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When does alcohol sponsorship of sport become sports sponsorship of alcohol? A case study of developments in sport in Australia

Abstract

Alcohol sponsorship of sport is common in Australia, with much debate about the appropriateness of linking sport with alcohol advertising and promotion. This paper provides examples of such sponsorships to appreciate the extent and nature of complex relationship between sport and alcohol sponsors. The public health and policy implications of alcohol sponsorship of sport extending to creating a sporting competition purely to promote an alcohol brand are considered.

Keywords

does, alcohol, sponsorship, sport, become, sports, sponsorship, alcohol, case, study, developments, sport, Australia

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When does alcohol sponsorship of sport become sport sponsorship of alcohol?

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Keywords:

Alcohol sponsorship, alcohol marketing, sport, culture, young people

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sponsorship of sporting events by the alcohol industry is a common practice in Australia, perhaps even more so than in other countries, and there is currently much debate between industry groups and public health advocates about the appropriateness of inexorably linking sport with the advertising and promotion of alcohol. The aim of this paper is not to provide a systematic audit of all alcohol sponsorships of sporting teams and events in Australia, but rather to provide some illustrative examples of current alcohol sponsorships which have been reported in the trade press, and to review in detail a current case study to appreciate the extent and nature of the complex relationship between sport and alcohol sponsors.

It is not uncommon for professional sporting competitions to have more than one alcohol sponsor, although rarely in competing product categories, and Australian cricket provides a good example of this scenario. Foster's VB has the naming rights for Australia's annual one-day cricket series, but comfortably shares sponsorship with a brand of scotch whisky. However, in this saturated market competing alcohol companies develop a range of strategies to form a link in the minds of consumers between their brand and Australia's national summer sport. While these include marketing tools such as advertising campaigns, interactive web sites, promotional materials and devices that associate sporting teams and individual players with the consumption of alcohol, Lion Nathan took one step further by creating a sporting competition (the XXXX Beach Cricket Series) purely to promote an alcohol brand. Despite some claims of unethical conduct – mainly related to accusations from Foster's of ambush marketing – this marketing campaign was welcomed and even celebrated by the media, sports fans, and governments (including local councils and even John Howard, the then Australian Prime Minister).

It was suggested in the late 1990s that public awareness of the impact of alcohol abuse on society would lead to increasing pressure to regulate alcohol sponsorship of sporting events, and public health advocates having been calling for such regulation for more than a decade. However, the Australian government does not appear to be

heeding the call, despite mounting evidence that the symbiotic relationship between alcohol and sport in Australia is a key contributor to alcohol-related harm. Not only are alcohol sponsorships of sport thriving, we are now seeing sports sponsorships of alcohol.

When does alcohol sponsorship of sport become sport sponsorship of alcohol?

ABSTRACT

Alcohol sponsorship of sport is common in Australia, with much debate about the appropriateness of linking sport with alcohol advertising and promotion. This paper provides examples of such sponsorships to appreciate the extent and nature of the complex relationship between sport and alcohol sponsors. The public health and policy implications of alcohol sponsorship of sport extending to creating a sporting competition purely to promote an alcohol brand are considered.

Alcohol and sport in Australia

Drinking behaviours, and attitudes, are strongly influenced by social and cultural norms and by the social situation in which alcohol is consumed (e.g., Greenfield and Room, 1997; McDaniel et al., 2001). The close association between alcohol and sport is particularly problematic, with evidence that young people who watch televised sport are exposed to extensive alcohol advertising (Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, 2003), and that those young people who are sports fans drink more alcohol and experience more alcohol-related problems (Nelson and Weschler, 2003).

Among Australian teenagers and young adults consumption of alcohol is typically associated with sport as an important component of post-game celebrations (McGuifficke et al., 1991). However, it is also associated with the general ethos of being part of the team, and men in particular are more likely to drink excessively when socializing with members of their sporting team than with other groups of friends (Black et al., 1999).

