufacturers have done a better job in explaining new products, but it still is a never-ending battle, especially with the different helmet manufacturers. “We also still have people asking for concussion-proof helmets on a daily basis,” he says.

Plus, customers seem to believe all businesses are Amazon, with racks of products that can be shipped out the same day. “Society today expects that everyone can provide a product within a day. We can’t deliver a crimson gold helmet the next day. We constantly have to educate people,” Bruno says.

Budgets are a perennial problem, adds Randy Nill, at Nill Bros. As equipment

prices increase, school budgets just aren’t keeping pace. “We have small schools that can’t afford the footballs, much less \$250 helmets.”

Along with that, competition remains intense, says Tom Pippo, with T&B Sports. “We are always trying to stay ahead of the national companies by supplying superior service along with competitive pricing.”

As programs shrink, there are fewer opportunities, says Don Coffey, another roadman with T&B Sports. “And those programs that shut down sell off their inventory, further reducing sales for dealers.”

Even schedules pose problems, says Randy Nill, at Nill Bros. In his territory, football once was delivered in July —now he has to do so in May. Besides trying to finish up Spring sports, he’s caught between trying to get products in from the manufacturers and getting squeezed by cash flow since schools don’t even get their budgets funds in until July. He often can’t even bill until those funds are available and then he often waits another 30-60 days to get paid.

Steve Kelly, at Kelly’s Sports, sees a major challenge in hard goods, with sales dropping the last three to four years. Many of those shoulder pad and helmet sales are now going to the reconditioners that often also sell new equipment. Yes, Kelly’s does some reconditioning, but it’s tough since the margins are so low.

The seasonal crunch doesn’t help either, especially as orders come in late as budgets get pushed back. “We all chase it now. The helmet companies have trouble handling 80 percent of the business in a two-month period. We struggled this year with painted helmets and getting back reconditioned items in time.” ■

Flag on the Play

The safety of football has no doubt given some parents pause for concern, especially for younger children. As a result, many recreational leagues have addressed this by offering an alternative — flag football. Team dealers have seen this as a growing trend, but it varies greatly throughout the country.

“It’s gotten very big,” says Steve Kelly, of Kelly’s Sports. “One, it’s safer than or as safe as soccer.” Plus, it keeps kids playing football while bringing business for the team dealer.

Grogan-Marciano also sells flag football, but it simply doesn’t add up to the same dollars as the tackle business. “Fewer items, fewer dollars,” Mike Bruno notes, primarily uniforms, usually T-shirts and flag sets.

It’s not that prominent in Red Weir’s territory, says Mike Weir. The youth leagues have it available, but funds are limited. Often league fees primarily go toward insurance, leaving only \$15 or so for a T-shirt. “The ironic thing is they spend more on flag sets (\$150 or so) than they do on footballs or uniforms.”

Nill Bros. has grown its flag football business over the past couple years as leagues extended programs from ages seven and eight up to nine-10 age groups, says Randy Nill. “These hits do start at a young age, so it’s a great concept. It’s better that they learn the game.”

“Losing a helmet and pad doesn’t replace those sales, but it still is good for the sport to keep these youngsters playing,” Nill adds. ■



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Football In the News

The media continues its onslaught of covering safety and other issues concerning football. Anyone who types a search in Google will be overwhelmed with hundreds of thousands of possible stories on every medium possible — digital, print and electronic. Here's a review of just a few such stories and some other highlights in the always-challenging world of football in 2016:

Sports Illustrated:

The venerable sports publication ran a telling story in its NFL Preview Issue in August that posed the question: "Football's Endgame: What would happen if America's pastime just ... died?" The article portended ominous clouds around the game. "Ten years ago it would have been easy to laugh off the question, but given the current climate, it's about time to consider: What if football ceased to exist?"

It went on to look at a litany of events troubling the game, ranging from lawsuits to the NFL's refuted studies on concussions. And that was just over recent events. Satire, yes, as the writer weaves in a futuristic look at the game's demise in a look at a football game played in the late 2020s.

His report ends with a quote and a possible conclusion: "Quoting James Michener ... 'Every society decides what it is willing to pay for its entertainment.' The more Americans

learned about the true price for their once-beloved game, the less they were willing to pay it."

Washington Post:

A June 7 story in the paper carried an interview with Chris Borland, who retired from the NFL at the age of 24. He played just one season as a line-backer with the San Francisco 49ers but decided to quit amid concerns over degenerative brain conditions like chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE).

As for football's future, Borland told the paper, "Dementia pugilistica was discovered in 1928. That's punch drunk. That's dementia for boxers. And we still have boxing. Football will continue. I think Frank Deford, the writer, said that these issues are actually commentary on our social class system more so than the game. I think you'll see who boxes. I think you'll see that trend continue in football.

Harry Edwards, a sociologist and a

liaison with the San Francisco 49ers, wrote a book ... detailing that same phenomenon where it's increasingly impoverished inner-city kids that play these dangerous sports. So I think that would be the trend more so than football going away."

Wall Street Journal:

The sport's economic impact can't be denied. It extends well beyond the NFL, with high schools and colleges across the country depending on football to fund other sports. And it's become somewhat excessive when big money now even flows to high school teams with significant corporate sponsorships.

A story on Aug. 25 reported several incidences of big-money sponsorships for Texas high schools that incidentally cut team dealers out of lucrative sales.

- The home opener for the Cedar Hill Longhorns was broadcast live on ESPN2, with players outfitted from

head-to-toe in Under Armour gear thanks to a sponsorship deal the school signed in 2014.

- Eight teams from the city of Frisco wore new Nike uniforms thanks to a \$1.74 million, five-year deal with the apparel giant. Even more telling, the teams started the season in a quadruple header as part of the opening of a 12,000-seat domed stadium that the school district built in partnership with the Dallas Cowboys. And Ford pitched in with its naming rights.

- The Allen Independent School District, a football powerhouse outside of Dallas, has a sponsorship deal with Nike as well. It plays in a 18,000-seat stadium dotted with Coca-Cola ads. The district expects to take in \$238,000 in stadium sponsorships. Plus, the paper reported, "Nike has sent a helicopter and a Lamborghini to campus bearing surprise trunks of gear as a reward for making the state championship games in previous years." ■

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2



3



4



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3. **McDavid's** latest editions in football protection, the Rival Pro 5-Pad girdle and shirt (pictured) provide Flex Air protective padding with integrated multi-directional vented flex channels for ergonomic range of motion and air flow. Bio-shape design provides comfortable compression fit and anatomically correct pad positions.

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Not-So-Free Safety

Two of the leading football associations talk current events.



Media headlines blared about the potential demise of youth football when Pop Warner, the nation's largest youth football program, settled its first and only concussion-related lawsuit in early March. The suit was brought by the mother of a former player who blamed the sport for her son's suicide after an autopsy found he had CTE (chronic traumatic encephalopathy). The brain disease is caused by repeated head hits and a contributor to depression and other mental health problems.

Newspapers, television stations and digital media wondered if this would lead to the demise of football for youngsters, as well as open the floodgates for more lawsuits.

Team Insight asked **Jon Butler**, executive director of **Pop Warner**, and **Bob Colgate**, director of sports and sports medicine for **NFHS**, to provide their insights.

The negative publicity concerning foot-

ball, particularly concerning its safety and the impact of concussions, continues. What's your take on all this?

Butler: We take issues of safety very seriously and have been leaders in making the game better and safer for the young people who play it. We have

More suits are indeed in the works.

Not far behind, high schools also face mounting safety challenges — not just for football, but for everything from basketball injuries to MRSA bacterial infections contracted by wrestlers.

Needless to say, these organizations are doing their utmost to educate coaches, parents, players, schools, athletic directors and more on safety amidst the perils of play. Plus, rule changes continue to make football safer. Where all this goes is anybody's guess, but leaders from Pop Warner and the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) addressed a number of issues concerning football's safety and future.

developed and initiated very important and effective rule changes, coaching education and concussion protocols.

But we're not done. It is a constant commitment to ensuring safer conditions and preserving this great game.

Colgate: The NFHS has a sound rules-

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writing process focused in significant part on risk minimization. Also, through the use of online education courses for players, coaches, game officials and parents, and the adoption of state laws and protocols for concussion management, the sport of football at the high school level is as safe as it has been since the first rules were written in 1932. With more than one million students playing the full-contact, collision sport of high school football, there undoubtedly is a degree of risk involved. But from the prohibition of spearing in the mid-1970s to the continued focus on eliminating helmet-to-helmet contact, tremendous strides have been made to reduce that inherent risk of injury.

What are you hearing from leagues and coaches, perhaps even parents, about football and its safety?

Butler: They all want we want: Make the game as safe and as enjoyable as possible and keep the essence of the sport intact. We listen to the parents,

players, coaches and other volunteers, as well as to our independent Medical Advisory Committee.

Colgate: Schools and parents want to make sure high school football is as safe as possible, just like any other high school sport. We do recognize, however, that the concern regarding concussions is on the mind of every parent who has a son – or daughter – playing high school football. The NFHS and our 51 member state associations have taken steps during the past number of years to minimize the risk of injury related to concussions and that process continues.

What concerns do you have about the impact on football participation both near and long term?

Butler: We are excited to work with those who sincerely care about making sports safer and that remains our focus. There are those intent on wiping football from the American landscape. That's unfortunate since so much good is being done at all

levels, beginning with Pop Warner, to improve the game.

Colgate: None at this time. It is something that the NFHS will continue to monitor. (As reported in the September 2016 issue of *Team Insight*, football remained one of the most popular high school sports last year, with participation levels remaining constant.)

What trends have you noticed in participation? And what effect, if any, has this had on the popularity of flag football?

Butler: We have remained steady over the last four years and we're excited about that. We actually offer flag football as a complement to tackle football and love that kids want to play the game, whether it is tackle, which remains extremely popular, or flag.

What specific steps are you taking to address the safety issue?

Butler: We eliminated kickoffs this fall for our three youngest age

groups. This is in addition to so many other efforts we've made over the past few years to improve safety without changing the nature of this great game.

Colgate: The NFHS Football Rules Committee and the NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee review the sport of football all the time to see what can be done to further minimize risk. Thanks to recommendations provided by the 2014 NFHS Concussion Summit Task Force, state associations have adopted limitations on the overall amount and frequency of full contact during football practices — both during the traditional fall season as well as offseason activities over the last two years. Now, more than ever before, precautions are in place to reduce the risk of serious injury resulting from concussions. We are able to recognize the signs and symptoms of concussions and protocols are in place to remove athletes from competition when a concussion is suspected. ■

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In the United States, SELECT is proudly the official ball sponsor and match ball for all NAIA and NJCAA schools nationwide, a wide number of state adoptions, including Georgia, Wisconsin and Kentucky, and a large number of conferences across the country — it recently signed up with the Peach Belt Conference.

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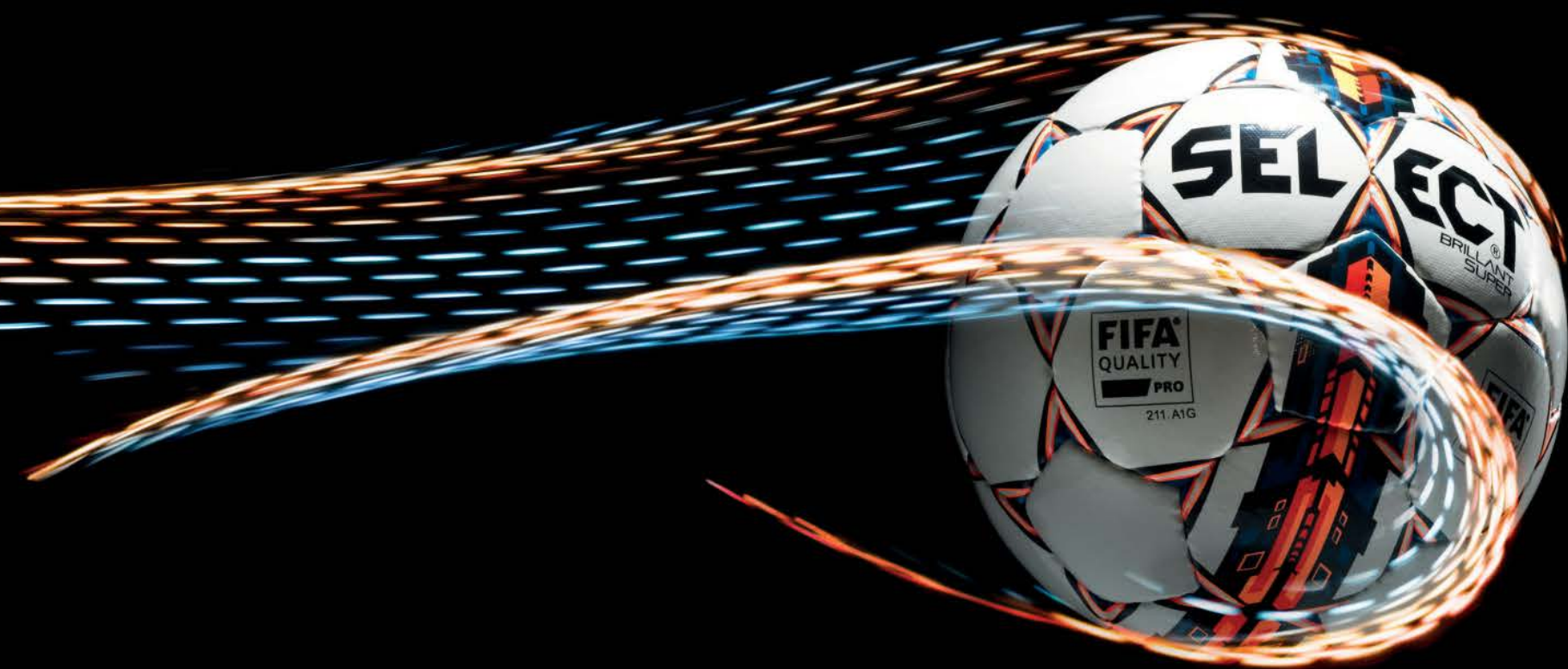


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A BEAUTIFUL AMERICAN GAME

Many dealers say soccer now rivals the Big Three in terms of contribution to their bottom lines, although there remain some challenges unique to such a sport. By Mike May

There is no denying it any longer — soccer is now a mainstream sport in the United States. It's played indoors and outdoors in every state in the country ... by millions of people ... on grass, in school courtyards, at the beach, inside gyms and on artificial turf ... it's played by children, teenagers, millennials, and men and women in their 30s, 40s, 50s, and a few older than that.

