

# Kicking Out Junk Food

Sports sponsorship and a better deal for health



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## **A note on definitions**

Throughout this report, we refer to 'sports sponsorship'. When we use this term, we are referring to a wide range of different marketing activities that can occur as part of a sponsorship deal, which could be associated with a team, association, league or individual player. When referring to food and drinks, we refer to non-alcoholic beverages only.

These other marketing activities could include TV/social media adverts, broadcast advertising on radio/podcasts, outdoor advertising at bus stops, billboards, phone boxes, print advertising, promotions, competitions or giveaways, on-pack promotions on food and drink packaging.

We also refer to 'unofficial' marketing activities, which is referencing the general use of sporting imagery such as footballs, rather than co-branding with a team, association, league, or individual player.

## **Acknowledgements**

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# Executive Summary

## Background

Sport has incredible power, profile, and popularity and has the potential to play a pivotal role in improving the nation's health. However, sport has a long history of partnering with unhealthy commodity industries, including less healthy food and drink brands.

These sponsorship arrangements with high-profile athletes, globally televised tournaments and national governing bodies' grassroots programmes all increase exposure to less healthy food and drink, normalise its consumption alongside watching sport and may ultimately, be contributing to weight gain on a population level.

The summer of 2021 presented a multitude of sporting opportunities for food and drink brands to promote their products to large audiences. Notable tournaments included UEFA EURO 2020, The Hundred and the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games. Food Active and the Children's Food Campaign teamed up to monitor how food and drink brands were engaging with these events and collect views from UK parents on this type of marketing.

## Methods

A mixed methods approach was used to bring together insights from parents regarding the use of sport to market less healthy food and drink products through an online survey as well as documenting case study examples of sport sponsorship arrangements between sport and the food and non-alcoholic beverage industry and their outputs aligned to specific competitions.

## Key findings

There were significant concerns from parents regarding the array of marketing techniques used by less healthy food and drink brands when sponsoring all levels of the sporting pyramid. 8 in 10 parents expressed concern about the use of team and tournament logos on adverts and packaging (83%), social media activity featuring players (82%), on-pack promotions (81%) and pitch-side advertising (79%) cited most frequently.

The case study examples we collated during the summer also illustrate the plethora of marketing techniques utilised by less healthy food and drinks brands. These included street-level advertising, shirt and sleeve sponsorship, pitch-side advertising, social media and App-based promotions, competitions, the use of sports personalities, and discounted matchday food bundles. Brands engaging with advertising via sport included Coca Cola, McDonald's, Just Eat, McVitie's, Cadbury, Deliveroo, Papa John's Pizza, Carabao, Powerade, Walkers, KP Snacks, Greggs, Lidl, Costa, Subway, to name just a few.

Parents in our survey recognised how less food and drink brands use sport to normalise consumption of energy dense, nutrient poor products. There was strong consensus that sport, and particularly athletes, should use their influence to positively impact on health and wellbeing, and reject sponsorship deals not aligned with this. 86% of parents we spoke to supported further Government legislation to prohibit partnerships between sport

and less healthy food and drink brands. 9 in 10 parents (91%) agreed grassroots sports should not have to rely on income from these sources.

## **Main Recommendations**

### **The Government should:**

- Introduce regulations to ensure that only healthier food and drink products can be associated with marketing through sports.
- Address the use of promotional techniques on unhealthy food and drink product packaging.
- Work with the governing bodies of sport, organisations representing players and athletes, sponsorship consultants and public health specialists to create new guidelines to inform the type of commercial partnerships that should be encouraged.
- Equip local authorities with adequate financial resources to support public health and community sport to tackle the inter-linked issues of physical inactivity, obesity, and NCDs.
- Commit to monitoring-brand-only advertising by companies with high association with HFSS food and drink consumption, including advertising as part of sports sponsorship deals or otherwise associated with sports.

### **Sports Associations, Clubs and Venues should:**

- Commit to phasing out any sponsorship arrangements and associated marketing of products and brands considered to be less healthy and instead seek opportunities to promote healthier diets.
- Make funding available for Club Community Organisations (CCOs) and other organisations in the sport and physical activity sector to deliver educative programmes around prevention of non-communicable diseases and the role of healthier food and drink, without industry or brand interference.

### **Individual Sports Personalities and Influencers should:**

- Commit to endorsing only food and drink that contributes positive nutrition in line with a healthy lifestyle and phase out any commercial relationships that undermine this goal.
- Actively support and promote healthy eating campaigns run by non-profit local and national organisations.

*A detailed list of recommendations is available on p.46-47 of the main report.*



# Introduction

Sport has incredible power, profile, and popularity to play a pivotal role in our vision for a future healthy nation. From young children on school playing fields through to high profile superstars and globally televised tournaments, the sport industry reaches and influences millions of people daily.

Sport sponsorship deals are very big business. The Government's sport strategy, published in 2015, acknowledged the need for diversified funding of sport in order to deliver on a vision of an active nation, but also noted the dangers of commercial sources of funding associated with food and drink high in fat, salt and/or sugar (HFSS)<sup>1</sup>. It called for a responsible approach by sporting bodies, clubs and venues, committed to discuss the "scope of voluntary agreements in this area", and also the potential for a new Government childhood obesity strategy to address this topic.

Roll forward to Summer 2021, dubbed the Summer of Sport, and at a EURO2020 press conference Portuguese footballer Cristiano Ronaldo hit the news headlines when he calmly removed two bottles of Coca Cola from view and told the public to drink water instead. And yet, his actions were the exception, not the norm. From the Tokyo Olympics' partnership with Coca-Cola, to KP Snacks' sponsorship of new family friendly England Cricket Board tournament 'The Hundred', or Team GB Paralympic medal winners posing with McVitie's biscuits for medals, it's clear that voluntary agreements on responsible commercial relationships are failing. As this report goes to press, football clubs are busy promoting branded chocolate bars and energy drinks to their fans and competing in the Carabao Cup and the Papa John's Trophy.

There has been little progress on the regulation of sports sponsorship despite significant advances to regulating other aspects of junk food marketing and promotions. None of the successive iterations of Government Childhood Obesity strategies in 2016 and 2018, the Government Health Prevention Paper in 2019, nor the revised Government obesity strategy launched in 2020, have addressed this failure of voluntary action, as the proliferation of junk food associations with many major sports (see p.15-16) clearly demonstrates. Indeed, with new regulations on healthier food and drink product advertising on TV and online due to come into force in 2022, there is now an increased risk that food and drink brands will look to increase marketing spend in areas such as sports sponsorship. In addition, the loophole in the new advertising regulations around brand-level (as opposed to product) advertising mean that many elements of sports sponsorship promotions operating at brand level remain unaffected and totally unrestricted.

In June 2021, Food Active and the Children's Food Campaign launched our #SummerofJunkFoodAds initiative - to track and monitor the activity across major sporting

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/486622/Sporting\\_Future\\_ACCESSIBLE.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486622/Sporting_Future_ACCESSIBLE.pdf)

tournaments during Summer 2021. We also invited parents of children under 18 to share with us their experiences of the influence these have on their own families. 346 parents took part in our research, with a survey open to any parent, carer or guardian of a child in the UK from 11 June - 27 September 2021.

In this report, we share the findings of our research with parents and their views and experiences of the impact of sports sponsorship on children. We present insights from our work monitoring of several high-profile sporting bodies over Summer 2021, and the key themes and approaches that are used to 'sportswash' less healthy food and drink brands. Whilst we acknowledge that sponsorship does have a place in professional sport, and there is clearly a need to fund grassroots sport, we believe it is now time to end partnerships with companies selling HFSS products, just as the relationship with tobacco was phased out in the early 2000's<sup>2</sup>. We acknowledge that similar calls are being made in relation to alcohol and gambling, given the physical and mental health challenges these also represent.

***"Sports are supposed to promote a healthy lifestyle through physical activity and food choices. Less healthy foods and drinks should not be promoted full stop but advertising through sports is totally nonsensical."***

Parent response to survey, 2021

We are calling on the Government, league operators, governing bodies of sport, individual clubs, venue owners and players themselves to reassess the relationship of sport with less healthy food and drink, and the mixed signals these send to children and adults and offer recommendations for future action.

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<sup>2</sup> The Tobacco Advertising and Promotions Act (2002) prohibited all domestic sports sponsorship from 31 July 2003. The rules extended to international sporting events including Formula 1 motor racing from 31 July 2005. Action on Smoking & Health timeline: <https://ash.org.uk/information-and-resources/law-guide/advertising-promotion-sponsorship/>

## Viewpoint: Jacob Rosenberg, 17, Bite Back 2030 Youth Board member

**“Sport has an opportunity to put healthier options in the spotlight and push junk food totally off stage”**

“Junk food brands have a massive influence over children and young people in sport. The examples are endless; Coca-Cola sponsoring the World Cup, KP Snacks sponsoring The Hundred, Cadbury sponsoring the big 6 in English football and so, so much more. ***The reality is, if I want to enjoy sports, I have to accept that I am being bombarded by messages about junk food from sponsors.*** When the health of 1 in 3 children in the UK is at stake from having overweight or obesity, junk food brands and sports organisations need to step up and realise the damage that they are doing.

I spend so much of my time interacting with sports, whether that’s playing it myself, watching it on the tele, going to the games - I am so obsessed with sports. I am an Arsenal fan and season ticketholder; I go watch my local football team Sutton United regularly too where I also have a season ticket. Sport is a massive part of my life. Yet, it feels so bizarre to me that these sports that I love and centre a lot of my time around encourage me from every corner to do lots of sport, keep on getting involved to stay healthy and still decide to promote high fat, sugar and salt products to me. **Is it not hypocritical to preach about health through exercise to then promote junk food that may have an even bigger and worse effect on my body?** We want sports to be role models for young people and so they need to keep promoting health by taking junk food out of the spotlight.

At Bite Back, we think that there is no place for junk food in sports. ***Sports creates heroes and role models that young people look up to and trust. Athletes and teams should be looking to use their influence for good and put child health in the spotlight and it saddens me that they choose not to.***

Bite Back are immensely proud to say that we are sponsors of football team Dulwich Hamlet this season, where we have our own stand showcasing the quote “Let’s Kick Junk Food Out Of Sport #AdEnough”. We hope our sponsorship of Dulwich encourages tournaments, teams, and athletes to use their influence for good and put child health first. We hope others will see that sport can and should be doing things differently. Take the Ronaldo example; during the Euros he removed a bottle of coke from his view and insisted on drinking water instead. ***Sport has an opportunity to put healthier options in the spotlight and push junk food totally off stage, literally like Ronaldo.*** So, we ask that other clubs and sports step up like Dulwich consistently do and stop their sponsorships with junk food brands.”



# Section One: The Backdrop

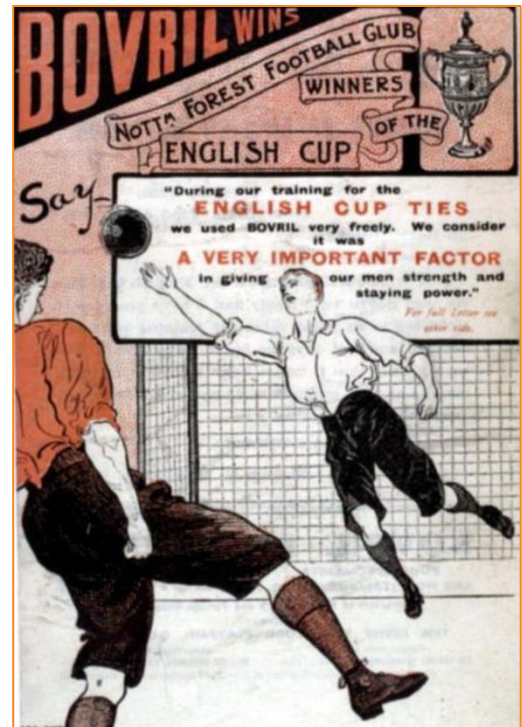
## Sports sponsorship: the story so far

There is evidence that sport, particularly football, first began a process of commercialisation in the late nineteenth century. One of the earliest known examples of a food product using sport to claim health and performance benefits was Bovril in 1898<sup>3</sup>. A poster associated with Nottingham Forest, the FA Cup winners in 1898, stated, "During our training for the ENGLISH CUP TIES we used BOVRIL very freely. We consider it was A VERY IMPORTANT FACTOR in giving our men strength and staying power".

