

Campaign for Alcohol-Free Sports TV



February 9, 2009

Commissioner David J. Stern National Basketball Association 645 Fifth Avenue New York, NY 10022

Dear Commissioner Stern:

We respectfully request that the NBA reconsider its lifting of the ban on courtside hard liquor advertisements, and annul other proposed policy changes that would allow teams to promote hard liquor on team websites, at point-of-sale retail locations, and in-arena promotions. Those changes can only aggravate a professional sports advertising environment that is already awash in promotions to drink beer that captivate young people with their themes and humor.

Courtside advertisements are intimately linked to the game and send a message that alcohol and professional basketball go hand in hand. It is difficult — if not impossible — to avoid those ads while watching the players run up and down the court. In fact, their positioning will likely create almost constant television impressions filled with liquor ads. Courtside liquor ads not only promote drinking to the thousands of underage fans who attend the games, but also highlight logos and brands for the hordes of young viewers at home. Permitting any courtside alcohol ads — as well as other promotions to drink — is insensitive to the young basketball fans and inconsistent with the NBA CARES community-oriented programs.

There are many good reasons for the NBA to reconsider and eliminate *all* alcohol advertising during its telecasts. Alcohol is the drug of choice among young people. Drinking that begins in high school often continues into college. More than four in ten college students drink at "binge" levels—consuming five or more drinks on at least one occasion in the past 30 days. Binge drinkers are more likely than non-binge drinkers to be injured, assaulted, or sexually assaulted.

Alcohol advertising during sports telecasts reinforces and normalizes drinking behavior among young people and appeals to a young population of sports fans. Recent evidence has linked teens' exposure to alcohol advertising with more frequent and heavier drinking. It is bad enough that beer commercials steadily inundate millions of underage viewers during NBA games. Opening the door to a flood of new, stealth hard-liquor ads can only make matters worse. It certainly will not help in society's efforts to deter underage drinking.

Drinking by young people has real and tragic consequences. Alcohol is a significant factor in the four leading causes of death among persons ages 10 to 24: motor-vehicle crashes, unintentional injuries, homicide, and suicide. Research shows that alcohol use by young people may cause long-term harm to their developing brains, including damage to proper learning and memory functioning, compared to older drinkers.

Email: BeerFreeSportsTV@cspinet.org * Website: www.BeerFreeSportsTV.org

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The NBA has one of the largest followings of fans under the age of 21 among all televised professional sports. This is not surprising since the NBA has a long history of reaching out to young fans through the Jr. NBA/Jr. WNBA programs which organize summer camps, tournaments, skills competitions, coaches clinics, and player appearances "...to develop a life-long passion for the game of basketball...." The NBA's recent initiative with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to enhance youth basketball programs will generate even more young fans who can be delivered to product marketers, including alcohol producers.

Sports are a fundamental developmental activity for young people, helping to build character, teamwork, leadership, and promote physical activity. We question the exploitation of athletics by alcohol marketers seeking to expand their markets. Young people comprise an important part of the basketball fan base actively recruited by teams through special promotions, the sale of branded children's clothing, and the sponsorship of various youth activities and community events. Many kids admire pro stars and look up to NBA players as role models. It is just plain wrong for the NBA to be procuring millions of underage persons to be targeted by companies that push alcoholic beverages.

We commend the NBA for its commitment to social responsibility through programs supporting youth, family, education, and health-related causes, including drug abuse prevention. However, we are deeply troubled by the NBA's lack of concern for the health of young people and their futures, considering that alcohol is their number one drug of choice and the most destructive drug in America.

We respectfully request that the NBA revisit its beer advertising policy and reconsider its recent decision to lift the ban on courtside hard liquor advertising. We also ask that the NBA continue to disallow hard liquor on team websites, at point-of-sale retail locations, and inarena promotions.

A number of substance abuse prevention, community, health, faith-based, and youth advocacy organizations join us in this request. Please see the attached page for the growing list of those organizations. We look forward to your response.

Tracy T. Downs

Manager

Campaign for Alcohol-Free Sports TV

Sincerely,

George A. Haci

Director

Alcohol Policies Project

Center for Science in the Public Interest

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On behalf of:

American Society of Addiction Medicine, Chevy Chase, MD

Athletes for a Better World, Atlanta, GA

Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, Boston, MA

Center on Media and Child Health, Boston, MA

Center for Science in the Public Interest, Washington, DC

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA), Alexandria, VA

Institute for Public Strategies, California, Montana, Mexico

Marin Institute, San Rafael, CA

NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, Alexandria, VA

National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers (NAATP), Alexandria, VA

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (NCADD), New York, NY

National Families in Action, Atlanta, GA

National Institute on Media and the Family, Minneapolis, MN

North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, MD

Remove Intoxicated Drivers, Schenectady, NY

Society for Adolescent Medicine, Blue Springs, MO

United Methodist Church—General Board of Church and Society, Washington, DC

Youth Leadership Institute, San Francisco, CA

Alabama Citizens Action Program, Birmingham, AL

Baker Community Counseling Services, Inc., Macclenny, FL

Champaign-Urbana Campus Community Coalition on Alcohol and Other Drugs, Champaign-Urbana, IL

Charlottesville Weed & Seed Network, Charlottesville, VA

Christian Action League of North Carolina, Inc., Raleigh, NC

Cobb Alcohol Taskforce, Marietta, GA

Committed Caring Faith Communities, St. Louis, MO

CommPre - A Program of Horizon Services Inc., Hayward, CA

Community Connection, Great Falls, MT

Delaware Ecumenical Council on Children and Families, Wilmington, DE

Drug-Free Action Alliance, Columbus, OH

Georgia PTA, Atlanta, GA

GRAAB Coalition, Cleveland, TN

Illinois Alcoholism & Drug Dependence Association (IADDA), Springfield, IL

Illinois Church Action on Alcohol & Addiction Problems, Springfield, IL

Lee County Coalition for a Drug Free Southwest Florida, Cape Coral, FL

Media Literacy for Prevention, Critical Thinking, Self-Esteem, Santa Fe, NM

Medical Society of Delaware, Newark, DE

National Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Emmaus, PA

Northern Lights Youth Services (NL SADD), Hillsboro, ND

Operation Snowball, Inc., Springfield, IL

Oregon Community and Family Coalition, Oregon, OH

Oregon Partnership, Portland, OR

South Kingstown Partnership for Prevention, South Kingstown, RI

Starting Point of Ozaukee, Inc., Grafton, WI

Tarrant County Challenge, Inc., Fort Worth, TX

Westford Against Substance Abuse, Westford, MA

Westminster Area Community Awareness Action Team (CAAT), Westminster, CO