



Kyle Scott

Founder and President, Buying Sandlot

Submitted to the House Committee on Education and Workforce

Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education

Hearing: "Field of Fees: Private Equity's Role in the Commercialization of American Youth Sports"

June 30, 2026

Chairman Kiley, Ranking Member Bonamici, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement. My name is Kyle Scott. I am the Founder and President of Buying Sandlot, a trade publication focused on the business of youth sports.

Buying Sandlot covers the operators, investors, facilities, technology platforms, and entrepreneurs reshaping youth sports in America. Our readership spans operators, investors, vendors, facility owners, professional sports organizations, and nonprofit leaders.

Buying Sandlot has roughly 19,000 newsletter subscribers and reaches hundreds of thousands more through our podcast and social channels. Our first Summit, in Philadelphia this April, convened approximately 450 industry professionals. We also collect and distribute first-party survey data from operators, clubs, and facilities. Unless otherwise noted, Buying Sandlot's first-party survey data reflects self-selected responses from our audience and should be read as directional market intelligence rather than nationally representative polling.

I am not submitting this statement on behalf of any investor, operator, league, platform, advocacy organization, or private equity firm.

My perspective comes from reporting on the market, interviewing stakeholders, hosting events, and collecting first-party data. This statement is not meant to diminish nonprofit, community, and scholastic programs — they hold undeniable value, and my own family participates in and volunteers with them — but I will speak primarily about the private side, which is what Buying Sandlot covers.

The central point I aim to make is this: youth sports has real cost, access, safety, and transparency problems. Some private capital-backed operators have contributed to those

problems. But the market is far too broad, fragmented, and varied to reduce those problems to private equity alone.

The better policy question is not whether one capital structure should be banned. The better question is whether youth sports organizations — public, nonprofit, founder-owned, institutionally backed, franchised, or community-run — are expanding access, improving quality, operating transparently, protecting children, and serving families well.

Youth sports is larger and more complex than the current public debate suggests

What we have learned across our reporting and data is that youth sports is a multi-layered industry: larger, more nuanced, and more vibrant than the policy conversation has acknowledged.

The most publicized estimate, from the Aspen Institute's Project Play, puts family spending at more than \$40 billion a year. But Project Play notes this excludes public spending by schools and municipalities, private facilities, and sponsors, and that the true economy is likely much larger.

Other estimates run higher: a Kinetica Group analysis cited figures of roughly \$50.6 to \$54 billion in 2024, with some projections approaching \$114 billion by 2032.

The exact number matters less than the direction. Youth sports is no longer a loose collection of weekend games. It is a large, fragmented, fast-modernizing market spanning facilities, software, events, coaching, travel, media, and sponsorship.

The cost problem is real, but the participation story is more nuanced

The debate has centered on cost and the claim that private equity is pricing families out.

Project Play found the average family spent \$1,016 on a child's primary sport in 2024, up 46% since 2019.

Families feel those costs across registration, equipment, training, tournaments, travel, and lodging. Expanding access to quality programming for lower-income households should be a national priority. Others have detailed the many benefits to individuals and society when children play.

The access problem is also real. Federal National Survey of Children's Health data, highlighted by Project Play, show youth sports participation rose to 58% in 2024 even as the household income gap widened.

But the cause is more complicated than the dominant narrative suggests. Our analysis of the same federal and Project Play data found that among children below the federal poverty line, sports participation was 36.3% in 2024 — higher than other clubs and organizations (30.4%) or arts (30.1%) — and had risen about 5% since 2019, while other clubs and arts saw double-digit declines. Project Play itself noted that the 46% cost increase was roughly twice the rate of price inflation over the same period. That means general inflation explains a meaningful portion of the price increase, even as youth sports-specific costs clearly rose faster than inflation.

