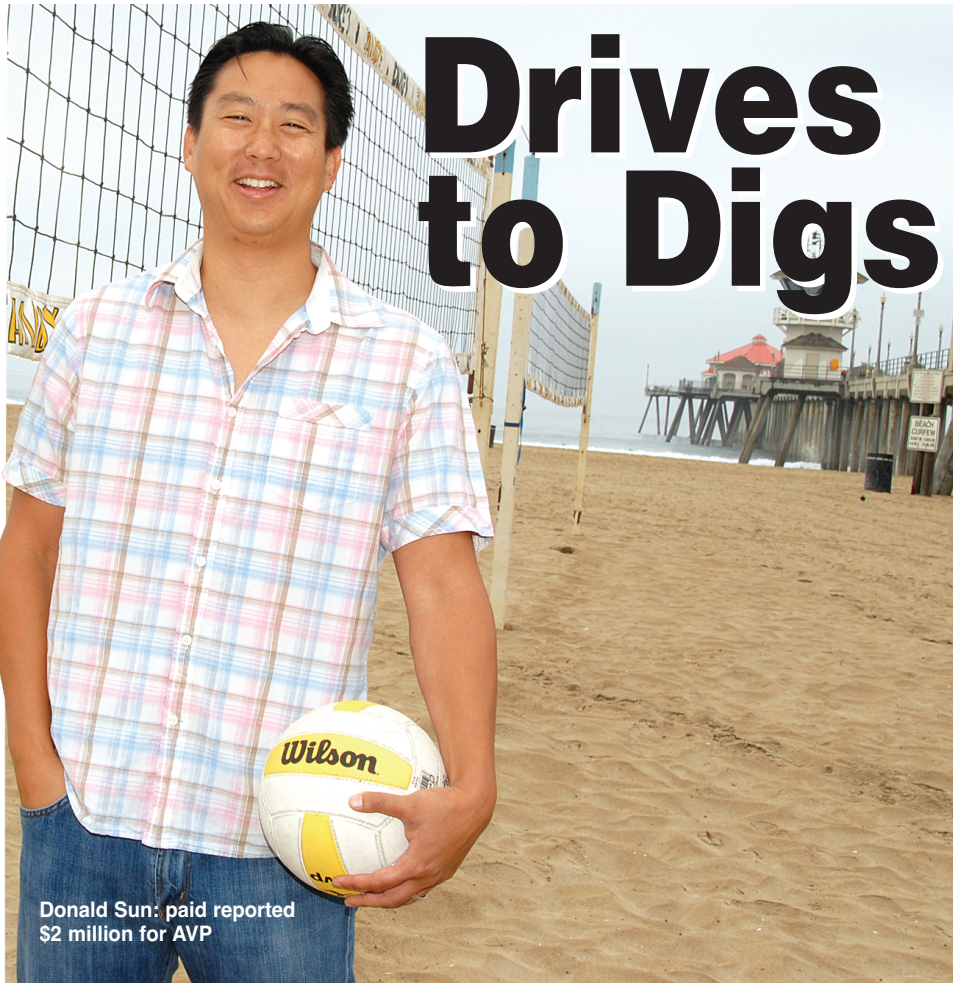


ORANGE COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL



Donald Sun: paid reported
\$2 million for AVP

Son of Kingston Technology Founder Takes on Pro Volleyball

■ By PATRICK CORBET

Donald Sun is taking his talents to the beach.

That's no short trip for the son of **David Sun**, cofounder of **Kingston Technology Corp.** The younger Sun had been director of flash planning and procurement at the Fountain Valley-based company, the world's largest third-party maker of drives and other memory devices with an estimated \$5.8 billion in revenue last year.

Then he paid a reported \$2 million for the **Association of Volleyball Professionals**, and set out to claim ground in a relatively small niche of the sports world.

Costa Mesa-based AVP operates the AVP

Pro Beach Volleyball Tour, which produces events across the nation. Teams of two compete in tournaments for cash prizes and AVP ranking points.

Players earn points individually, but traditionally compete with a set partner on the circuit. Teams compete on an event-by-event basis, with championship events drawing pros based on their standing on points.

Any two ambitious volleyballers can enter qualifying matches in open tournaments.

Highs and Lows

The Costa Mesa-based league has had an up-and-down existence since it started in 1983.

Some high points: AVP athletes have won gold medals in every Summer Olympics since beach volleyball was added as a sport in 1996. **Misty May-Treanor** and **Kerri Walsh-Jennings** took the gold at the recent Olympics in London.

The Olympic final pitted May-Treanor and Walsh-Jennings against fellow Americans **April Ross** and **Jennifer Kessy**. It generated a big buzz for beach volleyball and set the table for the AVP's return.

