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The Light SS1 soft helmet

in a softer, more durable and comfortable TPU material.

Also new for this season is its SS1 soft headgear for flag and 7-on-7 versions of the game. Esayian is expecting big things from that helmet.

“The performance of the SS1 soft headgear is unprecedented and our biggest challenge will be keeping up with demand,” he says. “While we deliver the best head gear ever tested and competitors are struggling, and while many leagues are starting to require helmets, we expect our dealers to be pretty happy.

“If we are not challenging the market leader by year end, I would be surprised,” he adds. “This is the most explosive segment of the sports marketplace. Players, coaches, parents and our dealers will certainly be the benefactors of such a revolutionary design.”

Vicis Enters Receivership

Even with some high-profile users and big-name investors, football helmet manufacturer Vicis announced in late December that it is entering into receivership after facing serious financial troubles.

“This is a difficult but necessary step that gives us the best opportunity to secure a buyer for the company with the goal of ensuring maximum return to shareholders,” Vicis board chairman **Bruce Montgomery** said in a statement. “We know this is heartbreaking news for Vicis customers, employees and investors who placed their trust in our products and believed in our mission. Our employees in particular dedicated their time and talents to building a great company that did great things and we are thinking about them and their families during this difficult time.”

Vicis started in 2013 and the company launched its first helmet for NFL and college players in 2017. Among its investors are NFL quarterbacks Russell Wilson and Aaron Rodgers and former players such as Roger Staubach and Doug Baldwin.

Vicis has also launched a youth version of its helmet and a soft headgear for flag and 7-on-7 football.

But the company ran into financial trouble last year and CEO Dave Marver stepped down in November. Geekwire.com reported Vicis laid off more than 100 employees in early December. At the same time the *New York Times* reported that Vicis was “running out of money.”

According to the *New York Times*: “The company expects to lose \$26 million this year, according to internal Vicis documents. With its cash dwindling, it has struggled to fulfill some orders. The delivery of a few hundred helmets ordered by the upstart XFL has been delayed. The new league is hoping the helmets will arrive by the start of training camps early [this] year, according to an XFL official with direct knowledge of the transaction, who spoke on condition of anonymity to preserve the league’s relationship with one of the few helmet manufacturers.”

The bad press also included a comment from **Ralph Greene Jr.**, who took over as the new chief executive. “Our employees are currently furloughed and we need to raise capital in order to continue operating, or we may have no other option but to wind down all operations.”

Riddell Partnering For Custom Helmets

Direct seller Riddell is now getting deeper into the custom helmet business through a strategic partnership with NetVirta, a Boston-based company that is the creator of a mobile 3D scanning technology, called Verifit. Leveraging NetVirta’s Verifit app, Riddell captures 3D head shape data of an individual’s head. The app streamlines creation of Riddell Precision-Fit helmets, which are designed uniquely for individual athletes.

Riddell Precision-Fit technology debuted in 2017 and now the technology will be available to customers nationally as Riddell reps capture data using the app on iOS and Android devices. Verifit captures head shape measurements with accuracy of +/- 0.5mm, allowing Riddell to create a truly custom fit. Riddell believes customers will download the app directly, capture head shape data themselves and upload them to an order platform.

NFL and Amazon Working In the Cloud

The National Football League and Amazon are partnering to develop the technologies and solutions to improve player health and safety using the tech giant’s cloud-computing services. In this high-tech partnership, Amazon



One step in the NetVirta process for making Riddell custom helmets.

Web Services and the NFL will use data and analytics to jointly develop the Digital Athlete, a platform that intends to improve player safety and treatment in the near term and ultimately predict and prevent injury.

The Digital Athlete platform will create a computer simulation model of an NFL player that will be used to test different scenarios within the game environment without exposing players to any risk. The platform will use AWS’s artificial intelligence and machine learning services to develop new tools and develop better insights into player injuries.

It will specifically study the impact of a variety of factors such as game rules, equipment and rehabilitation and recovery strategies on player injuries. Over time, the partnership aims to develop the capability to predict the risk of player injuries.

The Digital Athlete will apply AWS’s AI, machine learning and computer vision technologies, including Amazon Rekognition, to the NFL’s data sets from various sources such as historical and current video feeds, player position, the choice of equipment and playing surface.

Xenith Collaborates With Rheon Labs

Late last year Xenith entered into a long-term collaboration with UK-based Rheon Labs, a technology company specializing in energy control and impact mitigation. Xenith will work with Rheon Labs across a suite of offerings designed for football players and Xenith’s first product with the Rheon technology will be introduced in early 2020.

Rheon, invented by Daniel Plant, PhD, is an ultra-energy-absorbing technology that intelligently changes its behavior in response to an impact. The technology utilizes materials and geometries that provide soft cushioning for the high-occurrence, lower speed impacts, but adapts for optimized protection in high speed impacts. ■