And all of those players, fans, parents and coaches have made soccer a mainstream sport for team dealers, soccer specialty shops and retailers as well. Indeed, many dealers say soccer now rivals the Big Three in terms of contribution to their bottom lines, although there remain some challenges unique to such a relatively new sport.

The Numbers Story

The numbers tell the story of soccer's importance to the team sports game:

- According to the latest statistics from the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), in the 2015-2016 school year, there were 821,851 high school soccer players in the U.S. — 440,322 boys and 381,529 girls.
- For boys, soccer is now the fifth most popular high school sport in the U.S., while soccer is the fourth most popular for girls.
- High school soccer is played by boys and girls in all 51 of NFHS' state associations.
- For boys, the five most popular states for high school soccer are California, Texas, New York, Illinois and Pennsylvania. For girls, the top five reveal a similar pattern of popularity: California, Texas, New York, Pennsylvania and Illinois.

"Soccer is in great shape as a sport," says **Theresa Wynns**, director of sports and officials at NFHS. "Soccer has seen

growth in the number of schools sponsoring the sport and a tremendous growth in the number of participants."

- On a national level, the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) reports that there were 12.6 million outdoor soccer players in the U.S. in 2015.
- Outdoor soccer's popularity makes it the third most played team sport in the U.S., behind only basketball and baseball.
- SFIA research indicates there were 4.8 million indoor soccer players in 2015, up six percent from a year earlier.
- One of the consistent aspects of outdoor soccer participation is the high percentage of soccer players who are core participants — those who play more than 26 times a year. Of the 12.6 million outdoor soccer players, 47 percent fall into this category.
- From a sales perspective, according to the SFIA's "Manufacturers Sales by Category Report," wholesale sales of soccer equipment (soccer balls, protective gear and accessories) in 2015 were \$127.1 million, up from \$112.1 million in 2012. Wholesale sales of soccer uniforms are even higher — \$135.3 million in 2015, up from \$130.3 million in 2012. And, wholesale sales of soccer footwear top the charts — \$345.9 million in 2015.

Dealers Talk Soccer

Whether team dealers are located in the east, west, north or south, all are selling something to do with The Beautiful Game. In the coastal community of Vero Beach, FL, soccer is a major player for **Dave's Sporting Goods**.

"We thrive on soccer," says owner **D. Shaun Whipp**. "Our local Indian River Soccer Association has roughly 1000 youngsters from ages four to 10, all of whom buy a spirit pack every year that contains a set of cleats, shinguards and a soccer ball."

According to Whipp, 60 percent of the youngsters participate in a local recreation league, while the remaining 40 percent play competitive/travel soccer.

Whipp says the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team capturing the 2015 World Cup and the closing of Sports

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Authority both have had a positive impact on soccer's contribution to his bottom line. Indeed, he estimates the closing of the local Sports Authority stores, which primarily serviced the entry-level player, has helped his soccer sales by nearly 20 percent.

Soccer has a permanent foothold in northeastern Iowa and teams are buying custom uniforms, socks, soccer balls, shinguards, goals and nets from **Iowa Sports Supply**, Cedar Falls, IA.

"We sell soccer to colleges and high schools," reports sales consultant **Austin Ryan**. "Colleges play in the fall, hoping to get the games played before the snow hits, and high schools play in the spring, as soon as the snow melts."

Ryan points out that while high school teams are always looking for the best deal in order to save money, the college soccer programs don't mind spending a little bit more to get lighter cleats, more comfortable socks and sleeker uniforms.

With Spalding being the official high school state soccer ball of the Hawkeye State, Ryan – who played college soccer at William-Penn University – says sales of the Spalding soccer ball are strong, but he also sells Baden and Adidas balls.

On the outskirts of Denver, people are playing soccer, but not in droves. As a result, the soccer business is an important, but not pivotal, category for **Sportline**, in Arvada, CO.

"Soccer is not a major sport for us," says VP **Tom Jacobsen**. "Our soccer business really depends on interest from local soccer clubs. We sell uniforms to a few high schools in our area – girls in the fall and boys in the spring – but we don't sell too much soccer footwear, as most players are buying on the Internet or from soccer specialty stores."

In northeast Texas and southeastern Oklahoma, high school soccer sales are significant, but could be stronger for **Williams Sporting Goods**, Paris, TX.

"We sell uniforms, socks, balls, goalie gloves and soccer goals to high school soccer teams," says business manager **Steve Bellene**, who estimates there are 150 high schools in its area.

While Bellene says he loses some soccer sales to Eurosport and other online alternatives, his ability to solve a customer's immediate problem is what separates his business from the electronic competition.

"They don't offer the same immediate customer service that we can, especially when there's a problem," adds Bellene. "We also do screenprinting and embroidery in-house, which is a time saver."

Bellene does feel that there's a difference when doing business with high school soccer coaches as opposed to coaches in other sports. "It seems

that soccer coaches tend to buy online more than coaches in other sports," states Bellene.

In Texas, Bellene says the high school soccer season is not as long as in other parts of the country because it is squeezed between the end of almighty football in the fall and the beginning of baseball in the early spring.

Right now, the official soccer ball of Texas soccer is manufactured by Baden, which stimulates sales of that brand. "Coaches like their teams to play and practice with the same ball," says Bellene.

In eastern Tennessee and western Virginia, soccer clubs, local recreational leagues and high school teams go shopping at **Team Sports Outfitters**, Bristol, TN.

"We sell lots of uniforms from Adidas and quite a few soccer balls from Adidas, Baden and Wilson," says **Keith McCall**, a buyer/roadman with the dealer. "We sell quite a few Wilson soccer balls because it's the official state ball of Tennessee and Virginia."

While Team Sports Outfitters doesn't sell soccer cleats, it does sell quite a few shinguards, goalie gloves and Bison goals.

When it comes to soccer socks, Team Sports Outfitters gets them from its parent company, Bristol Products Corp., which is also located in Bristol. "We have access to great custom socks from Bristol Products," adds McCall. "It's a big business for us."

In the Midwest, soccer specialty retailer **Soccer Village**, Cincinnati, OH, has seven stores in three states – Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana – and is 100 percent committed to selling soccer to both local players and nationally online.

"Our business is totally focused on soccer – 365 days a year," says president **Bart Rapp**. "We sell soccer at retail, direct to teams and through e-commerce. Our business platform is split three ways and about 75 percent of our soccer revenue comes from sales of soccer balls, socks, footwear and replica jerseys. The fastest growing portion of our business is e-commerce."

At the team level, Soccer Village does more business with travel and club teams than with high school teams.

"The biggest portion of our business is from travel and club soccer," notes Rapp. "These club teams require their players to buy mandatory kits, which include two team uniforms and socks.

Sublimation & Soccer

Soccer has always been one of the more fashion-forward team sports and, as a result, has been an early adopter of sublimation technology to get that trendy look. Although creativity at the high school level is tempered by state regulations on uniforms, club and recreation teams have embraced the look in various degrees. Bart Rapp, who's been involved in the soccer business for more than 30 years and is currently president of Soccer Village in Cincinnati, points out that the introduction of sublimation has been nothing short of transformational. "Sublimation has changed the team (soccer) business," he says. "It's now getting to the point where club logos are appearing within the jersey numbers. It all started when Adidas started putting its logo inside the numbers on jerseys."

Then players must buy mandatory training kits. These young players are dressed just like the pro players. They look as professional as any professional that you'll see."

When they walk into a Soccer Village customers see a wall filled with more than 300 SKUs of footwear and another wall featuring at least 80 soccer balls. Also featured are 35 models of slides and sandals along with international and club replica jerseys, socks and shinguards.

According to Rapp, one distinguishing feature about soccer players is their fashion consciousness.

"Soccer has always been kind of fashion-oriented, for both boys and girls," adds Rapp. "Once the general public notices and moves to what's trendy in soccer, then soccer players will tend to stop wearing it and move on."

Rapp points out that one of the fastest growing categories

within soccer is compression and protective gear, such as sliding pads, headgear and compression shorts. More girls are wearing calf guards and leg guards and more field players of both genders are wearing protective gear.

In Merrifield, VA, **Matt Godek**, owner of **Matt Godek Rugby & Soccer Supply**, is noticing a behavior trend in his Washington, D.C. region that is undoubtedly taking place around the country.

"Local recreational soccer leagues are having a tough time estimating how many players will be playing in their local leagues, especially coming out of the summer," notes Godek. "As a result, they are extending the registration deadline. Then, there's a rush on the team order for socks and uniforms."

According to Godek, one of the positives of all the media attention on professional soccer is that the European clubs such as Manchester United, Chelsea, Juventus, Real Madrid and Barcelona are big replica jersey sellers. On the downside, all of this media attention means more retailers are carrying soccer.

"The expansion of the sport of soccer has played a role in reduced profitability opportunities," admits Godek. "There's also lots of bootlegging going on, which further erodes any potential retail sales opportunities of soccer merchandise."

Godek also notes that since many local soccer programs are looking to get the best prices possible, it often means the sale is done with an out-of-area or out-of-state retail outlet such as Eurosport or other online outlet.

"When money leaves a community, that's not good," says Godek. "Money that is spent in the local community stays in the local community, which helps maintain and support the local fields, parks and recreation facilities." ■



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3. Under Armour's Armourfuse crew neck silhouette with ventilated mesh side panels comes in four designs that combine traditional soccer visuals with UA aggressiveness in a sublimated assortment.

4. Teamwork's in-stock basic soccer uniform is a budget-friendly, moisture-wicking soccer jersey and short in several color choices and available in both youth and adult sizes.

5. Made of its sublimated Wickflex material, the Reusch Camo Woman's Pro-Fit jersey includes Control Cuff, which uses its Silicontrol strips to help with the control of the ball on the Stretch Zone cuff area.

6. The Adidas Tiro 17 jersey features mesh fabric on the top back yoke and a tonal mesh polyester sleeve pattern.

7. Designed for its Collegiate/High School goal, Blazer's one-piece aluminum brace bar is recommended to be used with a wheel kit to help stabilize the goal, especially on synthetic fields.

8. Franklin's Blackhawk portable soccer goal has a lightweight and portable design that makes set up and transportation a breeze, while the durable fiberglass and steel construction maximizes stability.

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The Dynamic Future of Training Equipment

Bownet Redefines Baseball and Softball Training Equipment — AGAIN!

Training athletes for sports has changed dramatically in the last 20 years. Sports medicine, sports nutrition and new training methods based on building a stronger more flexible and resilient athlete have gotten a lot of the headlines. But, until

companies like Bownet Sports came along, training equipment for coaches and athletes lagged behind. Most of this equipment was considered permanent or heavy, but not portable. Bownet Sports changed all of that.

A LITTLE HISTORY

Eight years ago, Jack Lucas, President and CEO of Bownet Sports, was inspired by his daughter, an aspiring fast-pitch pitcher, to design a new type of practice net after she tripped on a guide wire and then injured her wrist. He built what began as one of the first baseball/softball practice nets with no guide wires into the most popular practice net in the sporting goods industry. He also changed the nature of training by developing a series of portable style practice nets into what is now known as the “Bownet System” approach to training. Multiple nets are now used to warm up as well as train every player on the team, not just a few.

PORTABILITY IS THE KEY

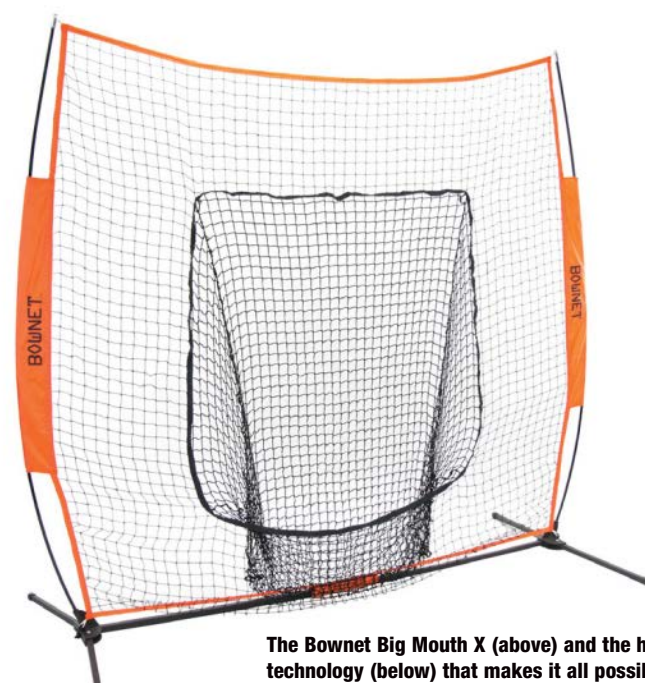
The Big Mouth Net, designed by Bownet Sports, is used on fields everywhere, from practice facilities to tournaments and from parks to back yards. The dynamic change in training turned out to be portability. “Players and coaches must be able to train anywhere, train now.

“Players and coaches must be able to train anywhere, train now. They need to be mobile.” — Jack Lucas, CEO, Bownet Sports

They need to be mobile,” as Jack Lucas often says.

Coaches and players are on the

move from tournament to practice to more games in their home towns, local regions and around the country. This, combined with the shrinking availability of fields, meant that training equipment had to become synonymous with portability.



The Bownet Big Mouth X (above) and the hinge technology (below) that makes it all possible.

BOWNET DOES IT AGAIN — BIG MOUTH X

Recently, Bownet Sports redefined its best-selling Big Mouth net – renamed the Big Mouth X – by redesigning the frame so that coaches and players could be even more portable. “It was time for us to create the “NEXT” generation Big Mouth design and reinvent the category again,” explains Lucas.

The response to the new patented design has been amazing, as coaches who have had the chance to test it out claim how much quicker it sets up and – just as importantly – how much easier it was to take down. “There are no more pipes to take apart, saving so much time,” Lucas adds. “And we listened to our coaches and retailers by redesigning the bag to be significantly more durable.”



By reinventing its best-selling Big Mouth training net, Bownet Sports has recognized the evolving nature of training equipment towards portability. “We built our company on becoming the best portable and durable equipment company for coaches and players who work hard every day,” says Lucas. “They deserve the best quality portable in the industry today. Bownet gives it to them. As we often say, use Bownet and “Train like a Pro.”



Bownet components ... Even more advanced technology and a more durable bag make Bownet nets the best quality portable training aids in the sporting goods industry today.



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A New Goal



Top Left: Get the classic styling of the World Cup goal anywhere with this portable model from Gill Construction Products. Teams can customize the look with custom powder coated net posts.

Left: Bison's No-Tip portable soccer goals include built-in weighted transport wheels that double as ballast. No-Tip complete packages meet all ASTM F2056 and ASTM F2673 standards for safety and performance without the use of loose ballast bags or undependable ground stakes .