Australia has been described as “a model case where alcohol and sport are united in a close partnership” (Munro, 2000, p 199). For example, a survey of Queensland-based surf lifesaving, rugby union, and Australian Rules football club patrons found that 40% usually drank five or more alcoholic drinks on each visit, 22% drank seven all more, and 5% 13 or more (Connolly, 2006); which is significantly more than the

recommended maximum of four standard drinks (National Health & Medical Research Council, 2009).¹ Australian studies have shown that non-elite sportspeople consume excessive levels of alcohol, and that members of male sporting teams feel pressured to drink alcohol because of the masculine image of sporting activity and mateship (Lawson and Evans, 1992).

Alcohol sponsorship of sport

Much of the focus of research and advocacy has been on alcohol advertising during sports telecasts – for example, an analysis of US media spend showed that the alcohol industry spent more than \$540 million on advertising in sports programs on television (Centre on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, 2003). Alcohol, and the promotion and advertising of alcohol, has been associated with sporting events for many decades and in most countries, to the extent where it has been argued that it would “be unusual to view a sporting event without seeing some form of event signage or a commercial for an alcohol or tobacco brand” (McDaniel et al., 2001). A review of national, regional and club levels sports sponsorships in New Zealand found that sponsorship of those sports popular among young people was predominantly from gambling, alcohol and unhealthy food, with rugby in particular dominated by alcohol sponsors (Maher et al., 2006).

Australian data shows that young people aged 13 to 17 years are exposed to only slightly less television advertising for alcohol than those aged 18 to 29, with a large proportion of this occurring as a result of viewing sporting events (King et al., 2005). While the influences on alcohol consumption, and particularly alcohol consumption among young people, are complex and multi-faceted, there is clear evidence that alcohol advertising is a key contributor. There is a large body of evidence to demonstrate that exposure to alcohol advertising influences alcohol expectancies (e.g. Grube, 1995; Stacy et al., 2004), drinking intentions (e.g. Kelly and Edwards, 1998; Stacy et al., 2004), and perceptions of drinking as a normative behaviour (e.g.

¹ The Australian National Health & Medical Research Council (NHMRC) recommends that adults drink no more than two standard drinks on any day to reduce the lifetime risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury, and no more than four standard drinks on a single occasion to reduce the risk of alcohol-related injury arising from that occasion.

Casswell, 1995; Lieberman and Orlandi, 1987). Further, three longitudinal studies from the United States have confirmed the direct association between exposure to alcohol advertising and subsequent drinking. In particular, these studies have shown that those who viewed more alcohol ads in the seventh grade were more likely to drink in the eighth grade (Stacy et al., 2004) and to drink greater quantities in ninth grade (Ellickson et al., 2005), and that each additional dollar per capita spent on alcohol advertising was associated with a 4% increase in the amount of alcohol drunk by young people (Snyder et al., 2006).

One of the arguments often given for the increasing level of alcohol sponsorship of sport is the difficulty of in obtaining other sponsors, particularly since the imposition of bans on tobacco sponsorship. In Australia, tobacco advertising was progressively banned from the 1970s, beginning with a phasing out of television and radio advertising between 1973 and 1976, followed by the banning of print advertising in 1993, outdoor advertising in 1996, and (with variations between states) point-of-sale advertising from 1999 (Chapman & Wakefield, 2001). Tobacco sponsorship of sport was subject to the same argument as alcohol sponsorship, that sporting groups were economically dependent on this sponsorship (Chapman & Wakefield, 2001). However, in the 1990s several Australian states introduced legislation, and established health promotion foundations, to replace tobacco sponsorships with public health sponsorships. These foundations (such as Healthway in Western Australia and VicHealth in Victoria) used the funds raised by a legislated 5% increase in tobacco taxation to sponsor sports, racing and arts organisations who had previously received tobacco sponsorship (Holman et al, 1997; Chapman & Wakefield, 2001). During the recent public and political debate over the proposed 'alcopop tax' (an additional tax the Australian Government is proposing to be levied on ready-to-drink alcohol products), the Greens (an Australian political party) proposed, unsuccessfully, that this tax could be used to replace alcohol sponsorship of sport as was the case with the buy-out of tobacco sponsorships (ABC News, 2009)

The sports sponsorship market in Australia is estimated to be worth \$600 million per year, with an average sponsor 'spend' of \$3.3 million in 2007 (Cincotta, 2008). It has been estimated that each year \$50 million comes from alcohol companies – making

them one of the biggest spending industries – with 80% invested by three companies, Fosters, Lion Nathan and Diageo (Lee, 2008).

