

Bobbles, Fleury Flakes, Bleier's Brew, and More

For the past 17 years, Brian Koeberle, who runs a one-man law firm situated off Campbell's Run Road along the Parkway, has keyed in on the pulse of sports fans with what he calls "good marriages" between products and representatives to put on their labels, or sometimes shape the products altogether.

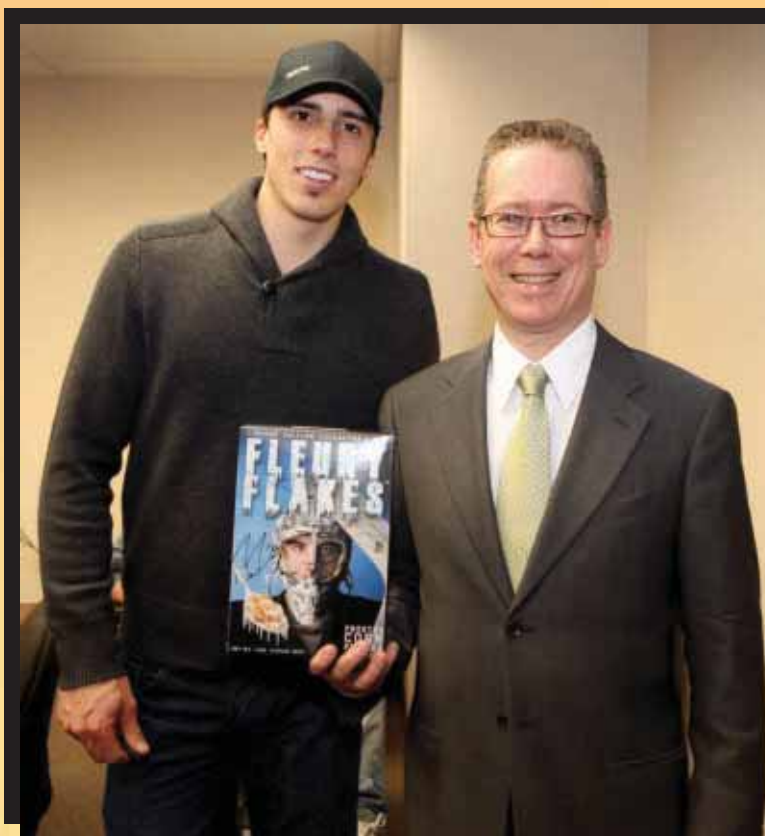
Operating out of offices in Penn Center West that he shares with PLB Sports, a brokerage firm branding foodstuffs from candy to ketchup,

Koeberle is part agent and part lawyer, often teaming up with PLB to develop marketing strategies to sell their own sports figure-centric foods. Over the years, the thousands of endorsement deals he's helped create have not only benefited those celebrities he's represented, but also the charities they support and local businesses.

Proceeds from a recent re-release of the popular Fleury Flakes, for instance, benefit the Pittsburgh Penguins' Project Power Play, which helps youth organizations build outdoor hockey rinks. They're also benefitting Ballou Skies, an organization that helps boys with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. The popularity and collectability of the box, says Koeberle, has had him fielding orders from as far away as Alaska and Sweden.

"The postage was pretty expensive," he says.

Proceeds from Bleier's Brew, meanwhile, benefit a charity that's helping to complete the Southwestern Pennsylvania WWII



ABOVE: Marc-Andre Fleury of the Pittsburgh Penguins, left, with Attorney Brian Koeberle, on the release of the popular Fleury Flakes cereal box.

Memorial on Pittsburgh's North Shore alongside the already constructed Vietnam and Korean War memorials. Four-time Super Bowl winning Steeler running back Rocky Bleier is, of course, a decorated Vietnam veteran.

The beer, which Koeberle says sold out quickly, was also brewed by Pennsylvania Brewing Company.

"We really wanted to stay local on that," he says. "Penn is a great brewer."

It's not exactly how Koeberle envisioned his career when, as a law student at Duquesne

University, he began gravitating towards sports representation. Upon graduation, he quickly found out it wasn't exactly the easiest field to get into, with firms that were hardly receptive.

