

**DISCUSSION ON COMMERCE- MARKETING - SPONSORSHIP
NAWIRA, RWC QUALIFIER, CAYMAN ISLANDS, 8 & 9TH JUNE, 2004**

***DEALING WITH GOVERNMENTS
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Governments are probably the most important single source of funding, or, if you like, sponsorship, for sport in any country. All governments, to a lesser or greater degree, are committed to the development of sport in their respective countries and include expenditure on sport in their budgets.

Many governments have Sports Commissions or some such agency to manage their sports budget and to deal directly with a variety of Associations, Federations or Unions which represent different sports.

Invariably, sport is assigned a Cabinet Portfolio, with a particular Minister in charge of the development of sport and accountable to Parliament for the government's policy, programmes and expenditure for sport.

Historically, governments generally consider the development of sport as a social obligation and as part of a country's educational and health development. All governments everywhere regard international success at sport, whether individual or team, as a matter of considerable national prestige and we know that socialist governments have traditionally placed sport high on their national priorities, Cuba, being the contemporary model.

Governments still consider sport an integral part of education and health development and a social obligation, but, in today's world, governments commitment to sport is much more than obligation and image, it has become a major commercial activity and governments are prepared to invest in sport. Sport is also rapidly becoming an important means of promoting tourism for West Indian governments whose countries are tourist destinations.

Hedley Benyon and his team when promoting the Rugby Festival of Youth last year in Florida, were able to attract both local government and commercial sponsorship in Cocoa Beach, who saw the Festival as a Sports Tourism event. I believe the Festival could similarly have been marketed to the Trinidad & Tobago government and commercial community to attract sponsorship in the island.

Here, in the West Indies, cricket dominates over all other sport and attracts substantial government attention and funding, as it does commercial sponsorship, and is really the only sport which benefits from broadcasting sales and gate money.

Cricket is the one sport in which the West Indies competes internationally, as though a nation, and it is the one sport which governments are ready to spend small fortunes to support. Attesting to this, is the fact that West Indian governments bidding to host Cricket World Cup 2007 matches are even prepared to invest in new multimillion dollar stadiums with seating capacity of some 20,000 in order to be chosen as a host country.

What all of this means, is that the challenge to attract and win government financial support as well as commercial sponsorship for the less popular and less well established sports like rugby, is considerable, if not formidable, but not impossible.

Commercial sponsors increasingly today focus their support on sports which attract the support of consumers of the product they sell. Governments should be seen no differently.

The governments' product is electoral support. Governments will readily put their money behind sports which are widely popular with the voters, who are for the government, the consumers, hence the unqualified support for cricket in the West Indies.

In the case of Guyana and possibly Trinidad & Tobago, this can take on some hidden and unexpected agendas, where political party loyalties and support are ethnically motivated. The same dimension could apply where there are sociological differences, such as class and even gender to be exploited for political gain. It is not, therefore, above, or perhaps, beneath governments to pay attention to just who plays rugby when considering the support to be given.

It's important, therefore, for a sport to appeal to a wide cross section of the community both in terms of those who play it and those who support it, but especially those who support it. Motor racing, for instance, in Guyana, is an extremely expensive sport with its exponents being generally wealthy, but attracts the highest number of spectators after test match cricket of any sport. International race meetings are, therefore, almost always attended by the President and/or the Prime Minister, who are happy to perform the lap of honour.

In the West Indies, for obvious reasons, rugby cannot at present be marketed to governments as a sport attracting large numbers of voters, anymore than it can be marketed to commercial sponsors as attracting large number of spectators or television audiences, though it can be marketed to some extent as a sport which attracts very large international audiences. Rugby World Cup 2003 helped introduce rugby on television into homes in Guyana which had never heard of rugby and has helped the GRFU promote the sport.

In Guyana, we have emphasised through the media that this Rugby World Cup Qualifier provides the opportunity for the winning team to perform on rugby's world stage and be seen and noticed by millions of television viewers worldwide and, therefore, supporting the national team is a worthwhile investment.

How then can we market a small but, gradually, growing sport, which, so far, has extremely limited spectators, to governments which, themselves, have limited budgets for spending on sport?

There is obviously no generally applicable formula to fit every country in the West Indies, but there are four basic rules which I recommend we can follow to attract government sponsorship and support.

Rule 1 - Administration & Financial Accountability

Ensure that your sport is efficiently managed and administered and that this is recognised by the government's sports administration.

The iRB requires us to submit a Strategic Development Plan with target goals we must meet in order to justify our Trust Grant. Share this with the National Sports Commission and the Ministry of Sport or the appropriate agency of government. Let them see and believe that you have a plan, that you are organised, that you have growth targets you are prepared to meet and, most of all, that you are serious about the administration of your sport.

Submit your plan and your budget and your audited statement of accounts at the beginning of each year to the government. Demonstrate that you are financially responsible. Let them see that the money you receive from the iRB, from the government and from commercial sponsors is productively invested and accounted for.