It is now perhaps common knowledge that a thick, salty, meat extract paste such as Bovril, may actually *harm* performance, rather than improve it, but for fans at the time that could see Nottingham Forest's superiority on the pitch, we can only assume this helped to incentivise purchasing as this technique is still used to this day. In the academic literature, this is known as the 'health halo' effect.

Over the last century, brands have not only continued to take advantage of the health halo effect but have continuously refined it. Most pertinently for this report, techniques developed during the twentieth century primarily by the tobacco industry are still being deployed today by other less healthy commodity industries, including the food and non-alcoholic beverage sector.

For instance, the tobacco industry is credited with inventing the idea of inserting trading cards of football players into cigarette packets as early as 1896<sup>4</sup>. We see this technique replicated in the modern day in the form of Panini trading stickers, and now in-App collectibles<sup>5</sup>. Since 2019, Cadbury, a multinational confectionery company, have run seasonal promotional campaigns in the UK and Republic of Ireland to 'Win the captain' or 'Win the legend' as part of their sponsorship of the Premier League. Selected packs contain collectible Panini stickers featuring English Premier League legends to incentivise purchase<sup>6</sup>. These have featured former England internationals such as Michael Owen,



*Bovril Wins, 1898. Image taken from Hadley (1970), p.88*

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<sup>3</sup> Hadley, P. (1970) *The History of Bovril Advertising*, London: Ambassador Publishing.

<sup>4</sup> Football cigarette cards. <https://spartacus-educational.com/Fcigarette.html>

<sup>5</sup> Panini UEFA EURO 2020 Tournament Edition Official Sticker Collection launches. <https://www.uefa.com/uefaeuro-2020/news/0267-11e159d249a8-17bf0c134364-1000--euro-2020-sticker-collection/>

<sup>6</sup> Cadbury puts football legends on shiny Panini stickers for 'Win a legend' promotion. <https://www.prolificlondon.co.uk/marketing-tech-news/agency-news/2020/01/cadbury-puts-football-legends-shiny-panini-stickers-win>

Jamie Redknapp, Ian Wright, Gary Neville and former Republic of Ireland international, Shay Given.

There has been progress in limiting other less healthy commodity industries from hijacking sport to promote health-harming products, most notably tobacco advertising through the introduction and adoption of the World Health Organisation's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control<sup>7</sup>. However, regulations around junk food sponsorship and advertising remain weak in the UK.

The lack of effective regulation and international action on junk food sponsorship of sport has permitted McDonald's to sponsor the Olympic Games for 41 consecutive years. It is rumoured that the fast-food chain began its involvement at the 1968 Winter Olympics when it flew hamburgers to US athletes in the French Alpine resort of Grenoble after they reported missing American food.

The partnership ended in 2017, with McDonald's instead choosing to "focus on different business priorities"<sup>8</sup>. It's estimated that by the end of their relationship with the International Olympic Committee, McDonald's was contributing approximately \$1bn per four-year cycle.

***"I think advertising of less healthy food, particularly that which is aimed at children, needs to be banned (in the same way that cigarette advertising was)."***

*Parent response, 2021*

Similarly, Coca-Cola became an official sponsor of the FIFA World Cup in 1978, a relationship that will continue for the tournament in Qatar in 2022, and will mark its 44th year as a sponsor, eclipsing McDonald's relationship with the Olympics. In practice, this means that FIFA has yielded global marketing rights to Coca-Cola for 12 consecutive World Cup tournaments in exchange for financial compensation and perhaps, reputational rewards. To put the scale of the marketing opportunities available to Coca-Cola into perspective, the last edition of the FIFA World Cup held in Russia in 2018 reached an estimated 3.572bn people globally, with the Final between France and Croatia attracting a live audience of 1.12bn people<sup>9</sup>.

These sponsorship deals with large international governing bodies of sport, whilst huge in exposure, and monetary terms, are only the tip of the iceberg. When we look at the sporting pyramid holistically, we can see that sponsorship of sport by less healthy food and drink is present at all levels - even at grassroots.

McDonald's may have relinquished their status as the official restaurant of the Olympic Games, but they have maintained their relationship with the English, Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh Football Associations.

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<sup>7</sup> WHO. Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Available: [https://www.who.int/fctc/text\\_download/en/](https://www.who.int/fctc/text_download/en/)

<sup>8</sup> The Guardian. McDonald's pulls out of Olympic contract to end 41-year sponsorship: <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2017/jun/16/mcdonalds-pulls-out-olympics-contract-end-41-year-sponsorship>

<sup>9</sup> FIFA (2018). More than half the world watched record-breaking 2018 World Cup. <https://www.fifa.com/tournaments/mens/worldcup/2018russia/media-releases/more-than-half-the-world-watched-record-breaking-2018-world-cup>

As part of this arrangement, McDonald's funds the training of football coaches, runs community football days under the "Fun Football" brand, and equips over 5,000 FA accredited football clubs with brand new kit annually<sup>10</sup>. These activities, delivered predominantly at grassroots level through County Football Associations in England, provides McDonald's with unprecedented access to children and young people, creating a positive association between the national game and a restaurant chain that provides highly processed, energy dense, nutrient poor food and drink. The latest cycle will have provided 5 million hours of football by 2022, when the current sponsorship deal will end.

There are significant detrimental effects of food marketing, including enhanced attitudes, preferences, and increased consumption of marketed foods<sup>11</sup> and using sport as a marketing vehicle can influence false associations between less healthy products and healthful behaviours<sup>12</sup>.

Furthermore, endorsement of McDonald's by men's and women's national team players and managers sends mixed messages – although athletes may promote physical activity, they simultaneously encourage consumption of McDonald's products that can lead to negative health outcomes.

***" These foods are not foods that the elite sportspeople should (or do) eat themselves, so it is morally wrong for them to associate themselves with such foods."***

*Parent response, 2021*

It's disheartening that McDonald's boast they're the longest standing supporter of grassroots football in the UK. If community sport and physical activity is to deliver on its potential as a health-promoting activity across the life course, financial arrangements with junk food companies need to be prohibited.

However, sport must be funded from somewhere. Despite repeated government promises to strengthen public health, prevention and provision of sport and physical activity, most recently following the COVID-19 pandemic, the reduced spending power of local authorities has resulted in severe cuts to the non-statutory services that councils provide. This has negatively impacted public health and leisure services budgets.

Austerity measures have resulted in cuts to budgets, services, staffing within sport and most significantly sports development and community recreation, both within local authorities and community sports organisations (CSOs). In response to this, costs for individuals to participate in sport and physical activity have increased, creating a financial barrier for many. A lack of funding from the government for community sport and physical activity over an extended period may be creating a vacuum that continues to be exploited by less healthy food and drink brands.

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<sup>10</sup> The FA. (2020). Over 500k children will play five million hours of football in new McDonald's scheme. Available at: <https://www.thefa.com/news/2018/aug/06/mcdonalds-sponsorship-renewal-020818>

<sup>11</sup> Smith, R., Kelly, B., Yeatman, H., and Boyland, E. (2019). Food Marketing Influences Children's Attitudes, Preferences and Consumption: A Systematic Critical Review. *Nutrients*. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31003489/>

<sup>12</sup> Bragg, M. A., Roberto, C. A., Harris, J. L., Brownell, K. D., and Elbel, B. (2017). Marketing Food and Beverages to Youth Through Sports. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29111226/>

## Impact on health: what does the evidence say?

There is a growing body of international evidence around the influence of less healthy food and drink marketing and advertising that takes place as a result of sports sponsorship deals. In this section, we provide a summary overview of some of the evidence currently available.

- Polonsky and Speed (2001) found that exposure is likely to create an association between clubs and brand sponsors among fans<sup>13</sup>, whilst Kelly et al (2011) study with Australian children suggest that sports sponsorship improves children's opinions of brands. It found most children (68%) could recall sponsors of their sports club, naming a median of two sponsors, including a median of one food company sponsor each. Almost half (47%) of children could recall any sponsors of their favourite elite sporting team. Furthermore, most children had received a voucher or certificate from a food or beverage company to reward sport performance (86% and 76%, respectively). Around one-third of children reported liking the company more after receiving these rewards<sup>14</sup>.
- One recent study of English Premier League (EPL) sponsors found that (44%) of the 36 food and drink product sponsors were classified as 'red' (in the application of the traffic light labelling system). High sugar 'energy drinks' were present with Monster Energy Drinks' logo appearing on the websites of eight EPL clubs (Crystal Palace, Everton, Leicester City, Sheffield United, Southampton, Tottenham Hotspur, Watford and West Ham United) in 2019/20. Carabao, the Thai based high sugar 'energy' drink, sponsored the English League Cup and one EPL team (Chelsea). Another 'energy' brand, Gatorade, sponsored Arsenal and Manchester City (both clubs in 2018/19 and Manchester City only in 2019/20)<sup>15</sup>.
- A systematic review by Dixon et al. (2019) found wide use of sports sponsorship to promote unhealthy foods through professional and community sport, prompting increased awareness and preference for sponsor products. Most studies were self-reported responses to sponsorship, with a lack of behavioural data on food purchasing and consumption. Sports sponsorship by unhealthy food brands achieves vast public reach, promoting increased brand awareness and preference for sponsor products<sup>16</sup>.
- Whalen et al. study (2018) of UK TV advertising of less healthy food and drink items indicates that using sporting and physical activity messages makes genuinely healthier food choice more difficult by creating an undeserved "health halo" around junk foods<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Polonsky M and Speed R (2001) Linking sponsorship and cause related marketing. *Complementaries and conflicts*. *European Journal of Marketing*, 35(11/12):1361-85.

<sup>14</sup> Kelly, B., Baur, L.A., Bauman, A.E. et al. "Food company sponsors are kind, generous and cool": (Mis)conceptions of junior sports players. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act* 8, 95 (2011). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1479-5868-8-95>

<sup>15</sup> Ireland, Robin (2021) Commercial determinants of health in sport. The example of the English Premier League. PhD thesis. Available at: <https://theses.qia.ac.uk/82394/>

<sup>16</sup> Dixon H, Lee A, Scully M. Sports Sponsorship as a Cause of Obesity. *Curr Obes Rep*. 2019 Dec;8(4):480-494. doi: 10.1007/s13679-019-00363-z. PMID: 31673981.

<sup>17</sup> Whalen, R. et al. (2017) The Health Halo Trend in UK Television Food Advertising Viewed by Children: The Rise of Implicit and Explicit Health Messaging in the Promotion of Unhealthy Foods. *Int Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5877105/pdf/iierph-15-00560.pdf>

- Ireland et al (2019) found that there is a mismatch between the sponsorship of the brands and the players, who are portrayed as role models for health<sup>18</sup>.
- In one study with Australian children, three-quarters (76 %) of the children aligned at least one correct sponsor magnet with the relevant sport. Just over half the children (54 %) correctly matched the most popular sport (an Australian Football League team) with its relevant sponsor (a fast-food chain)<sup>19</sup>.
- Another cross-sectional study in Australia found large proportions of community sports clubs with junior members are sponsored by both alcohol and fast-food industries, and greater acceptability for prohibiting sponsorship from the alcohol industry than the fast-food industry<sup>20</sup>.
- A 2013 study of young adults in Australia by Pettigrew et al suggests that restricting elite sport sponsorship to healthier food brands that meet set nutritional criteria could help promote healthier eating among young adults<sup>21</sup>.
- A US study by Bragg et al (2018) found that sport organisations had 44 food and/or non-alcoholic beverage sponsors (18.8% of sponsors). The National Football League had the most food and/or non-alcoholic beverage sponsors (n = 10), followed by the National Hockey League (n = 7) and Little League (n = 7). They identified 273 advertisements that featured food and/or non-alcoholic beverage products 328 times and product logos 83 times (some advertisements showed multiple products). Seventy-six percent (n = 132) of foods had unhealthy nutrition scores, and 52.4% (n = 111) of non-alcoholic beverages were sugar-sweetened<sup>22</sup>.
- In Canada, a study by Pauze et al found that 40% of the 67 sports clubs identified received some form of food company sponsorship. Food companies constituted 16% of total sponsors and were the second most frequent type of sponsor after sports-related goods, services, and retailers (25%). Fast food restaurants and other restaurants accounted for 45% and 41% of food company sponsors, respectively<sup>23</sup>.
- In New Zealand, a study by Carter et al (2013) found both healthy and unhealthy brands and companies sponsor sport. However, it is not extensive, and relatively few brands support their sponsorships with additional marketing. Interviews revealed that, although many sports organisations felt concerned about associating themselves with unhealthy foods or beverages, others considered sponsorship income more important<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> R. Ireland et al. 2019 'Exploring the relationship between Big Food corporations and professional sports clubs: a scoping review' *Public Health Nutrition* 22(10): 1888-97 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980019000545>

<sup>19</sup> Pettigrew, S., Rosenberg, M., Ferguson, R., Houghton, S., & Wood, L. (2013). Game on: Do children absorb sports sponsorship messages? *Public Health Nutrition*, 16(12), 2197-2204. doi:10.1017/S1368980012005435

<sup>20</sup> Gonzalez S, Kingsland M, Hall A, Clinton-McHarg T, Lecathelinais C, Zukowski N, Milner S, Sherker S, Rogers B, Doran C, Brooke D, Wiggers J, Wolfenden L. Alcohol and fast-food sponsorship in sporting clubs with junior teams participating in the 'Good Sports' program: a cross-sectional study. *Aust N Z J Public Health*. 2020 Apr;44(2):145-151. doi: 10.1111/1753-6405.12954. Epub 2020 Feb 12. PMID: 32050304.

