

SPORTS MARKETING TAKES SHAPE

With a growing economy, a major football championship to host next month and the world's two biggest sporting events to be held in neighbouring Brazil in the next five years, the short-term future looks bright for sports marketing in Argentina. **Dermot Ledwith** reports.

THE ROSTER OF SPONSORS lined up for the Copa America, which kicks-off in Argentina next month, is a clear reflection of how the world's biggest brands will be focusing on the region in the coming years.

Global names such as Kia, Canon, Coca-Cola, LG, MasterCard and Santander have signed up to sponsor the event, the latter three sharing the highest platinum status. The world's leading brewer, Anheuser-Busch InBev, will additionally replicate its multi-brand approach to sponsorship of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, promoting its Budweiser, Brahma and Quilmes brands at the tournament as its official beer sponsor.

A good starting point in the history of sports marketing in Argentina is February 26, 1983 when Boca Juniors ran out with wine producer Vinos Maravilla on their shirts, becoming the first Argentinian football club to embrace shirt sponsorship. Boca's shirt sponsor today is Korean-based LG while Nike has been a long-term kit provider and has a five-year deal with the club until 2015. Total and Coca-Cola are premium sponsors.

Over at fierce rivals River Plate, adidas provides the kit and MasterCard, Petrobras and Coca-Cola are among the sponsors. The national team has main agreements with Coca-Cola and Volkswagen - amongst others.

Other major backers of Argentinian sport include Visa - sponsors of Argentinian rugby since 1996 and basketball since 2004. Argentina's national basketball team, whose **men's outfit** won bronze at the Beijing Olympic Games, is kitted **out** by Chinese **manufacturer Li Ning** in a six-year deal signed in 2007.

Gerardo Molina, CEO of Buenos Aires sports marketing agency Euromericas, likens the marketing activity in Argentinian sport to the explosion of sports sponsorship in Europe during the 1990s. However, he warns that more needs to be done to steer away from "unprofessional thinking more in line with the last century than the future."

"There is a lack of structure and systematic processes to take full advantage of the opportunities available," he explains. "In a recent study, for example, we found that 82 per cent of football clubs in Latin America lack a sports marketing plan that takes into account modern concepts such as commercialising sport as a product or the changing perceptions of fans, athletes and TV."

Andres Stalman, of branding and design agency Cato Partners, believes there is room for improvement on the sponsor side: "Argentinian brands can do more to connect with sport. It's not about slapping on a logo anymore, brands need to engage with fans through social media and digital marketing and find more innovative ways to activate sponsorship agreements."

Luis Criscuolo, ex-Argentinian rugby international and managing director of Havas Sports & Entertainment in Buenos Aires, sees progress being made: "'Sports marketing' is still a recent term in Argentina. Until now sponsorship deals have generally been closed through personal contacts.

"Two years ago it was almost unheard of for a sponsor to ask for a study on ROI but last year we carried **out** two such audits and delivered two further consultancy projects to other brands.

"Various sports bodies have started to work with specialist sports marketing agencies, more qualified individuals are carrying out professional activities as part of marketing plans, with ROI as **the** ultimate goal, and **the number of courses and seminars** in sports marketing are increasing."

Havas signed an agreement with the Argentinian Tennis Association (AAT) in 2009 to act as its marketing and **communication** agency. Since then local oil company YPF has been signed **up** as a main sponsor, an AAT

'brands club' has been started. With a Davis Cup quarter-final in early July, commercial activity is at its height in Argentinian tennis.

For Chema Fernandez Diaz, country manager of marketing and advertising agency You First Argentina, the arrival of international agencies, such as his, has helped drive the Argentinian sports sponsorship sector: "We see a more professional approach from the sponsors than from the clubs or rights holders. In recent years we have introduced foreign brands such as Herbalife or Adecco and their experiences in other markets to Argentinian sport."

With the help of You First, human resources company Adecco has been a sponsor of the Argentinian Basketball League - Liga Nacional de Básquet (LNB) since 2008, using know-how from a long-term deal the brand has with the Spanish equivalent.

Basketball is a growth sport in Argentina, a report in local newspaper Olé placed it as second **in** popularity to football. Four Argentinians currently ply their trade in the National Basketball Association (NBA) and countless more across Europe.

The LNB only formed in 1984, but it was the Olympic gold medal won by the Argentinian men at the 2004 Athens Games that really brought the game to the nation's hearts.