So he got involved with the Major League Baseball Alumni Association, a nonprofit that connects retired MLB players with endorsement opportunities. It was while working there that Koeberle got to meet and work with icons he followed while growing up as an Orioles fan in Erie. A favored uncle turned him on to the team, and over the years the Pirates broke his heart more than once, both in 1971 and again in 1979, by beating his beloved Baltimore in the World Series.

Years later, he found himself meeting and working with those same baseball icons he'd grown up watching play in the 1970's, in what he calls, "a good era for baseball."

After a number of years working for the nonprofit he

How about a box of Fleury Flakes! Or a Bleier Brew!

Or some Bret “The Diesel” Keisel Salsa? Attorney Brian Koeberle handles celebrity endorsements for products and more.

ventured off and started his own business and began collecting clients. At first he started working with professional athletes in baseball, football, basketball, and hockey, along with boxers, Olympians, and then celebrities.

Over the years, he’s worked with Willie Stargell and John “Boog” Powell, signing them both to deals with Repp Big and Tall. He got “Mean” Joe Green and MLB players Johnny Bench and George Brett to lend their likenesses to Franklin Mint statues. He arranged for the Yogi Berra and Jackie Robinson versions of the Cooperstown Bears.

And those Steelers bobble heads from a couple years back, with the likenesses of classic players like Jack Ham, Mel Blount, Mike Webster, L.C. Greenwood, and others – those were his doing.

“We hit it just at the right time with those,” he says about the bobble heads, which were sold at Giant Eagle stores. “It’s usually something you see at Pirates games but it worked out well.”

Not long ago, Icelandic Seafood contacted him as they were looking to start distributing a jumbo-sized frozen fish filet to restaurants. Koeberle thought about it for a moment and then came up with the idea of getting former Chicago Bears Defensive Tackle William “The Fridge” Perry to promote the campaign.

“They were saying they wanted something giant,” he says. “It made sense.”

Perry made appearances at seafood conventions in the Icelandic booth, signing autographs and sampling fish.

Koeberle also regularly gets clients to do appearances at Altoona Curve and other minor league baseball games. He’s gotten Jeff Cohen, who played Chunk in “Goonies,” and Peter Mayhew, who wore the Chewbacca costume in “Star Wars,” to both throw out first pitches.

Toward the beginning of the season, he says, requests for sports figures at the minor league games tend to lean more towards football players, and then at the end more toward hockey. For the hockey players, they started having them “slap out the first puck” while a junior hockey player got to be

the “catcher.”

Among those he’s gotten to appear in Altoona include Pascal Dupuis, Matt Cooke, and James Neal, along with Lawrence Timmons, Ziggy Hood, Antonio Brown, and LaMarr Woodley.

The other side of Koeberle’s business consists of work as a transactional attorney, handling out of court work like real estate law and small business representation in an office filled with just some of the hundreds of products he’s helped brand. For the most part, the legal side and sports representation sides have remained separate. But recently they merged when he took on a client appealing a code of conduct violation.

Koeberle won’t say who, but points to a trend in professional sports where players are appealing more and more sanctions due to a heightened awareness of concussions, first in professional football, and then hockey and now possibly even baseball. And while that heightened awareness is a good thing, punishments haven’t always been consistent. Until they are, it’s possible more players might begin seeking legal representation from individuals with sports backgrounds like Koeberle.

For the past 17 years, Koeberle has also been teaching a course on sports law at Robert Morris University.

For the most part, he says, the sports representation side has been the larger side of his business, though more recently the two have started to even out. And even though Koeberle says he’s no Jerry Maguire, over the years he seems to have gained some interesting perspectives into those players he’s spent time with.

He got to talk Expos baseball with Pascal Dupuis on a limo ride up to Altoona and got to know a little about the embattled Fleury outside of the shadow of the Penguins organization. With Fleury, he found a down-to-earth, quiet kid who was humble and didn’t have an ounce of star mentality.

It’s not hard to imagine the two getting along. Koeberle says he says he’s proud of the way his business has helped the community, and in particular, he’s proud of sending celebrities overseas to entertain troops in places like Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Japan, Korea, and Okinawa.

“It’s not such a bad place to come to work every day,” he says.