<sup>21</sup> Dixon, H., Scully, M., Wakefield, M. et al. The impact of unhealthy food sponsorship vs. pro-health sponsorship models on young adults' food preferences: a randomised controlled trial. *BMC Public Health* 18, 1399 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-6298-4>

<sup>22</sup> Marie A. Bragg, Alysa N. Miller, Christina A. Roberto, Rachel Sam, Vishnudas Sarda, Jennifer L. Harris, Kelly D. Brownell. *Pediatrics* Apr 2018, 141 (4) e20172822; DOI: 10.1542/peds.2017-2822

<sup>23</sup> Pauzé E, Ekeh O, Kent MP. The Extent and Nature of Food and Beverage Company Sponsorship of Children's Sports Clubs in Canada: A Pilot Study. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2020 Apr 27;17(9):3023. doi: 10.3390/ijerph17093023. PMID: 32349246; PMCID: PMC7246505.

<sup>24</sup> Carter MA, Signal L, Edwards R, Hoek J, Maher A. Food, fizzy, and football: promoting unhealthy food and beverages through sport - a New Zealand case study. *BMC Public Health*. 2013 Feb 11;13:126. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-13-126. PMID: 23399019; PMCID: PMC3574844.



# Loopholes in food and drink advertising regulations

## Current rules in 2021

Current regulations on food and drink advertising apply to products defined as being high in fat, salt and/or sugar (HFSS) according to the Nutrient Profiling Model and prohibit marketing of these products to under-16s. They were introduced for broadcast in 2007 and regulated by Ofcom<sup>25</sup> and later extended to non-broadcast media under Section 15 of the CAP Code in 2016<sup>26</sup> and overseen by the industry self-regulator, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). This includes a total ban on HFSS advertising on dedicated children's channels and other media, plus restrictions in placing advertising into media with an audience of more than 25% children. The regulations also prohibit the use of popular children's celebrities and child-friendly cartoon characters, and promotional claims such as free gifts designed to appeal to children under the age of 11. In practice, the 25% audience threshold has allowed the continuation of TV advertising of HFSS products during family entertainment shows watched by millions of children<sup>27</sup>, as well as websites and on social media platforms such as YouTube and Instagram that are popular with children and teens. In the outdoor space, the 25% audience metric has been interpreted by advertisers and the ASA as being advertising less than 100m from the entrance of any primary or secondary school. However, it omits other nurseries, children's centres, and youth clubs likely to have a higher-than-average footfall of children, including sports stadiums and leisure centres<sup>28</sup>.

***"Kids are particularly suggestible and as sport is a family watching event junk food manufacturers are getting around the very strict rules on advertising to children on kids specific programmes".***

*Parent response, 2021*

***"The sponsorship of sport by unhealthy food brands remains an area of great concern, whether that be when viewing or partaking in sport. Sport sponsorship by unhealthy food brands should be addressed, with lessons learned from existing restrictions around tobacco."***

*Professor Linda Bauld, Bruce and John Usher Chair of Public Health, Usher Institute, University of Edinburgh, cited in Obesity Health Alliance Strategy: Turning the Tide*

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<sup>25</sup> [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0024/31857/hfss-review-final.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0024/31857/hfss-review-final.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> [https://www.asa.org.uk/type/non\\_broadcast/code\\_section/15.html](https://www.asa.org.uk/type/non_broadcast/code_section/15.html)

<sup>27</sup> "Britain's Got a Problem with Junk Food Adverts", Obesity Health Alliance analysis of child exposure to HFSS advertising during Britain's Got Talent, 2019 <http://obesityhealthalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/BGT-advertising-analysis-2019.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Taking Down Junk Food Ads, Sustain 2109, [https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/taking\\_down\\_junk\\_food\\_ads/](https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/taking_down_junk_food_ads/)

## New rules from 2022

Through the 2021 Health and Social Care Bill, the Government is set to tighten restrictions on HFSS advertising on these initial regulations with the introduction of a 9pm watershed on TV, and a total ban on paid-for advertising online, both for a selected number of product categories defined by the Department of Health and Social Care<sup>29</sup>. If passed by Parliament by the end of 2021, the new regulations will come into force at the end of 2022. In addition, new restrictions to in-store promotions such as displays at entrances, aisle ends and checkout areas, and multi-buy deals will be introduced in October 2022 (with an additional twelve-month transition for on-pack promotions)<sup>30</sup>.

## Sports loopholes

Sports sponsorship deals are excluded from the new regulations. Whilst some of the marketing tactics used by sponsors will fall under the regulations, such as product-based TV and online advertising or social media activity promoting specific HFSS products, other activity involving venues, tournaments, players, competitions, on-pack promotions and competitions, and associated community engagement will not. Furthermore, only product level advertising is covered by the new regulations, and as the chart on p.15-16 shows, sports sponsorship often operates at a brand level. As other channels of marketing become more restricted, brands will be looking to exploit the advertising avenues still available to them. In this scenario, the lack of regulation in sports sponsorship allows companies to continue marketing their brands under a banner of 'social responsibility' or philanthropy, when in reality - unless they start providing unbranded financial support - it is simply advertising by another name.

***"Marketing of unhealthy food should be banned completely, especially in sports!"***

***"I would love to see the Government starting to take action that we can all see."***

*Parent responses, 2021*

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-advertising-rules-to-help-tackle-childhood-obesity>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/restricting-promotions-of-food-and-drink-that-is-high-in-fat-sugar-and-salt/outcome/restricting-promotions-of-products-high-in-fat-sugar-and-salt-by-location-and-by-price-government-response-to-public-consultation>

## 2021 Food & drink partnerships players' table

***“All the companies that are there sell foods that people want but they are very high calorie - often calorie-dense foods - and they’re associating it with sport, which is actually an unhelpful thing to associate it with, particularly for young people.”***

*Chief Medical Officer for England, Prof. Chris Whitty, Gresham Lecture, April 2021.*

The table below is a non-exhaustive list of commercial relationships between prominent junk food, soft drink and food delivery platform brands in the UK and sports organisations. It briefly explores some of the privileges that sports rights-holders grant these companies. These include traditional marketing activations such as shirt sponsorship and pitch-side advertising as well as more sophisticated marketing programmes, for example, sponsorship of grassroots sport programmes

The table is arranged alphabetically by brand/company, rather than by any other logic. This list excludes ambush marketing activities that food and drink brands, supermarkets<sup>31</sup> and food delivery platforms<sup>32</sup> create, that seek to leverage the attention generated by sports events to market less healthy food and drink products. Some examples of these can be found in the tactics section on p.36-38.

BRAND / PRODUCT	SPONSORSHIP DEALS	ACTIVITIES
<b>Cadbury / Mondelez</b> 	English Premier League - ended 2021.  Arsenal FC, Chelsea FC, Liverpool FC, Manchester United FC, Manchester City FC, Tottenham Hotspur FC.	Advertising Campaigns eg. Win the Captain  Co-branded chocolate bars in retailers & club outlets, advertising and social media, fundraising activity.
<b>Carabao Energy Drink</b> 	England Football League Cup	Pitchside advertising, online and social media advertising. Shirt badges

<sup>31</sup> Food Active (2020) Supermarkets serve up football themed junk food deals [online] Available at: <https://foodactive.org.uk/blog-supermarkets-serve-up-football-themed-junk-food-deals/>

<sup>32</sup> Healthy Stadia (2020) Takeaway companies deliver junk food festival as project restart kicks off [online] Available at: <https://healthystadia.eu/takeaway-companies-deliver-junk-food-festival-as-project-restart-kicks-off/>

<p><b>Coca Cola</b></p> 	<p>International Olympic Games, Paralympic Games</p> <p>Premier League (until end of 2019/20 season)</p> <p>Community level football, including Street Games</p> <p>Marcus Rashford, Harry Kane, Jesse Lingard, Jermaine Jenas.</p>	<p>Headline sponsor, venue branding, press activity, athlete endorsements.</p> <p>TV and online advertising “Where Everyone Plays”, online pack promotions and competitions.</p> <p>Sponsored kit and equipment</p> <p>Social media influencing, participation in community sport events.</p>
<p><b>Gatorade</b></p> 	<p>Manchester City FC Men’s and Women’s Team</p> <p>UEFA Champions League</p>	<p>Official sports nutrition partner, LED boards and branding at the Etihad Stadium.</p> <p>Official partner</p>
<p><b>Lucozade Sport</b></p> 	<p>English FA - Men’s &amp; Women’s national teams</p> <p>Rangers FC Men’s &amp; Women’s teams</p> <p>The London Marathon, Vitality Big Half &amp; Lucozade Sport Virtual 10k</p> <p>Hashtag United</p>	<p>“Official hydration partner”, player profiles appeared on special bottles</p> <p>“Official hydration partner” during training &amp; matches</p> <p>Partner of London Marathon for 21 years. New virtual 10k naming rights.</p> <p>A virtual football team inside the FIFA21 game, logo on the shirt.</p>
<p><b>KP Snacks - Skips, Pom-bear, Popchips, Hula hoops, Butterkist, KP Nuts, Tyrell’s, McCoy’s</b></p> 	<p>England Cricket Board’s The Hundred</p>	<p>Team kit sponsorship, social media, player endorsements online competitions, product sales at live games.</p>
<p><b>Just Eat</b></p> 	<p>UEFA Champions’ League, Europa League, Europa Conference League, Futsal League, Youth League, Women’s Championship League, Men’s &amp; Women’s EURO Championships.</p>	<p>Official food delivery partner. Stadium LED boards, pitchside advertising, event activities, online and social media promotions.</p>
<p><b>Kinder / Ferrero</b></p> 	<p>England Football League Trust</p>	<p>Kinder/Ferrero Joy of Moving programme with 31 community clubs &amp; 650 schools - Move and Learn programme in schools and ‘Joy of Moving’ festivals in school holidays. NB This is now an unbranded activity.</p>

<p><b>Mars - Snickers</b></p> 	<p>English FA, Scottish FA</p>	<p>FA Snickers Protein Just Play Centres running sports sessions. Competitions to win tickets.</p>
<p><b>McDonald's</b></p> 	<p>English FA, Northern Irish FA, Scottish FA, Welsh FA plus community level &amp; children's football</p>	<p>McDonald's Fun Football &amp; Community Football Day local events, branded children's kits &amp; equipment</p>
<p><b>Monster Energy</b></p> 	<p>England Rugby League - Men's, Women's and Wheelchair teams</p> <p>BMX, motocross, skating, surfing, skiing.</p>	<p>Shirt Sponsorship by HydroEnergy</p> <p>Monster Army targets 13-21 years to take part in BMX, motocross, mountain biking, skating, surfing, skiing.</p>
<p><b>Papa John's Pizza</b></p> 	<p>England Football League Trophy, Scotland Professional Football League</p>	<p>Pitchside advertising, branding on shirts and media activity, online promotions, and competitions.</p>
<p><b>Walkers Crisps</b></p> 	<p>England FA</p> <p>Gary Lineker</p> <p>UEFA Champions League, Women's Football and Women's Euro competition.</p>	<p>TV Advertising, football themed crisp flavours, celebrity endorsements, social media activity.</p> <p>Four new football themed branded crisp products, in-store promotions, online and social media marketing.</p>



# Section Two: Our research

## Aims and objectives

1. To understand parent opinions, experience, perspectives and attitudes towards less healthy food and drink marketing through sport and its impact on children and young people.
2. To document current examples of how junk food and soft drink manufacturers take advantage of sports competitions to market less healthy food and drink products.
3. To disentangle discrete marketing activities by junk food and soft drink manufacturers to understand how sports imagery such as famous players, footballs, tournament, and club logos are used to encourage the purchase of less healthy food and drink items.