In Australia, public health agencies and advocacy groups have been lobbying for a ban on alcohol sponsorship of sport; tighter adherence to the ‘spirit’ of the self-regulatory code (Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code) which prohibits the depiction of the presence or consumption of alcohol as contributing to sporting, social or other success; and removal of the current provision which allows alcohol advertising during live sporting telecasts on weekends and public holidays (Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice). This latter change would reverse the current counter-intuitive exception to the rules that otherwise prevent broadcast of alcohol advertisements during children’s viewing times.

There is currently disagreement between industry groups and public health advocates about whether associating alcohol with sport contravenes the ‘spirit’ of the advertising codes of practice – particularly as this association extends to sporting stars featuring in Australian alcohol advertisements, further blurring the line between advertising and content. It has been argued that such an association is inappropriate because of the potential impact on underage consumers who tend to be frequent viewers of live and televised sporting events (e.g., Howard and Crompton, 1995).

At the heart of the debate lies three overlapping questions: whether sports sponsorship enables the alcohol industry to target young drinkers, whether alcohol and sport are a natural ‘fit’ or an inappropriate juxtaposition, and whether the removal of alcohol sponsorship would leave sporting groups without funds.

The argument as to whether alcohol sponsorship targets underage drinkers (or future drinkers) is not a new one. In an article in the Sydney Morning Herald, Jacobsen (2003) quoted both industry spokespeople who argued that they do not target underage audiences and public health researchers who argued that they do. For example, Lion Nathan (who sponsor horse racing, rugby league and union, Australian rules football and golf) stated that its company “does not in any way target its marketing at those under the age of 18”; whereas Professor Charles Watson stated: “The industry is particularly interested in reaching the older adolescent market and

young adults because they want to establish drinkers at an early stage.” It is also important to note that sponsorship of sporting events shown on television allow alcohol companies to avoid the usual restrictions on daytime advertising of alcohol products.

Public health advocates and organizations focused on the wellbeing of young people are united in their view that alcohol advertising and alcohol sponsorship are harmful to young people. At an international level, the World Health Organization’s European Charter on Alcohol 1995 asserts that:

All children and adolescents have the right to grow up in an environment protected from the negative consequences of alcohol consumption and, to the extent possible, from the promotion of alcoholic beverages (and) ... no form of advertising is specifically addressed to young people, for instance, through the linking of alcohol to sports.

The Western Australian Department of Sport & Recreation has expressed concerns about the inappropriate association between alcohol and sport and the anomaly in controls on alcohol advertising during children’s viewing times. The Department has issued a position statement on alcohol sponsorship:

In the context of junior sport and to protect young people from harm, the Department of Sport and Recreation does not support alcohol sponsorship. DSR strongly urges sport and recreation clubs and associations to seek sponsorships from companies other than those producing and promoting alcoholic beverages.

Paul Dillon, from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre has argued that sponsorship is designed to win brand loyalty among young drinkers: “It’s a very subtle message, but it’s a message that young people get, that sports and alcohol go together” (Jacobsen, 2003). This is a message that industry groups, and advertisers, argue is appropriate. For example, Craig Dodson from Sponsorship Solutions, has stated that the male demographic and the images of success and mateship make sport and alcohol a ‘natural fit’ and that alcohol producers value “the sheer numbers of eyeballs that sports can deliver”. However, as Geoff Munro, director of the Centre for Youth Drug

