

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 161, No. 156

U.S. Women's World Cup success opens marketing floodgates

The 2015 Women's World Cup final began with a bang. Within six minutes of play, U.S. midfielder Carli Lloyd had scored her second goal and, soon after, catching Japan's goalie outside of the box, Lloyd kicked in a third from just beyond midfield. In a mere 13 minutes, Lloyd had set a World Cup record for the fastest three goals scored by the same player.

The powerhouse American team included stars like Hope Solo, Megan Rapinoe and Abby Wambach, who holds the record for the most international goals scored by a man or a woman (183, for those who are counting). In the end, the United States celebrated a 5-2 victory over Japan, becoming the first women's team ever to win three World Cup titles and enjoying a little revenge — the same two teams faced off in the 2011 World Cup final that Japan won on penalty kicks.

The athletes played to a crowd of more than 53,000 at BC Place Stadium in Vancouver, B.C., and the final was easily the most-watched soccer game in American TV history, reportedly pulling in an impressive 25.4 million viewers on Fox.

Commentators have described the monthlong tournament as a "showcase of dominance for international women's soccer." The average audience for the final reportedly exceeded that for the NBA Finals, the Stanley Cup Finals and the entire 2014-2015 broadcast season average of every show in prime time, including "Sunday Night Football."

Despite its popularity, the Women's World Cup only garnered \$17 million for Fox in ad revenue from corporate sponsors. This compared to the \$529 million ESPN made on the 2014 men's tournament in Brazil. Meaning, of course, that many advertisers may have missed out on what turned out to be a very

SPORTS MARKETING PLAYBOOK



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big opportunity.

Forward-thinking brands — such as Adidas, Fiat and Nationwide Insurance, all FIFA corporate sponsors — banked on increased exposure because the advertiser playing field wasn't as crowded as it normally is for big sporting events.

A Fox executive reported that "nontraditional" advertisers also entered the arena, including grooming and personal-care brands, like Clorox and Tampax. Now that the tournament has commanded attention as a high-profile event with strong ratings and increased visibility, marketers may be less as skittish about spending money on it in the future.

A review of the three biggest Women's World Cup advertising trends provides a sense of where branding is headed in women's soccer.

Trend 1: Team sponsorships and integrated ad campaigns win the day

As sponsor of the U.S. team, and as orchestrator of an integrated Women's World Cup ad campaign, Nike, the athletic wear giant, made a more powerful deal than any of the event sponsors. In April, Nike unveiled "clean, simple and bold" home jerseys and announced that, for the first time ever, the

company would sell the kit in women's, men's and youth sizes.

Replicas only have been available to women in the past. Nike also added specially designed World Cup cleats in eye-catching "lagoon blue" and "volt yellow" — sure to be on every young player's wish list for upcoming August soccer camps.

At the same time, Nike launched the first of a two-part ad campaign targeted at women, a group that was once an afterthought, but now is a market-driver.

The first spot featured the inner monologues of women during spin class, a run, a yoga session and while at the gym. The ads used the tagline "Better For It" and focused on "celebrating the everyday girl in her most honest state and natural state," said Nike spokesperson Charlie Brooks. The brand also recruited U.S. soccer players Christen Press, Ali Krieger and Lloyd to share workout routines on the Nike+ training app.

Planned for the tournament, the second soccer-specific part of the campaign — called No Maybes and designed by startup Thousands Creative — centered around a "Nike Soccer: American Woman" spot that tallied a stunning 586,510 online views after its first Women's

World Cup airing.

The minutelong ad opened with individual shots of Wambach, Sydney Leroux, Alex Morgan and young American soccer players running drills. As The Guess Who's classic "American Woman" kicked in, the focus shifted to camaraderie and teamwork, and the ad ended with the line: "Strong Alone. Unstoppable Together. Nike.com/WomensSoccer."

Thousands Creative partner Shamus Eaton explained that they wanted to make a strong, powerful ad that "put women on the same plane as a lot of the World Cup spots featuring their male counterparts." Nike chose #NoMaybes for its social media push because the American players embody the idea that the word "maybe" is a "super dangerous word — almost more dangerous than no." Champions have to "go in 100 percent" and refuse "the temptation of slacking off."

As a result of this well-planned and executed campaign, Nike was 121 percent more associated with the Women's World Cup than official FIFA sponsor (and Nike competitor) Adidas, according to the marketing firm Amobee Brand Intelligence. Amobee also reported that Nike was the most mentioned brand leading up to and during the final — measured by the number of tweets that included #NoMaybes.

Trend 2: Mobile buying

The country's largest online seller of licensed sports merchandise, Fanatics, reported a 3,000 percent spike in sales of women's soccer gear during the 24-hour period after Lloyd's hat trick, almost doubling purchases made during the highest-selling day for men's World Cup gear last year. A deeper look revealed that 65 percent of sales for U.S. team merchandise occurred on mobile devices (mostly smartphones) making the Women's

World Cup final the “second-most-popular event for mobile shopping on the site, behind Duke’s college basketball title in April,” the company reported.

While some consumers may refrain from buying on mobile devices because of the constraints of the devices — tiny keyboards make entering shipping and payment information clunky, and small screens keep don’t display products well — sports fans often get swept up in the moment.

David Katz, head of product management at Fanatics, has seen this phenomenon across multiple sporting events — when the play action gets hot or when a team wins a championship, fans reach for their mobile devices.

Trend 3: Endorsement deals for key players

Players (and some fans) have long bemoaned the scant attention paid to women’s soccer. Michelle Akers, a former U.S. midfielder and FIFA player of the century, recently asked why companies aren’t more involved with the sport: “Part of their market is women, so why don’t they use these female soccer players who are kick-ass athletes and people to help sell their products?”

After the success of this year’s World Cup, brands are signing U.S. team players left and right.

Lloyd’s performance in the opening minutes of the World Cup final earned her the title of most tweeted-about player; Amobee said she was “200

percent more seen on social media (that day) than all 30 MLB teams combined,” and so many people visited her official website that it crashed.

Visa reportedly snagged Lloyd for an endorsement deal through the 2016 Olympics, Nike used her in its Training Club marketing on the Nike+ app and Usana Health Sciences has a public relations deal with Lloyd.

Josh Weil — Lloyd’s agent — has reportedly said the athlete is “in advanced talks” with other companies, including an auto company and a watch company, that have never before done anything with soccer before, and that Lloyd has charged him with finding more endorsements in the training and nutritional space, as she is deeply interested

in food, health and wellness.

Lloyd isn’t the only player that is doing well post-World Cup championship. Morgan reportedly has at least 10 endorsement deals and will earn no less than \$3 million this year. Press is the new spokesperson for Coppertone. Wambach is sponsored by Gatorade and Panasonic, among other brands. And Hope Solo has been the prominent face of Nike’s soccer campaign.

As reports of new deals continue to emerge, commentators speculate that brands plan to ride the World Cup championship fame all the way to Rio 2016 — and beyond.