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50MM ATHLETES

Most Marketable Athletes of 2026



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Introducing SportsPro's 17th annual list of the world's 50 Most Marketable Athletes powered by NorthStar Solutions Group.

This year's assessment model reads three things together: the equity an athlete has built, the momentum behind it, and the room they still have to grow.

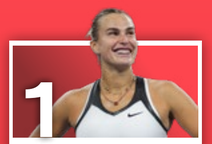


50MM Athletes

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50 Most Marketable Athletes 2026

50MM ATHLETES


1 Aryna Sabalenka


2 Eileen Gu


3 Giannis Antetokounmpo


4 Erling Haaland


5 Carlos Alcaraz


6 Alysa Liu


7 Victor Wembanyama


8 Alexander Zverev

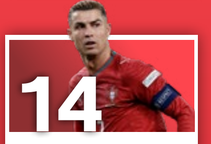

9 Charles Leclerc


10 AJ Dybantsa


11 Jalen Brunson


12 Sunisa Lee


13 Shubman Gill


14 Cristiano Ronaldo


15 Caitlin Clark


16 Karl-Anthony Towns

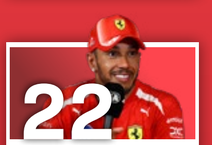

17 Iga Świątek


18 Shohei Ohtani


19 Kylian Mbappé


20 Vinícius Júnior


21 Naomi Osaka

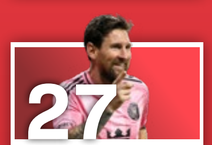

22 Lewis Hamilton


23 Lamine Yamal


24 Neymar


25 Fernando Mendoza


26 LeBron James


27 Lionel Messi


28 Sophie Cunningham

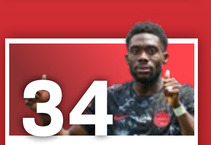

29 Alessia Russo


30 Angel Reese


31 Jemimah Rodrigues


32 Coco Gauff

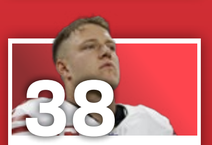

33 Nelly Korda


34 Alphonso Davies

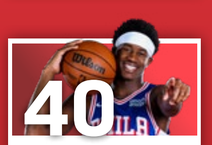

35 Jannik Sinner


36 Rishabh Pant


37 Smriti Mandhana


38 Christian McCaffrey


39 Jasprit Bumrah


40 VJ Edgecombe

41 Ilia Topuria

42 Rayssa Leal

43 Myles Garrett

44 Cade Cunningham

45 Harry Kane

46 Novak Djokovic

47 Alexia Putellas

48 Max Verstappen

49 Jared McCain

50 Devin Booker

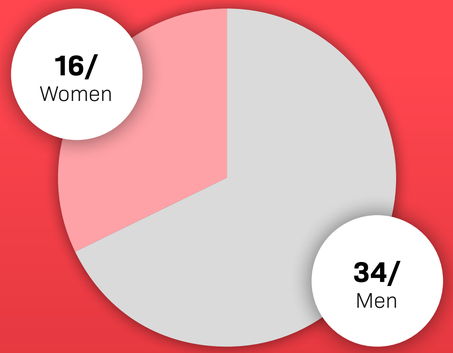
Stats overview

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50MM 2026: By the numbers

Gender split

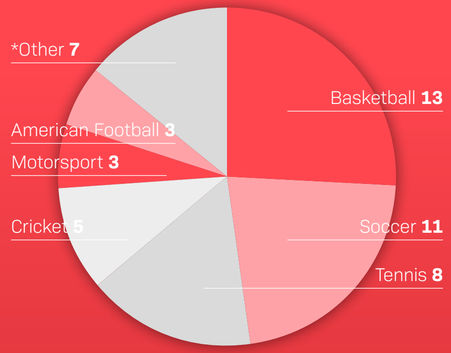


Women account for **16 athletes in this year's top 50**. That number is down from last year's total of 20 and a peak of 23 in 2023.

Female representation

Year	Athletes
2010	6
2011	5
2012	8
2013	14
2014	13
2015	12
2016	15
2017	14
2018	14
2019	16
2020	17
2021	19
2022	22
2023	23
2024	22
2025	20
2026	16

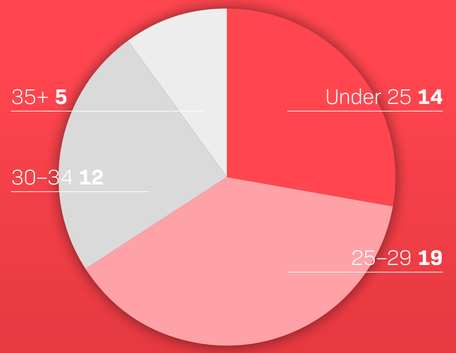
Sport



*One of each sport - Skiing, Figure Skating, Gymnastics, Baseball, Golf, MMA, Skateboarding

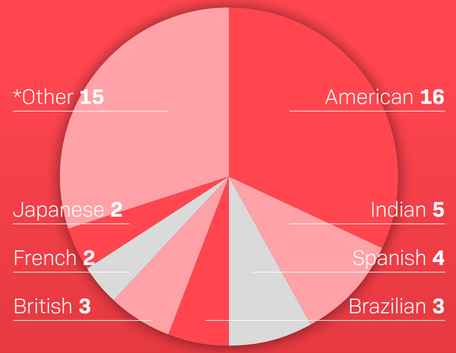
22 nationalities are represented in this year's top 50, with Americans leading the way. **Basketball is the best-represented sport with 13 athletes**, followed by soccer, tennis, cricket, motorsport and American football.

