



# THE POWER OF CULTURE & PERFORMANCE

A LOOK INSIDE TEAM EXOS &  
SKLZ

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As SMBA 15' prepares for Spring Break, the tenth cohort was treated to a specially arranged tour of the Team EXOS/SKLZ facility in Carlsbad, courtesy of Prof. Frank Ryan. For me, the visit combined my undergraduate studies as a kinesiology major and my current work in the Sports MBA program in the form of a building that's home to a high-performance training center and an innovative sports equipment company.

To kick off the afternoon, we were led around the Team EXOS side of the facility, a high-tech training and wellness facility, by Performance Manager Victor Hall. From the open feel of the facility to the imagery on the walls, the EXOS mission of Mindset, Nutrition, Movement & Recovery, has a strong presence throughout the building – collectively creating an “athlete refuge”. From ping pong and video games to a juice bar offering individualized pre-and-post-workout shooters, EXOS houses not only a multidimensional training facility but a place where individuals can be themselves outside of their training regimens.

As we toured the training room floor, Victor explained that the open design and overall feel of the training area relates directly to the core value of movement. Whereas traditional gyms focus on targeting muscle groups, EXOS focuses on functionality and dynamic movement as it relates to performance. With physical therapy staff on-site, state of the art classrooms that open into the training room and access to sports massage tools such as foam rollers and massage sticks, the single-floor layout of the training area also relates to the integration of EXOS' values of mindset and recovery.

The back of the building housed a pair of hydrotherapy pools to aid in recovery and a variety of turf areas tailored towards sports specific training. Among the variable turf areas was a strip of an all-weather track alongside a strip of turf similar to what is used in the NFL training combine for the 40-yard dash.

**From a business perspective, the cohesive attitude toward training has not only brought Team EXOS recognition by Forbes, CBS Sports, NFL.com and Sports Illustrated, but a unique collaboration with the other half of the building, SKLZ. Inspired by his children, SKLZ is headed by CEO and founder John Sarkisian, who received his MBA from SDSU.**

While EXOS focuses on how best to use training tools to enhance performance, SKLZ is the hard goods provider of training and development tools. Their philosophy is that every elite athlete was at one point an aspiring young athlete, so why should development and performance enhancement be limited to those who are already at the elite level? Both companies aim to make athletes better, so the partnership between the two came naturally. With a shared vision of improving performance through skill development and education, SKLZ focuses on young athletes who can't come to train at an EXOS facility.

We toured the warehouse where we witnessed operational efficiency in the form of a custom box machine, a room full of designers working on models of SKLZ's next product and the Inventor Wall, homage to those who helped get SKLZ off the ground. Initially, 90% of SKLZ products came from inventors with marketable ideas, but simply ran out of resources. As the company continues to grow, 70% of product research and development is now done in house.

Directly across the Inventor Wall was yet another powerful installation of imagery portraying the SKLZ journey. Through a series of hanging panels, the story begins in 2002 with the Hit-A-Way Ball, the baseball trainer that started as a ball strapped to a surf leash. With Reggie Jackson as the brand ambassador for the trainer, SKLZ moved over 300,000 units in the first year. Fast forward to 2014 and SKLZ is currently in 26 countries and averages an inventory turnover three times a year.



After briefly touring the upstairs offices and observing the wall of five-year employee bobble heads, the class was treated to a presentation by Mark Verstegen, Founder and President of EXOS and CEO Dan Burns. Inspired by the values instilled in him as a child, Mark Verstegen is motivated by the desire to help others. As an entrepreneur, he has found a way to turn his passion into a model of systematic support and consistency that results in giving others the courage to push themselves to a high level of sustainable performance.

The duo that grew EXOS from a small business to the successful model it is today offered us the following advice: Know your values, have a game plan, and then place value on what you have to offer. The power of culture is eminent, especially in the tight-knit world of sports and with a shared vision of the future, partnerships will form organically.

I could go on and on transcribing the notes that I enthusiastically wrote in a flurry while they spoke, but it was this last note that I found extremely profound.

EXOS is in the business of proactive health and upgrading lives, and the only way to truly tap into an individual is to seek to understand. If you find the person that lies inside and listen to what their definition of success is only then can you actively interject to push them toward their goal. One's mindset is always first.

And as we rack our brains day in and day out, we can't lose sight of what's really important. Our values are what drive us to action, our skillset helps us to develop a plan, but in the end it is our mentality that ultimately leads to a decision. As emerging professionals in a world that is naturally competitive, we must maintain a sense of responsibility and take ownership of all that we do. Because only then can we give ourselves a chance to sustain whatever task is thrown at us, whether it's in the form of a project or an exam, or even an internship.

As we prepare for the next round of midterms after spring break, it was extremely refreshing to step out of the classroom and observe professionals in their natural environment. SMBA 15' is thankful to Professor Ryan for arranging the tour and to Victor, John, Mark and Dan for taking time out of their day to show us their impressive facilities and offer us invaluable advice for our professional and personal lives.

