

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Retailers turn athletes into muses as \$450M menswear market matures

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Russell Wilson's Good Man Brand is sold by Neiman Marcus

By JEN KING

Retailers have taken advantage of contemporary menswear's popularity by aligning with the sports world's most premier athletes.

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Sports figures are often turned to for style inspiration by discerning male consumers who tune in for post-game press conferences and read about their favorite players in men's lifestyle publications. Retail marketers have taken note, choosing to work with talked-about players from a number of sports for content and collaborations, with the goal of turning fans' interest into purchases.

"Today's affluent consumer is as discerning as ever," said Paul Farkas, co-founder and CEO, [Athleisure Mag](#) and [Accessory2](#). "They are super informed and hyper-connected, with access to a host of comparison and recommendation engines at their fingertips for showrooming everything. Price, quality, fit, performance and value are all important shopping criteria.

"Ironically, male shoppers are often varying levels of sports fanatics (they are or they are surrounded by them with work and friends) and keen on sporting their favorite players' collections and limited items, regardless of budget," he said. "A bond is formed with a feeling of remote intimacy; projected adoption of celebrity taste; and a sense of style trend is intermingled with each new release.

"The better the brand-athlete narrative and the star's authenticity with the line on and off the field, the better the chance of significant adoption. Brands that can establish a franchise over several seasons can find major boosts of stock value across the entire company, the stakes are surreal."

Sartorial sports

According to a study prepared by the now-shuttered men's lifestyle publication *Details*, the menswear market topped \$450 million for 2015. The study also found that for 2015, men's clothing sales via ecommerce have grown at an annual rate of 17.3 percent since 2009 ([see story](#)).

"The luxe menswear boom continues year over year, and today's menswear shopper is increasingly super keen on fitness and wellness himself," Mr. Farkas said. "Men's Athleisure is a key sweetspot as the flexibility of dynamic, stylish clothes is desired to support juggling an active lifestyle of studio class/gym looks, casual-dress work attire, and nightlife style.

"The suit has had its day as the sneaker-head has grown-up to become the athleisure-head in today's adulting," he said.

To tap into the potential profits gleaned from menswear, retailers have strengthened their offerings for men through department refurbishments, capsule collections and marketing content featuring well-known sports figures.

For many male consumers, the teams and players they follow are idolized both on and off the field. This includes their style preferences, with many players, from the New York Rangers' Henrik Lundqvist to Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo, being prominent fixtures on best-dressed lists.



Henrik Lundqvist was featured in Bloomingdale's Father's Day gifting guide ([see story](#))

Collaborations that play into popular athletes' "clothes horse" ways have become popular as it allows the player to explore a new facet of himself. Also, as with any high-profile collaboration, consumers are more likely to be interested in pieces that have a connection to someone they respect or admire.

This marketing strategy has most recently been undertaken by department store chain Bloomingdale's, who worked with New York Giants' wide receiver Odell Beckham, Jr. on a capsule collection.

After slight hesitation from Mr. Beckham, the football star collaborated with Twenty Tees designer David Helwani on his own line, 13 x twenty. The sportswear line will hit stores and online come September, just as the NFL's regular season begins.

Mr. Beckham's 13 x twenty, a reference to his jersey number, is considered athleisure with knitwear pieces such as sweatpants, hoodies and tees. The prices range from \$85 to \$595 for a wool jacket.



Odell Beckham, Jr.'s 13 x twenty collection

In addition to selling online, the pieces will be available at Bloomingdale's 59th Street store in New York and its Chicago and Los Angeles flagship locations.