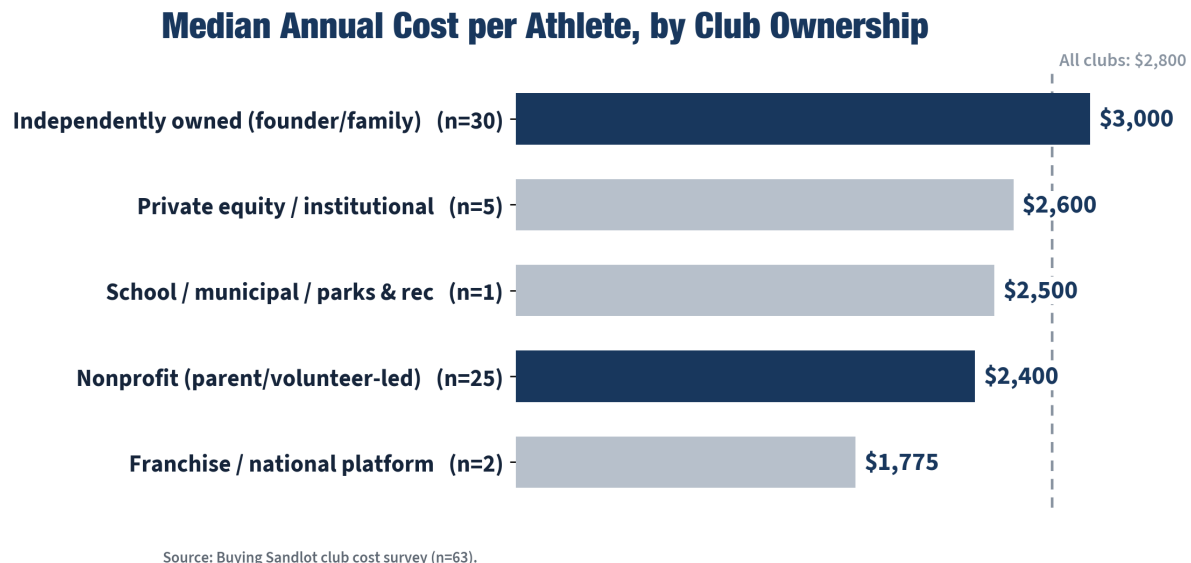
That does not minimize the access problem: lower-income children face broad barriers to structured participation. But the data does not support the conclusion that private equity or club sports alone explains it.

Our analysis also found that sports has the highest participation rate among those structured activities at every income level. The widening gap may reflect that sports spending is highly income-elastic at the top as much as exclusionary at the bottom — a distinction that matters, because policy can conflate genuine excess at the high end with decreased access at the bottom.

The same analysis pushed back on the assumption that community-based sports have disappeared. Project Play survey data indicate community-based teams account for 43% of participation and free play 41%, versus 17% for travel and club teams. The same survey found parents reporting more pressure to specialize from school coaches than from club coaches.

In other words: youth sports has a cost problem, but the problem is not simply that for-profit clubs are replacing low-cost community sports.

What club sports actually cost



We recently surveyed 63 club operators about cost. The median annual cost was \$2,800 per athlete (average ~\$3,068), with the typical athlete touching the program four days per week for nine months a year.

This is not a nationally representative sample of all youth sports participation. It is intentionally focused on the club segment, which is one of the more expensive and politically scrutinized parts of the market. But the ownership breakdown is instructive.

Of the 63 club cost survey respondents:

- 30 were independently owned by a founder or family
- 25 were nonprofit or parent/volunteer-governed
- 5 were private equity or institutional capital-backed
- 2 were franchise or national platform affiliates
- 1 was school, municipal, or parks-and-rec governed

79% of respondents said their per-athlete prices were up compared with two years ago.

70% reported a typical annual club cost of at least \$2,000.

48% reported at least \$3,000.

21% reported at least \$5,000.

But the annual figure tells only part of the story. Converting reported annual cost into estimated athlete touchpoints — using each respondent's annual price, days per week, months per year, and a 52-week year — yields a median of roughly \$19 per touchpoint. The mean is higher, about \$24, skewed by high-end programs.

