

# Chiefs and Pirates - playing the branding game

 By [Thabani Khumalo](#)

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When South African Breweries, Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates announced the Carling Black Label Cup, the football fraternity reacted differently.

Some criticised the PSL decision to cancel the season opener, the Telkom Charity Tournament, and others questioned the rationale behind active involvement of clubs' followers in the selection and coaching of the derby game. While one sports commentator said, "The Soweto derby has gone down the bottle," others welcomed the initiative as a good business decision by participants.

My reaction is that Pirates and Chiefs agreed to participate in this unique initiative in-order to maximize their brands' equity. Simply put, they are playing the branding game.

Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates are big football commercial brands. Surveys have confirmed that the two clubs combined enjoy a cool 80% support of the country's football industry. As a result, Chiefs and Pirates use their brands to increase the value of their balance sheets and they focus ruthlessly on managing every aspect of their brands.

## Understand the role of brands

The two clubs manage corporates as strategic business partners, players as assets, fans as soccer consumers, and non-soccer followers as untapped markets. The secret of their successes is that they have committed a lot of resources (capital and human) in building, nurturing and strengthening their brands because they understand the role of brands and their contributions to modern sports business environment.

As a result, Chiefs and Pirates have created a superb commercial playground for some of the country's leading business powerhouses for positioning their brands at the top in terms of visibility and awareness.

Consequently, the two giant soccer brands receive considerable amounts of sponsorship money from corporates which want to link their brands to the country's popular clubs without fear of negative repercussions. It is therefore not surprising that the two clubs have more than 20 sponsorships between them.

From a [sports sponsorship](#) point of view, the Carling Black Label Cup promises to yield good results for the participating brands. SAB knows that football inspires a passion that exceeds everything else by tenfold, and that football is attractive as a product because it gets to the country's masses.

## Promotional and positioning tool

For starters, sports sponsorship as a promotional and positioning tool has the unique ability to cut through the clutter of traditional media. Effective sponsorship programmes transfer the passion of sport into the sponsoring brands, giving the brands and their products relevance and connection to consumers that is otherwise not always possible.

Sponsorship is not merely a question of appearing with one's logo and slogan on a competitor's shirt, on old-fashioned advertisement boards, multifaceted merchandise, electronic images chasing each other around the ground's perimeter, or ground paintings at an event. Above all, it means projecting the specific values of the sport onto the company and its brands and ensuring that this association registers with the fans.

Octagon's Neil Duffy says, "Sponsorship provides an opportunity for 'passion transfer' where the passion that a consumer as a fan has for their sport is transferred into passion for the sponsoring brand which in turn can start to build equity as a Passion Brand itself."

What makes the Carling Black Label Cup different from other sports sponsorships?

1. First, the event will enable participative brands (Carling Black Label, Chiefs and Pirates) to reach, connect and interact with millions of passionate fans around the country, thus providing fans with unique brand experiences.

The tournament will also see ordinary SA soccer followers interacting with the coaching and playing personnel of the country's two celebrated clubs. Lucky fans will "be the coach" by selecting the players for the starting line-up, be empowered to make a substitution - meaning they will have a real influence on the outcome of the game.

2. Secondly, the Carling Black Label Cup is a sponsorship of champions and icons. Carling Black Label is the winner of 20 international awards while Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates are the most successful football brands, counting tens of trophies among themselves. And world's football superstar of all time, Ruud Gullit, the face of the event, is the 1987 and 1989 world footballer of the year and winner of prestigious awards with big international club brands.

Surely, the Carling Black Label Cup is a partnership of champions.

I expect it to produce great results and huge spin-offs for the participants, and this includes excitement among fans.

Surely, the Carling Black Label Cup is a great sports sponsorship initiative and an excellent brand management strategy. Well done, Dr Irvin Khoza and Mr Kaizer Motung.

## ABOUT THABANI KHUMALO

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