
Cooling Trend

Nike improves on its ice-filled vest for hardcore athletes.

Athletes are notorious for the lengths they'll go to for an edge, whether by injecting themselves with horror-movie hypodermic needles or downing nutritional drinks that resemble sewage runoff. At the 2004 Athens Olympics, Nike introduced a new agony, which it's upgraded this year for Beijing: an ice-filled vest that athletes wear for an hour before competing in order to reduce their bodies' core temperature. "It's not a pleasant experience," acknowledges designer Eddy Harber. "This is an extreme product."

For those who can stand the chill, Nike's PreCool Vest confers considerable advantages. According to the Nike Sports Research Lab, the body spends only a quarter of its energy moving muscles, and the rest regulating heat; inhibiting the rise of body temperature allows athletes to go

farther, faster. At Athens, however, some athletes complained that the stiff vest hindered their warm-ups. So for the new version, Harber, part of Nike's Advanced Innovation Team (AIT), took inspiration from the fish-like scales of Paco Rabanne's iconic 1960s metal minidress and constructed the vest from interlocking triangles that allow the rigid ice to contour to the wearer's body.

Preparing the old vest for use had also been cumbersome, so AIT partnered with medical supply company Dialectrics to introduce welded watertight pouches that athletes can fill and freeze on-site, reducing the garment's weight and size in transport. An exterior layer of reflective insulation ensures that the ice cools only the body, not the air around it.

Nike's concern for the environment didn't stop there. The vest incorporates waste materials from the manufacture of Nike Air soles as a key material (its felt carrying case, made from old suits, also reflects the company's sustainable mindset). "Athletic performance is just one aspect of the innovation in its design," Harber says.

www.nike.com —JESSE ASHLOCK

