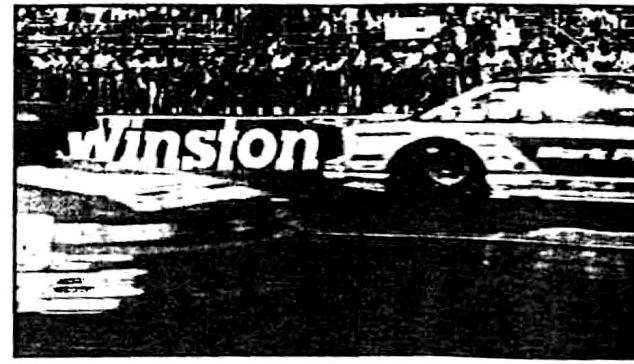


Where there's smoke, there's sports



"Winston" can't be missed as race cars whisk by.

At every turn, the health bane that is tobacco has left its brand

By Mark Johnson
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Soccer is among the most demanding of sports. Skill, speed and quick reflexes are valued, but the one prerequisite for field players is endurance.

It would be easy to imagine a popular soccer player endorsing, say, athletic shoes or an oat bran breakfast cereal. Yet the product most closely aligned with the U.S. national soccer team kills 890,000 Americans a year, according to the Centers for Disease Control, and is the nation's single most important preventable cause of death. It's the same product that joined forces with auto racing and women's tennis, the one that advertises in 22 of 24 U.S. major league baseball parks and is marketed through sports as diverse as darts and rodeo.

Tobacco may be the enemy of most athletes, but it has managed to penetrate stadiums and tracks around the world. Events such as the Winston 500 stock car race, the RJR at the Dominion golf tournament and the Marlboro Cup horse race have become part of the American sports lexicon. And the Philip Morris Co., the country's largest cigarette manufacturer, was one of 12 corporations that helped the United States secure the 1994 World Cup soccer rights.

Hoping to sever the tobacco-sports connection, a diverse but vocal group of industry critics has picketed Virginia Slims tennis tournaments, pushed for restrictions on tobacco advertising and urged that tobacco companies use their sports promotions as an avenue to reach children. An outfit called Doctors Ought Care, founded by Dr. Alan Blum of Baylor College of Medicine, has garnered attention through its "Amphysma Slims" tennis tournament and its sponsorship of the U.S. women's team. In early 1988, civic leaders in Minneapolis persuaded the local sports authority not to renew its crative contract with RJR Nabisco Inc. for a Winston advertisement in the Ampley Metrodome.

In 1983, physicians working for the median ski team balked when the median Ski Association accepted RJR-Nabisco Inc. as its major sponsor. Several skiers also rebelled, and the battle evolved into a campaign to prohibit all forms of cigarette advertising and promotion. The battle died last year when Canada adopted an advertising ban as part of a strict anti-smoking legislative package. C. Garfield Hood, the lobbyist who led the fight, scribbled the ski team controversy as "opening salvo" that "forced the ole issue of tobacco advertising and motion onto the federal agenda."

Hoping to emulate Mahood's success, Reps. Thomas Luken (D-Ohio) and e Syner (D-Okla.) last March introduced bills that would prohibit scco advertising at sporting events in U.S. "We're setting brush fires rywhere," Syner said last year. Said n: "This is the battleground. There's ther battleground like sports." eanwhile, despite declines in sales smokers, the domestic tobacco stry posted a record \$6.6 billion t before taxes in 1988, according to ge Thompson, an analyst for ential Bache. As profits grow, so do otional budgets. "I haven't seen it difficult," Cathy Leiber, former tor of event promotions for Philip is, said last year. "Despite what you in the newspapers, only more e are pursuing us. I sit here in this s, and I'm constantly swamped with oals from people wanting us to or their events."

he U.S. Soccer Federation has vered the value of tobacco money. U.S. national team, which has ed for the 1990 World Cup soccer in Italy, this year accepted tions to compete in four Marlboro ocer tournaments that involve al and leading club teams from e and South America. More oro Cups are slated for next year peration for the World Cup, boro has the resources to pull off ing like this. We don't," said Paul USSF treasurer and former

director of World Cup USA 1994, the outfit that secured the tournament for the U.S. Without corporate help, he said, the team "could not fly to Europe and South America and still stay in business — at the same time exposing the game to our people."

