

Nike ahead of the game, not below par, in labor conditions

Nike's manager of labor communications defends his company's practices

Student concern about working conditions in factories around the world should be applauded. There are millions of workers in the United States and around the globe who would benefit from improved working conditions, and the more knowledge we have, the better.

It is unfortunate that two students decided to attack a company which has made some pretty big moves to improve the working conditions for the more than 500,000 workers that makes its products (ODE, June 3). I do not disagree with the students' goals, but let's get a few facts straight.

Just this past year, Nike has taken the following steps:

— Committing to full public disclosure of factory locations where licensed university products are made for universities that require this of all their licensees

— Increasing the minimum age of workers to 16 in apparel and equipment factories and to 18 in footwear factories

— Converting to water-based adhesives in 95 percent of footwear products, reducing factory workers' exposure to potentially harmful chemicals

— Instituting indoor air quality standards at Occupational Safety and Health Administration permissible exposure limits in all our footwear factories

— Raising wages in Indonesia three times in 13 months

— Ensuring that every contract footwear factory has education programs for workers by 2002

I am confident that no other University of Oregon licensee has taken these or similar steps.

Nobody at Nike tolerates violations of our code of conduct. To think we do is simply absurd. We feel confident in the levels of oversight that are in place to ensure that if violations do occur, they are dealt with immediately and appropriately. The Fair Labor Association is one of the layers of oversight in place. We realize that the FLA may not be perfect, but it is the only agreement out there that brought companies, non-governmental organizations; human rights groups, lawyers, religious

groups and unions to the same table to jointly protect the rights of workers. In fact, many companies will not join the FLA, claiming its standards are too stringent.

In addition to the FLA, Price-waterhouseCoopers will audit every single Nike contract factory this year. In addition, we are a member of the pioneering Global Alliance that works with local non-governmental organizations in some of our main manufacturing countries to assess worker needs and develop plans to improve conditions based on worker feedback. We also work with a university in Vietnam that conducts focus groups with workers ... the list goes on and on.

Stated clearly in our code of conduct is the fact that factories will pay at least the country minimum wage or the prevailing industry wage, whichever is

higher. It is also clearly stated that, with overtime, workers will not work more than 60 hours a week or no more than the legal limit, if this is lower. In the past, we have terminated contracts with business partners who failed to comply with these standards, and we will continue to strictly enforce compliance in the future.

As to the report the students cite from China — not only is it from 1997, but it was completely inaccurate when it was released. We rebutted it point for point, and I would be happy to provide the students with these facts if they are interested in finding out how inaccurate the report actually was.

The way we approach business is very simple — relentless improvement. Just as we seek to bring the best product to athletes around the world, we seek to improve the factories with which we work every day. To quote a recent article in the L.A. Times (April 19) that looked at Nike factories in

Vietnam "... a job at Nike would seem a prize not much shy of hitting the lottery." Or to quote two students from Brigham Young University (The Daily Universe, Feb. 2) who visited a number of different factories while in Vietnam last summer, "If we were citizens of Vietnam, there is no other firm for which we would want to work." Now maybe the lottery reference is going a bit far, but our focus will remain on making our contract factories better today than they were yesterday.

I hope the levels of awareness continue to rise on this important topic. I also encourage students to seek the truth and judge Nike by its actions, not the criticisms of uninformed groups. Please visit our Web site at www.nikebiz.com to learn more about our labor practices.

Simon Pestridge is Nike Inc.'s manager of labor communications and is based in Portland.

Commentary
Simon Pestridge

Cubs

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care where I play, as long as I get a chance," said catcher Chris Curry, a 1999 ninth-round draft pick from Mississippi State. "The Cubs have a lot of tradition, and I'm just proud to be part of it. They're arguably America's Team."

Emeralds' pitcher Tim Lavery, who was drafted in the 11th round from Illinois, said it's exciting for him and his family to get picked by the hometown team.

"I remember going to Cubs games ever since I was a little kid with my dad and grandpa," he said.

Fans, of course, wouldn't mind seeing some winning out on the field, but if you're a Cubs fan, losing just seems so natural.

"It's funny because people in Chicago love the Cubs, but at the same time it's totally acceptable to yell out, 'Cubs suck!'" said Maureen Smith, who grew up in Chicago, but has lived in Eugene for five years. "If you ever at any time think they might win and then they start losing, it's always 'Ahhh, I should've known. It's the Cubs.'"

Smith said she's always shocked to run into

other Cubs fans in Oregon, even ones who have never been to Chicago. She assumes the team's popularity stems from being such a longtime underdog, but she doesn't discount the power of the late Harry Caray.

Caray was the team's television announcer for years and his singing of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" during the seventh-inning stretch is legendary. Not to mention his mangling of players' names and his tendency to drink a little during games, Smith added.

"I was a Cubs fan growing up, and I remember watching Harry Caray," said outfielder Derrick Cohens, a draftee from Lake City, Fla. "But my main goal is to make it to the big leagues and play next to Sammy Sosa."

If Cohens' fantasy ever materializes, it will be with a club that hasn't won a World Series since 1908, a fact not lost on the diehards.

"The Cubs may never necessarily win it all, and no one really expects it when they go to Wrigley Field," Jim Dunn said. "But it's the American Dream."

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