

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters intended for publication should be a maximum of 400 words and 10 references and should be sent to Simon Chapman, deputy editor, at the address given on the inside front cover. Those corresponding to articles or correspondence published in the journal should be received within six weeks of publication.

Medical stationery as a means of transmitting health warnings

To the editor – The wide array of stationery supplied to and used by doctors for use with patients (prescription pads, laboratory examination records, letterhead stationery, etc) provides enormous potential for transmitting health warnings about tobacco use.


This type of health promotion was initiated in April 1992 through the most prominent health care association in Uruguay (CASMU – Centro de Asistencia Médica del Uruguay). CASMU has 256 000 patient affiliates and involves 2500 physicians. Some 300 000 prescriptions are written per month, with an average of 13 per head per year.

The health warnings used on the pads will be regularly changed so that patients receive different messages such as “smoking produces lung cancer,” “three smokers die of lung cancer each day,” “smoking is a large risk factor in cardiovascular disease,” “a pregnant woman who smokes damages the health of her child,” “passive smoking is a real health hazard,” and “smoking causes addiction.”

The messages will be tailored to the specialty of the physician, and there is potential to extend this initiative to all 9000 physicians practising in Uruguay. The advantages of this initiative are manifold: no cost, increased awareness extended to both patients and smoking physicians, and no potential for interference from the tobacco industry.

HELMUT KASDORF

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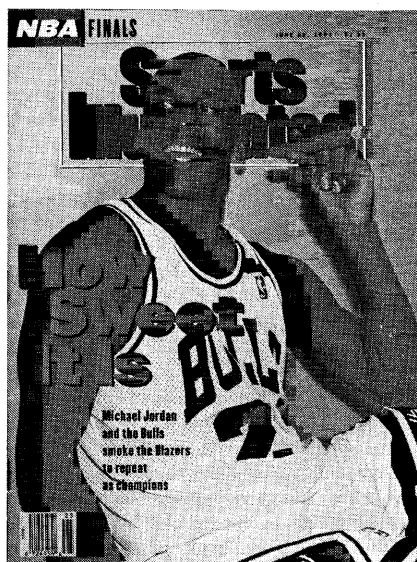
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CASMU	NO CENTRALIZADOS			
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NO VALIDA PARA MEDICAMENTOS		FIRMA DEL MEDICO		
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Form. 314/10 - IMP. CASMU

Order form for clinical examinations, with the message, “Three smokers die of lung cancer each day.”

Cigars, sports, and Michael Jordan

To the editor – *Sports Illustrated*, one of the most widely circulated lay sports publications in the United States, has recently outdone itself in its insidious support of smoking. What message were the editors



trumpeting in the recent cover that displays Michael Jordan with his victory cigar? Only an imbecile would miss the link between the “glamour” of champions and smoking. It is bad enough that *Sports Illustrated* annually accepts \$35 million worth of advertisements that mislead and misinform young people about the harmful effects of tobacco.¹ At least young readers can be taught to disregard the advertisements as the specious propaganda that they represent. The magazine’s unmitigated celebration of smoking in the lifestyles of athletes is, however, unconscionable.

Had this cover been a unique occurrence or a candid photo opportunity, one might excuse it simply as poor judgment or seizing the journalistic moment. But this photo seems to have been staged and the sidestream smoke that damages the lungs of others must have been air brushed away. The fact is that *Sports Illustrated*, presumably because of its dependence on tobacco advertising revenues, has never addressed the harmful effects of tobacco on athletes, even though it has addressed illegal drugs and alcohol.² What is more disconcerting than the failure to report on the damage inflicted by tobacco, however, is the indirect support for tobacco products by associating them with triumphant athletic performance. In addition to this recent most egregious example on the cover, last year’s story about the National Basketball Association championship included a photo of Michael Jordan smoking.³ A recent story about the league-leading batter from the Philadelphia Phillies baseball team went out of its way to portray smoking as central to his character without so much as a mention of the fact that his smoking behaviour robs him of the ability to run or field.⁴

I am certain that all who are aware of the harmful effects of tobacco feel sorry for the supremely talented Michael Jordan if he chooses to damage his wonderful skills through the use of tobacco. He should know that smoking will bring new meaning to the adjective that is frequently used to describe his performances – breathtaking. Although

the publishers of *Sports Illustrated* accept tobacco advertisements, they should not promote tobacco through their “journalism” as well. The editors and publishers of periodicals with sizable youth readerships should maintain high standards of journalistic integrity.