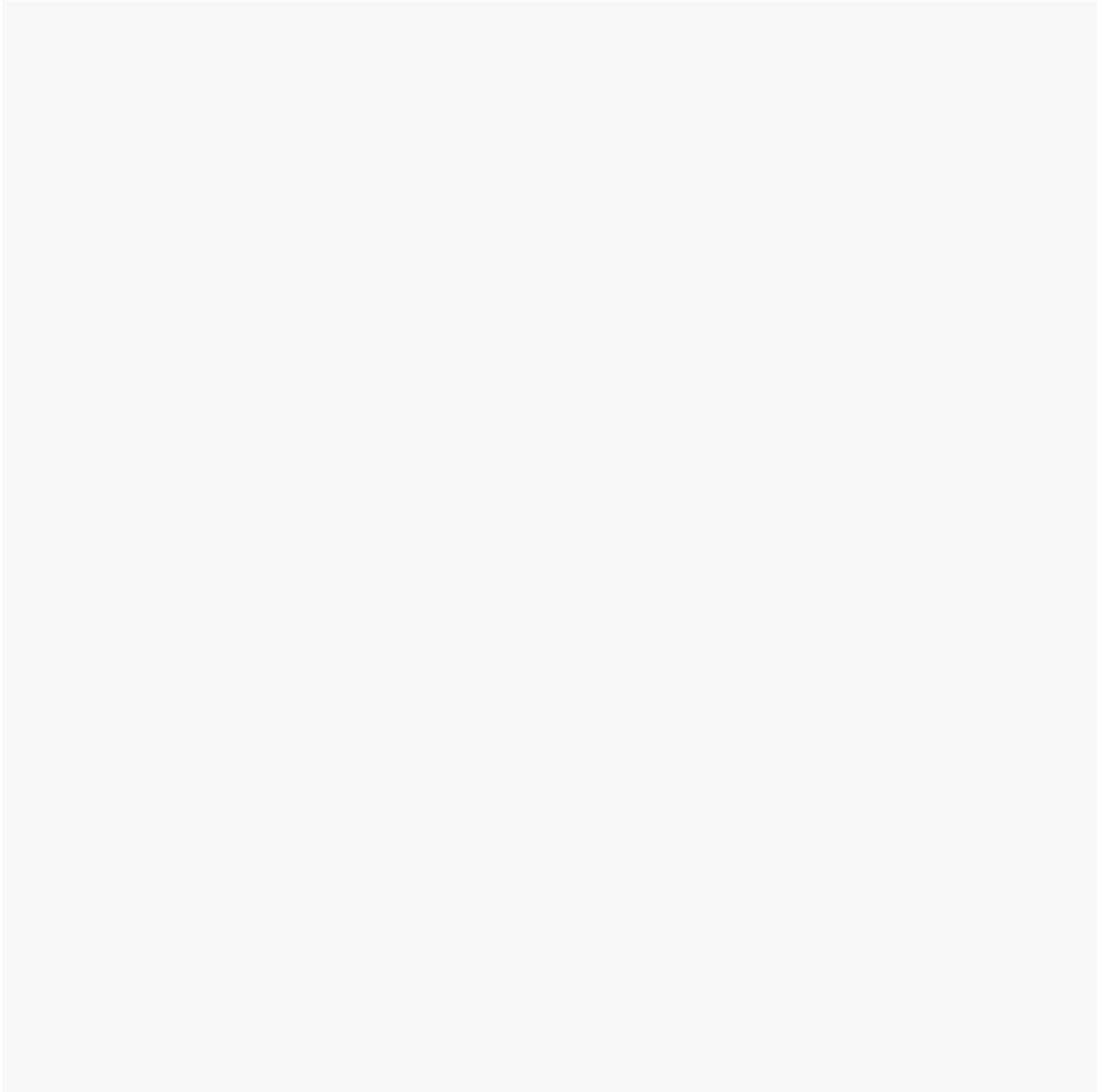
To promote the launch further, Mr. Beckham will be featured on the cover of the retailer's Best of Men's catalog. Within the catalog, the wide receiver will discuss the inspiration behind 13 x twenty and fall fashion.

Similarly, department store chain Neiman Marcus is launching the Good Man Brand in August. The contemporary-yet-casual collection was co-founded by Russell Wilson, quarterback of the Seattle Seahawks.

