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Will Kevlar Revolutionize Sports?

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By: Darren Rovell
CNBC Sports Business Reporter

More than 30 years ago, the folks at **DuPont** [\[DOW 38.7837 ▼ -0.0263 \(-0.07%\)\]](#) brought Kevlar to the market — a lightweight, shock absorber that's most identified with bulletproof vests and car bumpers.



Over the years, its applications have gotten more creative, but one company called **Unequal Technologies** is relying on the material to change how sports are played.

The company's president Rob Vito says Unequal has some 50 patents to use a more flexible form of Kevlar, a combination of

material made by **DuPont and Dow** [\[DOW 30.98 ▼ -0.18 \(-0.58%\)\]](#), that allows it to better protect body shock to athletes.

"If Kevlar can stop a bullet, it can certainly prevent shock," said Vito, who is also a professor of entrepreneurship at Penn State.

Vito says he has spent the last 10 years securing patents. The company's business model is to license its Unequal material to retailers, who would then produce the goods and give the company a royalty.

"We have no sales force and no factory," Vito said.

To get started, Unequal actually did produce shoe insoles, an area that has largely been ignored.

Because of the pressure that comes down on the feet and the cheap quality of insoles in general, athletes often feel foot pain. By making the insoles out of Kevlar, Vito says the shock is better absorbed.

Vito says the insoles, which are sold for \$24.95, are so strong they come with a lifetime replacement guarantee. He believes the athletic shoe insole business can be a \$100 million business in five years.

And Unequal is starting to build a fan base.

"I've been in this business for 30 years and I've never seen a product as good as this one," said Dr. Lee Cohen, team podiatrist for the Philadelphia Eagles, 76ers and the Penn State football team, which are now using the insoles. Cohen says he doesn't have any financial involvement with Unequal.

Vito says he put Kevlar in a catcher's mitt and the catcher didn't feel the pop.

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so he thought he dropped the ball. A batter who hit the ball with Kevlar tape on the bat couldn't feel exactly where he hit the ball.

The company wants to prevent the shock, but obviously doesn't want to take away all the feeling. Vito says the material can be "dialed up or down" to make sure the shock is taken away, but the feel is still there.

The tape is Unequal's next product. Athletic training company **Cramer** is licensing the technology and it is being tested by more than 20 teams this year before it will hit the market in 2010. By using the Kevlar alternative, Vito says trainers can save 80 percent of the traditional athletic tape they use, which Vito says often becomes stretched and useless after 30 minutes. How much the tape will cost is not yet known.

Right now, Unequal is a small start-up, but Vito has big dreams. If Unequal's Kevlar application becomes the next big thing, he hopes it will be a \$1 billion business in the next decade.

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