

# Sports Teams, Glendale Raptors A Community Touchstone

by Kurt Woock

Writer for and on behalf of the City of Glendale

Advertising in sports has a long tradition. For more than 100 years, Goodyear's iconic blimp has been floating over sporting events. Wheaties has been stamping the image of top athletes on its famous orange boxes since the 1930s (Lou Gehrig was the first). Ohio University unveiled a first-of-its-kind degree in sports marketing in 1966, and plenty of other schools have followed.

Bits of trivia like those are fun, but the reality of advertising and sports is serious business. Connecting businesses to customers and potential customers through sports is a juggernaut industry, worth tens of billions of dollars annually. People partner with sports teams and stadiums to become part of the fabric of the sporting experience. Sports fans are loyal, and they respect loyalty. The in-game experience is a community event filled with excitement and memories in the making. These are exactly the types of situations businesses want to be part of. Glendale Raptors and Infinity Park have been working with companies large and small since 2007. The perspectives of some of these sponsors illustrate the various ways sports can serve a key role in a marketing strategy.

Establishing and maintaining visibility is a crucial, ongoing task. Terri Fisher is president of 5 Star Talent and Entertainment, Inc., which produces and organizes entertainment, from musical acts to ice sculptors to magicians to comedians and more. Fisher works to ensure that 5 Star's advertising does



Armandt Peens of the Glendale Raptors takes a conversion kick in the Pacific Rugby Premiership Final in front of a home crowd at Infinity Park. Photos by Seth McConnell

more than plug the company name. She said it's important to make people curious about what your business offers and then demonstrate to customers that they have shared interests with your business. Advertising with the Raptors "Is a form of advertising 5 Star without making a hard sell," Fisher said. In a way, sports teams serve the role of a party host introducing guests to other guests; the team is something everyone knows and trusts. Instead of starting with skepticism or awkward conversation, guests begin with a mutual connection.

But not just any mutual connection will do. It's key that the particular traits of that "mutual friend" jibe with the traits you're looking to identify with. Jill Farschman, publisher of Denver Metro Media, said "rugby is a fast-growing sport, and Infinity Park is a world-class facility. Being associated with rugby and what's happening with the sport means you're innovative, leading edge." She added that the Raptors consist of both a men's and women's team, a plus when trying to reach a broad demographic. Broad reach is important to Farschman, who publishes Washington Park Profile, Life on Capitol Hill, and Neighborhood Life.

Farschman is not alone in her assessment. Kirsten Kreiling manages marketing and communications for the Raptors. The diversity of rugby fans is a major selling point for many businesses. "Some people are surprised to find out that our fans are almost an even split between men and women." The age range really varies widely: The family-friendly atmosphere and affordable tickets means that the rows of Infinity Park fill up with everyone from kids to grandparents.

Sports teams are adept at drawing a broad audience because they serve as a community touchstone — something everyone can rally around, talk about, and root for. Laura Nord, district manager for Potbelly Sandwich Shops, said that it was this role that stuck out to her when choosing to sponsor the Raptors. "Partnering with a neighborhood organization is most ideal for us, and the Glendale Raptors team is located closely to two of our sandwich shops and is a prominent attraction in the area. I hope our sponsorship reflects our passion behind connecting with the neighborhoods in which we are located." Tiphane Gumpfer, assistant community manager at Solana Cherry Creek, has similar aims as she builds the name recognition of Solana's apartment complex. "We are trying to build awareness and increase exposure to our new community in the area, and this was a great opportunity with the amount of people who attend events at Infinity Park."

The various aims and goals sponsors have range from debuting a business for the first time to thanking longtime patrons



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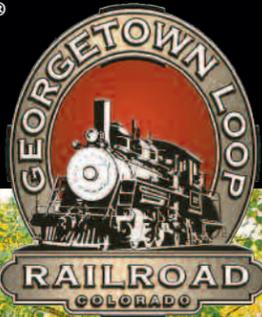


The Glendale Raptors Women win a line-out in front of their home crowd at Infinity Park for the Women's Premier League Final.

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of a cherished community institution. Partnering with a young, quickly growing team provides a level of personability and flexibility. Kreiling said she has several "pre-packaged" sponsorship levels as beginning points, however she added that "they are really just a starting point and a rough guideline for us to follow." She said she strives to customize sponsorship packages in a way that will best position sponsors to achieve their goals. For example, "some sponsors, may not have much of a social media following, so offering them social media tagging really isn't helpful to them. In cases like that, we look at some other types of fulfillment we can offer that will benefit the sponsor most." For those companies for whom web presence is important, the Raptors can deliver that crucial element. Kreiling said the team's various social channels have reached more than 3 million people. All the matches played in the stadium are live webcast; in addition to local fans not at Infinity Park, fans throughout the country and around the world are watching.

Reaching customers is not always easy. Despite a historic number of mediums through which to reach people it's easy to get crowded out. It takes creativity to break through. Finding forums of memorable experiences, like sports stadiums, is a start. Match that with an organization who will work with you to get your message across, and you have a winning formula.