



# ***FUELLING A BETTER TOMORROW FOR YOUNG AUSTRALIANS***

How the pressure of performing in sport  
is eroding teen confidence and driving  
declining teen participation



# AT GATORADE, WE BELIEVE IN THE LIFE-CHANGING POWER THAT SPORT HAS ON TEEN'S LIVES

Improved  
resilience



Improved  
mental health



Increased  
confidence



Greater social  
connectedness



## TEENS WHO ARE MEMBERS OF A LOCAL SPORTING CLUB ARE MORE LIKELY TO:

Demonstrate  
greater **trust** in  
other people



Possess a  
stronger **sense of  
belonging** to their  
community



Form more  
close  
friendships

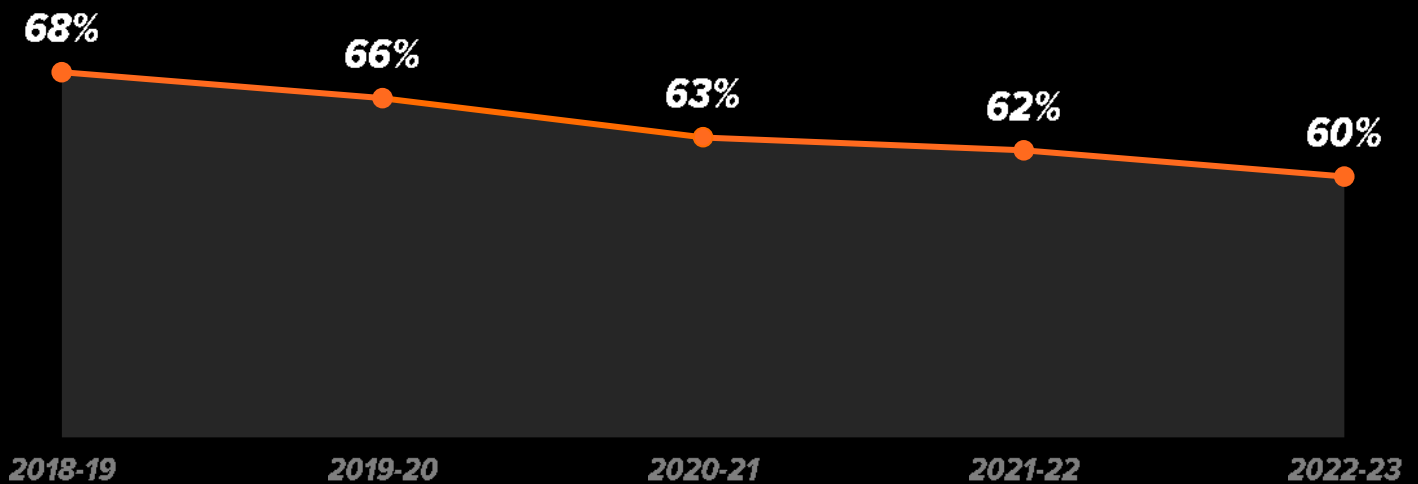


Achieve  
greater levels  
of life  
**satisfaction**,  
happiness and  
health



SOURCE:  
*The value and benefits of sport / Clearinghouse for Sport*

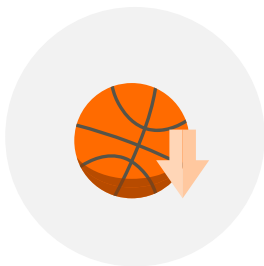
## BUT TEEN'S PARTICIPATION IN SPORT IS DECLINING



# 128,133

fewer teens are playing sport now, than they were 4 years ago\*

If it continues on this trajectory...