Studies, pointed out this means that athletes are sponsored by a product that they cannot use if they want to compete at the highest level (Jacobsen, 2003).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the recipients of alcohol sponsorship also speak in favour of it. For example, when asked to comment on a possible ban on alcohol sponsorship, West Australia Football League director of football Grant Dorrington was quoted as saying: “Foster’s, dealing with [the WA Football Commission], have a responsible drinking policy,” and “They don’t want people to drink-drive, they don’t want people to get full and bash your mate” (Midland Reporter, 2009). He also argued – as do industry representatives – that the dependence on sponsorship money should be the primary consideration: “Let’s say someone has research that says for the sake of our community it should be banned...Before they bring it out, they need to do a quick check – what community clubs are getting money and who’s going to fund them...Don’t do anything until you can answer that question.” The underlying message here should be of great concern to the community: even if we have clear evidence that alcohol sponsorship of sport is harmful, we shouldn’t ban it (and we shouldn’t even release the evidence to the community) unless we can guarantee to replace the sponsorship dollars. Cricket Australia entered into the debate in a manner that raised eyebrows, by claiming that “banning alcohol sponsorship would impinge on sport’s ability to deliver community programs that had a positive impact on health” and “we’re paid in dollars, not in schooners” – an unfortunate comment given that it coincided with the release of a study that showed alcohol sponsorship was associated with heavy drinking among athletes (Wall, 2008). Even more controversial was the Coalition of Major Professional Sports’ submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill, in which they claimed that the Bill (which called for a ban on alcohol advertising before 9.00pm) would “impact the ability of sporting organisations to directly invest in a range of programs - particularly in the areas of sport participation and broader community initiatives...sport plays an important part...providing opportunities for indigenous Australians and access to programs for people with disabilities.” Cricket Australia went one step further, explicitly stating: “The bill would affect our ability to deliver indigenous, women's and disability programs” (Munro, 2008).

Alcohol sponsorship of Australian cricket

Foster's Australia's VB (Victoria Bitter beer) has had the naming rights for Australia's annual one-day cricket series since 2003 (Sinclair, 2006). Foster's Australia launched its 'VB Boonanza' campaign in conjunction with the commencement of the 2005-06 summer one-day cricket international series. While we do not have figures on the total cost of the campaign, it was revealed that the prize pool alone was \$2.4 million. The campaign was described by Foster's communication manager, Jacqui Moore, as being part of "the reinvigoration of the brand with four months of summer action around the cricket" (Williams, 2005). The campaign, which included television commercials, online, sponsorship, point-of-sale and a range of other promotions – was built around 'Talking Boony,' a talking figurine about the same size as a can of beer. 'Talking Boony' was a caricature of David Boon, a former Australian cricketer, who was described in the trade press as "an Australian icon, partly for being a great Australian athlete, but mostly for looking like he should be sitting in the stands drinking beer, rather than padding up in the middle...But it was his effort in drinking 52 beers on a Qantas flight between Sydney and London at the beginning of (another) successful Ashes Tour that truly elevated him to icon status" (Sinclair, 2006). The figurine contained a microchip and a timer which enabled him to 'speak' during the cricket; about an hour before the start of the first match he spoke his first words "Hey, get me a VB, the cricket is about to start" and throughout the cricket he made many other comments to his 'fans' – some about cricket, but many about beer (such as "have you got any nachos? I like nachos. They go well with beer").

The Boony campaign was criticised by public health advocates for exploiting Boon's notoriety as a binge drinker, arguing that such a promotion could only have negative effect on the entrenched drinking culture of cricket clubs (Munro, 2006a). However, the advertising industry applauded – and awarded – the campaign. In May 2006 the advertising agency that created the 'Boony' campaign, George Patterson Y&R, won a prestigious Yellow Pencil award at the D&AD Global Awards in London in the New Uses of Broadcast category for its 'innovative' campaign for Foster's (Alarcon, 2006a); and in June 2006 they won a Lion at the Cannes International Festival for the 'Talking Boony' promotion (Jacobs, 2006a). They were equally popular with

consumers, with all 200,000 sold and 1900 sold on eBay, with one going for nearly \$230 (Patterson, 2006).