Rugby union is another sport where huge strides are being taken. Argentina's growth **on** the world stage will come to fruition **in** 2012 as Los Pumas' compete for **the** first time against in the Tri Nations - against Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

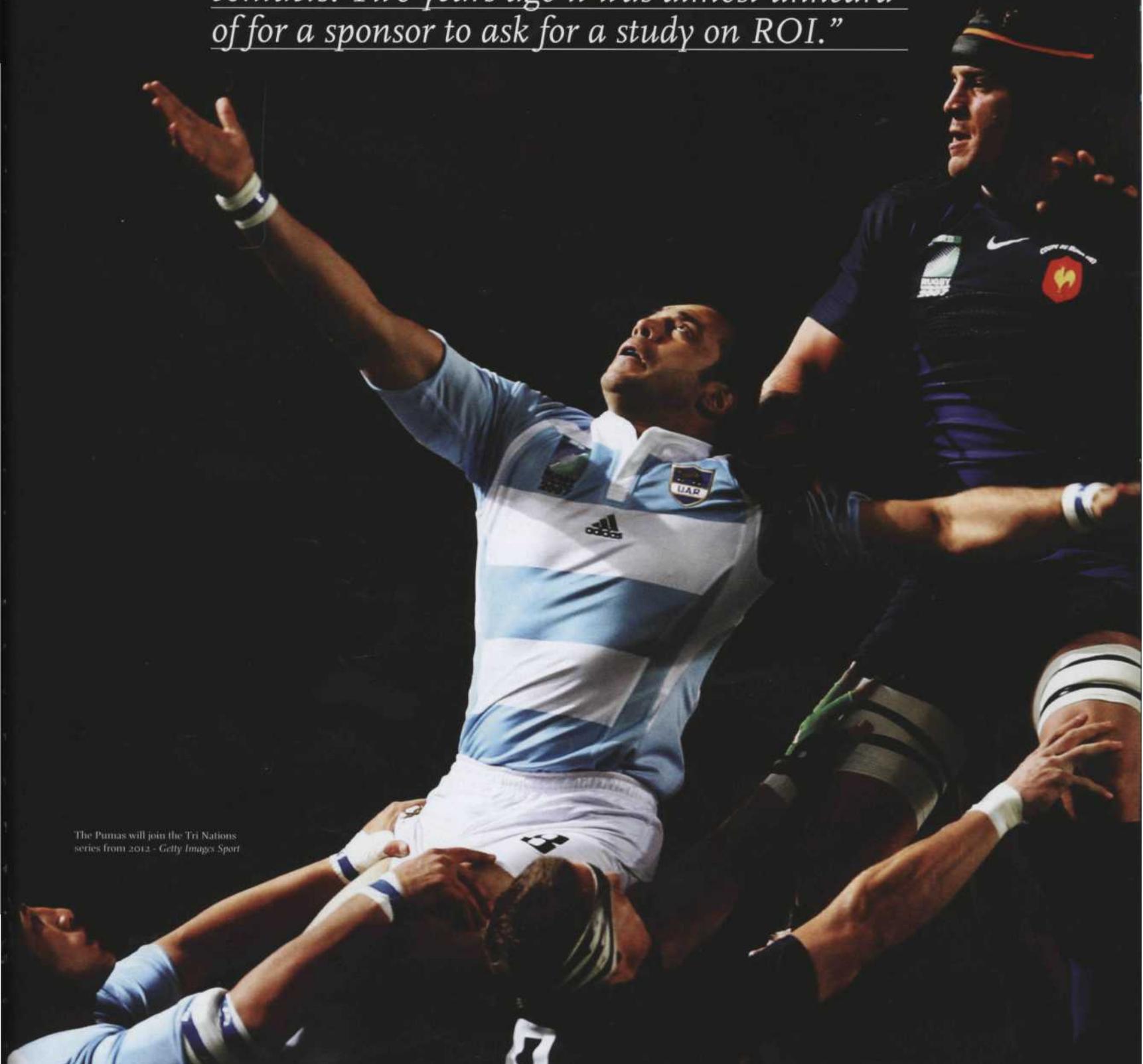
Attempts were initially made as long ago as 2007 to admit the team to the Six Nations, a logical possibility as the majority of the national team earn their living in **Europe**.

However the long-term benefits of Argentinian rugby were taken into consideration when the **International Rugby Board** finally decided in 2009 that, as a southern hemisphere team, the Pumas should play in the **Tri Nations** series **from** 2012. A study **commissioned** by MasterCard into the **economic** impact of the championship predicts a local injection of \$8 million to \$12 million for each match hosted in Argentina.





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The Pumas will join the Tri Nations series from 2012 - Getty Images Sport