

Nashville Business Journal - March 17, 2008

<http://nashville.bizjournals.com/nashville/stories/2008/03/17/smallb2.html>

NASHVILLE BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, March 14, 2008

D1 teams up with pro athletes Peyton Manning, Shane Battier

Nashville Business Journal - by [William Williams](#) Special to the Nashville Business Journal

Walk into the Cool Springs **D-1** and you are confronted with pulsating music, massive aspiring professional athletes hurling themselves about an indoor turf field and an eye-popping area of heavy-duty workout machinery that would render a YMCA weight room no more impressive than a toddler's playpen.

"We bring the intensity and the hard-core attitude," Will Bartholomew says.

Bartholomew is president and CEO of **Explosion Sports LLC**, the parent company of six D-1 Sports Training facilities.

He has structured Explosion Sports to own the majority of each D-1 location, with a celebrity athlete serving as a minority partner. The parent company controls and manages the business components of the six facilities, while the sports partner assists in funding and endorsing his site.

Recently, Explosion Sports sold land for the construction of a hotel building to accommodate aspiring pro athletes and located on the D-1 Cool Springs campus, and it owns a medical building adjacent to the Cool Springs D-1.

D-1 is hard to classify. Its training facilities offer more than old-fashioned gyms but not the extra goodies (swimming pools, basketball and racquetball courts) found in more conventional fitness centers.

Consider that his D-1 complex - a former go-cart race track - provides members a "grown man's playground" with "an industrial, hard-core feel," Bartholomew says.

Bartholomew's father, Sam, graduated from the United States **Military Academy at West Point** and was commissioned as an armored cavalry officer, seeing duty in Europe, Panama and Vietnam. He later earned a law degree and now teaches as an adjunct professor at Vanderbilt University's Owen School of Management.

Will has no military background, but he inherited his father's drive and toughness.



Todd Stringer, Nashville Business Journal

Will Bartholomew's Explosion Sports LLC wants to take the 'grown man's playground' concept of D1 Sports Training national.

[View Larger](#)

The younger Bartholomew played fullback at the **University of Tennessee**, where he majored in finance.

"Growing up, I watched how my dad conducted business and handled the people he interacted with," Bartholomew says. "He has been the single- greatest influence on the way I've done business."

Bartholomew has observed his business-savvy father and applied those lessons learned to D-1.

He allows significant feedback from his employees and business partners - professional athletes Shane Battier (NBA), Peyton Manning (NFL) and Phillip Rivers (NFL).

"Will was a team player at Tennessee and he believes in the team concept and bringing great partners together to reach a common goal and reach excellence," says Manning, a former Volunteer teammate of Bartholomew.

On the "team player" theme, Bartholomew solicits employee feedback, noting, "I realize I don't have all the answers."

Monthly membership fees can cost as much as \$200, limiting the pool of potential members, even in well-to-do Williamson County. Some prospective members might feel intimidated by the setting. Everyone is required to work with a trainer.

"The trainers usually don't cut the members," Bartholomew says, adding that members are honest enough with themselves to voluntarily step down.

But most members (some as young as 7) do survive - and thrive.

Though Bartholomew declines to give specific financials for each facility, he says the Cool Springs D-1 has seen annual revenue increases ranging between 15 percent and 100 percent since it opened in 2003. Turnover - there are 94 employees company wide - has been minimal.

Though franchising is not an option at this point, Bartholomew expects corporate expansion opportunities for D-1. Birmingham, Ala., and Little Rock, Ark., are the next markets.

"Over the next 10 years, our type of gym with the personal training aspect and unique atmosphere is where [many facilities] will be going," he says. "There is no doubt that today's culture has changed and that has altered the landscape of fitness. It is an exciting business to be in. We are developing the future."

LESSONS LEARNED

Toughest business decision: Hiring people.

Greatest business challenge: Not micromanaging people and trusting my staff to provide excellence.

Biggest surprise of your career: When an executive worked alongside the athletes at D1 and went from 400 pounds to 220 pounds [David Griffin from "the biggest loser."]

What someone else can learn from you: It is not me. I am standing on the shoulders of a great God and also great people who have helped me significantly.

Greatest frustration: Not being able to please everyone.

Five year vision: D1 nationwide

First move with a capital windfall: Still waiting on my first BIG capital windfall!

William Williams is a Nashville-area freelance writer.

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.