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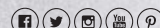
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All Tech-ed Up

It's all about technology in the team sports business in 2016.



The trick for our business is to find the balance between taking advantage of all that technology has to offer while holding on to the personal touch.

Even though some people close to me might dispute the fact, I have, indeed, embraced technology. Need proof? First off, I have cut the cord on my television set and watch only Netflix and other streaming channels. My smartphone allows me to pretend I'm at the office when I'm really sitting on the beach. This magazine is available in both print and digital versions to fit the reading habits of all of our subscribers. And email means I never have to actually talk to anyone ever again.

Okay, I'm kidding about that last one — call me old-school, but I do enjoy speaking with readers on the phone. But I bet I could go through an entire week without ever having to pick up my iPhone and engage in an actual conversation.

And therein lie the problems and the challenges — some would say the opportunities — for the team sports business. Certainly the game-changing advances in technology are impacting every business in all corners of the world, but it is a uniquely vexing challenge for an industry that was built on personal relationships and good, old-fashion service.

The trick for our business is to find the balance between taking advantage of all that technology has to offer — and believe me, it has a lot to offer as you

will see when you read the special Tech and the Team Dealer section that begins on page 30 — while holding on to the personal touch that has been a hallmark of the team business for generations.

Dealers are working to achieve this balance and some are understandably more successful than others. Those that are finding the balance have embraced online team stores, make liberal use of uniform builders and carry laptops or tablets instead of catalogs. They are (unfortunately?) available 24/7 via email and text and they utilize technology to be more efficient and, even more importantly, to provide better service to their schools and programs.

But even they are worried about losing what has made team sports unique. This concern can be found in conversations I had with executives around the country as we put this special issue together.

On the one hand, Don Bates, of Allen Sports Center, tells me, "Connecting in the field with staff, vendors and customers has never been easier." But, on the other, he adds, "Customers now have the ability to research and shop online for pricing after a salesperson spends time defining their needs and budgets for them. It takes some of the loyalty away."

ADA's Pete Schneider says the downside of all of this technology is felt on the relationship side of the business. "While most team dealers want to embrace the technology for the benefit of their customers, they don't want to lose touch with the relationships they have fostered over the years."

Don Leonard, of Crown Sport Sales, sounds much the same theme: "It takes the personal touch away from our business."

Obviously, the challenge of finding the balance between technology and the personal touch is significant. So let's make this pledge — utilize all that technology has to offer to make your business better and more efficient. But also make it a point to stop by and say hi to a coach or AD as often as possible.

Perhaps someone can develop an app or wearable technology — a FitBit for team dealers! — that will track how many times you actually talk to a customer or vendor. You can make a goal of at least five a day to go with the 10,000 steps on your other wrist. That sounds like a good balance of technology and touch. ●

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“We continue to believe that the sport of football at the high school level is as safe as it has been since the first rules were written in 1932.”

Bob Gardner, NFHS executive director

School Days

Football leads another high school sports participation increase.



High school sports participation increased for the 27th consecutive year.

Apparently kids are still playing high school sports — and in record numbers

Led by an encouraging report in football participation nationwide, the number of participants in high school sports increased for the 27th consecutive year in 2015-16, according to the annual High School Athletics Participation Survey conducted by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS).

The number of participants in high school sports reached an all-time high of 7,868,900, 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 — from 1,083,617 to 1,083,308.

While some states reported a decline in football participation in 2015, 24 states registered increases in boys' participation in 11-player

football. When combining boys' and girls' participation in 6-, 8-, 9- and 11-player football, the number of participants actually increased slightly.

“The NFHS and its member state associations have taken significant steps over the past 10 years to minimize the risk of participation in football and all high school sports, so this report on the continued strong interest and participation in high school football is very encouraging,” says **Bob Gardner, NFHS executive director**. “With the adoption of state laws and protocols for concussion management in place, we continue to believe that the sport of football at the high school level is as safe as it has been since the first rules were written in 1932 and we believe this year's participation report is confirmation of that belief.”

After a decline the previous year, boys' participation increased about 25,000 to an all-time high of 4,544,574, while girls' participation increased for the 27th consecutive

year with an additional 36,591 participants and set an all-time high of 3,324,326.

Among the other findings:

- Track and field registered the largest increase in participants for both boys and girls, with an additional 12,501 boys and 7243 girls. Track and field ranks second to football in boys participants with 591,133, and remains the most popular sport for girls with 485,969 participants.
- Six other top 10 girls' sports registered increases in 2015-16 — volleyball, soccer, softball, cross-country, tennis and lacrosse. The top 10 girls' sports remained the same as the previous year: track and field, volleyball, basketball, soccer, fast-pitch softball, cross-country, tennis, swimming and diving, competitive spirit squads and lacrosse.
- After track and field among the top 10 boys' sports, soccer registered the largest gain with an additional 7753 participants, followed by cross-country (up 6710), basketball (4949) and baseball

(2248). Although the top five boys' sports remained the same as last year — 11-player football, track and field, basketball, baseball and soccer — cross-country moved to sixth place ahead of wrestling, which dropped to seventh after a decline of 7555 participants. Tennis, golf and swimming and diving complete the top 10 listing of boys' sports.

• Lacrosse continued its rise among emerging sports with 197,572 total participants to rank 10th in girls' participation and 11th for boys.

• Among some of the non-traditional high school sports on this year's survey, archery (8668), badminton (17,645) and flag football (12,093) continued to register increases in participation. Also, while boys' wrestling had a drop in participation, an additional 2000 girls participated in the sport last year for an all-time high of 13,496.

• Participation in adapted sports also increased in 2015-16 from 8483 participants to 9491, with schools in 12 states now offering these programs for students with disabilities.

• The top 10 states by participants remained the same; however, Florida moved ahead of New Jersey to eighth position this year. Texas and California topped the list again with 809,075 and 802,117, respectively, followed by New York (372,772), Illinois (344,143), Ohio (319,929), Pennsylvania (319,853), Michigan (295,436), Florida (285,885), New Jersey (279,371) and Minnesota (237,686). Thirty-three of the 51 NFHS member state associations reported increases in participation in 2015-16.

The participation survey has been compiled since 1971 by the NFHS through numbers it receives from its member associations. The complete 2015-16 High School Athletics Participation Survey is available on the NFHS website at www.nfhs.org. ■



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New Kid on the Wrestling Mat



There's a new wrestling kid on the mat as My House Sports Gear, based in Scranton, PA, looks to expand from its roots in mixed martial arts (MMA). My House Sports Gear has moved into custom wrestling gear after cutting its teeth by making MMA fight shorts. Its product line now includes competition wrestling shorts, singlets/tops, headgear, robes and customized gear bags. "We are bringing back the classics as we are introducing custom team embroidered wrestling robes," says owner and CEO Tim Pane. Other items include custom shorts and singlets for both male and female wrestlers. Customers are buying the product through the company's website – MyHouseSportsGear.com – or through team dealers. Interest is international, as the company is selling in all 50 states and in Mexico. As an aside, Pane's company outfitted the Olympic wrestlers from Mexico and Haiti in the Olympics in Brazil in August.

Russell Athletic Is Defending Team Sports

“Who will defend team sports?” Russell Athletic, with more than a century of selling to the team business, is answering that question with a unique “Team On” integrated marketing campaign along with a content series entitled #SettleYourScore.

The national campaign launched during the heart of the pre-season football this summer and included digital, social, out-of-home, a study on the evolution of high school two-a-days, and a two-a-days sale at RussellAthletic.com with a buy-one, get-one-free offer on all performance wear.

Heisman Trophy winner and NFL legend **Eddie George** serves as a brand ambassador for the campaign.

The most unique aspect of the far-reaching campaign is that instead of celebrating the champions, the series focuses on 101 teams that lost their football state championship last season by a touchdown or less. To make it even more personal, Russell is actually partnering with seven of these high school football teams to turn the one thing that haunts them from their state championship loss into their ultimate motivation.

“We felt it was important for our brand to invest in where we wanted to take the business,” **Matt Murphy**, Russell Athletic VP-marketing, says. “We feel there is a space for a brand to talk about what is right about team sports.”

“What haunts you?” is a tough question to ask high school coaches, Murphy admits. “The eight seconds, one play or 99 yards that led to the loss hurts, but it could also become the perfect fuel for a new season. Their untold stories will resonate with any team that



has a score to settle this season.”

“There’s a story for every team that didn’t make it all the way,” adds George. “I experienced it and it taught me to finish, not just in football but in life as well.”

As part of the campaign, players, coaches and towns literally stared down what haunts them in the form of outdoor billboards near each high school with reminders like “8 Seconds.” Players wore sweat-activated practice gear that reveals inspiration when they sweated through their shirt. And, right before the season started, they tore down the “haunt” billboards to reveal the team’s new mantra for the season. Finally, each of the selected schools’ stories will be documented on TeamOn.RussellAthletic.com and on Russell Athletic social media channels.

“Our goal was simple: tell the story of the birthplace of team in America,” says Murphy. “Anyone who loves football and believes in the idea of team will relate to these stories and find inspiration from them. Unlike a lot of what is out there today in sports, this inspiration is drawn from the untold stories of real teams.

“To us, ‘team’ is not staged or scripted,” adds Murphy. “So we wanted the voice of this campaign to come from the teams, towns and coaches themselves.”

Murphy says the football effort is just Chapter One of an ongoing campaign that will eventually include other team sports where Russell has a strong presence. ■

The #SettleYourScore campaign and the Russell Athletic effort to defend team sports in America will be highlighted at TeamOn.RussellAthletic.com and @RussellAthletic on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

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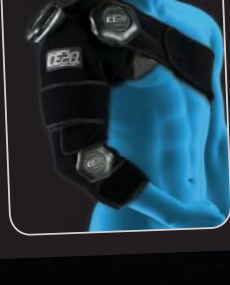


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In the News



Wilson Football Gets 'Smart'

It is only appropriate that in this special "Tech and the Team Dealer" issue of Team Insight that a highly technical product is being introduced by Wilson Sporting Goods. The Wilson X Connected Football, available this month, "marries the best in digital technology with the top performing football in the world to create an immersive gaming experience for fans that was not possible before," according to Bob Thurman, VP at Wilson Labs.

The ball is offered in both Official and Junior sizes and it comes with a free wrist coach, similar to those used by NFL quarterbacks, which has been designed to hold a player's phone on their non-throwing arm so there is no restriction in passing. The companion app is free from the Apple Store and via Google Play on September 8.

"By embedding a state-of-the-art, undetectable sensor in a football that connects to a cool app on a fan's mobile device, every fan can become their favorite NFL team's quarterback and create their own virtual stadium anywhere, anytime they want to play," explains Thurman.

Baseball, Softball Back In the Olympic Games

Now that the medal haul is complete at the Summer Olympics in Rio, Americans can look forward to a chance for at least two more the next time around after the International Olympic Committee voted to approve adding baseball and softball to the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020.

"The decision is an important milestone in the sport's history and a momentous day for baseball/softball's estimated 65 million athletes in over 140 countries, as well as millions more fans around the world," says **World Baseball Softball Confederation** president **Riccardo Fraccari**.

Softball was removed from the Olympics for 2012 and 2016. Baseball was last played in the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, with South Korea taking the gold.

PSG Consolidating Operations

Performance Sports Group is moving the composite technology developed by Combat, a Canadian company it purchased in 2013, to its Easton branded products unit and consolidating all performance sports bat production in Thousand Oaks, CA.

As a result, PSG intends to shutter Combat's Ottawa, Canada and Kent, WA, factories, lay off a reported 85 before October and immediately exit all Combat branded products with the exception of the Maxxum line.

PSG, also parent of the Bauer

hockey brand, will incur an estimated \$13.2 million in expenses related to the consolidation. According to the company's most recent annual report, Combat sold three percent of its products to big-box and sporting goods chains, with the remainder distributed in baseball specialty accounts. Easton, conversely, sells 51 percent of its merchandise to big-box and sporting goods chains and the remaining 49 percent to baseball specialty retailers.

The company's baseball/softball segment, consisting of both Easton and Combat, generated annual revenues of \$199.3 million in 2015. For the nine months ended Feb. 29, baseball/softball segment sales were down 8.6 percent.

New NOCSAE Standards

NOCSAE recently approved a number of new standards for team sports equipment, including what is billed as the world's first chest protector standard for commotio cordis. Among other rules were football helmet standards to address concussion risks and performance requirements for newly manufactured lacrosse balls.

The chest protector standard for commotio cordis is the result of NOCSAE-funded research to help identify the specific cause of commotio cordis and develop a chest protector standard designed to significantly reduce the likelihood of occurrence. The proposed standard applies specifically to baseball and

lacrosse players.

The proposed chest protector standard is open for public comment through January 2017. Earlier this spring NOCSAE representatives and technical advisors met with manufacturers to solicit feedback on testing methodologies.

At the same time, NOCSAE voted to move its proposed performance standard for newly manufactured lacrosse balls to final status. The new standard establishes specifications for the weight, circumference, hardness and performance characteristics of lacrosse balls. It will go into effect in June 2017.

Finally, a new football helmet performance standard is currently open for public comment. The proposed football helmet standard incorporates rotational accelerations in the pass/fail specifications and includes provisions for adjusted pneumatic ram impact velocities for helmets that manufacturers label as youth helmets. Also part of the revision is additional testing specified in the pneumatic ram test standard.

Three Brands Team With USA Football

Shock Doctor, **McDavid** and **Cutters**, all part of the **United Sports Brands** family, have each partnered with USA Football. The sponsorship builds on a long-running relationship with USA Football, as Shock Doctor partnered with the organization in 2010 and Cutters joined the partnership in 2012.

McDavid is now an official partner

of USA Football, while Shock Doctor is its official mouthguard and Cutters its official glove.

In addition, products from McDavid, Cutters and Shock Doctor will be worn by athletes selected to the U.S. National Team program during USA Football-sanctioned events, including the 2017 International Bowl.

Dick's Acquires Affinity

Dick's Sporting Goods recently acquired **Affinity Sports**, a sports management technology company based in San Diego. Affinity will become a part of the Dick's Team Sports HQ platform, which launched in January and provides an all-in-one platform that offers youth sports leagues three key services – online registration and team/league websites, custom uniforms and FanWear and access to donations and sponsorships.

Affinity's specialized sports management software will both facilitate and simplify the registration, scheduling and communication processes between national or regional governing bodies and their associated leagues, working to close existing communication gaps and enabling better player and coach visibility between these groups.

League administrators will also be able to use the online tools through Dick's Team Sports HQ to design gear specific to their league, allowing coaches and parents to order uniforms and FanWear from their website. ■



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ROAD TRIPPING

Specialty sports are thriving in the U.S., but the opportunities vary from state to state. By Mike May

In this election year it is readily apparent that America is a country of very diverse tastes, activities and opinions. One man's tax cut is another's increase; left is right and right is left. In 2016, it is very hard to discern any pattern among Americans in different parts of the country.

Much the same can be said about team sports, because as it turns out there are different purchasing patterns, habits and priorities by teams, clubs and schools, depending on the sport and the time of the year — and location on the map. Surprisingly, not every team dealer in Maryland sells lacrosse; the number one selling sport for a Phoenix area team dealer is swimming; and many dealers won't sell cheerleading at all because their time is best spent on more profitable — and less annoying — team sports.

Need more? Sure.

Take the changing sport of wrestling, a sport previously reserved for male athletes and now experiencing some decline in participation. Coming to the rescue are young girls taking to the mat in large numbers. Now, according to the most recent participation research from the NFHS, this school year 39 state associations are sanctioning girls' wrestling. There are nearly 2000 high schools that offer girls' wrestling programs and more than 13,000 girls are now wrestling at the high school level. (That's compared to 250,653 boys at 10,597 high schools.)

"The rules of interscholastic wrestling are better now than in the history of the sport," says **Elliot Hopkins**, of NFHS. "However, the sport of wrestling is in a tumultuous state. We have experienced the growth of girls' wrestling each year, but must accept the fact that the boys' participation numbers are down another 8000."