Age groups



This year's top 50 athletes **range in age from 18 (Rayssa Leal) to 41 (Cristiano Ronaldo, Lewis Hamilton and LeBron James)**. Most athletes fall within the 25-29 age bracket, while the median age is 28.

Nationality



*One of each nationality - Argentinian, Bahamian, Belarusian, Canadian, Chinese, Dominican, Dutch, German, Greek, Italian, Monegasque, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Serbian

Age distribution



Athletes	1	2	1	1	3	4	2	4	3	3	2	7	6	1	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	3
Age	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41

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Top 150 [1-25]

	ATHLETE INFORMATION					PILLAR SCORES			NORTHSTAR SOLUTIONS GROUP
Rank	Athlete	Nationality	Age	Sport	Persona	Brand Equity (score out of 45)	Momentum (score out of 40)	Commercial Trajectory (score out of 15)	Marketability Score (score out of 100)
1	Aryna Sabalenka	Belarusian	28	Tennis	Global Headliner	37.78	29.88	13.29	**80.95**
2	Eileen Gu	Chinese	23	Skiing	Global Riser	36.23	26.62	14.09	**76.94**
3	Giannis Antetokounmpo	Greek	31	Basketball	Global Franchise	38.27	26.80	9.39	**74.46**
4	Erling Haaland	Norwegian	26	Soccer	Global Icon	39.24	31.59	3.35	**74.18**
5	Carlos Alcaraz	Spanish	23	Tennis	Global Headliner	36.14	23.80	13.23	**73.17**
6	Alysa Liu	American	20	Figure Skating	Regional Headliner	24.18	34.10	14.76	**73.04**
7	Victor Wembanyama	French	22	Basketball	Global Franchise	32.73	25.05	13.90	**71.68**
8	Alexander Zverev	German	29	Tennis	Global Headliner	36.72	22.56	11.83	**71.11**
9	Charles Leclerc	Monegasque	29	Motorsport	Global Icon	39.68	19.85	11.59	**71.12**
10	AJ Dybantsa	American	19	Basketball	Multi-Market Challenger	19.04	36.76	15.00	**70.80**
11	Jalen Brunson	American	30	Basketball	Multi-Market Anchor	31.35	31.17	8.11	**70.63**
12	Sunisa Lee	American	23	Gymnastics	Multi-Market Contender	31.49	24.74	13.35	**69.58**
13	Shubman Gill	Indian	27	Cricket	Local Riser	26.64	32.00	10.55	**69.19**
14	Cristiano Ronaldo	Portuguese	41	Soccer	Global Icon	38.10	23.64	5.98	**67.72**
15	Caitlin Clark	American	24	Basketball	Multi-Market Mainstay	36.64	17.31	13.54	**67.49**
16	Karl-Anthony Towns	Dominican	30	Basketball	Regional Franchise	33.48	24.86	8.90	**67.24**
17	Iga Świątek	Polish	25	Tennis	Regional Mainstay	29.49	23.65	14.03	**67.17**
18	Shohei Ohtani	Japanese	32	Baseball	Regional Icon	34.53	28.51	4.03	**67.07**
19	Kylian Mbappé	French	27	Soccer	Global Icon	36.90	27.63	2.56	**67.09**
20	Vinícius Júnior	Brazilian	26	Soccer	Regional Franchise	36.49	21.04	9.45	**66.98**
21	Naomi Osaka	Japanese	29	Tennis	Global Anchor	35.78	28.48	2.62	**66.88**
22	Lewis Hamilton	British	41	Motorsport	Global Franchise	34.98	28.36	3.29	**66.63**
23	Lamine Yamal	Spanish	19	Soccer	Global Franchise	33.52	20.40	12.44	**66.36**
24	Neymar	Brazilian	34	Soccer	Global Icon	36.62	23.41	6.22	**66.25**
25	Fernando Mendoza	American	23	American Football	Local Riser	12.85	39.71	13.17	**65.73**

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Top 150 [26-50]