Not surprisingly, given the positive response from the industry and increased consumer sales, in October 2006 Foster's Australia announced an extension of the Boony campaign for the 2006-07 summer cricket series. In 2006-07, not only did we have 'Talking Boony', we also had 'Talking Beefy,' modelled on former English cricket captain Ian 'Beefy' Botham. The figurines were available as a pair with promotional VB cartons, and 'The Battle of the Tashes'² was billed as VB's biggest ever promotion (Patterson, 2006). That season's 375,000 pairs of figurines, which used infra-red panels to verbally spar with each other, were issued with replaceable batteries "in the hope they'll stay in people's homes long after the Ashes are over" (Patterson, 2006). For the 2007-08 series, Shane Warne became the 'face' of the VB campaign (and the talking doll). Once again, the multi-million dollar campaign featured mass media advertising, a website, competitions and promotions, and merchandise – including the VB Warnie figurine programmed with phrases including "Ahhh VB, drinking anything else would be un-Australian" (Anonymous, 2007a).

It is not uncommon for professional sporting competitions to have more than one alcohol sponsor, although rarely in competing product categories, and Australian cricket provides a good example of this scenario. While Foster's VB has the naming rights, and remains the official beer sponsor of Cricket Australia, in September 2006 Johnnie Walker Scotch whisky announced its increased involvement in Australian cricket, including both a lucrative \$20m sponsorship deal with Cricket Australia, and an on-pack promotional campaign. The five-year deal between Cricket Australia and Johnnie Walker was described as "cement[ing] Johnnie Walker as the official scotch whisky of Cricket Australia, and follows the successful ICC Johnnie Walker Super Series in 2005-2006, which attracted more than 900 million viewers worldwide" (Jacobs, 2006b). Johnnie Walker's marketing director, Andy Gibson, was also quoted as saying: "Red Label Cricket demonstrates what Johnnie Walker can bring to the sport" (Jacobs, 2006b).

² 'Tash' is a colloquial term for moustache, and both of these former captains sported moustaches

With so many alcohol brands, and so few high-profile sports, some brands are looking outside the usual options. For example, in the bourbon market, sponsorships include Cougar's sponsorship of the NRL, cricket and V8 Supercars; Jim Beam's sponsorship of NSW rugby league, an AFL team (via Coca-Cola Amatil), the V8 Supercars and (as of 2009) driver Will Davison; and Jack Daniels' sponsorship of the V8 Supercars. Thus, in 2006 Wild Turkey – at that point fifth in the overall bourbon market in Australia – “restructured its marketing approach” to fully fund the ‘branded content’ prime-time Joker Poker television program (Alarcon, 2006b).

Cricket sponsorship of Australian alcohol

Advertising ‘clutter’ is seen as a major problem for advertisers and sponsors, with companies looking for new ways to stand out and attract consumer attention – leading to an increase in ‘experiential’ marketing and ‘proprietary events’ (Cincotta, 2008). The relationship between Australian sport and alcohol promotion reached a new low in September 2006 with the launch of the Fourx (XXXX) Gold beach cricket campaign. The highlight of the campaign was “a competitive six-a-side beach cricket tournament which will feature 21 cricket legends from Australia, England and the West Indies slugging it out” (Buchan 2006). The cricket series was part of the XXXX Gold Beach Cricket campaign which included TVCs, a website featuring an interactive game, themed XXXX Gold packaging with vouchers for a free cricket ball, and discounts on other beach cricket merchandise, as well the distribution of free beach-cricket kits to thousands of grassroots cricket teams across Australia.

This international beach cricket series featured famous past players from Australia, England and the West Indies, and was televised nationally; with the respective captains being Alan Border, Graham Gooch, and Courtney Walsh. The organisers reported expecting crowds of up to 7000 people at each of the games, and arrangements were made for the building of temporary stands for spectators (Lalor, 2006).

What makes this promotion unique is that this tournament, and the game itself, was contrived entirely as a promotion for XXXX Gold beer. Lion Nathan owns the event and controls who plays, what the rules are, and where the events are held (McIntyre,

2009). It had “a new set of rules, and a world-first high-tech technology ‘switch pitch’ which allows slow or fast-paced bowling, developed especially for the tournament”. Andrew Coates, XXXX Gold Beach Cricket director, was quoted as saying that “the campaign was the biggest promotion ever held for the brand, and [he expected] the tournament to become a permanent addition to the sports calendar” (Buchan 2006). Lion Nathan committed approximately 90% of XXXX Gold’s marketing budget to this ‘sporting competition,’ an investment that was rewarded with a sales increase of over 8% in its first year (Cincotta 2008). Equally importantly, unlike most forms of advertising, the company was able to recoup a substantial proportion of this marketing expense from the sales of event tickets, merchandise, TV rights – and even on-selling sponsorship opportunities to other companies (Collings 2008).

