



THE SIGNALFAN™

Q&A BY EDIE TOLCHIN

Q & A with Jill Cakert, inventor of the new sports strategy signaling device, The Signalfan™: Our contributing editor, Edie G. Tolchin, recently met up with Jill Cakert, who was kind enough to share her insight and experience in inventing and developing her new sports-related product.

Edie G. Tolchin: Please tell us a bit about yourself and your background.

Jill Cakert: My name is Jill Cakert, I am a dental hygienist, wife, mother of three, (grandmother of a 21 month-old granddaughter and a one day-old grandson, at the time of this writing.) I am also a softball coach. I received a scholarship to Temple University to play Division I softball. I have been involved with softball since I was nine years old and it has always been my passion. I got my education, met my husband, and made many good friends through the game. Out of my passion, and love of the game, The Signalfan was born.

The Signalfan was a clearer way to give signs to our players while keeping our opponents totally guessing. It is much easier than trying to read a bunch of jumbled hand signals or shouting to players over the clamor of voices in a game. The Signalfan also enables coaches' signs to look the same no matter which coach from your team is giving them. As a result, I was able to coach for our local high school varsity program and run the offense while I still worked part-time at the dental office. The one or two games I missed because of work were able to be coached by another coach without any miscommunication.

The Signalfan standardized our signs and, it was right there to see. We won our high school's first softball division championship in 35 years using The Signalfan for offense, defense, moving fielders, and even calling some pitches.

EGT: What exactly is The Signalfan Pat: D591,622?

What are its many uses? Which types of sports teams can use it?

JC: The Signalfan is a color-signaling system that may also use direction, number of paddles, an indicator, a combination of those, or even a sequence of paddles to relate the coach's or teacher's instructions. It can be used for any sport in which there is time to glance over to get a sign. It is a non-verbal way to communicate and its applications are continually expanding into other sports and may also be useful in a classroom setting, for multi-language, hearing-impaired, or a noisy environment.

EGT: Who decides which color(s) represent which strategies or moves?

JC: Each coach, team, or person, chooses how they want to get their signs across. There are thousands of variations and the signs may be as simple or as complex as you wish. If you are using color you

can change the sign by switching the location of the color, change its direction, or perhaps the indicator or number of paddles. So the colors can stay the same all season. If you are using a number of paddles only and not color, you can vary the colors or direction or which side you hold it. Periodically, people have come up with new ideas that I haven't even thought of. For example, if you have one of the 8% of the population who is colorblind you can simply add stripes or dots or other patterns to differentiate the paddles or simply use number of paddles and direction.

EGT: I see you hold US Patent #D591,622. Did you do the patent research on your own?

JC: I hired a patent attorney to research the patent and I reviewed all the papers as well. I also got a second legal opinion from another patent attorney.

EGT: How long did it take to obtain your patent?

JC: I received confirmation of my patent a little over a year after it was filed.

EGT: Did you create a prototype?

JC: Yes, the prototypes were made in various sizes and various attachments were tried. The input from a field hockey coach my nephew was dating at the time helped me decide on the size of the paddles. I wanted them to fit into a pocket. That same coach, Jaclyn Roesch, was the first to use The Signalfan for field hockey. And field hockey was the first sport to embrace The Signalfan.

EGT: Please share with us your

manufacturing process. Is your product made domestically or overseas?

JC: My product is made in the USA with parts from different companies. I then assemble The Signalfan with help from family and friends. I had emailed various plastic companies and had gotten quite a few responses. Some actually called me and with their help I figured out the kind of material I needed to use.

EGT: Did you encounter any snafus or obstacles in making your product?

JC: Figuring out every aspect of the product is time consuming and takes a lot of effort. (I took a lot of trips to our local hardware store.) Then, finding the best places to get the parts in some kind of small bulk is the next step. Finding a company that was willing to make a small batch (144) was not easy. I was lucky to have found one to start with. I moved to a computerized company after the first two batches.

EGT: Once you received your first production run, had you already begun to pre-sell The Signalfan, or did you perhaps work with a PR or marketing firm to get the word out there?

JC: At first I gave some out for free. I actually attended a field hockey clinic for coaches and set up an inviting booth for coaches to speak to me about The Signalfan. The directors of the clinic allowed me to address the attendees to explain how The Signalfan worked. That was my first exposure to the public other than my using The Signalfan at tournaments in softball. My sales have been through my website, a

few other websites that I wholesale to or drop ship for, coaches' clinics, and YouTube videos. It is now in 35 states in the US and also in Canada, Japan, and Italy.

EGT: Did you learn anything particularly significant about the marketing aspect of your product you might want to share with our readers?

JC: To market something that is so different is not an easy task. I have found clinics and YouTube videos some of my best resources. I am open to and always looking for new ways to get the word out.

EGT: Do you have any final advice or words of encouragement for our readers?

JC: People comment on how I have been tenacious and have kept plugging for so long (six years.) If you truly believe in your product and its worth, it is easy to persevere. It is then more a labor of love. It has been an interesting ride (and not easy to take); and, I am sure it will continue to be so. I feel The Signalfan is a true asset in the sports world. Communication is key in all things and very much so in sports.

EGT: How can our readers contact you and order your product?

JC: www.thesignalfan.com and email is info@sportsignalfan.com. A portion of every sale is donated to Autism foundations. The cost of The Signalfan on my site is \$24.99.

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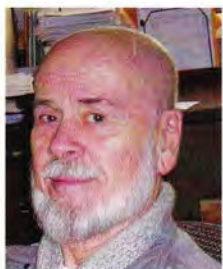
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EDIE TOLCHIN, known as “The Sourcing Lady” (SM), “invented” EGT Global Trading in 1997, with a goal to link U.S. inventors with Asian manufacturers, to provide an exclusive import service for sourcing, quality control, production testing and safety issues, manufacturing, international financing, air/ocean shipping, customs clearance arrangements, and dock-to-door delivery. Website: www.egtglobaltrading.com



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