The sport did get a minor assist this summer from exposure at the Rio Olympics and **Emily Martin**, national sales manager at **Cliff Keen Athletic**, expects there to be a surge in participation and interest in the sport of wrestling because of the media coverage.

"Every four years, wrestling rides on the excitement generated by Olympic coverage," she says. "The sport usually gets good press. It's a big positive."

And then there is track and field, an awkward sport for many team dealers. From a pure

participation point of view, track and field is the second most popular high school sport in the U.S. for boys and the most popular for girls. But, unfortunately for dealers, it is not a big a revenue generator — equipment demands are few and need to be replaced only every few seasons, while uniforms are relatively inexpensive compared to other sports.

Still, it's too big to ignore. NFHS reports that track and field registered the largest increases in participants last school year for both boys and girls, as an additional 12,501 boys and 7243 girls joined in the fun. It's worth noting that 21 NFHS state associations also sponsor indoor high school track and field for both boys and girls.

Volleyball also received extensive Olympics exposure, at least compared to non-Olympic years (when exposure is essentially zero). Here, girls dominate high school participation and the sport attracts the second largest number of overall female participants. Of the NFHS' 51 state associations, only 10 did not have at least 100 schools playing girls volleyball and two states — California and Texas — have more than 1000 high schools sponsoring girls' high school volleyball teams.

Dealers are still trying to figure out cheerleading, a two-dimensional sport where one aspect is vastly different from the other. There are traditional cheerleading squads fielded by nearly every high school in America. And then there are the competitive spirit squads.

Out on the ice, SFIA reports that there are 2.5 million ice hockey participants in the U.S., with participation growing slowly every year since 2010. Of the current 2.5 million ice hockey participants, roughly 1.3 million of them are classified as core participants (those playing more than 13 days a year). While ice hockey is certainly played by females, the majority (75 percent) of players are male and the vast majority of core players are male.

On The Road

The one common denominator among all of these sports is that they are essentially played at some level in every corner of the country, although certainly in different numbers. *Team Insight* decided to take a virtual road trip around America to find out how team dealers approach the opportunities and challenges of the various specialty sports. The results are illuminating.

Around the U.S.: Northeast

In West Lebanon, NH, no teams or coaches are walking in the front door of **Stateline Sports** to order anything connected to volleyball, wrestling or cheerleading. Rather, ice hockey, lacrosse and track and field keep the cash registers ringing.

"Ice hockey is probably our biggest sport," says manager **Bob Friend**. "We sell everything in lacrosse and we sell primarily shoes and spikes to local track teams."

In St. Albans, VT, ice hockey and lacrosse are the big sports, with volleyball gaining in popularity. Track and field generates some business, but wrestling, rugby and cheerleading barely move the financial needle, so to speak.

"We are busy selling ice hockey from Father's Day to May the following year," says **Kevin Smith**, owner of **Kevin Smith's Sports**. "There are only about six weeks every year where we are not selling ice hockey to clubs, high schools, youth teams, college programs and men's teams."

But even with that strength in ice hockey, Smith reports that lacrosse is his fastest growing sport. "We sell to boys' and girls' lacrosse players," adds Smith. "They are buying uniforms, sticks, helmets, goals and the nets."

And while volleyball is an established sport in other parts of the country, it has yet to fully catch on in Vermont.

"This is the third year of varsity status for volleyball in Vermont," reports Smith, who says they mostly sell the basics such as uniforms and volleyballs.

And as the weather warms in the spring, local track teams are just buying uniforms and some spikes from Kevin Smith's Sports. "We don't sell any of the hard goods in track," admits Smith.

Kevin Smith's Sports really doesn't cater to local wrestling, rugby and cheerleading squads. "We do very little wrestling business, there are no rugby teams in our area, and cheerleading is a hard sport to pinpoint," says Smith.

Around the U.S.: Mid-Atlantic

In Delaware, student-athletes are playing volleyball, they are wrestling and they are running track and field in droves. Volleyball, too, is a very strong category Wilmington, DE-based **AI's Sporting Goods**.

"Our school business is a key part of our



Volleyball is a major sport for team dealers in many parts of the country.

TEAM / SPECIALTY SPORTS

volleyball sales,” notes sales associate **Sheri Hart**. “Teams are buying uniforms, T-shirts, shorts, socks, volleyballs and some volleyball systems. We also sell volleyball gear to a couple of nearby universities and colleges.”

“We also sell to three or four wrestling clubs in our area,” adds Hart.

In the spring, high school track and field teams are turning to Al’s as well.

“In Wilmington, there are a number of young children, as young as age five, competing in track and field,” Hart says. “In addition to running singlets and spikes, schools are buying the items necessary for the field events, but those hardgoods don’t need to be replaced every year.”

In southern West Virginia, students are into volleyball, wrestling, cheerleading and track and field. The spending pattern by schools and clubs on these sports is proof positive.

“Right now, volleyball is major sport for me,” says **Larry Foster**, owner of **Spartan Sporting Goods**, Beckley, WV, who reports he is selling everything in volleyball from shoes, socks and uniforms to kneepads, hair scrunchies, volleyballs and volleyball systems. “I do more business with schools and middle schools than with travel volleyball clubs,” he adds, and because Wilson is the official volleyball for high school athletics in West Virginia the majority of his sales are the Wilson volleyball. He does sell a few Tachikara volleyballs to private schools, he adds.

In wrestling, teams are buying the bare essentials and necessities from Spartan Sporting Goods.

And while many team dealers shy away from the cheerleading business, Spartan Sporting Goods aggressively pursues that business.

“We do a great deal of cheerleading business,” Foster reports. “We sell a number of uniforms, shoes and accessories and we have a sales staff that understands the cheer business. They do a great job of providing the schools and their cheerleaders with what they need.”

In the spring, track and field takes over at Spartan Sporting Goods. “Track and field is a great sport for us,” Foster says. “We sell a number of track singlets, warm-ups and hoodies.” It also sells hurdles, stop-watches, relay batons, shot puts, starting blocks and discuses.



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Around the U.S.: South

In the north central Georgia community of Fayetteville, wrestling, volleyball, track and field and cheerleading are important and popular, but certainly are not – and probably never will be – as important as football, basketball and baseball.

“In wrestling, we sell a few uniforms, some headgear and lots of mat tape,” says **Howell McElroy**, owner of **Fayette Sporting Goods**, Fayetteville, GA. “Mat tape is our biggest selling category in wrestling,” he adds, pointing out that they do not sell wrestling footwear.”

During volleyball season, McElroy's time is taken up by volleyball players and teams accessing his inventory prior to and during the season.

“In volleyball, we sell volleyballs, knee pads, some uniforms and a few volleyball systems from time to time,” he says. “While we have sold the volleyball category for years, the demand for product is not as big as other sports.”

In the spring, he does well with local high school track teams buying uniforms, shot puts, discuses, spikes and measuring tape. But when

it comes to selling to cheerleading squads, McElroy treads lightly.

“We sell practice gear, spirit wear and shorts to cheerleaders,” says McElroy. “But I stay away from selling custom fit uniforms. If a uniform doesn't fit, the cheerleader and the parents go bananas, but they don't realize you can't return a custom-made uniform.”

“I have been selling sporting goods for 37 years and I have never seen anything like the mother of a cheerleader when the order is wrong,” he adds. “That's why I stay away from custom uniforms for cheerleaders.”

In south Florida, public high school wrestling programs are buying headgear, warm-ups and shoes from **Medallion's Sporting Goods** in Jupiter. It sells more wrestling uniforms to private high schools than to public high schools, according to store manager **Kevin Licata**.

Volleyball is a big deal in south Florida and is played at the travel, recreation and high school levels. Demand for product is significant, according to Licata.

“I am outfitting many travel and local rec teams from head to toe,”

he says, which is good because at the travel and rec level teams are playing in both the spring and fall. Medallion's is also selling hard goods such as nets, uprights and standards. Its top volleyball brands are Asics, Mizuno, Augusta, Spalding and Tachikara. And, of course, beach volleyball is also big in south Florida, but uniforms are minimal for that bathing suit-wearing niche.

While high school girls play volleyball in the fall and high school boys play volleyball in the spring, the girls' business dwarfs the boys business, according to Licata.

While every high school in south Florida has cheerleading squads, most of those squad's big-ticket expenditures – such as shoes and uniforms – are not sold by Medallion's. But, Medallion's does sell practice wear and poms to local cheer programs.

Around the U.S.: Midwest

In Eau Claire, WI, specialty sports such as wrestling, volleyball, cheerleading and track and field are major sports for **Chippewa Valley Sporting Goods**.

“Wrestling is a big sport for us,” reports owner **Randy Nicolet**. “We sell the full top to bottom package — shoes, singlets, head gear, practice gear and spirit wear.”

Chippewa is also a one-stop shopping destination for the local volleyball community. “In volleyball, we sell to local schools, colleges and travel teams,” Nicolet says, with main purchases including shoes, socks, uniforms, balls and the occasional net system.

While Chippewa Sporting Goods does pay some attention to cheerleading, it's not a big target market.

“Cheerleading is a tough one for us because of the difficulties with sizing and sourcing,” admits Nicolet. “We do sell some cheerleading items from Under Armour, though.”

Local track and field athletes in the greater Eau Claire area are running around in circles wearing spikes and uniforms purchased from Chippewa.

“We also sell lots of field equipment from Gill to local track programs,” adds Nicolet.

In nearby Green Bay, **Home Team Sports & Apparel** generates the vast majority of its business from football, basketball and baseball, but that doesn't mean it doesn't pay attention to the many local girls who play high

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school volleyball in the winter.

"We sell volleyballs, nets and uniforms, some of which are sublimated," says office manager **Joe Karchinsky**.

Wrestling is in the blood of former NSGA chairman **Randy Nill**, owner of **Nill Brothers Sports**, Kansas City, KS. But the fact that this is an Olympic year doesn't always mean that sales for wrestling will be pick up.

"Wrestling sales definitely are not up," admits Nill. "It's a sport that just doesn't have a lot of product, although there has been a surge in sales from schools in Kansas since July 1 when school budgets were opened for spending. We've been deluged with business and we are running and gunning ever since then."

According to Nill, one of the big reasons why wrestling doesn't soar in popularity during an Olympic year is because television coverage focuses on freestyle and Greco-Roman, while wrestling in American high schools and colleges is collegiate folk style.

Despite this, Nill reports that he does sell a significant number of wrestling singlets, headgear, knee pads and all-important accessories such as mat cleaning supplies and mat tape.

"Because of the concern with MRSA, we sell lots of mat cleaning supplies," he explains. "And, we sell a great deal of mat tape. Those are two strong line items for us in wrestling. As for headgear, most of the good kids have their own headgear."

But one hot new product in recent seasons has been the growth of sublimated wrestling uniforms. "Sublimation has been a big hit in wrestling singlets," says Nill.

While wrestling is near and dear to Nill's heart, it's certainly not the only sport sold by Nill Brothers Sports. "Every sport is important to us," Nill says.

Among them, the set, serve and spike sport of volleyball is a winning category. "Volleyball is a good category for us," he says, and while the high school girls' market is solid, Nill adds that the most lucrative volleyball markets are the AAU/club/out-of-high school programs.

"Club volleyball is where it's at," says Nill.

The Baden ball is the top seller because it's the official volleyball for Kansas and Missouri high schools, although Nill says the Molten ball is

Lacrosse maintains its title as "the next big thing" in team sports in America.



gaining in popularity with area volleyball club teams.

Nill Brothers even gravitates to the cheerleading business. "We're looking to expand our youth level business in cheerleading," says Nill.

During the spring, Nill Brothers springs into action for local track and field teams. "Track is a good category for us because the numbers are strong — lots of boys and girls," says Nill. "We are selling uniforms, warm-ups and lots of field equipment, including shot puts, discuses, uprights, cross bars, pole vault pits and padding for the pits."

In Terre Haute, IN, wrestling and track and field are the strongest specialty categories for **Coaches Corner**, while volleyball and cheerleading hold their own. Ice hockey, however, is not even on the radar screen.

"In wrestling, high school teams are buying headgear, uniforms, practice wear, warm-ups and travel bags," says GM **Doc Claussen**.

In the spring, track and field teams are purchasing uniforms, spikes, hurdles and some gear for field events,

he adds, and while demand for ice hockey gear is minimal, Claussen says that some local ice hockey players will make the 90-minute drive to Indianapolis to play for teams there.

As for volleyball and cheerleading, both sports generate very little revenue.

"We dabble in volleyball, but it has such a short window," Claussen says. "As for cheerleading, it's hit or miss."

One of the challenges that Claussen faces with selling cheerleading uniforms and accessories is the mindset of the coaches. "Younger cheerleading coaches are used to buying on the Internet," says Claussen. "It's not right or wrong. It's all they know. I admit that it is very convenient for them. It's a different culture."

In central Kentucky, volleyball, wrestling and track and field are strong, while cheerleading fills a small niche.

"Volleyball is really big for us," says **Dale Keith**, owner of **Duke's Sporting Goods**, Elizabethtown, KY. "We sell to many local school teams

— junior high and high school and to travel teams."

Its volleyball sales include uniforms, balls, nets, systems and footwear. Everybody must buy the state-sanctioned Baden volleyball. To help facilitate more volleyball-related sales, Keith does create online stores, which is often used to sell team merchandise and spirit wear.

In the winter, many local high school student-athletes in the Bluegrass State are wrestling, if they are not playing basketball.

"Wrestling is a pretty good sport for us," says Keith, who sells a lot of singlets, headgear, kneepads, shoes and spirit wear.

Many cheerleading teams in central Kentucky head to Duke's for their non-uniform items. "We stay away from cheerleading uniform sales, but we do sell shoes and spirit wear," says Keith. "Those cheerleaders have money to spend."

Around the U.S.: Southwest

What's the number one specialty sport at **East Valley Sports** in Mesa, AZ? Surprisingly, says owner **Dennis Callison**, it is swimming.

But other than that water sport in the desert, wrestling is strong for East Valley Sports. "Wrestling is a good niche for us," says. "We sell based on price points, especially footwear. We don't sell upper-end items. Teams are also purchasing headgear, singlets and knee pads from us."

During volleyball season, Callison will sell uniforms to some schools, but most of that business now seems to go to big-box and Internet outlets. "Volleyball is not even a top 10 sales category for us," adds Callison.

Callison says that track generates as much revenue as volleyball. "We just sell a few uniforms to track teams, but it's not big business," Callison notes.

While Las Vegas may have a track record as a desert oasis and a gambling playground, there are regular people who do regular things such as play high school sports, with volleyball, wrestling and track and field all strong for **Turf Sporting Goods** in Las Vegas.

"Volleyball is a strong category for us as we sell uniforms, socks, knee pads, volleyball nets, volleyballs and volleyball systems," says GM **Jerry Okuda**, but not footwear. "Players are buying shoes online."



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2. MyHouse Sports Gear's Custom Team Embroidered Robes offer a 10-inch long front lapel team name/mascot applique, 15-inch wide back applique with embroidery and embroidered belt panel with individual names or weight class.

3. Blazer's University Starting Block features a four-inch wide heavy stainless steel rail (rust proof) and spike plates with angled spikes that provide a solid grip on the track. The aluminum shoes have heavy-duty rubber pads and four different angle adjustments.

4. The Pretereo III wrestling shoe from **Adidas** features a sticky rubber outsole for grip in all directions, reinforced ankle zone plus supportive heel structure and a single-layer mesh upper for light weight and maximum breathability.

5. Gill Athletic's Electronic Starting Pistol offers high-visibility LED strobe lights and includes connection cables for sound system and FinishLynx timing systems. It is a lightweight and economical alternative that eliminates the hassle of starting blanks.

