There is important business to be done around the 2014 FIFA World Cup. As usual, sports brands that make football a main focus, have tried to impress star players and the buying public that their most recent innovations are worth investing in.



Brands brush up for Brazil 2014

Every four years, football's governing body, FIFA, sets up camp in a carefully chosen host country and organises the greatest tournament in this or, arguably, in any sport, the World Cup. Brazil is hosting the 2014 event, in which 32 national teams will compete. Twelve different Brazilian cities will stage matches between June 12 and July 13, with the opening game between Brazil and Croatia taking place in São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro the venue for the grand final.

Sports brands love the World Cup because pictures of star athletes wearing their shirts, boots and training gear appear on screens and newspaper pages everywhere for days on end and fans all over the world queue up to buy team shirts and other merchandise. In short, the FIFA World Cup is good for business.

Brands know, however, that they need to include new offerings specifically for the World Cup to attract consumers. Fans, children and adults, male and female, want products that specifically mention and are clearly associated with Brazil 2014.

The most obvious battlefield for the brands is shirts. They exchange big contracts with the national associations whose teams generate large volumes of replica shirt sales among supporters. The three biggest football brands in the world, adidas, Puma and Nike, will all be widely represented at the finals. Nike is providing shirts to ten of the finalists, including big sellers such as Brazil, England and France, with the US, Croatia, Australia, South Korea, Greece, the Netherlands and Portugal completing the Nike roster.

Adidas will be the second-most-worn brand, with nine teams using its kit. These include the German national team, which is reported to

The official tournament ball is the Brazuca from adidas.

Adidas

have turned down an offer six times higher from Nike to remain faithful to a German brand. Other adidas teams in the competition will be current holders, Spain, as well as major contender for this year's trophy, Argentina and champions of Africa, Nigeria. Japan, Colombia, Mexico, newcomers Bosnia-Herzegovina and Russia will also wear adidas.

Puma will be in third place in terms of brand prominence. Its traditional ties with African football remain strong, with four of the continent's five representatives (Ghana, Cameroon, Ivory Coast and Algeria) wearing Puma. They will be joined by Italy, Chile, Switzerland and Uruguay, making eight teams in all. This leaves five competing nations with kit suppliers outside the big three (see panel).

Lighter and faster

Shirts from adidas use new textile technology called adizero. Each shirt weighs only 100 grammes, representing a weight saving of 40% compared to earlier materials, allowing footballers to become "even faster on the pitch", the company has said.

Another adidas contribution will be the official ball, called the Brazuca. Tested over a six-month period involving more than 30 teams in 10 countries, the technology incorporated into the bladder and carcass is identical to the UEFA Champions League ball. However, a new structural innovation with six identical panels and a different surface structure will provide improved grip, touch, stability and aerodynamics on the pitch, said the Germany sportswear company.

One pink, one blue

Puma has unveiled new boots for the FIFA World Cup in Brazil, a model called evoPOWER 1 Tricks, which includes one pink boot (officially beetroot purple) and one blue boot per pair. "Players who wear Tricks strongly believe in themselves, and not only strive to stand out on the pitch, they want to stand out for ever and make history," says the marketing spiel. It has a one-way stretchable upper made from a proprietary microfibre called AdapLite to allow for natural foot mechanics and mimic a barefoot kicking motion, Puma says. There's a lightweight Pebax outsole with a combination of bladed and conical studs, suitable for use on firm natural surfaces.

Italy's Mario Balotelli said in characteristically frank terms: "I have to be honest, the first time I saw the Tricks boots, I thought the Puma guy was mad. But when I realised he wasn't, I was already excited. The evoPOWER looks cool in these special colours; it is definitely unique." Other players who will wear the boots include Cesc Fàbregas of Spain, Sergio Agüero of Argentina, Marco Reus of Germany and Yaya Touré of Ivory Coast.



Nike is supplying more team shirts for Brazil 2014 than any other brand, with ten.

Nike

On May 17, Uruguay's Diego Godín was one of the first to wear the boots in an official match and it was an auspicious start because his goal (albeit with a header) was enough to earn his club, Atlético Madrid, a 1-1 draw with Barcelona and its first Spanish league title in 18 years. While loudly praising the central defender's contribution on the night, commentators on Spain's Radio Nacional referred to his new boots as "la horterada del siglo", which translates loosely as the fashion faux pas of the century. Perhaps the Tricks are an acquired taste.

