Get Sponsored

A guide to sponsorship for athletes on the World Class Pathway
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to help guide you through the process of seeking and securing personal sponsorship. We’ll describe the different types of sponsorship, advise who to approach, how to approach them and recommend what to look for from any sponsorship agreement. We’ll also warn you of the pitfalls and highlight some of the tricks of the trade.

Whether you are a seasoned athlete or just setting out in your sport, Get Sponsored will guide you through the sponsorship process from start to finish, offering advice and useful tips. Make this your one-stop, online resource to help you Get Sponsored.

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Note – the BAC provides a service that supports athletes in gaining sponsorship – speak to your Performance Lifestyle Adviser or visit the BAC website www.britishathletes.org for more information.
INTRODUCTION

Sponsorship is a process by which a company, organisation or individual provides an individual or organisation with funds, products or services for commercial advantage. Sponsorship is a business relationship and should be mutually beneficial to the sponsored individual and the sponsoring company.

Most companies seek a return on their support or investment, ranging from goodwill within the community to more complex benefits such as media exposure, increased sales and brand awareness.

Sponsorship is about building long-term relationships. The longer the relationship lasts, the greater the value that can be derived from it. It is not an exact science, however, and manifests itself in a host of different forms on many different levels.

Obtaining sponsorship is a challenging task and can be very competitive – some companies receive over 100 sponsorship enquiries every week.

TYPES OF SPONSORSHIP

Sponsorship can vary from £50 to £50 million deals depending on the opportunity. A sponsor providing £100 worth of equipment can be as important to one athlete as a sponsor providing £3 million is to another. The total sport sponsorship market in the UK is currently valued at approximately £400 million.

The most common forms of sport sponsorship agreements are the following:

- **Shirt/Team Sponsorship** – Samsung Mobile and Chelsea FC
- **Squad Sponsorship** – Skandia and the British Sailing Team/Aviva and the UK Athletics Team
- **Athlete Sponsorship** – Nike and Wayne Rooney/Chris Hoy and Kellogg’s Bran Flakes
- **Event Sponsorship** – The Barclays Premiership
- **Venue/Stadium Sponsorship** – The Brit Oval/The O2 Arena
- **Broadcast Sponsorship** – Heineken and ITV’s Rugby World Cup coverage
- **Small Athlete Sponsorship Deal** – a hockey player receiving 4 free sticks a year

WHY SPONSORSHIP?

There are many different reasons why companies enter the sponsorship marketplace. Here are a few of the most common objectives that companies seek from a sponsorship programme:

- Increase sales
- Develop customer loyalty
- Heighten brand awareness
- Develop new markets
- Develop business-to-business relationships
- Launch new products
- Broaden customer base
- Develop community relations
- Change or revitalise brand image
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The initial approach is all-important. In most cases there is only one bite at the cherry, so you have to get it right. Preparation is key so make sure you have a clear idea about what you want from your sponsor – best case and worst case scenario.

Starting from scratch can be daunting but there is no science to attracting sponsorship and no magic formulas. Luck can often play a big part, but most importantly it’s hard graft, a lot of legwork, time and effort. There is also often a very clear case of "It’s not what you know but who you know". In other words, relationships and networking. Quite often, successful sponsorship is obtained through an athlete's existing network, so consider your current personal contacts to see if there may be potential opportunities worth exploring – family friends, club connections, friends of friends etc.

SELECTING POTENTIAL SPONSORS

When it comes to selecting which companies to approach, research is crucial and there is no better tool than the internet to identify which companies to approach. You should also try your local library or local Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber of Commerce will have a list of all local companies and should be happy to share the information with you.

Always pick companies that are relevant to you and your sport. Find out if the company has ever sponsored anything before and if so, what areas they have been involved in.

Be realistic in your approaches. It might be better to find a local company than a national or multinational with little or no presence in your local community. It is also worth noting that most large companies will have allocated their sponsorship budgets for the next 12-18 months, so some may not be able to assist even if they are interested.

Ring and ask the company for some information (e.g. an annual report, brochures, etc.). Any background information you can muster about the company – either in print or online – will be of use.

Search through websites of local sports clubs – whether football, rugby, cricket, athletics or tennis. Find out whether they have any sponsors and, if so, add them to your target list. These companies have already recognised the value of sponsorship and may be happy to invest further in a ‘local’ athlete.
MAKING FIRST CONTACT

Finding out who is the best person to contact is hard. The best route is to get a personal introduction from someone you know. Failing that, you should try one or more of the following people:

- **Marketing Director** – Sponsorship budgets and sponsorship activity is almost always handled by a company’s Marketing department. Smaller companies will not have these positions and so it might be best to approach the Chief Executive directly.
- **Community Affairs Manager** – This is particularly relevant to local sponsorships where there may be a direct benefit to the local community.
- **Sponsorship Manager** – Many small companies will not have a Sponsorship Manager, the Marketing Director will handle all sponsorship activity.
- **Brand Manager** – Particularly relevant for larger companies and those in the FMCG sector. (FMCGs – or fast moving consumer goods – include every day products such as confectionary, soft drinks, washing powders etc.)
- **Chief Executive** – If you know that he or she has a keen interest in sport – or, more importantly, in your sport – then a Chief Executive is well worth approaching. In this case it is often best to get a referral from a third party.