	ATHLETE INFORMATION					PILLAR SCORES			NORTHSTAR SOLUTIONS GROUP
Rank	Athlete	Nationality	Age	Sport	Persona	Brand Equity (score out of 45)	Momentum (score out of 40)	Commercial Trajectory (score out of 15)	Marketability Score (score out of 100)
26	LeBron James	American	41	Basketball	Global Icon	39.19	19.79	6.65	**65.63**
27	Lionel Messi	Argentinian	39	Soccer	Global Icon	41.36	20.98	3.05	**65.39**
28	Sophie Cunningham	American	30	Basketball	Local Contender	24.76	34.85	5.73	**65.34**
29	Alessia Russo	British	27	Soccer	Global Riser	26.18	25.53	13.60	**65.31**
30	Angel Reese	American	24	Basketball	Local Mainstay	31.52	18.49	14.27	**64.28**
31	Jemimah Rodrigues	Indian	26	Cricket	Local Challenger	24.54	25.92	13.72	**64.18**
32	Coco Gauff	American	22	Tennis	Regional Mainstay	37.89	14.54	11.64	**64.07**
33	Nelly Korda	American	28	Golf	Regional Challenger	22.70	27.68	13.47	**63.85**
34	Alphonso Davies	Canadian	25	Soccer	Global Headliner	25.83	24.87	13.05	**63.75**
35	Jannik Sinner	Italian	25	Tennis	Regional Franchise	32.66	17.46	13.66	**63.78**
36	Rishabh Pant	Indian	29	Cricket	Local Mainstay	27.56	23.75	12.07	**63.38**
37	Smriti Mandhana	Indian	30	Cricket	Local Riser	28.88	22.10	12.38	**63.36**
38	Christian McCaffrey	American	30	American Football	Local Challenger	27.51	25.52	10.00	**63.03**
39	Jasprit Bumrah	Indian	32	Cricket	Local Riser	28.00	27.53	7.44	**62.97**
40	VJ Edgecombe	Bahamian	21	Basketball	Local Challenger	22.30	26.11	14.39	**62.80**
41	Ilia Topuria	Spanish	29	MMA	Regional Headliner	20.16	33.21	7.74	**61.11**
42	Rayssa Leal	Brazilian	18	Skateboarding	Local Challenger	22.91	23.08	14.88	**60.87**
43	Myles Garrett	American	30	American Football	Multi-Market Riser	16.89	33.84	10.06	**60.79**
44	Cade Cunningham	American	25	Basketball	Multi-Market Challenger	21.08	25.25	14.33	**60.66**
45	Harry Kane	British	33	Soccer	Global Icon	32.34	27.77	0.43	**60.54**
46	Novak Djokovic	Serbian	39	Tennis	Global Franchise	34.95	19.81	5.79	**60.55**
47	Alexia Putellas	Spanish	32	Soccer	Global Mainstay	25.67	27.11	7.62	**60.40**
48	Max Verstappen	Dutch	29	Motorsport	Global Icon	33.67	16.53	10.25	**60.45**
49	Jared McCain	American	22	Basketball	Local Challenger	23.63	22.41	14.21	**60.25**
50	Devin Booker	American	29	Basketball	Regional Mainstay	23.82	27.09	9.27	**60.18**

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50MM ATHLETES

Top 150 [51-75]

	ATHLETE INFORMATION					PILLAR SCORES			NORTHSTAR SOLUTIONS GROUP
Rank	Athlete	Nationality	Age	Sport	Persona	Brand Equity (score out of 45)	Momentum (score out of 40)	Commercial Trajectory (score out of 15)	Marketability Score (score out of 100)
51	Elina Svitolina	Ukrainian	32	Tennis	Global Riser	20.86	29.74	9.09	**59.69**
52	Anthony Joshua	British	37	Boxing	Global Icon	36.55	21.43	1.59	**59.57**
53	Steph Curry	American	38	Basketball	Global Icon	35.61	19.84	4.14	**59.59**
54	Ilia Malinin	American	21	Figure Skating	Global Riser	20.97	23.66	14.70	**59.33**
55	George Russell	British	28	Motorsport	Global Icon	32.45	22.46	4.39	**59.30**
56	Oscar Piastri	Australian	25	Motorsport	Global Franchise	32.56	13.80	12.87	**59.23**
57	Paige Bueckers	American	25	Basketball	Multi-Market Riser	29.55	19.29	10.31	**59.15**
58	Thomas Müller	German	37	Soccer	Global Headliner	25.01	24.60	9.33	**58.94**
59	Aitana Bonmatí	Spanish	28	Soccer	Global Riser	19.35	26.67	12.80	**58.82**
60	Bukayo Saka	British	25	Soccer	Global Icon	34.41	21.41	2.93	**58.75**
61	Canelo Alvarez	Mexican	36	Boxing	Global Icon	32.21	17.58	8.66	**58.45**
62	Khamzat Chimaev	Russian-Emirati	32	MMA	Global Headliner	22.30	28.79	7.20	**58.29**
63	A'ja Wilson	American	30	Basketball	Multi-Market Contender	25.58	20.42	12.26	**58.26**
64	Janja Garnbret	Slovenian	27	Climbing	Global Challenger	19.81	25.48	12.93	**58.22**
65	Kyle Schwarber	American	33	Baseball	Local Challenger	16.11	32.19	9.82	**58.12**
66	Shai Gilgeous-Alexander	Canadian	28	Basketball	Multi-Market Riser	21.25	27.21	9.57	**58.03**
67	Sha'Carri Richardson	American	26	Track & Field	Multi-Market Specialist	32.38	14.75	10.91	**58.04**
68	Justin Herbert	American	28	American Football	Local Specialist	23.78	26.26	7.68	**57.72**
69	Simone Biles	American	29	Gymnastics	Regional Riser	30.72	14.38	12.50	**57.60**
70	Cooper Flagg	American	19	Basketball	Local Mainstay	17.41	25.10	14.82	**57.33**
71	Tyrese Haliburton	American	26	Basketball	Multi-Market Mainstay	30.58	15.44	11.22	**57.24**
72	Su Yiming	Chinese	22	Snowboarding	Regional Challenger	20.65	21.92	14.57	**57.14**
73	Virgil van Dijk	Dutch	35	Soccer	Global Icon	39.04	16.93	1.04	**57.01**
74	Ilona Maher	American	30	Rugby	Multi-Market Challenger	27.79	17.86	11.28	**56.93**
75	Alex de Minaur	Australian	27	Tennis	Global Riser	24.45	20.61	11.77	**56.83**