Above: Bownet's E.A.S. technology (Energy Absorption System) diffuses ball energy throughout the goal to extend its lifespan, give more stability and balance and add flexibility upon impact. Bownet's Quick Clips are included to make attaching the netting to the Bow-poles even easier

The *Team Insight* Vendor Roundtable convenes to talk about portable goals and how team dealers can benefit from selling these big-ticket items to schools, clubs and towns.

Chris Livingston, National Sales Manager, **Bison**
Jonathan Hayden, Chief Managing Officer, **Bownet Sports**

Jeff Roth, Vice President, **First Team**

Laura St. George, Vice President-North America, **Gared**
Darren Clare, Division Manager, **Gill Construction Products**

Jon Fishman, General Manager, **Goal Sporting Goods**

Sophia Pifer, Marketing Associate, **Kwik Goal**
Moderator: Michael Jacobsen

Let's start with the obvious question: Where are the opportunities for team dealers selling soccer goals?

Darren Clare, Gill Construction Products: Everywhere you see a green field where there

are multiple soccer goals.

Laura St. George, Gared: As soccer continues to grow in popularity, the growth of the sport is exponential. The opportunities are endless, from soccer clubs and rec clubs to K-12 training camps and traveling tournament play.

Chris Livingston, Bison: Based on where and who we ship our goals to, I'd say the opportunities are everywhere. With soccer being one of the fastest growing sports in the U.S., schools and other facilities are upgrading their old goals to better quality and, most importantly, safer goals.

Jonathan Hayden, Bownet: The traditional market for team dealers are high schools, colleges and travel/recreational clubs.

Jon Fishman, Goal Sporting Goods: There are many opportunities selling soccer goals,

from schools to youth clubs to adult leagues. Margins are already excellent, so pay attention to customer needs to ensure the customer is buying from domestic suppliers with a wide selection and quality products. Do research with the customer as to what they are looking for. Ask questions. Do research before seeing the customer. Anticipate their needs based on previous purchase history and experiences. The dealer benefits by offering a complete range to the customer of both hard and soft goods — one-stop-shopping.

Jeff Roth, First Team: The opportunities are in selling to schools, park and rec departments and local club organizations.

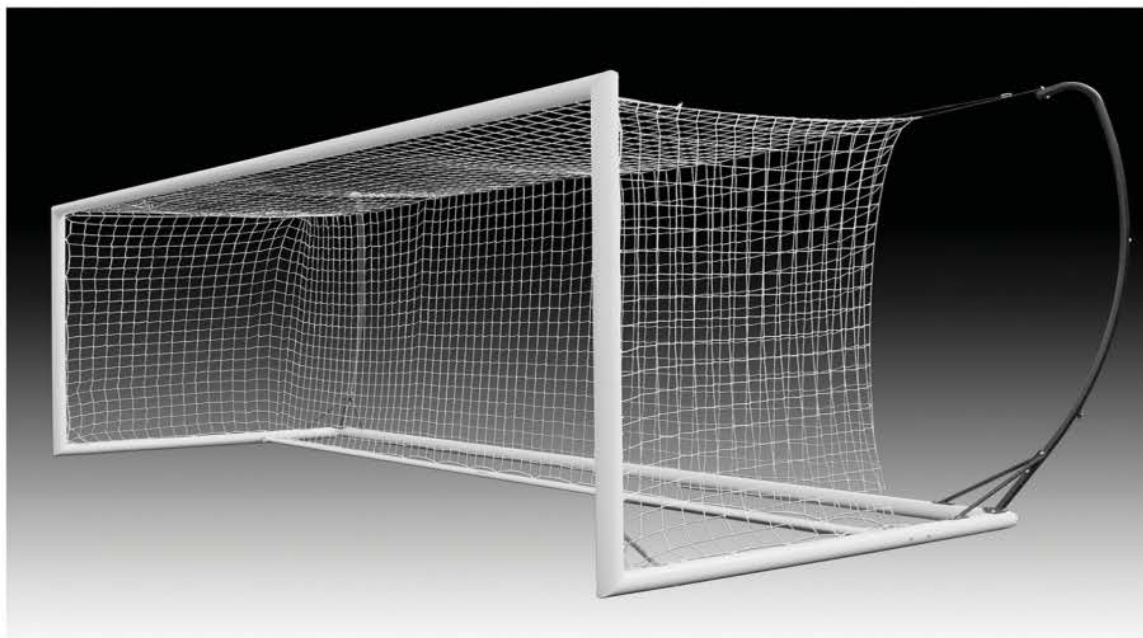
Sofia Pifer, Kwik Goal: Since the U.S. Soccer Federation recently updated their Player Development Initiatives, many clubs may need to purchase different size goals, particularly 4X6-foot and 6.5X18.5-foot goal sizes, to follow

the new small-sided game formats

How can team dealers compete with direct sellers and online shopping in the soccer goal category?

Livingston: Just like in any other category, the team dealer has to emphasize the personal relationship. Price is still a factor, but if the pricing is close between an online direct seller and the local team dealer, I believe the team dealer gets the business 90 percent of the time because they can provide immediate assistance if any type of issues arise.

Hayden: Having some stock in the store is a good way to battle the online companies. When comparing products online versus in-person, it makes a big difference in establishing the quality and durability. Customers may look online and think our goals are equal to our competitors', but when they see our goals in person the difference is quite evident. Dealers who have some of our soccer goals in stock sell more because customers have a chance to experience how significant the frame, netting and poles are, for instance. This helps our dealers sell larger sizes as well because the customer can see and feel the weight of our goal and how easy it is to set



Kwik Goal's Pro Premier Portable Competition Goal is ideal for facilities that want the international goal look but cannot sink ground sleeves into the ground. The goal includes an aluminum base frame and two back net posts.

up and take down regardless of the size.

Pifer: Many dealers offer online purchasing options and competitive pricing. However, when it comes to purchasing goals, many customers prefer a face-to-face conversation to help them choose a goal. Dealers can help a customer sort through the different options in material, size, netting, net attachment and official requirements.

Roth: Most customers need help deciding which type and size of soccer goal suits their needs best. Any help the team dealer can give puts them at an advantage up against point-and-click retailers.

St. George: Team dealers have the upper hand in most of the interactions, as the equipment upsell from uniform sales is typically available. Dealers should never discount the importance of in-person meetings, product selection recommendations and working with manufacturers that are loyal to non-direct distributions.

Clare: Team dealers can compete with a hands-on service approach the customer or school cannot get from an online retailer.

Do dealers even need to hold inventory in the goal category?

Hayden: Yes, I think dealers should hold some inventory. Customers will pay full MAP retail and sometimes more if they know they can just buy the goals on the spot rather than wait for them to be delivered. A small representative stock amount and a demo on the floor help sell more goals. If you have them, they will sell, especially in season and the holidays.

Fishman: Yes, it is important for dealers to hold some inventory. It is hard to keep in stock a large soccer goal, but nets and other equipment are very important and manageable at little expense. The more that is in stock, the easier it is for the dealer to keep the customer from shopping around.

Livingston: When we can ship soccer goals the next day, there really isn't any need for dealers to stock soccer goals. But, the most obvious reason to not stock soccer goals is the amount of space needed, as well as the cost of the goals themselves.

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New European L-shaped portable goals in 3"x 4" elliptical aluminum tubing throughout from Goal Sporting Goods feature channeled tubing that allows for easy and quick net attachment.

St. George: We don't believe that dealers need to hold the inventory of physical goals, but they should be maintaining at least two pairs of net.

Roth: No. We are typically able to ship soccer goals immediately, which means they can arrive within three-to-five working days anywhere in the U.S.

What are the advantages in directly drop shipping?

Hayden: This is the other advantage of having stock — to demonstrate the quality for customers looking for larger goals or multiple sets.

Livingston: These goals can be very

cumbersome to deal with, so it's much easier to for the dealer to have us ship directly to their customers.

Clare: The advantage for dealers is not tying up cash carrying inventory.

Roth: There's no cash tied up in inventory and the units are delivered directly to the customer.

St. George: Soccer play can require different sized goals and take up considerable storage spaces. If a dealer maintains stock of nets and accessories, the drop shipping of the goals should add to a successful endeavor.

Fishman: Most goal sales are drop shipped with little or no after-sales involvement from the road rep or store. There are no deliveries and no hassle.

Pifer: Most dealers do not have the space to stock a significant quantity and variety of goals. The drop ship option not only allows them to save space, but also increases the likelihood of availability and quick delivery. ■

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What can dealers do to promote goal safety?

Sophia Pifer: Most importantly, dealers can remind each and every customer of the need for goal anchors. Reputable goal manufacturers will offer a variety of anchors to accommodate different goal models and playing surfaces. Dealers should consider offering oversized goal safety stickers.

Darren Clare: Dealers can help by making sure their customers read the safety instructions that come with the goal and emphasize the importance of using anchors or sandbags.

Jeff Roth: Dealers need to educate customers about the proper use, transport and storage of soccer goals.

Jonathan Hayden: There has been a lot of discussion and some lawsuits regarding metal goals falling on children. As a portable goal company, Bownet doesn't have the metal crossbars that can cause injury. Bownet soccer goals are durable, yet flexible to set up and take down compared to metal goals. It makes



a difference to a customer, coach or parent to know that even our 8x24 goals don't have a solid crossbar and work great as a durable and portable soccer goal. Portable soccer goals make a big difference in "after-game safety" as

well since they can be taken down quickly and safely, unlike metal goals that are often left on fields, inviting children to play on them unsupervised.

Jon Fishman: Goal safety is and will always be a priority in the sport and we firmly believe that the safety of our goals is the number one criteria when designing and building our products. Form, fit and function drive the on-the-field design and we offer several methods to safely secure our goals. Educating the customer is very important, from using appropriate anchor systems to proper ways of moving goals.

Goal safety is and will always be a priority in the sport and we firmly believe that the safety of our goals is the number one criteria when designing and building our products.

Chris Livingston: The easiest option is to sell the No-Tip soccer goals that Bison offers. The ballast drums/wheel kit combination is part of the installation process so there isn't a way to forget to anchor the goals.

Laura St. George: Our Touchline Soccer Goal line includes ground anchors. It is not just a suggestive measure of safety, but a law in many states that ground anchors must be used. Each dealer needs to ensure that he is partnering with manufacturers who put safety in the forefront of their engineering and ship goals with safety accessories and sticker markings. ■

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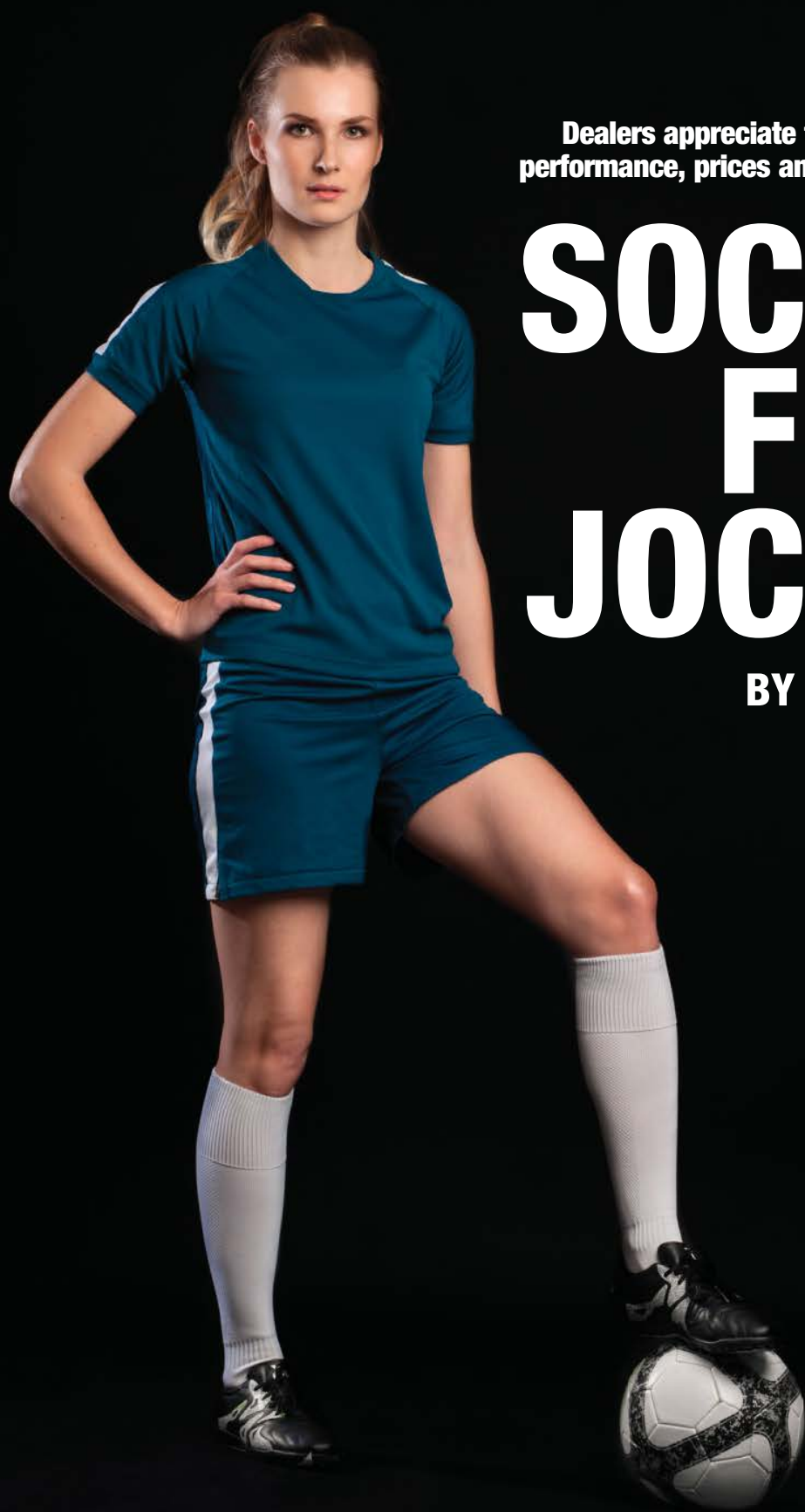
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Dealers appreciate the category as performance, prices and margins rise.

SOCKS FOR JOCKS

BY MIKE MAY



For decades, athletic socks were a standard and necessary commodity for the athletically inclined, fitness buffs, workout enthusiasts and anybody involved in competitive sports. For generations, those socks were made of cotton and the majority of them were white, perhaps with some stripes at the top.

