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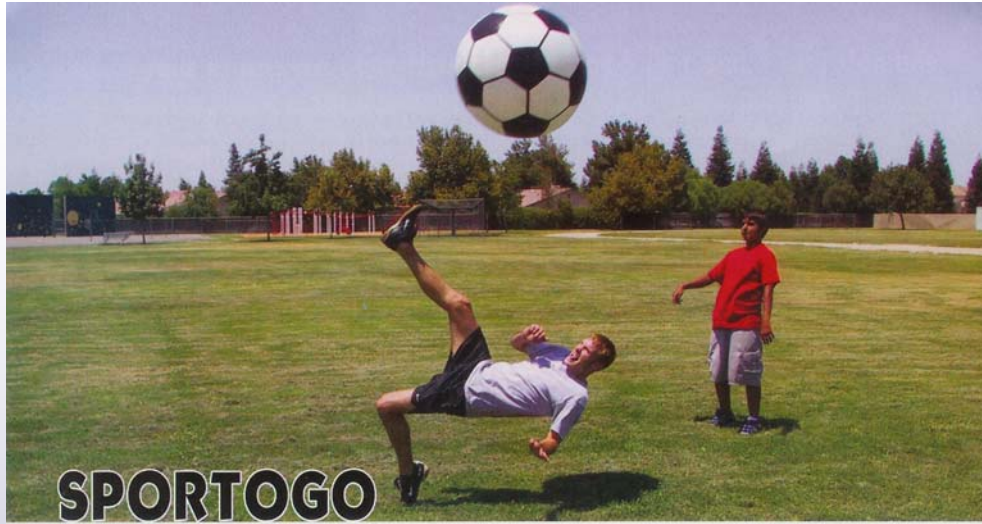
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SPORTOGO SUPERSIZES IT

Walking past a local park, a soccer ball crosses your path. You stop to spot its owner. Do you expect to see:

- A. A child chasing it.
- B. A teenager chasing it.
- C. Shaquille O'Neal chasing it.

If the ball in question is a Sportogo soccer ball, O'Neal may seem to be the only person capable of subduing the behemoth. And, at 40 inches in diameter, the Sportogo ball may give Shaq a run for his money.

For nearly eight years, Sportogo's giant inflatable sport balls have been surprising and delighting people of all ages. That's quite an achievement for an invention created purely as a marketing tool for another item.

Better known for his Hydro Bronc whitewater "wheel" (see *Inflatable News* April/May 2003 cover story), Sportogo President Rod Blair originally designed the giant sports balls for a Hydro Bronc publicity shoot. Said Sportogo Operations Manager Shawn Mangrum, "With no whitewater nearby, we needed to create some excitement for the Hydro Bronc publicity shoot, which was set to take place on a smooth lake.

Rod came up with the idea of staging a 'giant' soccer game between players in several Hydro Broncs." The soccer game was such a "huge" success that Blair decided to pursue the giant sports ball concept as a standalone product.

The ball is constructed from a heavy-duty PVC or light-weight latex internal bladder, depending on how the ball will be used. The latex weighs just a fraction of the PVC and is used for Sportogo's ultra-light line of products. Sportogo recommends users inflate the PVC sports balls with a double-action hand pump. Alternatively, an air compressor may be used, but instructions should be followed carefully to ensure the longest life possible.

Double-knit polyester covers eliminate wrinkles and give the sports ball their individual "identities" as oversized soccer balls, basketballs, volleyballs, fuzzy tennis balls, beach balls, baseballs and eight balls.

After a brief foray in China, manufacturing of the sports balls moved to Sportogo's Bakersfield, California facility, which allows for better quality control, quicker turnaround and ability to personalize the balls with company logos or other specialty artwork.

Producing in the Bakersfield facility also has allowed Sportogo to design and develop non sports-related items such as giant Christmas ornaments and fishing bobbers, as well as specialty items such as melting snowmen, inflatable barbells and more.

Mangrum says the giant inflatable balls appeal to men, women and children of all ages. In fact, he claims the giant size

is a great "equalizer." Said Mangrum, "Rather than one or two people hogging the ball and having all the fun, I like to say Sportogo balls make everyone uniformly 'bad.'" In other words, Yet, Mangrum, says the applications are nearly limitless. "How our products are used depends upon which market buys them.



Photographers use the balls as props for children's photos and team pictures. They are used quite extensively for wheelchair soccer with the physically disabled. Our neighbors to the north in Canada even have hosted demolition derby soccer games using them.

The balls make great advertisements or decorations at sports bars during sporting events." The company has even constructed sports balls capable of withstanding high-impact projectiles for use as paint ball obstacles.



And, humans aren't the only ones having fun. Sportogo balls have been used to train police horses, elephants and dolphins, and as play toys for large breed dogs. The company website, www.sportogo.com, is full of fun shots of animals strutting

their stuff with Sportogo balls.

International Inflatable Products and Games Association (IIPGA) Inflatable State Representative (ISR) for Connecticut, John Rozz, started using Sportogo giant volleyballs in the spring of 2003. Rozz says they are great for indoor or outdoor, as well as, day or night fun. "We paint them with ultraviolet paints and stage games under black lights," remarked Rozz.

Rozz's inventiveness with the giant inflatable sports balls hasn't escaped the notice of folks at Sportogo headquarters. Mangrum confesses to "constant amazement at all the new uses John has found for our products. Every time I talk to John he seems to have come up with a new use we never thought of."



Rozz has used Sportogo balls in events with middle schools, high schools, colleges and corporations and calls them "another cool item for clients to choose from." People from 12 to 60 have participated and according to Rozz it's something everyone can do. "We can make the game easy or hard depending on the skill levels of the group."

With the giant inflatable sports balls, Sportogo has taken an everyday item and supersized it, but they've supersized the fun too.