## Methodology

A mixed methods approach was deployed to bring together insights from parents themselves with monitoring of marketing activities by food and soft drink manufacturers associated with sports.

### **1. Understanding parent opinions, perspectives and experience**

During the early summer of 2021, Food Active and Children's Food Campaign developed an online survey designed to capture parents' perceptions of less healthy food and drink marketing through sport. The survey was launched to take place simultaneously with several major international and domestic sports events including, but not limited to, UEFA EURO 2020, England & Wales Cricket Board tournament 'The Hundred', Wimbledon, The Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the start of the 2021/22 football season.

The survey was composed of 22 questions, including a variety of multiple choice and open-ended questions, with completion taking roughly 10 minutes. The survey was open to any parent, carer or guardian living in the UK with children under 18 years of age. If parents either did not have a UK address or children over 18, they were excluded from the survey.

The survey was open from Friday 11 June until Monday 27 September 2021. Food Active disseminated the survey via its local authority network, social media following and mailing list. The Children's Food Campaign distributed the survey across its vast network of members, its Parents' Jury panel of 600 parents, social media channels and via the Sustain local food partnership network. Partners were provided with a brief communications toolkit with suggested tweets and graphics to use.

## **2. Documenting examples of less healthy food and drink marketing associated with sports**

A collective case study approach was used to produce an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of the diverse nature of marketing opportunities at the disposal of less healthy food and drink companies through sport.

Studying the similarities and differences between the cases will advance our understanding of the sports sponsorship model and how this may impact on brand recognition and purchasing and consumptions behaviours.

## **3. Analysis of marketing tools and tactics**

An ad-hoc approach to the collation of discrete marketing activities was undertaken with researchers aiming to capture marketing examples from newsletters, social media, TV adverts, out-of-home or street-level advertising, on-pack promotions, and point-of-sale.

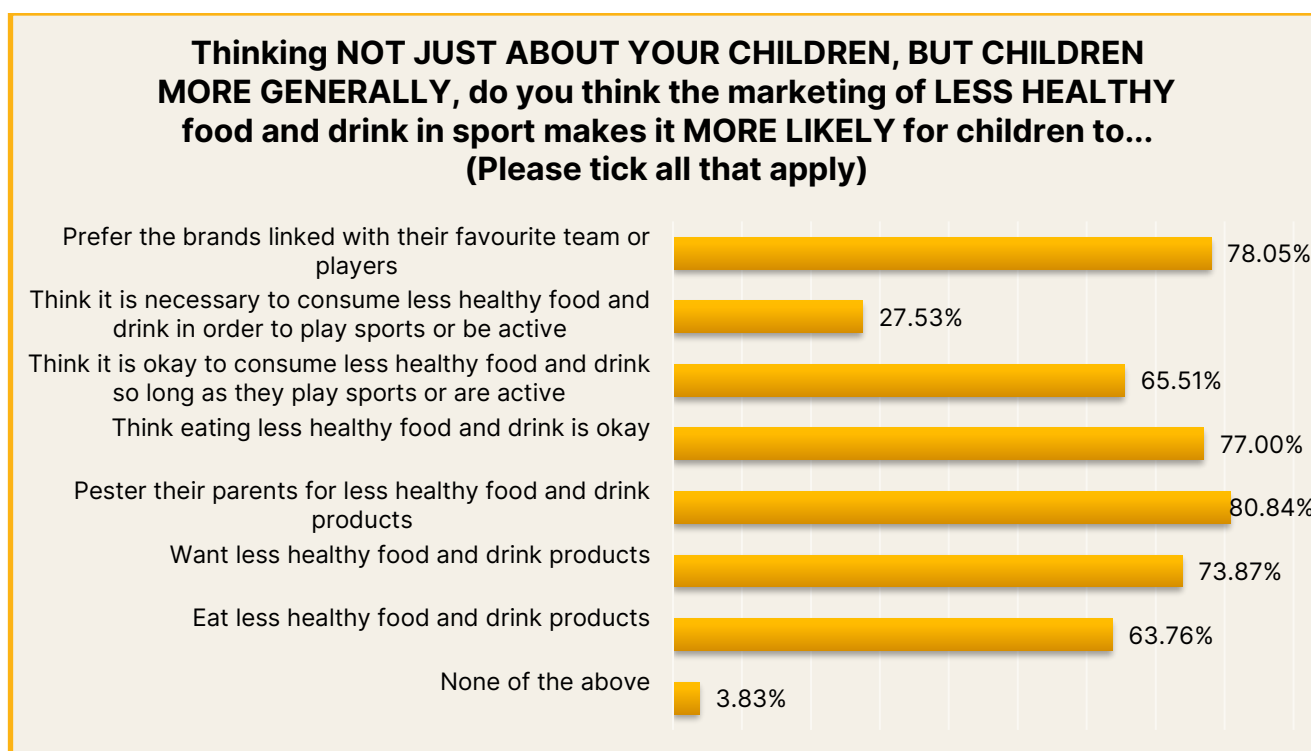
The research team then analysed each of these discrete marketing activities in turn to break-down how sport was being used to influence consumer attitudes and perception of less healthy food and drink products.

## Impact on children: what did parents tell us?

Below we provide an overview of findings from our survey, completed by 346 parents across the UK. As the survey was open to any parent who wished to participate, it is not demographically representative of UK adults, and likely to be weighted in favour of parents interested in healthy food topics. *A full survey report, with the methodology, limitations and detailed findings can also be viewed separately at <https://www.sustainweb.org/secure/Kicking-Out-Junk-Food-Parents-Jury-Appendix.pdf>.*

### Summary of findings

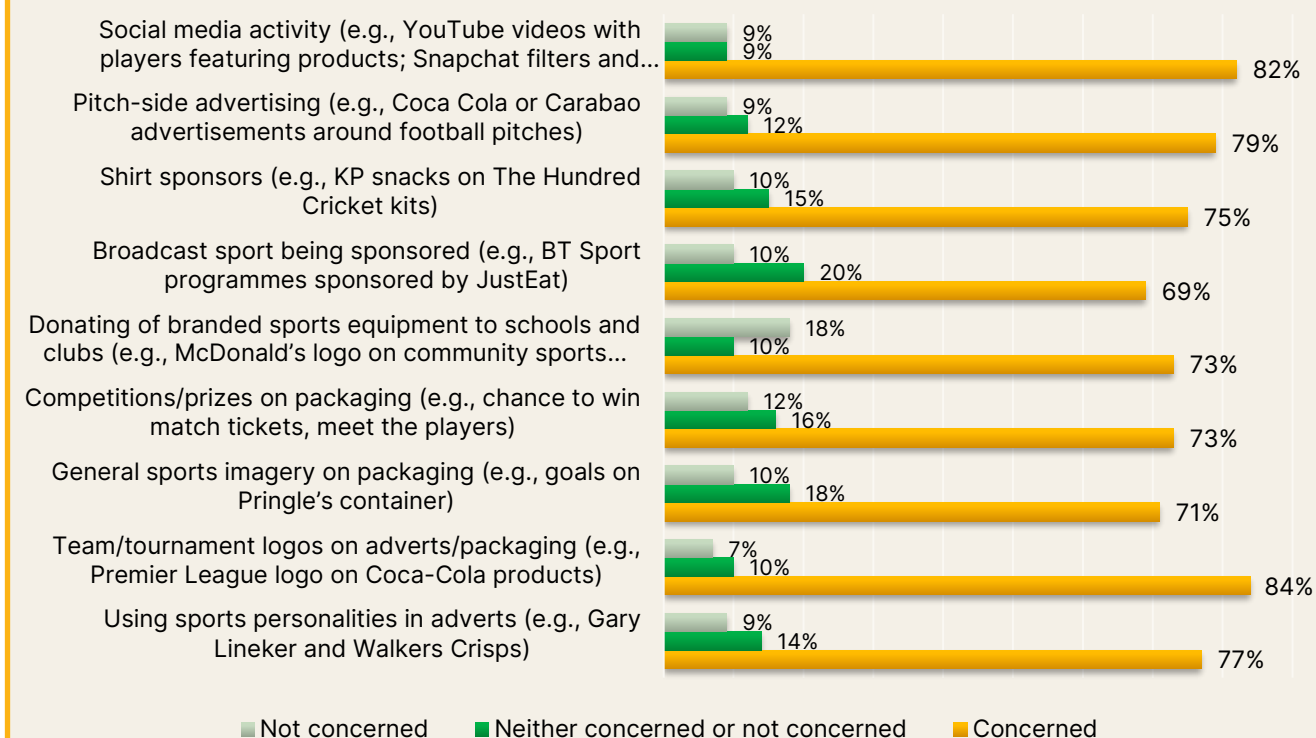
- The three sports most commonly associated with less healthy food and drink marketing by parents were football (96%), summer Olympic games (32%) and motor sports (25%)
- When parents were asked what impact marketing of less healthy food and drink through sport has on children, the top three impacts were reported; 'pester their parents for less healthy food and drink' (81%), followed by 'prefer the brands linked with their favourite team or player' (78%) and 'think it is okay to eat less healthy food and drink' (77%). See Figure 1 below for more detail.



**Figure 1:** Parents responses when asked whether they thought the marketing of less healthy food and drink in sport made it more likely to influence a selection of children's behaviours and attitudes.

- 9 in 10 parents (90%) felt the marketing of less healthy food and drink through sport makes it harder for parents to feed their children a healthy diet.
- When asked what marketing techniques were of greatest concern to them, parents most frequently reported the following three methods; team/tournament logos on adverts/packages (83%); social media activity (82%) and pitch-side advertising (79%). See Figure 2 below for more detail.

**Please state whether you are concerned or not concerned about the following ways in which LESS HEALTHY food and drink products are marketed through sport.**



