

STYLE & FASHION

Cooler Runnings

Anyone can slap a logo on shorts. Brands like Tracksmith and Satisfy sell pricey gear meant to show off a runner's personality.

By Ashley Mateo

LOOK AROUND the next time you're on your local running path: Runners are no longer only sporting the Day-Glo hues and giant logos that have defined the sport's aesthetic for decades.

Instead, you'll spot eye-catching outfits with minimalist design, clean lines and a subtle cool factor. As running becomes more popular, its outfits have evolved to suit a more diverse community.

Today's runners aren't just looking for function in their performance apparel; they want a kit that expresses who they are outside the sport, too.

"The purpose is the same, but it's about identity," said Brice Partouche, founder and creative director of running apparel brand Satisfy. "What does that product represent to you?"

Fashionable boutique performance brands including Satisfy, Tracksmith and Bandit Running let runners express their personal style in a way they can't with the homogenous designs from the major shoe companies that have long dominated the running apparel market.

Their reach is so strong, you'll see some of these brands alongside legacy names like Nike and Lululemon at the Paris Olympic Games.

Bandit Running, a 4-year-old upstart from New York City, is outfitting the track

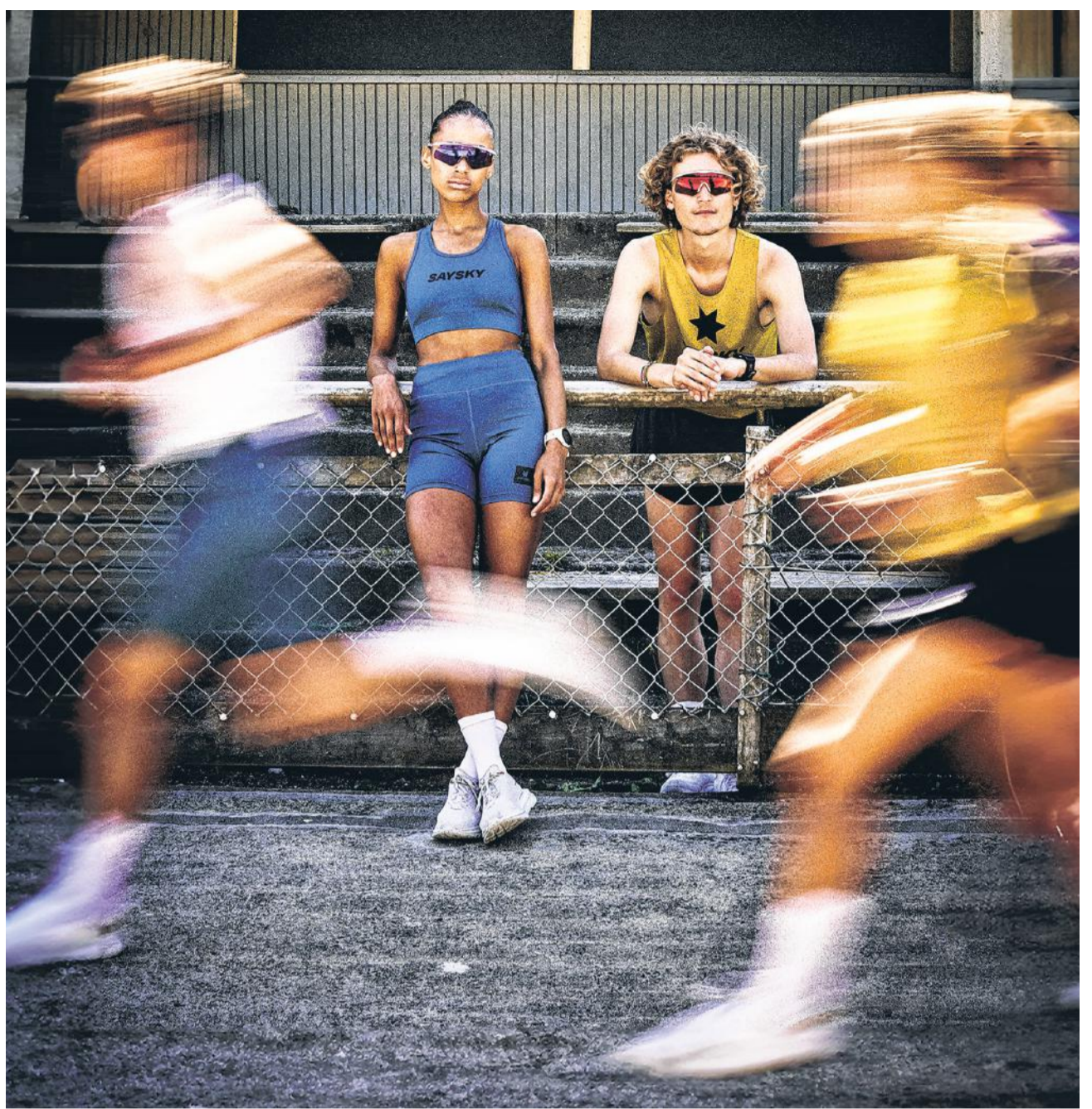
and field athletes from St. Vincent and the Grenadines in modified versions of its existing performance pieces, complete with a bespoke pattern using the colors and elements of the nation's flag, said Bandit co-founder and creative director Tim West.

