

Biggest World Cup comeback so far: beer

June 14 2014, by Alexandre Grosbois

Brazil fought hard when FIFA insisted it overturn its ban on alcohol in stadiums, but the World Cup hosts lost, and with the tournament now under way it's official: beer is back.

After 11 years of stadium sobriety, FIFA and its sponsor Budweiser celebrated the suspension of Brazil's law against [alcohol](#) sales at matches—a bid to stop crowd violence—by pouring thousands of cold ones for fans at Thursday's opening game in Sao Paulo.

Fans could also buy Bud Zero and local brands Brahma and Brahma Zero, all owned by AB InBev, the world's biggest brewer.

Those will be the only alcoholic beverages on sale at matches, thanks to Budweiser's contract to sponsor the World Cup until 2022, a deal estimated to be worth several million dollars a year.

Fans looking for caipirinhas or any other beer will have to find a street vendor—who, in another concession to FIFA, are kept well away from the stadium.

Last month the German Centre for Addiction Issues, a health lobby group, condemned the lifting of the ban for the World Cup and last year's Confederations Cup warm-up tournament.

"It is a health, political and security scandal," said Raphael Gassmann, the organization's director, warning [alcohol sales](#) were linked to violence.

"Economic interests must not prevail over the health and security of spectators."

FIFA rejected the group's criticism.

"Budweiser and AB InBev have long been involved in promoting [moderate alcohol consumption](#) around the world," said a spokesman.

"They will continue to do so during the World Cup, to ensure that fans have an exceptional experience while consuming beer responsibly."

'Bullied' on beer

Two days before the opening match, the *British Medical Journal* published a report criticizing FIFA's conduct in Brazil and football's links with the booze business.

"Whichever country hoists aloft the trophy on 13 July the real winner will be the alcohol industry," it said.

FIFA "has a long record of championing the financial interests of its commercial partners, including Budweiser, the tournament's official beer partner, by imposing extreme conditions on governments around the world."

These include tax waivers on any profits made by commercial partners during the World Cup and "bullying" the Brazilian government into suspending its stadium alcohol ban, it said.

FIFA said it just wants to put on a good World Cup and sought to highlight the benefits of beer sales.

"Our commercial partners share FIFA's ambition to have a positive

influence on health and sport," the spokesman told AFP.

"The revenues from sponsorship operations allow FIFA to put in place football development projects in its 209 member countries, as well as 'FIFA 11 for Health'" —a program to promote football as exercise.

Though it lost the alcohol battle, Brazil did manage to win some small victories in its wrangling with FIFA.

Petitions in host cities Salvador and Recife forced FIFA to cave in and allow stadium sales of two favorite local foods—acaraje, an iconic black-eyed pea fritter, and tapioca, a crepe made with cassava flour.

It's up to fans whether or not to wash them down with a cold Bud.

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