

## Do the responsible thing: Get cigarettes out of sports

Who says there is no cigarette advertising on television? On NBC's telecast of the 1989 Marlboro Grand Prix, there were 4,997 images of Marlboro signs, 519 of Marlboro billboards and 249 of the Marlboro car. The brand name was visible for 46 minutes of the 93-minute telecast — 49% of the time. It wasn't an auto race, it was a high-speed smoke screen.

The 1969 Cigarette Labelling and Advertising Act banned cigarette advertising over the electronic media. The law went into effect in 1971. Suddenly television — the most powerful and pervasive marketing tool available — was off-limits for the most powerful and pervasive legally marketed killer in the country. So the tobacco companies found another way to stop the heartbeat of America — they began sponsoring sporting events that were televised and began putting advertisements in view of all the right camera angles at all the right stadiums.

In 1971 came the Virginia Slims tennis tour. In 1971 came the Winston Cup auto racing series. In 1973 came Marlboro Cup horse racing.

The tobacco companies had found a lucrative loophole. Rather than pay for 30-second ad spots as they once did, they paid to put their names on sporting events, to place billboards in the most viewed sight lines of TV cameras.

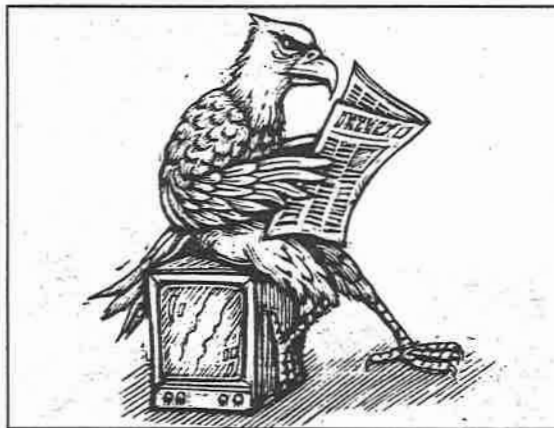
This unholy alliance among tobacco companies, sports and television has insidious consequences. As pointed out by Jason DeParle in *The Washington Monthly*, "The first, and perhaps most troubling, is that it obscures the connection of cigarettes and disease, subliminally and perhaps even consciously. Quick: speak the words 'Virginia Slims' and what do you see? A) Chris Evert, or B) the cancer ward? If you answered A) — and most people do — then Philip Morris has you right where it wants you."

Dr. Alan Blum, a Baylor physician who founded an anti-smoking group called Doctors Ought to Care in 1977, believes the best way to attack tobacco's TV presence is simply to enforce the '69 Act, which mandates a \$10,000 fine for every violation.

"Now, you're not going to get cigarette companies to drop the sponsorships willingly and you're not going to get the sports to give them up," says Blum.

# TV

## AND OTHER MEDIA



BY NORMAN CHAD  
OF THE NATIONAL

"The only one to work on is television. I'm saying simply, 'Enforce the law.' Take ABC, NBC, CBS, ESPN, TNN — give them one warning and say, 'As of May 1, 1990, the Marlboro Cup cannot be televised in any form.' And start from there."

Meanwhile, a Washington lobbying group, Action for Children's Television, petitioned the Federal Communications Commission earlier this month to require that broadcast stations carry anti-smoking messages in some rough proportion to the number of smoking messages that they currently carry.

So while many on Capitol Hill are focusing on the possibility of limiting beer and wine advertising — disastrous for sports television interests — some now are targeting the non-advertising promotion of a product on TV.

"What's particularly annoying," said Donna Lampert, a lawyer for ACT, "is that the tobacco companies are doing the very thing they stood up [in 1969] and said they would not do. There weren't going to be any hidden commercials."

Indeed, it was the cigarette companies who pleaded for the broadcast ban a generation ago. The Fairness Doctrine then was in effect, and the FCC ruled anti-smoking groups could counter cigarette ads on TV. For every few times viewers saw those smiling, sexy smokers full of fun and sun, they also saw bodies ravaged by nicotine and heard the familiar hacking cough of habitual users.

"Quite frankly," Lampert said, "I wonder if we'd be better off letting the Marlboro man on TV and us having the anti-smoking messages."

The fact is, the product is legal. The fact is also that the Surgeon General's office estimates there are 1,000 deaths a day — one every 90 seconds — caused by smoking-related illness. Still, the U.S. government never has figured out exactly what to think about tobacco — it's decided it's legal (and helps subsidize the industry), but it also says it's not a good idea (and has a broadcast ad ban).

Many decry the prohibition of any product, or, as is the case with alcohol and tobacco, the prohibition of various advertising of a legally sold product. A free society is best-served by a free marketplace — of goods and ideas. Freedom of choice — even choosing to die — should be left to private interests, not Congressional debate. But even if we let the market determine its course, that does not prevent responsible individuals and institutions in sports and the media from making intelligent decisions:

- Should athletes allow themselves to be used as vibrant symbols for such a deadly product?
- Should newspapers, magazines and such visible forms of advertising as billboards routinely be subsidized by revenue from a product with the addictive powers of heroin and cocaine?
- Should television — which helps make sports a powerful purveyor of the culture — allow its incomparably impressionable airwaves to be no more than a sophisticated marketing tool for a product that shortens lives and looks for new victims?

No matter how blurry tobacco forces try to draw the line in this debate, the fact remains: when the smoke clears, cigarettes still kill. The right thing to do — on TV and elsewhere — is to kill off cigarettes.