



BASEBALL
NEW SOUTH WALES

STATE OF PLAY REPORT - 2026

2026



A WORD BEFORE WE BEGIN

Baseball in New South Wales has always been built on people. Players who love the game. Volunteers who give their Saturday mornings. Families who drive an hour each way for a match. That community is the reason this sport exists – and it's the reason we went out and asked them what they really think.

The State of Play consultation was not a box-ticking exercise. We wanted honest answers about what's working, what isn't, and what needs to change. The responses we received reflect a community that is genuinely proud of its sport and genuinely invested in its future.

The findings are encouraging in many places. They are also challenging in others. We have tried to present both with equal honesty – because the only way to build something better is to start with a clear picture of where you actually are.

"This report is the foundation. What we build on it through the Play Ball NSW Strategic Plan is the commitment."

Sue Cunningham, Chair | Matt Rippon, CEO

About this consultation

The State of Play survey was conducted in 2025 across the Baseball NSW membership. Responses were received from current players, parents, previous members, officials, scorers, umpires, coaches, administrators and volunteers. Findings are presented across the four priority areas of the emerging strategic framework – Play, Perform, People and Profile – and directly inform the Play Ball NSW Strategic Plan 2026–2029.

Who responded

GROUP	RESPONSES
Parent of current player	206
Current player	76
Official / Scorer / Umpire / Coach	60
Administrator / Volunteer	45
Previous member / parent	15
Other	26

How people found the sport

69%

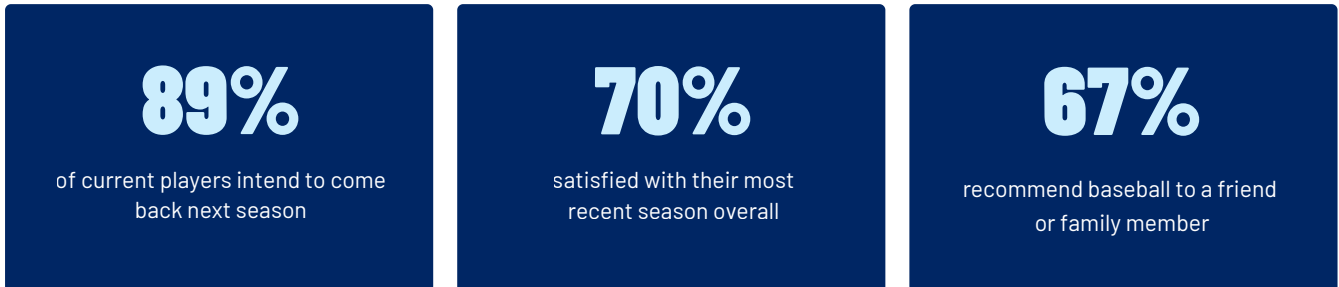
Found the sport through personal networks.

A powerful strength - and a ceiling on growth if we don't build visibility beyond our existing community.

WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

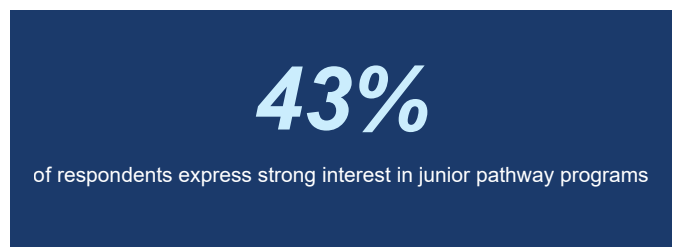
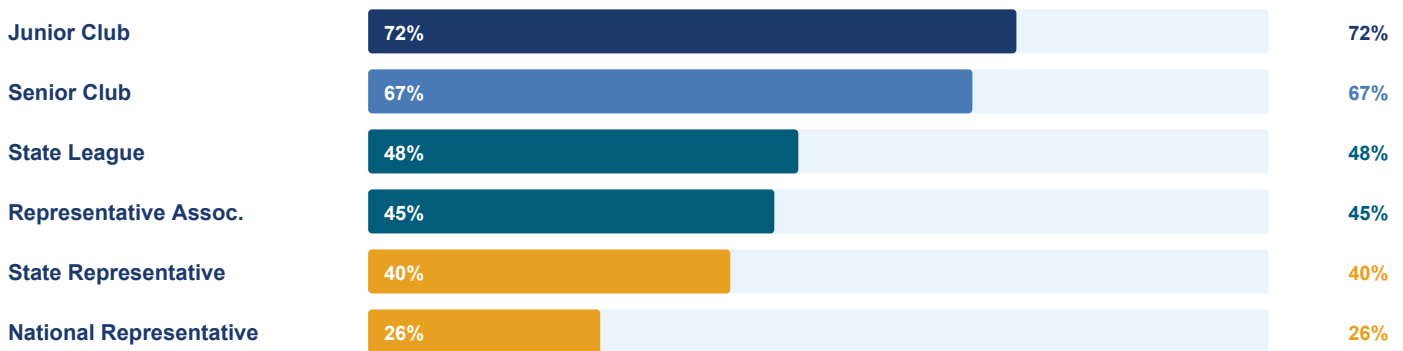
The top-line findings from our community consultation

