

# LET THEM EAT SMOKE

By CONNIE OSWALD STOFKO

**T**he skier's sinewy arms stab the poles into the snow, his supple body leaning into each turn as he races toward the finish line. The exertion and the exhilaration of the race, coupled with the cold, fresh air, coax his skin into a rosy glow. He is the picture of health and it's easy to see how he got that way: exercise, rest, a well balanced diet, and, judging from the banners lining the race course — cigarettes.

Sponsorship of athletic events by tobacco companies is common, complains Alan Blum, M.D. There's the Marlboro Recreational Ski Challenge and Camel Ski Days. And the Camel GT Auto Race and Camel Professional Motorcycle Race. Check out the Skoal insignia on the backs of the pit crew as they furiously labor over a repair. It's hard to miss the huge Marlboro logo displayed during baseball games at Shea Stadium, even if you're watching the game on television.

ESPN and TNN, national sports networks, show virtually continuous tobacco-sponsored sporting events all weekend, he noted.

But in what Blum calls a "real breakthrough," one U.S. team is going to an international competition, not under the name of a tobacco company, but under a pro-health banner.

The U.S. Boomerang team rejected an offer by the Philip Morris company to sponsor the team to the tune of \$15,000, Blum said. Now the team hopes to raise \$12,000 before it competes in an international tournament in Australia May 6-15. The team includes Barnaby Ruhe, who was featured in a *Reporter* article about boomerangs on Aug. 29, 1985.

The team is tiny, but Blum hopes that if such a small team can stand up to powerful tobacco companies, it will give others the courage to do the same.

**B**lum, who is in family medicine at Baylor University School of Medicine, is founder and chairman of DOC (Doctors Ought to Care), an anti-tobacco group. Speaking at UB last week, he called for a ban on tobacco advertising.

Tobacco is the number one preventable cause of death and disease in our society, says Blum, who is the former editor of the *New York State Journal of Medicine*. About 3 million Americans have died since 1981 due to smoking, notes Blum. That's a lot more than the 18,000 to 25,000 deaths due to AIDS in the same period.

"Yet there's not one single U.S. senator supporting a ban on tobacco advertising," he said. "It's the Marie Antoinette attitude — let them eat smoke."

It could be argued that by now people should know better than to smoke and should merely ignore cigarette advertising. But tobacco advertising, especially at sporting events, panders to the very people who *don't* know better

Dr. Alan Blum wants to change the U.S.'s 'Marie Antoinette' attitude toward smoking

— kids and the poor, says Blum. Advertising undermines the understanding of the risks involved with smoking.

Blum said he's worried that the Philip Morris Company will be successful in its attempt to sponsor the World Soccer Federation championships in 1994 and make the company's name "synonymous with the fastest growing kids' sport in the country."

The famous soccer star Pele advertises Tang in children's comic books and magazines, he noted. Kids also see him wearing a Marlboro T-shirt. Both products are made by Philip Morris companies, Blum said.

Kids aren't just buying cigarettes, they're buying brand names, Blum said, and they're wearing T-shirts emblazoned with cigarette logos.

"Every kid knows the Marlboro cowboy," Blum said. "If cigarette advertising is aimed at adults, find me one guy who started smoking in his twenties because he saw a cowboy on a billboard."

**T**o combat tobacco advertising, DOC is paying for counter-advertising. That's a big difference between DOC and other groups, Blum noted — DOC *buys* ads.

"Tobacco companies know how to get kids, but we don't do as well," Blum said. "Public service messages don't do a thing."

"Dippy" slogans like "We're fighting for your life" don't get out the message that smoking is bad, it just conjures up images of asking for money for test tubes, he noted. And the message won't come across through some pronouncement from the surgeon general.

Satirical humor and parody are the tools DOC uses. Instead of "Benson &

Hedges," DOC promotes "Benson & Heart Attack." "Virginia Slims" become "Virginia Slime" as well as "Emphysema Slims" — "You've coughed up long enough, baby."

