



A SHOT REPORT · 2026

THE STATE OF SPORT'S OPERATING SYSTEM.

Sport is one of the most passionate communities on the planet. We run it on admin tools. This report is about what that mismatch costs, in time, money, volunteers and kids, and what the infrastructure of sport should look like instead.

FOR CLUBS · SCHOOLS · COACHES · GOVERNING BODIES · FUNDERS

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THE ARGUMENT IN ONE PAGE

Grassroots sport is not short of passion. It is short of infrastructure. The tools we hand our clubs, coaches and volunteers were built for administration, and the community they are supposed to serve is built on culture. That gap is where the volunteers burn out, the kids drift away and the money leaks.

SIX FINDINGS

1. **The stack is broken.** The typical club runs on WhatsApp threads, spreadsheets, a paid admin app that nobody loves and one exhausted volunteer holding it together.
2. **The workforce is fraying.** England has 1.7 million fewer sport volunteers than at the 2016-17 peak, and the share of coaches who are women is falling.
3. **The kids are drifting.** Fewer than half of children meet the daily activity guideline, and the teenage years, especially for girls, are where sport quietly loses them.
4. **Development is unrecorded.** Sport tracks attendance and results; almost nowhere does it track the individual child's growth, confidence or reasons for staying.
5. **The money is real.** Community sport generates £122.9 billion a year in social value in England, and inequality of access costs an estimated £19.6 billion a year of it.
6. **Other industries already moved.** Banking, music and retail rebuilt themselves around engagement and identity. Sport, the industry with the most passionate users on Earth, still ships tools its own community tolerates rather than loves.

The test is simple. Open your club's app, then open your banking app. If the bank feels more alive than your sport, something has gone badly wrong with sport's priorities.

The answer is not another admin tool. It is an operating system for sport: culture first, development built in, safeguarding as architecture, free at the base, evidenced at the level of the individual child. The final section sets out seven principles any club, school or governing body can hold their next platform decision against, whether or not that platform is ours.

1 WHAT'S BROKEN

Walk into any grassroots club in the country and you will find the same operating system: group chats, spreadsheets, a folder of PDFs and goodwill.

The fixture list lives in one app. The subs are chased on another. The safeguarding certificates are in a drawer. Session plans, where they exist, are in the coach's head. Parents get half the information, late, across three group chats. And the person running all of it is a volunteer who took the job because nobody else would.

None of this is the volunteers' fault. They are running one of the most emotionally important institutions in their community, a place where children grow up and adults belong, with tools designed for scheduling and payment collection. The community is about culture, identity and belonging. The software is about admin. You cannot run a culture on an admin tool.

THE PASSION GAP

Here is the uncomfortable comparison. Over the last decade, banking apps became genuinely engaging: instant, personal, designed with care. Music platforms know their listeners better than record labels ever did. Retail built identity and community around trainers. Meanwhile the typical sports club app looks and feels like the back office it was built to be. Sport has the most passionate user base of any industry on the planet, people who tattoo their affiliations onto their bodies, and it ships the least loved software. That is not a technology gap. It is an ambition gap.

THE QUIET FAILURE: NOTHING DEVELOPS ANYBODY

Strip away the scheduling and the payments, and ask what the club's software actually does for the reason everyone is there, the development of the people playing. In almost every case the honest answer is nothing. There is no curriculum for the volunteer coach, no record of any child's growth, no way for a parent to see progress, and no memory of any of it when a player moves on. The most important thing happening at the club is the one thing the system does not touch.

Sport's software manages the logistics of the community and ignores the community itself. That is the broken heart of the current stack.

2 WHAT IT COSTS

The cost of running passion on admin tools shows up in three ledgers: people, participation and pounds.

