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## The Hard Sell in Frankfurt

By MARK LANDLER

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FRANKFURT, June 6 — With the kickoff of the World Cup just days away, even this most buttoned-down of German cities is cutting loose.

Transforming itself into a giant billboard, Frankfurt lighted up its skyline over the weekend with vast, projected images of soccer stars and great moments from past tournaments, including gauzy shots of the gold World Cup trophy.

Soccer's big event, which opens on Friday, hardly needs the extra plug. With a television audience of more than five billion viewers expected over the next four weeks — admittedly many of them repeat viewers, but about 300 million people are likely to watch the final game alone — the World Cup is a marketing juggernaut, easily eclipsing the Super Bowl or the Olympics.

"The World Cup has two things going for it that no other sporting event has," said Shawn Bradley, the chief operating officer and dedicated soccer fan at the Bonham Group, a sports marketing firm in Denver. "It is the most popular sport in the world, and it has nationalism."

In countries where the national team is playing, Mr. Bradley said, it is common for 95 percent of TV sets to be tuned to the game. Lawmakers in Portugal recently voted to reschedule a parliamentary debate when they found it would conflict with their team's match against Mexico.

Few events of any kind generate that kind of passion. And it makes for a one-of-a-kind opportunity to push mass-market products, whether it is athletic shoes (Adidas), credit cards (MasterCard), beer (Anheuser-Busch), fast food ([McDonald's](#)) or Internet service ([Yahoo](#)).

These companies are pouring upward of \$1 billion into marketing campaigns tied to the 2006 World Cup. Soccer's world governing body — the Fédération Internationale de Football Association, or FIFA — raised more than \$800 million from 21 official partners and suppliers.

Unlike the Olympics, which still bans ads in stadiums as a nod to its roots in amateur sports, the World Cup is unabashedly commercial. Anheuser-Busch names a "man of the match" after every game. McDonald's sponsors the children, aged 6 to 12, who escort players on to the field beforehand.

"The Olympics are a gold mine, but you've got to mine the gold out of them," said Nick Marrone, a former Canadian Olympic official who is now the senior director of global sports marketing for McDonald's. "With the World Cup, the gold is a little closer to the surface."

The United States, of course, remains stubbornly immune to World Cup fever, though marketers insist, year in and year out, that the sport's popularity is growing. Hispanics, they note, are devoted fans, particularly with Mexico in the tournament and Brazil the odds-on favorite.

For the seven American sponsors, however, the paucity of interest in the United States is beside the point, given the audiences they can reach virtually everywhere else. All are multinational corporations, which reap a large percentage of their sales outside their home market.

The Super Bowl, the granddaddy of American mass events, attracted 95 million viewers worldwide last February, according to Initiative, a London agency that buys time for advertisers. That is less than a third of the potential audience for the World Cup final in Berlin on July 9.

"What's attractive about the World Cup is its attractiveness outside the U.S.," said Tony Ponturo, the vice president for global media and sports marketing at Anheuser-Busch. "We sell Budweiser in about 70 countries. It really helps us grow Budweiser outside the U.S."

Anheuser-Busch is one of 15 official partners of the 2006 World Cup, along with [Coca-Cola](#), Gillette, Emirates airlines, Hyundai, Fuji and a few others. For exclusive rights to the World Cup name and billboards inside the stadiums, each is paying \$45 million to \$50 million.

The next World Cup, in South Africa, will be even more expensive, with sponsorships going for \$100 million, according to sports marketing experts. And they are still in demand: MasterCard, a long-time sponsor, was recently pushed aside by Visa, which signed a deal with FIFA for 2010 and 2014.

MasterCard sued FIFA in federal court in New York, contending that the Visa deal violated its own agreement. The credit card company is soldiering on with its marketing efforts — which have the theme of World Cup "fever" — though it declined a request to talk about them.

Anheuser-Busch's experience shows how much companies will put up with to be part of the World Cup. In Germany, it is not permitted to sell Budweiser under its full name because of a long-standing legal dispute with a rival Budweiser beer brewed in the Czech Republic.

