



SPONSORSHIP IN SPORT

Ron McKay

One of the sides you won't be seeing on *Match of the Day* this season is Coventry City, another of presenter Jimmy Hill's interests. The club has offended the BBC by cleverly redesigning its strip to include its new sponsor's logo — the distinctive black and white 'T' of Talbot cars — without actually splashing the company name across eleven chests.

BBC policy is not to screen events where the participants, central to the action, are wearing advertising. Hence boxer Alan Minter and Daf Trucks — the company whose name adorned the trunks he sat on when Sibson knocked him down — failing to appear on Sportsnight. Jimmy Hill, as part-time BBC employee and chairman of Coventry City, obviously knew the policy. However, he won't talk about his dual interests and the conflict they caused. Perhaps like the rest of us he finds the logic tortuous. After all, teams wearing the distinctive three stripes of Adidas on their boots and strips appear every week, racing cars plastered in cigarette ads aren't blacked out and every BBC announcer manages to include the names of the sponsors of Test cricket, athletics and snooker.

Sponsorship has become essential to most sports, even to soccer, which ten years ago would have shunned the advances of Japanese hi-fi manufacturers and American car men. The estimated £100,000 that Talbot will give Coventry this year will help to pay for ground improvements and to make up the increasing shortfall between attendance income and costs. But will sponsorship help to revive our flagging national game, or will it change it out of all character? Cricket, ironically, gives a glimpse of the way ahead.

In 1963 cricket was dying on its feet, attendances were plummeting, cricketers were appallingly paid and an increasing number of foreign players were being drafted to make up the deficiencies and to

provide spectator appeal. In that year Gillette paid just £6,500 to sponsor the Gillette Cup, a knock-out series of limited over one-day matches which the purists snorted at. It was a raging success in terms of crowd appeal and the Cup became institutionalised in the game so much so that 10 years later Gillette pulled out because people had actually forgotten that they made razor blades. The Nat West Bank took over, carefully emphasising *bank* in the promotional material.

Last year sponsorship brought in an estimated £2.5 million for cricket. Cigarette companies in particular, banned from direct TV advertising, have been eager to dish out their money, sponsoring the Sunday John Player League and the Benson and Hedges Cup. Lambert and Butler, the latest sponsor, has gone one gimmicky step further and introduced the floodlit evening tournament.

In the past five years Cornhill have been sponsoring Test matches, at a cost of about £200,000 a year, less than some ads now cost to *make*, far less transmit. That sponsorship has meant that England players now receive £1,400 a Test compared with £220 in 1971. But look at the benefits for Cornhill in those five years. The company was seeking to engender a feeling of security and trust by its sponsorship, to create awareness of its name. When it started sponsorship it was rated 12th among UK insurance companies in size but the public's 'spontaneous awareness' of its name was a mere 2%. The name is now known to 17%, the increase in premiums directly attributable to the cricket exposure was a staggering £10 million, putting the company near the top of the insurance league.

But what of cricket? Has the game developed commensurately? It has not. Ian Botham may earn £50,000 a year, and his saving of England surely guaranteed Cornhill a further few million in premiums in the last Test series, but the lot of the average county

professional is as bad as ever. The concentration on the one-day game and its thrills and quick scoring has left our batsmen in particular ill-equipped to deal with the prolonged examination of Test cricket. The last Test series may have been exciting but it relied for that on the incompetence, rather than brilliance, of the performers. The West Indies, would anyone seriously deny, would have destroyed both sides and neither sponsors nor participants would have been happy.

Clearly sponsorship benefits companies because it is comparatively cheap and brings their name before the public. In 1980 there were 369.45 hours of cricket on television, most of it sponsored, all of it at least having peripheral advertising round the ground. Soccer coverage was 215 hours. And look at the five most covered events in the first six months of this year — Embassy snooker (72 hours), Prudential cricket (24), Cornhill cricket (24), Sun Alliance golf (15 hours) and Stella Artois tennis (13 hours). Sport has sold itself cheaply.

It is fruitless arguing that the tide can be reversed, with football, the last bastion, having been eroded. Greed and incompetence has led to the present state. In the thirties, forties and early fifties football boomed, gates were mammoth, wages were held down and the directors took their profits leaving facilities to run down and attitudes to atrophy. In the process we have become a second-rate football nation.

So, if money is to go into sport — and clearly government isn't going to provide it — it should be to help develop from the bottom up. But it won't, because there are too many competing self-interests. Aided by the hypocrisy of the participants and by organisations like the BBC. Most of the sport you see on television is there because sponsorship has made it cheap to buy. Television, despite the prurient internal responses, works hand in hand with sponsors. Commercial sponsors deliberately bring down the cost to a level the BBC will buy at so that their product gets exposure, cheaply for them and the BBC. Ask Embassy, Cornhill and Benson and Hedges.