...by 2030 only **43%** of teens will be participating in sport



...by 2035 less than **1 in 3** teens will be participating in sport



...in **10** years time sport participation by teens will have halved



And only **5.6%** of 15-17 year old's are meeting the Department of Health and Aged Care's physical activity guidelines (2022)^

\*AusPlay National Sport and Physical Activity Participation Report October 2023, page 26 chart 2- Young Adults aged 15-19 participate in sport-related activity 1+ times per week. Future predictions based on extrapolation of this data

^Australian Bureau of Statistics. Physical activity, 2022 <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/health-conditions-and-risks/physical-activity/latest-release>  
Unless referenced otherwise all statistics & quotes contained in this report are from the survey and studies conducted in partnership with Gatorade, La Trobe University CSSI and Fiftyfive5. Details of the methodology are contained on p18





# ***GATORADE IS ON A MISSION TO KEEP TEENS PLAYING TEAM SPORT***

To identify ways in which we can empower teens to stay in sport we need to **talk to them, understand how they feel and actively involve them in generating solutions to this problem.**

Gatorade commissioned the The Centre of Sport and Social Impact (CSSI) from La Trobe University (Australia) to conduct research to **give teens a voice on this issue.**



## ***THIS IS WHAT THEY TOLD US***



To play sport is to experience the joy of movement, to love the sweat and hard work, to value the relationships you form and to build confidence in yourself.



The social aspect of AFL, being such a large team sport is absolutely fantastic. I love meeting new people on and off the field, training together and improving together and forming dynamics/plays, it's so fun and gives us a separate social circle of friends

**FEMALE**



**95%**

enjoy participating in team sport



**91%**

feel connected to others when participating in team sport



*...but to play sport is also to perform; to be the best, to always be at the top of your game, to never let the team down and to win at all costs.*



The intense mindset of not being a good enough player if you aren't always intensely training or at your best 100% of the time. I think this mindset can be motivating, it is also super damaging and can reinforce the stereotype for men that you aren't a "real" man if you aren't strong

**MALE**



Winning is very important to most people that play/watch sport. If I were good at playing sport, I think this would motivate me a lot and I would strive to win. However, because I am not good at sport, it demotivates me because I know I won't help to win

**FEMALE**



# As a society are we too focussed on winning, putting pressure on our teens?

Sport is a key part of our national identity. We take pride in outperforming larger nations, often viewing sport as a way to showcase our innate resilience and tenacity on the world stage.

When they're winning, our athletes and sporting teams are celebrated as national heroes, the media spotlights their achievements, brands glorify them, young people look up to them and sponsorships and funding follow.

But what happens when they're not at their best and they don't meet our high expectations? Media coverage can shift dramatically, from being celebrated to being criticised and questioned, with social media further intensifying the pressure.



Winning is a huge culture in Australian sport which is a good thing for the Olympics, but not so great in children's team sports as the parents push the kids harder to win. This can lead to the kids being driven too hard and fast when they are younger, and they burn out

**FEMALE**



I believe that winning is a massive part of Australian culture, and it really drives athletes to be competitive. This also has a negative effect where kids may become over pressured to succeed rather than have fun

**MALE**



For most teens, the joy of playing  
far outweighs the desire to win

**64%**

of teens started playing  
sport to have fun

vs.

