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PROFILE: Once Upon A Coconut Explores Whether There's Still Oppty at High End of Category; Slim-Can Line in Pure, Energy Versions with Tequila Entry on Way; ONE Cofounder Fritz Veloso Joins Team

A group of Orlando-based entrepreneurs that lately includes ONE Coconut Water cofounder Emilie Fritz Veloso has been exploring whether there might be opportunity at high end of coconut water segment under brand name Once Upon A Coconut. Slim-can entry launched in Pure and Sparkling + Energy versions during pandemic as online play and has recently entered bricks & mortar retailers in NY via distribution arm of Harney Tea. A tequila-infused alc extension is on the way, as co plots geographic expansion to Las Vegas and other warm-weather markets. OUAC is entering once-vibrant coconut water market that in recent years has been devolving back to commodity status, with market leader Vita Coco the key holdout as ONE faded under Pepsi ownership, Zico became an aggressive price player under Coke ownership and steel-can and private-label entries grabbed some share. (The one conspicuous high-end success, Harmless Harvest, plays in refrigerated segment with different dynamics.) With Zico back in private hands and nation emerging from pandemic, maybe that's about to change. Emilie Fritz Veloso, who cofounded ONE ("one natural experience") with her then-husband, Rodrigo Veloso, has just come aboard as strategy & social equity advisor and taken a seat on board.

Once Upon A Coconut sources its water from young, sweet coconuts from Vietnam, where line is packed, in elegantly designed 11-oz slim cans that are intended to go "beyond the beach" in their branding, in words of chief brand & marketing officer Marc Sampogna. The items have 18-month shelf life and go out at \$21.99 per 12-unit online, \$2.49-2.99 at retail. The Sparkling Coconut Water + Energy extension contains 90 mg of caffeine (soon to be upped to 95) sourced from green coffee beans. The Sparkling Coconut Water + Tequila entry is being rethought, given complexities of supply chain that takes liquid from Vietnam to Mexico to US, perhaps with move to source coconut water for that specific entry in this hemisphere. Sampogna is hopeful it will debut in coming months, as 5-6% ABV item. OUAC also has purpose-driven component, donating 10% of profits to causes chosen by its consumers along lines of NAACP, Project CURE, Down Syndrome Foundation of Florida and Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

In discussion today, ad vet Sampogna, a partner in the biz, readily allowed that pandemic and associated complications had made for tortuous ride for new brand sourced and packaged in Vietnam, given shipping delays and cost escalations. Having a creative team member based outside Ho Chi Minh City proved crucial in keeping project on track when rest of team was reduced to video conferences with local partners to supervise production of liquid and graphic development. What was intended to be deliberate ecomm buildout accelerated its move to bricks & mortar when Harney Tea approached co about picking it up for self-distribution network in NY area, Marc recounted. Given scarce inventories, that exacted temporary hit to online biz but has proved worth the risk, to point where co is eyeing other markets, mainly in warm weather areas, for move to retail. Sampogna said announcement is imminent of move into hospitality and hotel group in Las Vegas, too.

Founding team operating as Neighborhood Beverage Co includes entrepreneur John Chiorando, who has extensive mix of businesses and is lending his Orlando facility and legal, logistics, fulfillment and digital development teams to OUAC cause. He's nominally listed as ceo, tho that's not day-to-day role. Also in mix is his cousin Ray Burbige, as coo, who offers help on sales side. Chief creative officer Alan Vladusic is former Publicis, Saatchi and Y&R adman and a longtime colleague of Sampogna. Fritz Veloso cofounded ONE Coconut Water with Brazilian-born Rodrigo Veloso, and since exit to Pepsi has turned her attention to cause-driven ventures from current base in Florida. She provides welcome bev-specific expertise to founding team, Marc said.

So far, funding has primarily come from Chiorando and Burbige but team is considering small outside raise over coming year that might bring in allies with right mix of skills and connections, Marc said.

More info and graphics at [website](#).

PEOPLE: Kombucha Production Guru Canek Lands at Goldthread Tonics as COO

Kombucha production guru Ramon Canek – who followed 10-year run at GT's with 5 years at its main challenger, Health-Ade – has landed coo role at Goldthread Tonics, the Santa Monica, Calif.-based maker of botanical- and adaptogen-infused drinks. Canek had performed contract work for co back in 2019. Goldthread Tonics, a familiar fixture at Whole Foods and other natural and specialty chains, was founded by herbalist William Siff, whom co likes to describe as "life-long ethnobotanical adventurer." Co's refrigerated, glass-bottle items go out under names like Turmeric Radiance, Elderberry Defense and Japanese Matcha.

