

AD WATCH

BAT flouts tobacco-free World Cup policy

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In Malaysia, British American Tobacco flouted the World Cup of football's no-tobacco ruling

It was not a tobacco-free World Cup for Malaysia. "2002 FIFA World Cup. Proudly brought to you on Malaysian TV by Dunhill"¹ was just one in a series of advertisements appearing in the Malaysian mass media for football's (soccer's) World Cup. BAT Malaysia side stepped the no-tobacco ruling on the 2002 World Cup and sponsored the telecasts to Malaysia where football reigns as the nation's most popular sport.

The 2002 World Cup kicked off on World No Tobacco Day, 31 May, to honour FIFA's (Federation Internationale de Football Association) agreement with the World Health Organization for a tobacco-free tournament. In December 2001, FIFA signed a memorandum of cooperation with WHO that included a clause saying all forms of tobacco promotion would be removed from all football events associated with FIFA.² WHO's theme for this year's World No Tobacco day, "Tobacco-free sports—Play it Clean" was lost as the Malaysian mass media advertised BAT's Dunhill sponsorship of the telecast. The advertising started about one month before the start of the championship and continued throughout the month of the series.

BAT, through its Dunhill brand, launched a US\$5 million campaign in newspapers and on television, and printed thousands of posters to promote and sponsor the live telecasts of the



Figure 1 BAT Dunhill posters promoting live telecasts of football matches in the 2002 World Cup

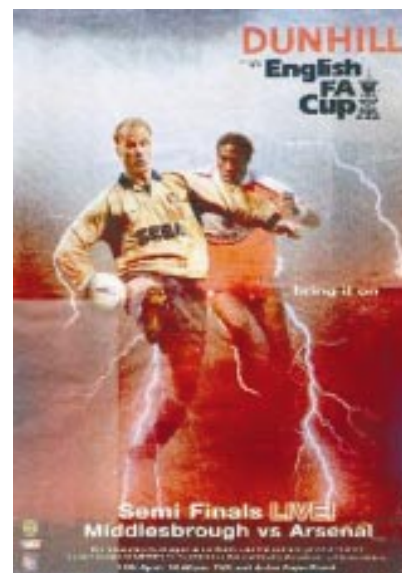


Figure 2 BAT advertisement featuring well known football stars in the English league, with the word "Dunhill" appearing above "English FA Cup", falsely implying sponsorship of the tournament

matches* (fig 1). It also erected billboards in several parts of the country³ and launched a special website on the World Cup (www.dxplay.com). Since 1993 Malaysia has banned direct cigarette advertisements on television, but tobacco companies have been circumventing this ban by engaging in brand stretching activities such as sponsorship of sports and pop concerts.

Tobacco companies' efforts at exploiting the tobacco-free World Cup was not just confined to Malaysia but also occurred in Niger, Uruguay, and Pakistan. In Niger, where BAT has a 10 year contract with the Soccer Federation of Niger signed in 1996, the company sponsored the telecast of the World Cup on large screens strategically located in the capital Niamey's intersections, featuring the Rothmans brand name. In Uruguay, the Nevada brand was the official sponsor of Uruguay's team to the tobacco-free World Cup tournament itself. In Pakistan, Philip Morris' subsidiary, the Pakistan Tobacco Company, sponsored the telecast of the World Cup through its Diplomat brand.⁴

Tobacco control non-governmental organisations from these countries and from around the world urged both FIFA and WHO to stop these

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*Figure quoted by official from Football Association of Malaysia to the Malaysian Ministry of Health.

companies from sponsoring the telecasts and using the tobacco-free event to promote their tobacco brands.

English football has a huge following in Malaysia, but Malaysians see it in association with Dunhill. BAT Malaysia has sponsored telecasts of the English Premier League which is advertised as the “Dunhill English Premier League” in the mass media. Advertisements show images of English football heroes such as David Beckham and Michael Owen to promote its Dunhill brand. An advertisement by BAT had also featured Arsenal’s Dennis Bergkamp where the word “Dunhill” appeared with the words “English FA Cup” (fig 2), when the tournament was actually sponsored by Axa. This was reported in the expose by *The Guardian* in the UK on BAT’s exploitation of English soccer and players in Malaysia.³ *The Guardian* reported how BAT had printed shots of Beckham, Owen, and other internationally known English footballers on an “English at its best” calendar with a “Dunhill English Premier League” logo, and distributed it to financial analysts. When these footballers and the English FA were alerted by ASH UK of their exploitation by BAT in Malaysia it was revealed that BAT had, predictably, no permission to use their names, given the English Premier League’s tobacco-free policy. The English Premier League has expressed extreme concern at the impression given by BAT to Malaysians that it is connected with and/or is sponsor of the English Premier League.⁵ David Beckham’s agent and the English Premier League are looking into the possibility of legal action over BAT’s use of both their names to promote Dunhill in Malaysia.

FIFA, while unable to stop BAT from exploiting the World Cup, said: “The manner in which BAT has been promoting its association with the World Cup—an association which does not exist—despite its agreement with the Malaysian League Marketing and also its flagrant misuse of players’ image is indicative of the ruthless tactics the company is prepared to adopt in order to try to deceive the public.”⁶

Despite FIFA’s tobacco-free policy for football, and WHO’s call to the world for tobacco-free sports, will tobacco release its hold over football? BAT’s sponsorship of football in Malaysia, according to its local contract, will go on until 2004 and in Niger until 2006. As it stands, this will contravene the industry’s own feeble marketing guidelines, the International Tobacco Products Marketing Standards, which are supposed to end such sponsorship activities at the end of this year. BAT Malaysia’s 2001 annual report says after 2002 there will no longer be mass advertising of sponsored activities associated with tobacco brand names.⁷ However Dunhill’s sponsorship of the Malaysia League to the tune of about US\$8 million a year will only expire late 2004.⁸ According to *The Guardian* report BAT Malaysia had acknowledged that using football was no longer acceptable and confirmed it would cease doing so at the end of this year. BAT’s spokesperson, referring to the telecast of the World Cup, said: “This is certainly not the sort of sponsorship that is in line with the marketing standards which we expect our companies to be applying at the end of the year.”⁹ Yet BAT will continue to sponsor football in Malaysia until 2004.

REFERENCES

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Another health hazard from smoking ... this time from Ireland.