The picture these numbers paint is one of genuine strength at the grassroots – and real work to do as players move through the system. Both are worth talking about clearly.



Satisfaction by level of the game

This is the most important data in this report. Satisfaction is high at club level – and drops sharply as players progress through the representative system. This is not a reason to question the value of representative programs. It is a reason to improve them.



SIX DEFINING INSIGHTS

These six themes emerged clearly and consistently across the consultation. Together they describe both the health of the sport and the work ahead.

- 1 Grassroots strength is the anchor of the sport**
Community club environments generate the highest satisfaction and the strongest sense of belonging. This is where baseball's culture lives – and it must be protected as we grow.

- 2 Representative pathways attract interest but erode confidence**
Aspiration to progress is high. But satisfaction declines sharply through the representative system – from 72% at junior club level to just 26% at national level. Transparency, selection clarity and development support are the gaps.

- 3 Volunteer capability and sustainability are under strain**
Only 39% of respondents believe volunteers receive adequate training and support. Administrative burden, accreditation costs, and limited recognition are driving the pressure. The sport cannot grow if its delivery workforce is burning out.

- 4 Female participation is a genuine opportunity – not yet fully realised**
63% of female respondents believe opportunities are impacted by being female. Just 52% would recommend the sport to another female player. Girls' participation is growing, but the pathways need to be continuous and welcoming.

- 5 Cost is a real barrier – and growing**
Sensitivity to cumulative fees – club, association and program costs is increasing. Affordability is not a fringe issue. It affects retention, particularly for teenage players and families considering representative pathways.

- 6 The brand is community-driven, not externally visible**
Baseball's internal culture is rich – participants describe the sport using words like family, belonging and passion. But 69% found the sport through personal networks. External visibility is limited, which caps our ability to grow beyond our existing community.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREA

PLAY – PARTICIPATION & THE PLAYING EXPERIENCE

The playing experience at club level remains the heartbeat of baseball in NSW. Junior and senior club environments generate the highest satisfaction across the entire system, and this is where the sport's culture, relationships and loyalty are built.

But the consultation also tells us that growth is not happening as broadly or as evenly as it could. Participation pathways are heavily relationship-driven. Key retention challenges are emerging. And certain groups – girls, teenagers, regional communities face barriers that need direct attention.

What we heard

- **Cost** – cumulative fees are creating friction, particularly for families considering pathway programs. Affordability matters.
- **Teen drop-off** – a pattern of attrition between 14 and 18 is emerging. School pressures, coaching quality and format options all play a role.
- **Female pathways** – 63% of female respondents believe being female affects their opportunities. Just 52% would recommend the sport to another female player.
- **Regional access** – participation opportunities outside metro areas remain inconsistent.
- **Formats** – interest in more flexible, social and school-based options is growing.

89%

of current players plan to return next season

FEMALE EXPERIENCE

63%

believe opportunities are impacted by being female

INTRODUCED VIA NETWORKS

69%

found baseball through family or friends

STRATEGIC INSIGHT – PLAY

Participation is stable. Growth needs to be intentional.

