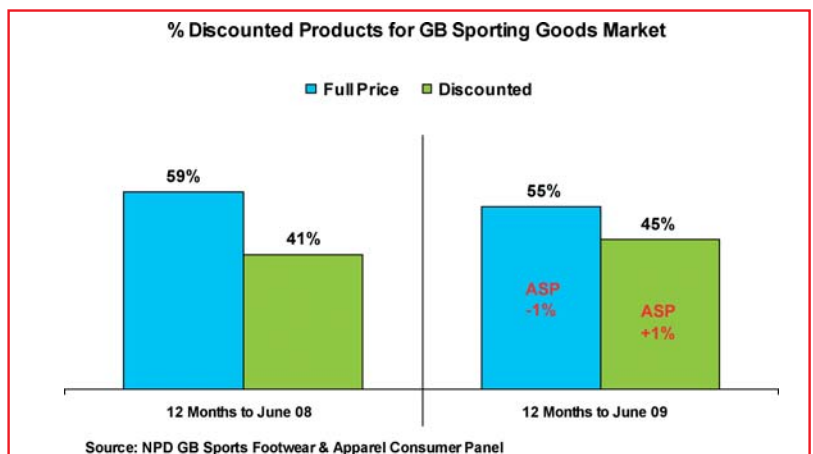


BEST of BRITISH?

Sporting success has had minimal impact on sales, says The NPD Group

This year has been a relatively successful one for British sports. The England football team has employed a more measured approach under Fabio Capello, while England's rugby union side floundered for a while, but under Martin Johnson's leadership has started to put in some good displays.

Our athletics team has continued to show improvement, mainly on the track, and there are now consistent gold medals at every meet. The Tour de France saw Bradley Wiggins finish a highly commendable fourth and Mark Cavendish only just lost out on the green jersey. We've enjoyed some success in tennis, with Laura Robson looking to move into the senior ranks full-time and, of course, Andy Murray overtaking Rafael Nadal as the world number two men's player for a while.





LEFT: Sales of tennis apparel were down during the summer months

British swimmers won seven gold medals at the Rome Championships, Jenson Button is leading the Formula One World Championship and England has reclaimed the Ashes, providing a marvellous end to a glorious summer of sport.

Apparel

Has this success led to more spending by consumers on sporting goods, though? So far it seems to have had little impact. Consumer spending on apparel for the 12 months to June 2009 compared to the same period to June 2008 has fallen six per cent. With NPD's Online Consumer Panel, we can track the usage for types of

apparel and the stable categories are running, gym and aquatic fitness wear. Certainly, with the seasonality of football the expectation would be of relatively flat figures for this sector, but here we see a decline. The outdoor sports expected to perform well over the summer would be tennis and golf, but again sales of apparel are down.

This could be a result of consumers using apparel for sports other than what it was intended for and choosing not to buy an unessential item if it means that they can use the clothing they already have. Average price is down by two per cent for apparel at around £13, and the amount of items purchased at reduced prices is increasing. Sales of full-priced items fell by 14 per cent for the 12 months to June 2009 compared to the same period to June 2008, while sales of reduced items increased by four per cent. Interestingly, the prices of reduced items are climbing, indicating that, far from buying the first discounted item they see, consumers are thinking about how far they can stretch their cash to buy the best item possible.

Footwear

The decline in full-price footwear sales is similar to apparel, as is the increase in reduced priced items. The patterns for pricing also follow similar paths, with consumers purchasing more expensive items if they feel they are getting value for money.

Looking at footwear sports categories, it is hard to see any particular sports improving. Football, running and gym training are all down, and not just in terms of value. The volume of sports shoes purchased is also in decline, and as average prices tumble it's affected high street sports stores.

When we take age groups into account, we can see it's the 25-34-year-olds who are continuing to purchase footwear at a greater level. Purchases made by this age group have increased in the 12 months to June 2009 compared to the same period to June 2008 by three per cent, mainly driven by lower prices, but sales are also up within premium retailers. Purchases made by the older age groups of 45 and over are in decline, with like-for-like sales down.

There will be room for growth once the market recovers and there is hope, with the continued success enjoyed by many British sports, that the younger age groups will spend more on sports goods in the future. For now it seems that the high achieving summer has not been matched by sales in the British sporting goods market. However, green shoots are emerging. **31**

The NPD Group monitors the sales of sports footwear and sports apparel in many countries around the world. For more information contact The NPD Group sports team on 01932 355580.