But even the company's plan to market its beer under the long-winded name, "Anheuser-Busch Bud," ran into trouble when another German brewer, Bitburger, protested that the word "Busch" sounded too much like the shortened name, Bit, that Bitburger uses in advertising.

Underlying the dispute is a wider German resentment that an American beer has the exclusive World Cup rights in a country that claims to have practically invented the stuff. German papers have taken potshots at Budweiser's watery flavor, suggesting that the "king of beers" is scarcely a duke.

"We had a unique situation in Germany because it is such a beer culture," Mr. Ponturo said diplomatically.

So Anheuser-Busch cut a deal that will allow Bitburger to sell its beer at World Cup sites, though in unmarked plastic cups. Anheuser-Busch will sell Budweiser in cups stamped with the Bud name. Mr. Ponturo is philosophical. At the 1998 World Cup in France, he noted, the company could not even put its name in the stadiums because French law prohibits any advertising of alcohol during sporting events.

Like Anheuser-Busch, McDonald's views the World Cup mainly as an opportunity to sell itself outside the United States. It is heavily promoting its sponsorship in McDonald's franchises in Europe and Latin America. But it is also running a promotion in restaurants in the United States with a Hispanic clientele.

"We're playing it where it has its greatest strength," Mr. Marrone said, adding that if the American team manages to do at least as well as it did last time, when it reached the quarterfinals, "There's only upside potential coming out of this thing."

The World Cup's commercial atmosphere gives companies that are not official sponsors plenty of opportunities to cash in, too. Ambush marketing, as the practice is called, is sprouting again this year, though the sponsors credit FIFA with being zealous in trying to stamp it out.

In February, FIFA, which is based in Zurich, obtained a court order to stop Burger King from using images of the World Cup trophy in its advertising in Israel. It was also forced to suspend a contest that promised tickets to games in Germany — a privilege reserved for the sponsor.

But some marketing ploys are impossible to stop. Lufthansa, the German airline, has painted the noses of its planes with black-and-white soccer balls. Travelers might be forgiven for thinking that Lufthansa, not the Dubai-based carrier Emirates, is the official airline of the World Cup.

**"It's just a brilliant idea, and Emirates must be cursing them," said Sören Pietzcker, a partner and expert on advertising law at the Hamburg law firm of Heuking Kuhn Luer Wojtek.**

To be fair, Lufthansa sponsors the German team. But that raises another problem for the World Cup's official partners. Most of the national soccer federations have their own sponsors, and that gives these unofficial companies a chance to tie their brand names to the tournament.

[Nike](#), for example, sponsors eight qualifying teams, including Brazil and the United States. Adidas, despite its official status, has only six, the German team among them. Even [Puma](#), a much smaller German maker of athletic shoes, has rights to 12 teams, including several from Africa.

Adidas was stung when China, one of its teams, failed to qualify. The company is putting the best face on this by arguing that more of its teams have a chance of winning than those of its archrival, Nike.

Adidas also sponsors Argentina, a perennial contender that is using a soccer pitch at company headquarters in Bavaria as its training camp during the Cup.

There is no doubt that Nike's marketing fortunes are hitched to those of Brazil, a five-time World Cup champion. The company's ads showcase the Brazilian superstar Ronaldinho. It has developed an elaborate Internet site with the slogan "Joga Bonito" — Portuguese for "play beautiful." The site, developed with [Google](#), features an online community for soccer fans.

Nike insists it will win either way. "It's not about the Brazilian team; it's about the spirit with which the Brazilians play the sport," said Trevor Edwards, the vice president for global brand management at Nike. "In some countries, they play a very rule-based football."

That is a not-so-veiled dig at Germany, the home of Adidas and the German team, whose players have a dogged — some say joyless — style of play that has nevertheless won them three World Cups. In marketing, as in soccer itself, jealous rivalries are just another part of the game.