

Active Lifestyle

Champion Launches an O2Cool Line



Members of the NBA's Orlando Magic Dancers model the new O2Cool performance athleticwear by Champion.

NEW YORK — Champion rolled out its new women's performance athleticwear line, O2Cool, for a crowd of about 8,000 at Disney's Minnie Marathon Weekend.

The line was unveiled in four fashion shows at the May 5-6 event sponsored by Lady Foot Locker in Lake Buena Vista, Fla. Members of the Orlando Magic Dancers and Dawna Stone, a recent winner on "The Apprentice: Martha Stewart" show, modeled the high-performance gear.

Susan Tregoning, marketing manager of the women's division of Champion, said the line of sports bras, T-shirts, shorts, pants and jackets of micro Meryl and Lycra spandex was "designed by the women at Champion for women."

"We do a lot of consumer marketing and moisture management, staying cool and dry, was the number-one benefit women want," Tregoning said.

She noted that O2Cool features fast-dry applications that are inherent in the fabrics, and special treatments such as venting mesh at the back of sports bras and Ts, and under the arm of jackets. Sports bras feature antimicrobial liners, Tregoning noted.

She added that compression shorts are rendered with a 7-inch seam to "cover the inner thigh," an important detail for consumers with fuller figures.

"The target consumer is 18 to 49, definitely the fitness enthusiast who appreciates performance benefits," Tregoning said. "But the line is very cute and young, and we think it will gain more consumers because of that."

Merchandise is scheduled to be in stores in early June and will be supported by an e-mail marketing campaign that will coordinate playlist tunes recommended by fitness experts. The idea will be for friends to e-mail each other about the new products and download the tunes to iPods, she said.

In addition to Lady Foot Locker, distribution is aimed at major department stores, including Bloomingdale's, and sporting goods chains such as the Sports Authority and Dick's Sporting Goods.

Suggested retail for shorts is \$30, for jackets, \$45, and for T-shirts, \$25 and \$28. A cut-and-sew sports bra will sell for \$36 and a seamless number will be \$34. Colors are bright purple, tropical pink, navy and periwinkle.

As for Champion's connection with Disney, Tregoning said, "Disney has been a great partner. We are sponsors of the '05-06 Disney Marathons in January, which pull in 30,000 runners. We provide the runners with shirts. So, Disney approached us with this opportunity and it's been a great match for us."

— Karyn Monget

Heatherlynn's Twist: Vitamin C Activewear

NEW YORK — New activewear brand Heatherlynn is using a fabric infused with vitamin C that is designed to be released into the wearer's skin.

The fabric comes from the Fuji Spinning Co., which developed a fiber containing a chemical called pro-vitamin that turns into vitamin C on contact with human skin. A small amount then is absorbed through the skin layer into the muscle tissue; the garment releases the vitamin for about 30 washes, according to Fuji Spinning. The company developed the fabric a few years ago, and it has been used in T-shirts and other items, but has had limited exposure in the U.S.

"I wanted to develop a line that looked good and also had health benefits," said company founder Heatherlynn Romoff.

Jeff Silberman, a textile consultant and professor at the Fashion Institute of Technology, said that he wasn't aware of the vitamin C fabric but that the process of "microencapsulation" has become a trend in the textile industry. Mills have developed fabrics that encapsulate lotions and antibacterial treatments that are engineered into the fiber at the molecular level. "There are all kinds of things people are adding to fabrics these days, but some of them are just novelties," he said.

All Heatherlynn apparel comes with a small tag that explains that the collection contains vitamin C.

Romoff, a licensed massage therapist, said she long has been interested in health and well-being. She also has a background in fashion and she spent a year working at Tahari. She said her line is designed to marry those two interests.

"This collection is designed to be comfortable for real women," she said. "All my silhouettes are easily adjustable and can be worn by women of different sizes."

The collection includes activewear items such as tank tops, yoga pants and hooded sweatshirts, as well as some lifestyle pieces, including a wrap dress, mini-skirts, capelets and robes. The initial looks are made of cotton and polyester and come in subdued hues of brown, white and black. Some items have special touches such as a polo top with a satin collar.

