

UK sportsman backs biotech company

Passing the Ball

Paul Duffen, Chairman of the UK's Premier League football club Hull City ("The Tigers"; see adjoining photo), supports a regional biotech company. Through his investment company, Reef Securities, Duffen is investing the equivalent of €270,000 in Pro-Cure Therapeutics, located in Heslington, York (some 60 km from Hull). Duffen told the Yorkshire Post that he, "felt that this is a business which has a real potential" and that he, "was impressed by the quality of science at the company."

You can be sure that an expert in booting pig skins will be an expert in biotechnology as well. Just believe your *Lab Times* reporter.

Pro-Cure was formed in 2001 as a spin-off of the University of York, based upon the academic research of Norman Maitland and Anne Collins of the Yorkshire Cancer Research unit. The scientists believe that the high rate of recurrence of prostate cancer is due to cancer stem cells, which are not targeted by current therapies.

The company claims on its website to have expertise in the culture, isolation, handling and gene profiling of human prostate cancer stem cells, to be, "in an excellent position to commercialise its research findings [that] will lead to the next generation of therapeutic drugs for the treatment of [this illness]." Pro-Cure's Executive Chairman, Brian Greenwood, topped off this big talk by predicting that the company would develop a therapy [...] "within a year."

Within a year? Your *Lab Times* reporter can't wait!

-WK-



Paul Duffen

Brain (Germany) lands prominent partners

Molecular Collaborations

Compound developer Brain (Zwingenberg, Germany) has signed and sealed a strategic research collaboration with its major U.S. competitor, Genencor (Palo Alto), a producer of industrial enzymes and subsidiary of the Danish food ingredients group, Danisco (Copenhagen). The deal's objective is the biotechnological production of bio-based chemicals from renewable raw materials. Brain will provide Genencor with access to its metagenomics and screening technologies to pursue product targets for the chemical industry (the German company owns metagenome resources of some 150 million genes of as yet uncultured microorganisms). If everything works well, the enzymes and biosynthetic pathways of interest are to be genetically engineered in microbial production strains.

Genecor and Brain were also partners in a white biotechnology project in 2004, when they joined forces to develop a new enzyme product platform. While Brain is a mid-size company with 72 employees and revenues of only a few million euros, Genencor plays in another league with almost 1,500 employees worldwide and nine-digit euro revenues.

In January 2009, Brain got another collaboration started with DSM, a global life sciences and materials sciences company headquartered in Heerlen (the Netherlands). Together, both firms are seeking to develop new strains with new metabolic production pathways for the fermentative production of specialty chemicals. DSM is an enormous retail enterprise with annual sales of almost 9 billion and some 23,000 staff worldwide.

-WK-



Scientists in one of Brain's labs with metagenome libraries.

Photo: Brain

Merrion (Ireland) completes insulin deal – supposedly

Nice if it Works this Time

An Irish company that is notorious for its unfulfilled desires could be building castles in the air once again. Merrion Pharmaceuticals of Dublin is the name, "Making Medicines Better" is the slogan, and "we'll go public this year" was the running joke in 2007.

You remember that fiasco? Merrion proudly announced its upcoming IPO at NASDAQ in April 2007, hoping to raise the equivalent of €48 million, but dismissed the plan later because of "unfavourable market conditions." In December 2007, Merrion scaled down expectations to €20 million, while finally netting a mere €6 million in an IPO at the local IEX, Dublin.

Recently, the Irish developers of oral-dosage drugs announced an amazing deal with the Danish diabetes company Novo Nordisk (Bagsværd near Copenhagen), who will pay up to €45 million in milestone payments for the development of an oral formulation of Novo Nordisk's GLP-1 receptor agonist. For this and other oral drug programmes, Novo Nordisk will use Merrion's GIPET (Gastrointestinal Permeation Enhancement) technology – and will pay additional milestones on each programme if necessary.

It would be nice if it worked this time.