Fast forward to 2016 and you'll find the socks for these same athletes are colorful, contain high-tech fabrics and fibers, are often

customized for a specific team or even an individual player and actually help with performance and recovery.

In team sports, final decisions on uniform colors and designs also impact what kind of sock is worn by the players on the team. In some cases, the chosen color and design of the sock may even dictate the design of the team's uniform. It all adds up to socks becoming one of the hottest — and highest margin — products in a dealer's bag.

"The sock category just continues to grow and

expand," observes **Corey Bockhaus**, director of communications at the **Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA)**.

According to the SFIA's "Manufacturers Sales by Category Report," wholesale sales of socks have grown every year since 2010, when they were just over a \$1 billion business. In 2015, wholesale sales of socks in the U.S. had grown by 19 percent to nearly \$1.2 billion.

"The popularity of the sock category with athletes from all sports has been a driving force behind this category's growth," adds Bockhaus. "The customization and personalization of the sock business has fueled the growth of the category. All indications are that sales of socks will continue to grow."

Dealers Sock it To Them

The evolution of the sock from being a minor accessory to a stand-alone category is eye-opening.

"Socks are big business," states **Bart Rapp**, president of **Soccer Village**, Cincinnati, OH. In fact, socks are such an important part of its business that Soccer Village utilizes as many as 30 sock mannequins to showcase its sock collection.

Rapp says that while boys like the new types of socks, the girls love them and help drive the business.

"The more colors they use to make socks, the more the girls like it," he says. "The girls are phenomenal for helping to drive sales of fashion socks."

Team dealers around the U.S. feel that choosing the right kind of sock is a key part of the uniform decision-making process by teams and schools.

"The final decision on the color or design of the team sock helps make or break the overall appearance and appeal of the team uniform," says **Joel Dunn**, president of **Joker Team Sports**, Miami Gardens, FL. "The final decision on the color of the team sock is an important one."

"In rugby, the style and design of the sock are as important as the design of the jersey," says **Matt Godek**, owner of **Matt Godek Rugby & Soccer Supply**, Merrifield, VA.

"For our teams, the color of the sock matters a lot," agrees **Tony Carter**, co-owner of **Duke's Sporting Goods**, Elizabethtown, KY. "It's a key part of the overall uniform decision."

Of course, there are times where the decision to pick a particular sock is based as much on brand as it is color and design.

"We carry standard colors in an Under Armour performance sock — black, royal, red, navy and gray," says **Trevor Knupp**, team salesman at **Cleats, Inc.**, Glendale, AZ. "They are about twice the cost of our comparable Pro Feet sock and they sell primarily to high school-plus age players who prefer the brand recognition of Under Armour."

While there are many different colors of socks



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from which to choose, tradition still rules the foot in many parts of the country.

“Our most popular colors are basically what you would expect. Black, navy, royal, red and white seem to round up the top five,” reports Knupp. “We do, however, sell a decent amount of what you would not expect, like the Columbia blue, purple, orange and teal, just because we carry a selection that few others in our area provide.”

“We still sell lots of traditional colors such as navy, royals and reds,” adds Carter.

“The local rec teams seem to stick with basic, standard, solid colors,” says **Kevin Licata**, manager of **Medallions Sporting Goods**, Jupiter, FL. “It simplifies the order and keeps it under budget.”

“You can never go wrong with a solid, traditional color,” says Godek. “It’s easy to replace and never goes out of style.”

Despite the fact that great strides have been made in the production and design of athletic socks, some traditional types of sock are making a comeback.

“Original stirrup socks are popular again in baseball,” notes Licata. “They are especially true with 15-19-year olds.”

Just as some teams may wear a special jersey to signify a special game, many teams are inclined to wear special kinds of socks at certain times of the year.

“We are seeing an increase in sales of the old ribbon socks,” notes Carter.

According to Carter, Dunn and Knupp, many team sports athletes want to spend more money to upgrade their sock selection.

“We are seeing a big increase in sales of customized socks by basketball and volleyball teams,” says Carter. “Teams are putting their school name, logo and mascot on the socks.”

“With access to images created on computers, teams are visualizing these images appearing on their socks,” adds Dunn. “The sock industry is being heavily influenced by creativity and imagination.”

“Most frequently, we will get custom socks and stirrup requests in regards to meeting team color needs that may otherwise be hard to meet,” says Knupp. “For example, we have a team that orders turquoise/grey/black stirrups and a team that does black/orange stirrups that would otherwise be impossible to find in a stock option. A huge part of a business is custom decoration, so we also have requests to embroider socks and stirrups with team logos.”

Just as some teams may wear a special jersey to signify a special game, many teams are inclined to wear special kinds of socks at certain times of the year.

“There are months like October when every team wants some version of pink in their socks because it’s Breast Cancer Awareness month,” says Dunn.

The Customization Game

Undoubtedly driving the team sock business – other than performance and, to a lesser extent,

What Athletes Want



AS MANUFACTURERS UP THEIR SOCK GAMES, it’s important that they never lose touch with the voices of their customers. After all, the customer is always right.

So to find out exactly what the target market for team socks really wants, *Team Insight* tracked down two prime candidates and found out what they are looking for — and why.

“I have many, many socks,” says **Jessica Nodell**, a high school senior basketball and volleyball player at **Berean Christian School** in West Palm Beach, FL. “I have so many that they take up two drawers.”

Why so many? “Socks are a way to show personality and style,” she explains. “It’s a simple way to jazz up your outfit.”

“If you are wearing socks with the same color detail as the color on your shirt and shorts, then it ties the outfit together,” Nodell, a co-captain of her school’s varsity volleyball and basketball teams, adds.

“I probably have anywhere from 25-30 socks, which are primarily set out for games and athletic events, and they vary in color,” says **Matt Ryan**, a football player at the **University of Charleston** in Charleston, WV. “Some are generic white or black, orange and black, blue and red.” He even has pink ones for October, in support of Breast Cancer Awareness month.

“Honestly, I think socks are one of the biggest attributes to a team’s uniform,” he adds. “My

socks definitely have to match the uniform that I wear.”

Ryan prefers black as his everyday sock color and he usually wears the regular mid-length, Dri-Fit (Nike) sock. “I own many, many pairs of the Nike Elite socks because they’re great for any athletic event, plus they hold up pretty well,” he says. “My socks are usually Nike, unless my coach tells me otherwise.”

Nodell points out that her color preference depends on the coaches and their requirements.

“Some coaches like the team to wear the same sock, which means you don’t have the freedom to show your style,” she says. In that case, she prefers to wear black or a color that would accent the jersey.

“I find myself wearing black socks for both basketball and volleyball, but I tend to wear more colored socks with basketball because in basketball the manufacturers offer a variety of shoes with different colors, which makes it easier to match with your socks.”

As far as sock types, she prefers thick to the newer thinner versions.

“I find myself wearing two socks in a game – usually a short sock under a crew sock – because of all the quick agility movement,” Nodell says. “I need extra support and comfort from my sock. If I only wear one sock that is thin, I end up getting blisters.”

Sock makers, are you listening? ■

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price – is customization. Teams want their own colors, logos, numbers and even mascots as part of their sock design.

“Customization is becoming increasingly popular as many teams and corporations prefer to have their names and logos on socks,” points out **Lee Tarnoff**, president of **Red Lion**. “Frequently our customers prefer our custom socks to the major brand names.” Red Lion offers both custom socks in traditional knit-in designs and also in sublimation printing.

“Sublimation is growing in popularity all the time,” adds Tarnoff. “There is almost no design or logo that can’t be duplicated exactly. The choice of colors in a design is also almost unlimited.”

“We are finding that each sport and athlete is challenged with unique conditions that demand special solutions from their socks,” says **Laura Siciliano**, director of brand development on the **Under Armour** business for **Gildan**. “We design socks with specific cushioning, venting and grip to help address these unique challenges.”

While sublimation is undoubtedly a game-changing technology finding application in socks, some sock makers feel that sublimation, at times, has more sizzle than substance.

“The sublimation trend is slowing down and the consumer is moving back to a more conservative

sock,” says Siciliano. “You can see this happening on game day on the field. Athletes are choosing core colors with strategic color enhancements. We feel that there is still a consumer looking for novelty, but that is decreasing.”

Others remain unsold on the sublimation trend. “Sublimation is more of a play for the big brands

“We are finding that each sport and athlete is challenged with unique conditions that demand special solutions from their socks.”

Laura Siciliano, Gildan

like Nike and Under Armour, where price points don’t come into play as much,” says **Mary Hannah Statham**, marketing manager at **Implus**. At Implus, technology continues to drive product, she adds. “We are continuing with arch support and seamless toe,” says Statham. “And we are using fibers that move moisture away from the skin to the outside of the shoe to prevent friction and blisters. Also, camo is a new trend in team socks.”

Implus socks cover all of the core sports, Statham adds. “Most of the team socks are specific to a sport, but we make a generic AllSport sock that captures all of the various sports,” she says.

Beyond sublimation, technology is taking center

stage at **United Sports Brands**, which owns the Shock Doctor and McDavid brands. It produces socks with a very pragmatic, performance-driven attitude.

“Our socks are manufactured in our own factory in Switzerland using state-of-the art machinery with expert craftsmanship,” says **Daniella Gasaway**, USB’s director of marketing communications.

“These medical grade products are designed with graduated compression that utilize higher levels of compression at the ankles and reduced compression at the calves,” she adds. “Blood circulation is increased and recovery is enhanced and accelerated.”

At Pearsox there has been an increase in demand for more detailed logos as well as quicker turnaround times, according to **Scott Schulman**, sales operations manager at **Pearsox**, along with an increase in the need for a quick mock-up and high resolution graphics.

“We have also noticed the need to simplify the process and styles, making it easier on everyone involved,” he adds. “The custom sock market is still a growing as there are many teams who overlook the sock as an essential part of the uniform. This is changing as the boom for casual and dress socks continue, so will that in the team sports side as well.” ■

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Setting the table: Sublimation offerings from (left to right) Champro, Cliff Keen, Under Armour and Holloway.



DOLLARS AND SENSE SUBLIMATION 4.0

Speed and customization sell to teams in today's Amazon world.

By Nancy Baeder

Sublimation has “Ubered” the team uniform business. With a re-imagined sublimation custom design experience and less inventory to carry, dealers have a platform for selling in an Amazon world. By all counts it’s working out well.

“I love it. There’s so much more for me to show my customers now that virtually every vendor offers it,” says **Ed Knapper**, general manager of **AI’s Sporting Goods**, Wilmington, DE. “It’s easy to get all the logos, colors, fonts, names and numbers and it’s delivered to us complete. Our customers love the detailed custom designs and prices have come down a little.”

Sublimation uses artwork to create a unique look. “It’s a huge closer for the sale when we can show a custom design in their team colors,” says **Jeff Schaefer**, general manager of **E.I. Sports & Apparel**, Evansville, IN. “Once you create the vision, they want it and price becomes secondary.”

Yet delivery can be a bit of a hang-up. “Today’s expectation is for getting it NOW,” says **Kim Karsh**, owner of **California Pro Sports**, Harbor City, CA. “Blame it on Amazon. The mentality of the younger coaches is ‘I can have it today,’ and the idea of lead times makes no sense to them. The vendors that can deliver quickly win.”

To speed up the process, many vendors are improving design and ordering systems and manufacturing in the USA. “We know that when our customers receive a high quality North American-made product in a timely matter the chance of repeat business grows,” says **Rich Nigro**, director of sales and operations at **Dynamic Team Sports**. “Delivery is always on a

customer’s mind.

Who really wants to wait six-to-eight weeks for their uniforms?”

A strong value equation for sublimated gear is living up to all the hype. Lightweight, breathable fabrics are durable, colorful and comfortable. Ink colors are truer, making color matching easier. And dealers love that they’re delivered fully decorated and ready to package and distribute.

“Ordering sublimated is a pretty simple process for us with a lot of options for our customers. We love that everything comes in done and we see everything going that way,” says **Brian Read**, owner of **Read’s Sporting Goods**, Bloomington, IL. “Our baseball coaches were reluctant to move away from traditional tackle twill, but once they had first-hand experience with the sublimated products they recognized the advantages of lighter weight fabrics, comfort and design.”

It’s hard to beat from a dollars and “sense” perspective. “With pre-set pricing and no inventory investment, sublimation works to the benefit of team dealers,” says **Meg Daniels**, senior product line manager at **Under Armour**.

Team dealers selling sublimation have infinitely more business opportunities. “Sublimation allows team dealers to maximum their customization ability while reducing their inventory. Prior to sublimation printing, these two objectives would have been counter to each other,” says **Wesley Horne**, CEO of **GameTime**.

In short, sublimation has refreshed the team business.

“It has definitely created new opportunities for us by improving our efficiency to build and sell custom,” says **Brent Compton**, owner of

Pacesetter Sports, Terra Haute, IN. “We were skeptical in the beginning that the process would be complex and the uniforms wouldn’t hold up, but it turned out quite the opposite. It makes doing custom more affordable and more spontaneous.”

Service-Driven Momentum

“The technology has obviously created a phenomena, conceptually and practically, and we have become increasingly fond of the changes it’s bringing to our business,” says **Compton**. “It’s exciting and rewarding. Folks like me are creatures of habit, but it has opened my mind to what’s possible and to service customers in a new way.”

Technology advances in fabrics, software, ink, paper, printers and presses, and service enhancements in delivery, online designers and ordering systems have all combined to drive robust growth and mainstream the process. Each vendor has developed a distinct approach and the options for delivery and design vary.

“Most of the big boys have perfected their processes for dye coverage, color vibrancy and the right fabrics. That’s their expertise,” says **Karsh**. He has considered sublimating in-house but has decided to align himself with well-vetted vendors.

“Frankly it’s easier to let them do it,” he adds. “It’s a long-term investment because the printers are expensive and it requires a large press, a pattern maker and sewers.”