Shirts from Puma for all of its teams taking part in Brazil 2014 have as "an apparel innovation" PWR ACTV, which the company insists is a first-to-market use of both athletic taping and compression within the apparel. The ACTV tape is strategically placed within the

Puma's new evoPOWER 1 Tricks boots. The right shoe is pink; the left shoe is blue.

Puma



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Puma is supplying the kit for four out of the five African finalists at the 2014 FIFA World Cup, including Yaya Touré's Ivory Coast team.

Puma

garment to provide micro-massages on the skin, working with the player's body to help maximise performance and provide a faster, more effective energy supply to the active muscles. This, combined with underarm mesh inserts for increased breathability and freedom of movement, will give Puma athletes a competitive advantage at the tournament, it claims.

On and off the field

All home and away kits for the ten federations that will wear Nike in Brazil were showcased at an event in Madrid in April. The kits combine high-tech innovation to keep players cool, such as laser-cut ventilation, engineered mesh and Nike Dri-FIT technology, the brand stated. They are also environmentally sustainable, it claims, with each kit made from fabric that comes from recycled plastic bottles. Visually, each shirt features cultural design elements unique to each country.

Nike has also created a clothing collection for players to wear throughout the tournament, on and off the field. Dubbed the "athlete journey" collection, and overseen by Martin Lotti, creative director for Nike Football, it seeks to outfit players all the way from warm-ups, anthems, playing and training, to media appearances, travel and downtime in the training camp.

"The overall goal was to create iconic and memorable pieces for the players to wear throughout their time in Brazil," said Mr Lotti at the unveiling. "This is the biggest moment in their

On the small side

While big brands Nike, adidas and Puma battle it out among themselves for the big contracts with the biggest-selling teams, five of the 36 teams stand apart, with kits from smaller suppliers. Spanish manufacturer Joma will, once again, supply Honduras, Italian brand Lotto has made the shirts for Costa Rica and Ecuador will wear kit made by a local firm, Marathon.

Another interesting exception is Belgium, one of the strongest, most attacking and most exciting teams in the always-tough European qualification programme and the pick of many pundits to be something of a surprise package in the finals. With most of its players representing big clubs in big leagues around Europe, the Red Devils (as the team is known) are popular. However, the official supplier of the Belgian kit is small Swiss sports brand Burdda.

One story to come out in the build-up to the tournament has centred on complaints from the Iranian team about kit from Uhlsport. The German sports manufacturer issued a statement in May denying that it was responsible for problems with the quantity and quality of the gear Iran's players were being given. Media all round the world had picked up on comments from former Real Madrid coach, Carlos Queiroz, who now manages the Iranian national team, and from several prominent squad members, about socks and track suits shrinking after washing and being so under-supplied that the country's football authorities have told their players not to swap shirts with opponents at the end of their games.

"The claim that players have not received sufficient soccer jerseys for the tournament is wrong and absurd," said Uhlsport in its statement. "None of the soccer jerseys made for the World Cup can be worn for another match, as the national flags of both teams as well as the date of the match are imprinted on the chest. Iran will certainly receive the necessary number of jerseys and apparel for all games."

The company said claims that its socks were prone to shrinking are "just as wrong and absurd". It insisted all its products have undergone extensive testing and that none of the professional football clubs it supplies has ever experienced this problem. Its suggested explanation of the controversy is that "other forces" hoped to make personal gain from the partnership between Uhlsport and the Iranian Football Federation. Uhlsport alleges that when it refused to be party to any wheeling and dealing, complaints about its apparel began to surface and quickly escalated. "Players unfortunately often allow themselves, imprudently, to be misused for this purpose," it said.



Potentially one of the most exciting teams in the tournament, Belgium has small Swiss brand Burdda as its kit supplier.

Burdda

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Brazil N98 Anthem Track jacket, part of Nike's new on and off field clothing collection.

Nike

football careers; we wanted to deliver players our very best product to help them perform their best on the pitch and inspire them off it."

