The shoes most notable feature is a lipstick red midsole that resembles a whalebone corset It s something you squint at and wonder: How exactly did they make that? The short answer involves polymers and a partnership with DuPont. The long answer includes Plank’s plans to reinvent his company’s supply chain, transform the city of Baltimore, and maybe even outmaneuver Nike in the process.

The phrase aggressive young fearless is plastered all over the walls It s a quote from golfer Jordan Spieth describing himself and the brand, but it could just as easily apply to Plank, whose grit and enthusiasm propelled him from walk-on to special-teams captain of the University of Maryland football program. During his senior year, in 1995, the mid-Atlantic was seized by a record-setting heat wave, and practicing in a sweat-soaked cotton T-shirt felt more oppressive than usual. The year after he graduated, Plank developed a moisture-wicking shirt made from synthetic fabric and began calling up former teammates. In Under Armour’s first year, when the company was still operating out of his grandmother’s basement in the Georgetown neighborhood of Washington, Plank put more than 100,000 miles on his Ford Explorer driving up and down the East Coast and trying to parlay those friendships with former teammates into orders. “I graduated from college and realized, I know 60 people playing in the NFL who have careers that are going to be somewhere between three and five years,” Plank says. “So the window is about this big. And I either take advantage of it now or lose it forever. I’m thinking, Is there a way for me to give them a gift that would also help me? And it’s that virtuous cycle that really got us going.” It worked better than even he expected. A combination of innovative technology and Plank’s fervor for his own product contributed to Under Armour’s vertical rise, from $17,000 in sales that first year, to $400 million in 2006, to a projection of almost $5 billion in 2016.