

PLAYER RETENTION IN YOUTH SPORTS:

Soccer and
Hockey

April 2025 UPDATE

SECTION 1: National Benchmarks

Sprocket Sports' groundbreaking report on [Player Retention in Youth Soccer Clubs](#), published in November 2023, provided a comprehensive analysis of why player retention matters and what clubs and coaches can do to improve retention. That study was the first data-based study of its kind to present national benchmarks for player retention in youth soccer clubs.

This April 2025 report provides updated player retention data for soccer and hockey clubs based on 2023-24 and 2024-25 club-specific registration data available as of December 2024.

Soccer

For the younger age groups, player retention in soccer remained relatively high at **78% for Girls U8-U13** and **77% for Boys U8-U13**, which is slightly higher than last year's Sprocket benchmarks. For the older age groups, the benchmark was **67% for both Girls and Boys U14-U17**, again slightly higher than last year.

U8-U13 Girls & Boys 2024 Retention Benchmarks

Last Year's Age	Birth Year	Player Retention
Girls U8	2016	77%
Girls U9	2015	77%
Girls U10	2014	82%
Girls U11	2013	83%
Girls U12	2012	78%
Girls U13	2011	73%
All Girls U8-U13	2011-2016	78%

Last Year's Age	Birth Year	Player Retention
Boys U8	2016	75%
Boys U9	2015	76%
Boys U10	2014	78%
Boys U11	2013	76%
Boys U12	2012	76%
Boys U13	2011	77%
All Boys U8-U13	2011-2016	77%

U14-U17 Girls & Boys 2024 Retention Benchmarks

Last Year's Age	Birth Year	Player Retention
Girls U14	2010	71%
Girls U15	2009	68%
Girls U16	2008	65%
Girls U17	2007	62%
All Girls U14-U17	2007-2010	67%

Last Year's Age	Birth Year	Player Retention
Boys U14	2010	73%
Boys U15	2009	72%
Boys U16	2008	67%
Boys U17	2007	52%
All Boys U14-U17	2007-2010	67%

Hockey

For hockey clubs and associations, player retention was higher for the younger age groups and also higher for Girls. **U8-U13 Girls came in very high, at 84%**, whereas the **U8-U13 Boys generated a 75% player retention rate**. For the older kids, **Girls U14-U17 came in at 68%** whereas the **Boys U14-U17 were at 58%**.

U8-U13 Girls & Boys 2024 Retention Benchmarks

Last Year's Age	Birth Year	Player Retention
Girls U8	2016	89%
Girls U9	2015	90%
Girls U10	2014	86%
Girls U11	2013	78%
Girls U12	2012	86%
Girls U13	2011	81%
All Girls U8-U13	2011-2016	84%

Last Year's Age	Birth Year	Player Retention
Boys U8	2016	78%
Boys U9	2015	70%
Boys U10	2014	75%
Boys U11	2013	75%
Boys U12	2012	78%
Boys U13	2011	75%
All Boys U8-U13	2011-2016	75%

U14-U17 Girls & Boys 2024 Retention Benchmarks

Last Year's Age	Birth Year	Player Retention
Girls U14	2010	79%
Girls U15	2009	64%
Girls U16	2008	68%
Girls U17	2007	61%
All Girls U14-U17	2007-2010	68%

Last Year's Age	Birth Year	Player Retention
Boys U14	2010	59%
Boys U15	2009	58%
Boys U16	2008	63%
Boys U17	2007	52%
All Boys U14-U17	2007-2010	58%

Methodology

To calculate the benchmarks, Sprocket Sports uses aggregated retention data from clubs across the country. The findings are particularly significant because the data is not self-reported from clubs. Instead, Sprocket uses proprietary data from its player registration database of large and medium-sized competitive soccer and hockey clubs and associations across the country with a median size of approximately 500 players.

SECTION 2: Key Findings- 5 Critical Success Factors

Sprocket's research included dozens of interviews with soccer and hockey club leaders across the country to discuss the most important factors that improve player retention. Many of these clubs are community-based organizations that are feeling increased pressure from the trend in youth sports towards more "elite" and "competitive" leagues, yet manage to defy this trend and retain players year after year. How? There are many common denominators among high performing clubs that appear to be making the difference:

1. A Focus on FUN

"Fun" and "Competitive" are not mutually exclusive. Healthy competition is fun and free play, small-sided games and "pickup" games are not only more fun, but also can make a huge difference in player development.

Sam Rogers, Minnetonka Youth Hockey Association, Minnetonka, MN on the importance of putting "fun" as an organizational priority and at the center of the player experience:

"Success is not just measured in wins and losses. But also in, 'did they have fun'? Are they wanting to come back?"

