

Aeropostale to clothe University of Pittsburgh's coaches, athletes

by Teresa F. Lindeman
Knight-Ridder Tribune

When Pitt football Coach Walt Harris strides along the sidelines at Heinz Field this fall, take a minute to check out what he's wearing. No, not the headset. The clothes.

"He's going to look much hipper than he did in previous years," promised Chris Finazzo, senior vice president and general merchandising manager for Aeropostale.

No offense, but this clothier to the teen market is confident its fashions will re-make the man.

Aeropostale (pronounced: Air-O-Post-Al), a New Jersey-based chain that operates more than 240 stores, has become the tailor of choice for Pitt's coaches on the sidelines and athletes in training. That means several hundred University of Pittsburgh's athletes -- from running backs to gymnasts -- will get practice gear bearing the Aeropostale label.

The mall-based chain, which targets the 13- to 22-year-old crowd, knows the value of partnering with sports teams. It has been building collegiate relationships for the past couple of years, sponsoring events and scholar programs with conferences such as the Big East, Big Ten and Conference USA.

Students on campuses already wear the retailer's clothes -- a line heavy on sweat shirts, sweaters and casual pants. But Aeropostale hadn't done an official collection for a school before getting the call from Pitt.

The Oakland school's contract with the Champion brand expired this year, so Pitt decided to talk to other vendors, said Rex Hough, assistant athletic director for corporate marketing. Aeropostale had done some work with the university last year.

There wasn't much time to design the Pittsburgh styles. As Aeropostale Chairman Julian R. Geiger remembers it, Hough called in March and the new lines were to start arriving last week.

As part of the development process, the retailer held a focus group with a panel of student athletes. "We basically left the room," said Pitt's Hough.

One thing they wanted was clothes styled for women. In the past, female athletes got by with men's sizes, usually cut too big. The new batch of clothing includes both men's and women's styles.

Other changes are more subtle. Instead of screen printing logos, Aeropostale might use full-line embroidery. Fabrics may be softer, colors adapted a bit to fit fashion trends.

Coaches got to preview the results, Hough said, but students had the most input.

Geiger said Aeropostale had already learned a lot

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-Rex Hough, assistant athletic director for corporate marketing at PITT University.

through a program in which it gives university-approved gifts such as polar fleece pullovers to 23,000 student athletes around the country.

"When you give an athlete a gift, you want to make sure the athlete wears that gift," said Geiger. It doesn't help the company nearly as much if the clothes show up on a younger sibling or even a parent.

Sports-related apparel is a big market. Total sales this year are projected to reach \$11.57 billion, up 4.5 percent from last year, according to the National Sporting Goods Association.

And for a company hoping to dress young people, an association with college athletes can be very valuable. Just ask Nike and Adidas.

Aeropostale is looking for exposure from the University of Pittsburgh connection, even if it's not going to be part of official team uniforms. Its logo will be on all the clothing, although much smaller and less obvious than the dominant Panthers presence.

It also has signed on as a major sponsor whose ads will be up on the sign boards at Heinz Field during Pitt games. Financial details of the arrangement weren't released.

Besides building its local presence, the clothier could get respectable sales from Panther fans. The new line will be available at the University of Pittsburgh bookstore on campus, game-day stores at Heinz Field and certain Aeropostale stores. Officials had planned to put more in the company's area stores, but the university outlets ordered more than they expected.

If the trial program works out, Aeropostale may eventually take its services to other universities.

What will Coach Harris be wearing at that first Heinz Field game Sept. 1? He'll have a variety of styles to choose from, depending on his mood and the weather.

Perhaps a chest-stripped pique polo shirt with a Panthers logo on the chest and khakis designed specially for him. Or he might grab the new jacket with the Panthers logo on the back and doff a soft baseball-style cap done in navy and gold.

"He will," said Hough, "look good on the sidelines."

Student engineers earn ride, chance to experiment, on NASA plane

by Holly Stepp
Knight-Ridder Tribune

Faure Joel Malo-Molina had dreamed of conducting research in space.

Late last month, he and three other students from the University of Miami got to do the next best thing.

For two days at Houston's Johnson Space Center, Malo-Molina and his classmates experienced weightlessness aboard NASA's KC-135A aircraft, a military version of a Boeing 707 that simulates low gravity.

While the plane is known by some less-heraty passengers as the "Vomit Comet," it was the "Weightless Wonder" for the UM students, dubbed the Space Canes.

"I felt like I could do that forever," said Malo-Molina, 24, a senior aerospace engineering major.

It was the first time a team from UM has participated in the Reduced Gravity Student Flight Opportunities program. They were one of 35 university teams selected. More than 300 teams applied.

Sponsored by NASA and the Texas Space Grant Consortium, the 7-year-old program holds annual competitions during which college undergraduates propose, design, make and test experiments for a low-gravity environment. The winning teams spend two weeks in Houston, undergoing training and preparing their experiments. Two days are spent flying on the KC-135A and running their experiments.

