



The SAGE Encyclopedia of Alcohol: Social, Cultural, and Historical Perspectives

Sporting Events

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Games and sports have been important leisure-time activities since recorded history, as has alcohol, even though they have not necessarily intermixed in all historic periods and cultures. Although some sports have a long historical trajectory and tradition, all sports are subject to constantly changing social, cultural, and economic phenomena. The contemporary Olympic Games have their roots in ancient Greece. Tennis and polo have a history that spans centuries, whereas baseball was born in the late 19th century, and basketball and American football are 20th-century phenomena. Up until the 19th and early 20th centuries, sports were largely amateur and confined to local venues. As colonization and imperialism expanded, European sports were adopted in developing countries and often became highly politicized. In Latin America, for example, nations have gone to war over sports, such as the Soccer War between Honduras and El Salvador.

Sports have long been linked to tradition, risk-taking, courage, strength, resistance, and stamina, which not coincidentally have long been the qualities that were considered essential for conquest and wars. Today, particularly in but not limited to the United States, sports are an immensely popular entertainment business. Sports also garner fierce loyalties and sentiments among its fan base, which to date often span around the globe. Since the days when televised sportscasts in postwar America began broadcasting live athletic events across the nation, sports have become an important source of revenue for all types of businesses woven into the sports culture and entertainment, particularly the alcohol industry.

Sports Culture and the Alcohol Industry

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, sports were regulated by mostly volunteer associations and were largely localized. The development of men's sports since the years after World War II has been increasingly linked to alcohol sales, promotion, advertising, sponsorship, and consumption. The alcohol industry has grown to play a key role in the commercialization of professional and college sports, especially in but not limited to basketball and football. In fact, at the international level, the industry is also a key player in broadcasts of soccer league and World Cup games, among many others.

Alcohol-industry advertising pervades mass-mediated sports broadcasts and print material such as sports magazines. It is also a core element of male sports culture and fandom and relies heavily on cultural myths and representations of male masculinity. Critics are concerned with the intertwining of sports, alcohol, and violence. Others, however, argue that alcohol per se does not cause men to be violent and attribute male violence to a combination of social factors. In any case, the linkage of sports, alcohol, and popular culture disseminates a pervasive and influential series of tropes of masculinity. Alcohol advertising, rather than focusing on the products it promotes, encourages audience members to adopt the lifestyle values and behaviors presented in its marketing.

Although sports media events usually target young males who enjoy sports entertainment, fandom among women is growing. Women have also been growing professionally within the culture of sports, not only as athletes. Since national sports broadcasting started in the 1940s until the mid-1970s, sports broadcasters were exclusively male. Since the 1970s, however, hundreds of women have become sports journalists and broadcasters, with varied degrees of success. The sports environment, however, remains male-oriented, and Internet and print articles abound rating "the hottest" female sportscasters rather than focusing on these women's professional characteristics. Alcohol, then, does not cause the gender differentiation pervading the sports industry as much as it often uses it in order to promote its products. In

fact, alcohol advertising pervades these broadcasts. Not only does the alcohol industry tend to purchase a significant percentage of the physical and broadcast advertising space, but alcohol company logos are everywhere, including atop the stadium scoreboards over which the camera hovers constantly.

Television transformed sports broadcasting into a set of nationwide, and today worldwide, spectacles. Selling to increasingly larger masses of audiences and fans opens up income-producing opportunities. Ever-improving technological innovations now offer enhanced and hyperreal imagery that increases the appeal and pleasure of watching live televised events. These innovations began with creative camera manipulations, such as close-ups, slow-motion repetitions, and spanning the crowds (and attractive women), and have enhanced the pleasure of live spectatorship in a true feat of aesthetic transformation. Today, enhanced home television sets with multiple screens add to the consuming opportunities offered by sports broadcasting.

Economics of Alcohol and Sports

Since the postwar years, alcohol publicity as related to sports has gone beyond just promoting products and their beneficial characteristics. The alcohol industry also encourages consumers to construct a self-identity based on its imagery and a consuming philosophy. This does not mean that the imagery and gender representations remain static through the decades. They shift and change to adapt to prevailing social conditions, aiming to keep building a consumerist sense of fan identity, which positions men and women in narrow and specific gender roles.

To date, alcohol advertising has moved from promoting a specific product and situation; it relies on lifestyle branding, a series of images and moods that create a desirable world in which consuming is essential. In the immediate aftermath of the postwar years, beer manufacturers, moving away from Prohibition and into a newly prosperous society, sought to expand the market for beer beyond the working class. Popular beer commercials, for example, featured white couples sharing a beer at home, the beach, or in a park. Studies of beer commercials in the 1970s and 1980s, however, show that by the late 20th century, commercials depicted men drinking beer with other men, in friendship and bonding.

Sports media events moved from a straightforward broadcast of the game to mass-mediated, multilevel cultural productions. For the biggest of these events, such as the Super Bowl, expectation is created among the audience by building excitement through a series of events throughout the year.

Similarly, college conferences have become heavily promoted televised events. Moreover, major events such as the Super Bowl are used as marketing opportunities for selling National Football League (NFL) and college-sports-issued products and paraphernalia such as DVDs, calendars, clothing, collectors' items, and much more. These items have also brought in the added revenue of product franchise rights

One of the biggest sales opportunities in the sports entertainment industry comes from alcohol sales. In the past college and other amateur sports venues banned alcohol sales in order to avoid problems resulting from binge drinking and the mixture of on-site drinking and adrenaline-fueled fandom. However, alcohol is now sold at some college sports events in the United States, and the trend to allow alcohol sales at college stadiums is growing rapidly.

Critics highlight the occurrence of violence and alcohol-related incidents near stadiums following a sports event. Supporters, however, stress that most sports venues have formal protocols and plans for alcohol and violence control. For example, a 2010 systematic study of alcohol-control policies at professional stadiums shows that most of the stadiums reported a limit of two alcoholic beverages per sale, and alcohol servers are required to check buyers' identifications to verify they are legally of age.

Moreover, about 30 percent of stadiums report having an alcohol-free designated seating area. Nevertheless, the fact remains that alcohol is easily available at sports events in stadiums, and there are many reports of the dangers of alcohol intake at sports events and their contribution to injury, violence, and even death.

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See Also:

- [Beer Advertising](#)
- [Beer Containers and Sales](#)
- [Gender and Drinking in Popular Culture](#)
- [Keggers](#)

Further Readings

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