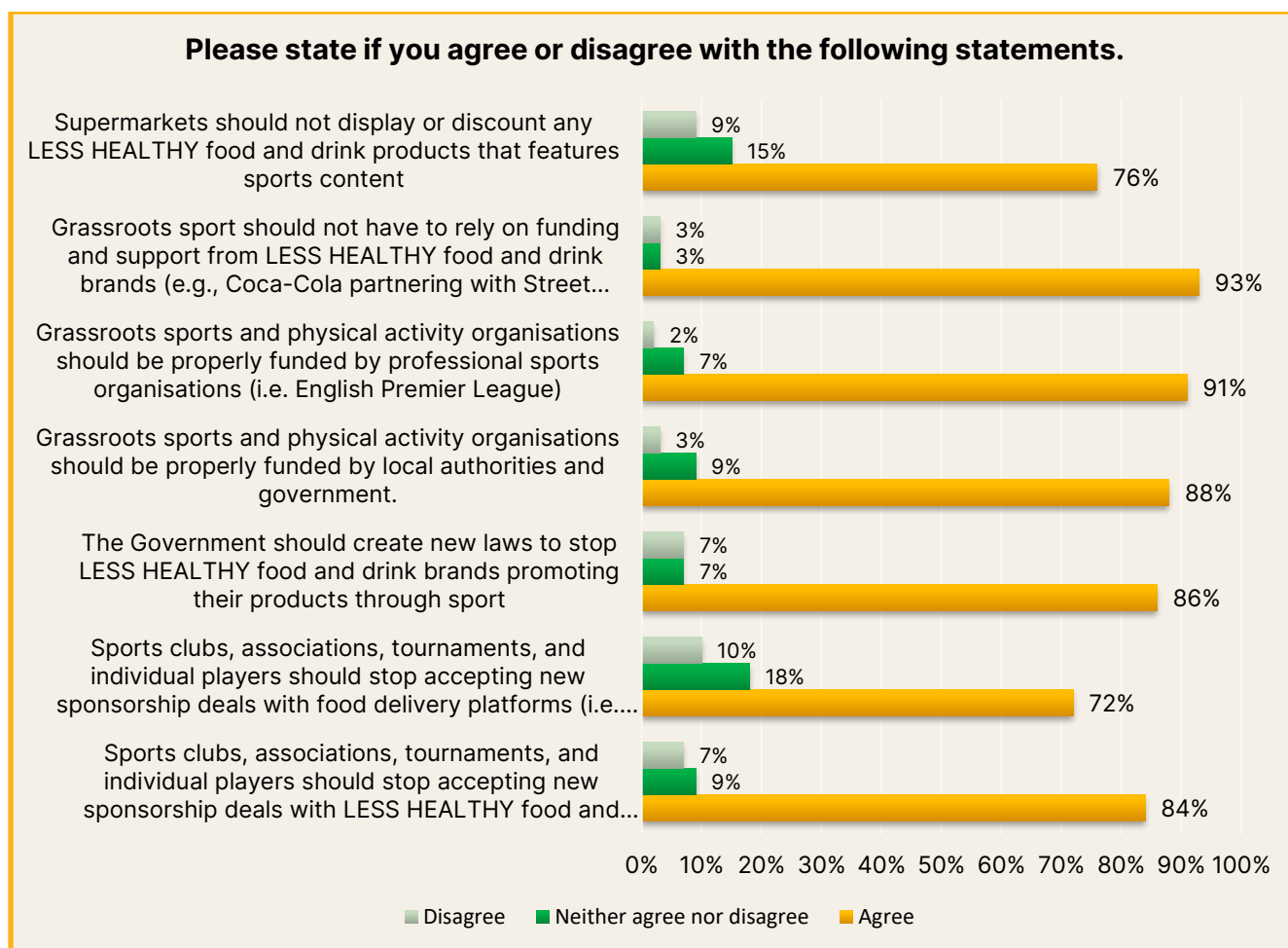
**Figure 2:** Parents' responses when asked their level of concern about a range of different marketing tactics currently used by food and drink brands.

- 8 in 10 parents (79%) were concerned about the marketing of less healthy food and drink through sport via TV; 83% were concerned about social media and 81% through on-pack promotions.
- Over 8 in 10 parents (86%) would like to see the Government create laws to stop less healthy partnerships between junk food brands and sport. See Figure 3 below for more detail.
- Over 8 in 10 parents (84%) agree that sports associations, clubs, tournaments, venues and players should reject any future sponsorship deals with less healthy food and drink brands. See Figure 3.
- More than 9 in 10 parents (92%) we spoke to thought it was okay for fruit and vegetables to be involved in marketing activities through sport. On the other hand, categories that parents felt it was inappropriate to be involved in marketing through sport included 'fast food and takeaway food' (88%); 'snacks and sweets' (87%) and 'any food or drink product that is considered 'less healthy' (79%).
- Parents were very supportive of ensuring grassroots sport and physical activity organisations are properly funded by professional sports organisations i.e., Premier League (91% support) or local authorities and government (88% support) and that they

***"I think sponsorship from the products mentioned in this survey should be discouraged by the Government and governing bodies of each sport."***

*Parent response, 2021*

should not be having to rely on food and drink brands to supply funding for these groups (93%). See Figure 3 below for more detail.



**Figure 3:** Parents' responses when asked about actions to tackle less healthy food and drink sponsorship.

Through a series of open-ended questions, parents were asked to expand on their thoughts and experiences of less healthy food and drink marketing through sport, providing us with lots of useful insights. These were themed as the following:

- **Mixed messaging from sports people.** The fact that elite athletes are promoting food and drink products that often do not correlate with the nutritional diets and fitness regimes they are likely to follow themselves. This is felt to be confusing and misleading for children and young people in terms of association of food and drink with health and fitness information.
- **Sports personalities using their platform responsibly.** Sports personalities have a significant amount of influence on young people. Parents report how children look up to them, copy them and are influenced by what they like. Parents want high profile figures to be more mindful of how they use this platform and the example they set.
- **Financial considerations.** Many sports stars and clubs are perceived to have high incomes and revenues and should not be seeking additional income from endorsing less healthy food and drink. This contrasted with parents' views around the struggle to fund community level sport, and the difficulty of saying no to offers of financial or in-kind support.



- **Normalising less healthy food and drink.** Parents expressed concerns that constant association of less healthy products and brands with sports adds to the way in which these foods and drinks are positioned as part of everyday life. Children grow up seeing them as the norm when participating in sporting activities.
- **Influencing children's preferences.** Parents shared some experiences of how this type of marketing has influenced their children and caused them to request the food itself after seeing an advertisement or a sports-branded product whilst shopping.
- **Importance of education and parental responsibility.** Many parents acknowledged their own responsibility in refusing children's requests for foods, limiting their exposure to TV or online advertising and in explaining why too many processed foods high in sugar, salt or saturated fat are not good for their long-term health. However, parents also noted that they are not always with their children, especially as they grow older and become more independent, to be able to exert control.

We have shared parents' comments during the survey throughout this report. Further direct comments, alongside the full data from the survey are available at <https://www.sustainweb.org/secure/Kicking-Out-Junk-Food-Parents-Jury-Appendix.pdf>

# Summer of Sport 2021 Case Studies

## Case Study 1: junk food promotion during UEFA EURO2020

The long-awaited UEFA EURO 2020 football tournament finally kicked off in June 2021, a year later than planned because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

***"My son asked to buy crisps at the weekend because it had a Euro Football competition on the pack."***

*Parent response, 2021*

Here in the UK, with three home nations playing in the men's tournament and one reaching the final, this gave food and drink brands plenty of opportunities to get in on the action and use the tournament to market their products. And they well and truly took advantage of it. Below are just some examples we collected during the tournament below.

### Official partner marketing: Deliveroo



*Credits: Left - Beth Bradshaw/Food Active. Right - Screenshot taken from Dominic Calvert Lewin's Instagram page.*

Food delivery platform Deliveroo used their partnership with the English FA to run a range of online and outdoor marketing campaigns. Their logo also appeared on the sleeve of England players, which featured on the English FAs and players' social media channels.

Overall, there were huge surges in orders for takeaway food and drink during high-profile games. Deliveroo said orders rose by nearly a quarter during England's victory over

Germany and JustEat said it expected to log more than a million orders, peaking at more than 2,500 a minute just before England's quarter final game<sup>33</sup>.

## Social media promotions: Just Eat & Greggs

The takeaway company, Just Eat ran an online joint promotion with Greggs, offering free sausage rolls any time any team scored a goal on UK soil. However, the promotion required a minimum spend of £5, encouraging people to order more food via the platform.



## Supermarket promotions: Lidl

Not an official partner, the supermarket ran a Euro2020 football themed promotion in its customer magazine, promoting beers, crisps and nuts.




Image credits: Top right – Screenshot taken from Greggs Twitter, June 2021. Above – Image sent in from Parents' Jury member, July 2021.

<sup>33</sup> The Guardian (2021) Takeaways are coming home as England fans prepare for EURO 2020 quarter final [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/jul/02/takeaway-are-coming-home-england-fans-prepare-euro-2020-quarter-final>



## In-app promotions: Costa Coffee, Uber Eats

Football themed competitions ran alongside key matches in the Costa Coffee app, offering free coffees and other prizes, encouraging purchasing.



London Wembley Glasgow Hampden Park

### Millions of prizes to be won with the Costa app

It's on. You could score free coffee, £1,000 to spend how you like or a coffee machine for home. There's even a new Volkswagen car up for grabs and loads more great prizes. To enter, download and scan your app every time you buy in store, at Costa Express, order for delivery or Click & Collect until 11th July.\*

[Download our app](#)



**Chris Kamara** @chris\_kammy · Jun 26

#AD Get yourself a takeaway for the football with 20% off orders over £20 and a chance to win an epic footy fan bundle with @UberEats Find out more here: [t.uber.com/9d0iD9](https://t.uber.com/9d0iD9)

GIF

Uber Eats launched an in-app competition to win 50 classic football shirts, fronted by former England player Chris Kamara, with codes to be entered during checkout. Customers were also offered 20% off if they spent £20 or more.

## Email campaigns: Papa John's Pizza

Papa John's Pizza offered subscribers to the Euro2020 mailing list 'big match bundle deals' for the England quarter final game.



What's your game plan?

Whether you're supporting England in the Euro quarter finals this weekend or having a get together with your own squad, we've got you! With 2 large pizzas, any 2 sides and large drink for £28.99, the Big Match Bundle is ready for any occasion 🍕

PIZZA LOVES  
**THE PERFECT GAME PLAN**

**BIG MATCH BUNDLE**  
2 LARGE PIZZAS  
2 SIDES AND A LARGE DRINK  
ONLY **£28.99\***

**ORDER NOW**

\*Terms apply

Image credits: Top: screenshot taken from Costa Coffee website, July 2021. Middle: screenshot from Chris Kamara's Twitter feed, June 2021; Bottom: screenshot from Papa John's email

## Print marketing: Subway & Just Eat

Subway advertised Euro-themed 'match winning deals' in a printed leaflet that was delivered to people's homes with delivery via Just Eat, or where homes were within a 10-minute walk of a Subway branch (the example below was sent to a home in L22 and was reported across multiple postcodes in the Liverpool area).



Image credit: Beth Bradshaw/Food Active

Subway also offered a 'free footlong sub' to anyone new downloading their app, using a discount code "ITSCOMINGHOME".

## Official partner: Coca Cola

As an official partner of EURO2020, Coca Cola had prominent branding across key sites in the 11 host cities (including London and Glasgow in the UK), including fan zones and host stadia and the sports venues. Its logo appeared during press conferences, and bottles of the fizzy drink were displayed.

By surprise, it was Portugal striker Cristiano Ronaldo who brought the issue of suitable products sponsoring sport into the limelight. Ronaldo decided to remove Coca-Cola products from view during a press conference at the EURO 2020 tournament, instead holding up a bottle of water, underlining his preference by declaring 'agua' (Portuguese for 'water').

This small move sparked a debate on the suitability of certain products sponsoring sport, with further players following suit. Italy's Manuel Locatelli following suit by moving Coca Cola bottles aside in place of water during the press conference following Italy's win over Switzerland. Meanwhile, other interviewees proceeded to open the fizzy drink bottles and drink.

The media attention also led to leading sporting figures being asked to defend UEFA's partnership, including England Football Manager Gareth Southgate who turned attention

***"It was encouraging to see Ronaldo remove Coca-Cola bottles at a press conference and say 'drink water' and I hope that more sportsmen and women will use their platforms to take a stand in this way."***

***"Ronaldo moving the Coke bottles recently was very impactful on my 13 year-old son's perceptions of this subject."***

*Parent responses, 2021*

away from elite level football and promotion during player press conferences and talked about need for investment of grassroots sport<sup>34</sup>.

***"I think there are lots of sponsors in sport and the impact of their money at all levels helps sport to function, particularly grassroots sport in our country requires investment and without some of those companies it would be very difficult to have the facilities we need. We're mindful in our country of obesity and health but everything can be done in moderation, and anything that is done in moderation is rarely a problem."***

*England Football Manager, Gareth Southgate, speaking at EURO 2020 Press Conference (July 2021)*

England Captain & Tottenham Hotspur player Harry Kane was also invited to comment in the debate, replying: *"Obviously, the sponsors are entitled to what they want if they've paid the money to do so. It's not something I've thought too much about. I've seen it go round on social media but if I'm totally honest I'm more focused on tomorrow [England's match vs Scotland] than anything like that."*

After a week or so of going back and forth between 'Drink Water!' and 'Drink Coke!', UEFA eventually stepped in to remind players of the contract they signed, which included being featured alongside tournament sponsors, effectively seeking to put the controversy to bed by saying, *"UEFA has reminded participating teams that partnerships are integral to the delivery of the tournament and to ensuring the development of football across Europe, including for youth and women."*

However, the issue of Coca Cola's sponsorship of major international sporting tournaments did not vanish without trace. In October 2021, following Australia's win over Sri Lanka in the International Cricket Council (ICC) T20 World Cup, Australian batsman David Warner tried to remove bottles of Coke that had been placed in front of him during the post-match press conference, saying *"Can I move this? ... Do I have to put it there?"*. When told to put the bottles back, he commented *"If it's good enough for Cristiano, it's good enough for me."*<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> MSN (2021) England press conference report [online] Available at: <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/sport/football/gareth-southgate-broke-down-exactly-why-he-didn-t-move-coca-cola-bottles-like-ronaldo/ar-AAZ17>

<sup>35</sup> David Warner interview on Fox Cricket's Instagram page <https://www.instagram.com/p/CVIm45vhvMO/>



## Case Study 2: KP Snacks and England & Wales Cricket Board

In 2019, a new 100-ball franchise cricket tournament was announced by the England & Wales Cricket Board (ECB), called 'The Hundred', designed to engage with a more diverse audience in cricket, and encourage more children to get involved and play cricket. The tournament involves eight men's and eight women's teams, formed from high profile names across the sport, located in major cities across England and Wales.