Nike sat down with footballers to work out which moments during the tournament would have the greatest need of a specific outfit. It then met with the players and federations to develop the products and styles. For training, the players will have a range of products in their kitbags, including a Select training top, perforated shell trousers, a mid-layer T-shirt, a woven jacket and shorts. Off-pitch styles include the N98 track jacket, the League polo, the Nike Tech Pant, a tech fleece full-zip hoody, and a Saturday jacket.

Changing landscape

It's been an unusual time for football brands. Reebok has shown no interest in the tournament this time, having bowed out of the sport completely to concentrate on running, walking and fitness. A reflection of this is that, after 16 years, the Reebok Stadium in north-west England, home to Bolton Wanderers, will change its name in July 2014 to the Macron Stadium after the Italian brand. Umbro, its deal with England having come to an end in 2013, will have no representation either (its current teams, Ireland, Canada and Norway, have not qualified). Newer brands to the sport such as Warrior and Under Armour have not yet made inroads into the national team market. Maybe next time, in Russia in 2018, the landscape will look completely different.

World Cup merchandise sparks new Greenpeace campaign

Campaign group Greenpeace made a splash in 2011 when it set brand against brand to create competition to see which company "signed up" first to a campaign to remove hazardous chemicals from the sporting goods supply chain by 2020. In truth, big brands, including the main target names of Nike, Puma and adidas, were already engaged in zero discharge programmes, aiming to have their supply chains free from hazardous chemicals by the end of the decade. When they reaffirmed this commitment in 2011, Greenpeace was quick to claim that this was a result of pressure it had put on these companies.

The non-governmental organisation followed up on this in 2012 by extending its 'detox' campaigns to mainstream fashion, with companies such as Levi's, H&M and Mango quickly offering their support. In 2013, it was the turn of the luxury sector and of outdoor brands to be on the receiving end.

With the world's eyes on Brazil this year for the FIFA World Cup, Greenpeace has decided to turn its attention to sports brands again and the latest in its sequence of 'detox' campaigns is called 'Red card for sportswear brands'. On May 19, less than a month before the start of the competition, Greenpeace announced the results of third-party laboratory tests on 33 products that Puma, Nike and adidas are selling to football fans in this World Cup year.

Produced in China, Indonesia, Cambodia, Bangladesh and Argentina and purchased in 16 different countries in Asia, the Americas and Europe, the shopping list consisted of 21 styles of football boot, four types of goalkeeping gloves, seven shirts and the replica version of the official tournament ball, the Brazuca from adidas.

The tests found substances such as perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs), nonylphenolethoxylates (NPEs), phthalates and dimethylformamide (DMF) in products from all three companies. Seventeen out of 21 styles of football boot and two of the four types of goalkeeping gloves tested were found to contain PFCs, including perfluorooctanic acid (PFOA). The adidas Predator boot was found to contain 14.5 microgrammes per square-metre of PFOA in the upper material, Greenpeace said, pointing out that adidas's own in-house limit is less than one microgramme. Nike's Tiempo boot contained 5.93 microgrammes per square-metre of PFOA. The Brazuca official World Cup ball was found to contain NPEs. At the time of the announcement, Greenpeace said it had still received no reaction to its "very specific questions" from the brands concerned.

Discussing the 'Red card' report with *WSA*, Greenpeace 'detox' campaign leader Manfred Santen says it's true that clothing and footwear manufacturers have consistently drawn distinctions between long-chain PFCs such as PFOA and short-chain ones, which they argue are less hazardous. And he accepts that it's also true that brands' position on this has support form august bodies such as the US Environmental Protection Agency. "There are two reasons why we don't accept short-chain PFCs as an acceptable alternative," he explains. "The first is that we know these PFCs are also very persistent and don't degrade. The second is that we do not have enough toxicological data and don't know enough about what the effect of short-chain PFCs will be after, say, five years."

The organisation also says it is not campaigning for any boycotts of goods produced in Asia or for manufacturing to return to Europe and North America. "We are not saying the brands should stop using these materials," Mr Santen continues. "Just that they do not need to apply durable water repellent finishes that are based on fluorinated chemicals. There are a lot of alternatives on the market that would allow the brands to have the same quality and would add, if anything, only a low percentage of extra cost."

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