



RAINY DAY REWARDS:

Ruined Medical Kit Turns AT into an Entrepreneur

Craig LoNigro, MS, ATC, is a proud alumnus of Hofstra University. It's where he got his start in athletic training. It's where he met his wife, Kristin LoNigro, MSED, ATC, who now serves as clinical coordinator of Hofstra's AT education program.

It's also where he's seeing the next chapter of his professional story unfold—and what a story it is.

"Just the other day, Hofstra was playing against Stony Brook in lacrosse, and we were sitting in the stands when it started to rain," LoNigro said. "I see the Hofstra athletic training staff run over to the sidelines and take out a whole fleet of FOOBAGs to protect their equipment. It was kind of a proud papa moment for me."

The FOOBAG (For Outdoor Only) is LoNigro's answer to trash bag-protected athletic training equipment. It's a line of "rain jackets for your gear," designed to protect medical kits and supplies from Mother Nature while keeping them easily accessible.

He launched the business in 2010, selling by word of mouth and from a website designed by his brother. By the end of 2011, the FOOBAG made its first appearance in a sales catalog, thanks to LoNigro's friend Wally Collins of Collins Sports Medicine. Last year, LoNigro advanced to the second round of the application process for ABC's "Shark Tank." This year, he was awarded a patent on his product.

It's an overnight success many years in the making. LoNigro remembers the exact moment the FOOBAG idea was born.

"My 'aha' moment came early one Saturday morning when I pulled up to the stadium at my high school," said LoNigro, now a full-time elementary school physical education teacher and a part-time athletic trainer. "It was pouring rain, and I was there to get ready for the football game. One of the coaches had borrowed my golf cart to take equipment down to the field. I thought, 'What are the chances he remembered to put my medical kit in a trash bag?' So I went out into the monsoon, and my whole kit was soaked. Everything was ruined.

"That very day I went home and documented the size of every single medical kit on the market, made some notes on some scrap paper—and that's how I started the FOOBAG."

With just a few weeks remaining until the AT Expo held in conjunction with the NATA Clinical Symposia in Baltimore, LoNigro is

excited to unveil the newest addition to the FOOBAG line: the Big FOO XXL, developed at the request of fellow athletic trainers who need protection for crutches, braces and other unwieldy gear. It joins the existing line of small, medium, large and AED-sized bags.

The Baltimore show—like the business itself—will be a family affair.

“My wife is my VP, and my daughters [Kelsi, 17, and Carli, 14] are in the business, too: one is the director of marketing and the other is the director of promotions,” LoNigro said. “We’ve spent quality time as a family, turning the Ping-Pong table in the basement into a production line.”

When LoNigro ventured onto the national stage for the first time at the NATA trade show in Las Vegas, he didn’t know how it would turn out.

“After the show, my wife and I took the girls to the Grand Canyon,” he said. “So there we were, driving across the Arizona

desert, and a motorcycle passed us—and the woman on the bike was wearing one of my FOOBAG T-shirts I had given away at the show! It was so cool.”

LoNigro understands the power of a free giveaway from his own firsthand experience as an athletic trainer. But he learned most of his entrepreneurial skills from his father, Richard. After a stint in the Minor Leagues with the Yankees’ farm system, the elder LoNigro has built the family business, Port Jefferson Sporting Goods, into one of the top 10 privately owned team sales sporting goods companies in America.

“I remember as a little kid having all this stuff in our garage,” LoNigro said. “I spent, and still spend, many Saturdays working in the store on Long Island. I’m one of 11 kids, and we all fell into business in some way. You just learn by default. And I saw how my dad did everything he could to make his business work. I’ve learned everything from him.”

As LoNigro continues to expand—mostly through athletic training equipment catalogs—he takes pride in every design improvement, such as the shoulder strap function inspired by Pepper Burruss, ATC, or the rip-stop added to counter the weight of a fully stocked, extra-large medical kit.

Originally manufactured in New Jersey, the FOOBAG now is made overseas, thanks to the help of longtime friends Steven and Howard Meller—the second generation of Champion Sports. Quality, inventory and delivery have improved exponentially, LoNigro said, allowing him to better serve ATs.

LoNigro sees a day when the FOOBAG will spill into additional markets. He knows that would likely take him further afield from athletic training. But ask him who he is, and LoNigro doesn’t hesitate.

“I’m an athletic trainer who made a product for other athletic trainers,” he said. “I’ll always be that.” §