PEOPLE: THE VOLUNTEER CLIFF



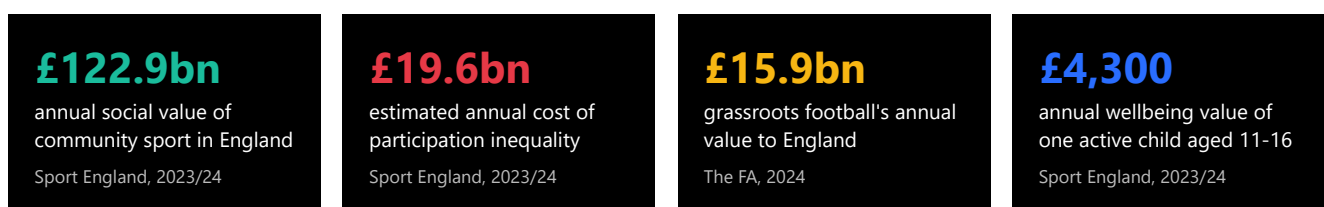
Every hour a volunteer spends chasing subs, rebuilding a spreadsheet or forwarding the same message to three group chats is an hour not spent coaching, mentoring or simply being present. Nobody has credibly counted those hours nationally; every club we speak to tells us they are the biggest hidden cost in their week. When the job becomes admin, people stop volunteering for it.

PARTICIPATION: THE DRIFT



The drift out of sport is concentrated exactly where support is thinnest: the teenage years, girls, disabled players, families who cannot absorb rising costs. These are not separate problems. They are one problem, the absence of any system that notices an individual before they disappear.

POUNDS: THE VALUE AT STAKE



Every child who fades out of sport takes roughly £4,300 a year of wellbeing value with them. Multiply by the drift and the inequality, and the wastage dwarfs anything on a club's balance sheet.

3 WHY THE TOOLS DON'T WORK

The current generation of sports software fails for a structural reason, not a cosmetic one: it was built for the administrator, and everyone else is an afterthought.

BUILT FOR THE ADMIN, NOT THE COMMUNITY

Team apps optimise for the person collecting money and setting fixtures. The player has no reason to open the app between matches. The parent gets notifications, not insight. The coach gets a register, not a curriculum. The fan does not exist at all. So engagement is exactly what you would expect: functional, occasional, joyless. The community's actual life, the conversation, the development, the belonging, happens somewhere else, usually on platforms built to monetise outrage.

DEVELOPMENT IS NOBODY'S FEATURE

The frameworks exist. Governing bodies teach whole-athlete development on every coaching course. But between the classroom and a wet Sunday morning there is no delivery mechanism, so the methodology stays in the classroom. A volunteer with an introductory badge is expected to deliver a certified pathway with no tools, no time and no support. The gap between what coach education promises and what club software delivers is the single largest unbuilt piece of sport's infrastructure.

SAFEGUARDING IS BOLTED ON, AND REGULATION IS COMING

Most team platforms treat child safety as a settings page. Account rules are loose, messaging controls are optional, and responsibility is quietly delegated to the club. That era is closing. The UK's Online Safety Act age-assurance duties have been enforceable since July 2025, with real fines already issued, and more jurisdictions are following. Platforms that treat safeguarding as a permission toggle rather than architecture are on the wrong side of where the law, and every parent, is heading.

THE LESSON OTHER INDUSTRIES ALREADY LEARNED

Around 70% of consumers say they are more likely to buy from brands offering personalised digital experiences (Deloitte Digital, 2022). Paris 2024 generated over 12 billion engagements on social channels (Deloitte and IOC figures), most of it in the space between events, not during them. Engagement follows identity, personalisation and community. Sport's own data proves the demand; sport's grassroots tools simply do not serve it.

The failure is not that clubs picked the wrong admin app. It is that sport needed an operating system and was only ever offered admin apps.

4 WHY IT'S NEEDED

This is not really about software. It is about what sport does for people when it works, and who loses when it doesn't.

"Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire, it has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand."