It is vital that you contact the right person to ensure your approach is properly considered, so research here is essential.

**Sports Marketing Agencies and Sponsorship Consultancies**

Specialist Sports Marketing Agencies and Sponsorship Consultancies are also worth approaching. These companies represent the interests of businesses and brands that are actively engaged in sports sponsorship. They are often responsible for advising their clients on where to commit their sponsorship spend. Indeed in many cases – particularly when approaching larger sized companies – your letter will be passed on directly to these agencies as they will be responsible for handling and assessing all sponsorship requests on behalf of their clients.

You can find a detailed listing of these agencies on websites such as www.sportcal.com.

Once you have identified your target agencies, visit their websites to find out which brands they represent, and then tailor your approach accordingly.

HOW DO I MAKE AN APPROACH?

There are three stages to making an approach:

**Stage 1 – Letter/Email**

Make it short and to the point. If possible, enclose a proposal/executive summary with more details.

Key points to remember:

- Personalise the letter to the individual. Never write “Dear Sir/Madam”
- Include a brief introduction about what you are writing about
- Don’t waffle. List key points that will attract the recipient’s attention
- Enclose information: a proposal and a business card
- If applicable, why not include a formal invitation for them to come and watch/meet you the next time you are competing in the area

Above all, remember to BE CREATIVE, as first impressions count. Remember that the recipient may receive countless similar requests, so anything you can do to make your approach stand out will give you a better chance (using colour, images etc.).
Proposal
This is the sales hook. A good proposal will make the reader want to ring you to find out more. It can be a proposal or a CV style document.

> Make it eye catching
> Use action photographs or colour photocopies of you competing. If possible, try to get hold of professional quality shots. Speak to your National Governing Body who should have a library of pictures from major events
> Make it informative
> Make it exciting and show your potential
> Talk about your training regime. Perhaps detail what you will do on an average day and list how many hours you put in per week/month. Make sure they appreciate what it takes to get to the top of your sport
> Detail your successes and results
> List your major championships appearances and medals won
> List the teams you have represented, from county level to national selections
> Include some example press cuttings. These should be neatly presented, putting each on a separate page with details of the publication they came from
> List the benefits that you can offer a sponsor
> Make it clear and easy to read – use bullet points
> Include a list of upcoming major events
> Highlight your goals and aspirations. Sponsors will want to see that you have a long-term commitment to the sport and that you hold high expectations of yourself
> Do not state how much money or product you want from the sponsor, leave that for the face-to-face meeting.

Stage 2 – Phone Call Follow Up
Once you have sent a letter and/or proposal it is crucial that you follow-up with a phone call to make sure that it was received and to see if the company is interested. Plan when you are going to do this, put a date in your diary about two weeks after you send the letter. This also gives you an excuse to make direct contact with the company.

One of the hardest parts is the dreaded “sales phone call”. You may find it difficult at first but it is something that can be mastered. See it as an opportunity to make a new friend, not as a major task.

> Rehearse and plan the call – write down the key points
> Be polite, but convincing
> Keep a smile on your face as you speak it comes across in the conversation
> Be persistent – getting through the secretary is hard work; lunchtime and evening is often a solution

Remember, you have nothing to lose but everything to gain.

Introduce yourself, and the sport you’re from, and explain that you’re calling to make sure that he/she has received your letter/proposal (don’t assume they have), has had the time to read it (again don’t assume they have, this may be a priority for you but is not necessarily one for them) and explain you are keen to find out their thoughts.

Stage 3 – Meeting
A face-to-face meeting is your golden chance to make a lasting impression. If the opportunity presents itself you must be prepared. Have a clear idea of what you want to get out of the meeting and, ideally, have a short presentation prepared.