That does not make the cost painless: a \$2,800 bill is still meaningful, and well above national primary sport averages. But it suggests club economics are driven less by ownership than by the intensity and duration of participation. A program touching an athlete four days a week for nine months is materially different from a six-week rec season or a once-a-week clinic.

In this early, self-selected sample, high costs appeared across ownership models. The small group of private-equity or institutionally backed respondents did not report a higher median price than the sample overall — though that subgroup is too small for firm conclusions, and we will keep collecting and distributing this data.

Most operators seeking capital want to grow, not simply cash out

The broader youth sports ecosystem is far more nuanced than the current framing would suggest. It includes facility owners, club operators, tournament organizers, technology companies, training businesses, service providers, compliance vendors, software platforms, and professionalized recreation companies that go well beyond the handful of scaled platforms most often mentioned in media coverage.

Many are run by passionate coaches, trainers, and local entrepreneurs. In many ways they represent the best of America: small and mid-sized business owners trying to make a positive impact on their communities while building something sustainable.

Buying Sandlot recently surveyed 190 youth sports operators across four categories:

- 83 league, club, or team operators
- 44 facility or venue operators
- 43 training or development operators
- 20 event or tournament operators

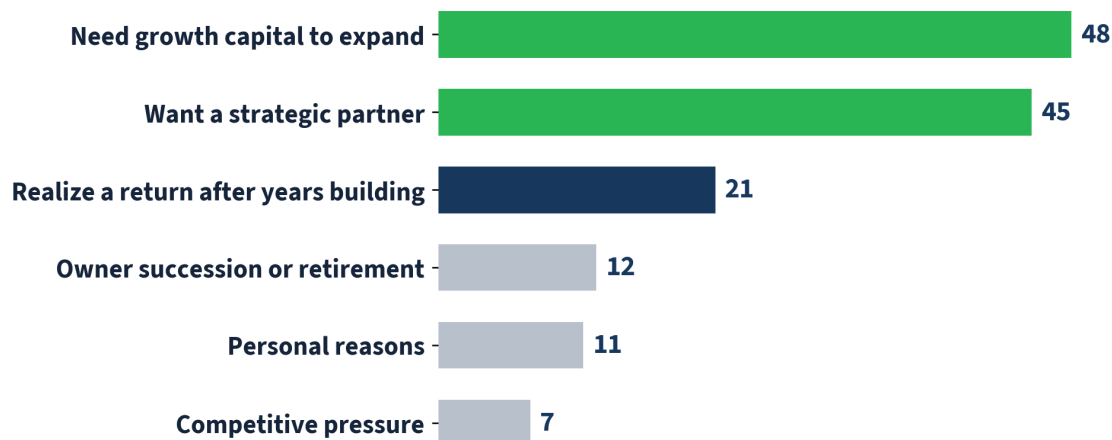
Of those 190, 103 (54%) had some capital posture — raising capital, or open to selling a minority stake, being acquired, or acquiring (multi-select):

- 56 respondents, or 29%, said they were actively raising capital
- 50, or 26%, were open to selling a minority stake
- 42, or 22%, were open to acquisition
- 31, or 16%, were seeking acquisition targets

The motivations are important: only 21 of 190 selected “realize a return” as a reason for seeking capital, versus 48 for “growth capital to expand” and 45 for “a strategic partner.”

This runs counter to the prevailing narrative that greed has overtaken youth sports. Profit motive is part of the market, as it is in any private market. But our data suggests that many operators are not primarily seeking capital to cash out. They are seeking capital to build, hire, expand, professionalize, and serve more athletes.