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50MM ATHLETES

Top 150 [76-100]

	ATHLETE INFORMATION					PILLAR SCORES			NORTHSTAR SOLUTIONS GROUP
Rank	Athlete	Nationality	Age	Sport	Persona	Brand Equity (score out of 45)	Momentum (score out of 40)	Commercial Trajectory (score out of 15)	Marketability Score (score out of 100)
76	Ousmane Dembélé	French	29	Soccer	Global Franchise	21.78	32.86	1.46	**56.10**
77	Suryakumar Yadav	Indian	36	Cricket	Local Mainstay	27.39	23.77	4.88	**56.04**
78	Lando Norris	British	26	Motorsport	Global Headliner	23.33	19.42	13.11	**55.86**
79	Robert Lewandowski	Polish	38	Soccer	Global Icon	35.20	20.32	0.00	**55.52**
80	Flau'jae Johnson	American	22	Basketball	Local Challenger	16.61	27.99	10.79	**55.39**
81	Kevin Durant	American	38	Basketball	Regional Icon	35.30	18.05	2.07	**55.42**
82	Travis Kelce	American	37	American Football	Local Anchor	34.02	19.61	1.65	**55.28**
83	MS Dhoni	Indian	45	Cricket	Local Icon	31.03	21.64	2.32	**54.99**
84	Justin Jefferson	American	27	American Football	Local Contender	27.16	13.18	14.63	**54.97**
85	Virat Kohli	Indian	37	Cricket	Multi-Market Icon	35.71	14.73	3.96	**54.40**
86	Marc Márquez	Spanish	33	Motorsport	Global Headliner	22.60	21.70	9.70	**54.00**
87	Jalen Williams	American	25	Basketball	Multi-Market Challenger	18.42	22.83	12.68	**53.93**
88	Eliud Kipchoge	Kenyan	41	Track & Field	Global Mainstay	27.47	19.02	7.38	**53.87**
89	Raphinha	Brazilian	29	Soccer	Regional Headliner	25.46	20.24	7.99	**53.69**
90	Rohit Sharma	Indian	39	Cricket	Local Icon	35.60	13.42	4.69	**53.71**
91	Pierre Gasly	French	30	Motorsport	Global Franchise	26.81	25.22	1.52	**53.55**
92	Chet Holmgren	American	24	Basketball	Local Contender	18.83	25.80	8.72	**53.35**
93	Alexander Volkanovski	Australian	38	MMA	Global Riser	20.37	24.54	8.29	**53.20**
94	Gabby Thomas	American	29	Track & Field	Regional Challenger	21.87	17.90	13.41	**53.18**
95	Tyrese Maxey	American	25	Basketball	Local Challenger	12.13	31.45	9.51	**53.09**
96	Dominik Szoboszlai	Hungarian	26	Soccer	Regional Franchise	19.71	29.58	3.84	**53.13**
97	Puka Nacua	American	25	American Football	Local Contender	14.57	27.87	10.49	**52.93**
98	Rodrygo	Brazilian	25	Soccer	Regional Franchise	22.97	18.51	11.46	**52.94**
99	Damian Lillard	American	36	Basketball	Regional Mainstay	30.95	17.20	4.76	**52.91**
100	Tyson Fury	British	38	Boxing	Global Anchor	23.54	25.42	3.90	**52.86**

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Top 150 [101-126]

