

STREET SCENE

Inside **S**

Here comes the Beat

They've embarked on a 45-date, two-month coast-to-coast tour of the United States, but Special Beat won't be traveling in the mega star rock style of, say, a Madonna. Nope, these guys are forgoing that, especially since they're financing the tour themselves. Find out why on Page 3D.

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Detroit Piston John Salley wore his own now defunct brand of shoes by Osaka during the pre-season, but now sports Nikes after signing a contract with company.

Putting the best sneakers forward

By Charlene Mitchell
special writer

The battle of the high tops is gaining momentum.

Air Jordan, The Pump, British Knights, Avia Spiders and a host of other high profile athletic shoes have hit the classroom and basketball courts in what can best be described as the "sneakers war."

With the leather, ankle-high, rubber-soled footwear being in vogue for the fashion conscious elementary through college age folks, companies like Reebok, Nike and Converse are spending millions of dollars promoting their brands.

Sports stars like Michael Jordan of the Chicago Bulls can be seen in television commercials jumping to heights that appear to be limitless. And a glance at members of the world champion Detroit Pistons, who know just how competitive of a business it is.

Most NBA stars wear basketball shoes of their own preference. In short, it's the shoes that give them the best fit and playing comfort. Figured into that is which company pays them to endorse their product. Some players receive up to 50 pairs of shoes a season along with a hefty endorsement fee from the companies.

ACCORDING TO Dave Wieme, the Pistons' public relations assistant, a check of the team's footwear shows seven different brands among the 12 players on the roster.

Contrary to the heavy advertising campaigns of its competitors, Converse supplies the shoes for three Pistons — Bill Lamblin, Mark Aguirre and Trece Rollins — more than any other company.

"Basically, the players can wear any brand name they want," said Wieme, pointing out that it was only 10 years ago that the NBA required all players to wear the same shoes as part of their uniform.

"It's just the way things are today," Wieme said. "The shoes the players wear has such a tremendous influence on what everyday people buy at the stores."

Want to emulate Vinnie Johnson or James Edwards? Buy Nike. Joe Dumars? Adidas.

Dennis Rodman prefers the popular Reebok Pump, a change from the shoe by New Balance he wore in previous seasons. Scott Hastings prefers L.A. Gear, and William Bedford is alternating between Pony and Nike.

During part of the pre-season

John Salley was wearing his own now defunct brand of shoes by Osaka. After the company folded, he signed a contract with Nike.

"If the shoe fits wear it," said Salley, hinting that his decision to go with Nike was based in part on the handsome fee he's being paid for doing so.

As for Pistons' captain Isiah Thomas... Well, Zeke is sporting a relatively obscure brand of shoes popular with NBA players on the West Coast, called Asics.

AND, LISTEN, for you star watchers, word has it Michael Jackson likes L.A. Gear. M.C. Hammer is into British Knights, and the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, has a penchant for Tre-Torn.

Major sporting goods retailers like Dunham's, Herman's and Foot Locker all depend heavily on sales of athletic shoes.

At Dunham's in West Bloomfield, the sample of Reebok's Pump is on the top shelf of the wall display "to keep all customers from playing with it," joked one salesman.

It seems adults and kids alike enjoy trying on the shoe, which retails for \$170, to see how the orange basketball-shaped device on the shoe's tongue inflates the inner workings of the shoes, making them tighter around the ankle.

While the sneaker craze may be good for business, most kids' parents aren't going for the exorbitant prices of the popular shoe brands.

"I'm not going to pay \$100 or even \$80 for one pair of shoes... It's ridiculous," griped a Southfield mother of two pre-teenage boys who were nearly in tears when she gave an emphatic no to their request to buy the shoes.

In Detroit, school officials have implemented a new dress code which forbids students to wear expensive sneakers to school, citing theft and other problems that seem to arise between students who own the shoes and others who don't.

"IT'S A STATUS thing that we just want to get rid of," said a teacher at Denby High School.

In the northern suburbs, many teens say they prefer the worn look of beat-up Keds in the slip-on style, boat shoes or well-worn penny loafers.

For now the sneakers war continues, but hopefully for the parents under pressure to buy, someone will wave a white flag, indicating an end to the fashion frenzy.

Mr. Positive fills the airwaves with good talk

By Sue Mason
staff writer

When Gregory Balleff speaks, a lot of people listen. . . . People in the Detroit area . . . in Chicago . . . in Cleveland . . . in Texas . . . in California.

It's not that he has a voice that carries. Quite the opposite is true. Balleff is soft-spoken, but he has the "power" as he calls it, the power of positive thinking.

Meet Mr. Positive.

"I am a mirror to people's souls. I am what I am and what I say. If I believe I will be successful, I will be successful. If they believe they will be successful, they will be successful."

Sound positive? Well, how about this.

"I am who they are. If I can become positive, they can become positive."

Yes, he's for real. And, yes, people

listen to him. And, no, he isn't on one of the lesser known radio stations. Mr. Positive is a Friday night fixture on WLLZ.

At the age of 27, Balleff wants to corner the market on positive thinking. He admits his aspiration sounds vain, but he believes that today's society really does need doses of positive thinking.

He got started in 1986, doing positive pieces on Tower Radio 96.3-FM. Because the station had a lot of "power and influence," he felt it could be used to improve people's lives.

HIS IDEA was to get people to "take a dream and believe in it." Balleff kept his messages short and to the point. One message lasted two-three minutes. And playing off the stations power theme, he ended his messages — and still does — with "And you have the power."

He eventually left for WLLZ and in between did cable TV shows,

made 22 appearances on "Kelly & Co." and is tentatively scheduled to appear on "Arsenio Hall" in the coming months.

Balleff has refined his format over the years. Today, his messages are more esoteric and "use poetry to articulate his positiveness." He gets help with the poetry — "Like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, crack will take you for a ride." — from his boss, Paul Tepatti.

"I have to make sure I catch the hard rockers' attention," Balleff said. "I have to come to the radio and shake you. I want to represent to people that they don't need drugs."

"I want to personify positivity along the lines of religion, but not in the religious sense. I want people to put out positive vibes."

Balleff's positive inspirations and influences have come from an odd collection of people and experiences. ELVIS IS his main motivator, the result of seeing a concert "The

King" did in Hawaii and was transmitted via satellite throughout the country. He reached millions of people and the concert brought home the point of how much influence the rock star had on people, Balleff said.

Another inspiration was a young girl he saw while working at Farmer Jack years ago. The youngster, sick with leukemia, was trying to catch up with her parents while in the store.

"They were ahead of her and she reached for her parents' hand; I saw it as her reaching out for her Mom and Dad and they weren't there. I heard she died three months later. That really rocked my world."

And a seven-year struggle with a speech impediment also contributed to his positive nature. Experts told him he "wouldn't amount to a hill of beans, if you can't articulate." It taught him to "never say never," he said.

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Gregory Balleff wants to corner the market on positive thinking and has gotten a start with his Mr. Positive radio shorts that air on WLLZ-FM Friday evenings.