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Scott James

July 2008 — Fair Game

Fair Trade Sports, Seattle, WA

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"Aside from spending time with my family in our vegetable garden, Green Festivals might be the most ideal place in the world for me," says Scott James, owner of [Fair Trade Sports](#), an eco-friendly, Fair Trade sports ball company that donates after-tax profits to children's charities like [Room to Read](#) and the [Boys & Girls Club](#). "I usually lose my voice there, which is a good sign that I've met several hundred more people from the Green America family that I'm proud to call friends."

We're proud to call Scott a friend too, and we're pleased to have Fair Trade Sports represented at our Green Festivals. For readers who haven't been to a Festival yet (and for those who have!), we asked Scott to tell us more about the next steps toward eco-friendlier sports balls, and what "respect" means to him.

Green America: What does your business do?

Scott James: We generate dollars for children's charities through the sale of the world's first line of eco-certified Fair Trade sports balls for soccer, football, basketball, rugby, volleyball, and more.



Scott explains the story behind Fair Trade Sports at our Seattle Green Festival.

What makes Fair Trade Sports green?

Scott: Seventy percent of any sports ball by weight is the interior air bladder — the thing that makes the ball bounce. Those air bladders are made of latex, a rubber product. Ours use eco-certified rubber from our forests in Sri Lanka and India that have been certified by Forest Stewardship Council. Our sports balls are also certified Fair Trade by the FLO, the Fairtrade Labeling Organization International, which ensures fair wages and a healthy work environment for the workers who make the balls.

"Respect" is the primary brand-name of the sports balls from Fair Trade Sports. This brand-name adds a third concept onto the coaching points with which many

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athletes are familiar: 1) Respect for yourself as an athlete. 2) Respect for your competition (whether you just won or lost). And 3) Respect for the hands that stitched your ball (with which you play, train, and compete).

What have been some of the biggest challenges of maintaining high standards of social and environmental responsibility?

Scott: No one else has begun greening sports balls yet because of the difficulties and expense involved. And no one else has produced certified Fair Trade sports balls yet because of the added expense and transparency required. The enormous multinational companies in this industry have not made a move in this direction yet, as they would rather pay their celebrity athlete spokespersons millions of dollars, rather than pay their workers a fair living wage. I hope to use Fair Trade Sports to model and encourage those multinational companies to convert their product lines to eco-certified and certified Fair Trade. Large companies can change, they just have to be encouraged and incentivized to do so.



R-E-S-P-E-C-T.

What did you do before you started your green business?

Scott: I've been told I'm a "computer geek with people skills." That's probably as good a description as any. I left the high-tech world to join the Fair Trade movement. My most recent high-tech job was with a small Seattle-based software company called Microsoft. You might have heard of it.

What was the worst job you had before dedicating yourself to Fair Trade?

Scott: That's probably a story best told over beers. Local, organic beers, of course.

What motivated you to start your own green business?

Scott: It occurred to me that one day Justice, my firstborn child, was going to ask me what I did for a living.

What's been your proudest moment as a green business owner?

Scott: Hearing my five-year-old explain to other children in his own words why a Fair Trade soccer ball is important.

What advice would you give to green entrepreneurs just starting out?

Scott: Start talking early to others involved in your industry, particularly your counterparts in Europe and the Pacific Rim. They are likely several years ahead of you in bringing their ideas to market.

What's the next green step you're working on right now?

Scott: I'm working on pulling ideas from my friends in the bio-fuel world to create a better synthetic leather outer shell for our sports balls (the other 30-



percent component that makes up a sports ball). Right now it is petroleum-based.

What is the most hopeful sign you've seen recently in the green economy?

Scott: That we can move (quickly) away from our dependence on foreign oil.

What are you most excited about going forward?

Scott: Directly benefitting the lives of our producers, the folks hand-stitching our sports balls. You should read some of the [producer stories we have on our blog](#). Awesome people.

What is your most popular product?

Scott: It's a close tie between our children's soccer balls and the full-size footballs.

What green product could you not live without?

Scott: No question ... yerba mate from my brothers and sisters at [Guayaki](#).



**70% eco-certified latex;
100% certified Fair Trade.**

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