Dealers love that their vendors handle all the complexity. “It’s easier for dealers because they don’t have to price out different screens or a



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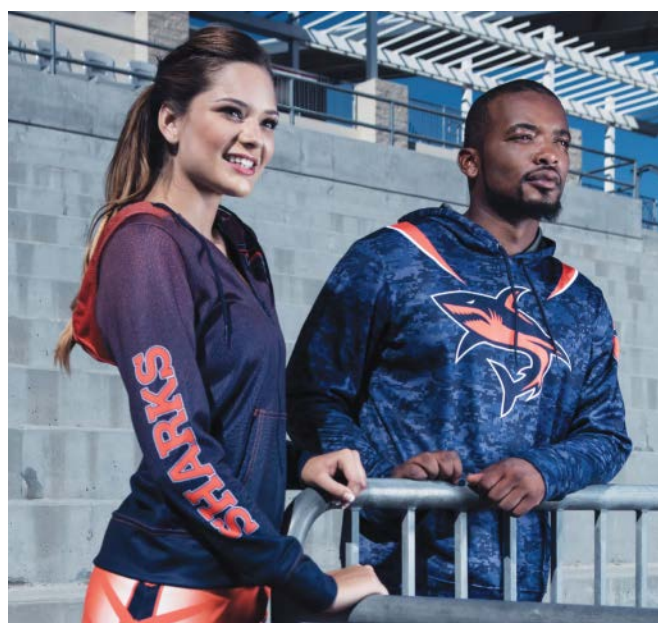
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five-color logo versus a two-color print. The number of colors doesn't matter; you just need good artwork," explains **Chad Clark**, vice president at **Cliff Keen**. "We equate it to baking the perfect chocolate chip cookie. There are many different ingredients, factors and techniques that go into it. Dealers benefit immensely from dealing with vendors who know the process thoroughly and can control the quality of the product."

Even more appealing, dealer costs are straightforward. "Sublimation is an easy sell for dealers because teams are able to build out their uniforms and see them immediately," says **Kristina Peterson-Lohman**, corporate communications director at **Wilson**. "It also eliminates the need to account for additional costs for decoration and labor."

Design and convenience increased Compton's sublimation business from volleyball and soccer in 2013 to almost every sport. "One big reason is the creativity to do what you want," he says. "Our tech-savvy customers go online and play around with designs. Others need our help, but once they see it in their design and colors, they want it. Every coach loves being able to order fill-ins without a minimum."

Easy reorders are a major advantage. Because sublimation designs are basically art files sent to a printer, products technically will not discontinue. "Coaches no longer face the dilemma of discontinued jerseys, where the only options are reordering for the whole team or sewing up the holes," says **Marty Spellman**, national sales manager at **Champro**. "Every garment we make has a reference number inside so it's easy to reorder if you need a few more pieces in three months or five years."

Coaches love that they can always order more of the same. "We have one youth wrestling coach who has ordered the exact same uniform for 10 years. He gets the fill-ins he needs for new members and it looks exactly the same as the others," says Schaefer. "Before sublimation that singlet would have been discontinued three or four times in those 10 years."

Schaefer says sublimation has been great for business. "With sublimation we do design, artwork, approvals and the vendors do all the work," he says. "It also takes pressure off of our print shop and allows us to expand to additional business."

His sublimation business is expanding to compression items and spiritwear. "We've done some compression sleeves and a few football teams wear sublimated compression shirts under their jerseys that are customized with a player number or mascot," says Schaefer. "All of our vendors offer spiritwear lines, so when a booster parent calls we can offer it as an option."

Knapper also sees sublimation leaking into

other areas. "We're starting to do more socks, headbands, sweatshirts and jackets," he says. "We approach the sale with two questions, 'When do you need it?' and 'Can you afford it' and go from there. Keep in mind that not every customer is looking for sublimation, so we still do a lot of screenprinting."

Sublimated socks are a great way to expand the uniform sale.

"Sublimated socks allow the dealers to be as creative as they want, while erasing issues of color matching and logo limitations," says **Brad Davis**, national sales manager at **Twin City Knitting**.

TCK is launching its sublimated socks program this fall with a variety of stock designs, as well as the ability to do custom designs. "We have experimented with this product for a few years now to ensure quality that lives up to the Twin City name," says Davis. "Our knitting techniques reduce sock grin-through and our yarns are most conducive for image clarity and color. We also limit the print area to the leg to ensure that the performance of the foot stays intact."

A strong value equation for sublimated gear is living up to all the hype. Lightweight, breathable fabrics are durable, colorful and comfortable.

Delivery is a critical service aspect. Teams often form late, new players join existing teams, and players lose jerseys. There are many reasons why teams need fast delivery and vendors address these issues in a variety of ways. Many vendors are making quick delivery possible with USA manufacturing.

"Speed of manufacturing has always been a key differentiator for us. Our order process is completely transactional, from online order entry through manufacturing," says **Chris Kollmeyer**, product development manager at **Teamwork Athletic**. Teamwork offers a full custom option through its ProSphere Plus service line and template-driven sublimation through its Spectrum brand.

Game Gear believes that Made in the USA resonates with its customers. "With the current political and economic challenges, our USA-made products help us deliver one of the fastest lead times," says national sales manager **Danny Marcario**. The company's new panel sublimation innovation decorates the front panel of a shirt or jersey or the side panels of a pant or shorts to save time and reduce cost for customers.

Brute has developed a proprietary single flow process to deliver custom designed uniforms quickly and competitive with foreign imports on price. "Our process allows a shorter time frame than many dealers can source stock apparel and add their own decoration," says president **John Purnell**.

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“One key to driving down delivery times is all of our products are Made in the USA.”

“Now that companies are doing it in the states it has gotten quicker,” says Read.

Schaefer has experienced delays when dealing with companies that contract it out and run into production issues. “When it’s done overseas, they are helpless to fix it when things go wrong,” says Schaefer. “We prefer to buy USA-made.”

Lead times, design options, delivery and online ordering systems are all things dealers evaluate when choosing sublimation vendors.

“Price and delivery are the two things we hear about from our customers. We get more business on delivery than price,” says Karsh. “It takes vision by the manufacturers. It may be hard for the bigger vendors to understand how much difference delivery times make to us when they have all the business they can handle.

“For us, Teamwork has it down with no mistakes and delivery in two weeks if we follow all their parameters,” Karsh adds. He also compliments Champro for its 10-day turnaround and a good selection for rush orders.

Knapper also chooses to buy Made in the USA, and also Canada and Mexico. “One recent improvement is the weekly update reports from

bigger vendors such as Under Armour, Alleson, Wilson, Rawlings and Dynamic,” he says. “We do a lot with Dynamic; they were first and I love dealing with them. I get a lot of help with artwork and I can still pick up the phone and talk to someone. Maybe that’s old-school, but I appreciate the way they operate.”

Many things have changed. “The six-to-eight weeks turnaround time is a whole lot better than the four-to-six months we used to wait for custom uniforms,” notes Compton.

Delivering on promises means aligning with the right vendors.

“Dealers are starving for sublimation vendors they can trust. They have built a strong reputation in their market and one mismanaged order can put that reputation at risk,” says **Brad Sullivan**, director of marketing at **Holloway**. “We believe dealers will choose the vendor that consistently delivers a quality product that arrives on time and exceeds expectations.”

True Custom or Templated?

If you take a broad brush to the sublimation business, artwork is key to controlling design and delivery. As the technology matures, two design directions have emerged — full custom and template-driven.

The technology began with full custom “sky’s the limit design” that readily accommodates custom artwork. That option still exists at

many vendors. The tradeoff is a little time and a little cost for graphic designers and art approvals.

As sublimation has mainstreamed, vendors offered template-driven designs with a series of menu-driven choices. The use of pre-loaded graphics helps speed the design process. Many have the option to upload custom graphics, adding some time and cost. These templates meet or exceed the expectations of many teams and make the design process more foolproof.

“Our customers go right on, design it the way they want, see it and approve it. It no longer takes an artist’s time and a lot of tedious back and forth revisions,” says Read. “Whether it’s Adidas miTeam or Rawlings’ my locker, it’s very simple. All I have to do is order sizes and numbers.”

“It’s definitely the intent of the larger vendors to channel or restrict the options with their uniform builders. It makes sense logistically and it makes the design process simple and straightforward,” says Compton. “When you want to do custom artwork with any vendor it adds time and cost to the order.”

All the progress still has limitations. “In my view, sublimation has evolved to where there is stock and custom sublimation — cookie cutter templates or true custom work,” says Schaefer. “I have had occasions where major vendors walk

away from a large order because of a custom logo placement or a camouflage pattern that isn’t one of their 10 patterns.”

Back when Dynamic introduced sublimation in the late 1990s, it meant full custom. While the technology has evolved to make things easier and more reliable, there is still a market for full custom. “Uniform builders are a great way for a customer to quickly visualize their ideas,” says Nigro. “That being said, we see a trend for custom designed uniforms. The industry is looking for something unique in a saturated market.”

For the same reason, many dealers continue to offer custom design work to their customers. “We employ a full-time graphic artist so we can put artwork in front of our customers and wow them,” says Schaefer. “With artwork, some vendors are good and some take very long. In my opinion it’s tough to find a vendor that does everything well — artwork, approval process, order entry, and delivery times.”

“We still push 100 percent full custom options rather than templated sublimation options. If you can dream it up, we can design it,” says **Sean Murphy**, CEO at **3N2**. “We have seen an enormous number of new entrants into this space, but we are still seeing a lot of growth since we have been doing it so long and control the end-to-end process.” ■

10 REASONS SUBLIMATION IS ON THE RISE

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4. Vendor expertise
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On Deck: Private Label Sublimation



The team business is like no other, with its particular brand of challenges. Not long after becoming a Nike team dealer in 2011, **Ken Kennedy** became frustrated enough with the standard method of buying and inventorying product that he set out to change things.

To his mind, purchasing from a large variety of domestic suppliers and competing in a crowded marketplace has led team dealers down a path of declining and eroding margins. With a little investigation he felt the obvious solution was to source private label custom sublimated uniforms to team dealers. Never out of stock, no inventory, one-piece fill-ins, color matching from year to year, and cutting edge decoration.

But how to get there? Well, get on a plane and tour numerous overseas factories, 25 to be exact.

That's the approach taken by Kennedy, now managing director of **FSG America**, a company that offers private label sublimated uniforms.

Kennedy discovered Fancy Sports Gear (FSG), a Chinese manufacturer dedicated to producing small-run, custom team orders, about two-thirds of the way through 25 factory visits.

"What sets FSG apart is both the scale that they do it and their commitment to the particular challenges of the team uniform business," says Kennedy. "I recognize that the average team dealer is simply unprepared to get on a plane, fly 14 hours and tour dozens of factories. But I was familiar with overseas sourcing from 20 years in the custom golf accessory market."

Kennedy was impressed that FSG could deliver state-of-art products of superior quality from an

ISO9001 certified factory. "Literally 10 pieces in 10 sizes with 10 names and 10 different numbers is no problem," he says. "They had the right fabric, the best equipment and the design skills to make durable rugby and football jerseys. Anyone can make a basketball or soccer jersey."

FSG America was born in 2016. "FSG America is an extension of the overseas factory. It is not a middleman," emphasizes Kennedy. "There is no markup." Quite simply, if it costs \$20 for a jersey in China the North American team dealer will pay \$20 plus duty (which is 32 percent) and freight. The team dealer has the convenience of someone else dealing with clearance issues, brokerage and overseas freight.

"The benefits to the team dealer of selling private label cannot be over-emphasized," says Kennedy. "The team business has literally become a race to zero to see who will sell the uniform for the lowest price. By selling their own brand dealers can sell on the merits of the product and their skills. FSG has done all the development work — we have sourced out the right fabric, developed the right sewing technique and pattern and time tested the sizing."

FSG America guarantees four-week delivery, two-week rush service, 10-piece minimums with one-piece fill-ins, artwork support and custom designs. A uniform builder will be available in mid-2017. ■



Get Tough

When it comes to names and numbers on team jerseys, there's no quicker, more cost effective method in the industry today than heat transfers. With ever-advancing fabrics and bright, sublimated designs, however, some might still be shelling out orders to a screenprinter, all in the name of "anti-scorch safety" or overall durability.

I'm here to tell you that you can personalize brightly colored and sublimated jerseys using heat transfers and save your business hundreds — even thousands — of dollars every year using a heat press. Just follow these tips and tricks when searching out a heat transfer material and you won't lose to scorching, dye migration and bleed-through, or the wear and tear from even the toughest of athletic use.

When decorating on brightly colored or sublimated uniforms, you'll want to be sure that what you're heat applying to the uniform stays true to its original and intended color. This is most common when using white heat transfer vinyl, but can happen to many other lighter-colored materials. The heat can activate dyes in the fabrics, while at the same time adhering them to (and through) the heat transfer material.

Thanks to physics, the letters and numbers end up tinged with the fabric's color, and are

otherwise not as bright and brilliant as they should be. For instance, and perhaps most commonly, white letters and numbers can turn pink after being heat applied on a bright red jersey. You might have even had a similar experience. To avoid these instances, it's important to use a heat transfer material that inhibits dye migration, or "bleeding," and can be applied at a lower temperature.

Football is a particularly aggressive, full-contact sport, so your uniform decorating methods need to reflect this fact. The heat transfer material that you use when decorating football jerseys should be durable and resistant to the elements of football. Manufacturers will indicate whether a heat transfer material can or should be used for full contact sport garments; if they are durable and resistant to abrasion.

You can also use poly twill for a durable, more authentic look, but keep in mind that this look comes at a higher price point since it requires sewing for permanent application.

When it comes to using a heat press for decoration, by taking into account the fabric content in the sports jersey and what heat transfer material you use, you'll always be ready for victory. ■

This article was supplied by Paul Sabatini, Stahls' ID.

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SUBLIMATION 2017





FASHION SHOW

11



13



14



15



12



1. Holloway's fitted track Hero design line is a popular new look that rounds out its track collection.

2. Under Armour's Armourfuse Sideline is fully customizable team product available in a fleece hoody/pant, quarter-zip and polo (men's only).

3. Form fitting construction, self-fabric or knit mitered V-Neck and arm trim from **Dynamic** is priced extremely competitively in both adult and youth.

4. Champro's Eugene Single-ply reversible basketball Juice uniform.

5. The **Cliff Keen** Compression Gear top is now available in a fully sublimated version and features flat lock stitching and athletic extended tail to stay tucked in.

6. Fully sublimated custom team gear is available from **MyHouse Sports Gear**.

7. Available in youth, adult and women's (in photo) styles, **Brute** singlets are made of CPStex heavyweight fabric and uses its Sublitek printing process to offer bold color and customization that won't peel, crack or fade.

8. Game Gear offers panel sublimation that allows it to sublimates the entire front panel of a shirt or jersey and/or the side panels of a pant or short.

9. Sublimated volleyball top from **Pacific Coast Sportswear**.

10. Full Custom Jerseys from **3N2** designed for Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

11. Wilson's Lady Sluggers Fast-pitch Style LS513 is made with Pro Fb Fabric.

12. Twin City Knitting's Hurricane design features the customer's original art with drop-in logo.

13. Holloway's sublimated hoodie utilizes its uniform builder to allow full-service access to upload a custom logo on any style.

14. Alleson Athletic is one of the leaders in sublimation technology for team sports.

15. Teamwork Athletic's ProSphere Face-Off lacrosse uniform features full sublimation.

COMING TO A DEALER NEAR YOU...