The 2005-06 beach cricket ‘competition’ included matches in NSW, Queensland and Western Australia; and the broadcasts attracted an average of 347,000 viewers (Lee, 2007). Not surprisingly, Lion Nathan continued the XXXX Gold Beach Cricket series in the summer of 2007-08, attracting 21,000 spectators to the live events and a far larger audience for the 16 hours of live broadcasts (Collings, 2008).

In February 2009, after the third summer of the XXXX series, Lion Nathan attributed the 5% per year increase in sales to the competition (telecast on the Channel Ten Network across Australia). Andrew Coates reported: “If you look at XXXX Gold Beach Cricket, it was a platform that helped take us to being the second-biggest beer in the country. Ultimately we will be No. 1” (McIntyre, 2009).

So where’s the scandal?

With a few notable exceptions (Lee, 2007, 2008; Jones, 2007), the Australian media wholeheartedly welcomed the XXXX Beach Cricket Series. In Queensland, journalists celebrated the transformation of Coolangatta beach into a ‘beach cricket haven’ and commended local premises for erecting XXXX flags (Anonymous, 2007b); cheered the honouring of cricket greats ‘in front of a capacity crowd’ (Williams, 2009); and encouraged television viewers to watch ‘legends of world cricket fight it out to become the XXXX Gold Beach Cricket Tri-Nations champions’

(Tucker-Evans, 2008). They also reported uncritically on the council's plans to repair the damage to the turf caused by trucks setting up the event (Anonymous, 2008); and called on 'Australia' to lift its game in the 2008-09 competition (Anthony 2009), clearly viewing this marketing event as a serious sporting competition. Lion Nathan, XXXX and key figures within the company were lauded for their successful marketing campaign/sporting event; with Coates congratulated on his 'stroke of marketing genius' (Date, 2007).

The incongruity of turning Australian beaches into all-day advertisements for an alcohol brand escaped the notice of the media; and John Howard, the then prime minister, tossed the coin at the beginning of the game to help Lion Nathan launch their media blitz (Lee, 2007; Jones, 2007). Even the sight of young children playing in the licenced bar hastily built on a Sydney Beach, and the iconic nippers (junior surf life-savers) parading with XXXX hats over their uniform caps, failed to raise a stir among the media and the sporting public.

This is not to say that the XXXX Beach Cricket Series was without controversy and scandal, just that the scandal focused on the commercial questions of divided loyalties (due to saturation of alcohol sponsors) and claims of ambush marketing, rather than on the ethical boundary that appeared to have been crossed in the relationship between alcohol marketing and Australian cricket.

In October 2006 Allan Border, a renowned Australian retired cricketer and ex-captain, resigned his position as a national selector, not because he was disgusted at the increasingly symbiotic relationship between cricket and beer, but because of a perceived conflict of interest between his sponsorship by XXXX (as the captain of the Australian beach cricket team) and Cricket Australia's sponsorship by Foster's (Brown, 2006a). Foster's claimed that the XXXX campaign, involving Border, was ambush marketing and was un-Australian (Brown, 2006b). A similar situation arose in the International Cricket Council Champions Trophy in Sri Lanka, nearly resulting in the cancellation of the tournament, and potential sponsees have been cautioned that they should ensure that "no scope should be left for commercial competitors to be sponsoring the same event" (Brown 2006b) including an overlap between the sponsorship of competitions, governing bodies, teams, and individual players. Cricket

Australia reported having difficulty identifying a replacement for Allan Border, and one of the key reasons cited for this difficulty was the gap between the earnings of a selector and the earnings from a media contract (Brown and Saltau, 2006). Again, the media seemed to miss the point, with the harshest criticism of Border coming from an autograph-seeking journalist who was snubbed by the great man at one of many events where journalists were hosted and provided with 'refreshments in the XXXX Gold retreat alongside cricket greats' (Gallagher, 2009).