Even amateur sports, like athletics, make their accommodations. And, despite what anyone would have us believe, athletes do receive substantial appearance money. And the indirect benefits of advertising money. Consider Sebastian Coe. In future he will be able to advertise products not associated with athletics and the money will go into developing athletics generally. Sensible, but will Seb actually do it for free? Well, he

might. You see his father has been signed up by sports entrepreneur Mark McCormack. And arguably Peter Coe, having trained one of the best athletes in history, is a marketable commodity in his own right. But he's unlikely to command a large fee for any major publicity exercise. Perhaps he'll take young Seb along for company? And if he makes a great deal of money out of these activities, perhaps he'll be able to settle quite a bit of it on Seb so that he doesn't have to give up athletics?

And is there anything in Olympic rules to prevent just such a scenario happening? That's right, there isn't! □

POST PUNK ROCK

Julie Burchill

Every Sunday morning over the past couple of months the swell Danny Baker presented a London Weekend Television programme called *Twentieth Century Box*. It's sad that such a rampant comedian should be employed as voice-over on such a pedestrian TV programme. *Twentieth Century Box* couldn't see the mood for the fees — it hung around with small details and backroom boys and failed to recognise the decline of the rock industry since 1977.

Its prime mistake was in seeing punk as the start rather than the end of an era. Punk rock for the uninformed, meant a band called the Sex Pistols, four working class boys who loathed the self-importance of what passed as modern rock stars. They were a hybrid of greed, patriotism, puritanism, aggression, class hatred and catchy tunes. Johnny Rotten, their leader, has since become an unsuccessful self-conscious rock hopeful, and is wheeled on like Old Father Time.

Twentieth Century Box took very much the square outsider's view that punk was a whacky and vital injection of working class verve. To its friends and followers, 1976 and 1977 were lamentably short snorts of fun, ending when the Sex Pistols exploded at the start of 1978. But to the large numbers of others, it has left a lingering cloud over the business. To some extent it has ruined the rock industry, once and for all, financially and spiritually. At the height of his powers, Rotten had a charisma that was almost Old Testament in its righteousness. New fads may come and go, but there is no hope of getting over the barricades that the movers of punk set up, because there's nothing on the



other side. Punk pulled away the veil of rock values.

The greatest gift that punk left was its refusal to create an audience for the sake of an audience. Modern bands rarely tour and even in voyeuristic America audiences are down by a quarter. The decline of the industry and the de-deification of the rock star go hand in hand: in a recession people resent paying money for second-rate music, no matter how much they love the second-rate star. After the uninterrupted growth in record sales throughout the 1960s and 70s, record sales dropped in 1980 to 1972 levels. Multinational companies like EMI and RCA are closing factories and making thousands redundant.

The companies complain about cheap EEC imports and Far East counterfeiting, but that's just the whine of the dinosaur who's gotten too greedy. The real hate object is none other than the person they've been pretending was just one integral part of the big, happy rock family — the fan. The

individual who is sick of paying over five pounds for twelve inches of vinyl that contains at most two good songs and also may be warped and scratched: and so now creates his or her own soundtracks to life by buying a blank cassette tape and recording from the radio.

The music industry is plagued by people who want to be up to date but never want to change. Such obsoletes are horrified by the thought of all those consumers out there who don't want to 'reasure their idols' every whine, who are happy to take or leave the latest song depending on whether they like it or not. The people who run the industry are horrified by the disrespect for creativity that free-wheeling home-taping implies. And far from being fast-moving trouble-shooting entrepreneurs they are too set in their ways to simply cut the record output and move on to the heavier production of blank cassette hotcakes. Instead, through the medium of the British Phonographic Institute, the record companies and their artists peevishly lobby Parliament for a levy on blank cassettes that may then be shared out amongst the artists who have failed to give the consumer what he or she wants. Only Island, always one of the more successful and mobile record labels, has moved with the market by producing their range of 'One Plus One' cassette tapes — one side carries a current album by an Island artist, one side is blank. Meanwhile the BPI grows hysterical in its clamour — labels are losing one million pounds per day, it claims, because people are taping at home.

As late as 1969 the giant American corporation CBS was running advertisements for records under the legend 'The Man [hippie slang for lackey of the establishment] Can't Bust Our Music'. Punk has punctured the play-acting that rock was somehow more than a business of buying and selling; it made the music business choke on the fact that the accent wasn't on music — it's on business.

The Sex Pistols, through their mentor-turned-dependant, came clean and dirtied the rapport of the artist with his/her consumer for ever when McLaren, their manager, stated gleefully that all rock had ever been about was 'making as much money as possible in the shortest time possible with as much style as possible.' It wasn't particularly about *loving* your music, as musicians had always had it, and it certainly wasn't about loving your fans. Bands didn't even want to be in the same room as their fans, it soon became clear, when combos like Blondie pounced on the innovation of the video as the perfect way of 'reaching more people in three minutes than a tour would in three weeks'. There will be no more screaming at airports. □