"Whether or not you are an athlete yourself, many men can identify to the hard work and dedication of professional athletes as well as look to them for style inspiration," said Twana Brown, vice president and divisional merchandise manager at [Neiman Marcus](#).

Born from Mr. Wilson's love of fashion, Good Man Brand also leverages the quarterback's philanthropic activities. For every Good Man Brand product sold, \$3 will be donated to the Why Not You Foundation, an organization that works to combat issues such as childhood cancer, word hunger and domestic violence one individual at a time.

The collection itself offers menswear pieces and footwear such as chinos, Italian-made suede sneakers and refined takes on classics including polos and crewnecks. Mr. Russell's Good Man Brand will be sold at Neiman Marcus locations in NorthPark, St. Louis, Oakbrook, Orlando, FL and Topanga, CA.



Modern minded, comfort driven Be Good #LeadInspireLive

A photo posted by Good Man Brand (@goodmanbrand) on May 12, 2016 at 6:02pm PDT

"Good Man Brand is a special brand, with a unique vision that strives to do more," says Scott Bonomo, Good Man Brand's co-founder and current president, in a statement "We're relentless in our drive to innovate around the notion of living life more comfortably.

"We've cultivated a network of talented craftsmen and manufacturers around the world who collaborate with us to help create and in some cases invent new products that reward modern-minded men with luxury, comfort and

effortless style," he said.

"We know that consumers are looking for the wow factor and they also want to be inspired in life, beyond just what they wear. We're excited to partner with the superior merchants at Neiman Marcus to deliver on both counts."

Content sports

In addition to athlete-supported design collaborations, retailers have turned to players to promote menswear offerings in-stores through digital content.

"Athlete endorsements also bolster the never-ending omni-platform content marketing feed and are an authentic way for luxury brands to give a spotlight and support sports players and their commitment beyond merely paid ad spots," Mr. Farkas said.

"The key is finding a connection between the brand and athlete where the line is created in a bespoke way to dramatically speak to their ethos, respectively and together," he said.

For example, department store chain Saks Fifth Avenue teamed up with the New York Jets for a style-focused YouTube series in 2014.

"Fashion Blitz" was a three-part feature, in which a store representative helped a team member revamp his wardrobe. This is part of a longstanding collaboration with the NFL team, a good fit due to the players' interest in fashion ([see story](#)).

Also, Italian menswear label Isaia delved into the made-to-measure process by showcasing its technique on retailer Barneys New York's blog.

For the bespoke promotion, Barneys filmed Isaia's made-to-measure services with Miami Marlins' right fielder Giancarlo Stanton, to accurately display an authentic interaction between brand and consumer. Walking through the process may strike a chord with consumers who have yet to had a custom suit fitted while providing an outlet for the purchase.

Brands and retailers pitching to male consumers often feature star athletes as ambassadors to connect with men on a level of mutual interest ([see story](#)).

"Star players are very much the new supermodels. They show off the clothes, jewelry and accessories masterfully with their hardbodies, chiseled faces, unique hairstyles and ink," Mr. Farkas said. "They are surrounded by fellow celebrities and model squads of their own, shared socially at all the prime hotspots, offering both glimpses into luxury lifestyle and #fitspo, today's magic formula.

"While the global luxury goods market has seen significant ebbs and flow, stylish affluencers require a rotating luxury wardrobe to memorialize personal progress and status in shared social and messaging lifestyle images," he said. "Sporting the latest limited editions, with an improved physique and state of mindfulness and balance is the holy grail.

"In the age of lifetime endorsements, star ambassador rosters are the new market cap for top tier heritage house and retail exposure. Competition is fierce as there is a limited amount of charismatic icons that move the needle and brands are so multi-faceted that conflicts increasingly arise. Athlete endorsements also bolster the never-ending omni-platform content marketing feed."