*Image Credit: England & Wales Cricket Board Promotion*

***“The new One Hundred cricket has different crisp brands for each team. It feels like the crisps are competing not the players. But as soon as my children see such brands and think they are good they then want them.”***

*Parent response, 2021*

A tournament that was designed with good intentions to increase the sport's appeal to families and young people, was ultimately let down by its choice of team sponsor.

In 2019, the ECB announced KP Snacks would be sponsoring all the teams, utilising its portfolio of snacks to sponsor each team. These included McCoy's, Hula Hoops, Butterkist, Tyrell's, KP Nuts, Pombears, Popchips and Skips. In a £4m deal, The Hundred will be tied into the deal with KP Snacks for 3 years.

This sponsorship deal gave KP Snacks the rights to t-shirt sponsors, pitch-side banner advertising, sale at kiosks on match days and advertising campaigns on TV and social media.

When the sponsor was announced they faced significant backlash from a number of key figures including the former CEO of the NHS, Sir Simon Stevens<sup>36</sup>. Given the fact the tournament is so clearly geared towards children, it begs the question how appropriate it is to be promoting crisps and sugary popcorn to these audiences.

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<sup>36</sup> The Guardian (2019) NHS boss condemns English Cricket Board's sponsorship deal with KP Snacks [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/oct/08/nhs-boss-condemns-english-cricket-sponsorship-deal-with-kp-snacks>

***“If you think about the extra demand [on the NHS] that is being created through the obesity epidemic, with poor diet now a bigger risk factor for ill health than smoking, it is disappointing ... when for example you see the English cricket board doing a deal with junk food aimed at children.”***

***“I would hope when those sorts of deals are being considered in future, people make a different choice ... Let’s not see these benefits negated by commercial sponsorship deals that explicitly prompt our kids to fill up with snacks and junk food.”***

*Sir Simon Stevens, former CEO of the NHS*

The ECB themselves recognised that they had an issue on their hands, and in response to the backlash, decided to remove the sponsors from replica kids’ shirts. However, the brands remained prominent on player kits as well as adult replica shirts.

A spokesperson for KP Snacks said:<sup>37</sup>

*“We have chosen not to brand the replica kits for people aged 16 or under as part of our team partnership with The Hundred.”*

*“In 2018 we began introducing colour-coded reference intake icons on the front of our packs to help people be more informed about the choices they are making when buying our snacks.”*

*“Our responsible marketing policy means we only target adults who can make informed choices based on our clear on-pack information.”*

## #PacketIn

The youth campaigning group Bite Back 2030 launched an online campaign during the tournament, calling on the ECB to reconsider their sponsorship deal with KP Nuts with 17-year-old Youth Board Member Jacob Rosenberg leading the way (read more from Jacob on p.9). The message to the ECB said: *“We believe junk food brands have no place sponsoring*



Image: Bite Back 2030

*sport. Considering you’ve removed the KP Snacks branding from your kids’ kits, we think deep down you agree. If you really want to attract a youth audience to cricket, be honest with us. Pick a sponsor that actually has a place in sport - not junk food brands that athletes would never include in their diet. Your current and future young fans are asking you: prioritise our health and pick a new sponsor for 2022’.*

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<sup>37</sup> The Cricketer (2020) The Hundred replica kits to remove KP snacks branding [online] Available at:

[https://www.thecricketer.com/Topics/londonspirit/the\\_hundred\\_replica\\_children\\_kits\\_kp\\_snacks\\_branding.html](https://www.thecricketer.com/Topics/londonspirit/the_hundred_replica_children_kits_kp_snacks_branding.html)

The [#PacketIn](#) campaign gained 2,385 signatures and secured a meeting with ECB to discuss potential alternative sponsors. Bite Back also presented mock-up designs of new Hundred kits that had been submitted by young people as part of a competition.

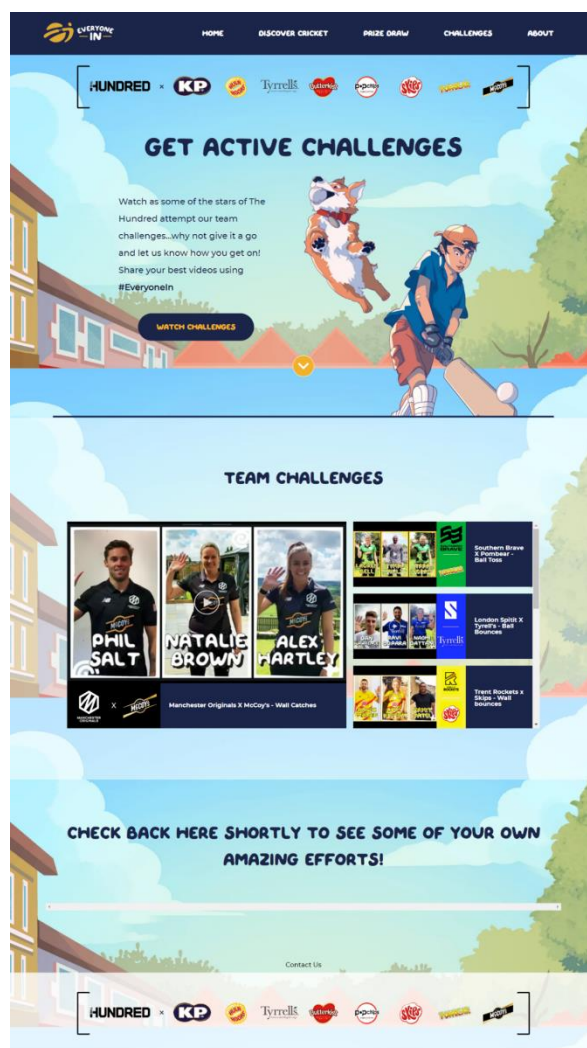
At the meeting, the ECB didn't agree to drop the KP sponsorship, but they did agree to include Bite Back's youth board in discussions to prioritise child health in future sponsorship deals. They also want to work with them ahead of next year's tournament to explore new ways The Hundred's programmes and stadium can promote child health and nutrition better. We hope the ECB upholds these promises and look forward to hearing how this relationship progresses, and how this can better impact on children's health and wellbeing.

## Everyone in?

As part of their sponsorship of the tournament, KP Nuts launched the campaign website, 'Everyone In' – calling it an 'easy-to-use digital platform offering simple, fun ways for families to get active this summer through cricket, alongside lots of fun video content with some of the male and female stars of The Hundred'<sup>38</sup>.

The site is very clearly designed to appeal to children and young people (as is the tournament as a whole), with the use of cartoon avatars of cricket players featuring KP's array of shirt sponsors for teams they are likely to have seen on TV, large child-like fonts, and bright colours. Videos of players wearing snack-branded shirts introduce activities. There is no age gate for the site, despite advertising the range of KP Snacks associated with their sponsorship of The Hundred.

Food Active and the Children's Food Campaign both submitted complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in September specifically on the 'Everyone In' website. At the time of publishing this report, the ASA had confirmed it was pursuing an investigation, but the outcome is not yet known. However, the Everyone In website appears to have been removed.



*Image credit: Screenshots taken from the Everyone In website, August 2021.*

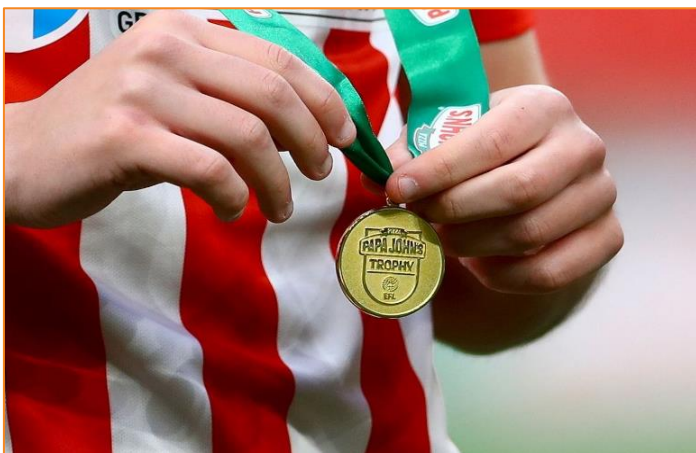
<sup>38</sup> Sponsorship (2021) KP Snacks and the Hundred launch 'Everyone In' campaign [online] Available at: <https://sponsorship.org/kp-snacks-and-the-hundred-launch-everyone-in-campaign/>



## Case Study 3: Papa John's Pizza takes over the EFL Trophy

Summer 2021 saw the return of the EFL Trophy, a tournament which includes clubs from League One and League Two, plus 16 invited U21 teams from Premier League and Championship

In 2020, Papa John's became the official sponsor until 2023, giving them free reign to advertise their brand on various different aspects of the tournament<sup>39</sup>. From the pitch side banners, to medals (see below), substitution boards and the trophy itself, the Papa John's brand is prominent in the eyes of the fans, including lots of younger fans.



Alongside this sponsorship, there is a competition for grassroot clubs to win new Papa John's branded kits, saying: *"The more you eat, the better your chances!"* Papa John's run football related offers and promotions, whenever tournament games are played.

Papa John's marketing campaign is clearly designed to use the EFL tournament and the league to increase their brand exposure, associate their brand and the eating of pizza with the act of watching football, and encourage consumption of food that can contain high levels of calories, fat and salt.



<sup>39</sup> EFL (2021) The EFL Papa John's Trophy kicks off [online] Available at: <https://www.efl.com/news/2021/august/the-2122-papa-johns-trophy-starts-here/>  
32

## Case Study 4: Junk food gets the gold medal at Tokyo 2020

Tokyo 2020 was another sporting mega-event that was delayed by a year following the disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic. In July 2021, it finally kicked off in Tokyo followed by the Paralympics starting in August.

The Olympic Games and its governing organisation, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has its own official sponsors, whilst national Olympic teams also hold bi-lateral partnerships with food and drink brands.

For example, an official partner of the Tokyo Olympics was Coca-Cola, now the longest-standing partner of the IOC, having supported every edition of the Olympic Games since 1928. Its renewed partnership until at least 2032 extends the Company's association with the IOC to a historic 104-year relationship.

This sponsorship involves the rights to advertise their products and/or brand in several different opportunities. Trailing the torchbearer of the Olympic torch relay was a truck displaying the logo of soft drinks giant Coca-Cola<sup>40</sup>. Banner ads and other digital content featuring Team Coca-Cola Olympic and Paralympic athletes promoted Coca-Cola, Minute Maid, smartwater, FUZE Tea and POWERADE<sup>41</sup>.

This includes yet another product placement at press conferences, this time with Powerade - as seen pictured with multi-winning US gold medallist, Simone Biles.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DIS7>

For Team GB, partners included a mix of healthy and less healthy brands including McVitie's, Yoplait and Aldi, whilst 'official suppliers' included Whole Earth and Birdseye Green Kitchen.

