



# THE STATE OF YOUTH SPORTS CLUBS & PARENT EXPECTATIONS



Research created in partnership with Ascend2

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# KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- » **There is significant room for improvement in the youth sports club experience.**  
43% of parents report being just somewhat satisfied or unsatisfied with the experience they have with their club.
- » **Club management technology matters more than we knew.**  
91% of parents surveyed agree that the technology their child's club uses to manage the member experience (e.g., registration, payments, communication, events, calendars) impacts their overall satisfaction with the club.
- » **Clubs aren't using technology that meets parent expectations.**  
82% of parents report having high expectations for the technology their club utilizes to manage the member experience, but only 44% report being very satisfied with the technology their club uses.
- » **Parents are willing to pay more for club technology.**  
About one-third of parents report that they would be most willing to pay additional member fees for better technology or apps used by the club.
- » **More apps mean more frustrations.**  
Parents who are asked to use only one app as a part of their club experience are significantly less likely to report experiencing frustrations such as last-minute event changes, payment issues, unresponsive coach or club staff, as well as lack of or missed communications from the club.

# INTRODUCTION

The community and culture surrounding youth sports have evolved significantly over the last decade. What was once a local, team-based activity is now a club-dominated industry valued at upwards of \$20 billion<sup>1</sup> in the U.S. alone. The challenge of club management - operating these youth sports organizations as full-fledged businesses - has never been more complex.

On one side, clubs are tasked with overseeing internal operations to ensure leadership, directors, administrators, coaches, and volunteers have the tools necessary to run the club efficiently and effectively. On the other, a friction-free membership experience is the expectation from parents and players, and is a critical part of improving a club's bottom line.



**We discovered a remarkable dissatisfaction with the current youth sports club experience, and its root causes may surprise you.**

43% of parents we surveyed report that they are just somewhat satisfied or unsatisfied with the overall experience they have had with their club. Our research indicates that the use of club management technology by a club to facilitate its relationship with parents is heavily tied to satisfaction and the frustrations that parents currently experience.

While the on-the-field experience matters the most to parents (coaching, practice and game schedules, playing time), the software and apps clubs use to communicate with members and the tools that allow parents to manage their memberships have an immense impact on their satisfaction - or lack thereof.

We surveyed over 500 parents of youth club sports participants from all over the United States to find out what drives satisfaction with their clubs, what matters most to parents, what keeps them coming back from season to season, and the role that technology plays in how clubs deliver the member experience.

In the research that follows, we'll take a closer look at what factors contribute to a positive (and negative) youth sports club experience for parents and how club management technology affects customers throughout key moments in the season.

#### References

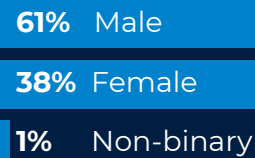
1. <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2019/12/26/1964575/0/en/Youth-Sports-Market-Projected-to-Reach-77-6-Billion-by-2026-Comprehensive-Industry-Analysis-Insights.html>

<https://time.com/magazine/us/4913681/september-4th-2017-vol-190-no-9-u-s/>

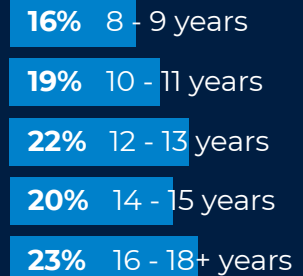
## PLAYER SNAPSHOT

Below is a look at the representation of players in this study. Parents were asked to select one child who had the longest tenure with the same club to reference when responding to questions throughout the survey.

### Gender of Player



### Age of Player



### Number of Seasons with Referenced Club



### Level of Play



### Club Sport Played



Soccer



Lacrosse



Ice Hockey



Volleyball



Other

# 1.0

## PARENTS HAVE HIGH EXPECTATIONS . . . AND CLUBS ARE MISSING THE MARK

### The Lifetime Value of a Satisfied Parent

Parent satisfaction makes a significant impact on the potential a club has for attracting new players and improving their repeated program participation. According to our research, when a parent is highly satisfied, it contributes to the loyalty and trust that parents have in a club. Longevity with the club, the number of children participating in club sports, and the parent's tendency to recommend the club to other parents are all factors influenced by the overall satisfaction a parent has with a club. **The bottom line: Streamlining club operations to ensure a seamless parent experience is a direct path to increased positive word-of-mouth and higher member retention.**



## The Lifetime Value of Parents (and beyond):



### Longevity

**80%** of parents who report being highly satisfied with their club experience are very likely to return for another season. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of highly satisfied parents have been with their club for two or more seasons, compared to just 58% of less satisfied parents. Player retention is critical for the continued success of youth sports clubs.



