

WHAT WE WOULD LOSE IF WE CUT SPORTS SPONSORSHIP



Sport matters. It is part of our identity. As representatives of different stages of the sports sponsorship chain, we believe that sports help define our community. But the sports that we know and love are under threat from legislation that would cut funding.

Our coalition represents organisations across the sponsorship chain: the rights holders, the sponsors, broadcasters and media. We have long-standing partnerships with local, regional and national communities, creating countless opportunities to bring EU citizens together around sports activities.

We all see sport as a vital part of our lives. As citizens, we exercise, we compete as individuals and part of a team, not just for our physical health, but our mental wellbeing too. This has been particularly important over the past two years, as lockdown measures have curtailed many other activities: sport has been a vital outlet for our emotions, as well as a physical boost that has helped build up our resilience during this period.

Sport is woven into the European identity. Think of all the major sports popular around the world and you will find that Europe is where major events take place, major leagues and clubs are located, and top sportspeople are based.

But sport is also part of the fabric of our local communities: small towns take huge pride in their local clubs and their local sports heroes. Sport boosts our sense of community – as both participants and spectators.

For sport to thrive, it needs support. To pay for equipment, training facilities and events, to boost visibility and increase access to new audiences and participants. And sponsorship is absolutely crucial.

Yet now, there are calls to simply cut this support. On February 15, MEPs will vote on an own-initiative opinion entitled “Strengthening Europe in the fight against cancer - towards a comprehensive and coordinated strategy” (2020/2267). The resolution’s general aim is to improve efforts to beat cancer, which, of course, we support. But there is a particular element in the resolution that would undermine sports in Europe.

The problem is a recommendation to ban all sports organisations and events from receiving support through alcohol sponsorship. This is a measure that would damage in particular the smaller sports federations, clubs and teams, negatively affecting their ability to run their operations. This would in turn impact the athletes and spectators of these sports.

That is why we are urging MEPs to back an amendment tabled by MEP Ivan Štefanec that would replace this outright ban on alcohol sponsorship of sports with a more measured prohibition related to sports events and activities targeted at minors. This also brings it into line with the focus on children and adolescents in the other recommended provisions around alcohol marketing restrictions.

We believe that communities can and should continue to benefit from the local support ecosystem that has helped thousands across Europe to access and enjoy physical activity.

This viewpoint is reflected across the sports community and its supporters. Take, for example, Belgium where the sponsorship of its ProLeague by a beer brand is an essential revenue source for a league that has nurtured some of the world’s finest footballers. Support feeds right down to the local level, funding facilities and coaching, implementing CSR programs. And just as people are loyal to local clubs, they are also faithful

to local businesses, with many community clubs in all sports having a longstanding partnership with the local brewery or village bar.

Sponsorship is also not just for the most popular sports like football. It is particularly crucial for minority or up-and-coming sports that may otherwise struggle to get visibility and secure local government funding. Take, for example, rugby: in some countries, like Portugal, it is a growing sport steadily gaining traction. But if the sponsorship that has nurtured rugby over the years were to suddenly be pulled, it would spell financial disaster for many of the clubs. And those losing out in the end would be the players and the spectators.

A full ban on sports sponsorship would also contradict other parts of the draft Parliament opinion that aim at improving the health of European citizens by encouraging physical activity and social interaction. An outright ban on sponsorship would be disproportionate, preventing sponsors from legitimately and responsibly reaching out to adult consumers, and depriving rights holders (the sports events, organisations and clubs) of essential revenue.

Covid restrictions have already cut us from sports events as both participants and spectators. But physical and social activity is vital for our wellbeing: the European Parliament should not issue recommendations that harm that objective.

That is why we collectively call on MEPs to amend the draft Parliament resolution. The proposed sponsorship ban could have dire consequences for grassroots sports and the communities that surround them. It would damage tens of thousands of sports events, clubs, teams and activities across the EU that offer opportunities for our citizens to both participate in healthy, physical activity and watch events that are at the heart of our towns, villages and countryside.

Sponsoring is crucial for sports and the community. If Europe bans all alcohol sponsorship of sports, it would be scoring a horrendous own goal.



Katja von Heinegg,
Advertising Information Group
(AIG)



Connor Murray,
Association of Television and Radio
Sales Houses (EGTA)



William Fenton,
European Sponsorship Association
(ESA)



Pierre-Olivier Bergeron
The Brewers of Europe



Will Gilroy
World Federation of Advertisers
(WFA)