Spectators, of course, also are exposed to the Marlboro name. And many of those fans are children. Industry opponents say that 90 percent of smokers take up the habit before they turn 20, 60 percent before they turn 14. The 1989 U.S. Surgeon General's report on tobacco and health concludes that the initiation of smoking is "a phenomenon that occurs almost entirely during the teenage years."

"I would say our youth of the world are so inundated with other advertising slogans, I think they wouldn't even notice being hit one more time," Stiehl said. Oddly, that is precisely the argument of the anti-tobacco forces, that children soak up images and brand names every day, without really noticing, and over time develop associations — the Marlboro cowboy, for instance, or Virginia Slims tennis.

"Nobody in 20 years has ever said to smoke 'em," said Dr. Alan Blum of Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. "They're saying, 'Be a Marlboro soccer player.'"

A spokesman for the Tobacco Institute, the industry's Washington-based lobbying group, argued that cigarette advertisements are designed to reach people who already smoke. "In general, the industry doesn't encourage youths to smoke," said Gary Miller, an assistant to the president at the institute. "It's not advertising that causes people to smoke."

Could there really be a link between teenagers who smoke and cigarette advertisements in stadiums? Do a few signs really make a difference? "The tobacco industry obviously thinks so because they pay an awful lot of money to put them there," said John Banzhaf III, executive director for Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), an anti-smoking group. "It's hard to say one sign is going to cause someone to start smoking. But as kids watch hundreds of games, over four or five years, you begin to get a strong association. I think it's a major problem."

According to Sunil Gulati, chairman of the international games committee for the U.S. Soccer Federation, the question of whether such a physically demanding sport should join forces with a tobacco company never came up. "No one to my knowledge has taken the position that for those reasons, they (Philip Morris) should be precluded from any involvement in soccer," Gulati said.

But Scott LeTetlier, U.S. president of the 1994 World Cup organizing committee, pointed out that the committee early on made a commitment to promoting fitness. "No question the medical evidence is irrefutable that cigarette smoking is damaging to your health," LeTetlier said. "Tobacco sponsorship is not consistent with our emphasis on fitness and health."

LeTetlier and Philip Morris officials said the company has not signed on as a 1994 World Cup sponsor. According to LeTetlier, FIFA officials said tobacco companies will no longer be selected as World Cup sponsors because of tobacco advertising bans in several nations. (Camel was a major sponsor of the 1986 World Cup finals in Mexico City.)

Said LeTetlier: "There's a school of thought that even though we don't support tobacco, as long as the tobacco industry has its hand out with money, who better to take it from?"

The tobacco-sports connection dates to at least 1886, when Goodwin cigarettes distributed cards with paintings of popular baseball players, beginning a trend in the tobacco industry. In 1910, a controversy arose when a line of baseball cards distributed by 16 cigarette manufacturers included a card featuring Pittsburgh Pirates great Honus Wagner. This came as quite a surprise to Wagner, who believed cigarettes were unhealthy and insisted that the companies pull all cards bearing his picture. The few dozen that are known to exist today are the most expensive on the market; one sold recently for \$115,000.

Other athletes were not so circumspect. Blum, former editor of the New York State Journal of Medicine, recalled growing up in New York City in the 1950s when the Dodgers were sponsored by Lucky Strikes, the Giants by Chesterfields and the Yankees by Camels. "You could go to the Bronx with a pack of Luckies in your pocket, and people would know you were from Brooklyn," Blum said.

Times have changed. The tobacco industry no longer uses athletes in advertisements and claims not to put its models in athletic-oriented scenes (although ex-Cowboy running back Walt Garrison continues to plug smokeless tobacco, and cigarette companies are not above placing models in locker rooms or softball uniforms). Instead, we watch Emerson Fittipaldi win the Indianapolis 500 in a car painted like a pack of Marlboros and women tennis players compete against a backdrop of Virginia Slims logos.

