

A Ringing Endorsement

By Reg P. Wydeven

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While cleaning out my closet last week, I came across my pair of limited edition 1992 Olympic-version Air Jordans. Instead of the signature colors of red and black, they are adorned in red, white and blue, plus have gold trim.

Even though it was over 20 years ago, I vividly remember watching the Dream Team roll over their global competition in Barcelona, winning the gold. I also recall the players holding flowers and standing on the podium to receive their medals. I thought Michael Jordan was especially patriotic because he draped an American flag over his shoulder.

Little did I know the flag was not about nationalism, but rather commercialism. As the face of Nike, Jordan didn't want to be seen wearing a tracksuit bearing the logo of Reebok, the official sponsor of Team USA.

Twenty years later, logos are still intricately important in the Olympics. While watching the Winter Games this year, the only logos visible were those of the Olympic rings and the Sochi 2014 emblem. And possibly the logos of *official* Olympic sponsors.

To avoid the commercialization of the Olympics, the International Olympic Committee has produced a 33-page book containing detailed regulations about logos. The rules govern the size and placement of logos on team uniforms and equipment.

For example, logos on uniforms cannot be larger than 20 square centimeters. Athletes may not wear clothing or use equipment that is designed for advertising purposes. During the X Games last month, skiers and snowboarders had the logos of their corporate sponsors plastered all over their helmets and clothing. None of this advertising is allowed at the Olympics, however. Rule 40 in the IOC's book even prevents athletes from publicly speaking or tweeting about their sponsors. This rule resulted in athletes protesting at the Summer Games in London in 2012.

The only exception to this rule is that equipment used by athletes may have the name of the manufacturer appear on it, so long as the equipment has been sold at retail for a period of one year prior to the Games. While most people can't pick up a bobsled at Scheel's, snowboards and skis are a different story.

During the athletes' aerial displays in freestyle events, the names of manufacturers are prominently displayed on the bottoms of snowboards and skis. This is especially true for snowboarders, as they flip upside-down and cameras zoom in on the name on the bottom of the board in slow motion and high definition. These athletes also typically pose for pictures holding their medals and their skis or boards.

Burton, the manufacturer of snowboards used by many Olympians, including Shaun White, probably got more airtime than official sponsors, like McDonald's. Because any consumer could buy a board like White's, Burton's name can appear during competition.

It'll be interesting to see if the IOC closes this loophole. However, it would be pretty tough to go downhill with a flag wrapped around your snowboard.

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