**17%**

started playing sport to  
win

***Are we so focussed on winning,  
that we've forgotten why we play?***



Those who have dropped out of  
team sport in the last 2 years are

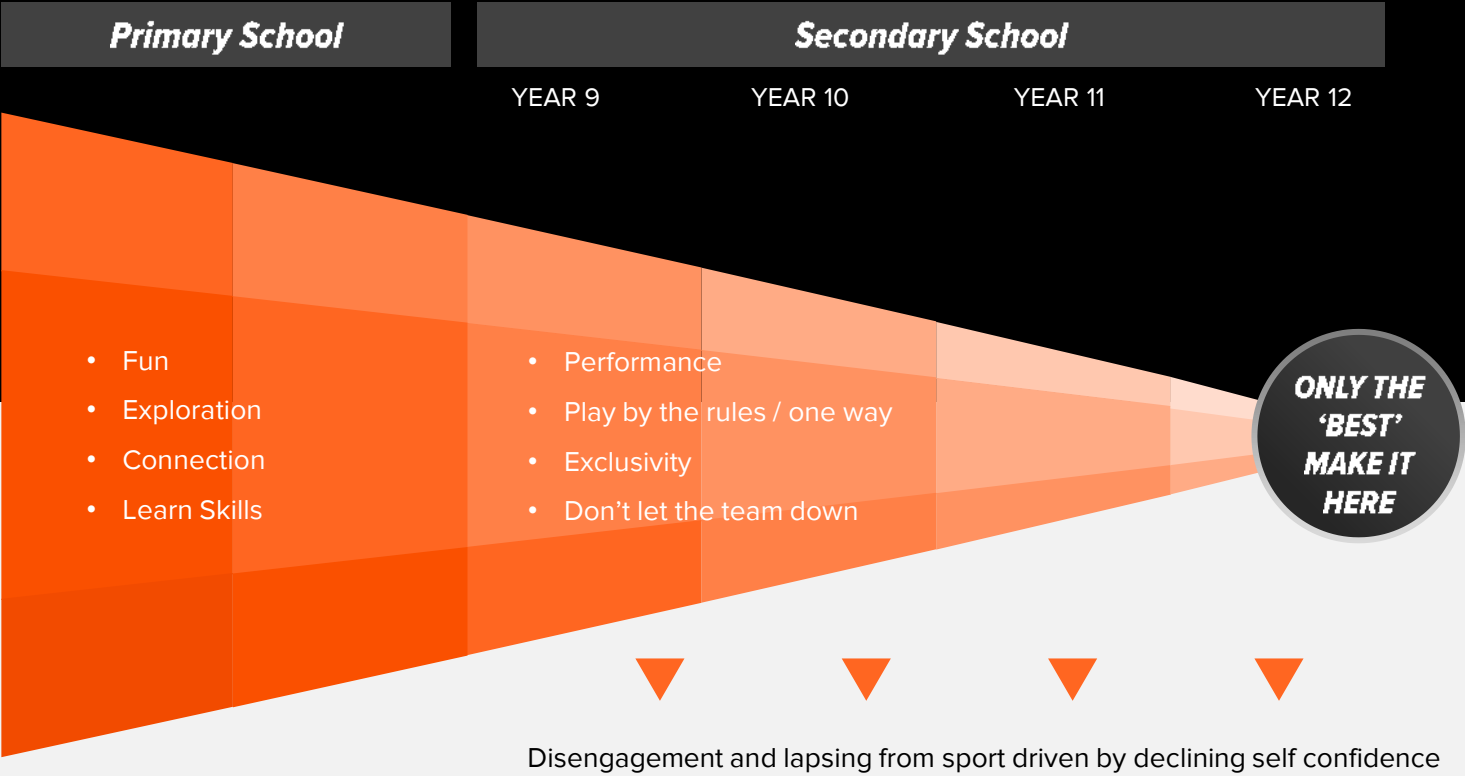
**25%**

more likely to have started playing for  
fun vs. those who haven't dropped out



But as teens transition to secondary school, they see sport becoming more focussed on performance, which can lead them to feel like they're 'not good enough' and disconnected from their team if they don't perform...

...ultimately driving declining self-confidence, engagement and participation



Fiftyfive5 online community with teens in year 9-12



When you're younger it's more about having fun but as you get older its very clear that it's all about winning



**FEMALE**

Sports isn't very important to me anymore because I don't like the culture around sports teams and how they treat people, obviously not all sports teams but the ones I know quite a lot of bullying occurs within them, ultimately causing people to quit and give up. Sometimes I wished I still played sports because I enjoy exercising

**MALE**

As you get older, I believe that the system of picking teams gets much less inclusive and becomes biased

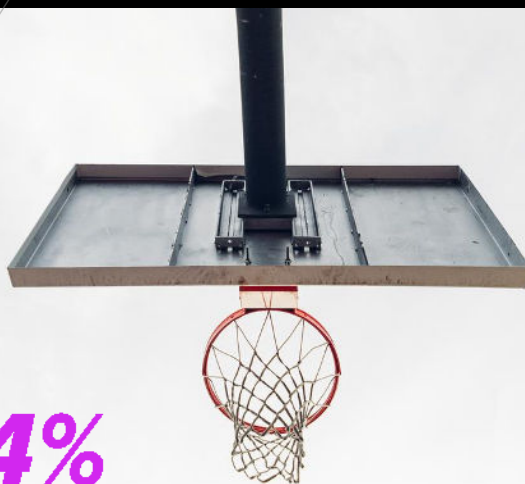
**MALE**

Team sport is stressful for me because of the pressure from your team to do well, as well as the competitive nature of it

**FEMALE**

# Self-confidence is one of the biggest barriers to playing sport, and the greatest enabler for change in reducing teen drop out

The more confident a teen is to participate in team sport, the more likely they are to start and, if that confidence remains high there is a greater likelihood they will continue participating.



