

TRANSCRIPT: TECHNOLOGY ENHANCES ATHLETIC PERFORMANCE...AT A PRICE

BY JOSH FIGUEIRA

HOST LEAD:

FROM HIGH-TECH GOLF CLUBS THAT TACK 50 YARDS ONTO YOUR SWING, TO SIMPLE INSOLES THAT INSTANTLY ADD INCHES TO YOUR VERTICAL LEAP, TECHNOLOGY IS CHANGING THE WAY PEOPLE PLAY SPORTS. BUT THAT TECHNOLOGY COMES WITH A PRICE, AND THAT PRICE MAY BE MORE THAN JUST MONETARY. JOSH FIGUEIRA REPORTS.

TRACK:

IF YOU'VE EVER BEEN THE LAST KID PICKED AT RECESS, YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO WISH YOU WERE QUICKER, STRONGER, OR MORE ATHLETIC. NOW, THANKS TO BILL CROW, YOU MIGHT JUST GET YOUR WISH.

CROW: YOU'LL RUN FASTER, JUMP HIGHER, BE STRONGER BY 15%, AND HAVE MORE FLEXIBILITY IN YOUR BODY.

CROW'S INVENTION, THE SPRINGBAK SPEED SOLES, SOUND LIKE AN ATHLETE'S DREAM COME TRUE. THE PLAIN BLACK INSOLES ARE THIN, DURABLE, AND HAVE THE ABILITY TO ELEVATE A PLAYER'S GAME INSTANTLY. BUT HEATHER REID IS WORRIED THAT, WHILE SPEEDSOLES ARE GOOD FOR THE ATHLETE, THEY MIGHT NOT BE GOOD FOR THE GAME.

REID: THE MORE WE VIEW THE USE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES AS SOMETHING THAT IS AS NATURAL AS A CHANGE IN WEATHER, THE LESS LIKELY WE ARE TO ASK OURSELVES THE QUESTION OF WHETHER THIS MAKES SPORT GOOD.

REID IS PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE PHILOSOPHY OF SPORT. SHE BELIEVES TECHNOLOGY DOESN'T BELONG IN THE WORLD OF ATHLETICS BECAUSE IT VIOLATES THE ORIGINAL SPIRIT OF SPORT.

REID: IN THE ANCIENT OLYMPIC GAMES, ATHLETES COMPETED IN THE NUDE... THERE'S SOMETHING IN TERMS OF SYMBOLIC EQUALITY—THAT EVERYBODY STARTS EQUALLY, AND THEN THE DIFFERENCE IS MADE ACCORDING TO MERIT, ACCORDING TO PERFORMANCE.

REID FEELS THAT CLOTHES ARE AN ACCEPTABLE INNOVATION, BUT, AS FOR OTHER TECHNOLOGY...

REID: I THINK IT CAN GET OUT OF HAND.

OTHERS ARE MORE LIBERAL ABOUT WHAT THEY'LL ALLOW ON THE PLAYING FIELD. DR. KIM BLAIR IS FOUNDING DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR SPORTS INNOVATION.

BLAIR: I'M REALLY A BIG FAN OF THE OPEN MARKET PLACE AND LET THE TECHNOLOGY DECIDE, YOU KNOW, GET THE TECHNOLOGY OUT THERE.

BLAIR SAYS THAT TECHNOLOGY ISN'T THE ONLY THING CHANGING SPORTS.

BLAIR: SO IS INCREASED STRENGTH TRAINING AND FLEXIBILITY, LIKE WE'VE SEEN

WITH GOLF AND TIGER WOODS I MEAN THAT'S TOTALLY CHANGED THE FACE OF SPORT, TOO.

TRADITIONALLY, SAYS BLAIR, TECHNOLOGY HAS MADE SOME SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS IN SPORT AS A WHOLE.

BLAIR: A LOT OF TIMES TECHNOLOGY CHANGES, AND THOSE THINGS ARE BASED ON SAFETY AND PROTECTING PLAYERS OR ATHLETES AS WELL.

REID AGREES, BUT SAYS THAT'S NOT THE TYPE OF TECHNOLOGY THAT WORRIES HER. IT'S PERFORMANCE ENHANCING TECHNOLOGIES, OR P.E.T.'S, THAT SHE FINDS UNSETTLING. REID'S AFRAID THAT P.E.T.'S COULD TRANSFORM SPORT INTO, WELL, SOMETHING ELSE.