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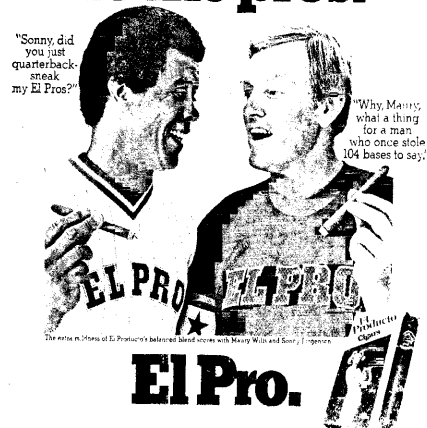
- 1 DeParle J. Warning: Sports stars may be hazardous to your health. *Washington Monthly* 1989 Sept: 34-48.
- 2 Connolly GN. Testimony before the Subcommittee on Health and the Environment, US House of Representatives, July 18 and August 1, 1986 (serial No 99-167). Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1987: 232-67.
- 3 McCallum J. Shining moment. *Sports Illustrated* 1991; 74 (Jun 24): 38-49.
- 4 Lidz F. What’s a Kruk? *Sports Illustrated* 1992; 76 (May 25): 30-7.

In reply – Commentary on the connection between tobacco and sports has focused on cigarette and smokeless tobacco promotions.¹⁻³ However, associations between sports and cigars have occurred through the years in a variety of forms.

In 1980 the Cigar Association of America hired a prominent New York public relations firm to improve the image of the cigar. Two years into the campaign a tobacco trade journal described that image as “a threefold manifestation comprising (1) success, (2) celebration, and (3) masculine achievement.”⁴ The television portion of the campaign began with a 90 second spot before the 1982 Super Bowl, the premier sporting event in the United States. Cigars were shown being lit and smoked in winners’ dressing rooms, and the commercial ended with the announcer saying, “For the winners, it’s champagne and cigars; for the losers, it’s ‘Close, but no cigar.’” A similar feature was planned for the 1983 Super Bowl.⁴

Newspapers have published photographs of professional football coaches smoking cigars – including Mike Ditka of the Chicago Bears⁵ and John McKay of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.⁶ Advertisements for Dutch Treats little cigars,⁷ El Producto cigars,⁸ and other brands appear in the sports sections of newspapers. An advertisement for El Pro-

C'mon, move up to the pros.



Advertisement in the Chicago Tribune, 22 September 1980, section 5, page 8

ducto ("El Pro") even featured former baseball star Maury Wills and former football star Sonny Jurgensen (see figure).⁸ [Jurgensen later became a member of the Quarterback Club, an association of former and current National Football League quarterbacks formed in 1989, whose members "as a group have taken a stand against the promotion of alcohol and tobacco related products."⁹]

I observed a particularly offensive promotion of cigars at one of the 1980 games of the Chicago Sting, a member of the North American Soccer League. A message from the home team published in the game programme¹⁰ (and announced over the stadium's public address system) says it all: Whenever the Sting scores a goal in 1980, Tom & Effe of 333 N. Michigan Avenue Tobacco Shop will be passing out cigars in the stands. Locations will be moved from game to game. Cheer for lots of goals so you can light up when the Sting score.

Larry Laoretti recently won the US Senior Open golf tournament with a cigar "locked

between his teeth the entire round."¹¹ He smokes Te-Amo ("I love you") cigars, a Mexican import that sells for \$2 each. In return for smoking cigars, wearing a Te-Amo patch, and having the brand name on his golf bag, Laoretti receives between \$30000 and \$50000 per year from the maker of Te-Amo, Consolidated Cigar (based in Fort Lauderdale, Florida).¹¹ Norman Sharp, president of the Cigar Association of America, joined Consolidated in celebrating Laoretti's golfing success. "Every mention or TV shot helps," Sharp gloated.¹¹

Although I'm an ardent fan of the Chicago Bulls and an admirer of Michael Jordan (I was born in Chicago and lived there for 14 years), I was as dismayed as Dr Margolis to see Jordan with his victory cigar on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. Mr Sharp, predictably, thought the cover was "terrific."¹¹

During the recent National Basketball Association playoffs Michael Jordan appeared frequently in television advertisements for Nike shoes. While children were

shown shooting hoops, a song was played featuring the lyrics, "I wanna be like Mike." Unfortunately, *Sports Illustrated* and Jordan have now given his young fans an image of the superstar that is wholly unworthy of emulation.—ED

- 1 Blum A. The Marlboro Grand Prix: circumvention of the television ban on tobacco advertising. *N Engl J Med* 1991; 324: 913-7.
- 2 Connolly GN, Orleans TR, Kogan M. Use of smokeless tobacco in major-league baseball. *N Engl J Med* 1988; 318: 1281-5.
- 3 DeParle J. Warning: sports stars may be hazardous to your health. *Washington Monthly* 1989 Sept: 34-48.
- 4 When a cigar needs a friend. *Tobacco International* 1982 Nov 12:5.
- 5 *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* 1986 Jan 12:21C.
- 6 *Chicago Tribune* 1983 Jan 7; section 4:6.
- 7 *Chicago Tribune* 1983 Jan 17; section 4:7.
- 8 *Chicago Tribune* 1980 Sept 22; section 5:8.
- 9 Quarterback Club. *Fact sheet*. Nashville, Tennessee: Quarterback Club, 1990.
- 10 Sting notes. *Kick* [the official magazine of the North American Soccer League], Sting v Washington, 7 June 1980: 2.
- 11 Lazarus G. Puffing victors give cigars a lift. *Chicago Tribune* 1992 July 14; section 3:4.