Foster's Group (manufacturers of VB beer, the official sponsor of Cricket Australia) accused Lion Nathan of engaging in ambush marketing (Tabakoff, 2006) - a claim that intensified when Lion Nathan purchased prominent signage at two of the grounds during the Ashes cricket tour (McMahon, 2007). Lion Nathan's Andrew Coates countered that beach cricket is 'totally different' and 'another version' of cricket; and their advertising agency described the campaign as 'guerrilla marketing', making the distinction that "Ambush marketing implies something bordering on unethical. Guerilla marketing is something that is stealthy and of the world we live in. Beach cricket is definitely the latter" (Tabakoff, 2006).

It is important to note the dependence of the media – as well as the dependence of the major sporting codes – on alcohol advertising revenue, and one could question whether this contributes to the media's lack of criticism of such blatant marketing campaigns. As well as the spend on alcohol sponsorship per se, the industry spent an estimated \$106 million on alcohol advertising, a quarter of which was associated with sport (and it is estimated that advertisers pay \$30,000 for a 30-second slot during major sporting telecasts) which has a direct impact on the amount networks are prepared to pay for broadcasting rights (Stark, 2009). In an article in a trade publication, a consultant reported on a range of sports sponsorships by wine brands, citing increases in brand awareness and sales, and posed the question as to the potential for a ban on alcohol sponsorship of sport in Australia. She concluded: "I don't think so. In a sports- and drinks-mad culture like ours, I think common sense (and the lure of the almighty dollar) will prevail" (Smart, 2007).

Writing in The Australian newspaper, Mike Daube, a professor of health policy, commented on the inconsistency that saw the media, sporting administrator and the

prime minister willing to condemn the use of illicit drugs by high-profile sports stars, while their misuse of alcohol did not attract the same level of concern. Daube cited the regular reports of drunken rampages, assaults, drink-driving and various other forms of unacceptable behaviour by the high-profile sports stars, but asked “how can the sports that employ them expect anything else? Our major sports are afloat on a sea of alcohol sponsorship” (Daube, 2007). Daube dismissed industry arguments that they do not target children and young people, and gave the example of ‘game development’ links on Australian Football League websites, where five of the seven sites for junior club football promoted drinks industry sponsors.

There are many reasons why our politicians appear to be reluctant to tackle alcohol marketing. The Greens’ Senator Rachel Siewert (2009), in a submission to the Excise Tariff Amendment (alcohol tax) Bill stated that the government currently collects over \$7.1 billion per year in revenue from alcohol taxation (excluding the estimated \$1.6 billion over four years if the alcohol tax were passed). When the Australian Electoral Commission released political donation figures for 2006-07, Smith & Clennell (2008) questioned the independence of government decisions on regulation of the hotel industry when they noted that the industry donated \$610,000, and the Australian Hotels Association was involved in a ‘fundraiser’ that raised \$492,000 for the Labour party. In a letter to the Sydney Morning Herald, the President of Democracy Watch cautioned: “The alcohol industry is the second biggest donor group after the development lobby” (Pedersen, 2007). A quick search of the Australian Electoral Commission’s Database identifies regular contributions to each of the major political parties from the Distilled Spirits Industry Council of Australia Inc, the Winemakers Federation of Australia, Lion Nathan Australia Pty Limited and a number of other alcohol producers and industry groups. It has also been argued that politicians are eager to criticize, and campaign, against issues such as illicit drugs, but are reluctant to be seen to criticize alcohol (despite alcohol causing more than twice as many deaths as all illicit drugs combined) as this is not a ‘vote winner’ (Stark, 2007).

Discussion

It was suggested in the late 1990s that public awareness of the impact of alcohol abuse on society would lead to increasing pressure to regulate alcohol sponsorship of

sporting events, particularly in light of several high-profile cases such as the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug abuse's formal protest against Anheuser Busch's sponsorship of the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, and the National Coalition of Hispanic Health and Human Services Organisation's first formal protest over the same company's involvement with World Cup Soccer (McDaniel and Mason, 1999). However, it was also mooted that organising and regulatory authorities would be hesitant to regulate such activities due to their high degree of dependence on income from alcohol sponsorships (Howard and Crompton, 1995).

