Traditional vs. Non-Traditional Sport Marketing: The Convergence of Comedy, Pop Culture, and Corporate Sponsorships

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As sport teams continually lose sponsorship and Olympic funded dollars they too are also looking for ways to raise the necessary funds to compete on one of the largest sporting platforms in the world. The U. S. Speedskating Team, after losing its primary sponsor DSB Bank NV in the wake of the company declaring bankruptcy and facing the prospect of running out of money to continue training for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, was saved from insolvency in November of 2009 by satirist and comedy star Stephen Colbert (Associated Press, 2009). Using his popular cable television show, the Colbert Report, as a vehicle to alert viewers to the team’s plight, Colbert entered into an agreement to serve as the team’s primary sponsor, with an expectation that the signature emblem of the show, The Colbert Nation, would be displayed prominently on team uniforms.

Using The Colbert Nation’s sponsorship of the U. S. Speedskating Team as a case example, this presentation will address the following questions: (a) how will U.S. Speedskating, the NGB, outside branding and satire experts, and the Colbert Nation view this sponsorship; (b) is the value of the Colbert Nation sponsorship worth it; (c) does this case present a new situation with the convergence of comedy, culture, and corporate sponsorship; (d) is the Colbert Nation sponsoring the team or the man; and (e) is this the future of funding in sports?

For this study the most viable and appropriate form of analysis is the case study. Case studies are a form of qualitative research and are defined as an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed, (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg, 1991). I will explore these questions and look to find trends in marketing practices through an extensive literature review while using the qualitative case study of the 2010 Olympic Speedskating Team’s sponsorship with Stephen Colbert and the Colbert Nation providing a framework for future non-traditional sponsorship model.