



College football fans love beer. Now universities want to cash in

By Diana Kruzman, Sophia Tulp 7:52 pm EDT August 9, 2017

The 12-ounce can features an anthropomorphic green wave, scowling angrily and brandishing a megaphone with the word “Tulane.”

The image shows an Instagram post from NOLA Brewing. At the top left is the NOLA Brewing logo and name, and at the top right is a 'Follow' button. The main content is a promotional graphic for 'ANGRY WAVE BEER TO HIT SHELVES THIS FALL'. The graphic features a large green wave character with a scowling face and a megaphone. Text on the graphic includes 'GREEN WAVE BEER', 'NOLA BREWING CO.', and 'Green Wave'. A descriptive paragraph on the right reads: 'A One, A Two, Helluva HULLABA-BREW! A filtered version of the more common Hefeweizen, this wheat beer features unique flavors and does well on fruit salad. It's big, with little big bitterness and a moderate level of alcohol. This is a beer for all seasons and is truly a satisfying beer for football, basketball or football! Cheers to those who love beer.' The post has 114 likes and 4 comments. The caption reads: 'Cheers to @tulanegreenwave! #GreenWaveBeer is coming 'atcha this Fall!''. The date is 'JULY 6' and there is an Instagram icon in the bottom right corner.

That's the new Green Wave Beer, named after Tulane University's athletic teams — the result of a partnership between Tulane and a local brewing company, which the school announced on July 6.

Beer and college football have long been linked, but deals like this one are on the rise as campuses cozy up to brewers.

As nationwide sales have stagnated, beer companies are trying new tactics aimed at college sports fans in particular, evoking school spirit in ad campaigns and even in the beer they brew.

“There is movement all over the country for universities to start selling alcohol and accepting alcohol companies' sponsorships,” said David Jernigan, the director of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Johns Hopkins University. “To the extent that they're lending their mascots, allowing companies to put their ads in the university's colors.”

Universities, seeing the potential for profit, are starting to agree to beer sponsorships and relax their stringent alcohol policies in many stadiums — even as some researchers warn that exposure to alcohol advertising can lead to unhealthy student habits and risk undoing the industry's efforts to discourage underage drinking.

“Studies have consistently found that the more exposure students have to alcohol marketing, the more likely they are to start drinking,” Jernigan said. “This is further embedding and normalizing alcohol use on college campuses, in college populations.”

Still, more campuses are stepping up:

- On July 26, the University of Houston named Bud Light its official beer, making it available for sale during athletic events. And the beer's parent company, Anheuser-Busch, has the rights to use elements of the university's brand in its marketing.
- The University of Texas-Austin announced a similar partnership with Corona in July, the first for that beer company with a university. The campaign — taglined “Horns up, Limes In!” — will include a special “Corona Beach House” tailgate area located near the university's football stadium, where fans can take photos with Corona's “iconic” Adirondack chair, the company said.
- Like Tulane, Louisiana State University and the University of Louisiana-Lafayette have both made branded beer deals with breweries in recent years.

The results of those deals might be spotted at tailgates, but brewers are making inroads inside the stadiums, too.



Louisiana State University is one of numerous schools making alcohol deals. (Photo: Edmund D. Fountain for USA TODAY)

The number of universities allowing alcohol at sporting events has grown. In the past month alone, Purdue University, Marshall University and California State University-Fresno have introduced or expanded alcohol sales in their sports arenas. And last spring, LSU said it was [planning to put](#) a beer garden in the stadium instead of selling it at concession stands.

The alcohol industry news site VinePair reported in 2015 that 34 college stadiums allowed the sale of alcohol, a figure that doubled over the previous six years. Currently, the SEC restricts alcohol sales in stadiums, but the *Tuscaloosa News* [reported](#) in April that those rules might be relaxed.

And these sales can mean big money. [Ohio State](#) reportedly made over \$1.1 million in alcohol sales in the 2016 season, its first season of selling alcohol in the stadium. UT Austin [brought in](#) over \$3.3 million last fall from [stadium sales](#), a 70% jump over the previous football season.

The growth in alcohol-university partnerships reflects beer companies' desire for expansion at a time when beer sales growth isn't keeping up with spirits and wine, particularly among Millennials.

According to the Beverage Information Group, beer sales by volume at U.S. bars and restaurants declined 3% from 2014 to 2015, and U.S. beer volume sales declined 1.2% through the first 50 days of 2017, according to data from market research firm IRI Worldwide.

Millennials of legal age account for 35% of U.S. beer consumption and 32% of spirits consumption, according to [Nielsen](#). In comparison, the [Wine Market Council](#) reports that they consume 42% of all wine in the U.S.

“College students are making brand choices that will last,” says Gary Wilcox, a professor who researches alcohol advertising at UT Austin. “If (companies) can get to you in college and build a relationship, that relationship will typically last a long time.”

But universities’ growing affinity for beer brands – whether in stadium sales, exclusive brews or branding rights — has raised concerns among health experts who study how college students drink.

In the 2015 Monitoring the Future study, which tracks the drug habits of children and young adults, 63.2% of college students reported drinking alcohol in the past month – while a separate report found that 1.2 million students drink on an average day. Jernigan said that seeing advertisements for alcohol can encourage students to take up drinking, and to drink excessively once they do.

Advertising toward college students is particularly troublesome, Jernigan said, because their brains are still developing, creating a “window of vulnerability for high-risk behaviors.”

Universities insist the focus is on fans — including alumni — not students, and on responsible consumption.

David Bassity, senior associate athletic director for communications at the University of Houston, said the UH and Bud Light partnership places an emphasis on enjoying responsibly.

“We always encourage of-age and responsible use,” Bassity said. “It’s something we are mindful of and promote.”

And at Tulane, Nathan Hubbell, general manager of sports marketing, says the booze is actually marketed towards older-season ticket holders and donors, as well as fans of coaches’ radio shows — who tend to be 21 or older.

“This isn’t something we’re advertising to students,” Hubbell said. “It’s not like we’re going to stick (beer) behind the student section at the stadium.”

UT Austin, which has the new deal with Corona, says it takes issues like binge drinking and underage alcohol consumption seriously, devoting resources to education and regulation among students. Jeff Orth, the associate athletics director for UT, says alcohol ads featuring the school aren’t aimed at students, but at the Longhorns’ fans and alumni.

“The messaging carries a responsibility message, whether it’s a phrase like ‘Relax responsibly’ or ‘21 means 21,’” Orth said. “Our partners are very focused on communicating that responsibility message because inherently we know our students are being exposed to that on some level.”



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Ashton Peebles, a rising junior at UT Austin, said advertisements he's seen linking Coors — another UT official marketing partner — to the university haven't impacted his decision of what beer to drink, or even whether to drink at all.

“The target seems to be football fans more than students,” Peebles said.

And yet, brands — like Dos Equis, which became the first-ever Official Beer Sponsor of the College Football Playoff last November — are finding creative ways to connect their branding with college.

The company's new “Most Interesting Man in the World,” Dos Equis quipped, “played college football in high school.”

Related: [5 schools where you can turn your taste for beer into a career](#)

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