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Balm Gives Pitchers Homespun Blister Aid

By BLOOMBERG NEWS
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By Bloomberg News

Back in his days as a rodeo cowboy, Stan Johnston, the [Los Angeles Dodgers'](#) head athletic trainer, mixed some items in his medicine chest and came up with a balm that helped heal the burns and blisters on his hands from riding bulls and roping steers.

He kept the recipe, and now Stan's Rodeo Ointment mends professional athletes. Dodgers pitcher Derek Lowe, whose blisters would cause him to throw blood-stained baseballs when he was with the [Boston Red Sox](#), says the black, tarry goo solved his chronic problem.

"It saved me from just having to make it through a game," Lowe, 33, said. "Now talent can dictate a game again, not how long you can hold on and endure the pain."

Johnston, who was a National League trainer at Major League Baseball's All-Star Game on Tuesday, has applied for a patent on his potion — a combination of Polymyxin B Sulfate and other ingredients. He says he is aiming to convince a pharmaceutical company to sell it as an over-the-counter medication.

"It heals things faster, any kinds of cuts, blisters, abrasions," Johnston, 46, said.

He already has believers. Most other Major League Baseball teams use it, along with the [Houston Texans](#) of the National Football League and the [University of South Carolina](#) football team. He says he expects to receive a patent Thursday.

For now, he has it made by SportPharm, a pharmacy based in Torrance, Calif., that supplies sports teams. It costs \$35 for a one-ounce tube, according to the president of SportPharm, Robert Nickell.

The ointment is excluded from the requirement for United States [Food and Drug Administration](#) approval because it is compounded by a pharmacy with substances that have already passed the agency's standards, said SportPharm's head pharmacist, Mike Pavlovich.

Johnston concocted the formula during his years in professional rodeo from 1974 to 1983. No ordinary cowboy, he had a bachelor's degree in sports medicine from Western Montana College in Dillon, which he attended on a rodeo scholarship. After he left the rodeo, he earned a master's degree in the field from Montana State in Bozeman in 1985.

After sustaining cuts and burns in the rodeo, Johnston used his expertise and combined

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Polymyxin B Sulfate, Bacitracin Zinc and Povidone Iodine, and applied it to his hands to toughen the skin.

“The pressure of the rope and heat from the rope would tear off the skin on my riding hand through my leather glove,” Johnston said. “You are riding a 1,600-, 1,800-pound animal. It would put a little bit of force on your hands.”

Johnston began using the substance on baseball players when he joined the Dodgers as a trainer in the team’s minor-league system in 1985. As players moved to other organizations, word spread.

South Carolina’s athletic trainer, Rod Walters, orders about 10 tubes a year for the football team and uses it to heal blisters on players’ feet and quarterbacks’ fingers.

“It has some healing properties in it,” said Walters, who heard about the ointment from SportPharm a few years ago. “It keeps it not so dried out. If it’s dried out, it gets very tender.”

Pavlovich, of SportPharm, said players applied the ointment two to four times a day for five to seven days. The skin heals, then toughens to help prevent the injury from recurring, he said.

The [Florida Marlins](#) ordered the ointment to help pitcher Josh Beckett combat nagging blisters. Beckett, who was traded to the Red Sox before this season, has been on the disabled list nine times in his six-year career, mostly because of blisters.

Beckett said he kept one tube with Red Sox trainers and another at home or the team’s hotel.

Johnston worked with Otsuka Pharmaceutical Company, a Tokyo-based drugmaker, for about a year, researching the market. Otsuka dropped out of the arrangement.

Getting a product like rodeo cream to the over-the-counter market takes five to seven years, said Brian Waldman, who advises companies and inventors on drug development for the Washington-based law firm Arent Fox.

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