According to the latest figures from the Federal Trade Commission, U.S. cigarette companies spent \$2.58 billion on advertising in 1987, a 715 percent increase over 1970 — the last full year that cigarettes could be advertised on television and radio. Predictably, the industry is spending more on billboards and print advertisements, but expenditures for concerts, art exhibits and sporting events have grown far faster. In 1987, promotional activities (including sampling, entertainment, coupons and sponsorships) accounted for two of every three advertising dollars.

It's no coincidence that the Virginia Slims tennis tour was born in 1970, just before the broadcast ban took effect, or that R.J. Reynolds began its multi-million-dollar association with the NASCAR stock car circuit in 1971. For women's tennis, the timing could not

have been better. Billie Jean King and other players were hoping to break away from the U.S. Tennis Association but were having a hard time finding a sponsor. Philip Morris was trying to promote a cigarette born out of the 1960s feminist movement.

It was a perfect match. The Virginia Slims tour has grown from a single \$7,500 tournament to 63 events and more than \$17 million in prize money. The brand name, meanwhile, has become nearly synonymous with svelte female athletes pounding ground strokes. But the Virginia Slims logo — a slim, sexy 1920s woman with a tennis racket in one hand and a cigarette dangling from an elegant holder in the other — grows more incongruous with each woman who takes up the habit. In recent years, lung cancer has surpassed breast cancer as the leading cause of cancer deaths among American women.

"The message of Virginia Slims cigarettes . . . is that cigarettes are a way of asserting independence, asserting liberties," said Edward Popper, professor of marketing at Bryant College in Rhode Island. "That's what the whole Virginia Slims campaign is all about. Couple that with athletic events, which create a very positive image, and with tennis players, the first widely advertised and attractive female athletes — couple that together, and it's very, very potent."

Though picketing at Virginia Slims events by anti-tobacco groups has been commonplace for years, Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova rallied behind Philip Morris last year in its bid to continue sponsoring the women's tennis tour. The Women's International Pro Tennis Council rejected a more lucrative offer from Procter & Gamble, which Sports Inc. magazine reported was willing to pay about \$31 million for four years. Philip Morris offered \$28 million over five years, the magazine reported, but the tour's older stars remained loyal to the company that helped make them rich.

The anti-smoking contingent did gain a partial victory. Philip Morris is turning over sponsorship of the tour to its Kraft General Foods division, though Virginia Slims will continue to sponsor 14 tournaments.

In 1982, when Navratilova wore the colors and logo of a British cigarette at Wimbledon, the link between tennis and tobacco was television. How better to circumvent the broadcast ban than to stick a logo on a highly successful athlete competing in a glamorous sport?

If that celebrity happens to drive a race car, the message is more potent still.

In a 1985 newsletter, U.S. Tobacco executive vice president Jack Africk alluded to his company's sponsorship of a Formula 1 racing team. "Formula 1

races obtain over 1 billion television impressions per year," Africk was quoted as saying. He added that Formula 1 "is an extremely effective way to establish awareness for Skoal Bandits," the tobacco-in-a-pouch product intended to break in first-time snuff users.

Joyce Julius and Associates, a Michigan firm that tabulates television exposure of product names in auto racing, determined that Winston in 1987 received 6 hours, 22 minutes, 25 seconds of TV exposure on the NASCAR stock car circuit with 2,360 mentions by announcers. (Each "mention" is valued as 10 seconds of exposure.) Total value, based on what that non-discounted commercial time would have cost: \$7,867,830. Not bad for a product that can't be advertised on television. On the CART Indy-car circuit, Marlboro received 2 hours, 31 minutes, 9 seconds of exposure with 101 mentions. Total value: \$4,792,890.

"You've got that rolling billboard," said Ernie Saxton of Motorsports Marketing Association. "Every time that

car goes by, your name is in the public eye." And race cars need not carry surgeon general's warnings.

The tobacco companies have benefited from the exposure, according to spokesmen at CART and NASCAR. "When they (R.J. Reynolds) came along, they immediately got results in sales," said Jim Foster, NASCAR vice president of marketing. Said Kevin O'Brien, marketing director for CART: "The auto racing fan is a very peculiar spectator. They seem to be very brand-loyal toward the companies involved in one of their favorite sports."

