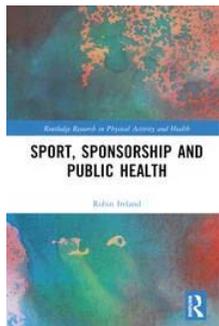


How Sport is Used to Promote HFSS Food and Undermine Good Health

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*“Commercial companies use a range of strategies and other approaches to promote products and choices that affect human and environmental health, defined as the **commercial determinants** of health”*

Professor Dame Sally Davies. 'Time to Solve Childhood Obesity'.
Department of Health and Social Care, England, 2019.

Arguably the tobacco and alcohol industries invented sport sponsorship

Crompton, John L.
"Conceptualization and alternate operationalizations of the measurement of sponsorship effectiveness in sport." *Leisure studies* 23.3 (2004): 267-281.



But Coca-Cola
also has a long
history of using
sport to
promote its
sugary drink



Playbook:

1. Sport is perfect for brands to be associated with – it's exciting, glamorous, unpredictable and appeals to young people and often enjoys major screen exposure
2. In addition, sport provides a 'health halo' enabling brands and products to be associated with healthy lifestyles
3. Sport has also historically provided a mechanism for unhealthy brands to avoid controls on advertising in other media (the tobacco industry managed this for decades)

4. As the tobacco industry promoted its mentholated and filtered products (arguing untruthfully that these were safer) and the alcohol industry now promotes its low alcoholic options, so the food industry promotes its low sugar alternatives
5. But it's all about the BRAND and the marketing is designed to promote consumption particularly amongst young people

Three case studies:



- McDonald's have been sponsoring football coaching for young people aged 5 to 11 years across the UK for over 15 years.
- **Get 'em young**



- Red Bull only came onto the market in 1987. Their marketing focuses on individuals, and risky and alternative lifestyles.
- **Associate with risky sports which appeal to teens and young adults**



- Current legislation would prevent Irn-Bru being named this as it certainly isn't made of iron (there is a lot of sugar involved) and it has continued to trade on this rugged image – 'made in Scotland from girders' – to enable it to be described as 'Scotland's other national drink' (after whisky!)
- **Sponsor Scottish leagues and competitions**



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McDonald's triumphs over councils' rejections of new branches – by claiming it promotes “healthier lifestyles”.

BMJ 2025;388:r163

Pic: Ravenshead FC, Mansfield, December 2023. Sponsorship of the youth team by McDonald's was used as part of the fast-food company's appeal against a planning rejection by Mansfield District Council on the grounds that the company promotes health and fitness.

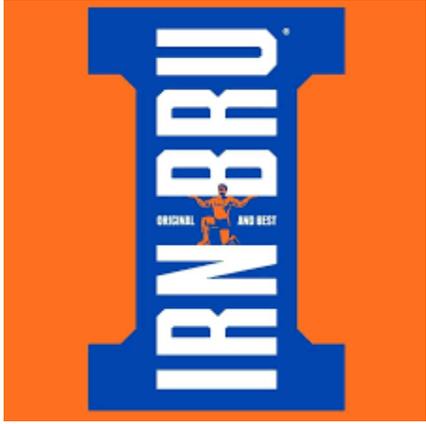


Danny MacAskill, Scottish trials cyclist, from Dunvegan, Isle of Skye.

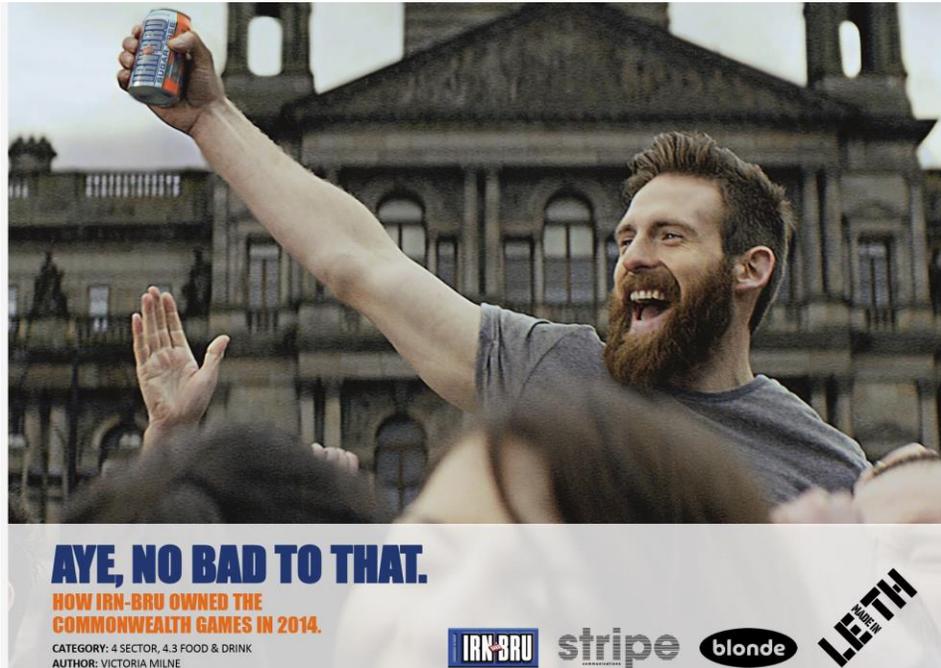
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The company's "Red Bull gives you wings" slogan was hit by a lawsuit in 2014. It was argued that this was false and misleading suggesting that the drink provided a superior source of energy although Red Bull contains less caffeine than a cup of coffee. Red Bull settled the case without admitting wrongdoing.

Nevertheless, the company have persuaded millions of young consumers that the sugary 'energy' drink is an essential component of the modern lifestyle.



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Irn-Bru have been associated with sports sponsorship for many years including the English Football League (2015-18), Scottish football (league and cup competitions), rugby (Scotland and England) and the annual Irn-Bru Carnival held at the SEC Glasgow (“Europe’s largest indoor funfair”).

The Marketing Society have a report titled: “Aye, No Bad to That: How Irn-Bru Owned the Commonwealth Games in 2014”: <https://psa.marketingsociety.com/media/1241/irn-bru-4-sector-43-food-drink.pdf>. Sales rose by 24.4% throughout the period of the games.



And finally – hook them young

In Prof Sir Chris Whitty's words, Chief Medical Adviser to the UK Government

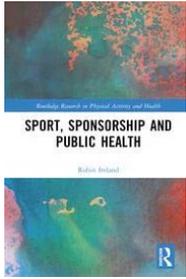
"If advertising didn't make an effect on people's behaviours, then people (companies) wouldn't pay the very large sums they do for it".

Tom Westerman. Photo credit: Lucy and Tom Westerman.





- An opportunity to showcase Glasgow and the joys and pleasures of taking part in sport?
- Or a festival of fast food and sugary drink showcasing Scotland's least healthy brands?



Thank you

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