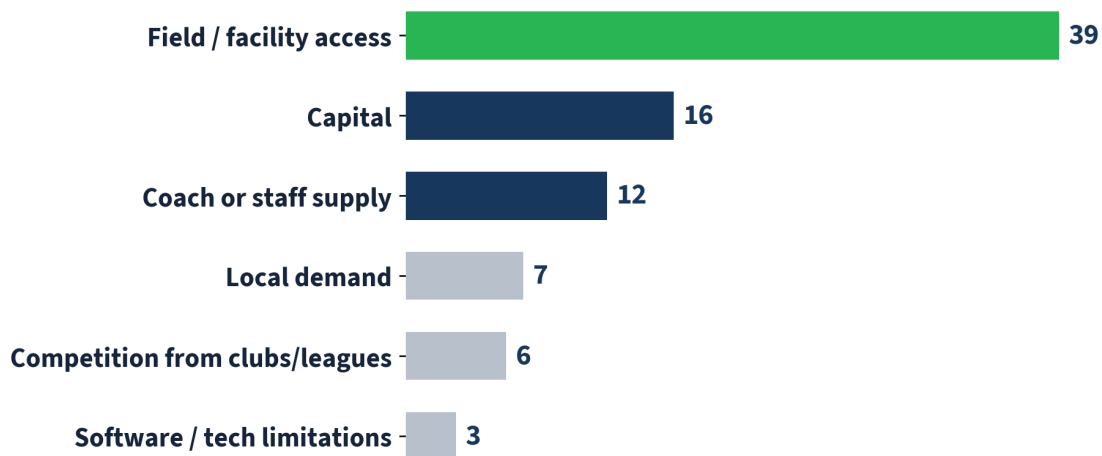
Why Operators Seek Capital



Source: Buying Sandlot operator survey (n=190). Multi-select; respondents citing each motivation.

Their most common intended uses of capital were facility acquisition or buildout, hiring, marketing, working capital, M&A, and technology.

Biggest Growth Constraint, Club & League Operators



Source: Buying Sandlot operator survey — league/club/team operators (n=83).

The most common growth constraint across the 190-operator survey was capital, followed by field or facility access. Among league, club, and team operators specifically, field or facility access was the top constraint. Among facility operators, capital, real estate or land costs, and construction or capex costs were central constraints.

The pattern is clear: clubs need facilities, and facilities need capital.

Facilities are a central constraint

A separate June 2025 survey of 45 facility owners and operators reinforces this. Of the 44 who answered the investment question, 39 (89%) were currently seeking investment or expected to within the next year.

Our facility database tracks 84 development projects at various stages — 31 coded private, 28 public, 16 mixed, 9 unclassified. Among the 48 with reported figures, it identifies approximately \$9.73 billion in investment.

A conservative text-coded review identifies 29 projects whose descriptions explicitly reference tourism, hotels, tournaments, or economic development. Those account for approximately \$5.9 billion — about 60% of reported investment.

That tourism economy creates incentives around weekend event volume and room nights. Those incentives can produce real value and also real cost pressure, especially at the high-travel end of the market.

Sports ETA's 2026 report found sports tourism generated \$274.5 billion in economic impact, \$111.2 billion in direct spending, and 124.3 million room nights. Participatory sports tourism — driven in part by youth and amateur events — generated \$60.1 billion in direct spending and \$149.1 billion in impact.

At the same time, not every project is a tourism play. Many operators are simply solving a local supply problem: overscheduled fields, scarce ice and court time, and the rent, staffing, and insurance costs of running a small facility.

The best policy response distinguishes between a destination tournament complex built around hotel revenue, and a local facility adding courts, turf, or ice so more kids can play in their own communities.

Private capital can help, and it can hurt

The right position is not “private equity is ruining youth sports.” It is also not “private equity is saving youth sports.”

Capital is a tool. Incentives determine whether it helps families.

Private capital can help when it expands access, builds facilities, supports safety and compliance, funds scholarships, or lets a founder-led organization grow without losing its culture.

Private capital can hurt when it creates excessive fees, opaque pricing, mandatory travel, take-it-or-leave-it contracts, or vertical integration that limits family choice.

