

# Rugby Poses Unique Business Opportunity

by Kurt Woock

Writer for and on behalf of the City of Glendale

In 1984, then little-known shoe company Nike released the first Air Jordan. They had just signed Michael Jordan to a sponsorship deal after he entered the NBA. At the time, larger shoe companies balked at the \$500,000, five-year contract, which was the largest shoe deal ever to that point. Today the brand is one of the most recognizable apparel brands in the world, earns billions of dollars each year, and it continues to grow. It has proven to be one of the best investments in sports history.

Chances like that don't come around often. Major sports teams and players operate in a much more mature business environment than they were in the 1980s. It's harder to find that hidden gem. With that in mind, rugby presents a unique advertising possibility in American sports. The costs to enter are lower than in larger, more established sports. But the momentum found in rugby presents an opportunity. It's the fastest growing sport in the country.

An article in *Forbes* stated that rugby is "a market that many business-minded rugby people want to open up, much like soccer has opened up over the last 25 years." A recent *New York Times* article featured businessman Jason Moore, who is seeking to

host the Rugby World Cup in the U.S. He said rugby is a natural fit for the U.S. market, "Think of the NFL with no pads, lateral passing and six downs. We see rugby leagues, in this country, appealing to fans of the NFL and college football who are hungry for contact and physicality in sports." In other words, businesses that are getting in now are getting in on the ground floor.

Sponsors of *Infinity Park* and the *Glendale Raptors* know this well. Jill Farschman is publisher of *Denver Metro Media*, a sponsor at *Infinity Park*. She said the owners of *Denver Metro Media* were already rugby fans, which made becoming a sponsor an easy choice. But the sport's business potential was just as compelling a reason as was being a fan. Farschman said the sport's fast pace, interesting gameplay, and the fact that the Raptors have both a men's and women's team were key factors in becoming a sponsor. Glendale has made significant early investments in growing the sport in this country, an investment that Farschman said could pay off for sponsors as well as the team: "We support an amazing sport that is recognized around the world, and we want Colorado to be established as the epicenter for this exciting sport."

Terri L. Fisher, president of *5 Star Talent and Entertainment, Inc.*, runs a unique busi-



Sponsors enjoy Glendale's Bruises and Brews Beerfest in August.

ness. *5 Star Entertainment* works with entertainers from musicians to magicians to produce memorable experiences. She said that finding new customers to work with is easier with the Raptors than elsewhere, "Because rugby is still rather unique, *5 Star Talent and Entertainment's* association with it also makes us unique. Everyone wants to climb on the Broncos bandwagon — or the Nuggets, Avs, or Rapids. This is a smaller pond and we are a bigger player in it. You can maximize your marketing dollars with this type of sponsorship. And, it's a great deal of fun."

While smaller in relative terms, the Raptors also present an opportunity to reach a diverse, passionate group of fans, through a variety of means, including robust social media channels, high-value webcasts of each game, and international tournaments at *Infinity Park*. "The Raptors have put Glendale and Denver on the international sports map in a unique way and have introduced some exciting variety into the sports market that's only continuing to grow as rugby gains popularity," Fisher said.

Kirsten Kreiling manages marketing and communications for the Raptors. She doesn't view sponsorships as a line of billboards to sell. Instead, she looks for partnerships that will be mutually beneficial. "I look for sponsors that are a natural fit for

*Infinity Park* — brands that are marketing to our fans already and those that will be interested in developing a true partnership — being here on site, engaging with our fans, working with us to not only promote themselves but also *Infinity Park*, the *Glendale Raptors* and the *RugbyTown 7s* tournament and Beerfest," she said. "When I am first talking to a potential sponsor I always look for how sponsorship at *Infinity Park* is going to benefit them. So my "pitch" isn't necessarily about selling them on a sponsorship; it's often more finding out about their company, their clients, their programs."

That level of awareness and personal attention leads to results. Kreiling recalled one new sponsor that wasn't really sold on the agreement but went ahead with it anyway. "Within two months, the sponsor was telling me how terrific we are to work with and how we have delivered more value to them in the first two months than several of their other sponsorships with major sports teams in the U.S."

Between 2010 and 2015, youth participation in rugby programs doubled. Time will tell if one of those young players is the sport's Michael Jordan. While we won't know for a few more years if that's the case, fans and sponsors alike don't need to wait to take advantage of rugby's potential. They can do that today.



Block Advisors gets in the rugby spirit on game day. Photos by Kirsten Kreiling



Local radio station Mix 100 has some fun at Monday Movie Madness.

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Contact Jenna Anderson with questions  
[janderson@glendale.co.us](mailto:janderson@glendale.co.us) | 303.639.4713

Practices held at Glendale Sports Center at Infinity Park  
 4500 E. Kentucky Ave., Glendale, CO 80246

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