

# How can brands score with sports fans?

By [Jamaine Chiwaye](#)

22 Sep 2021

How should brands, big or small, approach their involvement in sports?



Source: [www.pexels.com](http://www.pexels.com)

Sports fans have a psychological need to belong. That's part of the appeal of following an individual or a team. The camaraderie, the community, the teamwork, and the joys of association are what people sign up for. Being a fan creates togetherness and common points of connection which creates loyalty and keeps them coming back for more.

That unique bond is driving an unprecedented wave of investment in sports, including from venture capital companies such as CVC, which has taken a stake in multiple rugby competitions, and a host of other financial players who have focused on football properties.

The industry is expected to be worth \$599.9bn by 2025, such numbers might seem scary when compared with even the largest marketing budgets, but bringing a brand into the world of sports via sponsorship doesn't mean you have to be front and centre at the Africa Cup of Nations, the Euros or the Olympics.

Making the most of an investment in sports sponsorship increasingly hinges on how close you and your brand can get to the fans. This ultimately boils down to doing one thing: putting the fans first, and it can be achieved through a combination of these three ways:



## Friendsorship: the future of sport sponsorship

Mike Sharman 17 Sep 2021



### A deep understanding of fandom

Putting fans first requires a deep understanding of what matters to them. Once you figure out where a brand is most relevant it creates access to a myriad of opportunities. This requires defining where your brand's audience currently is and drilling down to the shared values between the brand, fans, and the sport. Media consumption, behavioural nuances and differences between fan groups are all fertile ground for creativity to flourish.

Being a fan means having an insatiable appetite to know, feel, discover, and experience more. On social media, you can follow your favourite teams, dissect, and debate the previous game or see where your favourite star athlete spent their vacation.

Social media, and the digital environment at large, has created an ever-increasing expectation of quality sports content for fans. Brands such as Carling Black Label "Be The Coach" has retained its relevance almost a decade later. Amazon Web Services (AWS) venture into Formula 1 has given fans more insight into the split-second decisions that they tune in to see every race day. These are prime examples of how brands have enhanced the fan experience.

Covid-19 restrictions have, of course, created an additional challenge to delivering that sense of being in on the action but creative brands such as premium beer Michelob Ultra have shown it's still possible. During the 2020 NBA Finals, Michelob Ultra managed to delight fans unable to watch games live in the arena by setting up virtual courtside seats among other prizes through a Twitter competition. They couldn't reach the fans in the arena, so they found them in their homes.

### Bigger picture thinking

A fan-focused approach means thinking about the bigger picture, that goes beyond the first and final whistles, chequered flag or an official's call to end the match. A football sponsorship is more than 90 minutes on a Saturday with a TV spot before, during and after. Sure, that is when the game is played, but being a fan is a combination of many special moments, each creating unique opportunities for brands.

The game before the game and life after offers new opportunities for brands to reach the fans they want to. In the lead-up to tournaments, brands can engage a more captive audience for longer periods of time. Bespoke content can build anticipation and place the brand in the middle of the hype by deploying a media mix that caters, listens to, and responds to the range of emotions fans display in the spaces they visit.



## The changing value of sponsorship

Jean Willers 31 Aug 2021



### Keeping ahead of trends

When you reconsider sports and fandom, opportunities begin to reveal themselves. The scale of what you want to do isn't limited by budget, but by your ideas and bravery.

For example, many brands consider themselves unsuitable for eSports; however, Debonairs Pizza's sponsorship of the African Cyber Gaming League proves otherwise. It's clear to see the value the brand could bring. Gamers need fuel and they all could do with a slice.

Likewise, NBA player Lamelo Ball took advantage of the opportunity of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) – bits of data stored using blockchain technology that makes them unique and gives a proof of ownership – to create player trading cards that will evolve as his career does. So, when he recently won Rookie of the Year, it updated. It will continue for as long as he's an active player. And the fans love that. They will follow him and their card – perpetually bringing them closer to the action.

All three areas demonstrate how we are entering a new world where giving the fans the best possible experience will create opportunity. Any brand, regardless of size can get in on the action. All they need is a great idea and a willingness, not to meet the fans halfway, but to actively go where they already are.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jamaine Chiwaye, strategy lead, creative systems, MediaCom South Africa

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>