6. Nfinity's first-ever high top for cheer, the Titan is old-school meets modern style. The shoe features an interlocking exoskeleton for added ankle stability that is designed for tumbling.

7. The Maverik Tactik head is designed and manufactured in the U.S. with a mid pocket to give players precision under pressure. It features X-Rail technology for extra stiffness and control, Optimal Release Point for pinpoint accuracy and Duratough material.

8. The Under Armour GK Fusion cheer shoe offers ankle support, lightweight fabrics and sole traction, allowing athletes to feel safer when soaring high and landing hard.

9. Brute's short sleeve compression shirts and shorts are an alternative to the standard wrestling singlet. Each piece features EvapTech performance wicking. Custom or templated designs and Sublitex sublimation printing offer bold color and design flexibility.

10. Powers' fully sublimated women's lacrosse Advantage Style 5 features a two-piece neck, a sublimated side stripe and sublimated sleeve trim. The kit is fully sublimated with a sublimated side stripe matching with the jersey.

11. Coming this Fall is a limited release of **Cliff Keen's** Fusion Headgear, combining features of other top-selling Cliff Keen earmuffs. The 3-Strap design, light and pliable inner shells and soft outer protective closed-cell foam provide for a secure and comfortable fit.

12. Pizzazz Pro Comfort Fit three-inch shorts are 92 percent poly/eight percent spandex and offer a four-way stretch.

13. Powr-Sand, Porter's aluminum telescoping standard, was created for top-level competition with features that allow users to have equipment remain outdoors year-round.

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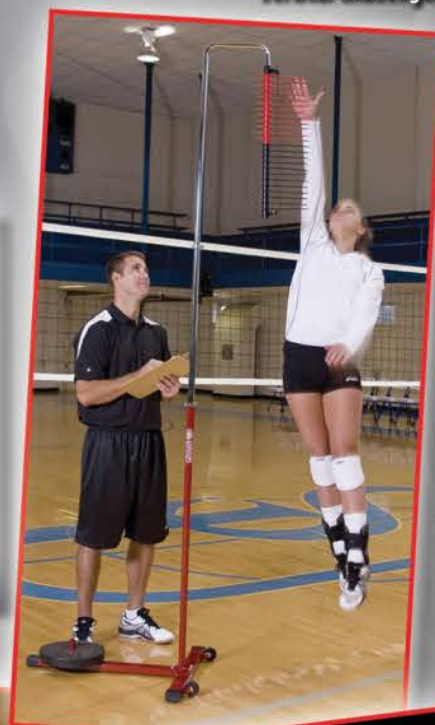
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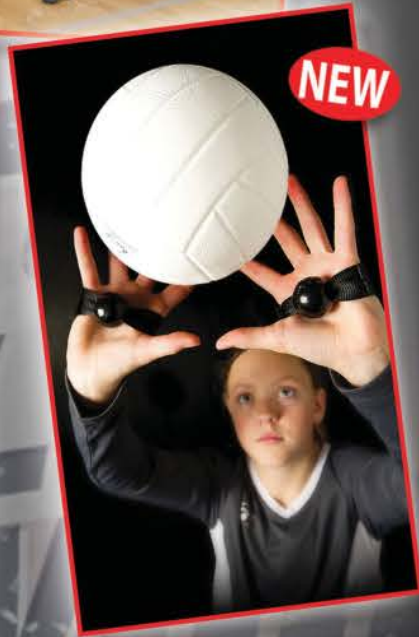
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TEAM / SPECIALTY SPORTS

Unfortunately, the wrestling business for Turf is not as vibrant. “Our wrestling business is even less than volleyball,” Okuda says. “We do sell singlets, headgear and lots of mat tape.”

In cheerleading, Turf Sporting Goods provides uniforms and spirit packs for the cheerleaders affiliated with the local youth football leagues, but in his region the high school programs buy direct from manufacturers.

Around the U.S.: West

Out west in the greater Los Angeles area, cheerleading, volleyball, wrestling, track and field and even ice hockey have a following, but it varies, to say the least.

California Pro Sports, in Harbor City, generates a little bit of income from local cheerleading teams. “We sell outfits, shoes and warm-ups to some regular high school squads and local Pop Warner Football leagues,” says owner **Kim Karsh**.

Volleyball is a major sport in southern California for both genders at both the high school and club level. “Travel volleyball clubs have just as many boys’ teams as they do girls’ teams,” notes Karsh. The difference? “When it comes to uniforms, girls have more fashion sense, while boys just want the basics.”

Wrestling is a high school sport in California, but only about 30 percent of the high schools in the Los Angeles area have wrestling teams, according to Karsh.

In track, Karsh gets purchases from high school cross-country teams since it’s only natural for cross-country runners to also be on the track team. Track teams are buying singlets, shoes and equipment for the

field events such as shot puts, discuses and high jumps, adds Karsh.

When kids are not hanging 10 in the Hawaiian surf, volleyball players, wrestlers, track athletes and cheerleaders are busy competing against one another in the Pacific paradise.

For **Stanley Costales, Jr.**, owner of **Sports Line**, Hilo, HI, volleyball is major sport. “Volleyball is big for us,” he says. “High school teams are buying sublimated uniform shirts, shorts, knee pads, socks and Baden volleyballs, which is our state ball. We sell volleyball systems from Bison. We don’t do too much in footwear.”

According to Costales, wrestling is “hit and miss, but when an athletic director from a high school does call, he is ordering singlets, sweats and headgear.”

In track and field, Costales’ business is, for the most part, limited to apparel such as singlets and warm-ups. “I don’t really sell any of the hard goods because the shipping costs are so high,” he says. “Most schools will buy directly from the manufacturer on heavy items used in field events.”

Around the U.S.: Northwest

In Montana, despite the ever-present appeal of the Great Outdoors, indoor volleyball is a very popular high school sport and a key sales category for **Jock Stop**, Glendive, MT.

“Volleyball is our biggest focus right now,” says store manager **Gabby Smith**. “This year, coaches are requiring that the players wear ankle braces, so we are selling lots of them. The volleyball girls also like to buy the socks. We don’t sell too many shoes, but we do sell uniforms, volleyballs and volleyball systems.”

During wrestling season, Jock Stop is selling wrestling shoes,

mouthguards, mat cleaning supplies and sublimated wrestling singlets. And like so many other team dealers around the country, “we do sell a great deal of mat tape,” adds Smith.

During the spring, track and field sales are steady, but not strong for Jock Stop. “Track and field is not our biggest category,” admits Smith. “For the most part, we sell warm-ups for track teams, but not too many uniforms because they don’t order new ones every year.” Jock Stop does sell some field equipment when it’s needed.

In Boise, ID, there’s more to the local athletic scene than Boise State University football. Volleyball, wrestling, lacrosse and track and field help fill the financial gaps that are not occupied by football, basketball, baseball, soccer and softball.

For **BSN sales pro Nick Brady**, there’s a strong local demand in the greater Boise area for anything and everything affiliated with volleyball — shoes, socks, spandex shorts, jerseys, hair scrunchies, volleyballs, nets and systems.

“I sell and supply anything that you see in a gym affiliated with volleyball,” Brady says. “We sell to all the clubs and all the schools.”

In the months, weeks and days leading up to wrestling season, Brady sells shoes, singlets, headgear, mat tape and the germicide chemicals. He also sells the gear worn by officials and the actual wrestling mats, but those usually last at least 10 years before they need to be replaced.

During track season, Brady is selling everything that’s worn, jumped over and thrown. “We sell shoes, shorts, singlets, hurdles, crossbars, measuring tape, stop watches,

starter’s guns, shot puts, javelins and the discus,” says Brady. “If you see something being used or worn during a track meet in our area, then I probably sold it to the school.”

In Bozeman, MT, many youngsters are turning out big time for track and field, wrestling, volleyball and cheerleading.

“Track is a good-selling sport for us,” says **Brian Pepper**, national sales manager for **Universal Athletic**, in Bozeman. “We have great relationships with track equipment companies that are easy to work with and help us get the business. While numbers may be down slightly, to work with a track team can involve a pretty sizable order.”

The sport of wrestling’s national decline in participation is impacting Universal Athletic’s business.

In the fall in Montana, many high school girls turn to volleyball.

“Volleyball is one of our strongest sports,” reports Pepper. “There are lots of really good companies out there to work with and selling head-to-toe is not out of the question for high school programs. With us, we are using OrderMyGear for volleyball. We are able to reach every athlete for the sale outside of the regular team purchase.”

While many team dealers around the country are hesitant to sell the cheer category, Universal Athletic welcomes the opportunity.

“We have four cheer and dance specialists that we have hired in the last year who are doing a nice job,” says Pepper. “We have had early success with the Under Armour uniforms. Our team realizes the opportunity there is from the camp season to practice to game night.” ■

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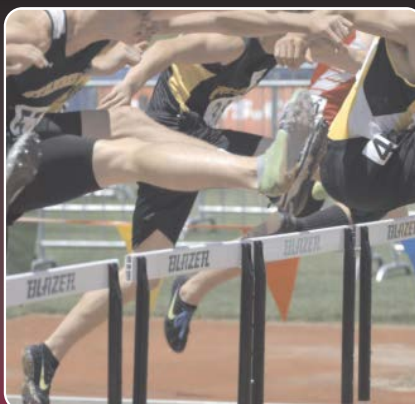
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A Special Report

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While the sport has a well-deserved reputation for its physical style of play, rugby is actually toning down its act a bit as it seeks a spot on the American sports scene. Now if only the rules weren't so darned complicated.

Americans got a taste of the sport this summer when rugby made its return to the Summer Olympics after an absence since 1924. Many insiders hope that even though rugby is still relatively new to the general population, the Olympic designation will jumpstart interest from Olympic-caliber athletes on down to recreational players.

It's worth noting that in the August 15 edition of the *Cynopsis Sports* e-newsletter, it was revealed that rugby was the third most talked-about sport after the first week of Rio 2016 on Facebook and Instagram, behind only swimming and gymnastics.

By the way, the U.S. women finished in fifth place, while the U.S. men's rugby sevens team placed ninth in Rio. Despite the somewhat disappointing finish, the U.S. men reached the quarterfinals where they lost to eventual gold medalists Fiji by just five points, which is the value of a

single try — rugby's equivalent to football's touchdown. USA Rugby is optimistic about its future in the States.

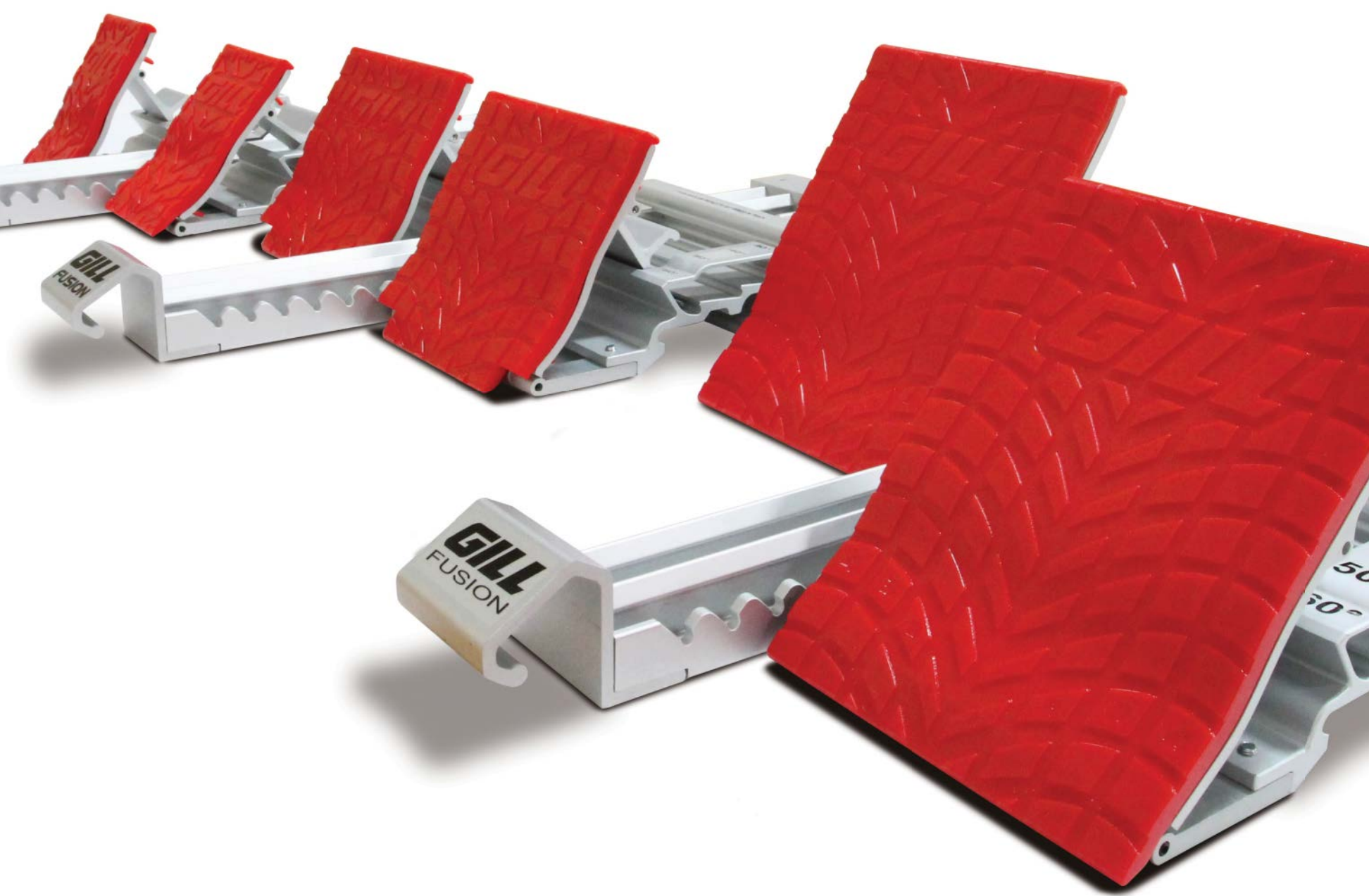
"This was the reason I chose to play rugby, to play in the Olympics," says **Perry Baker**, a member of the U.S. Olympic men's rugby team that competed in Brazil in August.

Baker is not the only one who feels strongly about the Olympic opportunity that is available through rugby.

"The Olympics are a huge platform and the most exciting part about this is that this allows more people to fall in love with the game (of rugby) and see why it's so special and so exciting," says **Jillion Potter**, a member of the U.S. Olympic women's rugby team.

On a national level, there were 1.4 million rugby players in the U.S. in 2015, according to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA). At the high school level, the hotbed of American rugby is in California, where there were 41 officially sanctioned varsity programs for boys and 16 for girls last year.

In the U.S. in 2016, the sport of rugby is like a field of flowers on the verge of bursting into full bloom — some feel it is "the next big thing," following in the footsteps of lacrosse today and soccer before that. While any eventual success remains to be seen, if and when the rugby "blossom" occurs



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"We sell direct to boys' and girls' youth, boys' and girls' high school, men's and women's college, men's and women's clubs, and old boys' teams," says **Graham Healy**, U.S. rugby project manager at **O'Neill's**, a supplier based in Ireland. "To teams and players on the pitch, we sell performance wear, jerseys, shorts and socks. We also sell hats, printed tees, polos, hoodies and rain gear. We run the gamut when selling rugby."

Because there are very few brick-and-mortar retail stores in the U.S. that stock and sell rugby gear, companies such as Healey must have an answer to every customer question and respond to every order.

"We are very customer-service oriented. We offer two-day delivery from Ireland to anywhere in the U.S.," says Healey. "We have a great product with a great price. In the U.S., we don't advertise. Our business comes through referrals."

Healey's perspective on rugby in the U.S. is shared by his competition.

For **Matt Godek Rugby & Soccer Supply**, a dealer based in Merrifield, VA, the vast majority of the revenue is coming from younger rugby teams.

