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The Game: GM, A-B, AT&T Pay To Play; MLB Marketing A Big Hit

March 19, 2007

The World Cup, Winter Olympics and Super Bowl XL were high-profile sports events in 2006, and also were key drivers behind the TV ad spends from General Motors, Anheuser-Busch and other marketers.

Despite cutting its total ad budget by more than \$700 million last year, GM led all marketers by channeling \$527.3 million to advertise during network sports telecasts, 23% of its total \$2.3 billion spend, per Nielsen Monitor-Plus. Ford, DaimlerChrysler, Toyota and Nissan also placed in the top 10 media spends during sports programming. Telecom companies among the top 15 were AT&T, Verizon and Sprint Nextel.

"Sports remain the ultimate and original reality TV programming with a mass audience of dedicated, passionate consumers who would rather watch the action live than through their DVR," said Peter Stern, president at marketing firm Strategic, New York.

Beer companies were less visible during network sports programming than in previous years, opting to shift dollars to the Web and experiential marketing. Anheuser-Busch, which "owns" the beer category during TV broadcasts of the Super Bowl, allotted \$235.9 million in 2006 to remain the leading spender among brewers, per Nielsen. Though that was an increase of \$13 million over 2005, it was 42% of A-B's total ad budget, a significant drop from 2005 (61.1%) and 2004 (a whopping 83%). Miller ramped up its total media spend from \$160 million in 2005 to \$261 million, but put fewer dollars into network TV sports: \$55.4 million (21.1% of its budget) in 2006 versus \$92.9 million (57.9%) in 2005. Molson Coors slipped from 5th to 20th, slicing its network TV sports spend from \$99.2 million (76.7%) to \$75 million (40.8%).

Concurrently, some marketers showed a dramatic increase in this area. Visa jumped from 19th to 6th. And Procter & Gamble, which had been among the biggest spenders in 2004 (including the Summer Olympics), dropped to 21st in 2005 but was back in the top 10 last year. Companies aligned with the International Olympic Committee's "Olympic Partner Program" (with the exclusive worldwide marketing rights to both Winter and Summer Games) also had strong network TV sports media spends in 2006. That included Coke, General Electric, McDonald's and Johnson & Johnson.

Meanwhile, baseball's Los Angeles Dodgers led all pro teams with a budget in excess of \$3.6 million last year, per Nielsen. The NBA's Los Angeles Clippers were second among pro teams at \$3.4 million. But the Dodgers had a better ROI: the team finished second among all MLB clubs in total attendance (3.75 million) behind the New York Yankees (4.2 million); the Clippers finished 13th among 30



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NBA teams (an average of 17,375 per game).

MLB had 14 of the top 20 media spends (excluding the Harlem Globetrotters, which led all sports franchises with \$4.8 million). An anomaly on the list was the Discovery Channel's Pro Cycling team, which ran a \$2.2 million campaign, "Race 2 Replace." That was, in effect, an open casting call to fill the spot vacated by Lance Armstrong, who retired. Pro rider Ivan Basso was named to the team in February.

(Which companies and teams made the top 50? [Click HERE](#) to see a breakdown of Team Spending, and [Click HERE](#) to see how companies spent their money.)

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