### Trust

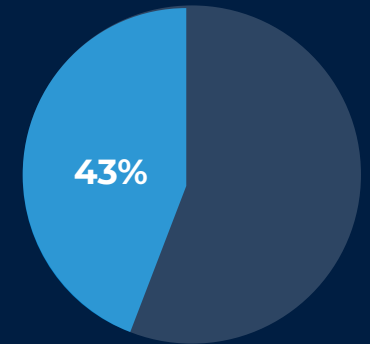
**77%** of parents who have the most overall satisfaction with their club report being very likely to recommend the club to other parents compared to just 22% of those with less satisfaction with their club. Parent-to-parent recommendations are an extremely powerful and influential part of encouraging club participation growth.



### Loyalty

**44%** of all parents surveyed have two or more children in club programs. Our research shows that the most satisfied parents are more likely to have multiple children in club programs than parents who are less satisfied with their club experience. Nearly half (49%) of very satisfied parents have two or more children in club programs compared to just over one-third (36%) of less satisfied parents. This is a prime opportunity that clubs can take advantage of by providing an exceptional experience in which the whole family desires to participate.

**Nearly half (43%) of parents surveyed report being just somewhat satisfied or unsatisfied with the experience they have had with their club.**



### Snapshot of a highly satisfied parent:

- **53%** have an annual household income of over \$100K
- **55%** are male, 45% female
- **69%** have male players
- **46%** have players that are 14 or older
- **The most satisfied parents are from New England/ Mid-Atlantic regions.** 64% of parents from New England and Mid-Atlantic regions are very satisfied with their club.

## 1.1 PARENTS HAVE HIGH EXPECTATIONS . . . AND CLUBS ARE MISSING THE MARK

### Parents expect more from the technology their club uses.

As youth sports continue to “professionalize,” parent expectations around the sophistication and reliability of club technology and the activities it enables (communication, events and scheduling, evaluations, registration, and payments) have elevated tremendously.

82% of parents report having high expectations for the technology their club utilizes to manage their club experience, but only 44% report being very satisfied with the technology their club uses.

As satisfaction grows, so do expectations surrounding technology. Parents who are most satisfied with their club experience are significantly more likely to have very high expectations (59%) for the technology utilized by the club as opposed to just 6% of those with less overall satisfaction.

Please rate the expectations you have for the quality of the technology that your club uses to manage your club experience (e.g., registration, payments, communication, events/calendars).

36% Very high

46% Somewhat high

10% Somewhat low

1% Very low

7% No expectations

A parent’s most frequent and important interactions with your club are often through communication apps, registration software, and scheduling tools. **If clubs don’t invest in the right club management technology, their businesses will feel the negative impact of a dissatisfied membership base.**



# 2.0

## WHAT MATTERS MOST TO PARENTS

**What happens on the field is always important, but communication, customer service, and club management technology also move the needle for parents.**

On-the-field elements of the club experience matter most to parents. Quality of coaching, practice, and game scheduling as well as playing time are the most commonly reported factors that influence a parent's opinion of a club.

**Top 3 factors that most influence overall opinion of a club:**

**57%** Quality of coaching

**48%** Practice & game schedules

**44%** Playing time

**91% of parents** surveyed agree that the technology their child's club uses to manage the club experience (e.g., registration, payments, communication, events, calendars) impacts their overall experience with the club.

Our research indicates, however, that the tools and technology clubs require parents to use in order to manage their membership and stay up to date on news and events are of great importance to customers.

One in three parents list the quality of communication they receive from their club as a top contributor to their overall opinion of a club their child participates in. Quality of customer service as well as the technology and apps a club uses to manage the parent experience also contribute greatly to their overall opinion of the club and whether or not to return to a club for additional seasons.

