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## 2 Sports Gear Makers to Play on Same Team

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Two of the nation's largest privately held sports equipment makers said Tuesday that they were combining to form one of the biggest teams on the industry's playing field.

Easton Sports Inc. of Van Nuys and Riddell Bell Holdings Inc. will become Easton-Bell Sports Inc.

The deal was orchestrated by Easton and New York-based private equity firm Fenway Partners Inc., which controls Riddell. It is being partly funded with money from Canada's Ontario Teachers Pension Fund.

Terms were not disclosed. The companies estimate that they have combined annual revenue of

\$600 million. The deal is expected to be completed by the end of the first quarter.

**"It's a great, synergistic hand-and-glove fit for both companies," said Lloyd Greif, chief executive of Greif & Co., a Los Angeles-based investment bank that specializes in mergers and acquisitions. "This is a massive consolidation move in the sports equipment market."**

Easton, which is best known for its aluminum bats used in softball and baseball as well as its hockey sticks, will keep its headquarters in Van Nuys.

Riddell Bell supplies helmets to the National Football League, and through its Bell unit is known for bicycle helmets.

Both companies have faced

tougher competition in recent years, with corporations such as Nike Inc. and Reebok International Ltd., now owned by Adidas-Salomon, becoming contenders in the world of sports manufacturing.

Overall, sporting goods companies have suffered flat sales in recent years, in part because of the public's "increased interest in sedentary attractions" such as video games, according to a recent report by the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Assn.

"We think that the combination makes a lot of sense," said Tony Palma, chief executive and president of Easton. "This company is an innovation leader that will be a 'best in class' company."

Easton Chairman Jim Easton

will serve in the same capacity at the new firm. Easton has 1,200 employees worldwide, with 450 in Van Nuys. Riddell Bell Holdings also has about 1,200 employees.

Easton has been family owned since it started manufacturing archery bows and arrows in 1922.

The company pioneered development of high-end, trend-setting aluminum equipment, including inventing the aluminum arrow in 1939, the aluminum baseball bat in 1969 and the aluminum hockey stick in 1982.

Riddell Bell Holdings was formed in 2004 when Fenway merged Riddell Sports and Bell Sports.