PACKAGING: PepsiCo Monkeys Around with Rockstar's Yachak Yerba Mate Extension; Dials Up Amazon Rainforest Cues

PepsiCo continues to monkey around – literally this time – with its acquired Rockstar portfolio, restaging its organic Yachak yerba mate extension in manner intended to resonate more with younger consumers. These days that often means animal imagery, so 16-oz cans are now going out with different Amazon Rainforest species for each of its 5 flavors, to make provenance of core ingredient unmistakable. "By evolving our packaging to focus on emphasizing consumer interests, we're letting our organic ingredients speak for themselves," said sr mktg dir Aziel Rivers. "This redesign was created first and foremost with our consumers in mind, bringing them an energy boost throughout the day while also being mindful of where their products come from." Each can carries silhouetted image of holly plant, the source of yerba mate, along with colorful depiction of animal – whether a monkey for Berry Red or frog for Passionfruit – at lower left. "Yachak Organic Plant-Based Energy Tea" is designator. They contain 165 mg of caffeine and go out at \$2.59-2.79. Yachak name is Kichwa word for shaman. As before, line is not visibly branded as a Rockstar item. At NACS, Yachak wasn't on view, but co pushed forthcoming hemp-infused Rockstar extension called Unplugged as it works to turn around brand.

Yachak, recall, was created 4 years ago while Rockstar was still independent, tho moving thru Pepsi system, and its launch may have been stunted by simultaneous arrival of yerba mate entries under Pepsi's owned Amp energy brand as co sought to give that foundering brand a new burst of relevance. Indeed, Rockstar had been well along in recruiting its own distribution network for Yachak before PEP decided to take it on (BBI, Oct 18 2017). For all that, Yachak has maintained durable presence at retail, at time interest in yerba mate ingredient seems to be heating up, even as Amp restage didn't succeed in reversing that brand's fortunes. By now Yachak is vying vs range of yerba mate and guayusa energy brands, including leader Guayaki along with Runa, Yerbae, Clean Cause and even an Honest Tea entry lately.

Former NFL Employees Turn to A-B, PepsiCo, Other Sponsors for Assist; Halftime Show Bids in 2022

Former employees of Washington Football Team, frustrated by lack of transparency from NFL regarding its investigation into inappropriate behavior and toxic work environment surrounding the football team, have turned to key sponsors like Anheuser-Busch and PepsiCo to turn up heat, per Front Office Sports. "We call on you as corporate citizens and sponsors of the NFL, who ostensibly care about ensuring a workplace for women that is free from harassment and abuse, to demand transparency from the League related to this scandal," reads letter sent to A-B ceo Brendan Whitworth, PEP chmn/ceo Ramon Laguarta and heads of Verizon, Amazon, Nike and Procter & Gamble. Letter sent on behalf of 40 former WFT employees (including former cheerleaders and admin staff) goes on to say: "While the NFL has refused to heed the calls for transparency and accountability from former WFT employees, advocacy groups, lawyers for the media, it will have to head such a call from its corporate sponsors. If the League has shown us anything, it is that money, and only money, talks."

Recall in 2020, NFL hired atty Beth Wilkinson to look into claims of sexual harassment and other inappropriate behavior. After 10-month investigation, commish Roger Goodell had her send findings and conclusions to him. Goodell fined WFT \$10 mil but never explained why. Goodell was blasted as a "hypocrite" this past week in NY Post for not sharing all findings, yet leaking out contents of John Gruden emails (which led to Gruden's resignation), while there were over 650,000 emails reviewed by Ms. Wilkinson's team.

Halftime up for Grabs Speaking of NFL, league announced it will be putting halftime show rights back up for grabs after PepsiCo deal expires after this year's game. Marketing experts estimate that rights to Halftime Show "could fetch from \$25 million to \$50 million annually," noted Front Office Sports. PEP's had rights since 2012 as part of a larger marketing deal valued at more than \$2 bil, per report. With 96.4 mil viewers for last year's game, PEP earned \$9.4 mil in "media value," according to FOS.