



ERIC OLIG/STAFF

Dr. John W. "Rick" Richards Jr. (left) is national president  
He stands with Dr. Adam Goldstein, founder of the Augusta chapter

## Physicians sponsor U.S. boomerang team

By Stephanie Neal  
Staff Writer

Boomerangs? In Augusta?

In Australia, actually mate. But an Augusta-based physicians' group now is the sponsor of the U.S. boomerang team, which is in Australia for World Cup competition that begins Friday.

Doctors Ought to Care, a 700-member pro-health organization, became the sponsor of the team after it rejected a deal from Phillip Morris tobacco company because team members didn't want to wear cigarettes on their jerseys, according to Dr. John W. "Rick" Richards Jr., national president of DOC who is a family practice physician and professor at the Medical College of Georgia.

"DOC is the first health group to sponsor a sports team ... It's a chance for us to show that there are other groups in the United States

that are willing to sponsor sporting events," Dr. Richards said. "Sports teams will not collapse if they don't take the tobacco company's money."

Tobacco companies sponsor sporting events ranging from tennis tournaments to auto racing to tractor pulls. The physicians' group says the companies sponsor the events to promote smoking to younger fans.

Since its beginnings in 1977, DOC has sponsored counter-events — such as the Emphysema Slims Tennis Tournament in Augusta — to offset the publicity generated by tobacco company dollars and to encourage people to make "informed choices" about the smoking habit, Dr. Richards said.

With that in mind, DOC took the three-man boomerang team under its wing about a month ago after the team captain was put in touch with Dr. Alan Blum, founder of DOC who is with the Baylor School of Medicine in Houston.

Although the team had approached Phillip Morris about sponsorship, they were concerned when they learned they would be used to promote tobacco products, Dr. Blum said. The team said they had hoped they would be used to promote food products also produced by Phillip Morris, such as cereal or gelatin.

Additionally, boomerang team member Eric Darnell, is an asthmatic, and was opposed to promoting tobacco products, Dr. Blum said.

So the team rejected the \$15,000 Phillip Morris deal, and accepted DOC's \$12,000 offer.

About half of that money has been raised, mostly in small donations from physicians, Dr. Blum said.

And members of the U.S. boomerang team now sport uniforms with the universal "no smoking symbol" instead of a brand of cigarettes.

"This is a bunch of athletes that is willing to forego tobacco companies," Dr. Blum said.

It's likely plastic boomerangs with the no smoking emblem soon will be among DOC's anti-smoking campaign materials, Dr. Richards said.