- Strengthen and formalise female participation pathways from youth through to open competition
- Address teen retention – improve coaching quality, format flexibility and transition support for 14–18s
- Expand entry points – school programs, social formats, regional access
- Make cost a conscious part of participation planning, not an afterthought

The participation base is resilient. Long-term growth requires deliberate effort to widen access and keep the people we already have.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREA

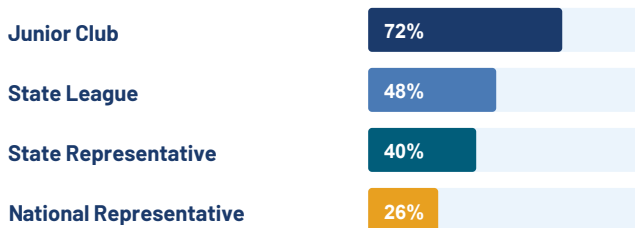
PERFORM – PATHWAYS & COMPETITIVE EXCELLENCE

NSW has a proud record at the national level – and the appetite to compete, progress and represent the state remains one of the most encouraging signals in this entire consultation. Nearly half of all respondents expressed strong interest in junior pathways and high-performance opportunities. That ambition is exactly what a healthy sporting system should be generating.

What the data also tells us is that as players step up through the representative system, their expectations naturally rise too. They're investing more – in time, cost and commitment – and they want to feel that investment is matched by the structure, communication and support around them. Building that infrastructure is precisely what the next phase of our strategy is designed to deliver.

Rising expectations – the opportunity

Satisfaction at club level is strong. As players progress, they're looking for more – more structure, more feedback, more clarity about where they're headed. That's not a criticism of programs; it's a signal of how seriously participants take their development.



% satisfied or very satisfied at each level of the game

What participants are asking for

- **Clearer communication** around pathways – how they work, what's expected, and what players can expect in return
- **More structured feedback** – athletes want to understand how they're developing, not just whether they've been selected
- **Holistic support** – as programs intensify, so does the need for athlete wellbeing alongside performance development
- **Consistency** – families want confidence that the experience at representative level will match the commitment they're making

43%

express strong interest in junior pathway programs

That level of ambition is an asset. The strategic plan is the commitment to build a system worthy of it.

STRATEGIC INSIGHT – PERFORM

The ambition is there. Now we build the structure to match it.

- Invest in pathway clarity – transparent selection criteria, consistent communication, and meaningful feedback loops for athletes and families
- Strengthen the support structures around representative programs – not just what happens on the field, but how athletes are developed and cared for holistically
- Connect performance back to the community game – pathways that inspire without creating separation

NSW baseball's representative programs have produced proud results for many years. The next chapter is about giving those programs the infrastructure - the systems, the communication and the support to match the expectations of the athletes



STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREA

PEOPLE – VOLUNTEERS, WORKFORCE & LEADERSHIP

Every game played in NSW happens because someone volunteered. Coaches at training twice a week. Umpires in all weather. Club administrators fielding queries at midnight. Scorers who've been doing it for twenty years. This sport runs on people.

The consultation confirmed what many already knew: the commitment is extraordinary, but the system that supports it is under strain. Only 39% of respondents believe volunteers receive adequate training and support. The rest don't – and many are feeling it.

What we heard

- **Administrative burden** is increasing – volunteers are spending more time on compliance and paperwork and less time on the game
- **Accreditation costs** are a deterrent, particularly for umpires and coaches at junior level
- **Governance clarity** is lacking; people aren't always sure who's responsible for what, or where to go when something goes wrong
- **Recognition** is inconsistent – the contribution of long-serving volunteers often goes unacknowledged
- **Retention of officials** is a concern – treatment of umpires in particular can discourage continued involvement

The numbers

39%

believe volunteers receive adequate training and support

COMMUNITY GOODWILL

67%

would recommend baseball to others - the goodwill is there, the support systems need to match it

STRATEGIC INSIGHT – PEOPLE

The sport runs on volunteer commitment. The system needs to reflect that.

- Clearer governance – roles, responsibilities and escalation pathways that actually work
- A genuine volunteer resource hub – practical tools, not more policy documents
- Coaching accreditation that is accessible, affordable and valued
- Umpire development and protection – competency pathways, mentoring, and a culture of respect
- Recognition that is genuine, not performative

The volunteer workforce is passionate and committed. Strengthening the systems around them is not optional – it's what keeps the sport running.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREA

PROFILE – VISIBILITY, PARTNERSHIPS & VOICE

Ask anyone inside the baseball community to describe the sport and you'll hear the same words. *Family. Community. Belonging. Passion.* The internal culture of this sport is genuinely strong and it's one of baseball's greatest assets.

