



Looking to raise awareness in Latin America - Getty Images Sport

BRIDGE-ING THE GAP

Bridgestone is in position to become the dominant sponsor in South American club football. Luke Harman of Sports Marketing Frontiers explains why.

WHEN BRIDGESTONE SIGNED its five-year deal to become the title sponsor of the Copa Libertadores from **2013** to **2017** in December, many speculated renewing its title sponsorship of the Copa Sudamericana, South America's second-tier continental club competition after the Copa Libertadores, would not be an option.

Not the case. Matias Borges, Bridgestone's sales and marketing director for Latin America, says the tyre manufacturer is in talks with CONMEBOL (the South American Football Confederation) to renew the deal, an agreement that would see it become the de facto leading sponsor of club football across the continent.

"We are still the sponsor and we are in negotiations with the representative of the rights [Uruguayan agency Tenfield]," he told *Sports Marketing Frontiers*. "We would like to be there and we are also thinking of using [subsidiary tyre brand] Firestone."

Bridgestone has title sponsored the Copa Sudamericana for the past two years, agreeing two one-year contracts in **2011** and **2012**. Sponsorship of both properties would provide the company with a year-round presence in South American football as the Copa Libertadores takes place from January to July, and the Copa Sudamericana from July to December.

Bridgestone's Copa Libertadores deal is the company's largest ever sponsorship investment in Latin America and *Sports Marketing Frontiers* understands it is worth about **50** per cent more than the sum paid by the previous title sponsor, Santander bank, from **2008** to **2012**. However, the fee is much lower than the **\$20** million-per-year figure that has been reported by some media.

In many ways, Bridgestone has been playing

catch-up in the South American market, with tyre brands such as Goodyear, Pirelli and Michelin having achieved high levels of brand awareness in the region. Precisely the reason it turned to sport.

"Bridgestone is a very well known company globally but the issue in Latin America is it's considered a very new brand," says Borges. "To achieve a growth in awareness we decided to enter into football in Latin America.

"In order to have a big impact we identified the Copa Sudamericana and the naming rights [to the tournament]. The second important objective was the pronunciation of the [Bridgestone] brand name - it's an English word and not easy for people in Latin America to pronounce.

"We needed people to hear the brand a lot in the media so we made arrangements with some channels that were broadcasting the matches, mainly Fox Latin America, for the journalists and commentators to talk about Bridgestone a lot."

Rival tyre company Continental has a strong position in football sponsorship in South America thanks to its sponsorship of the **2013** FIFA Confederations Cup and **2014** World Cup, both to be played in Brazil. Borges, however, does not consider Continental to be a direct challenger.

"Continental's presence in the World Cup is of course something all brands would like to have," he says. "But in terms of business it is not one of the key players. It has been investing and is growing, mainly in Brazil and in Mexico, but not much more than that."

The Copa Libertadores is also sponsored by five official sponsors, the tier below title sponsorship: Visa, Samsung, Makita, Santander and Toyota. Toyota was title sponsor of the tournament from **1998** to **2007**.