

# FACT SHEET

## Sport sponsorship in Italy 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 Italian 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).

### **Italian regulations on sport sponsorship**

No specific regulations on sport sponsorship and alcoholic beverages are in effect. The sources of information on this issue are the National Advertisers Association UPA and an Italian lawyer who has investigated the field and written articles on the issue of alcohol advertising and marketing.

Both confirmed the lack of such regulations, which means that sport clubs can freely decide the kind of sponsorship, leaving room for possible self-regulation codes of conduct. This is the case, for example, with the International Skiing Federation, which has a specific sponsorship code for international tournaments. Athletes' sponsors cannot be related in any way to alcohol, tobacco or drugs.

Unlike other European countries, in Italy the sale of alcoholic beverages during sport events, even if an alcoholic brand is the main sponsor, is evaluated on a case-by-case

basis, depending on the presumed level of trouble caused by the club's supporters and social disturbance. It is in the major's power to take the decision of limiting alcohol availability and access.

### **Sponsoring of top clubs by alcohol brands**

Sport sponsorship seems to be a quite common promotional practice in Italy. Given the great popularity of the five considered sports and of the high level clubs, promotion through sponsorship ensures a great visibility of products and a massive spread of the brand.

#### **Football**

Four of the top ten premier league football clubs are sponsored by alcohol producers (three by breweries, one by a wine producer). Also, there are two clubs (Lazio & Juventus) who are not sponsored by alcohol producers, but do sell wine bottles (by Cantine Scrimaglio) with their club logo. Additionally, the National Federation is sponsored by Peroni Beer.

The type of sponsorship varies from premium sponsors, official partners, official suppliers to institutional sponsors. On most of the websites the sponsorship is just specified by a logo of the alcoholic producer or a link which leads directly to the website of the sponsors. Information about the content and the quantity of sponsorship by the alcohol industry is hardly available within the club's internet presence.



Picture of the Juventus wine by Cantine Scrimaglio.

#### **Basketball**

The analysis of Italian premier league basketball clubs revealed five of the top ten clubs to be sponsored by alcohol producers.

Four of the clubs are sponsored by brewers, three by wine producers. Two clubs even have more than one alcohol industry sponsor. Of the basketball clubs that are sponsored by alcohol producers, marketing initiatives range from simply clickable logo's, to sweepstakes and selling wine bottles with the club logo. The types of sponsorships are described as official partners, silver sponsor, and commercial partners.

#### **Volleyball**

The monitoring process reveals that seven of the ten analysed top teams are funded by at least one alcohol producer (three clubs have two alcohol industry sponsors, while one even has three).

Two volleyball clubs (Pallavolo Modena & Blu Volley Verona) were sponsored by among others wine associations tasked with protection and/or promotion of a particular local production (Consorzio Marchio storico dei Lambruschi Modenesi & Consorzio Tutela Valcalepio). Another club (Andreoli Top Latina Volley) is sponsored by a 'high quality wine bar' (Encolojico-Ritrovo di Vite). The sponsorship is generally specified by a logo and a link to the sponsor's internet presence.

#### **Rugby**

The traditional link between rugby and alcohol is testified by the sponsorship of the Italian Rugby Federation by Peroni Beer and Glen Grant Whiskey. Interestingly, no other top ten rugby club has a beer sponsor. The three rugby clubs with alcohol brand sponsors are sponsored by wines.

The presence is mostly comprised of logo's with links to the sponsor company's website. The websites of the clubs as well as the internet presence of the alcohol producers hardly reveal the quantity of the respective endorsement.

#### **Water Polo**

Two of the top ten premier league water polo clubs have sponsors related to alcohol, and they are related only to restaurants and wine cellars rather than to alcoholic brands .

#### **Conclusions**

Of the fifty premier league sport club websites that were visited for this research, 23 clubs (46%) are sponsored by an alcohol producer and/or by an alcohol distributor. They are sponsored not only by big multinational brands but also by regional and even local small producers. Some clubs have more than one alcohol sponsor. Additionally, two national federations (football and rugby) are also sponsored by alcohol brands.

Having considered the massive exposure of young people to alcohol promotion through sponsorship, at least a clear set of regulations referring to sport sponsorship would be appropriate. In the best case, alcohol sport sponsoring should be restricted such as in the case of France and Norway. The French example shows that such a ban will not threaten the further existence of sports, sports clubs and sports events. With its alcohol sponsorship and advertisement ban in place, France still succeeded in hosting the 1998 FIFA World Cup and is currently hosting the International Rugby Competition.

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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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