

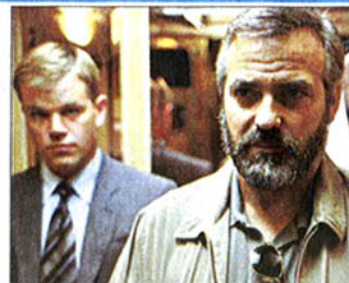
FINAL SCORES

NHL's sizzling start

- Attendance, scoring, rookies all strong in season's first quarter, 3C
- Jiri Fischer doing well, 9C



Ottawa's Dany Heatley: Senators scoring big.



In Syria: Matt Damon and George Clooney.

Holiday movies

- Thanksgiving film menu ranges from a thriller on petro-politics to an East Village musical, 3-4, 7D
- Syria rates ★★★ ½, 3D

Wed/Thu, November 23-24, 2005

Newsline

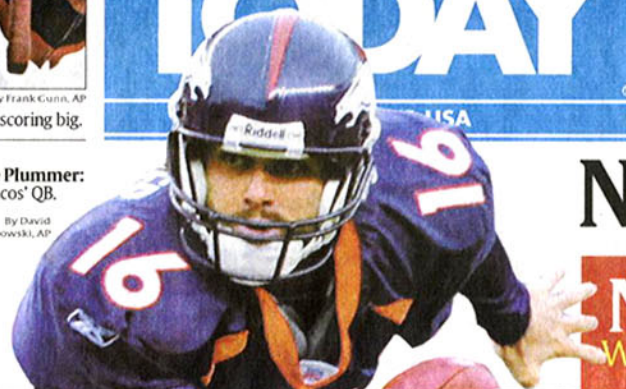
■ News ■ Money ■ Sports ■ Life

■ Stock markets stay on winning path

| Index | Close | Change |
|------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Dow Jones industrial average | 10,871.43 | ▲ 51.15 |
| Nasdaq composite | 2,253.56 | ▲ 11.89 |

Jake Plummer: Broncos' QB.

By David Zalubowski, AP



No turkeys here

- Broncos-Cowboys collision highlights Thursday matchups
- Falcons-Lions, too, 1, 6-7C

Technology
Every Wednesday

He hopes flush of embarrassment leads to flush of success

Businesses are sometimes born of adversity.

Such was the case with Brondell, the electronic toilet start-up.

In 1990, after Dave Samuel graduated from high school, his father took him along on a business trip to Tokyo. One night, the two went to a business dinner at a restaurant. Samuel excused himself to go to the bathroom and found himself staring at a toilet seat studded with buttons and electronic controls.

"I'd never seen this," Samuel recalls. "It had Japanese characters, so I couldn't read what the buttons meant. But, of course, I had to press the buttons to see what they'd do."

He pressed one that extended a wand inside the bowl. The wand then sprayed warm water upward to wash whatever areas a seated person might need to have washed.

Except Samuel wasn't seated. He was still standing, fully dressed, facing the toilet and gawking. The spray soaked the front of his pants. He launched into a frenzy of trying to dry himself before rejoining his father and a bunch of Japanese businessmen, ultimately slinking back to the table and throwing a

napkin over his lap.

You'd think this might've scarred Samuel for life — that he'd run screaming from any toilet that looked as if it had Intel inside.

Instead, he became intrigued by the little toilet that embarrassed him. He went to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and became an engineer. In 1996, he and pal Josh Felser started an Internet radio company called Spinner, selling it to AOL in 1999 — at about the peak of the dot-com bubble — for \$320 million.

"This afforded me the ability to take a little time off and explore my options," Samuel says. He was in his 20s.

In 2002, he went back to Japan and stayed at a Hyatt. Every bathroom had an electronic toilet. He did some research and found that in Japan, most business hotels, many public restrooms and just about every high-income household had an electronic toilet.

"I believed it was time to introduce this to America," Samuel says.

So he started a company, naming it after J.F. Brondel, who — according to the Sulabh International Museum of Toilets, which I swear I did

not make up — invented the valve-type flush toilet in 1738. Samuel added a second "l" to make the company name Brondell. "It was a stronger name," Samuel says.

Samuel is an ambitious guy, to say the least. Around this same time, Felser came back from Burning Man, an arts festival in the desert that attracts a lot of techies who run around naked there. Felser had taken tons of digital photos, and his friends really wanted to see them. Who wouldn't?

Felser figured out an interesting way to do this: create the equivalent of a virtual private network among a group of friends over the Internet, so they could easily see each other's large files such as photos, music or video.

Felser and Samuel thought other people would buy the technology. It became the basis for Grouper, a company Samuel and Felser started that has so far had moderate success. In December, Grouper will launch a major push into video sharing — kind of a video Flickr.

Samuel is busy as both president of Grouper and chairman of Brondell. (Felser is not part of Brondell.) Brondell started selling its toilets in January. The high-end model, the Swash 600, costs about \$500. It has a heated seat, computer-chip smarts, touch-pad controls and — yes — a wand that sprays you clean.



Brondell founder: Dave Samuel with the Swash electronic toilet.

Just make sure you're sitting. A little dryer follows with warm air.

Now, here's the problem: Americans have so far failed to buy into the idea of having their private parts go through the equivalent of a mini car wash. A competing company, Toto, has been selling an electronic toilet for a while now with only modest results.

Marketing is a challenge. There aren't a lot of good options for getting people to try it. Do you set up a demo unit at Home Depot?

Ads have to walk a thin line. Maybe the company needs to hire a spokesman like Bob Dole and come up with a euphemism as sterile as "erectile dysfunction." Brondell made a three-minute infomercial that's full of normal-looking people earnestly saying things like, "We're perfectly satisfied and perfectly clean all day long."

By the way, the older couple in the infomercial is Samuel's grandparents, Bill Hayes and Susan Seaford Hayes — aka Doug and Julie on *Days of Our Lives* for the past 30 years.

Maybe Samuel is right and it really is the right time for electronic toilets in the USA. It seems that Americans who try electronic toilets absolutely love them.

"I thought it was a joke when I installed it," says James Hong, founder of website Hot or Not. "I had no idea I would like it so much. When I travel, I often think in the hotel bathroom how much I wish I had the Brondell there."

Then there is the ultimate endorsement: Google has electronic toilets — though not Brondell's — in the restrooms at its headquarters.

Businesses will do anything to get a little piece of that Google

magic. I can see management consultants coming into companies and saying, "What's with this toilet paper in the restrooms? Get rid of it. Get electronic toilets. Google doesn't use toilet paper. From now on, you don't use toilet paper."

Could ignite a craze, as when managers started firing the bottom 5% of performers because Jack Welch did it at General Electric.

"I liken it to TiVo," Samuel says, drawing a parallel between electronic toilets and a video machine that ignites viewer passion. "Once you experience pausing television, there's no going back. Once you experience sitting on a warm toilet and having a warm water wash, there's no going back."

Samuel looks at the opportunity like a technologist. He notes that toilets have not changed in the 250 years since Brondell's invention. "It's one of the few areas that has seen little technological improvement," he says. "We're excited about changing that."

It's early yet, but it will be interesting to see if he can.

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