



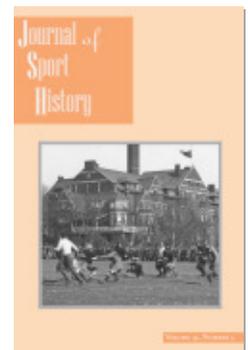
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Got Athletes? The Use of Male Athlete Celebrity Endorsers in Early Twentieth-Century Dairy-Industry Promotions

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The now-ubiquitous “Got Milk?” mustache campaign of the late twentieth century features a number of celebrity athlete endorsers in its print advertisements. As innovative as this campaign was, the use of athletes to promote dairy consumption among Americans was not a new marketing trend; the dairy industry has, in fact, sought out athlete endorsers and associations with sport and physical culture since the 1920s. In this paper, I examine the dairy industry’s use of celebrity male athletic endorsers in milk-drinking promotions of the first half of the twentieth century. Through an analysis of photographs, posters, and print advertisements, I argue that the dairy industry’s association with sport was intended to boost milk sales and ultimately shape a masculine discourse of health, fitness, and vitality around milk consumption.

KEYWORDS: MILK, MASCULINITY, DAIRY PROMOTIONS, ATHLETE ENDORSERS, SPORT

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Nature's Perfect Food. America's Health Kick. It Does a Body Good. These are familiar taglines from the most popular dairy promotions in the United States. The first one dates back to the nineteenth century, while the latter two are contemporary brand innovations.¹ *Got Milk?*—or, more recently, *Got Chocolate Milk?*—is the question posed in the influential and now-ubiquitous milk-mustache advertisements featuring multiple celebrity endorsers, including numerous athletes. These print ads are the outgrowth of the milk-deprivation campaign first developed by the San Francisco firm Goodby, Silverstein, & Partners in conjunction with the California Milk Processor Board in 1993.² As innovative as this campaign was, the use of athletes to promote dairy consumption among Americans was not a new marketing trend; the dairy industry has, in fact, aligned itself with sport and physical culture since the 1920s. Commercial companies began using the cultural platform of sport to promote their products and brands in the early twentieth century to hawk everything from soft drinks to newly manufactured automobiles. Coca-Cola, the Chalmers Automobile Company, Bull Durham Tobacco, and various clothiers advertised their products on baseball stadium outfield walls and through player endorsements in print advertisements.³ While the dairy industry's alignment with athletic culture can be positioned within this history of marketing through sport, in this paper I explore how sport fit into the historical narrative of dairy-industry marketing. I examine the dairy industry's use of celebrity male athletic endorsers in milk-drinking promotions of the first half of the twentieth century. Through an analysis of photographs, posters, and magazine advertisements, I argue that the dairy industry's association with sport, a prominently featured aspect of physical culture, helped shape a masculine discourse of health, fitness, and vitality around milk consumption. I contextualize my analysis within a brief history of the shifting agendas of the dairy industry and the politicization of milk drinking during the time period under review and position milk promotions within the era's expansion of advertising and consumer culture.

I engage with various examples of milk advertising as visual evidence of the discursive construction of milk in the first half of the twentieth century. My aim in this analysis of milk-promotion images is to provide an interpretation of the multiple meanings and cultural uses of these images. As scholars of visual inquiry in sport history remind us, images are more than simply archival evidence of the past. Analysis of their content, production, and reception can reveal contemporary cultural meanings and significance, in addition to preserving the past.⁴ I focus on image content in my examination of dairy-industry promotions featuring celebrity male athletes and argue that the images of these athletes either implicitly or explicitly endorsing milk consumption provide an essential part of the milk-promotion historical narrative and shed light on the broader cultural context in which they were situated.

Milk Politics

Milk drinking can best be understood within the political and economic context of the dairy industry. As dairy historian Melanie DuPuis argues, “[M]ilk is more than a food, it is an embodiment of the politics of American identity over the last 150 years.” In the United States, cow's milk was first promoted as a food in the mid-nineteenth century, specifically as a breast milk substitute for infants and a healthy beverage for weaned children. By the 1880s, the habit of milk drinking spread more broadly across the population, and just five

decades later, in the 1940s, milk was a major staple of the country's diet, with the average American drinking over a pint a day.⁵ This evolution did not happen, however, without governmental intervention, dairy-industry lobbying, and the advocacy of progressive reformers.