## 34%

of players report lack of confidence as a barrier or challenge to participating in sport

- Australian Sports Commission report (2023)



I just find it easier to be myself solo in comparison to others or a part of a team. Because there is a pressure of letting others down, while playing solo you're just letting yourself down

**FEMALE**



I feel like if I do sports in a group, it opens me up to be judged for the way I look or do things in that sport

**FEMALE**



But it's up to us -  
their coaches,  
family, friends,  
teammates,  
supporters to  
make this  
change happen

**75%**

of teens who play team sport  
say their self-confidence is  
impacted by those around  
them



Most  
positive  
impact on teen  
sporting confidence

**1st**  
Coach

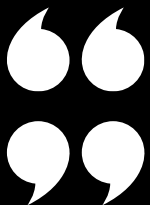
**4th**  
Friends

**2nd**  
Parents/family

**5th**  
Role models

**3rd**  
Teammates

**6th**  
People on sideline



After transferring from  
another club, I was more  
included, supported,  
encouraged, and overall  
enjoyed my experience.  
From the coaches to the  
players and support staff,  
there was always  
someone there for help

**FEMALE**

My friends...encouraging  
me when I mess up  
something, or hyping me  
up before the game and  
reassuring me that I'm  
good enough

**MALE**

Almost every game I feel  
confident because I know  
at the end of the day the  
scores don't matter; all  
that matters is I had fun  
and felt I tried my best

**FEMALE**

# WHEN WE FAIL, **THEY FAIL**



## 44%

of teens who play sport have experienced or observed bullying by a coach or teammate

When teens don't feel encouraged and supported they feel like they are letting the team down and lack belonging, reducing their confidence in sport



I was on the pitch and my coach at the time, who I didn't really like was not happy with the way I was playing. I did what the coach asked at first but when the other team quickly got around me I stopped, and the coach was constantly then yelling at me and threatening to take me off the field it got so bad. I was crying on the pitch whilst playing as this coach was yelling at me from the side lines. The referee interrupted and gave the coach a yellow card for speaking to one of his own players like that and I was checked up on by the referee. This game was one of the worst experiences I have had playing a sport I love

**FEMALE**





## Coaches have the greatest role to play in confidence in sport - they can make or break teen confidence

Whilst issues with self-confidence don't all stem from the coach, they have the ability to influence those around them

To teens, boosting confidence through great coaching comes from;

- encouraging me to play to my strengths
- making me feel good about myself
- giving positive feedback
- giving clear instructions
- making competition fun
- listening to my ideas and concerns



I felt confident playing ...when I knew that I had my coaches full support in my decisions on the field and was playing in a team where everyone trusted each other and their abilities. When I was able to play without thinking and worrying about my performance

**FEMALE**

My coach...encourages me, supportive, helps when I am struggling with a skill, understanding of all players, kind, makes the environment welcoming

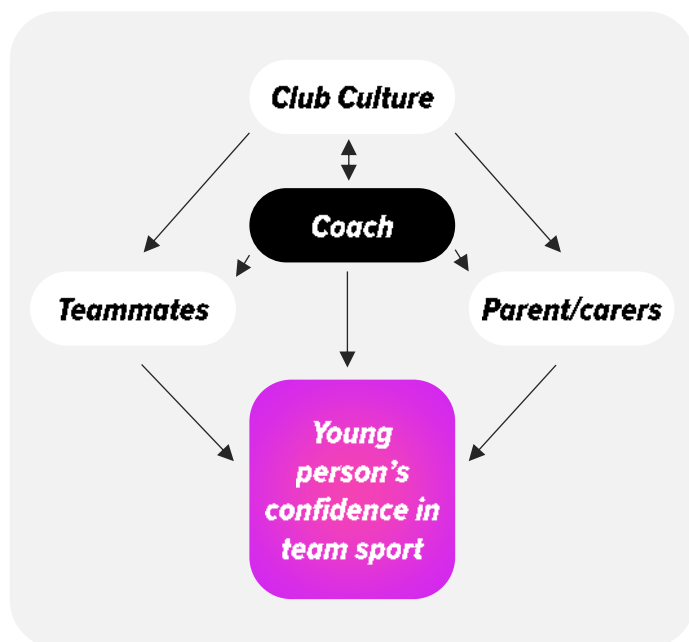
**FEMALE**

Preparing for a grand final, our coach told us how hard we had worked and everything we had done to get into this position to win the grand final. He told us how much we deserved it