Nat Walker, senior director of public relations at RJR Nabisco (parent company of R.J. Reynolds), said that brand loyalty is what attracts tobacco companies to race tracks. "What we're



This backdrop serves as a veritable advertisement for Virginia Slims

The Dallas Morning News

trying to do is reach people who smoke and try to get them, if they're smoking our brand, to continue smoking them — and if they're smoking someone else's brand to try ours."

Critics say the tobacco industry has used the sport to glamorize the risks associated with smoking. "How do you get people to use a product that's likely to kill them?" asked Banzhaf of ASH. "You do it with the idea that risk is the spice of life. How better to do that than with auto racing — guys spinning around at 180 mph, risking plowing into a wall and getting their brains splattered. It seems to be promoting the idea that even if smoking is risky, it's worth the risk."

Walker called that a "preposterous statement." He said his company is involved in racing because "it gets us in

touch demographically with a lot of people who smoke. Races are attended predominately by adults, and it's a good place for us to make exposure for our products. I would reject the notion that our sponsorship has anything to do with whether people smoke, but we feel it has something to do with what brand people smoke."

Blum disagrees. Go to a Camel GT car race, he said, and you can pick up Camel posters, Camel caps, Camel beach blankets and Camel T-shirts, some small enough to fit babies. ("Some adults are small adults," Walker said. "There are small sizes. We don't have any children's sizes, per se.") If you're of age, you can often receive free Camel cigarettes. Blum recalled going to an indoor game a few years ago and watching fans of all ages kick bells through the "O" of a Winston sign.

Kenneth Warner, chairman of the department of public health policy and administration at the University of Michigan, said cigarette advertisements "unequivocally, absolutely" target children. "The single most cynical statement from the tobacco industry is that they don't want children to use tobacco products," Warner said. "That's just patently absurd. They know if children don't use tobacco products, they've got no market."

According to Warner, nearly 1 million American smokers a year die and another 1.5 million quit. Just to break even, cigarette makers would have to recruit more than 6,800 new smokers per day. To reach that goal, some 6,000 would have to be under-aged. "The essential fact of tobacco use," he said, "is that it's an acquired habit, acquired during youth."

The tobacco industry maintains that it's not trying to convince anyone to smoke, much less children. "We do not want to make any appeal to young adults to become smokers," said Walker of RJR Nabisco. "We're on record for that, and I think our activities support that statement." The Tobacco Institute says the purpose of advertising is to ensure product loyalty and to reach the 10 percent of smokers who switch brands. "It's not advertising that causes people to smoke," said Gary Miller, assistant to the president at the institute.

Unlike the major cigarette makers, officials at UST — formerly U.S. Tobacco — have spoken of a need to "widen our user base." Though UST says it doesn't advertise in youth-oriented publications, Skoal advertisements with mail-in coupons for free samples still appear in pre-season football magazines. Popper of Bryant College said he once took advantage of a similar offer using his daughter's name and listing her age as 3 months. A carton of cigarettes arrived in the mail.

UST spokesman Alan Kaiser said his company's tobacco products "wouldn't be sent through the mail" to anyone under 18, but conceded, "I'm sure there are ways, if someone wants to be devious about it," to get around that stipulation. "It's not a perfect system," he said, "but the system is in place."

Sales for moist snuff in the U.S. rose 55 percent between 1978 and '85, with the heaviest use reported among boys under 19. Louis Bantle, chairman of the board at UST, once said: "In Texas today, a kid wouldn't dare go to school, even if he doesn't use the stuff, without a can in his Lewis." Gregory Connolly, Massachusetts' director of dental health said UST's vigorous sports marketing gave snuff the start it needed. Three years ago, he told Ellen Goodman of the Boston Globe: "Anything that moves in sports, U.S. Tobacco has either put a log on it, paid it to appear in an ad, given it scholarship or sponsored it."

Connolly, known as "Dr. Chew" by major league players who have received his anti-smokeless tobacco pitch, said snuff did not become popular in the majors until the 1970s, when young players brought the habit to the big leagues. Soon snuff began appearing in clubhouses — and eventually in the mouths of curious veterans. "It was a marketing miracle," Connolly said. "Blinking sports to what was a habit of females, they made it super macho."

Said Kaiser of UST: "Whether in reality there are people under 18 who use our products, I think you'd have to be naive to think there aren't some. But that doesn't mean we support that, and we don't."