In 1842, social reformer Robert Hartley was perhaps the first to dub milk the "perfect food" in his influential essay on the history and science of milk. His activism was part of a larger social movement to at first promote milk as a healthful beverage, then later to advocate for reform in the milk production process.⁶ By the end of the nineteenth century, health promotions were overshadowed by growing public fears about the safety of the milk supply, many of which were grounded in the newly established link between bottle feeding and infant mortality. As more mothers switched from breast feeding to bottle feeding with cows' milk, the urban infant mortality rate increased significantly, a result of the tainted milk supply and unsanitary conditions of urban dairies and milk storage facilities.⁷ As milk had already been deemed essential for raising healthy American children, the protection of the milk supply became a top priority for Progressive Era reformers and public health officials of the late nineteenth century.

A concordant priority involved the discursive work of separating milk from its female origins (and thus feminine association) by placing it in the masculine-coded realm of laboratory science and under the jurisdiction of mostly male health inspectors, and in the process, changing the tenor of dairy advertisements. In the mid-nineteenth century, milkmaids and cows were widely used in dairy ads, creating an association with feminine purity, production, and pastoral origins. By the end of that century, children were increasingly featured in dairy ads, establishing a stronger bond between health and milk drinking. Public safety ads of the early twentieth century featured text and illustrations that warned parents of the dangers of contaminated milk from unregulated sources. For example, a 1914 educational poster from the Chicago Department of Health positions a male health inspector as the protector of infant health. A later poster touting milk's ability to build strong, healthy bodies depicts a male public health official as a cartoon milk bottle guiding two children to the promised land of good health. These images effectively severed milk from its female origins and placed its promotion under the protective shield of masculinity.⁸ As a result, milk and milk drinking became associated with masculine authority.

At the same time, activists lobbied state and federal governments for the regulation of milk, prompting New York, one of the top dairy-producing states, to mandate pasteurization in 1912. The National Dairy Council (NDC) was formed in 1915 to research and promote dairy products, with most of its efforts aimed at schoolchildren. In 1919, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and state dairy councils started a cooperative program to promote milk drinking in schools, with the claim that milk would help reverse under-nourishment among children. In fact, milk is the only single food that has been federally subsidized and mandated for consumption in government-sponsored food programs.⁹ The Capper-Volstead Act, passed by Congress in 1922, granted agricultural producers, including dairymen, the right to collectively organize in order to process, handle, and market their goods for interstate and foreign commerce. The ability of dairy producers to organize across the industry laid the foundation for profitable production and the development of a strong dairy lobby. On another cultural front, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) provided

support for the dairy industry during the Great Depression. Artwork was commissioned by government offices in order to employ artists and create increased demand for milk.

On the heels of World War II, the U.S. government passed the National School Lunch Act of 1946, which made federal reimbursement for school meals contingent upon the inclusion of milk. This act, signed into law by President Harry Truman, declared it “to be the policy of Congress, as a measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation’s children and to encourage the domestic consumption of nutritious agricultural commodities and other food.” Per the terms of this legislation, schools were required to serve lunches meeting minimum nutritional requirements. A half-pint of whole milk was to be served with comprehensive “Type A” lunches, and two pints were required to be served as part of supplemental “Type B” lunches.¹⁰

Despite the federally required inclusion of a half-pint to two pints of whole milk in school lunch programs, in 1954 the NDC was still concerned about the poor promotion of milk and ineffective marketing strategies. In an industry review paper, Zoe Anderson, director of the NDC’s Department of Research and Nutrition, urged industry leaders to improve efforts to reach current and future consumers, while stressing milk’s importance in the school lunch program and the program’s vitality to the dairy industry. Anderson also expressed concern regarding the public’s negative perception of milk fat:

Unfortunately, some of the promotion done on skim milk products for weight reduction has left the implication with the public that milk fat is something that should be avoided. Milk fat represents close to 40% of the total milk solids sold by the industry. Surely, the industry cannot afford to give consumers the false impression that milk fat is not good for them. It is a highly important product of the dairy industry, whether we think of it from the standpoint of nutrition, taste satisfaction, or economics.¹¹

This quote illustrates the NDC’s preoccupation with profit in a capitalist economic structure, perhaps at the expense of consumer health. The common thread throughout this history is, according to DuPuis, the idea that consumers needed to be enlightened about the perfection of milk as a health-promoting food.¹² As noted by many researchers, however, and alluded to by industry insiders, milk is neither the perfect health food nor as good for humans as the government and the dairy industry would have us believe.¹³ Milk has been touted as an important source of Vitamin D and calcium, yet neither property occurs in remarkable quantities in the fluid’s natural state. Evidence suggests that dairy industry leaders were aware of milk’s nutritional shortcomings early on in its mass-production history. Milk was fortified with Vitamin D beginning in the 1920s, as a way to make milk relevant in the fight against widespread cases of rickets. The link between calcium and milk appeared in the 1930s and was cited as the main justification for milk’s placement in government-issued dietary guidelines.¹⁴ Even with these technological innovations, milk was (and continues to be) far from the best source of calcium and Vitamin D for consumers. Researchers did not identify the high percentage of lactose-intolerance among Americans until the 1960s; until that time, clinicians, nutritionists, and dairy insiders operated under the assumption that everyone could and should drink milk throughout the lifespan.¹⁵ That the U.S. government has promoted milk drinking so adamantly in the face of contradictory or deficient evidence indicates that the USDA’s dual mandate to promote U.S. agricultural interests and issue health guidelines really operates in the economic interest of dairy farmers.¹⁶

Marketing campaigns over the last century have followed suit by pushing milk as a healthful beverage.¹⁷ Indeed, the actions of the NDC and USDA, along with these key examples of federal legislation concerning milk consumption, have laid the foundation for the politicization of milk and government intervention in the private, for-profit dairy industry. The government mandate for milk in food programs and nutrition guidelines ensures the success of the dairy industry, thereby garnering dairy lobby support for politicians and creating the impression that the government-industry partnership prioritizes the health of Americans. The use of celebrity athlete endorsers throughout the first half of the twentieth century solidified this impression.

Milk Advertising Drives Sales and Consumption

These critical junctures in United States dairy history helped establish and reify the dominant public discourse about milk. In the middle of the nineteenth century, when milk was first widely recognized as a food source, it was promoted for the health of infants and children. Reformers quickly became preoccupied with the safety of milk supply and the conditions of milk production, generating suspicion among Americans. These concerns prompted Progressive Era reforms, after which milk consumption was marketed to a wary public for the health of Americans of all ages. As the dairy industry instituted better regulation standards for milk supply, industry leaders sought to assuage public fears through information-laden print advertising campaigns and clever marketing strategies.¹⁸ In the early to mid-twentieth century, after successful regulation of milk production and distribution, the focus shifted to linking milk consumption to health, nutrition, growth, and fitness, especially among school-age children. Throughout much of this history, the dairy industry and the U.S. government jointly engaged in milk boosterism; athletes were employed in this context as an effective means through which to promote the ostensibly healthful properties of milk, with an eye toward driving sales and securing profits for dairy producers. These efforts paid off, as the milk-processing industry had become one of the most successful food industries in the United States by 1920.

The proliferation of dairy-industry advertisements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was part of an almost 350 percent increase in print media advertising in the United States during that time period. That increase, coupled with the expanding use of photographic images, helped foster a new celebrity culture.¹⁹ The dairy industry was able to capitalize on that celebrity dynamic by using popular male athletes in its advertising campaigns throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The analysis of these ads reveals not only information about which products the industry most promoted and sold, but insights regarding the industry's directives for how—and why—Americans should incorporate those products into their daily lives.²⁰ Since the mid-1920s, the use of celebrity athletes to promote milk has been an effective strategy of dairy-industry propaganda. Athlete endorsers reinforce the healthful discourse surrounding milk and link the fluid to a fantasy of fitness and physical prowess for consumers, even in the face of contradictory scientific evidence.