The partnership with Yoplait was activated with competitions to win opportunities to meet Team GB athletes, carried on pack through their Petits Filous, Frubes, and Wildlife brands. Whilst we recognise that plain yogurt can be a nutritious source of protein, calcium and other vitamins and minerals, these ranges also contain free sugars beyond the naturally occurring lactose (e.g., Frubes contain 8g sugar per child serving, almost half the recommended limit of 18g for 4–6-year-olds<sup>42</sup>). They also use child-friendly packaging in

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<sup>40</sup> Sports Pro Media (2021) Why the Olympic sponsors have been uncharacteristically quiet in the build-up to Tokyo 2020 [online] Available at: <https://www.sportspromedia.com/insights/features/from-the-magazine/tokyo-2020-olympics-sponsors-marketing-activity-toyota-coca-cola-covid/>

<sup>41</sup> Coca Cola (2021) Tokyo 2020 Olympic Campaign [online] Available at: <https://www.coca-colacompany.com/news/tokyo-2020-olympic-campaign>

<sup>42</sup> NHS (2020) Sugar: the facts [online] Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/how-does-sugar-in-our-diet-affect-our-health/>



the form of animals and other brand characters, that attract children’s attention as well as encouraging parents to believe they are healthier than they are.



Image credit: Yoplait Gold website.

As part of their partnership, McVitie’s specifically contracted Team GB athletes Tom Daley, Max Whitlock, Becky & Ellie Downie, Liam Heath MBE, Frazer Clarke and Lauren Williams to take part in their marketing activities. Their marketing campaigns even state the contradiction of the biscuit company teaming up with athletes ‘not currently eating biscuits’. A later graphic circulated on social media tells a different story however, with athletes posing with a range of different McVitie’s biscuits.



Images taken from company social media channels and websites.



Finally, Papa John’s joined the action by sponsoring Paralympics Team GB during 2020<sup>43</sup>, with cause-related marketing fundraising taking people to their website.

<sup>43</sup> Franchise Supermarket (2021) Papa John’s team up with Team Gb Paralympics Team [online] Available at: <https://www.franchisesupermarket.co.uk/papa-johns-have-teamed-up-with-team-gbs-paralympic-athlete-david-weir-to-launch-the-weirwolf-challenge>



## Breaking barriers - Aldi

It was not all unhealthy news for Team GB. Aldi has been an official partner since 2015, and they have used this deal to promote messages of healthy eating rather than consuming less healthy food and drink.

On their website they have top tips on healthy eating, written by some of their Team GB ambassadors and through their programme Get Set to Eat Fresh, they have inspired over 2 million school children to learn about healthy food and cook more balanced meals.



*Image Credit: Aldi website*

This sponsorship is a great example of how sports organisations and teams can partner with the food and drink industry without compromising public health.

# Tactics: how food brands play the game

The food and drink industry deploy several tactics to market their products to spectators of sport. These are carefully designed to try and engage with audiences, using sensory cues such as colours and imagery, competitions, prizes and games, placement at frequent locations in stores, offering discounts or promotions on products, and tapping into colloquialisms to feel relatable to the viewer. This all makes for a very engaging experience. Below we take a closer look at some of these tactics, using adverts we saw over the summer.

## UEFA EURO 2020 newsletter, featuring Just Eat

This email newsletter promoting Just Eat's services features a less healthy product

Customers are encouraged to purchase with the incentive of match tickets at EURO 2020 matches despite seats being at a premium for fans due to COVID-19 restrictions

Just Eat's logo sits alongside the official tournament branding

**Win UEFA EURO 2020™ tickets**  
Order today for your chance to win two tickets to a EURO 2020 game. Enjoy a great meal and maybe even a little win on the side\*.  
Find out more [here](#).  
**Order now**

## Out-of-home street advertising from Deliveroo and Pringles

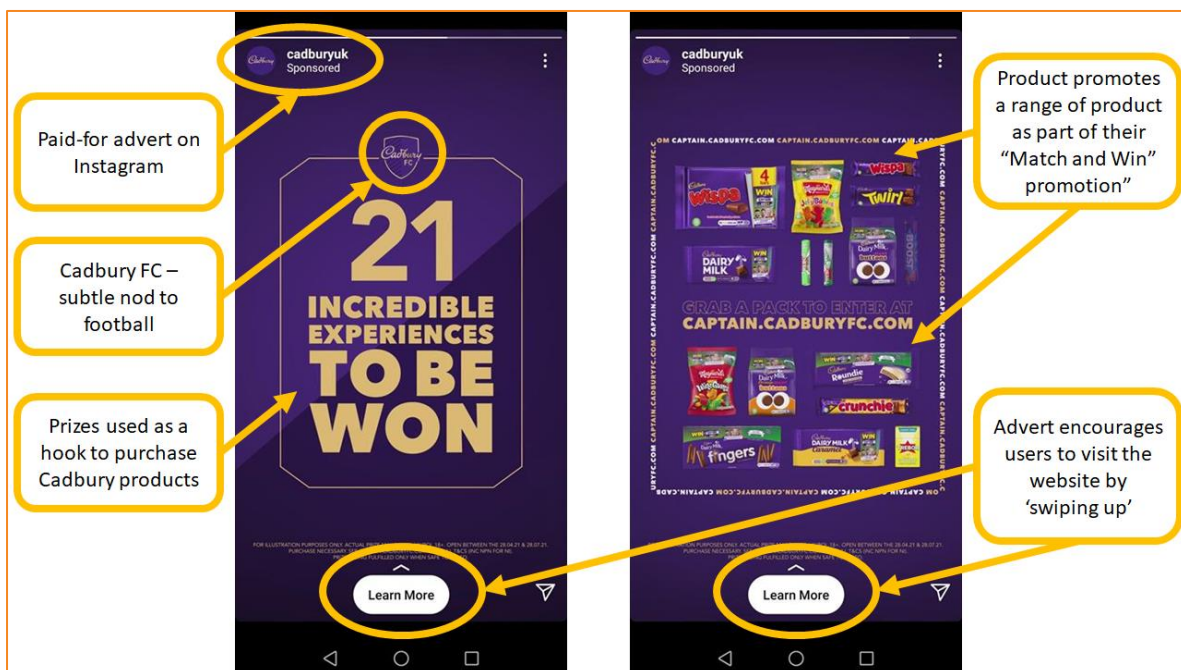
The same telephone booth featured both Deliveroo and Pringles marketing – both use wording and imagery associated with sport to appeal to consumers

“Nothing says ‘come on England’ like Italy’s finest.”  
Deliveroo not afraid to use irony on marketing messages

## TV advert featuring out-of-home billboard advertising for Deliveroo



## Sponsored content from Cadbury on Instagram





# Display promoting Pepsi and Doritos featuring Paul Pogba



## Discussion

### Time to kick junk food advertising out of sport?

This report provides insight into the wide range of food and drink marketing activities associated with the many different sport events in Summer 2021. The case studies we have presented highlight the array of different platforms – from social media platforms to outdoor advertising, print and email communications, TV and in-app gaming - that food and drink brands use to associate their products with sport, to keep their brand and/or products in view of spectators and appeal to those who enjoy watching sport.

Our parents' survey collected some useful insights into what UK parents think about food and drink brands being present within sport. It exposes the ways in which marketing through sport is perceived to undermine the ability of parents to encourage their children to have a healthy relationship with food and drink. This ranges from influencing their preferences, to pester power challenges and normalising daily consumption of less healthy food and drink. From the group of parents that we spoke to, there was clear appetite for change in this area.

There was a suggestion that the power and influence of sport described above could be targeted towards positive causes and campaigns more aligned with children's health and wellbeing. Parents particularly want to see sports personalities use their influence for good – with players like Marcus Rashford and Cristiano Ronaldo being cited as powerful examples for their children.

***“The government should be using sports personalities to promote tap water, reusable water bottles, fruit and veg instead.”***

*Parent response, 2021*

Suggestions included promoting healthier food and drinks, or just showing children and young people what they actually eat to stay fit and healthy, rather than foods they are unlikely to consume very often.

The majority of parents we spoke to agreed that sponsorship deals which include a less healthy food and drink brand with a team, association or player should simply not be allowed. They support action by the Government to restrict these relationships, and want to see sports clubs, associations and individual players starting to reject these types of deals. This is an important finding in the context of the current marketing restrictions that are in process, and policy makers should consider the issue of sports sponsorship in the fight to reduce children's exposure to cues to consume less healthy food and drink.

However, when challenging whether these sponsorship deals involving less healthy food and drink should be restricted, the question immediately arises about the potential financial impact this might have. This is particularly a concern for smaller clubs and grassroots community sports, which often struggle for resources and equipment. In the remainder of this discussion, we attempt to unpick this argument, consider potential alternatives, and highlight some examples of clubs who are changing the game.

## If not Coke & McDonald's, then who pays?

The issue of funding for sport came out very strongly in our survey with parents.

The majority of parents we spoke to felt that grassroots sport should not have to rely upon funding from the food and drink industry. Instead, they believe sport should be funded through national and local government structures (e.g., Sport England, Active Partnerships), or through schemes and facilities run by sports organisations (clubs, leagues, associations) using funding that is not associated with the food and drinks industry.

***"I would not want any sports facilities to be prevented due to lack of sponsorship, but athletes should not be promoting less healthy products and advertising should be restricted."***

*Parent response, 2021*

On the other hand, some parents recognised that several sports, in particular at grassroots level, are reliant on funding from food and drink sponsors to provide opportunities for children and young people to get involved in sport in the first place, and this was a more important issue for them than the type of sponsor funding the activity.

This debate is a commonplace when discussing the appropriateness of sponsorship deals. In the words of England FC Manager Gareth Southgate (when challenged about Ronaldo's Coca-Cola snub at the EURO 2020): *"I think there are lots of sponsors in sport and the impact of their money at all levels **helps sport to function**, particularly **grassroots sport** in our country requires investment and **without some of those companies it would be very difficult to have the facilities we need**. We're mindful in our country of obesity and health but everything can be done in moderation, and anything that is done in moderation is rarely a problem."*

However, in response to Gareth Southgate, we would argue that less healthy food and drink products, and increasingly food delivery platforms promoting such products, are over-represented in the food and non-alcoholic beverage category sponsorships. Our Players' Table (p.15-16), case studies (p.24-35) and examples of tactics (p.36-38) illustrate this.

There is no doubt that companies strongly associated with fast food and less healthy products such as Coke and McDonald's are currently ploughing millions of pounds into UK sports at all levels. In response to a wider shift in the soft drinks industry, brands such as Coke have also increasingly put their low and no-sugar products into the spotlight, however all fizzy drinks, including those with artificial sweeteners, are detrimental to oral health. So, the question remains - if the money doesn't come from them, then who?

***"Most of these sports need the money and super healthy brands haven't got that kind of money."***

*Parent response, 2021*

Local authorities were suggested as a potential funder for grassroots sports in the place of money from the food and drink industry. However, the reduced spending power of local



authorities has resulted in severe cuts to the non-statutory services that councils provide. This has negatively impacted public health and leisure services budgets. Even taking into consideration the uplift in 2019<sup>44</sup> the public health grant in 2020/21 was 22% lower per head in real terms compared to 2015/16. Achieving parity of funding per head to this level would require an additional investment of £1 billion<sup>45</sup>. Council's net expenditure on cultural and leisure services is also down more than 40%<sup>46</sup>.

Sport in local government and sports development is geared toward providing access to sports and physical activity opportunities. However, austerity measures have resulted in cuts to budgets, services, staffing within sport and most significantly sports development and community recreation<sup>47</sup>, both within local authorities and at grassroots level. In response to this, costs for individuals to participate in sport and physical activity have increased, creating a financial barrier for many<sup>48</sup>.

It is forecast that the COVID-19 pandemic will further reduce income for culture and leisure services by £500 million, a decline of over 50% relative to anticipated pre-COVID, post-austerity revenues.<sup>49</sup> This reduction in income is likely contributing to job losses and decreases in sector expertise, provision, and capacity, all of which points to a bleak future.

Looking at the role of National government in funding sport, over the last 18 months of the pandemic, the UK Government has worked to support the sport sector. In Winter 2020, the government announced a combined £300m funding through the Sports Winter Survival Package. The Package was designed to support sports - from national governing bodies through to grassroots clubs - impacted by coronavirus restrictions<sup>50</sup>. However, the fund only set aside £25m for grassroots activity<sup>51</sup>.

Sport England provided £270 million<sup>52</sup> directly to support community sport clubs and exercise centres through this pandemic, via a range of funds including the Community Emergency Fund (£35m), Return to Play (£16.5m) and other funds.