"Youth rugby is where it is all at right now," says president **Matt Godek**. "Youth rugby is being played by children as young as five. These youngsters are being coached by former players who

are now serving as the coaches."

According to Godek, business is brisk to teams featuring players from age five to 22.

"After college, my club business is not as strong as it was 15 or 20 years ago," he adds. "But what's amazing to see is the enthusiasm for rugby by non-playing parents who didn't play the game earlier in their lives. They really like the sport and are getting involved. In fact, these enthusiastic parents are now getting trained as administrators, coaches and refs."

From a financial perspective, the only downside of dealing with youth teams is that the team purchase is often dictated solely on the bottom line.

"All too often, I get an email order and the client is just looking for the best price," notes Godek. Usually that team's final decision on buying a set of rugby jerseys, shorts and socks is then often influenced by factors such as fabric quality, design, sublimation and turnaround time.

Godek is heartened by the growing number of businesses that now cater to the sport he loves. "Back in the 1970s and 1980s, there were five or six suppliers and retailers here in the U.S.," he recalls. "Now, there are at least 35 different companies that sell rugby."

But one thing that Godek has that no other rugby business in the U.S. has is possibly the best phone number: 1-800-USA-RUGBY.

"It's a very easy number to remember," he

understates.

In other parts of the country dealers with somewhat less-recognizable phone numbers continue to keep an eye on the burgeoning rugby business in their markets.

At **Rugby Imports**, East Providence, RI, it's a collegiate-driven business right now. According to VP **Mark Hoder**, Rugby Imports is generating most of its revenue selling to the large number of men's and women's college rugby programs, but the most explosive growth is in youth and high school rugby teams.

"The youth rugby market is bubbling up and the high school market is popping," says Hoder.

Hoder believes the Olympic exposure has given the sport more credibility and heightened the awareness among sports fans that are not part of the rugby nation. That Olympic status has generated sales of national team rugby merchandise, as well.

In the greater Los Angeles area, rugby is being played by youth and club teams, but the sport is still struggling to get equal recognition.

"Rugby is on our radar screen, but rugby teams struggle for access to field space," says **Kim Karsh**, owner of **California Pro Sports**, Harbor City, CA. "Rugby is in competition with lacrosse and soccer, which have more teams and therefore more seniority. Rugby is sometimes the odd man out." ■

RE-LAX AROUND AMERICA



Carrying the tag as the current "next big thing," lacrosse boasts more than 2.1 million players in the U.S. in 2015, according to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), and participation has increased every year since 2010. Some more factoids:

- Of those 2.1 million players, nearly 950,000 are considered core players who play more than 13 days a year, roughly 45 percent.
- A full 65 percent of lacrosse players and 67 percent of core players are male.
- And while 60 percent of players are between the ages of six and 24, roughly 90 percent of core lacrosse players are in this age group.
- Not surprisingly, only 30 percent of players have a college degree, a number that should rise as more college-playing lacrosse athletes eventually gravitate to local adult leagues

after graduating from college.

- More than 40 percent of players come from homes where the annual household income is at least \$100,000 per year.
- From a dollars and cents perspective, the SFIA's Manufacturers Sales by Category Report indicates that wholesale sales of lacrosse equipment are showing steady growth — from \$63 million in 2010 to \$88 million in 2015.
- According to figures from the National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA), retail sales of lacrosse sticks have been growing at a rate of nine percent a year for the last 10 years.
- And finally, according to the NFHS, the sport of lacrosse is on the way to becoming a coast-to-coast sport. Lacrosse is halfway there, so to speak, as 25 state high school associations officially sponsor boys' and girls' lacrosse. It's worth noting that lacrosse is the tenth most popular high school sport for girls and number 11 for boys in the U.S.

"Our records indicate that lacrosse is the fastest-growing sport in America," says **James Weaver**, NFHS director of performing arts and sports and staff liaison for boys' lacrosse. "Lacrosse is very popular in the Northeast and East. We are doubling our numbers every year."

While the hotbed of lacrosse remains in Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, California and New York, the tentacles of the sport are firmly established in those five states and spreading every year to other states.

In south Florida, lacrosse participation is getting larger every year.

"Lacrosse participation seems to grow every year and it appears to be at the expense of baseball," notes **Kevin Licata**, manager of **Medallion's Sporting Goods**, Jupiter, FL.

Travel and rec programs are buying uniforms, sticks, balls, goals, nets and protective gear from Medallion's. And,



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TEAM / SPECIALTY SPORTS

with the departure of The Sports Authority from the south Florida retail scene, Licata expects his lacrosse business to grow even more. Medallion's does sell lacrosse to local high schools, but it is selling more practice wear than on-the-field lacrosse uniforms to the schools.

In New England, young lacrosse players are getting all their introductory gear from **Brine's Sporting Goods**.

"Lacrosse is one of our main sports and we are selling lots of uniforms to the local town programs," says **James Brine**, a sales associate at Brine's, Sudbury, MA.

In Rochester, NY, **Jim Dalberth Sporting Goods** dabbles in lacrosse. "We sell lacrosse balls, nets and goals to schools," says owner **David Edtzel**.

In the central New Hampshire community of West Lebanon, sales of lacrosse uniforms and equipment are strong for **Stateline Sports**, but lacrosse sales have been stronger in prior years.

"We sell everything in lacrosse, even goals and nets, but our lacrosse sales have dwindled in recent years," admits manager **Bob Friend**.

In the western U.S., interest in lacrosse is

beginning to rival what's happening on the Eastern Seaboard.

"We are just now getting into selling lacrosse equipment," says **Brian Pepper**, national sales manager at **Universal Athletic**, Bozeman, MT. "We have been selling (lacrosse) uniforms and apparel for years. Lacrosse participation is skyrocketing and in my hometown, the issue is finding enough coaches. This category will only continue to grow for us as we continue to gain knowledge from our lacrosse vendors."

In sunny southern California, lacrosse is here to stay and getting stronger every year. "It's a big sport for us," says **Kim Karsh**, of **California Pro Sports**. "Lacrosse is a big high school sport for both boys and girls. The lacrosse clubs are dominated by boys' teams."

In Kansas and Missouri, "lacrosse is still a direct sell," admits **Randy Nill**, owner, **Nill Brothers Sports**, Kansas City, KS.

"At our local high schools, lacrosse is still a club sport," says Nill. "I'm yearning for lacrosse to come my way."

Within the last year, the sport of lacrosse began making some inroads into central Kentucky.

"High school lacrosse started coming into our

area in the last year," reports **Dale Keith**, owner of **Duke's Sporting Goods**, Elizabethtown, KY. "It's not a big-time sport yet, but some high schools have started teams and we're taking care of them."

Keith adds that there are high school lacrosse teams in Louisville, which is about 50 miles to the north of his area, so teams will make the trek there to get games.

In Fayetteville, GA, lacrosse is getting established. "We sell a little bit to some local lacrosse teams," says **Howell McElroy**, owner of **Fayette Sporting Goods**. "Right now, it's limited to team T-shirts and spirit wear."

While lacrosse is very popular along the Eastern Seaboard, it's not quite as popular in Delaware as it is in the surrounding states.

"Lacrosse is growing in Delaware, but it's not as popular as it is in nearby Pennsylvania," says **Sheri Hart**, sales associate at **Al's Sporting Goods**, Wilmington, DE. "We do sell some introductory sticks, gloves and helmets to younger players in local rec leagues and we do some lacrosse business with some local schools."

Of course, there are some parts of the country where lacrosse just hasn't taken root. ■

COOL ON THE ICE



Despite its obvious limitations – primarily finding places to play and the high cost of participation – ice hockey continues to hold its own special niche in team sports in America. Just how popular it is, of course, depends on the section of the country.

In suburban Boston, the ice hockey scene has changed in the last 15 years and while it's still very popular, the retail scene has gone through a few changes.

"Public high schools are buying pucks and custom uniforms from us," says **Frank Brillo**, sales associate at **Beacon Sporting Goods**, Quincy, MA. "But because of budget cuts, the kids from the public schools are buying their own sticks, protective gear, helmets and skates."

Many private schools are still buying everything for their players, he says, because they tend to have bigger budgets."

Beacon also sells ice hockey gear to some of the local college programs, but many of the higher profile college ice hockey teams get their product directly from the manufacturers.

In Vermont, ice hockey purchases are made nearly every month of the year.

"We are busy selling ice hockey from Father's Day until May 1 the following year," says **Kevin Smith**, owner of **Kevin Smith's Sports**, St. Albans, VT. Smith sells to all teams and all ice hockey players in his part of the country — from youth teams to adult men's teams.

In West Lebanon, NH, ice hockey is a big part of the annual revenue stream for Stateline Sports.

"Ice hockey is probably our biggest sport," says Bob Friend. "We sell uniforms to many area high schools. We also outfit quite a few colleges in the area from head to toe. But, our ice hockey business is not as big as it is with other team dealers in southern New England."

In some parts of Montana, ice hockey generates business and in other parts of the state, it does not.

"We do sell mainly practice and travel gear and a few uniforms, although that is still a work in progress," reports **Brian Pepper**, of **Universal Athletic**.

"Ice hockey doesn't generate any business for us in eastern Montana," says **Gabby Smith**, store manager at **Jock Stop**, in Glendive, MT.

Despite the fact that Phoenix is surrounded by a hot desert, ice hockey has a strong following in the Valley of the Sun.

"We have five or six ice hockey arenas in the area, but the pro shops do a great job of selling the teams what they need," says **Dennis Callison**, of **East Valley Sports**. ■

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Industry leaders provide insight into four key tech issues impacting the team business in 2016. →

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TECHNOLOGY SURVEY



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Every link in the team sports chain – from vendors and independent reps to buying groups and team dealers – is facing the challenges and opportunities presented by technology. *Team Insight* sought out a representative sample of them for their thoughts on how technology is changing the team game in 2016 and where we go from here. **By Michael Jacobsen**



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HOW HAS TECHNOLOGY CHANGED THE WAY THE TEAM SPORTS BUSINESS OPERATES?



STEVE VOGELSANG, GILL / PORTER

It has substantially increased speed and efficiency of the team sales process. There is more real-time vendor/product information immediately accessible and customer communication is coming in 24/7.

ADAM BLUMENFELD,
BSN SPORTS

IT HAS EITHER MADE IT DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO COMPETE OR IT HAS BEEN A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE AND A PATHWAY TO RADICALLY IMPROVED CUSTOMER-FACING SOLUTIONS.

JONATHAN HAYDEN,
BOWNET SPORTS

BY INCREASING THE SPEED AND EFFICIENCY OF VIEWING, ORDERING AND SELLING. EFFICIENCIES IN ALL DEPARTMENTS HAVE REDUCED COSTS OF ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL AND PROCESSING TIME.

JERRY WILLIAMS, SCHUYLKILL VALLEY SPORTS

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DON LEONARD, CROWN SPORT SALES

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PETE SCHNEIDER, ATHLETIC DEALERS OF AMERICA

THE INTERNET HAS HAD A PROFOUND IMPACT THROUGH INCREASED COMPETITION FROM E-COMMERCE DEALERS AS WELL AS VENDORS WHO SELL DIRECT TO THE END USER.

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HAS THE TEAM SPORTS BUSINESS EMBRACED TECHNOLOGY?



JONATHAN HAYDEN, BOWNET SPORTS

There are team dealers who have resisted the speed of change, but the younger generation of owners and employees has fully embraced new technologies. They grew up with it so they are more comfortable with the constant changes.

PETE SCHNEIDER,
ATHLETIC DEALERS OF AMERICA

Our industry had been slow to embrace technology initially, but in recent years has been much more open to how the new technology can benefit both the customer and their business.

DON BATES,
ALLEN SPORTS CENTER

THE SPORTS INDUSTRY IS OFTEN SLOW TO ADOPT NEW TECHNOLOGY, BUT CATCHES UP AT AN AMAZING PACE.

JERRY WILLIAMS, SCHUYLKILL VALLEY SPORTS

The industry is slow, but is making strides that need to be profitable.

STEVE VOGELSANG, GILL/PORTER

Depending on size and resources, a growing number of dealers are taking advantage of some level of vendor EDI and online sales platforms.

ADAM BLUMENFELD, BSN SPORTS

OUR INDUSTRY HAS DRAFTED BEHIND OBVIOUS IMPROVEMENTS MADE IN BROADER MARKETS, BUT HAS BEEN SLOW TO CONCEPTUALIZE HOW THESE TOOLS CAN BE UNIQUELY APPLIED TO OUR MARKETPLACE.

DON LEONARD, CROWN SPORT SALES

• IT DEPENDS ON THE DEALER. SOME HAVE TOTALLY EMBRACED IT, WHILE OTHERS HAVE BEEN SLOW TO ADAPT.

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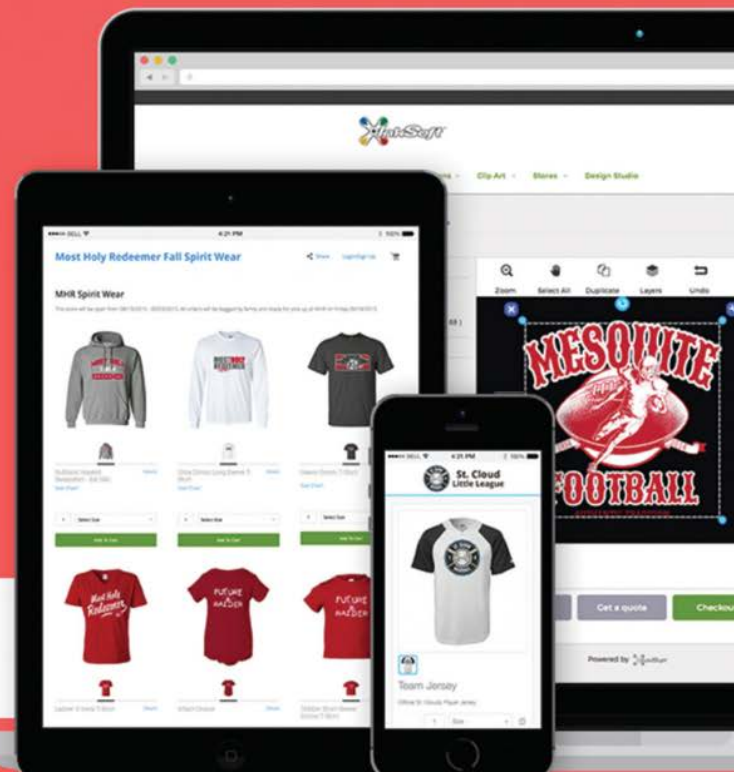
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WHAT IS THE DOWNSIDE OF ALL THIS TECHNOLOGY?



JONATHAN HAYDEN, BOWNET SPORTS

The reduced role of real human interaction. The Internet has now become the expert, in some cases replacing the knowledge of the local sales staff.

DON BATES, ALLEN SPORTS CENTER

Customers now have the ability to research and shop online for pricing after a salesperson spends time defining their needs and budgets for them. It takes some of the loyalty away.

ADAM BLUMENFELD, BSN SPORTS

CUSTOMERS WILL EXPECT SERVICE AND DELIVERY ON PAR WITH WHAT THEY SEE IN REGULAR LIFE WITH AMAZON, WHICH WILL APPLY PRESSURE TO SUPPLY CHAINS TO MEET RAPIDLY CHANGING EXPECTATIONS.

JERRY WILLIAMS, SCHUYLKILL VALLEY SPORTS

THE INTERNET ALLOWS CONSUMERS TO GET PRICES FROM MULTIPLE SOURCES QUICKLY. WE CAN'T SURVIVE SELLING ONLY ON PRICE.

STEVE VOGELSANG, GILL/PORTER

Customer expectations for speed and accuracy are rising and how team customers now define "relationship" is changing. Those that readily adapt will grow market share at the expense of those that cannot.

