Using athletes to push tobacco to children

Snuff-dippin' cancer-lipped man

In 1983, nearly 4,000 cigarettes are expected to be sold for every adult in the United States; in 1880, the per capita consumption was 25. The astronomical increase in cigarette smoking during the past 100 years has corresponded to the decline of all other forms of tobacco (cigar, pipe, plug, snuff), not to mention the disappearance of the spittoon.

Ironically, the popularity of cigarettes began in large part as the result of concerns about health. The spread of tuberculosis in the latter half of the 19th century led to an increase in antispitting laws and a resultant shift by tobacco companies into the promotion of cigarettes—mass produced on newly invented machines.


Until recent years, snuff dipping was a practice confined largely to black women in the rural Southeast, in whom the chance of contracting oral cancer has been found to be 50 times that of non-
users of snuff. Similarly, tobacco chewing was a custom of rural southern men. In 1980 Christen, McDaniel, and Doran called attention to widespread snuff-dipping and tobacco chewing among baseball and football players in college, high school, and elementary schools in Texas. These practices have been described as "the latest crazes" among teenage boys in the suburbs in the

How to enjoy tobacco without lighting up.
I've learned a lot since coming to Chicago—and not just about baseball. I've learned how to get full tobacco enjoyment without lighting up. I use smokeless tobacco. And you guys that are just starting out, well, you should try mild Happy Days mint. It's the perfect smokeless to begin with because it's got a taste that's mild and easy to enjoy. And just a pinch between your cheek and gum is all it takes. It's just right whether you're cutting the town or cutting down a baserunner.

If you're interested in trying a few pinches, write: Smokeless Tobacco, U.S. Tobacco Company, Dept ST-078, Greenwich, Conn. 06830

Northeast and in Washington, DC (Washington Post, November 12, 1980). One in 10 Colorado high school students surveyed by Greer uses smokeless tobacco; the age of the average user is 15.

There is no mystery to this phenomenon. Unlike cigarette advertising, commercials for these carcinogenic products have not yet been withdrawn from television, and manufacturers have taken advantage of the situation. The heroism imagery evoked in expensive promotional campaigns for snuff and chewing tobacco is—in a word—matchless. The array of celebrities employed to cultivate the puberty rite of tobacco use includes baseball players George Brett, Carlton Fisk, Catfish Hunter, Sparky Lyle, and Bobby Murcer, and football players Terry Bradshaw, Nick Buoniconti (now a tobacco and candy distributor), Earl Campbell, Joe Klecko, and Laurence Taylor (Advertising Age, June 23, 1980; U.S. Tobacco Journal, March 8, 1982).

Singer Charlie Daniels appears on a collection of high-priced paraphernalia for a brand of snuff, Skoal, a product of

We're out to in the mouth put a pouch of America.

National Radio
Network Television
National Magazines

Expect great things from Skoal Bandits:
Sampling

Catch the Skoal Bandit
Practice Runs—October 8, 1983
Qualifying Runs—October 7, 1983
Race Day—October 8, 1983

Whoever goes the farthest raceway.

 responds to a question from the U.S. Tobacco Journal about why so many young males are buying smokeless tobacco, United States Tobacco Company chairman and president Louis
Bantle estimated that 80% to 85% of his company's customers are new users and not just those who switch from cigarettes out of concern for health. He also reported that United States Tobacco is intensively aiming at a budding international market.

A public relations operation, the smokeless Tobacco Institute, in Peekskill, New York, issues press releases to get the public aware of the shortcomings of medical research reports implicating snuff as a cause of oral cancer ("Advertising Age," April 13, 1981).

With the recent $16 rise in the federal excise tax on a pack of cigarettes, United States Tobacco has begun a national $2 million advertising campaign for Skoal Bandits—little pouches of snuff, like chewing tobacco. The campaign was launched in July in New York City on radio and TV and in newspaper sports sections, including The New York Times and Newsday. The television advertisements in such programs as ABC TV's Wide World of Sports and NBC TV's Football Game of the Week teach the potential young "Bandit" the technique for using snuff. ("Advertising Age," June 27, 1983)

During the 1980 Olympic Games, the United States Tobacco Company, an official sponsor, spent $2.5 million promoting snuff. For 1984, it has created a United States Tobacco Sports Medicine Program. Various sports writers, TV sports analysts, athletic commissioners, team owners, players, and nontobacco sportswriters of professional sports have vied for media attention in 1983 to condemn smoking with one of them being that it is "an evil of two evils. But the more likely hypothesis, in light of the cigarette companies' having objected to the exclusion of smokeless tobacco from the ban on television advertising, is that the Skoal ads serve as an initiator to a milder form of tobacco use and may start even younger children on the road to cancer.

Can there be a more cynical attempt to capture the youth market than that by the makers of cigarettes, snuff, and chewing tobacco? Apparently so. A child walking through almost any candy store, supermarket, pharmacy, airport souvenir stand, or variety store cannot fail to come across a prominent display for candy cigarettes (with brand names identical to the real ones), cigars, pipes, and pouches of Big League Chew, a shredded bubble gum that produces "man-size wads" and that in the words of its inventor, former baseball player Jim Bouton, is "designed to look like chewing tobacco used by baseball players" ("Advertising Age," June 23, 1980). Then there is Chew, powdered bubble gum in a round little box resembling a tin of snuff. A display for Chew features a cowboy with a bulging cheek and the slogan, "Best chew this side of the Pecos."

What next can we expect from the candy companies—bubble gum cocaine?

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REFERENCES