REID: YOU KNOW THEY HAVE THOSE CONTESTS WHERE PEOPLE BUILD ROBOTS AND THEY FIGHT EACH OTHER, IS THAT REALLY WHAT SPORT IS GOING TO BECOME?

AND THEN THERE'S THE COST OF P.E.T.'S, SOMETHING JASON WILLOCK KNOWS ALL ABOUT.

WILLOCK: ONE OF THE THINGS THAT IT BOILS DOWN TO IS THAT TECHNOLOGY IS ALWAYS RELATED TO [THE] FINANCIAL.

WILLOCK IS AN ASSISTANT FOOTBALL COACH AT SPINGARN HIGH SCHOOL IN WASHINGTON D.C. HE SAYS HE DOESN'T THINK P.E.T.'S SHOULD EVEN BE A FACTOR IN THE HIGH SCHOOL GAME, BUT THEY ARE, AND HE BLAMES IT ON THE MANUFACTURERS.

WILLOCK: THE MARKETING STRATEGIES OF THESE COMPANIES ARE GREAT BECAUSE THEY'VE CONVINCED THESE KIDS THAT IT'S COOLER TO HAVE THEIR GEAR AND APPAREL THAN TO HAVE SOME MONEY IN THEIR POCKETS.

P.E.T.'S AREN'T CHEAP, AND NEITHER WILLOCK'S PLAYERS, NOR THE SCHOOL ITSELF CAN AFFORD EQUIPMENT THAT ISN'T ESSENTIAL. SOMETIMES, WILLOCK SAYS, THEY CAN'T EVEN AFFORD THE BASICS.

WILLOCK: WE PLAYED A TEAM IN PROBABLY 40 DEGREE TEMPS AND RAIN A COUPLE OF WEEKS AGO, AND EVERY MEMBER OF THEIR TEAM HAD A JACKET ON WHILE THEY WERE ON THE SIDELINE, KEEPING WATER OFF OF THEM, KEEPING THEM WARM, AND, WE WE'RE COMPETITIVE, BUT AT THE SAME TIME OUR KIDS WOULD SEE ACROSS THE SIDELINE AND YOU HEAR THEM MUMBLE "ALL THOSE GUYS HAVE JACKETS..."

JACKETS OR NO, THE TRUTH IS, P.E.T.'S ARE HAVING AN IMPACT ON SPORTS, ESPECIALLY AMATEUR SPORTS. BUT JUST HOW MUCH A "PART OF THE GAME" SHOULD P.E.T.'S BE? THAT'S NOT AN EASY QUESTION. EVEN DR. KIM BLAIR, OF THE CENTER FOR SPORTS INNOVATION ADMITS HE'S ALARMED AT HOW FAST THE TECHNOLOGY IS CHANGING. CASE AND POINT? A GADGET HE HEARD ABOUT AT A RECENT CONFERENCE IN SAN FRANCISCO.

BLAIR: THEY'RE NOW WORKING ON THESE THINGS, LITTLE DEVICES THAT WILL BE ABLE TO FLOW THROUGH YOUR BLOOD STREAM, AND ACTUALLY ENCAPSULATE MORE OXYGEN...

AND, HE SAYS THE TECHNOLOGY COULD BE ON THE MARKET WITHIN THE NEXT 5 TO 10

YEARS. SO HOW DOES BLAIR, A PROPONENT OF P.E.T.'S, FEEL ABOUT THE IDEA OF A TINY ARMADA OF COMPUTER CHIPS RACING THROUGH HIS CIRCULATORY SYSTEM?

BLAIR: I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THAT ONE.

SPORTS ETHICIST HEATHER REID SAYS, ULTIMATELY, IT'S UP TO US TO DRAW THE LINE.

REID: EVEN IF WE'RE NOT CURRENTLY ACTIVE ATHLETES, WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT WHAT MAKES OUR SPORT REALLY GOOD, AND WHAT KIND OF THINGS WILL GET IN THE WAY OF IT, AND USE THAT AS OUR CRITERION.

AND, SAYS REID, IF WE DON'T LIVE UP TO THAT RESPONSIBILITY, TECHNOLOGY MAY JUST MAKE SPORT AS WE KNOW IT, OBSOLETE.

FOR INTERN EDITION, I'M JOSH FIGUEIRA.