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Columns

The Game: New Sports Museum Has Balls; Gillette Sharpens MLB Focus

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THE long anticipated opening of the Sports Museum of America comes this week, letting fans see up-close and personal a plethora of artifacts, interactive features and marketing alliances.

The Sports Museum, located not far from where the Freedom Tower and other World Trade Center destinations are being built, is a key part of New York's lower Manhattan revitalization. Fittingly, exhibits pay tribute to the thrills of victory and agonies of defeat, with thousands of pieces of memorabilia from more than 60 sports halls of fame and museums.

Marketing partners include American Airlines and Cisco Systems, the exclusive technology-solutions provider that has made this what might be the most high-tech, interactive museum in the world. Numerous other companies are interested in partnerships. But as John Paul Basile, vp-marketing and sales at the Sports Museum, explained, "We have to be smart about how we tie in sponsors. Each sport and [participating] hall of fame and museum has their own partners. So instead of a sponsor for the baseball exhibit, for example, we would look for someone to sponsor great coaches or women in sports."

Marketing, focused on outdoor and print in New York, coincides with a May 7 opening. One creative with tennis great Billie Jean King references the upcoming Olympics: "Think it's hard to win for your country? Try winning for your gender." An ad showing Jackie Robinson shaking hands with Brooklyn Dodgers' teammate Duke Snider reads, "Sometimes politicians lead our country. Sometimes athletes do."

Lead agency is The Gate Worldwide, New York. Octagon, New York, has been working to secure corporate partners. The Sports Museum's founder and CEO is Philip Schwalb.

Among other potential events, the Sports Museum (www.Sportsmuseum.com) is in discussions with the U.S. Tennis Assn. to host the seeding selection for the U.S. Open in August. As permanent home for college football's Heisman Trophy, the presentation in December could be at the museum, in conjunction with ESPN.

"Some might say this is too much sports," said Basile. "But as one of our ads reads, 'When you list the loves of your life, is sports first or second?'"

Gillette Aligns Rookies, Razors

Gillette has ramped up activation to attract a young, male demo, recently adding more Nascar drivers and an online fantasy game to its "Young Guns" marketing program and last week becoming the first official sponsor of MLB's rookie of the month award. Gillette has been an MLB partner since 1939. This deal does not include the rookie of the year award, initiated in 1947 when Jackie Robinson was selected by the Baseball Writers Assn. of America (it is now called the Jackie Robinson

Award).

The Boston-based unit of Procter & Gamble will support with marketing featuring spokesman Fred Lynn, who in 1975 was named both rookie of the year and MVP of the American League. Among other venues, Lynn will be part of Gillette's presence during the All-Star Game and FanFest this July in New York. Gillette will use rookies who are honored each month in subsequent activation. Gillette and MLB will incorporate online, POP and in-stadium venues to direct people to MLB.com/Gillette, where for the first time they can participate in the voting. Fans now control 20% of the monthly vote while baseball writers and broadcasters retain 80%.

"Along with our Young Guns program, this is just a natural fit for Gillette to speak to younger consumers," said Mike Norton, Gillette's director of communications. "This really aligns Gillette with baseball's young players and brings fans one step closer to the game."

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