Some scaled operators build premium, elective experiences at high-quality facilities. Those can be expensive and should be scrutinized when pricing, contracts, lodging, or market power harm families. But their existence alone does not explain lower-income participation challenges, especially when most participation occurs outside elite club settings.

There are also genuinely troubling examples. Public reporting around youth hockey has raised concerns about rink consolidation, stay-to-play, vertical integration, and antitrust — involving both private-equity and non-private-equity actors.

That distinction is important. If the policy concern is market power, facility control, exclusive contracts, opaque fees, mandatory lodging, data use, or anticompetitive conduct, then the policy solution should address those practices regardless of whether the owner is a private equity fund, a professional sports team, a nonprofit, a founder, a municipality, or a strategic acquirer.

Professionalized recreation should be part of the solution

One of the most promising areas is what we call professionalized recreation.

These programs sit between inconsistent volunteer recreation and high-cost elite travel, offering families more consistency, safer operations, and lower-pressure programming without intensive travel.

Private capital is already present here. Several of the most popular, lowest-cost national recreation programs for young children are run by private-equity-backed franchisors. We have covered this as an important middle ground between inconsistent community efforts and elite circuits.

It is often exactly the model policymakers say they want: more sports, less travel, better experiences, reasonable cost, local participation.

Technology platforms also solve real problems for families and operators: registration, scheduling, payments, communication, streaming, and safety credentials.

These platforms are backed by every capital structure: venture, private equity, public, strategic. The relevant questions are how they handle pricing, children's data, interoperability, and transparency, not which capital structure sits behind them.

B2B service providers in compliance, background checks, insurance, and safety are another important, often for-profit category. They rarely interact directly with families but increasingly provide the infrastructure operators need to run safe programs, and their existence should not be treated as inherently harmful.

Sponsorship is another emerging area, with companies moving beyond local jersey ads to apply sophisticated media models to youth sports, with Fortune 500 brands increasingly investing in the space. Proponents argue at-scale sponsorship can subsidize participation costs. We have yet to see hard data, but it is worth following.

Conclusion

Youth sports is at an inflection point. The market is larger, more vibrant, more fragmented, and more nuanced than the current public debate often acknowledges.

There are bad actors, extractive practices, and families paying too much. There are markets where access is constrained by facility control, travel costs, and opaque pricing. Those problems should be addressed.

But there is also a vibrant community trying to solve real problems.

Buying Sandlot's first-party data suggests that the cost and access problem is not best understood as a simple story of one ownership model raising prices. Our club cost survey suggests that annual club costs are driven substantially by the volume of participation: frequent athlete touchpoints over long seasons, often layered with tournaments and travel. Our operator survey shows that clubs and leagues most need access to facilities. Our facility survey shows that local facilities overwhelmingly need capital. Our facility project database shows nearly \$10 billion in reported youth sports facility development, and a review of the projects under development suggests that a majority of reported investment is explicitly tied to sports tourism, hotels, visitors, tournaments, regional-hub positioning, or economic-development logic.

Taken together, these realities point toward a more useful policy question: ***How can the country build more affordable, local, high-quality sports infrastructure so families have better options close to home?***

Local facility capacity is one way to rebalance the system. Public support for facilities not dependent on tourism demand could reduce club-cost pressure, expand nonprofit and community access, and give families more alternatives to travel-heavy competition.

That support should not be a blank-check subsidy. It should carry access requirements, transparent pricing, scholarship expectations, and safety standards. But if policymakers want more children playing at reasonable cost, they should focus on whether communities have the infrastructure to support local participation.

Private capital is neither automatically the villain nor the solution, and public and nonprofit programs, while essential, are not automatically sufficient. A framework focused on ownership labels risks missing bad conduct outside private equity while chilling constructive investment in facilities, technology, and safety. The better test is whether youth sports organizations, regardless of ownership, are making the market more transparent, accessible, safe, and sustainable for families.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record. I welcome the opportunity to continue serving as a resource to the Committee on the youth sports market and the many ideas present within it.