

Action Replay



Nice Little Earners

Being a successful athlete can make you rich, very rich. Footballers, for instance, may get contracts involving staggering sums of money, often with bonuses for winning trophies. In many cases the actual sporting income is only a small part: tennis-player Maria Sharapova 'earns' around £15m a year, but well under a million of this is from prize money. The rest comes from advertising and endorsements, everything from rackets to handbags and cars. She is supposedly the third-richest athlete in the world.

Lewis Hamilton's racing driver outfit is covered with the names of companies he endorses: banks, mobile phones, whisky. Of course the sports stars need to have positive associations such as success, glamour and honesty. Advertisers will swiftly drop anyone who compromises these supposed standards, as shown by the consequences of the extra-marital escapades of golfer Tiger Woods.

The most recent example is Ryan Giggs, the role model footballer who committed the sin of having an affair and getting found out. Simon Barnes (writing in the Times, 27 May, in the wake of the Giggs revelations) castigated the humbug of the whole 'good guy' brand, where the appearance of virtue matters far more than the reality. But advertising, after all, is about stretching the truth, and is an industry built around humbug, so it's a bit much to complain about the sporting link specifically.

We must leave the last word to the American baseball pitcher, Dizzy Dean: "Sure I eat what I advertise. Sure I eat Wheaties for breakfast. A good bowl of Wheaties with bourbon can't be beat."

PB

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