	ATHLETE INFORMATION					PILLAR SCORES			NORTHSTAR SOLUTIONS GROUP
Rank	**Athlete**	**Nationality**	**Age**	**Sport**	**Persona**	**Brand Equity** (score out of 45)	**Momentum** (score out of 40)	**Commercial Trajectory** (score out of 15)	**Marketability Score** (score out of 100)
101	Jutta Leerdam	Dutch	27	Speed Skating	Global Anchor	31.84	12.56	8.48	**52.88**
102	Julián Álvarez	Argentinian	26	Soccer	Local Riser	16.44	26.53	9.76	**52.73**
103	Harmanpreet Kaur	Indian	37	Cricket	Local Riser	22.19	23.07	7.50	**52.76**
104	Rayan Cherki	French	23	Soccer	Regional Anchor	22.17	24.67	5.85	**52.69**
105	Ashton Jeanty	American	22	American Football	Local Challenger	18.23	20.00	14.45	**52.68**
106	Casper Ruud	Norwegian	27	Tennis	Global Mainstay	23.85	17.40	11.34	**52.59**
107	Kon Knueppel	American	21	Basketball	Local Challenger	6.49	33.41	12.62	**52.52**
108	Collin Morikawa	American	29	Golf	Regional Contender	19.55	20.95	11.95	**52.45**
109	Oleksandr Usyk	Ukrainian	39	Boxing	Regional Riser	22.46	21.02	8.84	**52.32**
110	Marcus Rashford	British	28	Soccer	Global Icon	30.38	18.23	3.54	**52.15**
111	Anthony Edwards	American	25	Basketball	Local Anchor	31.26	6.23	14.51	**52.00**
112	Paulo Dybala	Argentinian	32	Soccer	Global Franchise	26.47	20.59	4.82	**51.88**
113	James Rodríguez	Colombian	35	Soccer	Global Icon	27.08	21.51	3.23	**51.82**
114	Rúben Dias	Portuguese	29	Soccer	Regional Riser	19.75	21.20	10.85	**51.80**
115	KL Rahul	Indian	34	Cricket	Local Mainstay	26.95	24.07	0.73	**51.75**
116	Amber Glenn	American	26	Figure Skating	Global Mainstay	26.50	18.77	6.28	**51.55**
117	Aaron Judge	American	34	Baseball	Multi-Market Riser	22.05	22.34	7.01	**51.40**
118	Yashasvi Jaiswal	Indian	24	Cricket	Local Riser	12.66	26.72	11.89	**51.27**
119	Shreyas Iyer	Indian	31	Cricket	Local Mainstay	27.00	19.22	5.06	**51.28**
120	Ja Morant	American	27	Basketball	Multi-Market Anchor	24.86	21.97	4.20	**51.03**
121	Luke Littler	British	19	Darts	Multi-Market Challenger	18.09	17.91	14.94	**50.94**
122	Mohamed Salah	Egyptian	34	Soccer	Global Icon	38.34	12.21	0.37	**50.92**
123	Mikaela Shiffrin	American	31	Skiing	Global Anchor	30.08	12.29	8.23	**50.60**
124	Viktor Hovland	Norwegian	29	Golf	Regional Challenger	15.76	24.00	10.67	**50.43**
125	Josh Allen	American	30	American Football	Local Riser	20.66	23.72	6.10	**50.48**
126	Kimi Antonelli	Italian	20	Motorsport	Global Franchise	19.43	26.17	4.51	**50.11**

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50MM ATHLETES

Top 150 [127-150]

	ATHLETE INFORMATION					PILLAR SCORES			NORTHSTAR SOLUTIONS GROUP
Rank	Athlete	Nationality	Age	Sport	Persona	Brand Equity (score out of 45)	Momentum (score out of 40)	Commercial Trajectory (score out of 15)	Marketability Score (score out of 100)
127	Kawhi Leonard	American	35	Basketball	Regional Anchor	27.26	21.31	1.34	**49.91**
128	Jayson Tatum	American	28	Basketball	Regional Anchor	24.51	15.16	9.63	**49.30**
129	Enzo Fernández	Argentinian	25	Soccer	Local Mainstay	18.99	21.63	8.60	**49.22**
130	Xavi Simons	Dutch	23	Soccer	Global Icon	29.09	15.00	5.12	**49.21**
131	Jaylen Brown	American	30	Basketball	Regional Headliner	14.33	29.28	5.24	**48.85**
132	Declan Rice	British	27	Soccer	Regional Franchise	15.42	32.73	0.55	**48.70**
133	James Harden	American	37	Basketball	Global Headliner	26.33	15.46	6.89	**48.68**
134	CeeDee Lamb	American	27	American Football	Local Contender	17.70	17.09	13.84	**48.63**
135	Summer McIntosh	Canadian	20	Swimming	Global Challenger	18.94	15.92	13.78	**48.64**
136	Max Holloway	American	34	MMA	Global Mainstay	22.92	19.38	6.04	**48.34**
137	Jordan Love	American	27	American Football	Local Specialist	23.07	14.36	10.43	**47.86**
138	Scottie Barnes	Canadian	25	Basketball	Local Contender	10.56	24.98	12.20	**47.74**
139	Saquon Barkley	American	29	American Football	Multi-Market Contender	18.03	18.08	11.52	**47.63**
140	Siya Kolisi	South African	35	Rugby	Regional Contender	22.86	15.98	8.78	**47.62**
141	Casemiro	Brazilian	34	Soccer	Global Icon	24.51	22.45	0.61	**47.57**
142	Breanna Stewart	American	32	Basketball	Multi-Market Contender	23.18	13.77	10.61	**47.56**
143	Ibrahima Konaté	French	27	Soccer	Global Icon	18.02	28.27	1.22	**47.51**
144	Bijan Robinson	American	24	American Football	Multi-Market Challenger	14.70	23.85	8.96	**47.51**
145	Antoine Griezmann	French	35	Soccer	Global Icon	26.28	20.99	0.12	**47.39**
146	Jessica Pegula	American	32	Tennis	Regional Challenger	18.03	20.34	9.02	**47.39**
147	Rory McIlroy	Northern Irish	37	Golf	Regional Mainstay	19.54	20.07	7.81	**47.42**
148	Quinn Hughes	American	27	Ice Hockey	Regional Challenger	8.99	30.80	7.56	**47.35**
149	Scottie Scheffler	American	30	Golf	Multi-Market Mainstay	15.40	20.12	11.71	**47.23**
150	Nico Williams	Spanish	24	Soccer	Regional Mainstay	20.95	16.27	9.94	**47.16**

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Methodology

The 2026 edition of SportsPro's 50 Most Marketable Athletes powered by NorthStar ranks athletes on a 100-point NorthStar Marketability Score built from three composite pillars: Brand Equity (45), Momentum (40) and Commercial Trajectory (15).