> Prepare and plan the meeting. Jot down your objectives so you don’t get sidetracked
> Be professional – write and confirm the time and date of your appointment
> Be knowledgeable – do your homework about the company and people you will meet
> Make a good first impression – be pleasant to the receptionist!
> Dress smartly – if you have a team blazer wear this to create maximum impact
> Show your personality
> Be honest, confident and believe in yourself
> Be enthusiastic, show you are dedicated
> Make sure you have all the information to hand
> Leave a business card at the end of the meeting
> After the meeting, follow-up with an email or letter thanking them for their time and saying how much you enjoyed meeting them
**The Presentation**

This can take any format, either on a laptop if you have one, or just a flip chart of A4 sheets in a folder. Most companies will understand that athletes cannot always have access to presentation materials. But if you can put something together, it will show initiative and professionalism.

A basic PowerPoint presentation is probably the best solution. Wherever possible, make sure that you include images of yourself in competition, this will bring the presentation to life and make it much more emotive for the potential sponsor. You may choose to ask your Performance Lifestyle Adviser or a friend who is experienced to assist you putting together the presentation. Just make sure they understand what you are offering and that they have some experience of writing presentations of this nature.

Finally, make sure you know your presentation well – practising will familiarise yourself with the presentation and give you confidence when delivering.

**WHAT DO I ASK FOR?**

This is the big question but if you think things through in advance it is not too difficult. The key points to consider are as follows:

- Be reasonable and realistic
- Don’t ask a small company for a large amount of cash, they will most likely say no
- Some sponsors will be happy to give you money, but don’t always think of sponsorship support as hard cash. A sponsor that can provide you with free products, equipment or services is just as useful, if not more so, than a company offering money.
- How much you ask for from a sponsor will depend upon what you have to offer, (i.e. what value you can bring in return.)
- Consider the type of company you are approaching then determine what it is they could offer you that would be of little or no cost to them (i.e. A free mobile and contract from a mobile phone company, a courtesy car from a car dealership, free flights from an Airline etc.)
- Have an idea of what a company is likely to be able to spend. A local butchers, for example, will not have the same budget as the local bank.
- They may ask for a budget so set out a budget for yourself; make it realistic but don’t underestimate. Include all outgoings relating to your sporting activity and general living expenses, including your travel costs, rent, training equipment, professional services (e.g. physiotherapy etc.)
- Showing a planned budget will help you as well. They may cover all of it!
- Show value for money – results for less cost
- Be prepared to be flexible

Paint a real picture of what your current existence it like. There are a lot of misconceptions about athletes’ level of income and awards. So be honest, sometimes a small contribution from a sponsor could make a massive difference to your living costs.

**TAX ISSUES**

Before embarking on a search for sponsorship, athletes should be aware of the potential tax implications. Any income directly derived through personal sponsorship could adversely affect the tax-free Athlete Personal Award (APA) that you receive from UK Sport.

The British Athletes Commission (BAC) and EIS Performance Lifestyle advisers have been working with a firm of tax advisers to ensure that all athletes can receive the best advice possible in this area. To ensure that you are aware of your responsibilities, please go to [www.athletetax.com](http://www.athletetax.com) or visit the BAC website here [www.britishathletes.org](http://www.britishathletes.org)
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Networking is an extremely valuable tool in any business environment and a vital skill that you should make every effort to develop. You never know whom you might be sat next to at a dinner and the potential opportunities that this may open up for you.

Networking opportunities present themselves constantly in everyday life so try to view all social and formal gatherings as potential networking opportunities. Work the room, find out about the people around you and let them know who you are and what you do. If you make the right impression on the right people at the right time, you never know what this might lead to.

USEFUL TIPS

Make use of all potential contacts. Whether it be friends and relations or relations and friends of theirs! The more people who are aware of you, what you do and what you are looking for, the more chance you’re giving yourself of attracting sponsors.

Always carry some business cards with you. It will make you look professional and gives you the opportunity to leave a calling card after a chance meeting. Here are a few useful tips on how to conduct yourself in networking situations:

> However hard it may seem when confronted by a room full of people you don’t know, make an effort to mingle
> If attending a function with fellow athletes, don’t huddle in a corner and talk amongst yourselves. You can do that any other time
> Have something mentally prepared in your head to help spark off a conversation
> Set a realistic target for the number of people you want to speak to. Three or four during the course of a drinks reception will ensure that you keep circulating around the room
> Make an effort to remember the name of the person you are talking to. If other people join the conversation, it looks good if you can make the introductions
> Have confidence in yourself and what you do
> Find out as much as possible about what the person you are talking to does. Try to find some common ground / mutual interests
> Even the most high-flying businessmen may feel intimidated by a room full of athletes. Most will want to talk to you but may be shy about initiating the conversation. Take the onus away from them by making the approach instead
> Try not to get stuck for too long with any one person. Think of a good exit strategy in case you want to move on
> Exchange business cards and follow-up any promising leads with a friendly email the next day
> If you think strike up a good rapport with anyone in particular, invite them to your next event
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A key to any sponsorship agreement is that the relationship works for both parties. If neither party is getting any value or if one is benefiting and the other isn’t, then the sponsorship’s lifespan will be very limited. The key for you is to make it work and this means a lot of hard work and commitment to ensure that your sponsors feel they are reaping the benefits and getting value from the agreement. If you can make it work in year 1, the chances are that they’ll wish to continue the sponsorship for another term.

WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR SPONSORS

A key starting point for you is to determine what can you offer a sponsor. It almost requires you carrying out personal inventory.

Every sponsor is different, and has different needs, objectives and levels of expectations. These must be carefully managed. They may want any or all of the following:

- Visibility, exposure at events/competitions
- Exposure for their product/equipment, e.g. kit, racket, sunglasses
- Access to events – tickets, hospitality etc.
- Use of athlete as an endorser of their product or to make appearances, for advertising, etc.
- Community links, i.e. show they are involved in their local area
- Use of athletes for staff motivation

Start by assessing your overall position and that of your sport. Determine where you are now, where you want to be and how much your sport can offer a sponsor in terms of general appeal, accessibility and image.

Checklist of things to consider

Success

How good are you? Think about where you currently stand in your sport, both nationally and internationally.

- Olympic/Paralympic Games success?
- International / world ranking, e.g. medals won / World top ten, top fifty?
- British placing, e.g. no. 2 in Britain, England etc.
- Age group standard, e.g. best Under 14 level
- County standard
Potential
How good will you be? Think long-term. What are you striving for, what can you realistically achieve?

> Age group success
> Senior squad potential
> Olympic Games/World Championship potential
> Goals achieved to date
> Goals set (achievable)

Your Sport
Every sport offers different benefits and characteristics. Indeed winter and summer sports often attract different companies. Some sports appeal more to the youth market, some to a more mature audience. Some have limited international appeal others have a huge global following. Some attract significant levels of television coverage, some struggle to get any kind of coverage on terrestrial TV.

Consider the following:
> The type of sport – team / individual
> Indoor / outdoor / winter / summer
> The attributes of the sport, e.g. strength, power, agility, lifestyle image, endurance, dynamic, teamwork
> Sport profile – number of participants, previous success, e.g. rowing gold, Athens
> Number of spectators at events
> General media profile, e.g. press, television coverage etc.
> Mass market appeal, e.g. soccer
> Youth appeal, e.g. snowboarding

Competitions
Give your sponsor an idea of when, where and at what level you will be competing. Some sports have regular competitions at regional and county level yet few at international level. Others provide regular opportunities for competition on an international stage.

> Where will you be competing? i.e. England, Europe or Internationally, etc.
> When? Show a schedule/plan
> Is it a global sport played worldwide?
> International interest – do GB have any top stars?
> National interest
> Local interest

Unique Selling Points
This is any area that is specific to you as an individual and could potentially offer a sponsor something special, differentiating you from other sponsorships. For example;

> Personality – list any media exposure or work you have done in the past (e.g. launches, children’s workshops, regional TV etc.)
> Success through adversity – any human interest stories that might appeal to a sponsor
> Family background (e.g. sister is celebrity, grandfather founded xx swimming club)
> “First ever…” e.g. round the world attempt, breaking new ground
> “First ever…” e.g. Brit to win a medal in your chosen sport
> “Youngest ever…” e.g. to be selected for the national squad
> “First to represent country whilst still at school” etc.
> Why are you different?
> What is your story? Bear in mind that details you might consider boring or mundane may be of great interest to a businessman
> Be sure not to undersell yourself

Branding
Each sport has different rules for personal sponsorships, e.g. motor racing – branding on clothing, sailing – branding on sails, cycling – branding on bikes. Be careful what you offer here and be sure you can deliver.

> Check with your National Governing Body about the current national and international rules
> Different events/competitions have different rules
> Be aware of specific competition rules, e.g. Olympic/Paralympic Games – only official clothing can be worn with no other company branding
Exposure

Based on the points above can you provide a certain level of exposure or visibility for your sponsor? In other words will you be on television, in the newspapers or in magazines? Where and how?

- At a major international competition?
- At a televised event?
- At a local community event / festival, e.g. County Fair?
- At a coaching clinic?
- In your National Governing Body magazine?
- In your local paper or national paper?

Event Tickets / Hospitality

This is often of great interest to sponsors. Offer the options and find out from a sponsor what they would like. Many like to bring clients or business acquaintances to events in order to ‘show off’ their sponsored investment. Others may bring employees of the company to show them where the company money is being spent and in order to justify that spend.