**1 in 3:** Nearly one-third (29%) of parents say that the quality of communication they receive from their club is a top influencer of their overall opinion of the club.

**1 in 4:** Over one-quarter (28%) of parents say that the quality of customer service they receive from their club is a top influencer of their overall opinion of the club.

**1 in 5:** One in every five parents (21%) say that the technology and apps a club uses to manage their experience is a top influencer of their overall opinion of the club.

## 2.1 WHAT MATTERS MOST TO PARENTS

### What are parents willing to pay more money for?

About one-third of all parents surveyed report that they would be most willing to pay additional club fees for better technology or apps used by the club, both for performance analysis (34%) and registration/communication (32%).

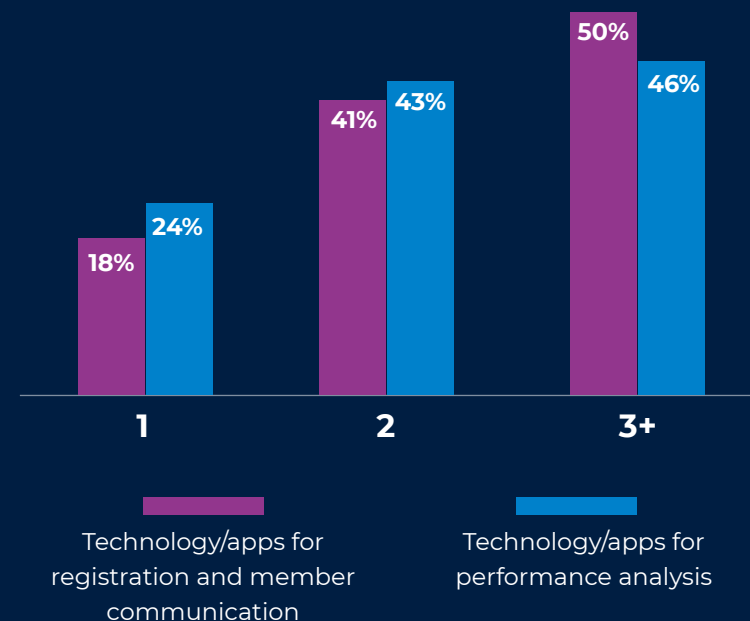
These numbers jump drastically when parents are segmented by the number of apps they are asked to utilize by their club. Half of those who report having to use three or more apps for their club are most willing to pay additional club fees for better technology for registration and member communication.

#### Which of the following club improvements would you be most willing to pay additional club fees for?

(All Respondents)



Segmented by number of apps used

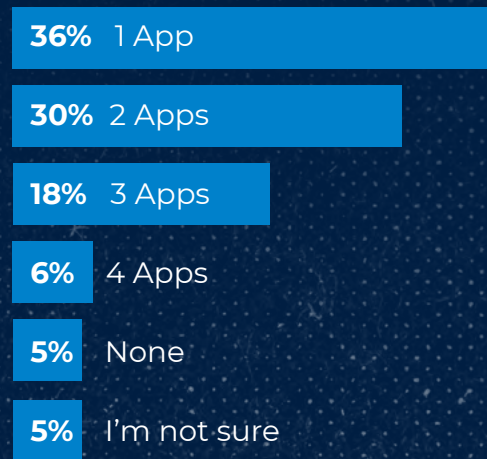


Parents using 3+ apps are equally willing to pay additional fees for updated technology as they are for player development programs and quality of coaches.

## PARENTS ARE FORCED TO USE TOO MANY APPS.

54% of parents are made to use two or more apps to manage their club experience (1 out of 4 have used three or more). As the number of apps that parents are asked to use grows, so do the rates of dissatisfaction with certain areas of their club experience.

Approximately how many different apps or software tools have you been asked to use by your club for registration, payments, communication, events/ calendars, etc.