NELSON MANDELA · LAUREUS WORLD SPORTS AWARDS, MONACO, 25 MAY 2000

The United Nations calls sport "an important enabler of sustainable development", recognising its contribution to health, education, empowerment and social inclusion (2030 Agenda, paragraph 37), and in 2024 every member state backed a resolution urging governments to treat sport as serious social infrastructure. The evidence at home says the same thing. Community sport in England generates £122.9 billion a year in social value. Well-designed, trusted-adult sport programmes are associated with reduced anti-social behaviour among at-risk young people; in the Ministry of Justice's £5 million Youth Justice Sport Fund, 82% of the 7,800 young people reached came from the most deprived 40% of areas.

THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

Ask any adult who grew up inside a club what it gave them, and they rarely talk about technique. They talk about the coach who believed in them, the responsibility of captaining a side, the discipline of showing up. Sport is where young people learn to lead, to lose, to belong and to look after each other, on the pitch and off it. Every child who drifts out at 13 loses that apprenticeship, and the community loses the adult they would have become: the coach, the volunteer, the organiser, the leader.

THE LONELIEST GENERATION

Around 3.1 million adults in England feel lonely often or always, and 16-24 year olds are the loneliest group in the country. The generation that plays the most sport has the least belonging. The clubhouses that once did that work, the sofas, the live scores on the corner TV, the older players you looked up to, have largely gone, and nothing digital was built to replace them. Rebuilding that belonging, deliberately and safely, is the point of getting sport's infrastructure right.

Sport Heads are the people whose lives are shaped by sport: players, coaches, fans, parents, creators and volunteers. They deserve infrastructure equal to their passion.

5 WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Seven principles for an operating system worthy of sport. Hold any platform, including ours, against them.

1

CULTURE FIRST, ADMIN SECOND

Fixtures and payments are table stakes. The product is the community's daily life: the conversation, the identity, the belonging. If members only open it when they owe money, it has failed.

2

FREE AT THE BASE, FOREVER

The club, team, school and coach layer must be free, permanently, or the system only reaches the families who can pay, and the £19.6 billion inequality gap grows.

3

SAFEGUARDING AS ARCHITECTURE

Age-tiered accounts, guardian visibility and messaging rules built into the structure, not left as settings. If a 16-year-old can create a team and privately message 12-year-olds, the design is wrong.

4

THE INDIVIDUAL, NOT THE REGISTER

Attendance counts bodies. Development watches people. The system must notice one child's fade, one player's growth, one volunteer's overload, before it becomes a statistic.

5

MEASURE CONFIDENCE, NOT JUST COMPETENCE

Ability decides who wins on Sunday. Confidence decides who is still playing in three years. Development tools should capture the athlete's own voice, not just the coach's verdict.

6

DATA BELONGS TO THE PERSON

A player's development history should travel with them between teams, clubs and sports, for life, owned by the player and their family, not trapped in a vendor's database.

7

IMPACT EVIDENCED, CHILD BY CHILD

Funders, schools and sponsors deserve better than attendance numbers. The system should show individual development over time, the evidence trustees, inspectors and grant-makers actually ask for.

None of these principles is exotic. Every one of them is standard practice somewhere else in your phone. Sport is simply the last passionate community still waiting for its infrastructure to catch up.



TAKE YOUR SHOT

We built SHOT Clubhouse because we lived every page of this report: the roped-in volunteer coaches, the girls' teams growing faster than anyone could support, the kids the system never saw, the clubhouse that no longer existed to hold any of it together.

SHOT is a digital clubhouse for sport: club and coach tools free for every club, team, school and coach, forever; a development engine (PERFORM) covering 47 sports with the whole-athlete frameworks governing bodies teach; safeguarding built into the architecture; and an identity, the Sport Head ID, that belongs to the person for life. Through our membership of the UN's Football for the Goals initiative, every paid development plan funds a free licence for a club that could never pay for one.

You do not have to use our platform to act on this report. Take the seven principles into your next committee meeting, your next platform renewal, your next funding application, and demand them from whoever you buy from. Sport deserves that conversation.

Take your SHOT. Own it. Make impact. · shotclubhouse.com

SOURCES

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Claims described as what clubs tell us are drawn from SHOT's own conversations with clubs and coach educators during 2025-26 and are reported as experience, not measured statistics.