This year's assessment model reads three things together: the equity an athlete has built, the momentum behind it and the room they still have to grow. As such, momentum, a set of pillar-level boosts in 2025, is now a full scoring pillar in its own right.

Behind the score sit 27 defined drivers, informed by several hundred data points per athlete and more than 3,000 brand partnership records. In total, 1,202 athletes across 70 sports were considered, using evidence from 1st July 2025 to 30th June 2026, with 247 assessed in full before ranking.

What the NorthStar Marketability Score measures

The NorthStar Marketability Score is a normalised, out-of-100 measure of an athlete's commercial resonance and forward potential. It is the sum of three pillar scores, each shown as points out of its maximum.



1

Aryna Sabalenka

NATIONALITY: **Belarusian** | AGE: **28** | SPORT: **Tennis**

80.95/100

Brand Equity

37.78/45

The question it answers

How strong, trusted and far-reaching is the athlete's brand today?

Momentum

29.88/40

The question it answers

How quickly is that value growing right now?

Commercial Trajectory

13.29/15

The question it answers

How much room is there for future commercial growth?

The weighting puts the greatest emphasis on an athlete's current brand strength and reach, close-to-equal emphasis on their present momentum, and a smaller share on longer-term runway.

Reading today's value alongside current momentum and future runway shows partners not just who is most marketable, but why: an established icon and a fast-rising newcomer can reach similar totals by very different routes.

Every score is relative to the field of athletes assessed in full that year, so a score shows standing among this year's assessed athletes rather than an absolute level.

Methodology

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How the list is built

SportsPro's list narrows 1,202 athletes to 247 assessed in full, then ranks them on the NorthStar Marketability Score.



1.

Full athlete universe

We assembled 1,202 athletes across 70 sports. The evidence window runs to 30th June 2026 and audience profiles were captured in July and August 2026.

2.

Screening to 500

A combined screen of existing standing, brand strength, exceptional momentum and emerging potential selected 500 athletes. In-sport performance and audience quality informed this stage.

3.

Full assessment of 247

247 athletes, spanning 25 sports and 42 nationalities, were taken through full data collection, partnership audit and driver scoring. Most came from the screened 500; a small number were added from outside it.

4.

Driver → pillar → total

The 27 drivers roll up into the three weighted pillars and summed to the out-of-100 NorthStar Marketability Score. Where two athletes' totals are effectively tied, the athlete with the stronger Momentum score is placed higher.

5.

Ranking

Athletes are ranked by their total NorthStar Marketability Score and the top 50 form SportsPro's list of the world's 50 Most Marketable Athletes powered by NorthStar.

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From data to drivers to pillars



We collect far more information than we score directly and roll it up into 27 defined drivers. Each athlete's profile draws on several hundred data points, which are cleaned, cross-checked and combined into the drivers; the drivers then roll up into the three pillars and the total NorthStar Marketability Score.

The information falls into six broad buckets:

Audience and social data

Reach, engagement, growth and consistency across major platforms, with audience breakdowns by country, language, city, interests, demographics and brand affinity.

Attention

How much public attention an athlete attracts, including how often people look them up, and how that is changing.

Media coverage and sentiment

The volume and tone of news and media coverage.

Brand partnerships

More than 3,000 partnership records; for athletes assessed in full, records are evaluated for type, scope, timing and fit with the athlete's themes.

Purpose, narrative and impact

The athlete's values, story and documented social and environmental contributions.

Cultural trends

Emerging cultural conversations and fast-rising trends.

No single data point decides a driver, and no single driver decides a rank. Drivers are standardised so they can be compared across sports and markets, and each draws on more than one signal where the data allows. NorthStar's platform combines data from leading providers, including Hootsuite Social Content Ratings, Lumen by Talkwalker, Modash, SocialInsider and NicheFire, with public web and search sources and NorthStar's own analysis and classification.

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The 27 drivers

The 27 drivers are grouped by pillar: 16 in Brand Equity, five in Momentum and six in Commercial Trajectory. Each is named for what it measures.

