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CAMPAIGN SPOTLIGHT

Bats in This Museum Don't Have Wings

By STUART ELLIOTT

A campaign is promoting the newest museum in New York as the house that Ruth built — and Heisman and Owens and Ali and King and Craig and Namath and Chastain and ...

The museum is the Sports Museum of America, which opened on May 7 in Lower Manhattan, at 26 Broadway in the old Standard Oil Building. The campaign, by a New York agency named The Gate Worldwide, presents the museum as a special place that celebrates the power of sports.

The marketing budget for the museum, including its Web site (sportsmuseum.com) and public relations, is estimated at about \$3 million.

The campaign is composed of print, outdoor and transit advertisements as well as the Web site, which describe the museum as “the nation’s first and only all-sports experience.” The ads all feature a pennant bearing the museum’s logo, designed by FRCH Design Worldwide in Cincinnati, and use lettering for the headlines that is evocative of the typeface for varsity letters.

The reference to the “all-sports experience” is meant to signal the partnerships between the museum and more than 60 halls of fame, national governing bodies and sports organizations around North America.

Those ties give the museum access to artifacts, exhibits and tchotchkes from sports that include baseball, basketball, football, soccer, swimming, tennis and track and field. There are also interactive displays that enable visitors to simulate what it is like to be, say, a hockey goalie or a Nascar driver.

Admission to the museum is costly: \$27 for adults; \$24 for students and senior citizens; and \$20 for children ages 4 to 14. (There are group discounts available.) The museum is a for-profit venture; its founder, Philip Schwalb, spent almost seven years and an estimated \$90 million to get it started.

In addition to honoring Babe Ruth, the museum pays tributes to the likes of John Heisman, of Heisman Trophy fame; Jesse Owens; Muhammad Ali; Billie Jean King;



Print ad from the Sports Museum of America campaign.

Jim Craig, the goalie of the 1980 United States men’s Olympic hockey team; Joe Namath; and Brandy Chastain of the United States women’s national soccer team.

The exhibits include the bra that Ms. Chastain revealed during the celebration of her team’s victory against China in the 1999 Women’s World Cup; the American flag that Mr. Craig draped over himself when celebrating his team’s “miracle” win of the gold medal; the original Heisman Trophy (the museum will be the trophy’s new permanent home); and Ms. King’s report card from fourth grade.

“These are people who have transcended games, who speak to what sports means to us as a people,” says John Paul Basile, vice president for marketing and sales at the museum.

“We have a bigger story to tell than being the national museum of sports,” he adds, centered on “what sports means as part of the larger culture.”

That is demonstrated in the approach being taken by the initial ads in the campaign.

“When you count the loves of your life, is sports first or second?” the headline of one ad asks. The text begins: “Sports has the power to inspire laughter, tears, hope, faith, loyalty and love. And now, so does one museum.”

A second ad, showing the familiar photograph of Ms. Chastain celebrating in her bra, carries this headline: “Work hard and one day kids may hang posters of you in their bedrooms.”

A third ad, which includes a photo of Jackie Robinson playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers, carries this headline: “Sometimes politicians lead our country. Sometimes athletes do.” The text talks about athletes “who didn’t only rewrite the record books. They rewrote the history books.”

And a fourth ad, showing Ms. King shaking hands with Bobby Riggs during their “battle of the sexes” tennis match, carries this headline: “Think it’s hard to win for your country? Try to win for your gender.”

At the same time, Mr. Basile says, the campaign tells potential visitors to the museum that “not

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only are you going to learn and be inspired, you're going to have a tremendous amount of fun."

That is conveyed in an ad that shows children playing football in what looks to be the 1950s. The headline asks this question: "How old were you when you wrote your Heisman Trophy acceptance speech?"

The text mentions how visitors to the museum can see the trophy — and touch it, too — and ends this way: "Just remember, if you decide to make a speech while you're standing there, make sure you thank your mother."

That light-hearted tone pervades the campaign. For example, the ad about Ms. King describes how the museum includes the Billie Jean King International Women's Sports Center and the first women's sports hall of fame.

"One visit and everyone will play like a girl," the ad concludes.

The ad that asks if sports is a first or second

love ends with this advice: "So plan a trip with that special someone in your life. But please, try not to get all emotional until you get there."

And an ad that suggests the museum is "heaven to a sports fan" discusses its offerings and concludes, "Talk about prayers being answered."

The entertaining tack reflects that the museum is competing for attendees not only with other museums in New York but also with "Broadway shows and sports events," says David Bernstein, executive creative director at The Gate Worldwide.

"It's not just about what the museum has," he adds, "but also the feelings it brings up in you."

"There's a universal truth here to get you to come downtown, to come to the museum," Mr. Bernstein says.

It is that sports touches on "all the issues that impact our culture and our personal lives," he adds.

"Sports tells you everything you need to know," Mr. Bernstein says, adding with a laugh, "I learned geography from where all the baseball teams were."

The print ads are running in newspapers that include The Daily News, The New York Post and The New York Times and magazines like New York.

The outdoor and transit ads are appearing as posters in the subway, on bus shelters and the sides of buses.

The ads for the museum also include the logo of Cisco Systems, which is described as its "founding sponsor." Cisco is sponsoring an exhibit about "ballparks of the future," Mr. Basile says, echoing a feature that the company sponsors on the Web site of Major League Baseball (mlb.com).

Baseball fans with long memories are asked not to confuse Cisco with Galen Cisco, the former pitcher and pitching coach.