## 2.2 WHAT MATTERS MOST TO PARENTS

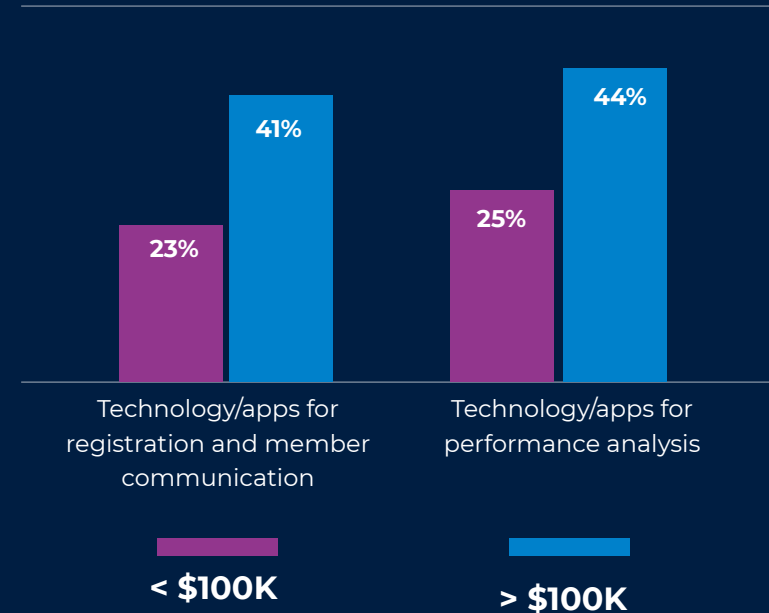
### Parent desires differ based on demographics.

#### What do parents want? It depends on the parent.

Parents who reported to be part of households with an income of more than \$100K per year are significantly more likely to value technology and apps both for registration and member communication as well as for performance analysis than parents with an annual household income of less than \$100K per year.

This group of parents from higher income households are also 2x more likely than all others to list technology and apps used by a club as a top reason to stay with a club for additional seasons. (30% of those with annual household incomes of \$100K or more per year vs. 15% of all others).

Which of the following club improvements would you be most willing to pay additional club fees for?



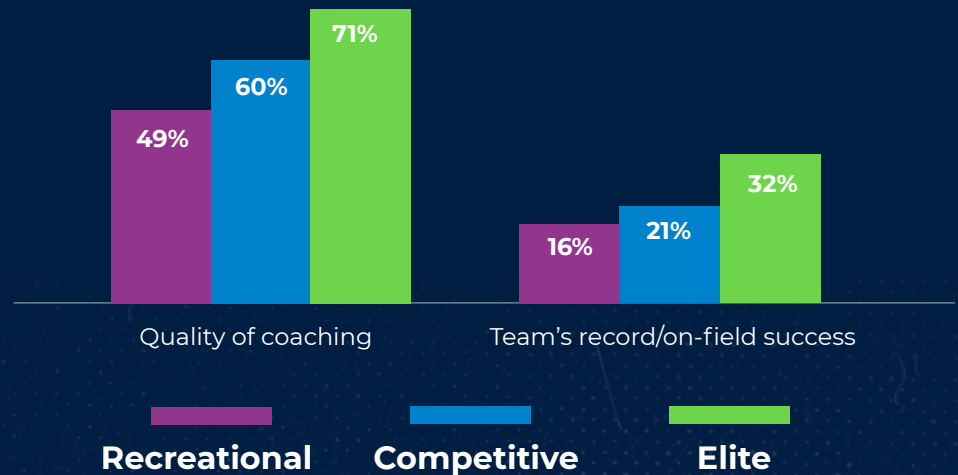
**Dads are willing to pay more.** Across all categories, but specifically for technology, our male survey participants were more willing than female participants to pay additional fees for technology, both for registration and member communication as well as for performance analysis.



## QUALITY OF COACHING

As the level of play gets more advanced, elements of the club experience such as coaching and on-field success become more important factors that contribute to the decision for parents to continue to participate with a club for more seasons.

Which of the following are the most important factors that contribute to your decision to remain or not remain at any club for future seasons?



For parents who have a player that has been with a club for two or more seasons, the **quality of club communication ranks higher than both on-field success and field location** when it comes to factors contributing to their decision to remain with a club for future seasons.

# 3.0

## EMPLOYING CLUB MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY EFFECTIVELY

### In what ways are clubs using technology today?

Youth sports parents are most commonly asked to use club software or apps for player registration and membership fee payments. Still, over one-third (36%) of parents have not used club management software to register a child and/or pay their membership fees. This is an enormous missed opportunity for clubs that are still utilizing forms, paper, email, checks, and similar dated systems.

