

2 Rumors Swirl Over FL-GCO Merger

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Panelists Talk M&As, Retail And Brand Buzz

By MEREDITH DERBY

NEW YORK — With the meteoric rise of the athletic-casual footwear market, the big question has become: What will it take for performance shoes to rebound?

According to one panelist during a recent *Footwear News* financial roundtable, a turnaround in the overall athletic market could be dependent on \$16 billion athletic powerhouse Nike setting the bar higher.

"It's going to take Nike to come out with the new acceptable fashion technical product" to renew consumer interest in the athletic footwear market, predicted panelist Sam Poser, who for 20 years

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>> INSIDER

Insider got a sneak(er)-peek at the "Pro-Keds for Jeffrey" collection at **Damon Dash's** headquarters in midtown Manhattan last week. A smattering of brightly colored hi-top, low-top and slip-on styles in suedes and metallic leathers set off with the brand's iconic red and blue striping, the collection carries that chic 'n' quirky **Jeffrey Kalinsky** signature on the classic, old-school vibe Pro-Keds platform. "I think



[Jeffrey] reps a cool aesthetic and a cool demographic that recognizes the coolness of our brand," Dash said, showing off a few styles in the showroom. "It goes more to establish a cool factor for [Pro-Keds]." The line, which retails for \$105 to \$125, will be available at Jeffrey boutiques in Atlanta and New York, Fred Segal in Los Angeles and 12 Nordstrom doors nationwide April 15.

>> **LIVE FROM MICAM:** The Brits were at it again on the first night of the Micam show. Londoners **Gwendolyn Carrié** and **Emma Hope** (below, left) were mwah-mwah-ing with the likes of **Raouda Assaf** at **La Banque**, a nightclub complete with gaudy décor and "spirited" live entertainment. The event was organized by the increasingly ambitious **British Footwear Association**, which has helped make bonding à la Britain a regular stop on the Milan show tour ... It's never too late to be lifestyle. That seems to be the idea at **Robert Clergerie**, where



the comeback Frenchman unveiled an eyewear collection for fall '07. The four new styles (think square, oversized, Nicole Richie-esque shades) retail for \$150 to \$160 and are slated to debut stateside in June ... **ANCI**, the National Association of Italian Footwear Manufacturers, is eyeing the U.S. market as the next location for its retail concept stores dubbed "I Love Italian Shoes." Though the organization did not reveal exact plans, it's unveiling a new promotional strategy in the U.S. for the back half of 2007 in anticipation of the Italian shoe store concept, and has already launched an advertising campaign at JFK Airport in Queens, N.Y. ... **Stuart Weitzman** signed a deal for three

new boutiques in resort hotspots Monte Carlo and St. Tropez, France; and Capri, Italy. The deals were literally inked while the designer worked his booth on the Micam show floor ... **Rupert Sanderson**, following the May opening of his second London store, is teasing a NYC store for fall, while the Euro-comfort brand **Geox** is eyeing greater retail presence on the East Coast by the end of 2007. (For more on Micam, see p. 6) — **Michelle Baran**

>> **TRAVELIN' MAN:** Ecco is crossing the continent — on the feet of **Detlev Henschel**. The 50-year-old German (below) plans to walk across North America along historic trails such as Route 66. According to Henschel, the walk to St. John, Newfoundland, (which began last week in Los Angeles)



could take up to nine months. Ecco, which has sponsored Henschel for the past year, plans to outfit him for the length of

the journey. En route, Henschel will provide the brand with feedback on the shoes' performance. Expect some Henschel-inspired developments in Ecco's spring '08 line. — **Jennifer Carofano**

>> **PROJECT FOOTWEAR:** It's been a busy year since designer **Emmett McCarthy** graced the stage on the second season of Project Runway. He recently celebrated the one-year anniversary of his Elizabeth Street boutique and the launch of his Web store, both of which will soon feature his newest project: footwear. In August, McCarthy will bow a footwear component for his namesake collection, a smattering of embellished luxury snakeskin looks that will go for \$175 to \$350. "I'm addressing the needs of my customer," he said. "They want me to style them top to toe, and they need shoes!" — **Lindsay E. Sammon**

>> **IN THEIR OWN WORDS:** "These flights are terrible — they're half empty. There should be fewer, fuller flights. We are ruining the world with all this cheap flying, you know," quipped **Manolo Blahnik** on a trip to Istanbul, where the shoe legend opened his first boutique last week. "Just the other day, I saw a picture of some little polar bears on the ice caps. They were dying. And there was one bear trying to catch them, with its paws out as their bodies floated away. It was terrible."