The Government also provides funding for primary schools through the School PE and Sport Premium, which is designed to make additional and sustainable improvements to the quality of the PE, physical activity and sport schools provide<sup>53</sup>. In 2018, this funding was doubled

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<sup>44</sup> HM Treasury. Spending Round 2019. <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/spending-round-2019>

<sup>45</sup> King's Fund. Public Health: Our Position. <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/projects/positions/public-health>

<sup>46</sup> IFS. (2019). England's council funding: what's happened and what's next.

<https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/BN250-English-council-funding-whats-happened-and-whats-next.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> King, P. (2013). 'Sport for All' in a financial crisis: Survival and adaptation in competing organisational model of local authority sport services. *World Leisure Journal*.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/04419057.2013.820503>

<sup>48</sup> Ramchandani, G., Shibli, S., and Kung, S. P. (2018). The performance of local authority sports facilities in England during a period of recession and austerity. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19406940.2017.1420676?journalCode=risp20>

<sup>49</sup> IFS. (2020). COVID-19 and English council funding: how are budgets being hit in 2020-21?

<https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/R-174-COVID-19%20and%20English-council-funding-how-are-budgets-being-hit-in-2020%E2%80%9321.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> HM Government (2020) Sports Winter Survival Package (Press Release) [online] Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-300-million-sport-winter-survival-package-to-help-spectator-sports-in-england>

<sup>51</sup> Morning Star Online (2020) Tories offer 300m to spectator sport, but only a fraction goes to grassroots [online] Available at: <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/s/tories-offer-300m-spectator-sport-only-fraction-grassroots>

<sup>52</sup> House of Commons (2021) Sport in our communities: Government Response to Committee's Fourth Report [online] Available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/7518/documents/79396/default/>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/pe-and-sport-premium-for-primary-schools>

from £160 million to £320 million per year using new revenues from the Soft Drinks Industry Levy<sup>54</sup>. As well as activity in schools, premiums may be used to increase pupil participation in competitive sport, such as engaging in the School Games<sup>55</sup>.

It's promising to see that the Government is investing in grassroots sport as they attempt to recover from the pandemic. However, this funding may only scratch on the surface, with many clubs already struggling for funding before Covid-19 and not all sports benefitting from the funding equally – and grassroots sport is a part of this. Without Government intervention both in terms of providing adequate funding and restricting sponsorship deals with less healthy food and drink brands, sports bodies will continue to argue that they cannot stay afloat without this type of commercial funding, especially given the increased challenges as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Parents also agreed they would like to see governing bodies of sport (e.g., national football associations) and league operators to play a greater financial role in funding grassroots sport and improving levels of participation without having to resort to unhealthy food and drink sponsors. However, these organisations are under increasing financial pressure in an increasingly competitive marketplace, and nearly all governing bodies of sport and league operators have seen significant losses of both income and staff over the course of the pandemic. Unsurprisingly, ambitions to prohibit less healthy food and drink products from sponsoring sport are generally met with considerable resistance, and many sports bodies are at pains to highlight the social, physical and mental health benefits their schemes deliver, whilst playing down the potential adverse health outcomes of partnering with unhealthy food and drink companies.

In addition, the Gambling Act Review, which is currently under way, may prohibit betting sponsors from appearing on shirts and on pitch-side advertising in the near future. This represents a more existential threat to many league operators and clubs due to the proportion of revenues that these deals generate compared to food and drink companies, and therefore it is likely that many sports organisations will be particularly resistant to any further challenges to the types of sponsors they can partner with, including food, soft drinks and alcohol sponsors. However, from a population health perspective, we believe that now is the right time to take a holistic approach to sports sponsorship and reconsider the merits of *all* unhealthy commodity industries and their relationship with sport.

***“Is it good enough for manufacturers to, on the one hand, acknowledge they are contributing to the obesity problem, and they acknowledge they are contributing to children’s teeth being extracted, but then on the other hand say they’ll sponsor some Saturday afternoon football?”***

*Alison Tedstone, Chief Nutritionist, Public Health England (now Office for Health Improvement and Disparities), [interview with Food Manufacture, Nov 2017](#)*

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<sup>54</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/sugar-tax-revenue-helps-tackle-childhood-obesity>

<sup>55</sup> School Games: <https://www.yourschoolgames.com/>

## Conclusion: Our view on unhealthy food funding for sports

In conclusion, it's clear that merely voluntary arrangements promoting 'responsible marketing' through sport are failing to stem the tide of unhealthy food and drink advertising. Parents are sympathetic to the need for funding sport and physical activity at grassroots and junior levels but believe that current dependency on less healthy food and drink advertising for these revenues is unacceptable. As a minimum, if the food and drink industry wish to invest in sports, especially at grassroots level, they could do so via a central pot that organisations such as Sport England (and their counterparts in the other nations) or the Football Foundation (and counterparts in other sports) can access without product branding undermining the healthy message.

There is also a wider discussion on ensuring responsible sponsorship of sport by commercial partners that are not undermining public health objectives. This is especially relevant at a time where we are trying to build back a healthier nation as part of the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. Recently released data from the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) for 2020/21 indicates a worryingly sharp increase in obesity prevalence for primary school age children<sup>56</sup>. Children in the most deprived areas are twice as likely to be at risk than those from the highest income backgrounds. In this context, further innovation in new policies to address obesity, other diet-related diseases and overall nutritional health must be a priority for the future health of our nation.

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<sup>56</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/national-child-measurement-programme/2020-21-school-year>

## Game Changing Alternatives

There are some examples of good practice out there, where sports clubs/teams have teamed up with non-food brands or adopted a policy which does not accept funding from organisations that may impact on public health.

### Case study: Forest Green Rovers

In 2021, Forest Green Rovers became the first professional football club to call for a ban on junk food advertising in sport.



The club has also taken significant steps to be a more environmentally conscious club, and since 2017 are recognised as the world's greenest football club. As part of their environmental policy, they now only serve fresh vegan foods within the stadium.

**Dale Vince, Chairman of Forest Green Rovers:** *"It's scandalous that junk food brands sponsor sport events and sporting teams. It's sport-washing, isn't it? These brands are using sport to improve the image of the stuff that they sell and the stuff that they sell is fundamentally bad. We all know that. Doctors have been telling us that for long enough and we kind of knew anyway."<sup>57</sup>*

Forest Green Rovers now has partners including Quorn, Violife and Oatly. However, although innocent drinks, which is 90% owned by Coca Cola, no longer has naming rights to their ground (previously the "innocent lawn"), the company is still named as a partner on their website<sup>58</sup>.

***"Forest Green Rovers are a great example of combining healthy food with a sporting career and making a positive difference."***

*Parent response, 2021*

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<sup>57</sup> Telegraph (2020) Medical chief calls for ban on junk food advertising in sport [online] Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/2021/03/10/medical-chiefs-call-ban-junk-food-advertising-sport-covid-death>

<sup>58</sup> Forest Green Rovers: <https://www.fgr.co.uk/partners>



## Case study: Bite Back 2030 and Dulwich Hamlet FC

As part of their campaign to end the link between junk food advertising and sport, Bite Back 2030 have teamed up with non-league side Dulwich Hamlet FC to set an example to others of what can be done to promote child health instead. The logo of Bite Back 2030 will this season dominate a stand and the training kit of the south London club<sup>59</sup>.



Image Credit: Bite Back 2030

## Case study: BEKO & Barcelona FC 'Eat like a Pro'

In 2018 Barcelona FC and Beko (the global home appliances brand) launched the 'Eat like a pro' campaign, aiming to address the growing issue of childhood obesity. The campaign is framed around the insight that children always do what their heroes do and will want to be just like them - something which came out very strongly in our survey with parents. Their heroes are active, talented, healthy, as any child should be. Kids will not choose "the healthy way" by themselves, but if someone they look up to does it, they will follow. The campaign features international football stars including Messi, Suárez, Piqué and Iniesta eating healthily in order to play at their best. In an advert that could have featured bottles

of chilled beer and pizzas ready to watch the game - a typical narrative often played out in many marketing campaigns such as Domino's, Papa John's and Just Eat or Deliveroo, it is refreshing to see a responsible sponsorship that uses the football club and their players' platform responsibly.



<sup>59</sup> Brixton Buzz (2021) Bite Back 2030 team up with Dulwich Hamlet FC [online] Available at: <https://www.brixtonbuzz.com/2021/08/bite-back-2030-a-youth-led-campaign-against-junk-food-team-up-with-dulwich-hamlet-fc/>

# Recommendations

As both Food Active and the Children's Food Campaign are members of the Obesity Health Alliance, we are aligning our recommendations with those in the new Healthy Weight Strategy, Turning the Tide<sup>60</sup> in relation to Government action. We also make further suggestions for other actors. We would welcome feedback and further debate on what action should be taken on this subject.

## For Government

- Introduce regulations to ensure that only healthier food and drink products can be associated with sports. This should include mega-events, grassroots sports, virtual events, e-sports, in-game sponsorship (e.g., FIFA), corporate social responsibility and community programmes run by clubs, leagues and national associations, title sponsorship for cup competitions and leagues, and all sports and events taking place within a school setting.
- Build on current and forthcoming advertising and promotional regulations to address the use of promotional techniques on less healthy food and drink product packaging. This should include restrictions on the use of cartoon, brand equity and licensed characters along with celebrities and sports stars; and, ending the use of on-pack promotional offers including giveaways and competition prizes, and restrictions on nutritional and health claims.
- Work with government (DCMS, DHSC, Sport England), governing bodies of sport, organisations representing players and athletes, sponsorship consultants and public health specialists to create new guidelines to inform the type of commercial partnerships that should be encouraged.
- Equip local authorities with adequate financial resources to support community sport and leisure assets to tackle the inter-linked issues of physical inactivity, obesity, and NCDs.
- Commit to monitoring brand-only advertising by companies with high association with HFSS food and drink consumption, and its impacts on preference for less healthy foods, including advertising and promotion as part of sports sponsorship deals, and use evidence to inform future reviews of healthy food and drink advertising regulations.

## For Sports Associations, Clubs and Venues

- Commit to phasing out any sponsorship arrangements and associated marketing of products and brands considered to be less healthy and instead seek opportunities to promote healthier diets.
- Make funding available for Club Community Organisations (CCOs) and other grassroots organisations in the sport and physical activity sector to deliver educative programmes on prevention of non-communicable diseases and the role of healthier food and drink without industry or brand interference.

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<sup>60</sup> Obesity Health Alliance (2021) Turning the tide: a 10 year strategy for healthy weight [online] <http://obesityhealthalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Turning-the-Tide-A-10-year-Healthy-Weight-Strategy.pdf>



### **For Individual Sports Personalities and Influencers**

- Commit to endorsing only food and drink that contributes positive nutrition in line with a healthy lifestyle and phase out any commercial relationships that undermine this goal.
- Actively support and promote healthy eating campaigns run by non-profit making organisations. For example: Veg Power's Eat Them to Defeat Them Campaign, Give Up Loving Pop (GULP), Veg Cities and Sugar Smart, as well as local holiday activities and food (HAF) programmes.

### **For Local Authorities**

- Ensure all local authority commercial partnerships associated with sports and leisure activities, especially those involving children, are consistent with Healthy Weight policies and priorities and not associated with less healthy food and drink brands. This could include refusing the use of council advertising or venue spaces, and accepting in-kind donations of food and drink, where these do not align.
- Work with local community sports organisations and clubs to support them in aligning any local commercial in-kind or financial support with a consistent healthy lifestyle message.

### **For Researchers/Academics:**

- Investigate the impact that less healthy food and drink advertising through sport has on children and young people - including brand preferences, awareness and consumption/energy intake patterns.
- Conduct assessments of the potential financial implications and also potential positive impact for public health outcomes of action to restrict less healthy food and drink brands from engaging in sports sponsorship.

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***Sustain:*** *The alliance for better food and farming advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity. We represent around 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional, and local level. [www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org)*

**Contact: Beth Bradshaw, Project Manager, Food Active, Health Equalities Group.**  
**[Beth.bradshaw@foodactive.org.uk](mailto:Beth.bradshaw@foodactive.org.uk)**

***Food Active:*** *Food Active is a healthy weight programme delivered by the Health Equalities Group, and commissioned by local authority public health teams, NHS organisations, and Public Health England teams at both regional and national level. [www.foodactive.org.uk](http://www.foodactive.org.uk)*