**For which of the following club activities do you or have you used a third-party application or software (mobile or desktop) as directed by the club?**

- 64% Registering and/or paying for programs and club fees
- 56% Viewing team and/or club schedules, calendars, and events
- 54% Receiving and/or sending club-related messages
- 30% Updating player attendance for games/practice
- 20% Accessing club forms and player evaluations

The parents who are most satisfied with their overall club experience are significantly more likely to have used an app for registration as well as for accessing club forms and player evaluations.



### Worth the cost.

98% of parents surveyed who are with clubs that use an app to do ALL of these activities agree that the opportunities, services, and benefits that they receive from their club programs are worth the money they pay.

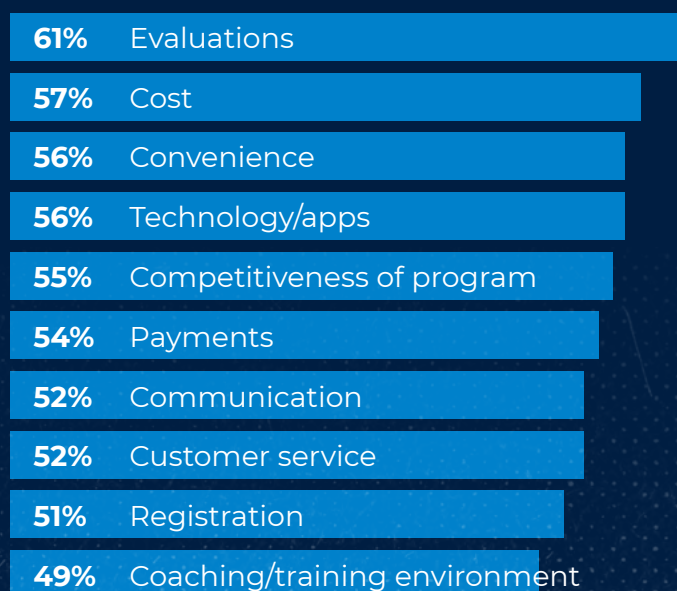
## 3.1 EMPLOYING CLUB MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY EFFECTIVELY

### Areas of least satisfaction correlate with areas where technology is not currently used.

There is notable dissatisfaction with the current club experience. Overall, player evaluations, cost, convenience, and technology/apps used by clubs are areas in which parents report the least satisfaction. Let's take a closer look at the club activities in which the most improvement is needed and how they correlate with how parents engage with club technology today.

#### Areas where improvement is needed

(% of those who reported either somewhat satisfied or unsatisfied in the following areas)



**Only 39% of those surveyed are very satisfied with the evaluations they receive for their players.**

This number jumps to 50% for parents who report using an app to access club forms and player evaluations. Powerful club management technology can streamline the entire player evaluation process, including delivering the finished product to parents.

**Only 44% of parents report being very satisfied with the technology** used by their clubs to manage player registration and payments, communication, schedules, and calendars/events. This group is significantly more likely to be with clubs using apps for:

- Registering and/or paying for programs and club fees - **74% vs. 56%**
- Viewing team and/or club schedules, calendars, and events - **62% vs. 52%**
- Updating player attendance for games/practice - **35% vs. 25%**
- Accessing club forms and player evaluations - **28% vs 13%**

Those who are very satisfied with the payment process of their club are significantly more likely to be with a club using an app for registering and/or paying for programs and club fees. **(73% vs. 55%)**





## 3.1 EMPLOYING CLUB MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY EFFECTIVELY

### Parents are frustrated with their club experience, especially when they are forced to use multiple club management apps.

Out of all of the parents surveyed, over one-third (34%) have experienced last-minute event changes (such as field location or practice time) in the last year and over one-quarter (28%) have missed entire communications from their club. These experiences can cause frustration among parents and decrease overall satisfaction with a club.

Interestingly, frustrations vary greatly by the number of apps parents are asked to use. Those who are only asked to use one app are significantly less likely to report experiencing nearly all of the frustrations listed.