The UM project focused on ana-

lyzing how liquids slosh about in the aircraft fuel tanks in a zero-gravity environment.

While most university teams are formed by professors and are connected to and funded by existing research programs on campus, UM's team was completely student-organized and led.

The other members of UM's team included Pastora Valdez, 30, psychology graduate student; Jorge Icabalceta, 25, a senior mechanical engineering major; and Mariela Aguilar, 20, a biomedical engineering junior. Only four students were allowed to fly; five other engineering students also worked on the project, but did not travel to Houston because of the cost.

Malo-Molina said the experiment has practical applications on how fuel is stored during flight.

"When fuel moves around it becomes more difficult to pump out of the tank," he said. "But if we know how it moves in zero-gravity, we can figure out how to best contain it."

That could mean lighter tanks and lower costs.

"Right now, most aircraft put fuel in separate chambers to control the movement, but in a space shuttle, you are talking about hundreds of extra pounds," explained Icabalceta.

The team constructed a Plexiglas box to hold a simulated fuel tank at different angles, the outside rigged with cameras and a VCR to record the movement. A portable pump was used to study how the fluid moved about the tank.

The students spent roughly \$4,000

on the project -- "Thanks to Visa and MasterCard," Malo-Molina joked. UM paid for the students' required medical examinations and will reimburse the cost of the students' airline tickets to Houston. The group also expects to receive some support from B/E Aerospace, a Wellington, Fla., company that makes cabin interiors for airplanes.

The study was the brainchild of Malo-Molina, who had participated in similar projects as a student at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach. But because he wasn't a U.S. citizen yet, he wasn't able to participate in NASA's student flights with those university teams. So this mission was a dream come true for the aspiring astronaut.

The experiment worked despite a few equipment problems. All student projects had to pass a test readiness review before take-off.

"There were a few late-night runs to the Home Depot," said Aguilar, who decided to change her major from biology to biomedical engineering as result of her experience.

Because the experiment was largely self-contained, the team had time to turn somersaults and float about the 60-foot cargo bay during the short sessions of weightlessness.

The plane flies arcs at an altitude of 34,000 feet to create 25 seconds of zero-gravity alternating with periods of two G-forces.

None of the Space Canes got sick.

"It was so amazing, to just feel your body become light and float," said Valdez. "It felt really natural."

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Family of Penn State student who died of liposuction in May speaks out

by Susan FitzGerald
and Marian Uhlman
Knight-Ridder Tribune

Colleen Fledderman was getting anxious as she sat in the doctor's waiting room.

Her daughter Amy, 18, had gone in for liposuction surgery shortly after 9:30 a.m. It was past noon, and she still wasn't out.

Fledderman thought back to the appointment a week earlier when her daughter signed up for the surgery that would suction fat from her chin and stomach.

The plastic surgeon had been reassuring about the popular procedure, Fledderman recalled.

"This is liposuction," Fledderman, of Newtown Square, Delaware County (a Philadelphia suburb), said the doctor told her when she inquired whether anything bad could happen. "She is zero risk. She's a textbook case. She's young, healthy. She's the kind of patient everyone would want to operate on."

But by the time Fledderman's wait finally ended on May 23, her active, athletic daughter was being rushed off by ambulance, struggling to breathe.

Forty-eight hours later, Amy Fledderman was dead from a complication of liposuction surgery.

Liposuction is now the most common cosmetic surgical procedure in the country. It is estimated that anywhere from 377,000 to 673,000 procedures were done last year -- far outpacing face-lifts and nose jobs. A precise number is hard to know because many types of doctors perform liposuction.

Because liposuction is rarely covered by insurance, patients must pay -- on average about \$4,000, according to the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery.

The procedure entails a tube inserted under the skin; fat is then broken up and

vacuumed out. Though safe for most patients -- who end up delighted with their thinner thighs and flatter bellies -- serious complications, even death in rare instances, can occur.

As with any operation, there are risks associated with anesthesia, infection, bleeding and blood clots. But there is also the rare and potentially fatal complication of fat clots. During the suctioning process, fat globules can escape, get into the bloodstream and travel to the lungs, leading to respiratory distress.

"Liposuction is not trivial surgery," said Dr. Rudolph H. de Jong, a former professor at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia who, for a study, counted 95 deaths nationwide from liposuction between 1994 and 1998.

"It should not be taken too lightly," the story of Amy Fledderman's death is based on interviews with her family, friends and patient records citing Richard P. Glunk, a King of Prussia doctor, as her surgeon. The family initially was reluctant to talk about their daughter, and only recently agreed to do so.

Glunk, referring to doctor-patient confidentiality rules, said that discussing any patient would be unethical. "I can't even discuss whether she is or is not a patient," he said in an interview.