But that culture is largely invisible to anyone outside it. With 69% of participants finding the sport through personal networks, baseball's reach is essentially capped by the size of its existing community. Word-of-mouth has carried the sport a long way

What this means

- New participants who aren't connected to a club or family in the sport have **almost no way to find it**
- Baseball's profile with government, sponsors and potential partners is **lower than it deserves**
- The case for facility investment is harder to make without **visible data and a strong public presence**
- Stories that would inspire new participants – great players, great coaches, great clubs – **rarely reach beyond the fence**

"Baseball has a story worth telling. The challenge is learning to tell it beyond the field."

The numbers

69%

of participants entered the sport through personal networks, not broader promotion

Participants describe baseball with words like **family, community, belonging and passion.** That's a brand. It just needs to be communicated beyond those who already know it.

STRATEGIC INSIGHT – PROFILE

The internal culture is strong. External visibility needs to match it.

- Build a consistent, authentic brand that reflects the community baseball actually is
- Invest in storytelling – real people, real stories, told beyond the boundary
- Develop commercial and strategic partnerships that extend reach and generate resources
- Use data to track conversion – who sees us, who tries us, who stays

Visibility drives participation. Participation drives sustainability. Getting baseball's story in front of new audiences is not a marketing exercise – it's a growth strategy.

WHAT WE'VE ALREADY DONE

A snapshot of achievements that set the foundation for what comes next

The State of Play findings describe a sport that has already been moving in the right direction – and needs to accelerate. Here's what's already in place.



Participation growth – numbers meeting and in some areas exceeding pre-COVID levels, reinforcing the strength of community competitions and state programs



Women & Girls investment – strategic staffing and program support to advance female participation, inclusion and opportunity across the state



Little League NSW concessions – competitions tailored for our context, fit-for-purpose and locally relevant through our relationship with Little League International



Financial & operational reset – improved modelling and organisational structures to ensure stability and consistent program delivery going forward



Sydney Blue Sox partnership – Academy, Clinic and community engagement initiatives strengthening both pathways and the sport's visibility in the market



High-Performance Uplift – structured pathways and progression opportunities for 14–18s, connecting the grassroots game to representative ambition



Coaching RPL framework – Recognition of Prior Learning pathway developed and implemented, elevating coaching quality and reducing barriers to accreditation



Schools Program expansion – record national delivery of Play Well initiatives, increasing accessibility and bringing new participants into the sport



Supplier & partner engagement – groundwork laid with key suppliers and partners in preparation for the next strategic horizon



Operational model reset – enhanced involvement, improved member experience and stronger stakeholder support across the sport

These achievements are the foundation. The Play Ball NSW Strategic Plan is what we build on top of them.

WHAT COMES NEXT

The State of Play report does not stand alone. It is the foundation for the Play Ball NSW Strategic Plan 2026–2029 – a plan built directly on what this community told us.

INTRODUCING

PLAY BALL NSW – STRATEGIC PLAN 2026–2029

The strategic plan takes every insight from this report and turns it into action. It is organised around four interconnected priority areas – the same four lenses we've used to examine this consultation data. Each priority area has clear objectives, concrete Horizon 1 deliverables that begin now, and measurable outcomes we'll report on annually.

This is not a plan that waits until 2030 to show results. The work starts this season.

PLAY

Wider access, better retention, stronger female & regional outcomes, greater experience at all levels

PERFORM

Transparent, trusted pathways from grassroots to national

PEOPLE

Supported volunteers, clearer governance, stronger coaching

PROFILE

A brand and voice that reaches beyond our existing community

Our commitment to this community

We asked. You answered. Now we act.

The State of Play process was built on a simple belief: that the people who make this sport what it is should have a real say in where it goes next. That belief doesn't end with this report. It continues through annual delivery reviews, ongoing community engagement, and a statewide member survey in 2028 that will shape Horizon 2 of the strategic plan.

Baseball NSW thanks every member, volunteer, parent, player, coach, official and administrator who took the time to share their experience. This report and the plan that follows belongs to you.



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