The low points: The league has filed for bankruptcy multiple times, most recently in 2010.

The opportunity for Sun to make the switch from the tech world to the beach volleyball world came in April and seemed well timed for him and the league.

"I really decided I needed a change in terms of direction and profession," Sun said.

AVP needed a financial rescue.

He is an Irvine native who played volleyball and attended various AVP events growing up. Sun purchased AVP in April and has hit the ground running, with **Dick Carle**, a former advertising and media agency executive, as chairman.

The duo said they needed to act fast following the success of beach volleyball in the London Olympics, seizing the opportunity to show fans the AVP was serious about coming back.

They also took it as a chance to demonstrate a commitment to athletes and sponsors, according to **John Eckel**, founder and president of **RockandSock'em Marketing** in Newport Beach, which has been brought on to help with marketing.

Eckel is a 22-year public relations veteran who counts a stint as president and chief executive of New York-based **Grey Global Group's** branded entertainment division before launching RockandSock'em.

He joined Sun and Carle into getting AVP back in the game after a two-year hiatus.

"The first challenge was, 'Are you for real and how are you going to come back?'" Eckel said.

Two Events

Sun announced a pair of events for the 2012 season just two months after acquiring the league: the AVP Cincinnati Open and the 2012 AVP Championships in Santa Barbara.

Cincinnati had played host to six prior AVP tournaments. The 2012 event was held over Labor Day Weekend, with past Olympic gold medalists **Phil Dalhausser** and **Todd Rogers** were among the competitors.

Poor weather hindered attendance, according to Sun, but the event still allowed the AVP

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Sun, Carle, Eckel: have deal with Wilson, hope to capitalize on buzz about volleyball at London Olympics

AVP

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to begin to develop an identity for events moving forward. The Open featured stadium-style seating and a total prize purse of \$175,000, the highest among pro beach volleyball's regular-season events.

The 2012 AVP Championship in Santa Barbara showed more potential. The three-day event drew about 30,000 fans. Most fans attended for free, with reserved seats court-side going for \$35, and entrance to a shaded private box with a lounge area getting \$50.

The event also attracted sponsors such as **Gatorade** and **Dos Equis**, among others, according to Eckel.

The AVP earned a boost with sponsors and athletes, based on Sun's decision to put up most of the money for two events, according to Eckel.

"Donald funded and invested in those events, which really answered any credibility concerns, got players fired up, [and]

demonstrated his commitment to the sport," Eckel said.

That sets the stage for the 2013 season, which has four events scheduled so far, with more likely coming.

Also in place are ties that Sun re-established with Chicago-based sports equipment maker **Wilson Sporting Goods Co.** Wilson licenses the AVP name for its line of volleyball equipment, which brings in some revenue and "provides an identity," according to Sun. Terms of the deal were not released.

The plans to revitalize the AVP also count on recognizing where the association previously failed. The league had put a premium on broadcasting its events on channels such as NBC and Fox Sports Net in the past. The AVP bought blocks of time at up to \$200,000 an hour and sought to sell advertising on its own, according to the SportsBusiness Journal.

That didn't work out.

"The former AVP business model relied heavily on televising tour events nationally on network TV, which is a major expense and

investment, unless one achieves high ratings points for each telecast to drive awareness, sell sponsor products, and build the brand," Carle said. "The challenge was that they had difficulty reaching more than 1 million viewers with each national broadcast. That created a very high cost per thousand viewers at a correspondingly low return on investment."

The AVP plans to rely more on live-streaming over the Internet to reach larger audiences at lower cost.

"TV will be a key element in the mix, but not the dominant driver it once was on the Tour," Carle said.

Four Majors

The 2013 AVP season doubles as the association's 30th anniversary, and will feature four Majors:

- The Classic will incorporate a retro feel while honoring beach volleyball legends.

- The Open allows for any team to qualify.

- The Players Tournament will allow athletes to vote on rules and format.

- And the 2013 AVP Championship will include teams that compete based on the 2013 season rankings.

The league is open to working with competing pro beach volleyball leagues, such as the **Jose Cuervo Pro Beach Volleyball Series**, but has no set plans. The Jose Cuervo Pro Beach Volleyball Series began in 2011 and had seven events in 2012, including The Huntington Beach National Championships in September.

"The dialogue is there," Sun said. "It is needed for the growth of the sport."

The AVP has also established a partnership with the Surfrider Foundation, a nonprofit organization whose efforts focus on protecting oceans and beaches. The league and nonprofit have teamed up on the AVP Serve & Protect America's Beaches Program.

The decisions Sun has made in his efforts to relaunch the AVP often are grounded in his experience with Kingston in the tech industry and lessons from his father, the cofounder and chief operating officer of the company.

"I have the greatest teacher and business professor in the world in my dad," Sun said. ■