Glunk, 44, said he has been in practice 14 years, carefully selects his patients, and runs an office equipped to handle emergency situations.

He said he is certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery, a member of the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, and has admitting and operating privileges at Lankenau, Bryn Mawr and Paoli Memorial Hospitals on the Main Line outside Philadelphia.

Amy Fledderman was home from Pennsylvania State University for Christmas break when she told her parents she wanted to have the liposuction procedure.

At 5-foot-5 and 128 pounds, she wasn't overweight. She had lost 25 to 30

pounds over several years, chipping away at her weight through sound eating and exercise.

At Penn State, she ran at least three miles most days, impressing her friends with her speed. In a poem for her freshman English class, she wrote whimsically about her workouts with her roommate and their determination to stave off the legendary weight gain of new college students: "They run together every

day; So back off, freshman 15."

Still, she couldn't shed a small stomach bulge and one under her chin.

Colleen Fledderman, a reading specialist, checked out some plastic-surgery sites on the Internet and watched a TV show about liposuction. She found nothing alarming, and her daughter's request didn't seem extreme to her and her husband.

After consulting with family doctors, Amy had had surgery when she was 16 to correct a developmental abnormality involving her breasts. Glunk had been the surgeon and the operation had gone well.

Amy Fledderman, the middle child of three, was a sensible girl who worked hard at everything she did. She was an honors student at Marple Newtown High School. She co-captained the tennis team, and her French-horn skills earned her a spot on the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association All-State Orchestra.

At Penn State, she was pursuing a major in bioengineering, with an eye toward genetics. She had taken on a heavy

load of science and math courses, earning about a 3.3 average. She also made the equestrian team.

"When we do tryouts, one of the things we look for is smiling faces. And she certainly was one of them," equestrian coach Malinda Grice said.

Amy Fledderman followed the family tradition in choosing Penn State and enjoyed spending time with her brother, Joseph, a senior. Renee, now 13, the

95 liposuction-related deaths between 1994 and 1998 came to light in a survey of 1,200 members of the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery.

De Jong, who did the survey, used the 95 deaths to calculate that the mortality rate was about 20 for every 100,000 procedures. By comparison, the death rate for hernia repair was 3 per 100,000.

A leading cause of liposuction death, de Jong found, was pulmonary embolism -- a clot made of blood, or in rarer instances fat, that can damage the lungs.

Other fatal complications of liposuction included perforations of the abdominal wall, anesthesia problems and cardiorespiratory failure, de Jong and a co-author wrote last year in the journal Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery.

More common problems are skin irritation, pain and swelling.

On May 15, home for summer break, Amy Fledderman went with her mother to see Glunk at his office near the King of Prussia mall.

Amy Fledderman explained to Glunk that some pockets of fat wouldn't go away, Colleen Fledderman recalled. She asked whether there was anything she could do to lose them.

"Absolutely not. It's genetic fat, and the only way to lose it is liposuction," she said Glunk told Amy.

Fledderman said Glunk explained that he wouldn't have to take much fat out. The procedure would involve five tiny incisions in the abdominal area and one under the chin. He would use an ultrasound device to help break up the fat and a tiny tube to suction it out. She would be asleep.

On the liposuction consent form Amy signed, Glunk listed risks: "infection, bleeding, scarring, pain, numbness, loss of skin, injury to surrounding structure, facial-nerve numbness, facial-nerve weakness, residual deformity, facial-nerve paralysis." There was also an anesthesia consent form.

The worst thing that could happen, Colleen Fledderman recalled Glunk saying, was that Amy could end up with a drooling problem because of the liposuction below her chin, but that that could be fixed with a stitch.

Fledderman said she asked about the dangers of a blood clot, and whether the procedure was safe to do in his office. She said Glunk indicated everything would go smoothly.

Glunk told the Fleddermans that he normally charged \$6,500 for the surgery, but because Amy was a previous patient, he would charge \$5,000, Fledderman said.

New Jersey adopted rules several years ago for office surgery, requiring doctors to report deaths and serious complications, and to post a written emergency back-up plan.

In Pennsylvania, the state Health Department issued rules in 1999 to bring some oversight to the growing business of office-based surgery. The rules require doctors' offices that have a section set aside for surgery to be registered or licensed as an "ambulatory surgical facility," meeting the same standards required of larger non-hospital surgical centers.

The state Health Department said Friday that based on a complaint, it is investigating whether Glunk's office is an ambulatory surgical facility operating without the necessary license. Deputy Health Secretary Richard Lee said the Pennsylvania Department of State, which oversees licensing of doctors, is also involved.

Glunk, in a recent interview, said he is in compliance with state rules.

The Fleddermans have set up a scholarship in Amy's memory. They're also consulting lawyers about their legal options.

"We never would have let her do it if we knew she could have died," Colleen Fledderman said. "It wasn't supposed to be a big deal."