Submit your tournament programme, domestic and international, to the government at the beginning of the year. If you expect government sponsorship to support participation in an international tournament, whether you are hosting one or going to one, let them have the budget well in advance. Tell them how much you want from government and tell them how you plan to raise the rest.

Its important, when asking for government money, to demonstrate that you are making a major, well organised effort, to raise funds yourself. Governments often feel at least obligated to match your efforts.

Rule 2 - Annual Elections

Ensure that you have Annual General Elections which are democratic, properly conducted and transparent and that the results are publicised.

The Union President should submit a comprehensive annual report immediately available to the government and to the press which adequately and honestly reviews the Union's performance for the year.

Rule 3 - Cultivate the Government

Use every means at your disposal to cultivate the Minister responsible for sport and his/her senior staff and, if there is one, the Chairman of the National Sports Commission and his/her staff. Do your best to interest them in rugby.

Make every effort to invite these dignitaries to major rugby tournaments and events and if possible, have them officiate at international tournaments hosted by your Union.

Arrange courtesy calls when the RDO visits your Union or any senior official from the iRB or internationally known rugby personality.

In some countries, the Head of State or Head of Government will take a particular interest in sport. Make every effort to keep him(her) or his(her) office informed about rugby developments and activities and invite them to be present at special occasions.

Make certain that the Minister and the Ministry of Education is fully briefed on and, if possible, involved in the Union's Youth Development and Schools Programme.

When your Union has a National Team going abroad to attend a Regional and/or International Tournament, keep the Ministry responsible for sport informed and as involved as possible. Before the team leaves, invite someone like the Minister or the Chairman of the Sports Commission to address the team and when the team returns, ensure that the Ministry and/or Commission receive a copy of the Team Manager's and Team Coach's report.

If you have a winning team, make every effort to involve the Minister and/or senior Ministry officials and Sports Commission in any greeting or public celebration on their return.

When your Union receives financial support from the government, ensure that you give it full recognition in the media. This, of course, applies equally to support from the business community. In Guyana, we held a Press Conference and invited representatives of the government and all of the business houses who sponsored our National Team for the RWC Sevens to be present and recognised and, in addition, placed an advertisement in the press thanking them.

Generally, do everything you can, therefore, to cultivate the government officials who have the responsibility for deciding on sponsorship.

Rule 4 - Cultivate the Media

It goes without saying that the more positive media coverage the game receives in your country, the better, in order to both attract government and commercial sponsorship.

In Guyana, we have been very successful at this, because the President of our Union is a Public Relations Consultant. Unions may be well advised to establish a relationship with a good public relations company to handle their publicity and media relations. This may be possible on a pro bono basis.

In our Region, where the game is yet to attract appreciable spectator support, good media coverage achieves much the same impact in the mind of a potential sponsor, because the sponsor is looking for publicity. Regular media coverage of your club tournaments and activities and not just international tournaments is achievable by making contact with sports editors and reporters and introducing them to the game and by putting out regular press releases reporting the results of club games and tournaments.

In Guyana, for instance, the sports media had little or no interest in rugby as recently as five years ago and not a single reporter knew enough to report a game. Its an educational process that takes time and effort but its well worth it.

Today, we have at least three sports reporters who can report the game with knowledge. Both the print and broadcasting media give it regular coverage.

Unfortunately, we suffer throughout the West Indies, from the absence of regular international television coverage of the game. In Guyana, there is none. We have, however, used the iRB video "Explaining the Game of Rugby", to good effect on television and we have used "The World of Rugby" and other iRB tapes judiciously. We have managed to persuade the government television station to carry a weekly half hour programme on rugby.

The structure of NAWIRA Rugby World Cup Qualifier tournament, like the 7s and U19s, particularly lend themselves to promoting our sport in the media, since the winning teams go directly to the Finals of the World Cup and this can capture the imagination and interest of the media if well promoted. We have been particularly successful in doing this in Guyana.

Rule 5 - Promote Sports Tourism

Increasingly, as previously observed, sports and tourism go hand in hand. International and even Regional tournaments attract supporters visiting the country who may be attracted to spend some of their time exploring the country. Government Ministries responsible for tourism are interested in exploiting this possibility.

A Union hosting a Regional or International rugby tournament or hosting a visiting rugby club from the USA, Canada or UK, for instance, or hosting an Invitational 7s tournament, such as the Cayman 7s, can work closely with the governments tourism department to arrange discounted package tours for the visiting teams and their supporters.

When Rugby USA U18 team came to Guyana last year for the U18 RWC Qualifier, the team was accompanied by a small number of parents and the GRFU assisted them in taking advantage of tourist opportunities.

The Trinidad & Tobago 7s hosted by the Enthusiast, takes a similar approach and increasingly invitational teams will plan tournaments around a tourist holiday.

In Guyana, the Ministry of Tourism, as in other West Indian countries, will put major sporting events on their tourist calenders. Make certain that this includes rugby.

Each country, of course, is different and must find its own approach to winning government support. In this paper, I've offered some thoughts and ideas, mainly based on our experience in Guyana, and I hope that these may be helpful to other Unions in countries of similar size and circumstances.