Brand Equity (16)

BRAND
Purpose, Mission & Values
How clearly the athlete's own content expresses a purpose, mission and values

BRAND
Endorsement Credibility
How audiences respond to the athlete's sponsored content compared with their regular content

BRAND
Reputation Stability
Brand safety: the absence of reputational risk

BRAND
Presentation
Recognised personal style and public presentation

BRAND
Narrative Strength
How fully and consistently the athlete's personal story comes through

BRAND
Commercial Portfolio (established)
The strength of established brand partnerships

AUDIENCE
Demand (Search Volume)
How often people actively look the athlete up

AUDIENCE
Institutional Amplification
Reach the athlete earns through media coverage and institutional channels

AUDIENCE
Attention Scale
The size of the athlete's audience

AUDIENCE
Engagement Consistency
How steady engagement is over time

AUDIENCE
Media Sentiment
The tone of media coverage

AUDIENCE
Engagement Intensity
How actively that audience engages

AUDIENCE
Audience Breadth
How widely the audience spreads across markets

VALUE AND IMPACT
Social Cause Engagement (Potential ROO)
Documented social impact and its potential return on objectives

VALUE AND IMPACT
Estimated Media Value
The commercial value of the athlete's media exposure

VALUE AND IMPACT
Environmental Cause Engagement (Potential ROO)
Documented environmental impact and its potential return on objectives

Momentum (5)

Attention Growth
How fast public attention is growing relative to the athlete's sport

Engagement Rate Momentum
Whether audience engagement is accelerating

Recently Detected Relationships
New brand partnerships first seen in 2025 and 2026

Category Momentum
Growing interest in the athlete's sport, in the men's or women's game

Audience Conversion
Whether rising public attention is turning into a growing following

Commercial Trajectory (6)

Career Runway
How much of the athlete's commercial prime lies ahead

Brand Base
The brand strength future growth can build on

Geographic Room
Untapped markets the athlete could still reach

Category Room
Partnership categories not yet occupied

Monetisation Headroom
Brand strength not yet converted into commercial returns

Cultural Foresights Alignment
Alignment with fast-rising cultural trends identified with NicheFire

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Methodology

Partnerships and impact

Each partnership counts in either Brand Equity or Momentum, not both. Established partnerships build Brand Equity, and new ones drive Momentum.

- **Established partnerships** (formed before 2025) count towards Commercial Portfolio in Brand Equity. They show the brand value an athlete has already built.
- **New partnerships** (first seen in 2025 or 2026) count towards Recently Detected Relationships in Momentum. They show where brands are moving now.
- **Renewals and upgrades** made during the evaluation period add credit to Momentum, because a partner choosing to extend or deepen a relationship is a forward signal.

Partnership records for the assessed athletes are audited against public sources for type, timing and the athlete's role, with weaker evidence carrying less weight, and classified by how well they fit the athlete's themes. Partnerships are scored where publicly documented with verifiable timing at 30th June 2026.

Social and environmental impact add credit within Brand Equity where the athlete's contribution is documented. They never reduce an athlete's own score: an athlete without documented activity is simply not credited.

Integrity and governance

Every assessment stage combines automated checks with human review.

- **Cross-source checks:** data from different providers is compared, and outliers and gaps are investigated before scoring.
- **Partnership audit:** partnership records for the assessed athletes are audited against public sources. Theme classifications received a second review on a subset of records, which was not blind to the first classification, and disputed cases were adjudicated.
- **Fixed reference points:** a common evidence window (to 30th June 2026) applies to every assessed athlete. Audience profiles were captured in July and August 2026, and sponsored-content performance data collected after the window was used for some athletes as a recorded exception.
- **Controlled production:** the final model is locked, version-controlled and run in one controlled environment, and every release can be reproduced exactly.
- **Expert review:** results are reviewed by NorthStar analysts for face validity before release.



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The Athlete Persona Model explained

Our Athlete Persona Model, first introduced in 2025, has been rebuilt this year around the way investors build portfolios. Each athlete is placed in one of nine cells on two axes, the way funds are classified by size and style:

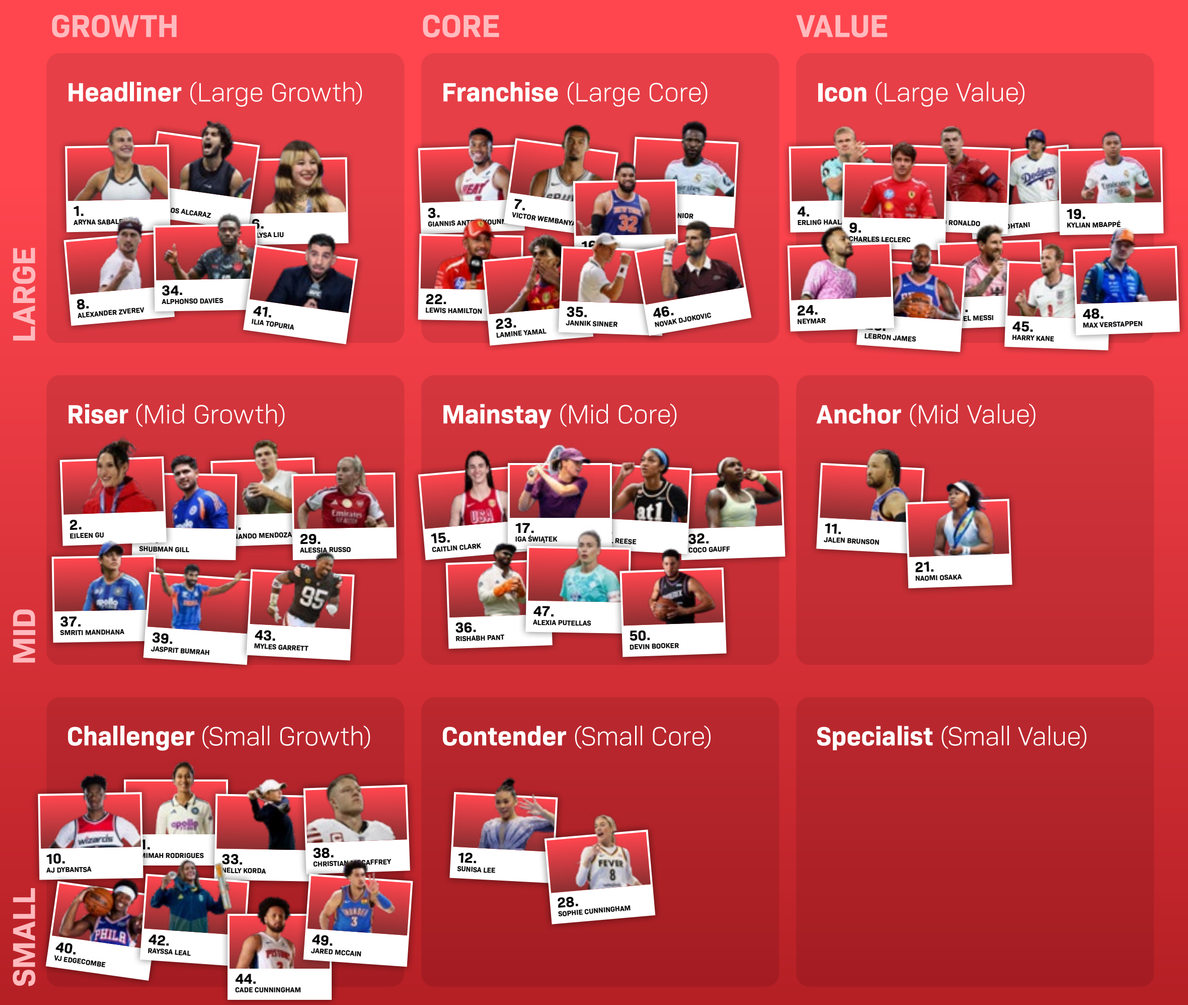
- **Market Footprint** — Large, Mid or Small: the scale, geographic breadth and institutional amplification of the athlete's accessible audience, relative to the assessed field. "Small" means the lower third of this elite field, not a small audience in absolute terms.
- **Style** — Growth, Core or Value: whether the athlete's commercial value leans towards momentum and room to grow (Growth), towards established commercial standing (Value), or sits in balance (Core).

Each cell has a core name (Icon, Franchise, Headliner, Anchor, Mainstay, Riser, Specialist, Contender, Challenger), and the persona adds the reach of the athlete's audience, Global, Multi-Market, Regional or Local, so a Global Icon and a Local Icon are the same kind of asset on different stages.

A persona describes the type and location of an athlete's commercial profile. It is not a second score: athletes in the same persona can differ widely in marketability, and the persona never changes a ranking.

For sponsors, personas support portfolio construction: a sponsor's objectives, horizon and risk appetite set a target mix across the grid, and personas narrow the field before athlete-specific fit is assessed. NorthStar also rates each athlete on sponsor-facing lenses — profile strength, stability, reputation risk and career runway — which are provided in sponsor consultations rather than published with SportsPro's list.

Contact NorthStar to find out how its athlete marketability data can support your organisation's sponsorship, talent or commercial decision.



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Roll of Honour



2010 LeBron James



2011 Usain Bolt



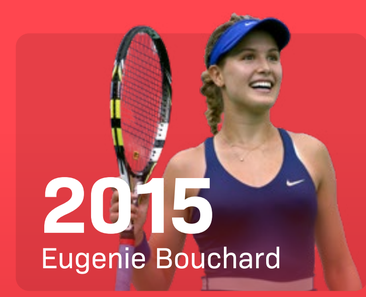
2012 Neymar



2013 Neymar



2014 Lewis Hamilton



2015 Eugenie Bouchard



2016 Steph Curry



2017 Anthony Joshua



2018 Paul Pogba



2019 Naomi Osaka



2020 Lionel Messi



2021 Simone Biles



2022 Cristiano Ronaldo



2023 Lionel Messi



2024 Simone Biles



2025 Lewis Hamilton



2026 Aryna Sabalenka

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NorthStar Solutions Group is a Strategy Realization firm that helps organizations translate strategic intent into durable outcomes through intelligence, alignment and activation.

NorthStar's Sports Practice applies this approach across asset value and commercial intelligence; fan, market and reputation intelligence; content intelligence and operations; sponsorship activation and value realization; and experience and enterprise modernization. Its work helps sports organizations, rights holders, brands and investors identify opportunities, make informed decisions and execute against them.

Explore the NorthStar model

Now in its 17th year, SportsPro's 50 Most Marketable Athletes is the industry's benchmark for athlete marketability. NorthStar is proud to power the 2026 list. The same model gives brands, rights holders, agencies, athletes and investors decision intelligence on the brand value and momentum of sports assets.

Click here to find out how NorthStar's athlete marketability data can support your organization's sponsorship, talent or commercial decisions.