-WK-

Belgian cell therapist rounds up €13.7 million

Heart Action

The Belgian biotech start-up Cardio3 Biosciences (Mt. Saint Guibert/Aalst) has closed a fruitful financing round that yielded €13.7 million, splashed out by venture groups and public institutions. The company, founded in 2007, claims that it owns a cell-based experimental treatment of heart failure ("C-Cure"). This involves taking a patient's own bone marrow cells, culturing them in a special way and obtaining "cardiopoietic" cells that can regenerate damaged heart muscle. According to the company, the treatment produces new autologous heart muscle cells, which behave identically to those lost in infarction, without car-

rying the risk of rejection. Previous cell therapies for this indication are considerably more risky, scientists of Cardio3 Biosciences maintain. The new money is to fund a clinical trial of C-Cure, including 240 patients. -WK-

Are Roche, Merck and Genentech ...

... the Winners of Tomorrow?

Do you trust tea leaves and crystal balls? You might as well, if you listen to market research companies. One of them, URCH Publishing (London), recently surveyed which big pharmas will make the biggest progress in cancer drug sales over the next five years (*Cancer Market Trends 2008-2012 – Key market forecasts and growth opportunities*). Roche, Genentech and Merck & Co. were placed on the winning side, while Sanofi-Aventis, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson will lose market shares, according to the URCH report. Possible winner Roche is expected to overtake U.S. rival Amgen as the biggest seller of oncology products by 2012. The market research experts detected a total of 14 pharmaceutical companies that had generated cancer sales of \$1 billion (€800 million) or more in 2007.

However, there's one consoling message that will please any cancer drugmaker, winners and losers alike. After URCH, the global market for cancer drugs will grow by 2012 with an annual growth rate of 9.4 percent. Everything's coming up roses. -WK-

Ratiopharm up for sale after its owner's death

Uncertain Future

After German pharma tycoon Adolf Merckle (picture below) threw himself in front of a train some weeks ago, the future of his commercial empire, including generics manufacturer Ratiopharm, is nebulous. 5,400 Ratiopharm employees in Germany and 24 other countries are trembling, awaiting a new boss, while the company's spokespeople spread the usual obscure waffle.

Why did Merckle, with a fortune estimated by *Forbes* at €9.5 billion, kill himself? Nobody knows, but his suicide note indicates that he couldn't bear the medium-term consequences of his strikingly bad speculation on Volkswagen shares some weeks back. This share gambling presented Merckle with a loss of several hundred million euros and, ultimately, meant losing control of his entire economic empire.



Adolf Merckle

Merckle's fortune was partly inherited since both his parents originated from wealthy families. Starting his business in 1967, he created a worldwide business network, being one of the richest people in Germany at the height of his success. Next to Germany's largest pharmaceutical wholesaler, Phoenix Pharmahandel, and a ski lift in the Kleinwalsertal (Austria), he was the owner of many other companies, such

as the generics manufacturer, Ratiopharm (yielding a revenue of €1.8 billion in 2007). As of January 2009, however, the tycoon was an independent gentleman without any lordship – and committed suicide. Merckle skittered away, while his staffers at Ratiopharm and elsewhere face an uncertain future. -WK-



Almost as handsome as *Lab Times* polo shirts (see page 46), one can get such a gizmo for free this spring.

Biomol's 40th anniversary

Free T-Shirts

Reagents supplier Biomol is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year. Founded in 1968 near Heidelberg, Germany, as a small one-man-shop, the company is now located in Hamburg. Employing a staff of over 20, the Biomol catalogue offers 80,000 products, including research antibodies, cytokines, transfection reagents and compound libraries.

To mark its birthday, Biomol has made a limited number of T-shirts for its customers. The shirts are reassuringly PC (no child labour; conservation of natural resources etc.). Your *Lab Times* reporter tested a free sample in December and found that it performed well (but was a bit chilly). There are three ways for *Lab Times* readers to get their hands on one too:

- Order €250 worth of Biomol products;
- Write a "testimonial" for a Biomol product or quote a Biomol product in a scientific paper;
- Take part in a Biomol lottery, starting in March 2009.

For more information, please visit www.biomol.de.

-WK-