

EAST BAY BUSINESS TIMES



SERVING THE GREATER EAST BAY REGION

SEPTEMBER 1, 2006

Volume 8, Number 52 \$1.50

INNOVATIONS

Keep up with the news as it breaks: eastbay.bizjournals.com

8

eastbay.bizjournals.com

SEPTEMBER 1, 2006 | EAST BAY BUSINESS TIMES

Bringing 'cool' technology to the gridiron, hospital and even race track

As football teams slam their way into the fall season, Berkeley-based CoolSystems Inc. is rushing to handle a surge in sales of its GameReady accelerated recovery system, which brings NASA spacesuit technology into the locker room.

Thirty National Football League teams and 339 players scattered across all 32 NFL teams buy the system, as do 195 colleges and universities, and customers in Major League Baseball and the National Basketball Association.

The system consists of a control unit and wraps fitting different parts of the body. It builds on the RICE method - rest, ice, compression and elevation - borrowing principles used in spacesuit technology to control pressure and temperature within a flexible garment.

Tom Oliver, CoolSystems' president and CEO, explained that combining cold therapy and compression is the key. The wraps circulate ice water to slow and stop swelling, then gradually build up compression for two minutes and then let the injury rest for one. Users can adjust temperature, pressure and treatment time.

The unit weighs 8 pounds empty; with water and a 7-pound bag of ice added, it weighs about 18 pounds. That makes it reasonably portable. Oliver said athletes use it on planes, buses and at home. The convenience gets them to use it more, making it popular with trainers.

The control unit costs about \$2,000; the wraps run \$230 to \$400; with a full set of wraps, a system costs about \$5,000.

UC-Berkeley has used Game Ready for



Fast forward

John Sailors

three years. The university's head athletics trainer, Ryan Cobb, said the school has two systems in both of its athletic facilities, with all 27 varsity sports using them.

Cal uses the devices for acute injuries and rehab. When injured, athletes might be put directly into a system. For rehab and postoperative therapy, they might do rehabilitation exercises followed by 15 to 20 minutes in one.

CoolSystems met huge obstacles in getting started. It was founded in 1998 by Bill Elkins, a scientist who helped design NASA spacesuits.

But when the system's original design failed, the company laid off employees and spent two years in redesign. It produced an overhauled version in June 2002, and with a handful of staff began selling it - only to have a fire destroy their office and inventory in the summer of 2005.

Out of cash and credit, Oliver said, "We had to decide if we were all going to sit around and write resumes together or decide to pull together and get it up and running again."

Sixteen of them decided to give it a go. Before the fire, MedVenture Associates, which provides funding for early-stage medical devices, had observed



STEPHANIE SECRET | EAST BAY BUSINESS TIMES
Above: CoolSystems' Tom Oliver shows the Game Ready Equine with wraps designed for horses. Right: a leg wrap and the system's control unit in use.

CoolSystems. MedVenture partner Chris Kaster said MedVenture was sold on the group's ability to re-start the company with a nearly seamless transition.

In December 2005, MedVenture led a funding round that totaled \$8.6 million.

CoolSystems now is focusing on accelerating sales, and on R&D. A big step will be to move from the sports field into the postoperative market, where orthopedic surgeons and physical therapists are beginning to recognize the system's value. Kaster said CoolSystems is finishing clinical studies that will "open the door wide."

The company also is pushing its Game



Ready Equine, which is redesigned for horses. The company plans to expand into markets in Northern Europe, Canada, Australia, Japan and elsewhere, and will start with the equine product.

jsailors@bizjournals.com | 925-598-1414