

CAMPAIGN FOR ALCOHOL-FREE SPORTS TV

A PROJECT OF THE CENTER FOR SCIENCE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

March 16, 2006

President Peter Likins
The University of Arizona
Administration Building, Room 712
1401 East University Boulevard
P.O. Box 210066
Tucson, AZ 85721-0066

Dear President Likins:

During the next three weeks your school will play a central role in the most exciting and visible event in college athletics – the NCAA men’s basketball tournament. That tournament should be a celebration of the best in college sports. Unfortunately, the event and its youthful participants have been hijacked to hawk beer to students and other fans, including many who are younger than the minimum legal drinking age. We respectfully ask that you question whether this is an appropriate use of your school’s reputation and its academic, social, and athletic missions.

While the student-athletes in the tournament compete on the court they will be part of the heaviest concentration of televised beer ads all year on college sports telecasts. Some forty percent – between \$25 and \$30 million – of annual spending for alcohol ads on all televised college sports comes during the three-week period of NCAA March Madness. According to the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Georgetown University, the concentration of beer ads during the tournament is 16 times greater than the average concentration of alcohol ads on all television programming. Clearly, the NCAA’s purported time limit on beer ads during its broadcasts provides no effective limit at all.

Those ads, many of which feature irresponsible, adolescent, and/or sexist messages, mock the high-risk and destructive drinking behaviors of college students and belittle the tragic consequences of underage and binge drinking by college students. You and your colleagues know that impact well: annually more than 1,700 deaths, 599,000 injuries, 696,000 assaults on students by another student who had been drinking, and more than 97,000 alcohol-related sexual assaults or date rapes.

Many college presidents recognize the fundamental disconnect between the mission of higher education and the business of advertising beer to young people. 246 NCAA schools – 24% of the NCAA, including ten of the 64 schools in the tournament – have already pledged to support an end to beer ads on telecasts of college sports. **We urge you to join them by signing the enclosed College Commitment to support the elimination of alcohol advertising in future broadcast contracts negotiated by your school, your conference, the NCAA, and the BCS.**

A growing body of research evidence suggests the timeliness of such action. Recent longitudinal studies of adolescent youth show that increased exposure to alcohol advertising is related to elevated levels of drinking and heavier drinking among that population. Underage persons pay attention to the ads, enjoy them, and take their drinking cues from them. Alcohol advertising represents one of many important and measurable elements in shaping a child's decisions to drink and how much to drink.

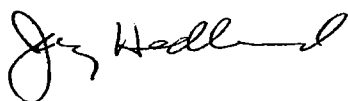
U.S. Representative Tom Osborne (a Hall of Fame former college football coach and professional athlete) has identified numerous issues that we urge you to consider in reviewing the questionable liaison between college sports and beer advertising: "Most of the young people who participate in NCAA athletics are under the legal drinking age, and since intercollegiate athletes are supposed to represent positive values, the alcohol commercials seem particularly inappropriate. Furthermore, having alcohol commercials appear during televised college games is inconsistent with the efforts colleges make to curb underage drinking. Rather than make money from the beer commercials, universities have a unique opportunity to minimize the exposure of young people to alcohol advertising and send a clear message on the serious risks of underage and excessive drinking."

Other sports legends, including Dean Smith, John Wooden, Joe Paterno, and Jim Calhoun, have echoed Rep. Osborne's words: "The use of college sports to market beer to millions of college students and other underage fans distorts the best values of college sports." More than 190 national, state, and local organizations – including the American Medical Association and the American College Health Association – also endorse the aims of the College Commitment.

In refusing to reform its own beer advertising standards last year, the NCAA declared that the decision regarding alcohol advertising on college games rests fundamentally with the presidents of NCAA schools. The time has come for schools, athletic conferences, and the NCAA Executive Committee to stop passing the buck on a beer advertising policy that is so totally without principle and so totally lacking in regard for the best interests of colleges and their students.

You and your school share the national spotlight during the NCAA tournament. We urge you to reject the promotion of beer to college students and other young fans by exercising leadership to support an end to beer ads on college sports. Endorsing the enclosed College Commitment will truly respect the values of college sports, higher education, and the best interests of academic institutions and their students. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Jay Hedlund
Manager
Campaign for Alcohol-Free Sports TV



George A. Hacker
Director
Alcohol Policies Project