

Bay Area firm gets its kick from healing

By Janis Mara, BUSINESS WRITER

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Tom Oliver, CEO of Berkeley based Game Ready, demonstrates the firm's accelerated recovery system - a computerized device that applies pressure and cold to injured body parts to speed the healing process. (D. Ross Cameron - Staff)

OBEYING THE DICTUM, "find a kneed and fill it," Berkeley-based Game Ready, whose devices aid healing from injuries, has teamed up with Minnesota-based OrthoRehab to distribute a post-operative knee treatment nationwide.

"This brings two things we didn't have: national distribution, plus now our knee wrap works with continuous passive movement machines such as Ortho's," said Tom Oliver, Game Ready's chief executive.

"Continuous passive motion," or CPM, refers to devices that bend and straighten the knee.

The arrangement will benefit both companies, as it supplies OrthoRehab with a new treatment — Game Ready's compression and cooling — and Game Ready will now get national distribution. Game Ready's high-tech devices formerly didn't work with OrthoRehab's CPM machines.

The devices combine compression and cold therapy to treat strained, sprained or otherwise injured body parts. The company's lightweight, red control unit, slightly larger than a shoebox, sells for around \$2,000, and accompanying ergonomic wraps that fit easily around ankles, knees and shoulders cost \$230 to \$650 depending on the area of use.

Since it hit the market in 2002 (the privately held company was founded in 1998), Game Ready's product has been selling like hot — er, cold cakes. The company claims hundreds of individual professional athletes as customers and says more than 120 pro

teams and more than 250 colleges and universities own a device. The San Francisco 49ers, San Francisco Giants and San Jose Earthquakes are users.

"Our device does intermittent compression to reduce swelling and intense cold therapy to reduce pain," Oliver said. "The CPM moves the leg back and forth so the knee is bending and flexing to get a faster recovery."

NASA designer Bill Elkins founded the company as CoolSystems nine years ago, applying space-suit technology to the patented wraps. Berkeley venture capital firm The Roda Group and sports agent Leigh Steinberg invested in the company, enlisting former PowerBar executives Oliver, Gabe Griego and the late Brian Maxwell.

The company's old headquarters burned to the ground in 2005, but Game Ready — whose products are also used to treat horses — came back strong at its new location on Dwight Way on Berkeley. Currently, about 50 people work at the company.

The rule of thumb for treating injuries is RICE: rest, ice, compression and elevation. While it's true that a bag of frozen carrots and an Ace bandage can provide ice and compression, Oliver said his company's product is superior.

"If you put frozen carrots on it (the injury), it will swell up again the next day," Oliver said. "With Game Ready, the massaging action will help get rid of the swelling so the cells can line up and tissue can heal."

Tom Abdenour, head athletic trainer for the Golden State Warriors, said his team uses Game Ready's product for a variety of injuries.

"We have three units. We use them here at our facilities or send them home with the players. They're efficient, effective and portable — you can take them on the road as well," Abdenour said.

"It's a popular item with those players who need it," he said.

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