The new Tracksmith Federation Collection—inspired by the clothing athletes wear on the podium and at the Opening Ceremonies—is being sold to spectators in Paris at the French store Merci, said Tracksmith founder and chief executive Matt Taylor.

Tracksmith, which launched in 2014, was created as an answer to Taylor's question: "Why do most of us dress one way in our daily lives, then put on these costumes, basically, to go for a run?" The Boston-based brand, known for its preppy New England aesthetic, has had its business triple since 2019; originally a direct-to-consumer company, it now has three storefronts in Boston, New York and London.

On the other end of the spectrum, Satisfy, a Paris label that launched in 2015, sells luxury running gear with a counterculture edge—picture a fringed muscle tank that wouldn't look out of place at Coachella, with holes designed to appear moth-eaten for ventilation.

Founder Partouche—who grew up skateboarding, snowboarding and in the music scene—carefully crafted that vibe. "With Satisfy, I wanted to show that runners are not



VERY FAST FASHION Brands like Saysky let runners express their style in a way that's harder with designs from bigger labels.

only runners, we're also people interested in many other things," he said.

Satisfy fan Ryan Varga, 36, from Denver, said, "As a skateboarder, I was heavily influenced by that culture, art and music. When I started seeing Satisfy's stuff pop up, it felt like discovering a skateboard brand again and made me look at running totally differently."

Designing for a specific

identity narrows a brand's potential consumer base, but it also creates clearer visual messaging and attracts more loyal customers. "I feel like running as a movement practice is not as self-expressive as something like skateboarding or surfing," Varga said, "so fashion feels like a way to hold on to some of that self-expression."

Soar's sleek minimalism screams of a focus on fast finish times, while Saysky's look-at-me colors and patterns broadcast a penchant for art and design; Janji's sustainable materials communicate an affinity for the environment, and Pruzan's androgyny says you won't be constrained by gender norms.

Bandit Running's aesthetic is meant to evoke New York City, but runners from far beyond New York City seem hungry to buy into the urban minimalism the company is selling. When the brand, which recently opened its flagship store in the West Village, drops a new collection, certain pieces (like the six-pocket Nova Crop top) sell out within minutes. At their pop-up events around major race events, inventory is scarce after the first few hours.

"We don't necessarily want to be sold out as fast as we sell out," West said. "But, ultimately, I don't think it destroys the relationship with the consumer. I think it makes people want things even more."

That's not the same feeling boutique-brand consumers get from big-box retailers. "Legacy brands still put out quality products, but I don't get that same community feel when I see others wearing

The reach of these boutique brands is so strong, you'll see some at the Paris Olympic Games.

it," said Kyle Buckley, 32, from Frisco, Texas. "With boutique brands, it almost feels like a membership—when I see other people wearing a Bandit shirt, it sparks conversation and helps foster friendship within my local running community."

While a pair of shorts from Nike or On cost between \$30 and \$70, boutique brands list prices more than double that. Satisfy's \$220

shorts use a micro jersey fabric that's knitted and perforated in Italy; Tracksmith's \$400 rain jacket features a lab-tested waterproof membrane with 360 degrees of ventilation; and Soar's \$205 leggings are made from a featherweight, French-milled woven compression fabric.

Fans of these brands insist the better materials are more likely to go the distance, which is more affordable in the long run. "As a generally frugal person, I was hesitant to spend money on boutique brands at first," said Kayley Heller, 29, who lives in Denver. "But Tracksmith was the first brand I really spent more on, and I haven't had to replace anything I've purchased from them in the past six years."

It's a shift from the technical performance products that merely labeled runners as part of the sport, without giving them the opportunity to express much else. "If everything was just price-driven, everyone would buy the cheapest thing all the time," said Taylor. "But when we place aesthetic and cultural value on something, you can opt into a message you want to send to the larger community. It's about your personality."

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Bandit Running, a New York City brand, is built on a minimalist, urban aesthetic