You'd be surprised at what manufacturers have on the drawing table.

All sports are moving to thinner, tighter, more breathable materials. The Arizona Diamondbacks became the first MLB team to use sublimation, adding snakeskin patterns to their uniforms in 2015. Ohio State has sublimated Buckeye icons on its regular jerseys. The Olympics showcased sublimated metallic basketball numbers. What's next?



From left to right: Cliff Keen, Dynamic, Champro, Brute, 3N2

3N2

3N2 launches 3N2 Team Locker, a technology solution offered to dealers to quickly set up team stores for selling sublimated gear on a web page that is branded for that team or organization. Also look for new custom sublimation accessories and training items, including men's and women's full custom compression leggings, full custom sublimated jerseys, running shorts, headbands, arm sleeves and socks.

BRUTE

Delivery of custom designed uniforms in 15 business days or less; made in the USA. New products for Sublitek sublimation printing

include football uniforms in youth and adult sizes, in DuraGame and DuraGame with Mesh Front; fan gear for parents, leagues and coaches; compression shirts, in light and heavyweight spandex fabrics; custom singlets, in youth, adult and women's styles made of CPStex heavyweight fabric; technical cut fight shorts, an alternative to the traditional wrestling singlet; quarter-zip pullover with custom or templated designs.

CHAMPRO

New designs and a broader selection of sublimated uniforms, including track and field and wrestling. New capacity responds to demand

for faster turns, as well as design order and tracking enhancements. Express program delivers USA fully sublimated apparel 10-12 days from art approval.

CLIFF KEEN

Three new singlet templates added this fall feature proprietary MXS Compression Gear Lycra fabric and state-of-the-art graphics. Made in the USA, customized in any color, logo, lettering and graphics within three weeks of art approval. Wyoming Compression Gear top with flatlock stitching and athletic extended tail available in a fully sublimated version. The sublimated two-piece uniform is now an ap-

proved alternate wrestling uniform in some states, such as Washington. Check local state uniform rules for legality in competitions.

DYNAMIC TEAM SPORTS

First in the game, Dynamic continues to improve on delivery time and offer true custom designs, with a team of graphic artists and a uniform builder to quickly visualize ideas. New football uniforms feature form-fitting construction, self-fabric or knit mitered V-Neck and arm trim, in adult and youth sizes. Fifteen new women's softball styles, with new patterns and new prints, designed with comfort, style, durability. Delivered in 15 business days.

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SPECIAL REPORT / SUBLIMATION 4.0



GAME GEAR

Panel sublimation creates a new look on shirts, jerseys, pants and shorts that is more affordable. The design option sublimates the entire front panel of a shirt or jersey and/or the side panels of a pant or short. Numbers can be added by screenprint or heat press. All Made in the USA.

GAME TIME FABRICS

Continuing to innovate through yarn developments, Game Time has developed a process that pairs Lubrizol X4J and sublimation. Lubrizol X4J is an elastomeric fiber that allows for better fit, more even stretch, cooling properties, advanced moisture management and fabrics that are thinner and stronger. Due to the lower melting temperature of X4J, it was previously not a candidate for sublimation printing.

HOLLOWAY

New sports and designs have been added to a full array of uniforms, sideline gear and fan gear for basketball, hockey, volleyball, baseball, softball and track. The Holloway 4 & 4 guarantee means a four-piece minimum order will ship in four weeks or the next order is free. The online uniform builder has been upgraded with user-friendly enhancements and the ability to add custom art to any style.

TWIN CITY KNITTING

Launching its first sublimated socks this fall, with knitting techniques to reduce sock grin-through and yarns most conducive for image clarity and color, while ensuring the performance of the foot stays intact. Erases issues of color matching and logo limitations. Available in stock and custom designs.

MYHOUSE SPORTSWEAR

New sublimated apparel this season includes full-zip jackets, hoodies and athletic pants. Extra steps ensure that all of apparel items in every fabric deliver a perfect color match.

PACIFIC COAST SPORTSWEAR

For spiritwear, new sublimated hoodies, crew and v-neck T-shirts. Custom mockup in 24 hours or less. Custom-dyed sublimated uniforms for track and field, basketball, volleyball and wrestling are designed, printed and Made in the USA.

TEAMWORK ATHLETIC

New sublimated socks complement the ProSphere lineup, as well as additional new designs the hoodie line and new designs for 2017 uniform releases. In addition to ProSphere Custom Sublimation, the company offers template-driven sublimation through its Spectrum brand, a

budget friendly line of tech tees, tanks, long sleeve and replica jerseys for sublimated promotional and sideline wear. Spectrum's standard manufacturing time is five days, which can be upgraded to three-day service.

UNDER ARMOUR

New sublimated team apparel (a July 2017 launch) in core sideline and fleece silhouettes. Program will launch across men's and women's with fully customizable hoodies, sweats, quarter-zips and polos. Available will be three design templates in 26 team colors, personalized with player names, numbers and team mottos.

WILSON

New 112 men's sublimated baseball uniform and new 513 sublimated style for women's fast pitch softball. Special event jerseys in colorful and unique uniform designs. ■

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Online Training Takes A Leap

Can learning to be a better team dealer be as easy as A-B-C?

By Patricia Fripp

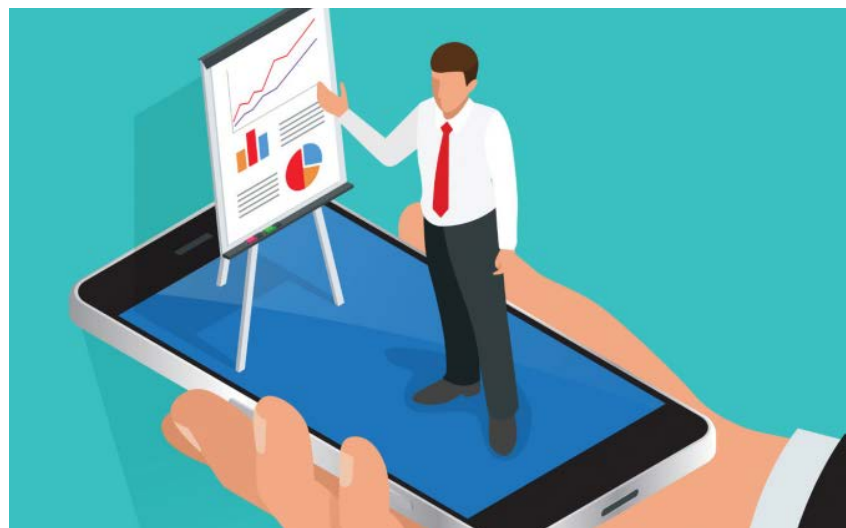
Successfully tying your shoe laces; learning the Pledge of Allegiance; memorizing the Periodic Table of Elements; conjugating irregular verbs in Spanish. What do these things have in common? They are all mastered through repetitive attempts. From a very young age, we began to achieve retention through repetition and that strategy still applies for mastering new content and new skills in business, especially one with as many details and new products as team sports.

However, when your employees attend a conference, a seminar, a board meeting or a class, even if they listen carefully, take notes, study the handouts and relate the material to their personal experiences, they will not be able to recall all of the most critical and relevant points. Neuroscience research and experience indicate that with only one exposure to the material this is the governing reality.

After the in-person training, the next critical component for retention is reinforcement through repetition. Even the most skilled, artful and memorable trainers will impact an audience's brains with very limited retention in one presentation. True retention comes from repeated exposure and practice of the skills that are taught.

That is why online training for your roadmen and sales associates makes sense.

Why should you invest in online training? Because you are a professional and you want your employees to be professional in their interactions with their



colleagues, with your competition, with potential clients, with everyone they encounter as they represent your company.

You are smart enough to know that the future belongs to the competent. True success in the world of team sports comes to those who are more multifaceted in their competence; those who seek out relationships with others in other disciplines, in and out of their companies; those who are always ready and willing to learn something new.

The value of investing in online training cannot be underestimated. This is especially relevant to the person who makes decisions around funding of training and development. When companies invest in online training programs, they reap multiple benefits:

1. An opportunity to demonstrate your commitment to the personal progress and growth of your roadmen and associates. Many younger associates will stay longer, work harder and be more committed to companies that help them learn skills that will last a lifetime.

2. A continuing education program can lead to increased confidence among your schools, leagues, coaches and athletic directors in the team sports business as a whole. When comparing individuals for promotion and new opportunities, those who actively seek professional accreditation have an advantage.

3. Continuing education programs link employees who have similar job responsibilities. They may also connect employees to programs that help them discover new opportunities available to them within the company.

4. When you provide employees with access to resources such as vendor presentations or industry online meetings, not only will they feel like they are gaining value from their relationship with their employer, but they will also be empowered to develop their professional skills.

5. Funding online training will multiply the value of in-person training by generating employee practices that will produce tangible results. As this is usually

a fraction of the cost of in-person training, more associates can benefit from the knowledge.

6. Workforces in team sports are often spread across a wide area or your employees are on the road most of the time and it may not be convenient or financially sustainable to send representatives from each area to a conference or training. Some managers are incorporating segments of the well-prepared and well-presented content from nationally known experts into their staff meetings.

7. Employees can access the online training at times and in locations that are convenient and practical for them. As many online programs are very well produced and have a "gamified" feel to them, employees are more likely to watch on their mobile devices on their own time.

When your employees, your colleagues, your managers or executives experience presentations, it is important for them to have opportunities to revisit the training. The impact of having quality online training available cannot be underestimated.

Just like learning to tie shoelaces, being able to revisit those lessons through virtual online training can make all the difference in whether those skills are imbedded and become skills that have a powerful and enduring impact for your company. ■

About the author

Patricia Fripp is a Hall of Fame keynote speaker, presentation skills expert and creator of the innovative virtual training: www.FrippVT.com.

Don't Be Uberized

Disruption in team sports is already here. Are you dealing with it?

By Randy Pennington

Are you afraid of being Uberized? You should be. Uber, Airbnb and Lyft aren't just the poster children for the Sharing Economy. They represent the continuation of a truth that is as old as civilization — active thinking about how to leverage technology to disrupt your industry.

This isn't the first round of disrupters. In the team sports business, the efforts of a company such as BSN are certainly disrupting the way business is done on many levels. Amazon changed the book industry. Netflix revolutionized the video industry. If you want to extend the examples, the telegraph destroyed the Pony Express industry.

This time it is different, however. The disruptive companies of today are transforming from an idea existing on the bleeding-edge fringe into the mainstream at record speed. Uber, for example, has grown from a single location to providing service in 300 cities worldwide in six short years.

What It Means for Team Dealers

The exponential growth of computing power has created an environment of unbridled possibilities. The question isn't IF your business and profession will experience dramatic change, but WHEN.

If it can be transformed, it will. Today it is entertainment, taxis, hotel rooms and retail — and team sports. Transportation and trucking will not be far behind thanks to driverless automobiles, robotic delivery capabilities and drones. It is not a leap to imagine accounting, law and medicine Uberized to put the right person in the right



place at the right time. Routine jobs performed by robots are not far off. Nanotechnology will eventually repair the plumbing in your home and your body without any human involvement.

Here's How You Win

Sadly, many of the businesses and occupations accepted as relevant today won't exist in the future. There are no guarantees, but you can take action today to increase your chances of succeeding tomorrow. Here are four ideas to adopt now.

1. Re-think how you acquire and deploy technology. Are your technology decisions based on what you need today or with an eye toward what could be possible tomorrow? Is technology a cost to be managed or an investment to be leveraged and exploited?

Are you locking yourself in to applications that will limit your opportunities or those that provide the highest degree of flexibility?

This should be obvious, but

start-up disrupters aren't using outdated technology. They are developing and deploying based on what's new and what's next to give them an advantage. You should do the same by fully integrating technology into every business decision. It also means being relentless in your search for new ways to leverage every dollar you spend.

2. Leverage your advantage. Team dealers have what every disrupter wants — customers. Do they love you so much that they are selling for you? Are you engaging them in on-going conversation about what would make them more successful?

The competitor coming after your way of life will serve customers in ways that you haven't yet recognized. Learning from complaints is the minimum. You must go further to turn good customers into partners who will provide ideas about what they need in the future.

3. Give yourself time to think and explore. The idea that will

disrupt your industry came into being because an individual or team invested the time to think and explore. Unfortunately, you are so busy working in your business that you aren't devoting the time and resources to think strategically about your business.

Keeping up with today's demands makes exploring the future a luxury you don't believe you can afford. It isn't a luxury, however. It is a business necessity to ensure your long-term viability.

4. Create a culture that loves change and seeks to disrupt.

The best way to keep from being Uberized is to be the disrupter in your industry. While smaller team dealers are certainly not going to mimic the BSN effort, you can add love for innovation and continual improvement to the culture of service, accountability and execution you have worked so hard to build.