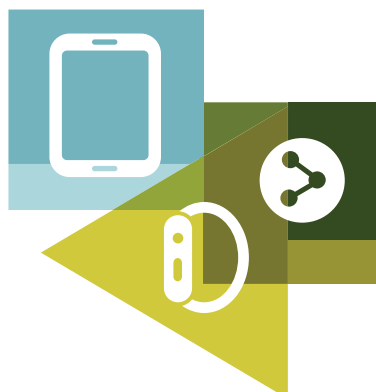
PETE SCHNEIDER, ATHLETIC DEALERS OF AMERICA

The downside can be the relationship side of the business. While most team dealers want to embrace the technology for the benefit of their customers, they don't want to lose touch with the relationships they have fostered over the years.

DON LEONARD, CROWN SPORT SALES

IT HAS TAKEN THE PERSONAL TOUCH AWAY FROM THE TEAM SPORTS BUSINESS.

WHERE DOES TECHNOLOGY IN TEAM SPORTS GO FROM HERE?



STEVE VOGELSANG, GILL/PORTER

Dealer and vendor integration will become more seamless. Product marketing and promotion, inventory availability and order processing, shipping and delivery notifications between the dealer, customer and vendor will get faster and more accurate.

JERRY WILLIAMS, SCHUYLKILL VALLEY SPORTS

I see a day where we rarely speak to the customer and that everything will be electronic. Our personal relationships will grow electronically.

DON BATES, ALLEN SPORTS CENTER

Technology will grow, as in any industry. There may be a day when there are actual virtual uniform builders. You may be able to compare on the same screen competitive uniforms or equipment with side-by-side information.

ADAM BLUMENFELD, BSN SPORTS

Technology goes blazing straight ahead at a pace our industry has never before experienced. The next 10 years will be about an ever-flattening world and supply chain, an over-emphasis on personalization and a premium given to quality, accuracy, self-service and speed.

PETE SCHNEIDER, ATHLETIC DEALERS OF AMERICA

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HOW THREE DEALERS ACROSS AMERICA ARE UTILIZING **TECHNOLOGY** IN 2016.

EMBRACING CHANGE



Think about this for a moment: 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. **By Tim Sitek**

N

early everyone remembers the days of the revolutionary new device called the fax machine. (Admit it, we all wondered how that ink was sent through the phone lines.) Well, that may seem like prehistoric history, but at the time that quaint technology dramatically changed the nature of business.

Fast forward (and we do mean fast) to 2016 and the speed of technical development in the team sports business is mind boggling, especially for dealers who grew up selling jocks and socks to their buddies at the local high school. The speed of technology today touches nearly every aspect of a team dealer's business. One dealer claims that technology has altered the way he does business more than any product he's sold for the past 25 years.

Yes, team dealers have embraced these new tools, notably online team stores for everything from player packs to spirit wear. 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. There are design tools. Let's not forget those smartphones, laptops and tablets. And throw in social media for good measure.

It's a brave new world for sure. Team dealers know it and are striving – and struggling – to adopt and adapt. But technology has become a differentiator, a factor in who wins the business and who is left on the outside looking in ... who makes money and who struggles making payroll ... who stays in business and who closes his doors.

Still, every team dealer understands that while technology provides the tools to improve, these same tools are only as good as the men and women who use them. In other words, the personal touch is in no danger of being lost in the world of team sports.

Here's a look at how three team dealers are using technology to stay relevant and in business while combining high tech with high touch.

Prime Time For Tech

In business since 1995, today technology drives business for **Prime Sports**. Based in Chula Vista, CA, in suburban San Diego, the team dealer continues to grow rapidly thanks to its staff and its ability to embrace tech tools, says **Manuel Romero**, supervisor, IT guru and sales rep.

Now with seven salespeople calling on schools, clubs, leagues and corporations, the company has grown to 30 employees. While it does business even in the Northwest and Northeast, not to mention one account in Japan, 95 percent of its business comes from schools, teams and companies in the San Diego area. Those team sales also extend well beyond apparel and footwear as it outfits teams with hard goods too. And its online sales lead the charge, with 70 percent of its online sales coming from its team stores, Romero notes.

Romero recalls the early days when the company started its own team stores. "It was tough," he notes. "We used an e-commerce basket and we had to create everything from scratch. It was a nightmare and we fought through it."

Now, Prime Sports uses the platform offered through TeamUniformOrders to make life easier and more productive when setting up those team stores. "There's no looking back since we began using TUO," Romero notes.

To further ensure accuracy and to increase productivity, Prime Sports uses ShopWorks to drive everything from quotes to order entry, from purchasing to inventory, from production to delivery.

Employing such technology speeds up the process, especially when designing and printing apparel, Romero notes. "You no longer have to manually enter colors and designs. You follow all the details from design to production to delivery. It's starting to take over," he says of the tracking software and team stores.

Plus, it greatly reduces the chances for mistakes. "It's as simple as names. You no longer have to write these down and trust that you spelled the name correctly. Instead, the customer supplies an Excel file and we can import it." Prime Sports even supplies the template for this, with size, number and name for both home and away jerseys.

As for the team stores, schools completely rely on this in California, Romero

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notes. Much of that stems from rules that prohibit coaches from selling merchandise. “We can offer spirit packs and the coaches only pick the product.”

And that’s the sweet spot for those team stores — high schools and soccer clubs. The latter really draws big numbers, Romero notes. “There are so many soccer clubs that have upwards of up to 500-600 kids.”

Consequently, team customers are demanding the tools that make their jobs easier. “They don’t want to come in. We provide forms online that they can download. We help with the sizing.”

Take those soccer clubs, Romero says. There may be 25 coaches involved in the different age groups and the club board members can’t deal with 25 voices. Instead, Prime Sports works with one, maybe two or three administrators, to set up the uniform, apparel and possibly shoes and accessories. The coach then fills out the supplied order form. “This streamlines the logistics and the orders,” he says.

With its in-house screenprinting, embroidery and tackle twill capabilities, Prime Sports can then decorate and deliver those team store orders within 10 days after the store closes, Romero notes.

While it has its own design team, Prime Sports also allows the creative crowd to come up with their own look by offering InkSoft. The online design software allows its customers to design production-ready graphics right from its website.

“We definitely educate them beforehand,” Romero says of the online design tool. “We warn them about the costs up front when choosing multiple colors and the locations of graphics.” Fortunately, many team customers already understand the dynamics of screenprinting and decorating, he says.

With all that tech, though, there’s still a learning curve for employees and customers, Romero notes. Implementing any technology can be challenging.

“The biggest part of that is the employees and customers buying into it,” Romero says. “The manual way was so familiar. It took a few months to buy into it. You let go of the order when you use ShopWorks, unlike the manual way. We constantly remind everyone it’s going to help and not a way to spy on them or reduce jobs.”

As for its customers, some just need a little push. “You may have to hold their hand if they are nervous about team stores,” Romero warns. “We bring them in to show them our facility and to demonstrate how the team stores work. They can touch and feel the product.”

That’s also important in balancing high tech with high touch. “We find and balance it well. We still visit coaches and talk to them,” he says. ■

Lighting Up The Scoreboard

As one of the owners of **Scoreboard Sports** in Salt Lake City, UT, **Sean Macklyn** has been selling sporting goods for 25 years and he’s seen his share of changes, not the least of which is how technology has shaped his business.

“We’ve gone from notepads and paper to a laptop. Technology has changed everything from the Internet to our order entry system. It’s changed more in that part of the industry than in the products we sell,” Macklyn notes. “How I’ve sold soccer shoes has changed drastically compared to the actual shoe.”

That even extends beyond his two retail locations and team stores. Social media drives his customers. “They used to come to our store to find out when a new shoe was coming out. Now the kids come to my store to try out shoes that they already know about.”

AT THE END OF THE DAY, TECHNOLOGY PLAYS A CRITICAL ROLE IN EXECUTING AND MEETING THE CUSTOMER’S NEEDS. THAT WON’T CHANGE.

Yes, technology shapes customer expectations, he says. Besides what is sold, they want to know the status of their order. “Look at Domino’s. They want to track their pizza order from start to finish. Consumers now demand this. It’s no longer just what I do, but how we’ve had to change to meet customers’ expectations.”

Now, Scoreboard Sports uses omnichannels to meet those expectations. Specializing in soccer, volleyball and wrestling, business breaks down to 20 percent retail for the try-it-before-you-buy-it crowd, 40 percent team and 40 percent online. Scoreboard even hits the road across its territory in the Wasatch Front. A trailer full of goods showcases its products and services at various soccer, volleyball and wrestling tournaments.

Its three roadmen also take advantage of team stores to maximize sales. It’s no longer just working with a coach who would then hand the needed items to the players. Now, Scoreboard touches the

end consumer rather than just the coach or league director, which drives sales online and in-store.

“That’s good, but you also better meet the consumer’s expectations or others will hear about it,” Macklyn stresses.

Using the TeamUniformOrders platform, those team stores have pushed sales. “I used to be able to handle those orders on a notepad. Without the technology, though, I wouldn’t be able to execute the business anymore,” Macklyn says.

There’s a caveat, too. Team stores are great, but these must integrate with dealer’s internal systems and technology. “You can’t have too many parts and pieces. Any platform has to be streamlined and efficient. You have a learning curve.”

Most importantly, Scoreboard sells proactively. “We use technology to close the deal. We do presumptive sales. We create a page with mockups. We brand it to them and use design software to quickly build a page. It shows that we’ve done the homework and put the effort into it. It’s allowed us to customize things,” Macklyn calls it virtual reality that works in closing the deal.

Additionally, Scoreboard uses a host of other tools, including Microsoft’s customer relationship management to track leads and better service existing teams. An order management system tracks quotes, purchasing, inventory, production and delivery.

“We combine TeamUniform-Order’s platform with our design and production software to sell and service accounts,” he says.

Those tech tools are great, but again he knows that printed materials still remain important. “You still need to stick a piece of paper in someone’s hands and catalogs still carry weight.”

All of this high tech and low tech meets the needs of Scoreboard’s customers. Some teams want the look offered by sublimation, others may opt for lower cost decoration. Some want the portals to look at designs and proofs and mockups to show players, parents and coaches the final look.

And more customers want visibility of their orders on those spirit and team stores. “We can give them a log in to see where the order stands. We can go even more granular eventually to show every step of the process from order to production to delivery.”

Technology still doesn’t replace connection, though. “At the end of the day, if everything is equal, people buy from people. Technology just differentiates you from the competition. You still have to sell.”

Technology doesn’t replace relationships or customer service. “It does change the way we

A LITTLE VENDOR **HELP, PLEASE**

communicate with the customer.” Just look back at the days of the fax, he says.

“It still doesn’t replace the phone call or visit. It just changes the way we do business versus the way we execute.”

Retail still plays a role, too. “The amount of stuff that people buy on the Internet has changed. They are willing to buy online, but many still want to

IT’S A BRAVE NEW
WORLD FOR SURE.
TEAM DEALERS
KNOW IT AND ARE
STRIVING – AND
STRUGGLING – TO
ADOPT AND ADAPT.

try on that pair of shoes.”

At the end of the day, technology plays a critical role in executing and meeting the customer’s needs. That won’t change. In fact, Macklyn knows that Scoreboard and team dealers must not only play the game, but stay well ahead of it.

“You have to adapt to technology and move along with the consumer. Those who don’t will be at risk of becoming extinct. You look at the age of owners today. I started when I was 20 and believe we’ve done a good job of keeping up. I can’t even imagine what the changes will be in the next 20 years.” ■

Clearing The Bases

No stranger to technology, **Bases Loaded** continues to clear the bases with its all-encompassing approach. Located in Rancho Cordova, CA, the business covers all the bases with its retail, e-commerce and team operations. In fact, the company recently made a major move to a much larger building to support its retail, online and warehouse operations, says owner **Dan Wells**. The move more than tripled its space.

“Technology plays a massive role in our success. It’s a competitive advantage. It allows us to be faster to market. And the software enables us to do more things,” he says.

In fact, Bases Loaded updated its team presence by aligning with OrderMyGear (OMG) to develop team stores. OMG allows Bases Loaded to use selected vendors that have loaded catalogs and images that allow it to quickly build a team store. “We can point, click and build customer team

stores very quickly,” Wells notes.

Still, team still only represents about 15 percent of the business. But that’s not because the team side isn’t growing. Rather, his retail and e-commerce operations are growing even faster. Those e-commerce sales alone more than doubled through June of this year, Wells says.

Such sales increases take some work and investment. Bases Loaded drives traffic by investing in Google shopping, pay-per-click ads and search engine optimization. “We spend a lot on generating traffic and make sure we get the order once they find our site,” Wells says.

Wells ensures that the e-commerce site is mobile and user friendly. “About 55 percent of our traffic now comes from mobile phones,” he adds.

Bases Loaded also uses social media to reach customers. “What they really want is communication,” Wells says of consumers. So it uses Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat and more to stay connected. “Each one reaches a totally different demographic,” Wells says of the social media outlets.

And Bases Loaded plays the e-commerce game well. Any order before 3 p.m. goes out the same day and shipping is free for any order of more than \$35. Most residents in California and Nevada even get their orders delivered the next day. While it may not be Amazon, Bases Loaded delivers on that promise, shipping 145 orders on a recent spring day.

Those Internet sales have made Bases Loaded a better retailer and team dealer, Wells notes.

First of all, the three legs – retail, e-commerce and team stores – feed off the same inventory and processes. Second, it sharpens pricing structures since consumers can shop the web to determine price points. And last, it allows Bases Loaded to expand its inventory, going deeper and broader in its selection.

As an example, Wells says that he may not have carried an orange bat bag in the past since it may have only sold three in a year. Now, it can expand the breadth and depth of its inventory since it has three channels to use in selling that inventory. And, yes, it helps when you specialize in baseball and softball, Wells notes.

As for its team sales, Bases Loaded focuses on select teams and leagues. It no longer uses roadmen. Instead, salespeople provide service over the phone for those too far away to drive to its retail location. Local teams and organizations, though, do drive to the store.

In-house decorating allows Bases Loaded to handle 8000 to 10,000 uniforms a month, complete with names and numbers, during the peak period. ■

AS TEAM DEALERS ADOPT AND DEPLOY TECH tools, they are also counting on their suppliers to provide resources to streamline their efforts.

First and foremost, team dealers want access to inventory levels from suppliers. After all, it’s tough to supply uniforms to just 14 out of 15 players or to find out that a spirit pack can’t be filled since the supplier ran out of an XL size.

“The biggest thing for us is online inventory and making sure it’s correct,” says Manuel Romero, of Prime Sports. “If their inventories aren’t real time, it’s very risky. The vendors that do have actual inventory, it’s a huge part of our business.”

Those B2B sites are critical, agrees Sean Macklyn, of Scoreboard Sports. “It’s number one from suppliers. It’s your portal into their business.”

And that’s 24/7, he notes. “I want to go on weekends or at night to execute an order. I spend the key part of my day on selling.”

Macklyn wants to be able to check inventory, costs, status of orders, place and cancel orders, pick shipping methods, find images and more after business hours. And not to be picky, but Macklyn wants sites that are easy to navigate and quick. As for the latter, he often prefers paper catalogs that provide quick access to information, never slow down with internet traffic or simply break down.

Active B2B sites make ordering quicker and with less errors, says Dan Wells, of Bases Loaded, but many vendors are still making the transition to technology. Purchasing inventory still takes time and he sees room for improvement.

In particular, Wells says suppliers need to take a better look at each customer. Bases Loaded believes in omnichannel retailing, courting customers with its brick-and-mortar stores, through e-commerce and team stores, and with social media. He still may get a rep who deals strictly with traditional team dealers or retailers, unlike Eastbay that has a dedicated rep that understands the company’s needs. As an example, he points to the need for images and clear product information to sell products on his e-commerce site, something that Eastbay can get through its reps.