A parody of the "Marlboro man," the symbol of the brand a large per-

*He wants to combat ads that pander to kids and the poor.*

tage of kids buy, features the "Barfboro man," Blum said.

The people who have less education and less money smoke the most, Blum said, and an argument could be made that there would be a market for cigarettes there without advertising. But tobacco companies increase that market through advertising, he said.

**T**he tobacco companies also donate money to black and Hispanic organizations. The companies pretend to do it through a sense of civic responsibility, but it's just a payoff to keep their market, Blum charged. People within the minority community, such as black publishers, are accomplices, he added.

"I call it sui-genocide," Blum said. "I think black publishers have sold out the black public, and they know it."

Blum plays no favorites. "I attack black, Spanish, and Jewish organizations equally," he said.

He lays even more blame on the mass media than he does on tobacco com-

panies since the media "know right from wrong." Newspapers will run editorials against smoking or a series encouraging people to quit smoking, then turn around and take money to advertise cigarettes.

The irony came through on Blum's slides: one showed the front cover of *Time* magazine with an article on medical costs; the back cover is a cigarette ad.

In Canada, the 10 largest newspapers forgo cigarette advertising, and there's a bill pending called C-51 that would prohibit it. But most papers in the U.S. don't even report on the Canadian bill, much less follow suit, he complained.

Some American newspapers say it's a First Amendment issue and they feel they must take the ads. While they'll take a stand against smoking, they're careful to never say a nasty word about the powerful tobacco companies, Blum said.

**H**e noted that these diverse corporations also manufacture food and other goods, and "nobody is willing to take on RJR Nabisco or Philip Morris." He pointed out that the ad agency for Nabisco cookies was recently fired because it created an ad for Northwest Airlines that cheered the prohibition of smoking on the airline's flights. Nabisco and R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company Inc. are both subsidiaries of RJR Nabisco.

"The real key on this to remember is that they aren't diversifying to get out of the tobacco business, but diversifying to insulate the tobacco companies," says Blum. "Virtually all of their profit comes from tobacco."

Blum also had harsh words for university faculty members who press for divestment of faculty pension funds from companies that operate in South Africa, but won't divest from lucrative tobacco companies. "South Africa" has become a buzzword, he said.

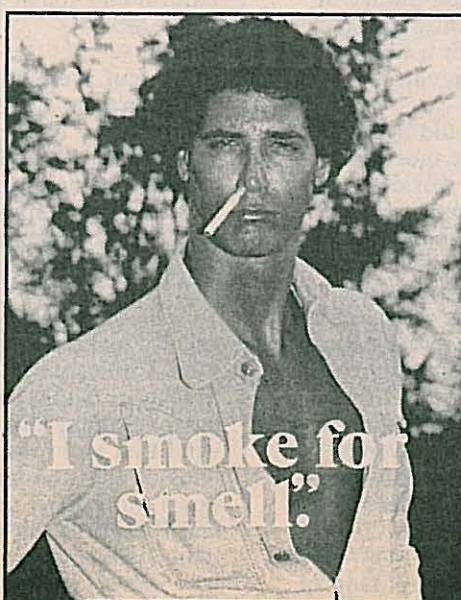
"We care about buzzwords, not issues," Blum said. "If we did, we would care about the millions of people dying, and not say that's what they deserve."

He also criticized faculty members who take research money from tobacco companies to study topics like nutrition.

"It's really hush money so they won't talk about things like smoking and heart disease," Blum claimed. A tobacco company that studies nutrition is like a person who builds an orphanage, but burned down the village in the first place, he said.

Blum's talk was sponsored by the Buffalo Public Interest Law Program, a group of law students interested in non-traditional law careers, and Roswell Park Memorial Institute. It was attended by a small group of law students, medical students, medical researchers, and reporters.

Tax-deductible donations for the U.S. Boomerang Team can be sent to DOC, c/o Dr. Alan Blum, P.O. Box 31604, Houston, Texas, 77231-1604. □



DOC's Barfboro Man