

# CAMPAIGN FOR ALCOHOL-FREE SPORTS TV

A PROJECT OF THE CENTER FOR SCIENCE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

**Statement of George A. Hacker  
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Center for Science in the Public Interest  
Press Conference  
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Welcome.

I am George Hacker, Director of the Alcohol Policies Project at the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

I am honored to be joined today by two of the most respected former college coaches in the United States, both of them hall of famers in their sports: Rep. Tom Osborne (R-NE), who coached national champion football teams at the University of Nebraska; and Dean Smith, former coach of national champion basketball teams at the University of North Carolina and a coach of the United States Olympic gold-medal basketball team. We're also joined today by Catherine Bath of the organization, Security on Campus. Catherine is a parent with a particularly heartbreaking story about the consequences of alcohol for young people. You will hear from each of them shortly.

Two months ago, the National Academy of Sciences released a landmark report that called upon the country to "create and sustain a broad societal commitment to reduce underage drinking."

That report, "Reducing Underage Drinking, A Collective Responsibility," emphasized that such a commitment will require broad participation at the national, state, local, and community levels, including, among others, alcohol producers, wholesalers and retail outlets, and colleges and universities.

Although others share the collective responsibility to reduce underage drinking, today we are asking college and university officials to help meet their part of that commitment by ending all alcohol advertising on televised college sports events. We are asking them to make the "The College Commitment," by getting rid of alcohol advertising on local broadcasts of their games and by working within their athletic conferences and in the NCAA to eliminate alcohol ads there too. The Campaign will be disseminating "The College Commitment" to all schools in the National Collegiate Athletic Association later this month.

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Underage and binge drinking are persistent problems on campus, with real consequences for students. University officials often admit that alcohol is at the root of many, if not most, serious disciplinary problems on campus. Underage drinking – and its many problems – also occurs long before young people even reach college. On average, young people begin to drink when they're around 13 years old.

College officials say they want to deter underage and binge drinking; they say they want to stop the riots that disrupt campus communities and blot their schools' reputations. But, too often, they're complicit with beer marketers in pitching beer to their students and other young fans. This relationship demeans the mission of their institutions and compromises their responsibilities to the health and safety of their students.

Alcohol advertising on televised sports is a huge business and it's growing fast -- \$596 million in 2002, a 22% increase over 2001. That amounts to about 60% of all alcohol advertising on TV.

College sports is an important part of beer marketers' television onslaught. They spent \$58 million on college games in 2002, which represented 5.3% of all ads on college sports, compared to just 2% of ads on all television shows. The NCAA basketball tournament in 2002 had 939 beer ads, more than the Super Bowl, World Series, College Football Bowl Games, and NFL Monday Night Football combined (925).

Beer marketers know who they're reaching. The college sports market delivers just the audience they want: large concentrations of heavy and binge drinkers, including many who are underage. And that's important to them, since underage drinkers down as much as 20% of all the alcohol consumed in America. There's no question that beer marketers reach millions of young people who watch and enjoy sports on television – including college sports.

In preparing the Campaign for Alcohol-Free Sports TV, we asked the American people what they think about using sports television as a platform to market beer to young people. Our national survey found that:

- Americans overwhelmingly (63%) believe beer companies use sports to reach and advertise to persons under the legal drinking age and that the companies know their ads appeal to underage persons.
- More than two-thirds (69%) of Americans say that airing beer commercials on college sports programs is inconsistent with the mission of colleges and universities – 84% think that beer advertising on college games is not in the best interests of higher education.
- Three in four Americans (73%) say it is wrong for colleges to take money from beer companies that promote drinking while at the same time trying to discourage underage and binge drinking among their students.
- 71% of Americans support a ban on all alcohol ads on televised college games.

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Today, we call upon college officials to hear and respect the views of American parents and other adults. Give up the beer money, stop enabling the promotion of beer to underage students and other young fans, and stop handicapping your own efforts to reduce alcohol problems on campus.

In the spirit of the recommendations of the NAS report on underage drinking, we also call on the beer industry to stop the reckless marketing to college students and other underage sports fans. If beer promoters were sincere in their claims about not encouraging underage drinking, they would stop advertising on college sports, where most of the participants, students, and many of the most avid fans are underage.

We don't expect that eliminating alcohol advertising in college sports alone will magically reduce underage drinking or end alcohol-fueled riots and other problems on college campuses. But we do know that colleges and the NCAA say they want to address fan misbehavior and out-of-control drinking on their campuses. Getting out of the business of promoting booze to kids is a good place to start.

Dick Schultz, then Executive Director of the NCAA, sought to do just that 15 years ago. In 1998, then Secretary of Health and Human Services, and current University of Miami President, Donna Shalala, told the NCAA, "We need to sever the tie between college sports and drinking. Completely, absolutely, and forever." During the past ten years, several college athletic programs have taken that step, motivated by the obvious disconnect between their mission within higher education and the fiscal rewards of selling their students and other young sports fans to alcohol marketers.

Rather than follow those leads, the NCAA has hung onto its tournament beer advertisers, and continues to broadcast pro-drinking messages to millions of underage persons. Some people think the term "March Madness" applies to the basketball. It most surely also describes the NCAA's misguided policy on alcohol advertising.

Making "The College Commitment" and getting rid of alcohol advertising in college sports will help college officials reclaim the moral high ground. It will help establish the credibility they need when they design programs and policies to reduce underage and binge drinking on campus and talk to students about alcohol problems.

Making "The College Commitment" gives college officials an opportunity to demonstrate real leadership, consistency, and clarity when it comes to tackling alcohol problems on campus and among young people throughout America. We look forward to working with college presidents, athletic directors, and scores of organizations nationwide to eliminate alcohol advertising where it clearly does not belong.

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