In the UK in 2006, the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs recommended – along with restrictions on alcohol advertising and changes to supply – a ban on sponsorship by alcohol companies of sports or music events attended or watched by under-18s. However, the proposals were rejected by the government, with ministers arguing that “the ban as suggested by the council would be disproportionate and would hit funding for grassroots sports projects” as the alcohol companies that sponsor high-profile sporting events such as the tennis and football championships also provide sponsorship to youth sporting groups (Burns and Hall, 2006).

The dependence on alcohol sponsors is not ubiquitous, and many sporting codes and sporting events thrive in the absence of alcohol sponsors. Australian soccer has a number of lucrative sponsorships with non-alcohol products. For example, in the lead up to the World Cup, the Socceroos' major sponsors included Qantas (which also has the naming rights for the team, hence the Qantas Socceroos) and Weet-bix breakfast cereal (Robertson, 2006); current sponsors include Qantas, Foxtel, Nike, Hyundai, National Australia Bank, Powerade and Optus. The 2008 Beijing Olympics sponsors included financial services, electronics and computer products, personal care products, car manufacturers, telecommunications and transport services; and the Australian Olympic team's sponsors similarly included financial services (such as Bankwest and Visa), electronics and computer products (GE, Panasonic, Acer and Samsung) and sporting apparel and fitness centres (Adidas, Speedo and Fitness First). Felt (2002) notes the increasing involvement in sports sponsorship of a range of other entities, including political causes, sports apparel companies, telecoms and media, corporations, and global consumer brands.

However, many major Australian sports – notably cricket, rugby league, Australian Rules football, and motor racing – continue to be dominated by alcohol sponsors. Unfortunately, the XXXX Beach Cricket Series is not the most inappropriate alcohol sponsorship in Australia in recent years, perhaps demonstrating how complacent we have become about alcohol sponsorship. The 2006 ‘Movember’ campaign – a men’s health campaign designed to increase awareness of prostate cancer, male depression, and testicular cancer, and to raise funds by having men grow a moustache sponsored by friends’ donations – was criticised for its links with alcohol and sport (Munro, 2006b). Foster’s VB was a major sponsor of the Movember campaign, and VB promotions were evident in the promotional materials, and particularly the web site. For example, the Pool Room page on the website had a group of men in a room filled with VB paraphernalia and all drinking the beer, along with a large poster on the wall which asked: “What sort of man grows a Mo? Of course, he’s a bloke who carries around a golden thirst”. Even more alarmingly, the page included a video entitled “A Mo Bro never let someone drink alone” and showed an unhappy man who cheered up when one of his friends bought him a drink. Finally, to the ire of public health advocates, the campaign’s registration form featured a photo of ‘archetypal binge drinker’ David Boon (Munro, 2006b). In case there was any doubt of the link between cricket, VB, and Movember, at the launch of ‘The Battle of the Tashes’ campaign VB’s marketing manager Ben Wicks said: “As a major Movember sponsor, we’re hoping some of the cricketers will keep their mo growing into the Ashes season. The two overlap nicely, because the first test is in late November” (Patterson, 2006).

In 2002 James Felt wrote that “the first high volume consumer brands to be involved in Formula 1 as well as other sports were alcohol and tobacco brands...[but] it may be said that sport as a whole has reduced the involvement of tobacco and alcohol, which has been part of sports sponsorship since the nineteenth century” (Felt, 2002).

However, this does not appear to be the case in Australia – where politicians and the media appear complicit in further promoting the association between alcohol and sport and our children are floating in a sea of alcohol marketing. If we are to tackle the increasing problem of alcohol-related harm in Australia, particularly among young people, we need to break the seemingly inexorable link between sports and alcohol.

Not only are alcohol sponsorships of sport thriving, particularly in the most high-profile sports - cricket and rugby – we are now seeing sports sponsorships of alcohol.

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