- Can you offer any tickets to competitions?
- Do you get them free as a competitor? If not, find out the cost to the sponsor
- Is there an option to purchase more tickets?
- Are they exclusive? Can you get access into a VIP lounge or players area?
- Can a sponsor purchase hospitality at the event? Do not commit to purchase tickets for your sponsor, but offer to help sourcing them. It is often the ability to access tickets which is more important than offering them free
- Make it clear who has to pay for the tickets

Coaching / Special Events

Can you offer something different to your sponsor that will add value to their sponsorship agreement?

- Special coaching sessions for staff, children of families of the sponsor?
- Could you do demonstration events?
- Could you coach children or families of the sponsor?
- Does the sponsor have special events, trade fairs etc. at which you can assist? They may want to use you to meet and greet clients or to give talks to employees about teambuilding, motivation and what goes into becoming an Olympic athlete

Personal appearances

This is an area that is key to most sponsorships, be careful not to over commit yourself. Ten days may sound a little in relation to a year, but if you try and fit an extra ten days into your training schedule or holidays it does amount to quite a lot, so be careful.

- How often and how much time will you give your sponsor? This can vary from one to six or ten appearances a year or even more, depending on training commitments
- Be specific as to whether you are referring to full days of your time, or just appearances of a maximum of 2-3 hours. There is nothing worse than a disgruntled sponsor who can never get any time with a sponsored athlete
- Make sure your expenses (including any extra accommodation) are covered by the sponsor, and be aware of the travel time it will take you to get to certain places
- If you commit to motivational speaking or making presentations on behalf of your sponsor, make sure you receive the necessary training on presentation and public speaking skills.

You can get advice from your Performance Lifestyle Adviser on gaining experience in this area.

The important thing is to be clear as to what you are committing to and whether there is any flexibility on time.
**WHAT YOUR SPONSORS CAN DO FOR YOU**

**Introduction**

There is the obvious issue of money, but never view sponsorship in terms of cash alone. There are a host of other ways that a sponsor can support you in your daily life as a full-time athlete. Approach companies that offer specific products or services that will be of value to you, and see if they are prepared to supply them to you either free of charge or at a discounted rate.

Bear in mind that many smaller companies with little or no experience of sponsorship won’t be savvy enough to know that they can help you in any way but financially. In these cases you will have to identify alternative opportunities that they may not have considered, such as the following:

**Products**

An obvious example is for your sponsor to offer you a weekly, monthly or annual quantity of product they produce, either free of charge or at discounted rate.

If you take time to study your annual expenditure on certain products that you habitually require in your daily life as an athlete, you will probably find that it amounts to a significant sum. Why not ask a company to take this financial burden away from you by providing the product for free? This will be of little or no cost to the sponsor, so less of a commitment for them than providing cash. In return you can offer them all the benefits discussed elsewhere in this document and effectively endorse their product or service.

Here are some examples of products that you could consider:

- Clothing – performance gear, training kit and formal wear
- Footwear – training shoes, performance shoes and casual footwear
- Sports drinks
- Nutritional supplements (energy bars etc.)
- Food and drink (request a monthly allowance from a local supermarket)
- Training equipment (either to hire or to keep)
- IT equipment (Laptop, printer and software)

**Services**

Again, look at your expenses and find out which areas are costing you the most money. Try to identify where a service provider could help you as part of a sponsorship agreement.

- Free or discounted membership from a local gym or health club
- Private health cover from an insurance company
- Free legal advice from a firm of solicitors (this may not seem of great value as you start out in your sport, but the higher your profile the more valuable this will become)
- Car insurance from a motor insurance group
- A preferential mortgage rate from a local mortgage broker
- Free broadband connection from an Internet service provider
- A free handset and monthly call allowance from a mobile phone company

**Travel Costs**

Travel is not just time consuming, it’s expensive too and many of you will no doubt travel long distances to reach your training centres, attend team meetings or compete at events.

Identify and approach sponsors that may be able to help you with these costs.

- Ask a local garage to contribute to your weekly petrol expenses
- Approach local car dealerships about the free use of a courtesy car. In return, offer them the opportunity to brand the car (e.g. Normand Continental VW, Official Sponsor of Joe Bloggs, GB Team)
- Contact airlines to enquire about the possibility of free flights (particularly relevant to athletes who regularly travel abroad to either compete or train)

**Accommodation Expenses**

Accommodation is another huge expense. Whether it’s paying your monthly rent or meeting accommodation costs whilst you are away from home training or competing. Try approaching hotel groups about the possibility of receiving discounted overnight stays in its hotels in the UK and overseas.
Business Networking Introductions
If you develop a close relationship with your sponsor, ask them to assist you with networking opportunities by introducing you to useful business contacts.

Local Authority/Council Inventory
Very few local authorities will be able to offer athletes any kind of financial support, but some may have sports awards that athletes may be able to apply for. These will usually be mentioned on the Council or Local Authority website. The majority won’t have a line in their budget for this kind of investment. They may, however, be in a position to offer inventory that could be of use to your personal sponsors.