It’s important for suppliers to provide those images and information, Macklyn says. Plus, “give me a way on your site to create a package offering that I could download and export to a customer. It’s cumbersome to take images and then import them into your system to design.”

Besides creating such sales material, it also should allow team dealers to send a price quote on the package. As an example, Macklyn raves about SanMar’s system that’s easy to use in building a customized package, including pricing.

Romero seconds the need for easy access to vendor sites that offer marketing tools. “There are some vendors that give us nice clean images and we can then design to show the customer. SanMar does a great job,” he adds.

Romero also wants vendor B2B sites to become more universal so he doesn’t have to reinvent the wheel every time he logs on to a different supplier’s site. He knows that may not be practical, but at the very least he prefers sites that are easy to navigate and user-friendly. “Some back ends on vendor sites are so bad. You can’t search easily for what you need. It can be frustrating.”

Uniform builders work well for custom uniforms, Romero adds. “The customer wants to see it online. Once they do, they go for that look.” ■

Touch and Sell

Team dealers know that their survival hinges on service. They also know that delivering that service has to keep up with the times. Online team stores have become a big part of giving customers a convenient option for buying everything from spirit packs to fan wear. Technology plays an important role in doing just that.

Enter two big players that have enabled team dealers to find new levels of service that increase efficiency and expand their sales to teams, clubs, organizations, corporations and more groups. TeamUniformOrders (TUO) and OrderMyGear (OMG) offer platforms

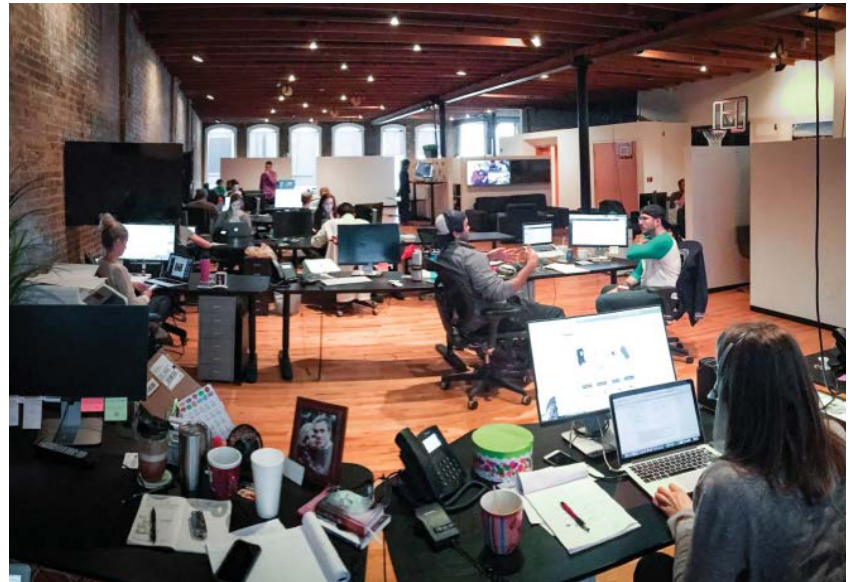
to allow dealers to focus on service while efficiently setting up those team stores that boost their business and provide a differentiating factor to remain relevant and competitive.

Team Insight spoke with two of the leading visionaries in online team stores – Gerry Brewer, CEO and managing director of TeamUniformOrders, and Kent McKeaigg, founder and CEO of OrderMyGear – to get some insight on their platforms, evolving services and the benefits for team dealers.

Can you provide us with a brief description of your technology?

Gerry Brewer: TUO offers automated, online ordering technology for

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dealers and providers of all shapes and sizes and even for non-sports businesses such as promotional products and corporate apparel. Dealers use the Tuosystems.com platform to streamline and improve how they take and process orders for the organizations they serve. The TUO platform enables team dealers to easily set up custom-branded online stores. Through centralized data management and sophisticated reporting tools, the entire ordering and fulfillment process is seamlessly managed and automated for each and every user.

Kent McKeaigg: OMG is a platform used by team dealers to streamline the process of selling group orders. All orders are paid individually.

What recent upgrades have you made and how do these improve your service?

Brewer: In the last year alone, TUO has launched more than 1500 new features, most of which originated from the close working relationship that TUO maintains with each and every user. In fact, new features are now launched systematically every two weeks and each have numerous end benefits to each and every user. Some of the biggest new features launched in the last year are Facebook Store Integration, Improved Club and Team Manager Tools, New Store Designs, Direct Shipping Integration, Automatic Order Status Tracking, Dealer-wide Data Management and Reporting, Advanced Product Libraries, Custom

TUO's online ordering technology is designed to make life easier for team dealers.



dealers to greatly reduce errors that occurred in the traditional way of collecting, processing and fulfilling team business.

McKeaigg: Dealers increase sales and often create a new, growing channel of business. They also become more efficient with what they are doing and, most importantly, it allows them to scale their operations to handle demand. At the end of the day, OMG allows them to reach more people, more efficiently.

What is your pricing structure?

Brewer: It's simple and very straight forward: No start-up cost/fee nor any monthly fees. No limit to how many online stores a team dealer can have

active at any time. TUO applies a relatively small percentage fee (similar to a credit card processing fee) to the total transactions in any online store. TUO does not apply this cost to shipping, taxes or any handling fees. If a team dealer decides it's not right for his business, there is no penalty or cancellation fee.

McKeaigg: OMG makes money when the dealer makes money, so we are vested partners with the dealer. We keep 3.5 percent of the volume total, which is usually passed on to the parent via a line-item charge. We also charge a \$2100 licensing fee. OMG has service options that include store creation, artwork and customer support as well. ■

Image Editor and Customer Support.

McKeaigg: We have created a marketing platform that allows coaches and reps to efficiently market to kids and parents. We have also improved reports so that reps can now take a store and create multiple POs (by brand) from a store with a few clicks. No more writing orders. One of our biggest projects has been our catalog platform that allows a rep to create custom product collections that are marketed to the coach for two functions. OMG also is creating data dashboards for both dealers and vendors to display valuable data in a practical way. On the product side, we are starting to integrate inventory data with a few vendors.

What benefits do team dealers receive from your platform?

Brewer: Dealers collect money upfront so they don't have to chase accounts or worry about bad checks after orders are already delivered. These stores also eliminate wasteful and inefficient administration costs. There are no more paper order forms or Excel spreadsheets. Administrative work is all but eliminated through automated order collection, real-time order tracking, real-time accounting and sales reporting and fulfillment reports. And online customer support greatly reduces the number of calls and emails about order status, size questions and last-minute change order requests and cancellations. Our platform also enables team

TECH-ORATION



en years ago few dealers would have imagined their world as it is now. Technology is transforming decorating products and processes, along with customer expectations for how they are designed, ordered and delivered. The choices and pace of change can overwhelm even the most ardent dealer.

Fortunately these dealers are finding solutions to leverage the technology and (hopefully) make life easier.

"All the technology makes it very easy to create custom apparel and gear on a tablet or a PC," says **Mike Weir**, owner of **Red Weir Athletics**, Columbia, MO. "Years ago we'd get out the colored pencils and markers to show a team what gold would look like on their uniform. Now it's just a few keystrokes."

From design to delivery, the digital tools available make the transaction more seamless. "The manufacturers have all the tools, whether you're designing online or checking inventory in real time so you're not ordering blind," says **Jim Gregg**, owner of **Cascade Athletic Supply**, Medford, OR. "It's definitely a challenge to evolve the business and keep up with it all."

Teams like choices and expect they can get what they want. "I don't think the technology has necessarily made things easier, but there's a lot more you can offer," says **Paul Norris**, owner of **Sports Plus**, Chantilly VA. "The challenge for our in-house decorating is keeping up with in all the new technical fabrics, special inks and new designs."

"Ideally team dealers are being informed by both the manufacturers and, more importantly, their customers. Listening to these voices helps dealers keep on top of current trends," says **Chris Kollmeyer**, product development manager at **Teamwork Athletic**. "It's important to partner with companies with the ability to adapt quickly to new market trends."

Ultimately team dealers are looking for new ways to maintain traditional high levels of service and stay relevant. "We try hard to do it all, to keep up with trends and offer complete decorating and in-house design services for team branding and identification to online stores," says **David Bell**, owner of **Bell's Sporting Goods**, Lafayette, LA.

What's undeniable? In this digitally connected, smartphone, 24/7 world the way forward for decorating, and the team business, is paved with technology solutions.

"The gap between those who embrace the best technology has to offer and those who have not (yet) has never been bigger," says **Gerry Brewer**, CEO of **TeamUniformOrders**. "The key driver continues to be the demands of the end customer and their collective insistence on working with providers who can simplify their lives. Embracing advanced technology solutions is often the means to that end."

Keystrokes for Team Orders

Decorating touches a majority of team sales. Whether that decorating is done in-house or by vendors, making it happen includes a lot of details and choices that impact the end result. Team dealers are constantly doing the calculus for which technology solutions to apply to their business.

Some are no-brainers, such as online uniform builders that let them show colorful designs in minutes.

DECORATING CREATES THE TEAM BRAND, BUT **TECHNOLOGY** REVEALS THE VISION. BY NANCY BAEDER

Digital Builders have made the design process is simple, fun, engaging and time efficient.

"We use uniform builders when we can, which is most of the time," says Gregg. "Every manufacturer has their own and they've all come a long way to making it easier. Right now we primarily do uniforms, although there programs to create vector artwork for T-shirts. We just haven't gotten there yet."

Dealer reps are becoming more tech savvy by necessity. "A lot of our guys didn't grow up with computers, but they use vendor uniform builders to create designs and some of them are pretty easy to use," says Norris. "The uniform builders have come a long way in the last four or five years. A lot of the time we send our customers directly to the manufacturer's site to figure out exactly what they want and we just submit the order. The customers are happy to do it."

Weir also encourages coaches to go online. "The coaches create their vision and send their designs to us," says Weir. "It works out great most of the time, but you have to be careful. Some coaches spend hours on designs, with respect to baseball caps, and they end up with a \$30 cap on a \$15 budget."

Online stores are another way that many dealers make technology work for them. It's a win-win to get paid up front for decorated team gear and provide a convenient service teams like.

"We set up team stores on our website for teams, boosters and sometimes as fundraisers," says Weir. "We have learned to keep it under 10 items; six is the perfect number to get the optimum number of orders for each decorated item."

Dealers are also turning to technology companies such as OrderMyGear (OMG) and Team Uniform Orders (TUO) in order to provide the level of service customers expect, letting experts handle the technology end and freeing themselves up to handle sales and service.

Sports Plus was an early adapter of OrderMyGear. "Most coaches want the kids to get their stuff and generate team spirit, but want nothing to do with the process," says Norris. "We find OMG a good system. The way things are, people are used to going online, ordering what they want and having it appear at their doorstep in a few days. In the team business, the timeline is longer, but they expect the same type of service. And more and more are willing to pay the fee to have it shipped directly to their house."

"Plus," he adds, "when you're selling to individuals, parents, you get higher margins."

Sports Plus has done more than 550 online team stores with OrderMyGear to date. "Most of my guys have them set up the stores for them. It's a small fee, but I tell them I'd rather have them out there selling more," says Norris.

Norris puts the number of items in an online store from five to 25 items, but the rule of thumb



TECH & THE TEAM DEALER / DECORATING

is 10-12 items to get the volume for each item you want. Once the store closes, Sports Plus does all the decorating, prints receipts and packages all the orders.

Kent McKeaigg, founder of **OrderMyGear**, sees his company as the way for team dealers to leverage their biggest advantage – relationships – by providing support for them on the technology side. “We continue to learn and grow the OrderMyGear marketplace as we use it to add value to our dealer base,” says McKeaigg.

Tech support includes building stores, creating artwork and customer support. “Dealers that utilize these services are growing over 50 percent,” he says. New services include OMG Catalogs, where dealers can strategically organize product collections for digital PO orders; Store Requestor, where dealers can determine their own constraints and market to coaches so coaches can create their own stores; a new Metrics Platform for dealers and vendors; and OMG Fulfillment, in the pipeline

for Fall 2016, to provide third-party decorators including embellishment, packing and shipping.

To manage its online business, Cascade Athletic Supply began working with TUO over a year ago. “We set up online stores for schools using their platform,” says Gregg. “Coaches tell us what they want in the store and we get it done. It doesn’t always have to be apparel either. We do stadium seats for football and blankets in team colors and logos.”

He likes that TUO is leading edge and proactive about improving its service, including providing webinars to help dealers keep up with any changes they are making. “It has definitely expanded our business and it feels great when all the orders are coming,” says Gregg. “It’s a lot of work, but everyone is accustomed to ordering online now and coaches appreciate not having to collect money. We see it as a service for our customers.”

Brewer believes technology support is the way for dealers to boost service and revenue. “There is a

simple rule of thumb when it comes to technology,” he says. “If whatever you decide to embrace has an obvious and immediate benefit to your end customer, move as fast as you can with it.”

While he understands that the team business is all about relationships, there is one caveat — relationships are now based upon a new set of criteria and expectations of the end customer.

“The most solid, sustainable relationships are based upon superb service, extreme responsiveness and the mandate that team dealers take more administrative tasks off of the backs of the teams they serve and simplify their lives,” Brewer says.

Decorating 2016

Technology has opened up more decorating options than ever, allowing team dealers to work within the customer’s parameters for budget, timelines and style. Dealers can impress customers in a good way by making it easier and more fun.

Here’s a look at the changes occurring within the decorating landscape.

Screeprinting

Screenprinting is the workhorse for creating custom uniforms and T-shirts with quick deadlines and smaller budgets. The process has been around forever, but there is much to keep up with nonetheless.

“In general we use screenprinting for T-shirts and uniforms, especially when teams only want one color,” says Weir. “The challenge is always the inks and the fabrics. It’s never a dull game because you have to worry about dye migration. The newest thing we’re doing is glow-in-the dark ink for football, camp T-shirts and workout shirts.”

Understanding inks and fabrics has become a science. “This is where the changes keep coming. Every time a new material comes out, someone has to come up with a new ink to use on it,” says Norris. “It’s crazy how many hundreds of gallons of ink we have in order to accommodate different



Teamwork Athletic



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TECH & THE TEAM DEALER / DECORATING

materials. It's not like the old days when you could use Plastisol inks on everything. As materials change, inks change, so it adheres correctly, covers well and looks good."

Printing on performance fabrics requires more care and more time. "Screenprinting on sublimated garments such as camouflage takes extra time because it's necessary to put down an extra layer, a black or a white over the sublimated fabric, before you can screenprint in order to control dye migration," says Gregg. With five full-time employees doing basic T-shirts and at-once uniform orders, his shop stays busy. "We can turn a screenprinted uniform in two weeks. Sublimation is not an option for a lot of teams, outside of the high schools that order a season in advance."

Teams expect help with designs for travel team jerseys, practice shirts and shorts and spirit wear. "We have three people on staff who can create all the vector artwork in-house for whatever teams need," says Bell. "We do the designs in-house and job out the screenprinting to a great shop that keeps up with all the latest inks and processes, such as fades."

Embroidery and Tackle Twill

A tradition in team sports, embroidery and tackle twill are the choice for higher priced garments, coaches' gear and team accessories such as hats and bags.

"We find that more teams are requesting embroidery, perhaps because they are purchasing higher dollar value items such as a \$50 polo shirt," says Weir, who has an on-staff

graphic artist and online design studio for creating and customizing vector designs.

"If it's a bag, it's embroidered, polos are embroidered," says Bell, whose in-house embroidery services accommodate almost every request. "It's amazing what people want you to embroider, but we have to draw the line somewhere."