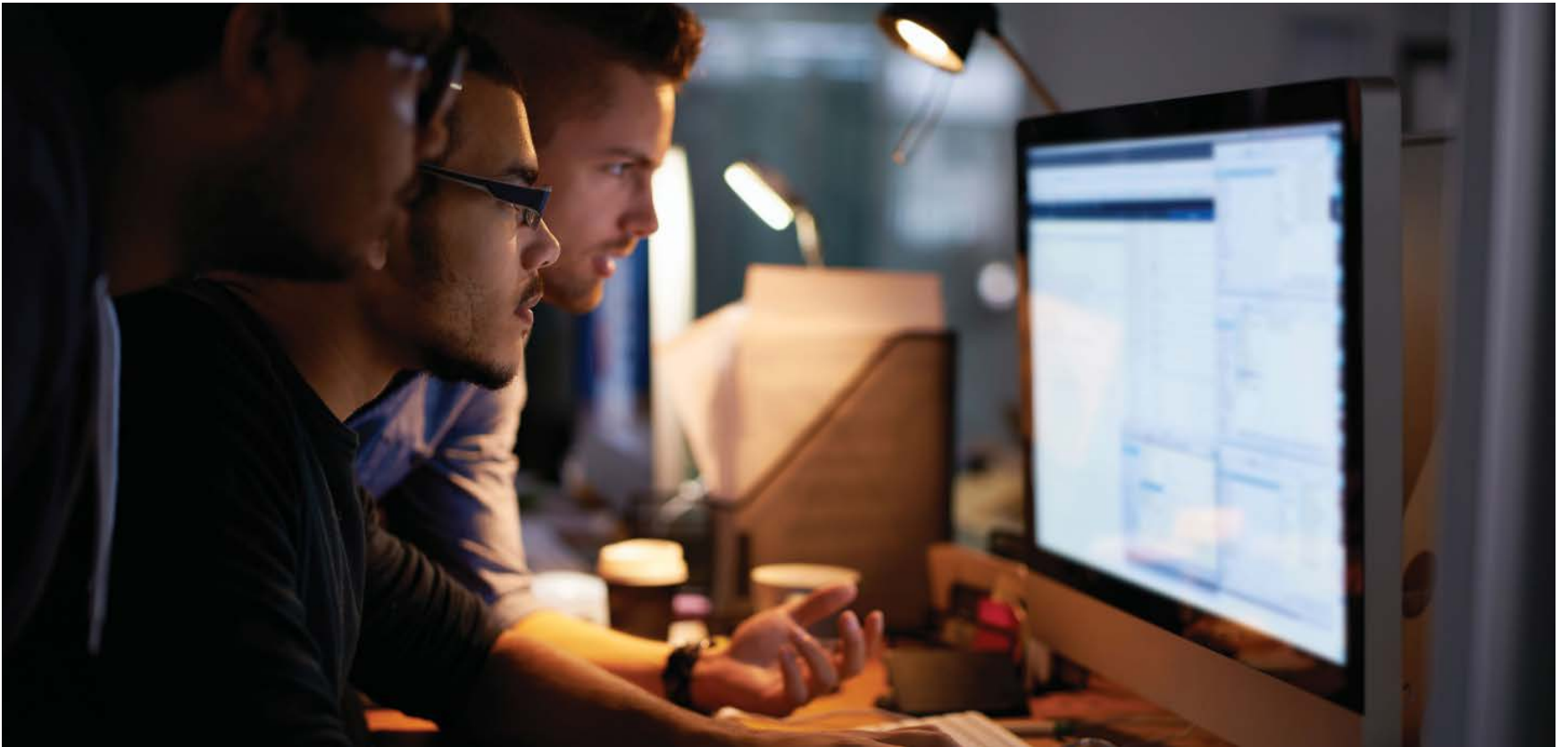
Guided By the Future

Balancing the freedom required for innovation with the discipline you need for consistent execution can be challenging, but it is not impossible. It requires intentional effort to create and sustain the new habits you need to discover the future while executing today.

The present should be guided more by the future than the past, and your future is destined to include a heavy dose of disruption and change. What are you doing today to ensure your success tomorrow? ■

About the author

Randy Pennington is an award-winning author, speaker and authority on helping organizations achieve positive results in a world of accelerating change. To contact him: info@penningtongroup.com; 704-965-2339.



I Spy, You Spy

Tips for how dealers can keep an eye on their customers and competitors.

By Heather Lutze

Shoe phones, cones of silence and British sports cars are not just for James Bond, Maxwell Smart and Mr. Gadget. Let's put on our trench coats, grab our briefcases and start our own team sports online undercover operation. This mission is yours, if you choose to accept it.

Team dealers are pulled in a thousand different directions to market themselves and build their own "brand." However, when potential clients search for you they may not necessarily know you by name, but rather their desired outcome. With a sea of businesses and so many variables for error, prospects turn to Google for answers.

The greatest marketing challenge is knowing what the client needs and to know what keyword phrases are important to them. It is also important to know how we see ourselves. We often create websites, blogs and social content on how we see ourselves and not what problem the client needs resolved. So they are turning to a robot for help. You need to appeal to the

robot and the human to be truly findable. I call this Findability — industry experts call it SEO (Search Engine Optimization).

I want to challenge you to think differently. Take a proactive approach to marketing and see if you can figure out what is inside the mind of your ideal online searcher. We often guess at what might work for online exposure — and guessing is expensive. The only way to stop guessing and to know for sure what your customers are doing is to spy on them.

Yes, spy on them.

Don't worry, this may be new to the average team dealer, but all of these tools and tricks are everyday best practices for Internet marketers. These are the best Findability tools that anyone can use — no geek knowledge required.

Know Thyself

Let's get to work spying, first on yourself. Start by using something called marketinggrader. This will help you establish a baseline for your online efforts.

Marketinggrader.com will give you a wide perspective of your

current website and will provide a quick assessment of whether or not you are including the key attributes that search engines expect of an authority web presence. Remember that search engines covet their search results. They only want to put the best of the best under keyword searches.

Are you blogging, social engaged, lead generating and other key factors? Now run your score. Once you write your score down, scroll down the page for detailed recommendations on how to improve your score.

Next go to my secret weapon — woorank.com. This site is a real "nerd" moment as it will give you a free 15-page SEO report on all the improvements that you can fix on your site for better Findability.

Run this report, save it to a PDF and give it to the webmaster in your life. Walk through the report and see how much of the "red" you can get out of the report. If you manage your site yourself, review the document and make the changes recommended.

Now for some extra credit, check out wordle.net or tagul.com. These

word cloud tools are nothing special particularly; there are a million of them online. However, if you use them correctly you can tell you how search engines interpret your site and what keyword phrase is most relevant.

Copy and paste all of your home page content into wordle.net and run the tool. The biggest word on the word cloud is the most repeated keyword on the page. Search engines want to rank the pages that are most relevant by keyword phrase. Circle the biggest keyword on the page, the second biggest and so forth.

Now you can see how search engines interpret what your home page is about. If the biggest word on the page is your name, you may want to consider what other phrases would be helpful for your home page to rank better. Oh, you can do this on a competitor's site, too.

Know Your Competition

Now it is time to spy on your competitors to see what they are up to with their online marketing.

First, try semrush.com. It is a great tool to see exactly what

keywords you currently rank under in search engines, as well as your competitors. So go ahead and run a report for your website. You will get a treasure trove of data on yourself, including keyword positions on a search result page, searches per month and any trending for that phrase.

Warning: This tool will let you run a single report before asking for your credit card. You can pull it up in different browsers to run more than one report. You are going to love this tool because it offers tons of great insights in an easy-to-understand format.

Now comes even more fun. Go to ispionage.com, a free tool that allows you to run as many reports as you like. You simply put a competitor's domain name into the tool and it will tell you what keywords they rank for and exactly what they are doing to rank.

This is like reverse engineering what they are doing and it will allow you to glean a strategy that is either aligned with them or

different. Remember, just because you think they are competitors offline does not mean they are a competitor online under a keyword phrase. You want to become findable to team customers that do not know you but should.

More extra credit: Check out keywordspy.com. Another great intelligence tool.

Now Act On It

All of this spying allows you to tap into the psyche of the searcher, whether it is a coach, AD, parent, athlete or – gasp – your competition.

A tool that will take you in that direction is an Adwords Keyword Planner, which works best if you run a paid search campaign (PPC). If not, this is the best tool by far to get keyword ideas.

Visit adwords.google.com, set up an account and use the keyword planner. You have to set up an account and enter a credit card, but you do not have to start a campaign. Just use and abuse the

keyword planner to discover your ideal keywords.

Remember, you want keyword phrases that are two or three keyword phrases long, such as “football helmet,” “school baseball uniforms” or, for me, “Social Media Expert.”

Be as specific as possible. Create a list of all the keyword phrases you would like to rank for in search engines. Consider creating content based on these keywords for blogs, social media or web pages. The tool gives you monthly search volume for keyword phrases. Try and pick keywords that have over 250 searches per month. If you are going to write content, you want to make sure it is worth your time.

To dive deeper into spying on your competitors, while at the same time optimizing your online efforts, now try spyfu.com. This tool is such a great intelligence-gathering device.

It has a number of great tools such as the Kombat tool to “fight” with your competitor (your domain versus their domain) and it breaks

it down the websites piece by piece. It also has a keyword tool called SmartSearch, where you will get search engine data from Google, Yahoo and Bing search engines.

Play around and run some reports. You will get great keyword ideas — see why that pesky competitor ranks for a particular keyword phrase and you do not. Set up a free 30-Day trial.

Have fun playing with these tools. Use them the next time you see a competitor ranking under a sought-after keyword phrase.

Use this Spying Tool Kit to dive into what they are doing, keywords they are using and how you can compete with them in results.

This message will self-destruct in 10 seconds. ■

About the author

Heather Lutze, CSP (Certified Speaking Professional) is a widely acclaimed trainer, and consultant who literally wrote the book on search engine marketing. For more: www.findability.com.

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Less is More

Seven information management questions every dealer must address.

By Barbara Hemphill

By 2020 the world will generate 35 times as much data annually as in 2010. Unfortunately, team dealers never even learned to manage paper and most are not doing any better with electronic documents.

Particularly frightening is that if you have 1000 pieces of paper, you can hire someone to sort through them looking for specific words and eventually they will find them. If you have 1000 electronic documents stored in a variety of places from employee desktops (not backed up) to external drives, they may never be found — and when they are, the company may no longer has the capability of reading the data.

Many companies — team dealers certainly among them — continue to experience cutbacks in workforce, but not in workload. For the remaining employees, accessing valuable company information becomes increasingly complex, whether it's a password, an email from a vendor documenting price agreements or crucial information about a client contract.

The computer has allowed us to generate information as never before, thus increasing our ability to create a mess. Poor information management creates inefficiency. Inefficiency costs money, causes unnecessary stress, precipitates poor customer service and directly costs untold thousands of dollars.

It's not a matter of if, but when the information management meltdown will take place at your company, unless you address the issue now. The following are seven essential questions to address.

1. What Do We Need To Keep?

Start with your company's mission and goals. What business are you in? What information do you need to reach those goals? And, of course, what information do regulators require?

You can jokingly state that the word "archives" should be spelled "our-chives" since so many companies keep information that actually belongs to other organizations.

2. In What Form?

Most information today is already in digital form. In many organizations, that information can be stored in more than one program.

Consistency is the key. Only a small portion of the information that exists on paper today is worth converting to a digital format. As the quantity of information received and generated by business increases, electronic storage options become essential. It is simply not cost-effective to use paper for long-term storage of business information.

3. For How Long?

Employees are scared to throw anything away because the boss may ask for it. Yet many of these bosses won't take the time to make a plan for records retention. When they do, the decision often breaks down in the implementation.

The advantages of electronic storage can become disadvantages, as companies painfully learn when called to account for e-mail messages sent years previously. Regardless of the reasons, the results are the same — overstuffed filing cabinets and hard drives.

Many companies hold file clean-out days, but often fail miserably. Why? Because management has failed to create the methodology, mechanics and maintenance to

enable and empower its employees to make the decisions required to eliminate unnecessary information.

4. Who Is Responsible for Filing?

One client was spending thousands of dollars annually on file storage. When they looked into the situation, they identified that one big source of the problem was that multiple members of the team were filing the same information for the same project. The problem was quickly resolved by identifying a specific member of each team to be responsible for filing the appropriate information.

Every large company has an information systems person. While some large companies have a person in charge of records retention, they are often brought into the picture only after the files are full or the information is no longer used on a regular basis.

Small businesses such as team dealers often ignore the issue entirely. It is essential to create a system so if a person leaves suddenly, the company is not left in jeopardy.

5. Who Needs Access To It?

A major challenge in information management relates to the liability created if/unauthorized people access private data. An advantage of an electronic filing system is the ability to determine who has access to what documents. It is unnerving to walk into offices and see paper and electronic documents accessible to people who have no reason to access them.

6. How Can We Find it?

The three components to an effective filing system are:

- File methodology — what documents are to be filed.

- File mechanics — how documents are filed.

- File maintenance — when documents are eliminated.

If any of the components are weak your filing system will be an ongoing frustration.

7. How Is It Backed Up?

A client recently lost 30 years of research because of a miscommunication with the IT department. A survey by Adobe of more than 5000 professionals found that 43 percent have lost important electronic documents and 70 percent of those losses were caused by a computer or hard drive failure.

What To Do

Clutter is postponed decisions. Countless companies are faced with the problem of hundreds, even thousands, of boxes of archives in storage rooms or off-site locations. Unfortunately, when management realizes the cost and the risk involved and finally decides to do something, the people who created the paper are long gone and current employees have little energy or motivation for making decisions about something that doesn't affect their ability to leave work on time.

While there is no quick fix for years of postponed decisions, avoiding the problem in the future is easy. Today's mail is tomorrow's pile, so you can't get results by ignoring the mistakes of the past. Create a system today to enable employees to make good decisions about the information they receive. ■

About the author

Barbara Hemphill is the founder of Productive Environment Institute, Raleigh, NC, and author of *Less Clutter More Life*. For more: www.BarbaraHemphill.com.



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The Loss of Soft Skills

Understanding why personal skills are lacking in today's technology world.

By Bruce Tulgan

At the corporate headquarters of a very old and very large consumer products conglomerate, summer interns are sometimes permitted to attend certain high-level meetings, mostly as a learning experience, but also to run errands and assist with clerical tasks during the meetings. One such intern was visibly annoyed when she was asked by her manager to dress in “business casual attire, at least” on days when she would be attending such meetings. After, “ignoring that suggestion entirely,” the intern came to one such meeting “very casually dressed” and then spent most of the meeting texting on her handheld device. When her manager whispered quietly to ask her to please stop texting during the meeting, the intern responded in an exasperated tone, “Actually, no.” The manager whispered back with incredulity: “No?” At which point, the intern explained, “I’m texting with my dad... about this meeting. So, it’s fine. My dad works here!” As it turned out, she was giving a blow-by-blow account of the meeting in progress to her father, who was himself a longtime executive in the company and had arranged the internship with the company for his daughter.

More Examples

An experienced nurse-manager on a busy hospital floor told me about her campaign to stop the new young nurses from using their hand-held devices at the same time they are administering care to patients. The manager and her nursing supervisors had been surprised and impressed to discover how often the young



nurses on their devices were instant messaging with each other about the patient care. They were asking each other for – and giving to each other – regular advice and support throughout the day. Sometimes they were searching the Internet for clinical information, often reaching out on social media to other nurses who were not even co-workers. One supervisor was startled to discover a young nurse having a real-time video conference on her hand-held device with her friend, a nurse in India. “She was standing outside this patient’s room, discussing the case with her friend in India. When I asked her about it later, she said this friend had been a mentor to her in school and she felt like she didn’t have anyone here yet she could confide in.” By the way, the nurse manager hastened to add that the young nurse in question was not herself of Indian descent. She went on, “They spent a lot of time on Facetime together. She was more comfortable getting answers from her friend in India than turning to any of us for help.”

The Game Has Changed

Any team dealer in American who has a younger employee or two – or even Millennial children

– certainly understands the above scenarios. Technology has changed the game and is threatening the very way a personal business such as team sports is conducted. But the world is changing and it is up to “older” team dealers to embrace the changes all of this technology has brought with it.

