

FACT SHEET

Sport sponsorship in Netherlands 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 Dutch 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).

Dutch regulations on sport sponsorship

No specific statutory regulations on sport sponsorship and alcoholic beverages are in effect. On the self-regulation side, sport sponsorship is mentioned in the Advertising Code for Alcoholic Beverages. This document states that linking the brand name of an alcoholic beverage to an event is permitted as long as the rules of the Code are applied. Also, it states that 'advertisements for alcoholic beverages may not be carried by an individual sports person or sports team or on attributes that the sports person uses in the active sports practice. Nor on the transportation used by sports persons of teams in the practice of speed sports.'

Sponsoring of top clubs by alcohol brands

Alcohol industry sport sponsorship is strongly associated with football in the Netherlands. Yet also, with sports events and slightly less popular sports as hockey and korfball.

Football

The top 10 clubs are all sponsored by alcohol producers. It seems that all the larger beer companies in the Netherlands have found a club to sponsor. Not only are the alcohol companies heavily promoted on the clubs' websites, the alcohol producers use the soccer clubs as a marketing tool to advertise their product in various ways. They organize events together with fans and with the club, they create promotional items in which the beer brand and the club are connected, and they even create special 'club' beer cans that are available in the stores (within limited editions).



The 'Feyenoord can' by Amstel, trainer Mario Been (left) received the first can.

Basketball

Only the Champion of the Basketball League (Eclipse Jet) is sponsored by an alcohol producer (Jupiler by Inbev). Other teams are mostly sponsored by local non alcohol industry companies.

Hockey

Top hockey Clubs are often sponsored by alcohol producers. Besides sponsoring the national Hockey team, five out of ten top clubs (in the Rabo Hoofdklasse) are sponsored by Heineken. Additionally, one is sponsored by Bavaria and one by Grolsch. Heineken likes to profile itself as a 'premium brand'; they apparently would like to be associated with 'an elite sport' as hockey.

Volleyball

Volleyball clubs are mostly sponsored by local companies: only one out of the top ten is sponsored by an alcohol producer (Taurus by Heineken).

Korfball

All Korfball Clubs that are sponsored by an alcohol producer (five out of ten clubs in the A-League) are sponsored by InBev (Dommelsch, Jupiler, InBev).

Conclusions

Of the 50 sports club websites that were visited for this report 29 (58%) stated that the clubs are sponsored by alcohol producers. The way the sponsorship deals are executed varies greatly between the selected sport branches and, in some cases, even between clubs of the same sport.

It is indeed remarkable that a large brewery like Heineken is able to use different sports to promote their different brands. For example, the Heineken brand—a premium brand—is strongly connected to elite sports such as field hockey (by sponsoring half of the top ten Premier League clubs) and sailing (the Heineken Regatta). Heineken's Amstel brand, however, is tied just as strongly to folk sports like soccer (by sponsoring half of the top ten Premier League clubs).

Another interesting finding is the differences in the naming of the sponsorship deals. Whether the alcohol producers are called 'partner', 'star sponsor', 'silver sponsor', 'business sponsor', or 'head sponsor', in virtually all cases they are considered partners, which implies mutual benefits. However, often it is unclear to outsiders what role the alcohol producers actually play within the club.

Lastly, it is interesting to observe the many different ways sports sponsorship is used to promote alcohol brands, especially on the football clubs' websites. Yet, this study has only focused on the websites of the clubs, while in practice, the ways in which marketing can be carried out is nearly limitless (billboards next to the field or in stadiums, promotional items, naming of stadiums etc.) Moreover, it is very likely that not every form of alcohol marketing through sport sponsorship is reported or advertised on the club website. It is likely that more marketing is taking place inside club canteens or on the sidelines of sports fields.

There are two important recommendations to be made: a) In Dutch Law sport sponsoring by the alcohol industry is not explicitly determined. For this reason a statutory regulation is recommended, keeping sport and alcohol marketing separated; b) such a regulation should include clear rules that protect children and youngsters against the harmful influences of sport sponsoring.

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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