



Nike

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production to these other manufacturers in Japan," he recalls.

Tiger sued, accusing the distributors of violating their contract. Nike sued back, saying that Tiger had reneged first. The case was tied up for three years in court until Nike won in 1975.

"But by then, Nike had already gotten started," says Hollister. "It was 1972 and the Olympic trials were in Eugene and the first production of competition shoes we ever came up with was for the marathon." There hadn't been enough time to design and develop the more-complicated spiked shoe.

"We did quite well," he boasts. "We had about 40 percent of the (marathon) field wearing Nike."

Nike lost \$30,000 that year, struggling to get a foothold in the market, according to Hollister. They abandoned a "tremendous" dealer network with Tiger, but Bowerman held all of the patents and copyrights on the Tiger designs.

"The whole concept that we started out with was to make the best possible product we can make and then let the market take care of itself," said Hollister.

There were only about five or six companies in 1972, "and then it just all of a sudden exploded and there were 230 companies in 1976."

Jogging had hit America.

"Most of them (the 230) don't exist anymore and we predicted that would probably be the case when we started out," Hollister explains. "Their idea was to get in there, make a quick buck and get out."

The remaining companies are growing at a rate of 40 percent annually, but Nike is doubling its sales annually.

"It's just a combination of things that allow you to stay in the market. I'm convinced we hit it at the right time," says Hollister.

Started club

Bowerman deserves credit for a large part of that combination, having brought jogging to America back in the 1960s.

"I used to instruct Bowerman's jogging classes and we'd have to pull peoples' teeth to show up," remembers Hollister. "It was really a struggle to get a couple of dozen people enrolled in a class in Eugene."

"The youth have changed from when I went to school in the sixties to now," he continued. "Now it's really a big thing not to drop out of physical activity as soon as you graduate from college. The thing is to keep it up."

Hollister and Nike started the Athletics West track club in Eugene last year to help the top amateur track and field athletes do just that.

"The Athletics West concept was a totally new idea," says Hollister.

"I'm in charge of our Olympic programs (for Nike) and we went to the last Olympic games and put

all of our money into one basket: the U.S. Olympic runners, 800 meters through the marathon. That's where our identity was and that's the area we designed our shoes for.

"Steve Prefontaine was with us for the last two and a half years of his life and Steve helped us get our shoes to where he could run in them. We didn't even worry about a sprint shoe — just the distance shoe.

"Steve wasn't there with us, but we had a very successful 1976 Olympic trials. We had nine out of the 15 distance runners on the U.S. team wearing our shoe. We were really pleased about that."

But, as Hollister puts it, at the Olympic games "we (the American runners) got our shorts blown off."

The company decided that it was going to have to take matters into its own hands. Says Hollister, "Nothing was going to happen if we were just going to rely on our U.S. Olympic Committee or the U.S. Government."

The problem, according to Hollister, is that "our strength, if you could call it a strength, is our collegiate coaching system. But suppose our strength is not a strength at all: our wealth and talent, sprinters who are running well while they are collegians, just disappear after college."

"We came up with a list of requirements for what would be a successful program," says Hollister. "It was going to a distance-oriented, 800 meters through the marathon, where the U.S. is weak."

Needed coach

"We needed an excellent coach and in our mind there is only one, Harry Johnson (formerly of South Eugene High School). We needed a good environment for the athletes — an environment where they appreciate track and field, where employers would appreciate it enough to get the guys jobs at certain hours that he can work and still train and go to Europe and compete in the summer."

From that list developed Athletics West. The money that Nike puts into it is used as a tax write-off.

Hollister feels that funding Athletics West, organizing marathons and clinics, and sponsoring individual runners reflects on the company in terms of sales.

There is intense competition by all of the shoe companies to get top amateur athletes to use their products. Hollister, whose title is Competitive Athletes Representative ("I made it up.") tries to see that all of Nike's runners are kept happy, occasionally flying them into Eugene for work at the Orthopedic and Fracture Clinic — all paid for by Nike.

But how far can a company go with an amateur athlete before he's termed "professional"?

"If you want to go by the book, by what the U.S. Olympic Committee goes by, I don't think there's hardly an amateur in the sport at the national level, irregardless of event," Hollister says. "It just doesn't exist — every one of them have broken the rules."

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