Yes, You Can!
The NCAA Can Do More to Restrict Beer Ads in College Sports

The Campaign for Alcohol-Free Sports TV, a project of the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), seeks to reduce youth exposure to beer advertising on televised college sports. Recent research has more closely linked teens’ exposure to alcohol advertising with more frequent and heavier drinking. Problems resulting from underage drinking and excessive alcohol consumption plague most college campuses and are considered to be among the most pressing concerns facing college administrators, who commit substantial funds to prevent and reduce those problems. Collaborating with beer marketers and broadcasters to push beer consumption undermines their prevention messages and demeans the missions of higher education and college athletics.

Since 2005, more than one-third (372) of NCAA-member colleges and 16 athletic conferences have signed the “College Commitment” pledge to eliminate beer advertisements from college sports telecasts. In April 2008, 117 college presidents and athletic directors asked the NCAA to review and end televised beer advertising during future NCAA basketball tournaments. And in August 2008, more than 400 Division I college presidents, athletic directors, and football and basketball coaches urged the NCAA Executive Committee to end beer advertising on all NCAA sports telecasts.

The NCAA Executive Committee decided to maintain the current policy, although University of Georgia President Michael Adams, speaking on behalf of the Committee, reported that “we don’t think [beer advertising] is appropriate for [college sports].” The NCAA also claimed that it has “the most conservative and restrictive approach to [alcohol] advertising of any sports organization.” The facts speak otherwise.

CSPI decided to test whether the NCAA’s claims regarding its “conservative and restrictive” alcohol advertising policy were accurate. We looked at advertising during the three 2008 NCAA “Final Four” basketball games and the 2008-2009 college football bowl games, specifically focusing on games within the Bowl Championship Series (BCS). Our analysis discovered that a higher percentage of beer ads appeared during the 2008 NCAA “Final Four” than during the 2009 BCS games. We found that 12% of all ads aired during the three NCAA “Final Four” games promoted beer, and beer represented the 2nd most advertised product category. In contrast, only 6% of all BCS game ads we monitored promoted beer, which was the 7th most-advertised product category.

NCAA basketball games contain two, twenty-minute halves (40 minutes of playing time), whereas college football games comprise four, fifteen-minute quarters (60 minutes of playing time). Because of the difference in length of these telecasts — football games run 20 minutes longer than basketball games — beer ads were far more concentrated during the NCAA “Final Four” basketball games than during the college bowl games. Therefore, the so-called “conservative” NCAA alcohol advertising policy allows a considerably greater saturation of beer ads per game than in BCS football.

Most notably, one bowl game (although not BCS) — the Chick-fil-A Bowl, featuring teams from two high-profile college conferences (ACC and SEC) — prohibits all beer advertisements, in-stadium signs, and sponsorships.

CSPI’s analysis demonstrates the flimsiness of the NCAA’s claims and suggests that substantial reductions in beer advertisements during college sports telecasts are possible without sacrificing the economic strength of the telecasts.
Monitoring Results
Advertising in College Sports Telecasts

2009 Bowl Championship Series (BCS)

- 380 advertisements aired during four\(^1\) of the five 2009 BCS football bowl games during January 2009. We counted advertisements that ran between kick-off and the final game buzzer, but excluded commercials during halftime.\(^2\)

- 358 (94\%) of the ads monitored promoted products and/or companies other than alcoholic beverages. Alcoholic beverage commercials represented 6\% (22) of the total ads observed.

- Beer ads accounted for the 7\(^{th}\) most-advertised product category, behind automobiles, telecommunications, network television programs, food, entertainment, and insurance companies.

- Both the number and proportion of beer ads during each BCS Bowl Game varied and ranged from a low of two beer ads, representing 2\% of all ads during the Rose Bowl, to 9\% of all ads (8 beer ads) aired during the BCS Championship Game. Beer ads and sponsorships were most frequent and concentrated on Bowl Games broadcast on the Fox network. The Rose Bowl featured 2 beer ads (ABC); Allstate Sugar Bowl, 6 beer ads (Fox); Tostitos Fiesta Bowl, 6 beer ads (Fox); FedEx BCS Championship, 8 beer ads (Fox).

Chick-fil-A Bowl Succeeds Without Beer Ads

- This year’s Chick-fil-A Bowl\(^3\) (formerly known as the Peach Bowl) featured the Georgia Institute of Technology and Louisiana State University, representing two popular and successful college athletic conference powerhouses — the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) and the Southeastern Conference (SEC). The game traditionally airs on New Year’s Eve during evening primetime on ESPN. Notably, the game contained no beer advertisements, nor in-stadium beer signs or beer sponsorships, pursuant to policy imposed by the primary sponsor (Chick-fil-A) prohibiting all alcohol advertisements.

- Tickets for the 2008 bowl game sold out for the 12\(^{th}\) straight year, and in 2007, the bowl brought in an estimated $12 million from ticket sales, corporate sponsorships, and television rights,\(^4\) which is comparable to or greater than revenue from bowl games the year before, including a few in the BCS.\(^5\)

- Viewership data from the 2007 game indicate a 5.09 ratings share (4.92 million households); making it the highest-rated ESPN-broadcast bowl game of the 2007-2008 season as well as the highest rated in the game's history.\(^6\) The rating was also higher than two New Year's Day bowls that year — the Cotton and the Gator.\(^7\)

NCAA 2008 “Final Four” Basketball Games

- TNS Media Intelligence reported for the entire 2007 basketball tournament that advertising expenditures by brewers Anheuser-Busch and SABMiller ranked fourth and fifth among top tournament advertisers. Among the top five, the beer category ranked second, behind automobiles.

- 196 ads aired during the three games of the 2008 “Final Four” men’s basketball tournament.\(^8\) This analysis excludes any advertisements aired during halftime, pre-, and post-game shows.\(^9\) Of those, 88\% (173) advertised products/companies other than alcoholic beverages. Alcoholic-beverage advertisements made up 12\% (23), of the total ads observed.

- Beer advertising (23 ads) represented the second most advertised product category, behind automobiles (34). CBS television shows (21), entertainment (18), and insurance (14) ads rounded out the top five most-advertised categories.

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\(^1\) Observed games include: Rose Bowl “presented by Citi”; Allstate Sugar Bowl; Tostitos Fiesta Bowl; Fed Ex BCS National Championship game. Due to a technical malfunction, the FedEx Orange Bowl was not videotaped and is not included in this analysis.

\(^2\) The NCAA claims it does not control ads aired during halftime and pre- and post-game shows. In order to fairly compare BCS (non-NCAA) and “Final Four” (NCAA), ads aired during those times are not counted in the analysis.

\(^3\) The Chick-fil-A Bowl is not one of the 5 BCS bowl games.


\(^8\) Analysis of 3 “Final Four” games included: University of Memphis vs. UCLA (4/5/08); University of Kansas vs. University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill (4/5/08); University of Memphis vs. University of Kansas (4/7/08).

\(^9\) See Footnote 2 above.