If you are a swimmer, for example, and the council owns the space outside your club, they may be able to offer this to your sponsor for a period of time in order for them to distribute promotional leaflets or display product (e.g. cars).

Likewise, if the swimming pool is owned and run by the council, find out if they would be prepared to offer poolside advertising free of charge to your sponsor.

PR Support
Most companies engaged in sponsorship employ specialist sponsorship/PR agencies to help them manage and activate their sponsorship programmes. Some larger companies will also have their own, in-house sponsorship resource. As part of your sponsorship agreement, suggest that the sponsor’s agency actively promotes you (and, by association, your sponsor) in local, regional and national media.

This will probably happen as a matter of course but you should make a point of liaising closely with these agencies to ensure that they are up to speed with your activity and achievements. They will be industry specialists with excellent media contacts and their support should ensure that you get maximum media exposure.

Staged Payments
If you do ask your sponsor for money, bear in mind that it may be easier for a company to swallow staged payments rather than a large lump sum in one go. This could be based on any of the following:

> Basic monthly payments (e.g. £50 per month for two years = £1,200)
> Performance related bonuses (e.g. 1st place in national event = £200 bonus, Top 20 = £500 bonus, Qualify for the Olympic/Paralympic Games = £1,000 bonus etc.)
> Media related (e.g. coverage in local paper = £250 per mention of sponsor or branding visible). Be careful when structuring this; if branding is key, ensure you get more credit if you make the front page of The Times! This method will require vigilance and awareness on your part to know where and when an article may appear. So whenever speaking to journalists, take care to ask whom they report for and when the article is likely to feature.
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This is an extremely important section. All successful sponsorships are about nurturing mutually beneficial, long-term relationships. Sponsorship is not something you enter into lightly. You will have to be prepared to put in the commitment and time needed to make it a success. The harder you work at it, the more chance you have of sustaining a long and fruitful relationship.

The biggest mistake you can make is to think that your work is done once your sponsorship agreement has been signed and sealed. This is just the beginning. No matter how well you perform in your chosen sport, if you are not committed to the relationship and not making efforts to make it work, then it may all come to nothing.

COMMUNICATION

A key to a successful, long-term relationship is communication. This is critical and can often make or break a sponsorship. Find out what your sponsor wants from you and from the relationship and make every effort to deliver this. Be careful not to over commit. Never compromise your performance by promising more than you can deliver but always do your best to meet and, if possible, exceed your sponsor’s expectations.

Always keep your sponsor up-to-date with what you are doing. Some of your achievements or activities that may seem insignificant to you but will probably seem of much greater significance and interest to your sponsor, so open up a regular line of communication to enable you to keep them fully up to speed. There are several ways that you can do this.

> Send a monthly report on your activities, results and upcoming schedule, no matter how minor
> A quick phone call from each event or a postcard from the various venues around the world is another
> Keep a record of all your press coverage
> Inform a sponsor in advance of events in case they wish to attend
> Meet with them two/three times a year, depending on how involved they wish to get
> Be proactive

This may seem a bit of a bind and an extra hassle but it is the most important element to the sponsorship.

MEDIA

Always look to identify opportunities where you can deliver added value to your sponsor. In this respect, press coverage is a vital tool.

> Develop a relationship with your local papers, radio and television stations
> Keep in regular contact with the sports desk
> Offer to write a weekly or monthly column
> Tell them where you are competing and send in your results. Be sure to highlight any PBs, SBs and, of course, medals won
> Talk to your local radio stations and build up a relationship
> Talk to your local television station; they are always interested in local stars. With digital television and 24 hour news channels, there is an increasing amount of air time to fill and everyone is looking for stories
> Always tell your sponsor when you are likely to get coverage so they can look out for it
> Tell sponsors if the event in which you are competing is televised
> Keep copies of all press cuttings
> Ask radio and television stations for a tape of your interview, most are happy to do this, but try to ask BEFORE you do the interview
> If you are the subject of an interview in the national, regional or local press, make every effort to credit your sponsor. Do this by wearing branded clothing in a newspaper photo or TV interview, or by crediting your success to the valuable support of your sponsor
> If the situation permits, agree to an interview request on the understanding that the newspaper will credit your sponsor at the end of the piece (i.e. ‘In association with Bovis Homes, sponsor of xx xx’)
> Keep a log of your interviews on radio and television

Develop these relationships with the media BEFORE you have a sponsor; it shows initiative and helps raise your profile in the local area. Strong relationships with the media will be a good selling point for you in your initial meeting.
GENERAL TIPS

Here are some general tips on how to deliver added value to your sponsorship relationship:

Memorabilia
Give a sponsor some signed kit or other memorabilia, either signed by yourself or other athletes at an event. Frame it if you can, it’s worth the extra money spent. They can use this for competitions among staff, fundraising etc.