**MALE**

My coach is very knowledgeable, and she is always pushing us to be our best and it has definitely made us a stronger team over the years. She always lifts us up when we're down and never puts pressure on us to perform like the Australian team

**FEMALE**



Parents and family play an important role positively impacting confidence to participate in team sport through their support and encouragement

**71%**

of teens who play sport say having a parent who supports them positively impacts their confidence

**61%**

of teens who play sport say having a parent who gives positive feedback after a game positively impacts their confidence

To teens, parents and family boost confidence through;

- unconditional emotional support
- tangible support such as financial support and help getting to games
- offering and/or providing positive encouragement generally
- giving positive feedback during and after games



They have always been very supportive and provided everything I need for basketball without question including getting up at 4am to drive me to special training and driving long distances for regional games. Mum has always expressed belief in my ability and potential

**MALE**

They encourage me to participate and just play the best that I can

**FEMALE**

They always reassure me when I am not going so well. They tell me how I could improve during games

**FEMALE**





Teammates are key to fostering a feeling of belonging and connection to the club and team

**80%**

of teens who play sport say feeling part of the team positively impacts their confidence

**76%**

of teens who play sport say being a part of a club where they feel like they belong positively impacts their confidence

**70%**

of teens who play sport say having a teammate who gives positive comments positively impacts their confidence



Others in my team/s that I've played in, have shown me so much support on and off the field, before and after games also. I feel more support through them than I do anyone else

**FEMALE**

In my team they don't make comments like some other people in my other team that make me feel sad, so I have a lowered confidence when I play for that other team. But my local comp team is very supportive and we are all nice to each other

**FEMALE**

My teammates...played alongside me and backed me no matter what which made me feel safe and confident

**MALE**





The research identified ten principles for building teen's confidence to participate in team sport, based on the key finding that creating a safe environment and sense of belonging is central to a positive sport experience.

Combined, these principles provide the building blocks for confidence in team sport for teens.

What a sport experience should set out to achieve

**01**

Build a participant-centred and socially inclusive environment

**02**

The coach is central to a player's confidence in team sport

**03**

The sport and parents should support the coach

Who should be involved in initiatives to build teen's confidence in team sport



**04**

Making small tweaks to the sport experience can have a great impact

**05**

Promote autonomy and co-creation — listen and give youth a voice

**06**

Meet players where they are at

How to build a teen's confidence in team sport



**07**

Foster a sense of belonging

**08**

Role model and promote confidence-building behaviours

**09**

Balance enjoyment/fun and skill development/performance

**10**

Provide players with safe opportunities to improve





# **OUR MISSION**

Gatorade continues to fuel young adults to keep active in sport. Through its global program, Fuel Tomorrow, Gatorade has committed to help 2.5 million teens access the life-changing power of sport by 2030



# RESEARCH APPROACH

Gatorade commissioned The Centre of Sport and Social Impact (CSSI) from La Trobe University (Australia) to conduct this project;

## STAGE ONE

Online survey made available to Australian teenagers, conducted June - August 2024 with responses from 1,120 13–18-year-olds who were currently participating or had recently participated in seven of the most popular team sports in Australia Soccer; Netball; Basketball; AFL; Cricket; Rugby League; and Rugby Union.

## STAGE TWO

Three World Cafés (two in Melbourne and one in Sydney) in August/September 2024 with 90 young people aged 14–18 (30 per café) who were either currently participating in team sports outside of school or had stopped participating in the last 24 months\*.

We would like to acknowledge support from the teams from Gatorade, Revolt, Year 13, and Fiftyfive5 for their collaboration on this project.



LA TROBE  
UNIVERSITY

Centre for Sport  
and Social Impact



\*Stage one of the research was based on a survey reviewed and approved by La Trobe University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Stage two of the research, which involved moderated workshops (World Café) with teens, was undertaken through a commercial consultancy agreement rather than a La Trobe HREC approved project, in line with national ethical guidelines.