

FACT SHEET

Sport sponsorship in Bulgaria Results from the AMMIE Project

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Introduction

Sport-related alcohol advertising and promotion expenditures for European countries are not publicly available. However, we do know that European sport sponsorship by the alcohol industry in 1999 was approximated to be 168 million US dollars. This made it the industry with the second largest amount of European sports sponsorship expenses, second only to both manufacturers of cars and sports clothing (1). We also know that in the US roughly 60 percent of the alcohol industry's marketing expenditure is spent on sport related advertising and sponsorship (2). These figures are concerning when considering that recent studies provide evidence that alcohol industry sponsorship is associated with more hazardous drinking in sportspeople compared to non-alcohol sponsorship (3, 4). Additionally, the sponsoring of big sports events by alcohol producers leads to many minors getting exposed to alcohol marketing (5). Owing to a lack of research into the effects of sports sponsorship it is unclear how the alcohol industry's sponsorship of both professional and amateur sports clubs impacts drinking behaviours. To give an accurate idea of sport sponsorship in top Bulgarian sport clubs we have chosen the 5 most practiced team sports. Consequently we have gathered a list of 50 clubs (10 for each sport). The criterion for the sport clubs to be included is a top 10 position in their respective leagues. The goal was to discover if these clubs are sponsored by alcohol producers and how visible the alcohol brands are on their websites. While this research is not scientific, this small systematic monitoring exercise underlines the importance of this subject by showing that in most countries sports sponsorship is highly prevalent in various branches of premier league sports.

Recent literature on alcohol marketing and alcohol brands sports sponsorship

Anderson and colleagues analyzed thirteen longitudinal studies and concluded that exposure to alcohol advertising is associated with the probability that adolescents start drinking alcohol. They also found that those who already drink, consume even more after

exposure to alcohol marketing (6). These findings are supported by two other systematic reviews (7) (8).

When it comes to exposure to alcohol industry marketing through televised sports events and its effects on drinking behaviour, there is less literature available. The impact study by Collins et al finds evidence that watching sports programs with many alcohol advertisements, raises the likelihood of the viewer drinking alcohol (9). Another study found that the frequency of drinking amongst drinkers during the previous 12 months can be extrapolated by exposure to beer concession stands at sports and music events (10).

Furthermore, it has been well established by many studies in Australia, New Zealand and the USA that sportspeople drink more alcohol in a more hazardous manner than non-sportspeople (4, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16). Additionally, it has been shown that levels of heavy episodic drinking have increased among young people, especially amongst sororities, fraternities and athletes in the USA and the UK (17). Recently O'Brien and colleagues added to this that sportspeople who are sponsored by the alcohol industry drink in more hazardous ways than those who have non-alcoholic sponsors (3).

Bulgarian regulations on sport sponsorship

Alcohol marketing in Bulgaria is self-regulated by the industry. The Bulgarian Association of manufacturers, importers and retailers of alcoholic beverages has approved Common standards for responsible commercial communications of alcoholic beverages. According to this standard, commercial communication about alcohol should not use objects, images, styles, symbols, colors, music and characters that are especially attractive to children and minors.

Promotional activities of alcohol products can be made by the advertiser in *organized sporting events*. Advertisers are prohibited from exposing brands of drinks on *replicas of sport articles* in sizes for children, instead they should offer such items without the brands. Advertisers are not allowed to sponsor *youth sports teams or youth sports leagues*. In respect to *sponsored sports or activities* that are considered dangerous, the communication may not contain the assumption that the players/performers

consume alcohol before or during execution, or that alcohol somehow improves their performance. Also, the drinking of alcohol

before participation in a sporting activity should not be encouraged.

Sponsoring of top clubs by alcohol brands

While Bulgarian amateur sports clubs are generally not sponsored financially by businesses, the situation with professional clubs is different. In recent years, banks and mobile operators have been the leading sponsors in the sport sector, while the alcohol industry is also enlarging its investments but its common targets are usually umbrella organizations or tournaments, and not so much clubs.

Football

Alcohol branded sponsorship connected to football mainly takes the form of sponsoring tournaments and other events. A good example of this is the tournament "Amateurs meet professionals", where the best amateur club meets with the football champions of Bulgaria. It is organized by beer Ariana (managed by Heineken). There is a big sponsor section on the website of the alcohol brand, devoted to the tournament, with photos, news, videos, etc. Ariana's tournament is advertised on the Internet and TV, through shirts, billboard, brochures, etc. Another comparable event is the Kamentiza Fan Cup, a tournament for amateurs. The sponsor section on the website is devoted to the tournament, and shows football news, photos, videos, results, etc. Kamenitza is the main sponsor of the event.



Billboard of the Ariana tournament in front of the national football stadium

On a team level, however, the situation is surprisingly different. We checked 10 professional clubs, and the results of the survey show that only one club is sponsored by an alcohol brand. This is Pirin Blagoevgrad. The club is sponsored by beer Pirinsko (managed by Carlsberg). There is a

section on the home page of Pirin FC with a logo and a link to the Pirinsko website. Pirinsko is a main sponsor, advertised with

logos on the shirts of the players, the stadium, billboards, etc.

Basketball

The Bulgarian Basketball Federation is sponsored by beer producer Ledenika MM. There is a multimedia sponsor section on the home page of the beer, devoted to basketball. On the page of the Federation there is a logo and a link to the Ledenika website. Ledenika MM also organizes a Ledenika Cup Tournament, on which we found no further mention of alcohol brand sponsors.

Volleyball

None of the 10 clubs that we checked is sponsored by an alcohol brand.

Hockey

None of the 10 checked professional clubs is sponsored by an alcohol brand.

Handball

None of the 10 checked handball clubs is sponsored by an alcohol brand.

Conclusions

The analysis surprisingly show that only one professional club of the 50 is sponsored by an alcohol brand. However, some national sport organizations and tournaments in football and basketball are recognized as important targets for alcohol marketing. Sports like volleyball, hockey and handball are completely neglected by the Bulgarian alcohol industry.

Why the Bulgarian alcohol industry is reluctant to enter more massively into sports sponsoring is a question that still has to be answered. One possible explanation may lay in the athletic achievements of Bulgarian athletes on various levels. Another explanation may be the clear and steady trend of people withdrawing their interest from local sports.

Important changes in the near future development of alcohol sponsorship of Bulgarian sports are not expected. It will probably remain concentrated on football as the most massively practiced and watched collective sport. Only a few professional sport clubs will be sponsored by alcohol brands. Instead the alcohol industry's focus will be on supporting tournaments, organizations or national teams. This obviously brings far more exposure to the general public.

There are, however, a few important recommendations to be made: a) alcohol sponsorship in sport should restrict children

and youth from being exposed to the respective alcohol brands; b) the national regulators should prohibit alcohol to be advertised as a prize for winning amateur football tournaments, as this has become a common practice; c) sport success and enjoying watching or practicing sport should be clearly differentiated from alcohol consumption.

AMMIE (Alcohol Marketing Monitoring in Europe) is a project of NGOs from five EU countries (Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands). The project (2009-2011) was co-funded by the European Commission and coordinated by the Dutch Institute for Alcohol Policy (STAP). The five NGO's monitored systematically alcohol advertising practices in 2010. Also young people were involved in this project.

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