

Elizabeth Gutierrez

Lauren Hobart, CEO DICK'S Sporting Goods

There's a paywall on sports; it's time to take it down.

When I became the third and first woman CEO of Dick's Sporting Goods, I knew I had a huge responsibility. Responsibility is not only geared toward my employees, stakeholders, and shareholders, but also toward our community. At DICK'S Sporting Goods we like to say that "we've always recognized the positive impact sports can have in people's lives, " and we maintain a tireless dedication to ensuring everyone has access to the transformative power of sports. When an 18-year-old Dick Stack took the \$300 investment to create his own store he knew he had to create something different, for athletes. I took on that responsibility and made it my own. Under my leadership, I helped build The DICK'S Sporting Goods Foundation, its signature Sports Matter initiative in 2014. This initiative has helped over one million children have access to sports. Together, DICK's and The DICK'S Sporting Goods Foundation have given over \$210 million in grants and sponsorships since its inception. The goal is and continues to be to always raise awareness and address the growing issue of underfunded youth sports programs nationwide.

Why should any child be denied the opportunity to enjoy playing them?

The data is clear: a report by The Aspen Institute that conducted a national survey of youth sports parents. This survey found that children from homes earning \$100,000 or more are twice as likely to play travel sports as those from homes earning under \$50,000. There are athletes who have global recognition from countries like Argentina and Brazil who came from low-income environments, but were given the opportunity to play a sport they loved and were passionate about because they did not have to worry about cost. We at DICK'S do not only want to be known as a company that sells sporting goods, but also to be synonymous with fostering an

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environment where all children can enjoy sports. We believe that playing sports is a right and not a privilege.

This is not just a sports issue; it is a community issue, an education issue.

By playing sports, children learn teamwork, resilience, and leadership, all skills that extend far beyond the pitch, field, court, or whatever their choice of sport is. When access disappears, so do those benefits. Playing sports comes with a high cost that many families cannot afford. There are costs associated with travel teams, private coaching, and training. In addition to personal costs, there are environmental costs. If you compare a field in a low-income neighborhood vs a field in a high-income neighborhood, the costs are visible. Better grass, fields, equipment, and even facilities.

Through our foundation programs, we have helped restore playing fields, fund teams' travel and coaching, and provided equipment to communities that need it the most. In 2021, we launched the Sports Matter Giving Truck. This truck hit the road, traveling thousands of miles to provide sports equipment that included soccer, volleyball, basketball, boxing, and physical-education products to more than 100 youth sports organizations in under-resourced communities. During each stop, kids had a chance to meet with athletes from professional teams, such as WNBA Washington Mystics' Elena Delle Donne and NFL's Kyle Juszczyk of the San Francisco 49ers. In addition, we handed out gift bags to kids, packed by Good Sports, with items donated by DICK'S Sporting Goods.

Philanthropy alone cannot solve this.

We truly believe in the power of sports, and we have treated access to them as essential, not optional. This means rethinking how we fund youth athletics at every level. Local governments must prioritize safe, accessible play spaces. Companies like ours must continue to step up, not just as sponsors, but as partners deciding the future of play.

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The real question isn't whether we can afford to invest in youth sports. It's whether we can afford not to. Every kid deserves a chance to play. Not because they might become the next professional athlete, but because of who they become along the way.

It's time to make sure no child is denied the opportunity simply because they can't afford to play.

Strategy note:

The rationale for the thought-leadership piece is that DICK'S Sporting Goods was founded for athletes. In a country like America, where sports are part of culture, the goal is to position DICK'S as both a leader in the industry and a brand with purpose, not just here to sell something. Using the voice of Lauren Hobart, the CEO, gives credibility to the message and provides someone in an authoritative position who can make and implement changes. The focus on access and community impact aligns with the mission of the Dick's Sporting Goods Foundation, which removes barriers for low-income youth to participate in sports. The piece not only holds the brand and Lauren accountable but also positions the company as a social change advocate. The piece strengthens the brand's equity, aligns with socially conscious consumers, and makes Dick's stand out from competitors.