

CAMPAIGN FOR ALCOHOL-FREE SPORTS TV

A PROJECT OF THE CENTER FOR SCIENCE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

March 30, 2005

Dear President,

We were very pleased to learn from the minutes of the last two meetings of the NCAA Division I Board of Directors and from *USA Today* that the Board is conducting a “comprehensive review” of the problem of alcohol use surrounding intercollegiate athletic events, including “[a]n examination of institutional, conference, and the Association’s alcohol advertising policies.” We think such a review is long overdue.

For more than a year, the Center for Science in the Public Interest’s Campaign for Alcohol-Free Sports TV has questioned college and NCAA policies that allow beer ads on sports telecasts. Those policies undermine the mission of higher education and the many laudable efforts by college officials across the country to change the culture of alcohol that exists on too many campuses. Similarly, we are concerned that the history of NCAA’s alcohol advertising policy reflects an inappropriately close financial, personnel, and policy relationship with brewer Anheuser-Busch. That company’s mission – to sell beer – conflicts directly with college and NCAA efforts to come to grips with alcohol problems in higher education.

We strongly urge you to aggressively pursue the NCAA’s alcohol policy review and ensure that such consideration occurs independent of the money or influence of the beer industry. We urge you to adopt a voluntary ban on all alcohol advertising, including beer advertising, in NCAA telecasts. Such action will enhance many of the diverse efforts to protect young collegians from underage and binge drinking.

You and your colleagues on other campuses know better than most the devastating impact of underage and binge drinking by college students and other young people. Annually, 500,000 college students are injured under the influence of alcohol, more than 70,000 are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or rape, more than 150,000 develop an alcohol-related health problem, and more than 1,400 college students die each year from alcohol-related injuries. Alcohol fueled “celebratory riots” have become commonplace on campuses across the country, and continue to this day.

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Given the extent of alcohol problems on campuses and in surrounding communities, and the universal acknowledgement by college officials that “a culture of alcohol” has infected the nation’s campuses, the NCAA cannot continue to justify an advertising policy that allows a relative flood of beer ads on its broadcasts.

The NCAA plays a major supportive role in linking beer and drinking as integral parts of college life. In 2003, the alcohol industry spent more than \$52 million to place 4,747 ads in college sports programming – including \$21.1 million for 395 ads on the NCAA men’s basketball tournament alone. In 2002, more beer ads ran on the broadcasts of the NCAA men’s basketball tournament than on the Super Bowl, all college football bowl games, the World Series, and the NFL Monday Night Football series combined.

The beer industry – specifically Anheuser-Busch (through money, program, and personnel) – has generated favorable consideration for beer into the operations of the NCAA. You can imagine our disappointment to learn that the working group options paper prepared for your January Division I Board of Directors meeting refers to a large financial contribution to the NCAA from Anheuser-Busch as a rationale for opposing a ban on all alcohol advertising: “The NCAA has accepted an endowment from Anheuser-Busch Companies, Inc. (\$2 Million in ’91; has grown to \$3-4 Million) to award over \$300,000 annually to member schools through CHOICES alcohol-education grants. [\$2.6 Million has been awarded to institutions since ’91.]”

The reference to the Anheuser-Busch money reveals that: 1) the financial relationship with Anheuser-Busch is uppermost in mind at the NCAA today as it considers alcohol-policy changes, and 2) the financial and policy link dates back at least to 1989, when the NCAA’s alcohol advertising guidelines were last revised in favor of the beer industry. Since that time, the NCAA tournament has provided brewers preferential access to college and younger sports fans and has effectively turned the funding and administration of its alcohol education programs over to the brewer.

The facts behind the NCAA and Anheuser-Busch relationship include:

- In 1989 the NCAA rejected Executive Director Dick Schultz’ proposed ban on beer ads and instead adopted a policy that bans all alcohol advertising except for products with 6% alcohol content by volume or less. That policy specifically allows beer to be advertised on NCAA broadcasts. Despite a purported limitation on the time allowed for beer ads – one minute per hour

- those ads appear on NCAA games twice as often as they appear in all television programming;
- In 1990, less than a year after the NCAA adopted its pro-beer advertising policy, Anheuser-Busch donated more than \$2 million to the NCAA to fund college alcohol-education programs;
- In 1996, the NCAA hired a former Anheuser-Busch sports marketing executive – Ronald J. Stratten – and put him in charge of NCAA education programs – including alcohol education programs;
- In 2004 Mr. Stratten touted a flawed and questionable Anheuser-Busch-funded survey about fan misbehavior at collegiate sporting events (a copy of our letter to Mr. Stratten is enclosed); the release of the bogus survey represented a patent attempt to minimize public concern about the destructive role of alcohol in college sports;
- In January 2005, the NCAA working group prepared a limited “options paper” on alcohol advertising and cited the NCAA’s multi-million dollar financial relationship with Anheuser-Busch as a justification for opposing a ban on beer ads on NCAA broadcasts.

The American public, college presidents, athletic coaches and others want change. In the past year, our Campaign has witnessed a strong groundswell of support for an end to alcohol ads on college sports broadcasts. 227 schools (22% of the NCAA) have signed the “College Commitment” of the Campaign for Alcohol-Free Sports TV, pledging to support and work for an end to alcohol ads on college sports. More than 175 national, state, and local organizations have endorsed the Campaign. College coaching icons Tom Osborne, Dean Smith, John Wooden, Joe Paterno, Jim Calhoun, and others have called for an end to beer ads on college games. U.S. Representative Osborne and a bi-partisan group in the House of Representatives have filed non-binding “Sense of the House” legislation calling on the NCAA and its member schools to give up alcohol ads on college broadcasts. A national survey conducted for the Campaign found that more than 75% of Americans believe that running beer ads on college sports programs is inconsistent with efforts colleges make to discourage underage and excessive drinking. 72% support a ban on all alcohol advertising during college sports broadcasts.

We know that you and other leaders in the NCAA and on campuses around the country are concerned about the persistent problem of underage and binge drinking by college students and other young fans. And, we’re aware that a ban

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on alcohol ads on college sports broadcasts will not, by itself, solve that problem. But, at the very least, the NCAA and its member schools should not be part of the problem. On principle, the NCAA should not participate in connecting alcohol with all the positive values and experiences related to college sports, nor should it assist in well-financed efforts to promote drinking among college students, young fans, and others.

We strongly urge you to adopt a voluntary ban on all alcohol advertising. We also urge you to ensure that the Board of Directors fully controls the review of alcohol advertising policies, because a review by current staff (including Mr. Stratten and potentially others linked to the alcoholic-beverage industry) raises substantial questions concerning its objectivity and credibility.

Thank you for taking on a comprehensive review of this critical issue. And thank you for all you do for the health and well-being of young people.

Sincerely,



Jay Hedlund
Manager
Campaign for Alcohol-Free Sports TV



George A. Hacker
Director
Alcohol Policies Project

cc: NCAA Division 1 Board of Directors