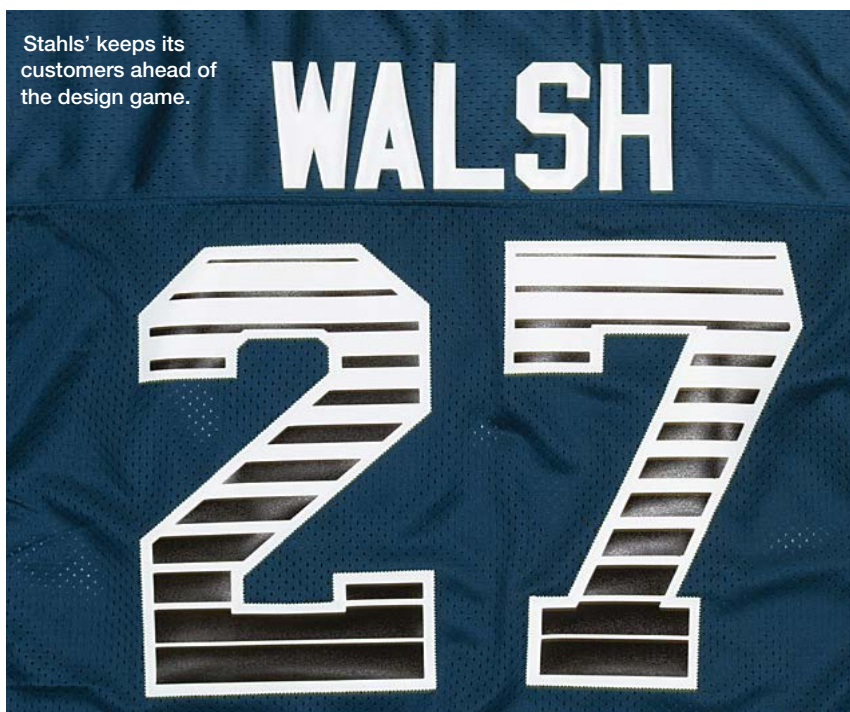
There aren't as many changes in embroidery. "There is always the next-generation machine, but embroidery hasn't changed as much as screenprinting," says Norris, who has 50 embroidery heads and three or four people that work strictly in embroidery doing hats, coaches' clothes, polos and jackets for teams. It also has two full-time artists that set up all the vector artwork for the embroidery.

Tackle twill remains popular, but the products have changed to accommodate stretchy, lighter weight performance fabrics. "We still do some tackle twill, but lot of that business has gone the way of sublimation," says Bell.

"We cut some of our own tackle twill when we have a really tight timeline, but we have found that it's easier to let Stahls' do it, then we sew it on either by hand on regular sewing machines or with our embroidery machines," says Norris.

"The stretch twills are perfect for today's jerseys," says Gregg, who finds that twill still leads in football. "Under Armour and Russell both offer a stretch twill that's one layer sublimated with three colors, whereas in the past if you layered three colors of twill it added a half a pound of fabric.

Stahls' keeps its customers ahead of the design game.



With sublimation you get more bang for the buck if you do a lot of colors and designs, plus it's a cleaner image."

"We utilize sublimated twill in football to provide a single layer, lightweight component. Despite twill looking like two colors, often with a contrasting outline around the numbers, it is all printed on one layer," says **Mike Lawler**, product line manager-football for **Under Armour**. "Our new ArmourGrid jersey is totally unique in the fact that it has non-stretch panels in the front and back, making it nearly impossible to grab."

Heat Transfers

New technology in transfers continues to heat up this business. Heat transfers are a best-cost, high-performance option when time is of the essence — for fill-ins, for player packs, whenever one more is needed.

"We use film and CAD-Cut our own designs," says Bell. "We don't silk-screen numbers as often as we used to, preferring to heat press numbers."

Heat transfers are light-years ahead of where they used to be. "Stahls' latest products are lightweight and fit on Lycra products that stretch four ways. We use them on jerseys, T-shirts and sweatshirts," says Norris. "We use a lot of transfers on shorts, for example, because it's less expensive to buy the transfers and do it ourselves. When someone comes back (which is 80 percent of the time) for a different size or to add a single piece, transfers are the best solution. We recently completed a girls' softball league where each age group got

the same design in a different color."

He prefers the heat press to screenprinting for multi-layer garments and for designs with a lot of colors or fine detail. "Heat transfers are a great solution when people want four or five colors, depending on the overall design," says Norris.

New lightweight heat transfer materials work with low temperature application for performance polyester. "We keep improving our product line to meet the needs of new uniform materials, including new number styles in our Elasti Prints transfers," says **Sue Wilkosky**, of **Transfer Express**. Its newest product is Stretch Litho, a full-color transfer that prints with a sharp edge, with no need to outline like other full color transfers. "The biggest advantage is that this product is printed on sheets allowing more than one print on a sheet, thus reducing printing costs," she says.

At Stahls', smaller, thinner, lighter weight versions of classic number styles are available for newer fabrics. "We continue to find solutions for challenges faced by uniform decorators to accommodate lighter weight, form-fitting jerseys with less room for decorating," says **Paul Sabatini**, sports marketing coordinator for **Stahls' ID Direct**. Its Lite versions offer a thinner two-color application with more of the garment present.

Heat transfers are also available for helmets, water bottles, bat knobs, lacrosse sticks, window decals and bumper sticks, reminds Sabatini. ■



Transfer Express stresses that decorating is not for apparel only.

Photos: This page, left, Teamwork Athletic; above, Transfer Express; Facing page, Stahls

Teamwork Athletic's
Pro-Sphere line.

The Sublimation Game

SUBLIMATION'S ADVANTAGES – light breathable stretch fabrics that maintain performance characteristics with no added weight for decoration and unlimited colors and designs – make it a popular choice for teams.

"Sublimation is still coming on and there's no turning back to twill for baseball and basketball. It's perfect for a basketball uniform because of the drape of the fabric, and more than 90 percent are sublimated now," says Jim Gregg, of Cascade Athletic Supply. "It's moving more that way for baseball and softball because the uniforms are lighter and cooler and maintain the traditional look of tackle twill. From a distance it's hard to tell it's sublimated."

"The lighter tech materials have really taken off down here, particularly for basketball, baseball and softball, in particular," says David Bell, of Bell Sporting Goods, who finds sublimated uniforms ideal for the south's warmer climate.

Improvements continue to be made to color, fabric and design flexibility. "Today there's more flexibility in the designs as well as more design elements to use or change. Five or six years ago it was much more basic," says Paul Norris, of Sports Plus, who purchases sublimated uniforms from many different vendors. "There are differences in quality and pricing. Some of the smaller companies still give an all-inclusive price, but the bigger branded companies are now charging fees for additional locations."

One of the by-products of sublimation's growing popularity is that dealers can focus on selling and service and less on handling production and technology aspects.

"Sublimation is absolutely affecting our business in a good way. Someone else is doing all the work and there are a lot more options for the same price," says Mike Weir, of Red Weir Athletics. "We love it for basketball and we do a lot football uniforms, too, from Holloway, Russell, Under Armour, Champro and Badger.

"I'd do it all online with sublimation if I didn't have to meet timelines," he adds, "but there are still a lot of teams who don't have the ability to order far enough ahead."

Vendors are working to shorten lead times and improve their sublimation offerings. Teamwork Athletic now guarantees three- to 10-day lead times for its sublimated ProSphere brand. "Turnaround time is critical, especially in the time-sensitive team uniform market," says the company's Chris Kollmeyer.

Under Armour sees demand for its fully customizable sublimated basketball uniforms. "Our new Armourlite fabric is a proprietary stretch woven fabric that provides all of the benefits of a knit fabric with the benefits of a woven," says **James Briggs**, UA's product line manager-basketball uniforms. "We provide 20 standardized prints to choose from, as well as some more traditional designs in our premier fabrics such as the new Erupt and South Bend uniforms." ■



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Under Armour's B2B Focus

AN INVESTMENT IN **TECHNOLOGY** FOCUSES ON THE TEAM CHANNEL.



By Michael Jacobsen

Already a marketing and product leader, Under Armour is now staking much of its future success on leading the technology parade — on both the consumer end and in its team sports business. While it is the consumer technology efforts that attract much of the public's — and Wall Street's — attention, its business-to-business efforts for team sports are equally impressive.

Under Armour retooled and launched its B2B site in April, 2015, that took advantage of the benefits on the business-to-consumer end and adapted it to its wholesale business.

Now Phase Two of the investment, scheduled to launch in late Fall, will include a redesigned uniform configurator.

Team Insight caught up with Randy Bielski, Under Armour's manager of B2B e-commerce, to get an inside look at the company's technology effort.

Team Insight: What is the focus of Under Armour's technology efforts in team sports?

Randy Bielski: Under Armour recognizes that the scope of interacting with customers within the team sales channel, much like many other businesses, is progressing. Wholesalers and customers want timely, accurate information at the tip of their fingers to make the best decisions for their

business. As growth skyrockets with underarmour.com and online sales in general on the rise, Under Armour recognizes the importance of an online B2B business that meets customers' expectations.

How will UA's uniform configurator differ from what's out there already?

The launch of the configurator is something that will not only replace our existing tool, but will surpass in form and function anything currently in the team custom landscape. Our partner in this project, Pollinate Advertising, brings a unique technology to the table that will set Under Armour's configurator apart from the competition. We have partnered with them to add features that allow us to understand the user, how they want to use the site and their pain points. This will allow us to cater directly to that user to ensure a great experience during design, while ordering and through delivery.

What is the focus of the B2B site?

The focus of the B2B site is service. Our audience spans 11 business channels in the U.S. and Canada, with a focus to global expansion in the near future, as well as our sports marketing assets that range from AAU basketball to our top D1 NCAA partners.

Why all of this investment in technology?

After evaluating the B2B business and the many gaps that existed with our third party B2B provider, we realized we were tailoring a business to fit an existing platform. We realized that in order to properly service the Under Armour team business we needed to build an Under Armour platform that our customers would relate to and use frequently to grow their individual businesses.

How will this make it easier for team dealers?

In building the B2B site, we took many features and asks from across a multitude of users and included

them in our design, from something as simple as improving search and navigation for products all the way to how products and orders are presented to the customer after they ship. However, the biggest benefit of this tool is that we are able to take customer feedback and immediately make changes to the site.

So what's the ultimate goal?

To stay ahead of where the business is going, appeal to a more computer-savvy generation that has entered the team sales world and continue to provide world-class service to all Under Armour customers.

Is this strictly a team focus?

The B2B site is built on the same platform as our B2C site, underarmour.com, which allows us to share resources and features across the two sites. However, we understand that how and why a customer is shopping on each can be vastly different. So while the framework is the same, there are many features unique to just the B2B site.

What are those unique features?

There are many differences around ordering and inventory that are unique to a wholesale customer. Additionally we have features that manage our marketing assets allotments as well as a roster order function for teams across all sports and competition levels.

What is the next technology step for Under Armour?

Without giving too much away, we see opportunities to connect dealers and coaches and players in the future. We know that the team business continues to change as quickly as individuals are changing how they shop online. Making information available to the customer and helping them find the best option will always be at the forefront of what we are trying to do at Under Armour and the Team B2B site is leading that charge. ■

A Sock Story

TECHNOLOGY ALLOWS PRO FEET TO RAISE ITS CUSTOM GAME.



By Michael Jacobsen

With customization driving the team sock business, vendors are turning to technology to help make the process easier for team dealers. Because roadmen have so many different lines in their bags and each line has many different variables, one vendor, Pro Feet was looking for a way to provide clarity with its line. The answer, like with so many things these days, rested in technology.

A significant investment has resulted in the Pro Feet iPad app, launched this year along with a website—sockbuilder.com—for designing custom socks. Joining the effort is a custom sock portal—portal.sockbuilder.com—that allows dealers to

track their custom orders and view their order history.

“Most of us are visual and we have to see images before we’re able to grasp concepts,” explains **Pro Feet** president **Taylor Wilson**. The sockbuilder, he explains, allows dealers to show customers a proof of a custom sock to help make the sale. “This can be done quickly and easily, any time of the day,” he adds, even while sitting in a coach’s office.

Another benefit: the sockbuilder allows Pro Feet to explain the myriad options in its custom line—differing lead times, different price points, and different technologies—in a visual way. The dealer can then do the same with his customers.

Wilson describes the iPad app as a real-time, electronic catalog that allows team dealers to tailor their presentation based on the customer they’re selling. For a football coach,

for instance, dealers can select only its line of football socks. Among the other benefits:

- Team dealers can email images and product details, as well as see inventory available.
 - All of Pro Feet’s sales flyers and marketing materials are accessible.
 - Custom mock-ups and proofs can be done in a matter of minutes.
 - Being able to create proofs and work directly with a customer while meeting with them shaves days off of lead times.
 - Dealers are able to track their orders through the custom portal, allowing them to provide better communication to their customers regarding order status.
- Wilson says the app and website are gaining traction among dealers who are notoriously slow in adapting new technologies.

“For most of us, it takes a little

while before we embark on a new way of doing things,” he says. “The sockbuilder and the iPad app are still very fresh and we understand it will take a little while before we see dealers fully implement them.”

But he is confident that implementation is right around the corner once dealers realize this technology provides more clarity and visibility and, quite simply, makes their jobs easier.

“Work schedules vary and seem to continue to expand,” Wilson says. “Our dealers wanted the ability to answer questions any time of the day or night. With the iPad app, sockbuilder and the custom portal, they’re able to do so.”

Realizing that this technology will continue to evolve, Pro Feet has invested in a full-time person responsible for maintaining the app and another to maintain the sockbuilder. “Our intent isn’t to build them and then forget about them,” Wilson says. “They’ll be consistently updated and improved.”

More technology investments are certainly in Pro Feet’s future. Already it is launching ProInk, a technology for making custom socks that allows high graphic designs, with performance sock features.

The company is also developing proprietary software to more efficiently draw custom logos for its knitting machines, with an eye on further driving down lead times on its custom sock program.

“We’ll continue to look for ways to use technology to help dealers do business with us,” Wilson says. “We think the sockbuilder, the custom portal and the iPad app are a great start, but we’ll continue to improve those technologies.”

“We’ll look for new ways to use technology that will help us better serve our customers,” he adds. “We’re not investing in technology for technology’s sake, but to help our dealers grow their businesses and better serve their own customers.” ■

Back to School

SANMAR U LETS TEAM DEALERS GRADUATE TO AN **ONLINE** RESOURCE.

By Michael Jacobsen

Not all uses of technology in team sports mean reinventing the wheel. Rather, in the case of the recently launched SanMar U website, it's all about having the foresight, commitment and resources to make existing technology work the company and its many customers.

The development of SanMar U – found at www.education.sanmar.com – was in response to a need SanMar saw to provide a resource for its far-ranging customer base to develop a

better understanding not only of what the company has to offer, but also of the decorating business as a whole.

“People were asking a lot of questions about the industry and fabrics and products and how to sell them,” explains **Lisa Terry, SanMar** communications manager who spearheaded the effort within the company. “We wanted to give them a one-stop-shop with answers to all of these questions.”

The result is SanMar U, which went live last Spring. “Our customers are now able to get answers to a lot of the questions they have all in one place,” says Terry.

SanMar U is broken down into a number of separate categories, making it easy for users to navigate to find the answers to their questions. Among them:

- Webcasts on pertinent topics such as “Capturing School Sales,” “Meet the Millennials” and “Spring New Arrivals.” A webcast scheduled for October will focus on “Conquer the Cold with Trending Outerwear.” An on-demand aspect allows users to share the information with customers and their own internal teams at any time.
- A Blog is updated weekly and provides decorating tips, selling advice and a What's Hot section. “It is where

we put together selling tools for certain markets,” explains Terry.

- The Style Network provides links to advice on style trends. It is refreshed seasonally with various reports on what's trending in key markets.
- Decoration Education provides how-to videos and decorating tips. “People can go there to learn about decorating and to train their own staffs about decorating,” points out Terry.
- A Product Education section focuses on the features, fit and fabrics through videos and downloadable guides.

Having just launched last Spring, SanMar U certainly remains a work in progress, Terry explains, and she is

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pleased with the response from the industry so far. "We are constantly finding out what people want and what format they want it in," she says. One increased focus will certainly be on online education and training.