Adam Kuhn, Executive Director, Satori, a research and analytics firm with a focus on youth sports, highlighted the top factors contributing to player retention, based on Satori club survey results:

"The two most important elements, by a large margin, were enjoyment and improvement."

2. Coach Culture, Support and Retention

Coaches are key. Those who can create strong connections with players and parents and build loyalty are a critical success factor in driving player retention. As a result, the stability of the coaching staff at a club - or "coach retention"- is a key predictor of player retention. Coach community, training and support along with fields, facilities, and infrastructure are critical factors to help retain top coaches - and in turn, players.

Murray Findlay, Chicago Edge, Oak Park, IL, a competitive community-based soccer club on the importance of coaches and coach retention:

“That’s what the club is. It’s their coach, it’s their teammates, and that’s where they’ll build their loyalty. If the coach is doing a good job, they’ll retain them. It doesn’t matter what we do, if the coach isn’t doing a good job, everyone’s in trouble. You retain a coach, you retain eighteen players sometimes. One of the reasons our player retention is so high, is because our coach retention is so high.”

Gordon Hancock, Sno-King Amateur Hockey Association, Kirkland, WA, a large hockey association on the importance of coach support and tools:

“It’s important for us that we’re making sure that these coaches have the necessary tools to develop practice plans, manage game scenarios... It’s really about building up the coaches, making sure they have everything they need to be successful, to run a team.”

Fritz Libby, Folsom Lake Surf, a leading soccer club in the Sacramento, California area on the importance of coach retention:

“We put in a coach retention plan... We started bringing coaches into a mentorship program that included partnering with experienced coaches and then also offering to pay for their licensing... We also follow up with them and back them, really show a lot of support when they get into any conflict with parents.”

Rob Marino, NLSA Surf, Pennington, NJ, a competitive community-based soccer club on the importance of coaches who know how to win the “relationship game”:

“While oftentimes, parents and players may be focused on results, to their credit, they also sometimes see the bigger picture and say, maybe we’re not winning every game and we’re not going to the national championship, but we’ve got a coach who respects my son or daughter and cares about them as a person, more than just a soccer player.”

3. Build Club Community

It’s very hard to leave a club when there are strong social ties among player, parents and coaches – and very easy to leave when a family feels like just another number. Focus on building club-wide community by hosting all-inclusive events and sharing top coaches among multiple teams and age groups.

Mike Kelleher, Charleston Soccer Club, Charleston, SC, a competitive community-based club on the importance of building club community:

“You’re part of a bigger entity than just the team or than just the coach and just the players... It’s the identity of that club, sense of belonging, and a belief in the whole as bigger than the individual – the sum of the whole is bigger than the parts – I think that’s really important.”

Greg Carr, Bay State Breakers Hockey, Rockland, MA, a leading hockey organization in the Boston area, noted the importance of building club community for all the stakeholders, including players, parents and coaches. Bay State holds an annual fundraiser for a local charity where the coaches play in a game that is coached by the players:

“The coaches love it, the kids love it, everyone loves it...it’s the camaraderie of the entire organization.”

4. Focus on ALL Players, Not Just the Best Players

While some clubs focus their player retention efforts primarily on the “A team” and its top players, clubs with a more strategic and long-term view understand that it’s critical to retain the vast majority of players at every level.

Jamie Lyons, Chicago Fire Youth Soccer Club, on the importance of a club focus on ALL players, not just the best players:

“I think the important thing for any club to do, whether they’re competitive or community, is to build a model and a strategy that’s based

around improving every single player in their club, and not just the most competitive players.”

5. Set and Manage Expectations

While the pursuit of a college scholarship is worthwhile and realistic for a small subset of players, leading clubs are focusing instead on maximizing the “joy” of the “youth sports journey” for all players. Rather than a mentality of “college sports or bust”, these clubs are enabling kids to be the best player they can be at whatever level of play they attain.

Fritz Libby, Folsom Lake Surf, a leading soccer club in the Sacramento, California area on the importance of managing expectations and delivering on your promises:

“How you recruit somebody is you make them a series of promises, and how you retain them is you keep those promises... It’s when you’re overpromising and underdelivering, that’s when people go away.”

Nate Bell, Park Slope United and Brooklyn United, a leading club in Brooklyn, New York:

“What we put our marketing efforts around is: your kid is going to be cared about and thought about... they’re going to be challenged, they’re going to have fun – all the things that we do really well and that really matter... We’re trying to really target those parents who want their kids to be in competitive sports, but have a realistic view of why they’re doing it.”

SprocketSports

Sprocket Sports is a modern, all-in-one management and marketing platform designed specifically for youth sports clubs. Its comprehensive technology helps clubs reduce operating expenses, increase revenues, build their brand and engage with families. In addition to player registration and payments, Sprocket Sports offers websites, marketing and communication modules, administrative tools, dashboards, mobile apps, and more.

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