Today’s young stars may well show up with the latest and greatest tools and tricks. Indeed, many of them seem to have developed almost “super-powers” in their chosen areas of interest and focus. They are often masters of the newfangled. What they are missing – way too often and more and more – is the old-fashioned basics. What many refer to as “the soft skills.”

When it comes to Millennials’ people skills, it is easy to blame the fact that they have become so accustomed to electronic communication that they are losing the ability to communicate well in person. That’s surely a big part of the story.

Communication practices are habits and most Millennials are in the habit of remote informal staccato and relatively low-stakes interpersonal communication because of their constant use of hand-held devices and the

more social media and instant messaging.

But there is much more going on here than Millennials staring at their devices too much, sending too many texts, and becoming increasingly less articulate because they get so little practice having real conversations. As a partner in a large accounting firm put it so well, “It’s not just how they communicate that is the problem. It’s what they have to say that really pisses me off!”

Thinking on Your Feet

Another soft-skills gap managers tell us about regularly in our interviews is summed up well by another senior level nurse manager with more than three decades of experience managing young nurses: “They just don’t think on their feet the way they used to. They know a lot. But if they are not sure of something, they go right to their device. What they never seem to do is just stop and think.”

As they become adult players in the real world of work, why don’t they stop and think on their feet, puzzle through problems, and reflect more on the best solutions?

Of course, there is one big reason: They have never had the need. Today’s information environment offers infinite answers to every question under the sun and they’ve always had powerful, easy-to-use information technology at their fingertips all the time.

I often remind older, more experienced people, “Do you remember when we used to have conversations with very smart people about meaningful things that sometimes ended with a giant chorus of ‘I don’t know,’ ‘I don’t know,’ ‘I don’t know,’ and ‘Neither do I’?”

Or maybe you remember having those 'I wonder if...' conversations with yourself. Are you old enough to remember those conversations? Well, Millennials are not. They have never had that conversation — with themselves or anyone else.

With computers, content providers and grown-ups to do so much of their thinking for them, Millennials have hardly any experience digging deep, puzzling and reflecting. They have a built-in expectation that learning curves are instant. They think of learning in small increments — filling skill and knowledge gaps as they run across them. The long learning curve is a rarity and a bit of a mystery.

But there is much more going on here. By 2020 the western workforce will be more than 50 percent Millennial and the factors that have influenced them will be influencing the workforce.

- Globalization. Second wave Millennials (born 1990-2000) will be the first truly global generation.

- Technology. The pace of technological advance today is unprecedented. In every aspect of life, anything can become obsolete any time.

- The information environment. Second wave Millennials are the first true digital natives. They learned how to think, learn and communicate in a never-ending ocean of information.

- Virtual reality. It's not just that they are always looking down at their hand-held devices. Millennials are always totally plugged in to an endless stream of content and in continuous dialogue with peers (and practical strangers) however far away (or near) they might be.

Being Aware of Your Employees

Millennials are perfectly accustomed to feeling worldly and ambitious and successful by engaging virtually in an incredibly malleable reality — where the stakes can seem all-important one moment, until the game is lost and reset.

As these factors become more and more prevalent in the young

workforce — and among people of all ages — managers are more and more likely to encounter situations such as the ones above. This is why it is critical that managers take a leading role in cultivating the soft skills of their employees, and stressing the importance of soft skills in an increasingly digital, individualistic culture. ■

About the author

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Uni-Sport



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Combining latest trends in sublimation as well as fabric design, Uni-Sport continues to lead with innovative compound heat transfers. For superlative service: sales@uni-sport.com

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The number one choice for full-contact sports, Thermo-Film offers a semi-gloss finish that's durable, abrasion-resistant and provides superior opacity to inhibit dye migration on brightly-colored or sublimated polyester. Stahls' Thermo-Film is available by the roll and in popular Stahls' services, including Pre-Cut and Pre-Spaced Letters & Numbers. tinyurl.com/stahls-highlight-film

Sports Attack



Football Machine

The Snap Attack provides precise repetitions of game-like variability of passed, kicked, punted or snapped balls in every practice from high schools to the NFL. Throwing head pivots to throw punts, left- or right-handed spirals or kick-offs more than 100 yards. Instant recovery allows rapid drills and combinations. www.Sportsattack.com

Reusch



Keeper Glove

Reusch's Supreme glove has added the Duraloop that provides an additional layer of its G2 Ultrasoft foam, along with additional foam over the wristband area that gives the keeper additional control of the ball when distributing.

Game Gear



Wrestling Singlets and Fight Shorts

Game Gear offers full custom sublimated singlets in two unique fabrics — SS (sleek stretch) and PS (power stretch). In addition it offers five-, six- and seven-inch custom inseams with traditional and racer back cuts allowing each member of the team to choose what they like. Game Gear also offers full custom sublimated fight shorts in a light weight, durable fabric called SW (stretch weave).

Jaypro



World Cup Anchor

This Jaypro Sports exclusive soccer goal counterweight is ideal to use where in-ground anchoring devices are not appropriate. Tank design allows for 50pounds of concrete, 39 pounds of sand or 24 pounds of water. Fits over any round or flat rear crossbar and is bright yellow for visibility and safety. Hard plastic shell will not crack and is designed to be stackable for easy storage. www.jaypro.com

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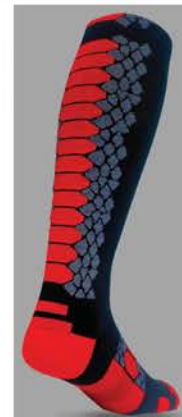


Private Label Uniforms

SG America is changing the sublimation uniform and apparel business. Instead dealers needing to go overseas to source uniforms and develop lines the overseas supplier has come to them. FSG America is the North American office of Fancy Sports Gear which is the leading supplier of sublimated uniforms in China. FSG America has a fully developed line of sublimated uniforms which are "private labeled" for every dealer and offered on a delivered and duty paid basis. This makes the program easy for all dealers to implement regardless of size and gives them access to incredibly high quality uniforms at an "overseas" price. What really sets FSG apart from other sublimation suppliers is also a guaranteed delivery program, double saturation inks and the fact that the factory is ISO9001 quality certified. Contact FSG America for a complete private labeled catalog of all sports and apparel. The image shown is of FSG America's Elite Football jersey — a top seller!

Pearsox

Legend Sock



Pearsox is proud to introduce the first of its series, the Knee High Legend sock. This high-performance moisture management sock is composed of acrylic, nylon and performance elastic, resulting in a top-of-the-line antimicrobial performance sock. The knee high Legend series socks are constructed with an ergonomic design, breathable mesh instep, arch support, ankle support and reinforced heel and toe.

A4



Water Resistant Jacket

The N4263 Force water resistant jacket features a woven polyester shell with micromesh inside. Also features a drawcord that locks at waist and neck, two-front zippered pockets, adjustable Velcro cuffs. It is water resistant, stain release and odor resistant. Moisture management for all-season comfort.

Uni-Sport



Heat Transfer

Uni-Sport athletic heat transfer company presents its new innovation, HDT- Transfer. Adding a whole new dimension to your brand. Its specialty custom embellishments will bring the highest dimensional-print quality and definition to your team design. Exceptional wash and color fastness and durability properties. Apply to high-performance athletic fabric polyester, poly-blend, tri-blend, cotton, and cotton Blend. Green Chemistry HDT-Trans education and elimination sustainability goal is Uni-Sport's commitment to a green environment manufacture.

Badger



Vent Back Tee

The new Badger Performance Vent Back Tee provides maximum ventilation for a cool, comfortable feel. This features its new tiny-holed mesh fabric on the entire back with its B-Core 100 percent polyester moisture management/antimicrobial fabric on the front and sport shoulder. Available in six team colors, adult and youth sizes. www.BadgerSport.com

SanMar



Wind Jacket

The new Sport-Tek Ladies Heather Colorblock Raglan Hooded Wind Jacket LST40 features a heather print that gives this water-resistant wind jacket a sporty, energized look. 100 percent polyester shell, 100 percent polyester mesh body and hood lining and 100 percent polyester woven sleeve lining.

My House



Custom Fight Shorts

Choose custom embroidered Fight Shorts in team colors with team logo (two Options: with or without side panels). Or pick from a variety of MyHOUSE Fight Short templates; fully sublimated with a choice of team colors and team logo

Champro



Uniform

The new Mark uniform features a raglan sleeve with Interlock polyester fabric. A two-color mitered v-neck and contrast piping set this uniform apart. The jersey comes in 17 colors so you can outfit an entire league. champrosports.com

Bison



Portable Basketball System

Bison now offers a T-Rex portable basketball system for every level of play. With the 2016 addition of the T-Rex Arena with an eight-foot safe play area and T-Rex International (10-feet, 8-inches), the full line-up features top-of-the-line technology that makes raising, lowering, and storage of portables simple, safe and fast.

Shock Doctor



Women's Basketball Mouthguard

Shock Doctor, now the official mouthguard of the NBA, has introduced a women's-specific version of its basketball mouthguard. This new clear mouthguard with a hint of pink better accommodates the size of the female jaw. A new clear version with a blue tint is also available in men's and youth sizes. www.shockdoctor.com

ADVERTISER INDEX NOVEMBER 2016

3N2	45
A4	72, 76
Alleson Athletic	53
Augusta Sportswear	5
Badger	55
Bison	38
Blazer	18
Bownet	14, 15, 34
Champro	63
Easton	13
Fancy Sports Gear America	61
Franklin Sports	39
Game Gear	51
Game Sportswear	44
Gildan/Under Armour Socks	41
Gill Athletic	36
High Five Sportswear	33
Holloway	3
Jaypro	37
MyHouse	75
OrderMyGear.com	67
OS1st	71
Pearsox	43
Reusch	32
Richardson Cap	24
Ripon	21
Russell Athletic	19, 56, 57
Select	26, 27
Sports Attack	25
Stahls'	6, 9
Teamwork Athletic	23
TeamUniformOrders	7
Under Armour	2, 48, 49
United Sports Brands	11
Uni-Sport	31



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BSN In With National IPA

National IPA, a founding member of the National Coalition for Public Procurement, has awarded **BSN Sports/US Games** its comprehensive Athletic and Physical Education Equipment contract in an effort to help public agencies and educational institutions reduce costs and administrative burden. The three-year agreement will allow BSN Sports/US Games to provide the best pricing for in-stock athletic and P.E. equipment to the school and institutional markets. The partnership took effect October 1.

Mizuno's Puccini To Retire



Bob Puccini, president of **Mizuno USA**, will retire from the company effective December 31, 2016, and transition to a role as non-executive

chairman. He will also remain a director on the Mizuno USA board. **Mark O'Brien**, the company's current COO will succeed Puccini as president of Mizuno USA and will also serve as chairman and officer of Mizuno Canada.

Puccini joined Mizuno USA in 1995 and was named president in 1996. In addition to his role as president of U.S. operations, Puccini served as chairman of Mizuno Canada, executive officer representing MCJ in the Americas and several roles within Mizuno Latin America Holdings. He joined Mizuno USA after leadership stints at Spalding, Titleist, Adidas and Head Sports.

Efinger Closing Its Doors

After more than 125 years in business in Bound Brook, NJ, **Efinger Sporting Goods** is going out of business. Founded in 1909, Efinger is one of the oldest and largest team dealers and retailers in the U.S. Its store measures 50,000-square feet and its product mix includes athletics, camping, hunting, fishing, outdoor lifestyles, biking and kayaking.

Under Armour Names LaRose

Under Armour has appointed **Jason LaRose** as president of North



Steph is Looking Good

Not sure if where he is headed, but Steph Curry is looking sharp off-the-court wearing Under Armour Eyewear's UA Double Down polarized with Storm lens technology sunglass style. Perhaps he's getting ready to attend Under Armour founder Kevin Plank's Sporting Goods Industry Hall of Fame induction ceremony in May in Arizona (see *Hall of Fame* story on page 12.)

America, succeeding Matthew Mirchin, who has transitioned to the role of strategic advisor, global revenue. LaRose joined Under Armour in 2013 to lead its global e-commerce business, eventually becoming SVP—digital revenue in 2015. He will continue to lead the e-commerce business while being actively involved in the search process to find his successor.

New Product: Sisu NextGen



Sisu Guard, maker of an innovative mouthguard design, recently unveiled Sisu NextGen. Engineered to withstand even more impact, and still only 1.6 mm thin, Sisu NextGen delivers more protection with its scientifically redesigned perforation pattern. It features a wider bite pad, rounded edges and improved moldability to allow athletes to talk normally, breathe naturally and stay hydrated during the game.

Bases Loaded Honored

Bases Loaded, an omni-channel retailer of baseball and softball apparel and equipment and member of Sports, Inc., was recently ranked number 3590 by *Inc. Magazine* in the annual Inc. 5000 Fastest Growing Companies for 2016. This is Bases Loaded's second consecutive year of being includ-

ed on this prestigious list. The company reported a 201 percent growth rate from 2010 to 2015 and in 2015 purchased a 30,000-square-foot location to expand its operations. It also consolidated existing retail, office and warehouse locations and its 20,000-square-foot Bases Loaded Baseball & Softball Superstore opened in a new location in January, 2016 in Rancho Cordova, CA.

UA Replacing Majestic in MLB

It was only a matter of time before one of the big boys came sniffing around its high-profile **Major League Baseball** uniform deal, so the news last month that **Majestic Athletic** will be replaced by **Under Armour** as the manufacturer of on-field jerseys in 2020 comes as no surprise. Also part of the deal, Fanatics will receive the rights to other apparel, while caps will continue to be made by New Era. Majestic Athletic, currently part of the VF Corp. licensed products group, has held the exclusive rights to MLB jerseys since 2005 and its current deal ends after the 2019 season.

A4 Names Bloomquist

A4, a supplier of athletic apparel, has hired **Kevin Bloomquist** as VP—sales. Bloomquist joins A4 with more than 25 years of sales management experience and he will be responsible for developing and executing sales strategies to drive A4's continued growth.

Thomas Signs with Zamst

Zamst recently entered into a worldwide endorsement deal with

Boston Celtics point guard **Isaiah Thomas**. Thomas will try out the Zamst's Filmista ankle support along with icing solutions for preventative protection. Zamst recently donated equipment for a two-day basketball clinic that Thomas held with children ages 8-12 in Boston as part of ProCamps Worldwide.

Grasshoppers Turn To Jeans



Ever seen pro ball players play baseball in jeans? That's what happened over the summer in Greensboro, NC, when the Greensboro Grasshoppers transformed into the Jeansboro Grasshoppers, sporting unique jeans uniforms courtesy of Greensboro-based **Wrangler**. The company enlisted the help of the local minor league franchise to celebrate its long history in the area. Note: They only look like jeans. ■

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