The collection has been picked up by the Takashimaya store on Fifth Avenue here, which will begin selling it in June. Romoff said she is talking to other boutiques and specialty stores. She has set up a Web site at heatherlynnworldwide.com that has information about the brand.

Wholesale prices range from about \$30 to \$98 and Romoff said she is aiming for first-year sales of \$500,000.

She said she eventually plans to introduce men's items, as well as a travel collection with pillows of fabric infused with vitamin C.

— Melanie Kletter



Two looks from Heatherlynn, a new activewear and contemporary line.



Zumiez Inc. to Acquire Fast Forward Stores

By Emili Vesilind

LOS ANGELES — Action sports apparel retailer Zumiez Inc. has signed an agreement to acquire Fast Forward, a mall-based retailer specializing in skateboarding apparel, accessories and hard goods. Financial terms were not disclosed.

Fast Forward, based in Fort Worth, operates 19 stores: 16 in Texas, one in California and two in Oklahoma. Zumiez, with headquarters in Everett, Wash., operates 180 stores and plans to convert the Fast Forward stores into Zumiez locations over the next 18 months.

Executives from both companies did not respond to requests for comment. But analysts said that the acquisition is strategically sound.

"Texas is a market that Zumiez has really wanted to target," said Sara Hasan, financial analyst with McAdams Wright Ragan. "In the last year, they opened three stores in Texas and it was a new market for them at that time. They said that they wanted to eventually have 40 to 50 locations

there, so this gives them a huge jump on that. It also gives them great access to consumers because people are already used to going to those stores for [similar merchandise]."

Zumiez said in a statement that it expects the acquisition to add 1 to 2 cents to earnings per share in 2006 and to be accretive to earnings per share by about 8 to 9 cents in fiscal 2007.

Sharon Zackfia, financial analyst with William Blair & Co., said her firm estimates that annual chain sales for Fast Forward are "in the \$23 million to \$25 million range," and added, "for [Zumiez], we'll add \$14 million to our top line for the second half of the year and \$24 million for the full year."

Rick Brooks, president and chief executive officer of Zumiez, said in a statement, "Fast Forward's culture and product offerings mesh extremely well with ours. We believe that this acquisition will help further our strengthening position in the youth market."

Zumiez was founded in 1978 and went public in May 2005. The company on Wednesday raised its 2006 earnings outlook to 65 to 66 cents per share from 61 cents.

SIDELINES

REEBOK TAPS EXECUTIVE: Uli Becker has been named head of global marketing for the Reebok brand. In this newly structured role, Becker will oversee global product, sports marketing, and global brand marketing and public relations

for Reebok. He will report to Paul Harrington, president and chief executive officer of the Reebok brand.

Becker heads global brand marketing at Adidas and is managing director of Adidas International B.V. in Amsterdam. Adidas acquired Reebok in January for \$3.8 billion. Becker will relocate to Reebok's worldwide headquarters in Canton, Mass., and assume his new role on July 17. A successor will be named for Becker at Adidas International.

Becker has been with Adidas for more than 16 years. He held senior management positions in product marketing, brand communication, advertising, media and sales on global, regional and local levels. Becker succeeds Dennis Baldwin, who left Reebok to pursue new professional interests. Since October 2005, Becker and Baldwin have led the marketing team in the Adidas-Reebok integration process.

"Strengthening our marketing and brand positioning is a cornerstone to our business strategy at Reebok," Harrington said in a statement. "Uli and his Reebok brand marketing team will expand upon and evolve our overall brand marketing strategy around individuality and authenticity, while also focusing on our key performance strategic initiatives, which include running and our league relationships with the NFL, NHL and MLB."

PUMA'S NEW SHOWCASE: Puma North America has opened the Puma Brand Center in its North American headquarters in Westford, Mass.

The 8,500-square-foot showroom will house all the brand's footwear, apparel and accessories collections, ranging from performance to sport fashion. The brand center also will be the main headquarters for national sales and marketing meetings.

Jay Piccola, president and general manager for Puma North America, said, "As Puma has continued to experience impressive growth in the U.S., we could not ignore the need and importance for this kind of space here at our headquarters."

In the fourth quarter ended Dec. 31, sales in the Americas, the lion's share of them generated in the U.S., jumped 83.9 percent to 136.4 million euros, or \$162.2 million.