

Challengers to Watch 2023: TrackSmith

By [Liston Pitman](#), issued by [eatbigfish](#)

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The world remains uncertain, and businesses must adapt to new and unpredictable economic, geopolitical and environmental realities. Against this backdrop, it's important to pay attention to the new (and renewed) challengers emerging and primed to disrupt categories in 2023. These companies are finding opportunities in the uncertainty, breaking with expectations, and not just meeting the needs of a fast-changing world but shaping its future.

In the 10th instalment of our annual 'Challengers to Watch' feature, we identify 20 rising companies from around the world and explore the broader trends, opportunities and threats to the status quo they represent.

Our roundup covers an expansive range of categories, markets and geographies, but all these companies share a firm rejection of 'best practice' and an understanding of the imperative to make their own rules.

Tracksmith – for championing the running class



When I say 'runner', what image comes to mind?

For some, it's the pros who, for decades, big running companies have blasted at us with their big media budgets. Or maybe, if you're generous, it's a friend who just started Couch to 5K. But, for many of us, it's that person we see running around town day-in and day-out, rain or shine.

For years, the incumbent running companies have been myopically focused on those first two runners at the expense of the latter — they lost touch with the soul of the sport as they sought growth from its edges.

Enter Tracksmith, a brand that centers 'the Running Class' — a group defined by their passion and commitment, not their performance. In the words of CEO and Co-Founder Matt Taylor, 'It's not at all about how fast you are, how many miles you run, or if you've run a marathon. It's much more about a psychographic — that running is an important part of your lifestyle'. It's a mindset best embodied by the committed amateurs of the sport (those Big Shoe forgot), but one that cuts across all demographics and skill levels. Everything Tracksmith does is underpinned by a laser-focus on this group's needs and their culture — in all senses of that word: historical, creative, the everyday.

Take their products. When Tracksmith started, the available apparel was both too much and not enough — a category of cheaply made, near-identical, Power Rangers-esque clothing. And so, Tracksmith made the opposite. In form, their clothes are timeless and understated with designs that take cues from the heyday of amateur running. They're often named for either the places and people who shaped the sport or for the little moments that define it — the Van Cortlandt Singlet, the Run Cannonball Run Collection. In function, their products are often superior to big brands. Like any good challenger, they sacrificed old ways of working to overcommit to the things that matter — in this case, forgoing wholesale and the associated costs to invest more in materials and construction that better serve the needs of the Running Class.



Their content similarly breaks with conventions. In a category of loud ads featuring mostly elite athletes, Tracksmith has consistently put out quiet videos focused on everyday runs, the moments that surround them, and the thoughts and feelings that define them.

Their first TV spot was written and meditatively narrated by frequent collaborator Malcolm Gladwell.

Their most recent video was an 83-minute film of a long run, shot in almost a single take.

And then there's Tracksmith's approach to retail.

Their 'stores' largely eschew pushing product, instead acting as community centers, starting points for group runs, and shrines to running culture.

The Boston Trackhouse is located 400m from the finish line of the Boston Marathon and resurrects many cultural touchstones of the Eliot Lounge — a legendary, now-defunct running bar. Most notable among these is ‘First to the Trackhouse’, which sees Marathon finishers shun the typical post-race hoopla and, in some cases, jump barricades in an attempt to get to Tracksmith’s space first to earn a robe and a trophy. 2023 will see new Trackhouses come to London and Brooklyn, both created with the cities’ unique running cultures and trails in mind.



But Tracksmith doesn’t just reflect theRunning Class’s past and present, it also seeks to help write a better future. They’ve created a Foundation fighting to give more people access to track and field and a Fellowship looking to elevate new, more diverse creative voices in the sport. Most prominently, they’ve created the Amateur Support Programme, which provides high performing athletes preparing for the Olympic Trials as much support as is possible without compromising their ‘amateur’ status — in the process, keeping the Amateur Spirit alive at the sports’ highest levels. A version of this programme unintentionally led to one of the brand’s defining moments when, at the 2020 Olympic Marathon Trials, 138 runners (20% of the overall field!) were sporting a Tracksmith singlet because of it.

And the brand’s only warming up. 2023 sees Tracksmith bring its magic to both new categories (running shoes) and new continents — expanding its retail footprint and the Amateur Support Programme to theUK and globalizing initiatives like their Fellowship.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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