Other than the obvious benefits for its customers, the development of SanMar U proved beneficial internally as well as it brought together various units within the company for an important project.

"This was certainly a team effort here," Terry says. "Different departments, such as training and sales and marketing, came together to create this."

Yet the focus remains on the benefits for customers and Terry is constantly researching with users as to where to take SanMar U from here. "Before we created the site I went to trade shows to meet with a lot of customers to find out what they wanted," she explains. That process continues, along with the

challenge of letting the world know SanMar U is there for their benefit.

"Now it is about getting the word out and letting people know this is there for them," she says, adding that her team's education is also an on-going process to make sure they are on target with their efforts.

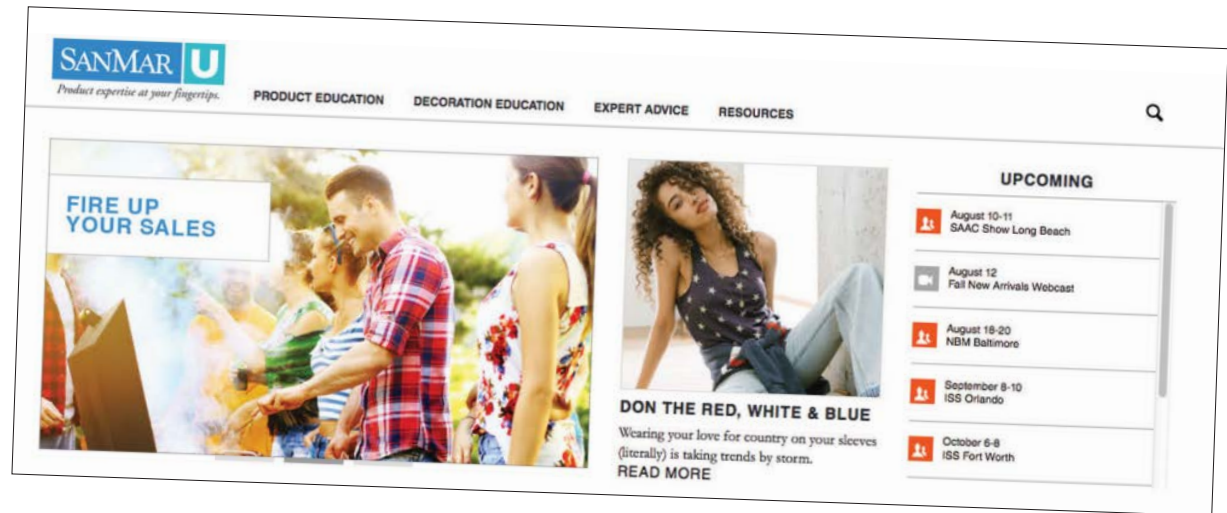
"There's no point in doing this if people don't want to use it," she

admits. "That's why we are going to keep asking what else they want to know, because this is a learning curve for everyone."

The immediate next step for SanMar U is an updated Decoration Education section that will provide even more specific information about all types of decorating. Terry is also working with SanMar partners to

provide video content focused on product and problems.

"This is all so people can easily find answers to the questions our decorating people are answering all of the time," she adds. "For team dealers it is a one-stop-shop to get answers to questions they may have on products and trends, along with sales tips and decorating ideas." ■



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Tech Protection

FOUR SPORTS MEDICINE BRANDS TURN TO **TECHNOLOGY** TO UP THE PROTECTION GAME.

No where in team sports has technology changed the nature of the game than in the evolving category of protectives. Lighter, faster and stronger is the mantra of modern athletes and today's protective products offer these same attributes with an emphasis on safety. *Team Insight* reached out to four brands playing a significant role in the development of the category for a brief Q&A session to hear their thoughts on how technology is making the team sports a safer place. By Michael Jacobsen

What role has technology played in the growth of the protectives category?

Mike Kennedy

Category Director for
Protectives, Rawlings

"Technology has been vital in the growth of the protective category over the years, along with education. Knowing what we know now has helped push the growth and innovation of the category by giving us access to more materials that offer better performance capabilities, weight reduction, etc., in order to improve the athlete's on-field performance. Technology is motivating manufacturers to push for better performing products."

Mary Horwath

Senior VP-Marketing,
United Sports Brands

"Technology put protectives on the map. McDavid's Hex technology is credited with making bulky pads a thing of the past. Today there isn't a NBA or collegiate player that hasn't worn some form of McDavid Hex sleeve, short or shirt to stay protected. And if it weren't for Shock Doctor's innovation in mouthguard technology starting back in 1992, mouth/facial protection would be even more of a serious concern."

Jim Caldwell

Executive VP,
Unequal Technologies

"Technology is everything. The nature of contact sports demands consistent application, innovation and advancements in technology to mitigate injury so these sports can survive and thrive. Behind any technology is science. And behind that are patents, materials science, formulas, laminates, heat and cold tolerances, specific scientific and technological solutions to everyday demands of the sports we love to play. You can't have battle-ready protective gear without tech driving it."

Neal Fink

VP-Sporting Goods Channel,
Performance Health

"Technology has driven the growth in the protectives category over the last 10 years and more. Look at all the leading brands — all of them are defined by one or more new technologies or concepts that were developed in the last five to 10 years. As athletes have changed so have the demands they place on their equipment. Everything now has to be lighter, faster and stronger. Those needs can't be met without the introduction of new technologies."

How do you and team dealers communicate your technology to the end user?

Mike Kennedy

Rawlings

"We try to educate the consumer at every touch point in which they'd receive information, whether it's our website or our accounts' websites or at the point-of-purchase in store. Along with that, there has been a much heavier focus on quick, 30-45-second tech videos that better show and explain the technology and how it benefits the athlete."

Mary Horwath

United Sports Brands

"Packaging and merchandising displays at retail are very important, but with consumers beginning their journey through any number of online resources we are now upping our game on a digital level, offering education about our technologies on our websites, social channels, apps and product reviews. Another way we convey the importance of protection is through our athlete ambassadors and partnerships with key associations."

Jim Caldwell

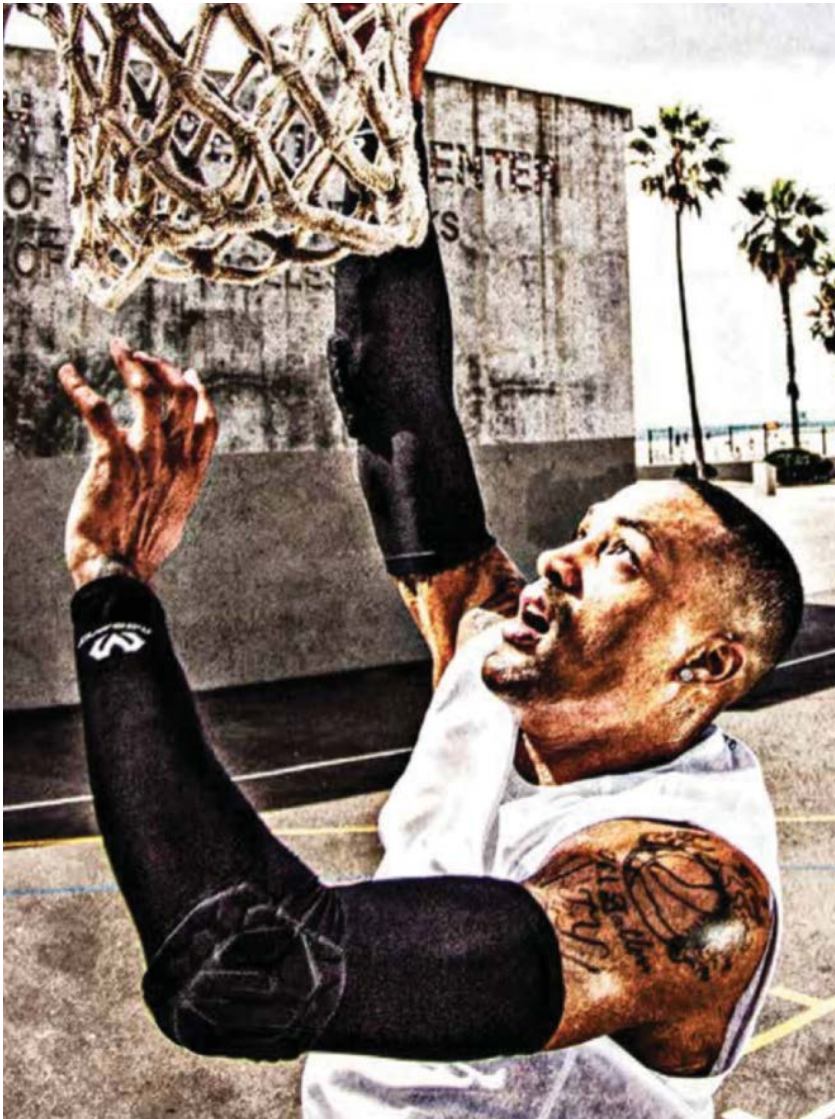
Unequal Technologies

"It has to be clear, simple, basic. A light switch activates plenty behind the wall, but we just want the light to go on. Players, parents and coaches want to trust the claims that can be bolstered through written or video testimonials, see claims proven out through demos in a loop display or clever POP and packaging graphics that illustrate the reason why our tech works without complicated language."

Neal Fink

Performance Health

"The most efficient and realistic means to actually delivering the message is the team dealer. There is no substitute for a well-trained sales force that can effectively communicate the benefits of a product to a coach or a parent. Making the technology accessible and easy to understand is critical to the success of any product. That ease of accessibility and clear messaging is even more important now that the space is filled with so many options and messages about player safety."



McDavid's HexPad.



Rawlings protectives.

Where is technology in the protectives category headed?

Mike Kennedy

Rawlings

"Technology in the protective category is evolving in many ways. Due to new processes available in manufacturing and production capabilities, the industry is pushing more towards methods of combining various foams, plastics and materials that can be integrated to form new lighter weight, breathable pieces that perform as good if not better than previous models. Utilizing the best properties of various materials to create higher performing gear is a main driver in the industry."

Mary Horwath

United Sports Brands

"The industry is continuing to evolve and grow and there is a strong demand for technically advanced products. One example of where mouthguard technology is headed, specifically in the area of basketball, is the advent of lighter, thinner mouthguards that go further to eliminate issues with speaking and breathing, while still offering the needed orofacial protection for what has become a very physical game."

Jim Caldwell

Unequal Technologies

"Parents are predominantly the gate for athlete participation. They need to know their son or daughter will be as safe as possible out on the field. The protectives category will grow. When we came out of the military and starting adapting our tech for sports, we had only a handful of patents. Now there are 100. The nature of discovery and a persistent push to innovate and make sports safer, without dulling the exhilaration experience, has to lead to thinner, lighter, stronger, better, so all stakeholders have greater piece of mind and kids can enjoy the sport they love with less risk."

Neal Fink

Performance Health

"Lighter and better-fitting technologies seem to be driving the efforts, but improving the durability and protective nature of the products is also important. Performance and speed are so essential today that athletes are demanding more from their equipment. Because of that, fit is critical. We are also seeing a lot of calls for customization. Athletes want the ability to customize their protection to their position, their sport or their existing injury. The driving force here is eliminating perceived obstacles to performance." ■

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SanMar



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The popular Cliff Keen Xtreme Fleece sets the standard for wrestling sweats. Made for wrestlers, but optimal for other activities as well, the eight ounce Performance Poly/Fleece fabric is ultra-soft, smooth and wicks moisture. Customizable with spot-sublimation. Now in a crew neck top and matching shorts. Worn by some of the nation's top athletes, the Cliff Keen Xtreme Fleece is tested by wrestlers to exceed expectations.

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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

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Betts Joins Axe Bat Team

Axe Bat, a division of Baden Sports, has entered into a multi-year partnership with All-Star outfielder Mookie Betts of the Boston Red Sox. Betts has used the Axe Bat exclusively since last September. As the first professional baseball player signed by the brand, Betts will appear in advertisements and provide input on Axe Bat product design and development. He is already featured on the newly designed Axe Bat website: www.axebat.com.

ADA Has Record Rebates

The Athletic Dealers of America (ADA) announced to its member/owners at its recent Buying Show in Orlando, FL, that the buying group surpassed the \$1 million mark in rebates distributed for 2015. Those rebates included Central Billing, PAID & PAID PLUS rebates, ProTeam private label royalties and various vendor volume rebates.

Obit: William Kiel, Sr.



William Kiel Sr., who helped to make Carron Net, now a fourth generation-owned company, what it is today, passed away July 31 at the age of 74. Kiel began working with Carron Net in 1959 and in 1975 was appointed GM. In October 1986, the executive team consisting of Kiel, Paul Carron, Eugene Carron and Donald Schweiger began the third generation of family ownership by purchasing the company. He served as VP until he was named president in 1988, a position he held for the remainder of his career. In November, 2000, Kiel purchased the ownership shares of

his three partners and became sole owner of Carron Net. He retired in February, 2008.

Riddell Breaks Ground

Riddell has begun construction on its new facility in North Ridgeville, OH. The 347,205-square-foot site will be Riddell's new home for assembly of on-field football helmets and custom shoulder pads and will serve as its primary reconditioning plant. Riddell will also relocate its production of full-size collectible football helmets and distribution of most football gear and apparel to the new facility, which is expected to open in early 2017.

Dealers To Meet in October

The 2016 Fall Team Dealer Market will be held October 25-26 at The Big Chill Event Center in Charlotte, NC. The show is attended by team dealers and sporting goods stores from North Carolina and South Carolina and has become the largest Fall Team Dealer Market in the Southeast, representing more than 50 sporting goods stores and more than 30 sales agents.

The Spring Team Dealer Market will be held in June, 2017 at The

Big Chill Event Center. For more information: teamdealermarket@gmail.com.

InkSoft Offers Catalog

InkSoft users can now offer their online customers performance apparel engineered for sublimation from Vapor Apparel. With the recent integration of the 2016 catalog, a variety of cuts and styles can be added to InkSoft-powered web stores. With this addition, InkSoft users can produce small-quantity, full-color digital orders using the sublimation process. For more: inksoft.com/vapor-apparel

Longstreth Names Manager

Longstreth Sporting Goods has named Danielle Dike as its softball manager. Dike graduated from Georgia Tech in 2012 and has a Master's degree from Liberty University in Sports Management. She was a four-year member of the Georgia Tech softball team and she coached at the University of South Carolina Upstate for the past three years.

Badger Acquired By CCMP

Badger Sportswear and CCMP Capital Advisors have entered into a definitive agreement under which affiliates of CCMP will acquire a

controlling interest in Badger. Terms of the transaction were not disclosed. The company's founders, Jerry and Bill Carr, will reinvest a significant portion of their equity as part of the transaction. Jerry Carr will remain CEO and will continue to serve as chairman of Badger's board of directors.

DonJoy Signs Bowman



DonJoy Performance has added San Francisco 49er's linebacker NaVorro Bowman to its roster of professional athletes. Bowman will serve as the face of the DonJoy Performance Defender line to promote on-field protection for players of all ages.

Alleson Names VP-Sales

Alleson Athletic has named John Lavelle VP-sales. He joins the company from Alpha Broder, where he most recently served as regional VP. He will report to president Todd Levine. ■



Two Lines We Like: Ankle Braces

Two new ankle braces are making their debut this Fall. **Left:** Active Ankle's Eclipse II, improved from the classic T2 Ankle Brace, provides protection through its solid U-shaped design and multi-point strapping system. The anatomically correct bilateral hinge allows for unencumbered forward/back and vertical mobility. MSRP: \$49.99 **Right:** DonJoy Performance's Protection On Demand Ankle Brace (POD) engages specifically when needed to proactively resist ankle roll and other common ankle injuries. POD, unlike taping, provides freedom of movement, adjustability and stability without breaking down. MSRP: \$79.99.



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