

Product seeks to clean up sports

Mouth guard rinse aims to clean up sports

By Brandon Wright, Times Correspondent
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TAMPA — Joe Theismann knows a thing or two about football.

In a career that featured a pair of All Pro selections and an NFL Offensive Player of the Year award, the former Super Bowl-winning Washington Redskin quarterback has plenty of good memories to reflect on.

Some, however, he wouldn't mind forgetting.

"I'd never even heard of trench mouth before," Theismann said. "It wasn't any fun, that's for sure."

Theismann, then a rookie with the CFL's Toronto Argonauts in 1971, played a game against the Montreal Alouettes the night after their stadium had been used for a livestock show. Throughout the game dirt got all over Theismann — including in his mouth.

"Trench mouth is hoof and mouth disease," he said. "And it's every bit as ugly as it sounds."

The disease is a severe bacterial infection characterized by bleeding and inflammation of the gums. It can also cause ulcers, fever and fatigue. It was this experience that led Theismann to become the national spokesman for a new product called Defense Sport Mouthguard Rinse.

"When I played, I never really thought much about things like keeping mouth guards sanitary," he said. "But you see guys drop them on the ground, put them in their socks or helmet. They get filthy."

Al DolceAmore, president and founder of SaniBrands Inc., observed the way football players treated their mouth guards and has spent the past three years developing the rinse. DolceAmore said his product is the first and only of its kind on the market. The rinse, which is dispensed through a squirt bottle, cleans and removes dirt and bacteria from the mouth guard.

"I watched all these players, whether it was in football or lacrosse or whatever, and how dirty their mouth guards would get," he said. "I thought 'This can't be good.'"

So DolceAmore, who works for a clinical research company, began working with a chemist to devise a rinse for mouth guards. After three years of tinkering, DolceAmore launched the product three weeks ago to rave reviews at June's National Athletic Trainer Association annual meeting.

"The response was unbelievable," he said. "Every trainer who came by the booth said this is a product that is needed."

The active ingredient in the patent-pending rinse is chlorhexidine gluconate, a compound found in mouthwashes.

"Lab results show these mouth guards get everything from dirt to animal feces to sputum to DNA on them from the ground and throughout games," DolceAmore said. "I mean if you drop a fork on the ground, you don't use it do you?"

With youth football starting up around the county, Brandon Cowboys Athletic Director Jason Johnson said sanitation training is at the forefront.

"We preach hygiene to the kids all the time," he said. "It's something we take very seriously out here."

But theory and application can sometimes be two vastly different things for football players as young as 5.

"A lot of times they just take their equipment and throw it in their bag after practice, along with their mouth piece," Johnson said. "Even though we tell them the right things to do, they don't always do it."

Although Johnson said he thinks the rinse is "a great idea," he isn't sure whether the product will catch on with youth players.

"At this age, I'm not sure it would work," he said. "They may use it once or twice, but I think they'll forget it or leave it somewhere when they come off the field."

The NFL's Oakland Raiders have already placed an order with DolceAmore, and he hopes to have the product in retail stores by the end of the summer. But DolceAmore said the rinse is also ideal for players of any age.

"We always tell kids to wash their hands and sanitize," DolceAmore said. "Back in my day mouth guards were 75 cents, and now some range from \$65 to \$100, so you can't afford to just throw them away and get a new one."