Thank Yous
Remember to write and say thank you after successful events (e.g. without your support I would never have done it).

Meet And Greet
If a sponsor attends your event, make the effort to see them whether you WIN or LOSE. If you do lose there is no need to have an attitude with your sponsor; they can probably guess you feel bad.

Internet
Email your sponsor if you can with updates whilst you are away competing.

Community Links
Working in your local community is always good for a sponsor. It gives them a positive profile amongst the local community and enables you to build your profile amongst the local business community.

> Work with local clubs, in sports and others
> Work with schools in your area – involve your sponsor (unless their product is not appropriate for schools, e.g. credit cards, alcohol)
> Link with the local press for a special coaching session for local children or adults
> Offer prizes for schools, courtesy of your sponsor (e.g. clothing, equipment, tickets to events)

GENERAL CODE OF CONDUCT

Remember, when a company commits to sponsor you, it is effectively making you an ambassador for their brand. It is a public endorsement in you and a show of faith by the sponsor that you are worthy of representing their brand. There is therefore a huge responsibility on you to uphold that brand image. You should take this responsibility very seriously.

The way you carry yourself in public is all-important to your sponsor. Bad behaviour inevitably creates adverse publicity and this will reflect badly on you and, by association, your sponsor. Indeed, it could signal the end of your sponsorship, as most sponsors will safeguard themselves against such occurrences in the sponsorship contract.

> Be professional, presentable and courteous at all times
> Always remember that you are representing your sponsor
> Have respect for your sponsors and those of others
> Do not ignore event/competition sponsors as without them, you would not be competing
> Do not ignore National Governing Body or Olympic/Paralympic sponsors as they too are critical to your success
> Each sponsor has their time for exposure and a piece of the action, make sure your sponsor understands this (most do)
> Be loyal, but not at the expense of others; that is unprofessional
INTRODUCTION

Sponsoring a sporting personality is arguably the highest risk area for any sponsor.

No athlete can be guaranteed success, neither can they always behave in a manner that the sponsor would wish. Injuries can take athletes out of action for months, even years, whilst bad behaviour can reflect on the brand and poor form can see athletes eliminated from competitions at an early stage. Similarly, the popularity of individual sports can increase and decrease over time. This is why sponsors increasingly use contracts to minimise the risk to their investment. On the whole though, contracts tend to reward good behaviour and performance rather than penalise misbehaviour or bad form.

Although considered one of the highest risk areas, sponsoring a sporting personality also offers some of the greatest rewards for brands.

There are several areas that a sponsor will consider when committing sponsorship to an athlete. They include:

> Exposure
> Behaviour
> Activities
> Conflicting endorsements

Dealing with athletes is about creating relationships. In an ideal world, your sponsor will draw up a contract and then never refer to it again due to the close working relationship and level of trust between you. A sensible sponsor will not put you under a great deal of pressure and will rarely want to penalise you financially should you under perform or fail to fulfil contractual obligations. The best approach by sponsors is to incentivise athletes through the offer of bonuses.

Bonuses can be awarded when athletes deliver an expected level of behaviour and media exposure. You may also wish to suggest to your sponsors that they offer additional bonuses should you exceed the expected performance.

Some sponsors insist on including a clause in the sponsorship agreement, protecting them in case the athlete’s poor behaviour adversely affects the company’s image. An ‘opt out’ clause is not unusual, should an athlete cause such damage to the brand that the future of the relationship is put in jeopardy.

Most sponsors will also wish to protect themselves against an athlete signing a deal with a conflicting brand or product, insisting that you agree to avoid any public association with other brands within that industry sector. The level to which this is enforced will depend greatly upon your public profile. A high profile athlete could be in the position to negotiate a sports shoe sponsorship and a separate casual shoe sponsorship with a different supplier. A lesser-known athlete, however, may have to agree a deal whereby the sponsor becomes his or her exclusive footwear supplier. This could depend on the level and value of the agreement – a company might pay enough for an exclusive deal.
CONTRACTS AND LETTERS OF AGREEMENT

Take time and careful consideration over this as it is the most important step at the start of any relationship and a fallback in case of any future issues. A simple ‘letter of agreement’ will usually suffice, though this will depend upon the value of the sponsorship agreement and the size of the company you are dealing with. In the case of higher profile athletes in high value agreements with large companies, a contract is usually the preferred option.