### Which of the following club-related frustrations have you experienced in the last year?

(Segmented by number of apps used)

	1 App	2 Apps	3+ Apps
Signed up for the wrong program	4%	14%	25%
Last-minute event changes (e.g., field location, practice time)	34%	34%	36%
Payment issue	10%	21%	31%
Forgot account log-in/password for club app	7%	23%	32%
Club app not working properly	6%	17%	26%
Unresponsive coach/director/club staff member	14%	17%	33%
Lack of communications from the club (e.g., emails, chats, etc.)	16%	27%	32%
Missed communications from the club (e.g., emails, chats, etc.)	16%	31%	40%
None of the above	40%	20%	15%

### More is almost never better.

Parents who are with clubs that are utilizing 3 or more apps are significantly more likely to have experienced a lack of communication as well as missed communications from the club.

## 3.2 EMPLOYING CLUB MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY EFFECTIVELY

### A closer look at technology usage by region.

#### App Overload

40% of parents from the Western region of the US report having to use three or more apps to manage their club participation. This is the highest of any region. The club activities that apps are used for vary by region as well. We see significantly higher rates of usage for updating player attendance for games and practice in the Southwest, for instance, while over two-thirds of parents from the Western states report using an app for registering and paying for club participation.

**For which of the following club activities do you or have you used a third-party application or software (mobile or desktop) as directed by the club?**

(Segmented by Region)

	New England/ Mid-Atlantic	South	Midwest	Southwest	West
Registering and/or paying for programs and club fees	64%	61%	62%	62%	68%
Receiving and/or sending club-related messages	55%	60%	55%	45%	50%
Viewing team and/or club schedules, calendars, and events	59%	49%	61%	52%	55%
Updating player attendance for games/practice	33%	24%	28%	40%	27%
Accessing club forms and player evaluations	20%	17%	18%	29%	20%

## LONGEVITY AND SATISFACTION.

Satisfied parents stay with clubs longer. We see satisfaction rates go up as the number of seasons with the club increases in nearly every area of the club experience.

### % of parents who are “Very Satisfied” with the following areas of their club experience.

(Segmented by number of seasons with the club)

	1 Season	2 - 3 Seasons	4+ Seasons
Cost	38%	46%	47%
Competitiveness of program	33%	53%	47%
Coaching/training environment	42%	53%	58%
Registration	40%	52%	57%
Evaluations	34%	39%	45%
Convenience	35%	51%	46%
Customer service	37%	52%	56%
Communication	39%	52%	57%
Payments	37%	49%	57%
Technology/apps	32%	48%	56%



# PARTICIPANTS & METHODOLOGY

## N = 507 Parents of Club Youth Sports Players

### Region

New England/Mid-Atlantic	<b>24%</b>
South	<b>20%</b>
Midwest	<b>23%</b>
Southwest	<b>9%</b>
Pacific Coastal	<b>24%</b>

### Pre-Tax Annual Household Income

Less than \$50K	<b>20%</b>
\$50K - \$100K	<b>32%</b>
\$101K - \$150K	<b>31%</b>
\$151K - \$250K	<b>11%</b>
More than \$250K	<b>6%</b>

### Gender of Parent

Male	<b>49%</b>
Female	<b>50%</b>
Non-binary	<b>1%</b>



## Methodology

Ascend2 benchmarks the performance of business strategies and the tactics and technology that drives them. With a custom online questionnaire, our “The State of Youth Sports Clubs & Parent Expectations” survey was fielded during the month of September 2022. We collected responses from 507 parents throughout the United States who self-identified as being a parent to at least one child between the ages of 8 and 17 years old who participate in a club sport, according to this definition: Club sports typically involve tryouts and offer multiple teams at varying playing levels. Importantly, club sports are NOT associated with school sports.

# ABOUT THE RESEARCH PARTNERS



Conquer the chaos of your club management workflow with PlayMetrics and become shockingly efficient. Our Club Operating System acts as the single source of truth for everyone in your organization, helping you optimize daily operations and transform your business in ways that weren't possible before. Trusted by the most forward-thinking youth sports clubs, PlayMetrics allows everyone from directors to parents to remain on the same page with modern financial, operational, coaching, and communication tools.

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