Here are some key points to consider when formulating a contract or Letter of Agreement (LOA):

> Always get a commitment in writing
> Write down everything that you agreed (make notes during your meetings)
> Take advice on what you are committing to
> Do not commit to anything you cannot be sure to deliver; don’t make promises you can’t keep
> Keep it simple; avoid too much legal jargon if you can (this may not always be possible)
> Make sure they are aware of other sponsors that may be involved, e.g. competition/event sponsors, national team sponsors, Olympic sponsors etc.

The important thing is to have a clear statement of what you and the sponsor have agreed and, if possible, ask a lawyer or solicitor to look over the agreement before you sign it.

You should continually reassess how your sponsor can help you. You might find that what was originally agreed in your contract is no longer relevant and that their support would be better served in other areas. Ultimately your sponsor will want to see you perform and succeed at the highest level and will want to support you in the best way you feel fit, so don’t be afraid to take the lead here.

In the case of contract disputes, athletes are advised to seek advice from SDRP (Sports Dispute Resolution Panel), an independent body established in 1997 to address the growing and damaging threat of sporting disputes. The SDRP should be consulted by athletes to help prevent potential disputes from going to court. For more information about the SDRP and its dispute resolution service, please visit: www.sportresolutions.co.uk

Disclaimer: This is not legal advice, just informative guidance.
KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Top Ten Things To Consider in an Athlete’s Sponsorship Contract;

1) With whom am I contracting?
You should not only be interested in the ability of a sponsor to pay money and deliver other benefits under an agreement with you but also its reputation. You will want a sponsor with good financial standing and reputation that will benefit your own status by association and certainly not detract from it. A sponsor who cannot pay in full and on time or damages your image is not worth having.

2) Cash and benefits
Check the payments you are receiving and set out any other benefits you are to receive in sufficient detail to make the agreement clear. Ensure that payments are exclusive of VAT, particularly if you are registered for VAT or you have a personal service company, and that payment dates are recorded. Your sponsorship value will increase if you perform well so try and negotiate bonuses which are payable on key performances (e.g. winning medals at championships, personal bests etc.).

3) What do you have to do?
Check to see if you have to attend functions, sign memorabilia, go to dinners (and whether expenses are included or not) etc. Ensure that you are comfortable with your obligations in terms of how many of these activities you are expected to undertake, how long each one may take and that your approval of any kit you are to use or clothing you are to wear is obtained. Ensure that your obligations do not interfere with training and competitions. A good sponsor will always understand – your value to them is dependent on you being a good athlete.

4) How long is the agreement?
The length (term) of the contract cuts both ways. The longer it is the more secure your guaranteed benefits but you are then tied into a payment structure that may be low if you are doing well. If you are a young athlete it is advisable to keep the term relatively short as your value can dramatically increase with good performances. Remember also that public interest in a particular sport can change overnight and be ready to take advantage of increased sponsorship values. Take particular care if a sponsor has the right to renew its agreement with you. When renewing an agreement, ensure that terms of the contract are reviewed as appropriate.

5) Early exit
If a sponsor fails to comply with its obligations under an agreement make sure you can get out of the agreement.

6) Excessive restrictions
Check that you are only giving away the rights that you need to give to a sponsor. If a sponsor only needs you to represent it in one country then don’t give away your rights worldwide. Make sure that if your Sponsor is a kit company it does not prevent you representing a company in another business sector, for example a food company or an airline. You should also think about making it clear that if you are part of a representative team (for country, county or club) and are required to wear something or take part in an activity which would be in conflict with the provisions of your agreement with a sponsor, then you are entitled to do so.

7) Additional support
Understand the nature of your sponsor’s business. They know what you can do for them and will pay for your services accordingly, but consider whether they can help you in a way that enhances your relationship, helps you and does not cost them much. Obvious examples are a car company that can supply a car for you to drive, an airline that can provide flights to competition/training venues etc. A discussion with a sponsor so your needs are understood and you understand the full range of their services can often throw up interesting opportunities. Don’t always ask for the obvious – be creative in what you can get from a company.

8) Clear language
Obvious but often overlooked – if you do not understand the agreement then do not sign it! Change it so that you do understand it.

9) Jurisdiction
All legal agreements are interpreted by reference to a country’s laws – make sure it is one that is convenient for you if there is a dispute and that you have an understanding of that country.

10) Legal advice
Last but not least, if in doubt get some advice from an expert. Not all lawyers understand sport but your National Governing Body should be able to put you in touch with one who does. An hour of advice can save you a fortune in time, money, lost opportunity and anxiety. It is your career, take care with it.

The British Athletes Commission (BAC) has links to several excellent sports law firms who can advise and assist on contract issues at preferential rates. For more information please go to www.britishathletes.org
Get Sponsored

A guide to sponsorship for athletes on the World Class Pathway