Furthermore, the visual images of athletes either implicitly or explicitly endorsing milk consumption provide an essential part of the milk-promotion historical narrative, and their analysis sheds light on the broader cultural context in which they were situated.

As the examples provided in the following section demonstrate, these athlete images often fit the prevailing advertising trends of the times. In the 1920s, national advertisers started scientific-based ad campaigns, in which headlines and text were emphasized. Many of those ads went so far as to replicate the look of magazine or newspaper editorial features.²¹ Dairy advertisements of this period demonstrate how scientific advice narratives persuaded consumers to incorporate milk drinking into their daily lives. This was also a time when advertisers recognized the possibilities of marketing athletics to consumers; dairy-industry marketers capitalized on this strategy in order to position milk as a product whose regular use could make consumers feel like sports stars.²² Advertisers in the 1920s and 1930s also relied on daily vignettes of social life to win consumers and compel them to use certain products.²³ Sport was featured in many of the ad vignettes that touted milk drinking. Advertisements of the 1930s and early 1940s often confronted consumers with health parables, while ads of the Great Depression and World War II years were sometimes used to promote government relief programs.²⁴ A number of the milk ads that exemplified these themes and strategies explicitly referenced sport in their visual and textual narratives. Collectively, the dairy advertisements of this era contributed to shaping a “community of discourse” around milk that established the fluid as healthful in the minds of consumers.²⁵ Given the already established hegemonic discourse around sport, its cultural association with milk was a boon to the dairy industry.

Links between Athleticism and Milk

In the late nineteenth century, sports were promoted as “a means and not an end,” in the words of Theodore Roosevelt. Progressives viewed sports and other athletic activities as a way to inculcate liberal tenets, assimilate immigrants into American culture, and produce upstanding citizens and capable leaders.²⁶ Moreover, sports were touted as character-building activities that would masculinize boys and make young men healthier, while rescuing them from the temptations of the city.²⁷ Thus, the Progressive ideal for the American male citizenry was one of fitness, virility, and steadfast morality. This ideal paired nicely with the early twentieth-century dairy industry’s efforts to distance milk from its more feminine associations and position the beverage as a healthful food source for adults and children alike.

By the 1920s, sport was understood more so as a vehicle for entertainment alongside other forms of leisure such as vaudeville and the burgeoning film industry. Indeed, sport rapidly developed into a product that Americans consumed with an insatiable appetite after World War I.²⁸ The newly formed consumer culture ushered in a society of spectacle that celebrated whiteness, masculinity, sport, and the well-developed body of male athletes as ends in and of themselves. Moreover, the robust, muscular white male body was viewed as an emblem of strong character and command.²⁹ In this cultural context, white male athletic celebrities were attractive and effective symbols in the dairy industry’s push to increase milk consumption among Americans. White male athleticism fused seamlessly with the privileged discourse surrounding the perfection of milk and the white bodies most genetically capable of digesting the food.³⁰

Indeed, it must be noted that dairy-industry advertisements, both sport-themed and general, mirrored the distinct lack of diversity and overwhelming whiteness of American

advertising culture of the first half of the twentieth century. African Americans did not appear as consumers during this time period. If they did appear at all in ads, they were relegated to stereotypical roles as porters, janitors, washerwomen, and houseboys.³¹ Black men in print advertisements appeared almost exclusively in service uniforms such as headwaiter, butler, chauffeur, and bellhop—a representation that reflected the racial prejudice and correspondingly limited occupations available to them in early twentieth-century white society. Moreover, advertising depictions of black men during this era exploited only those stereotypes that assuaged white fears.³²

Milk promotions featuring athletes further reinforce not only whiteness and masculine authority in public health but also the perceived masculinity of milk by associating the beverage with strength, fitness, and competition. The earliest athlete milk promotion I found features Washington Senator Hall of Fame pitcher Walter Johnson, who appeared in the 1925 USDA Educational Film Service silent, black-and-white short, “Milk for You and Me.”³³ The different segments of the film highlight the benefits of drinking milk across the lifespan—for infants, school-age children, middle-age adults, and senior citizens—and stress health concepts repeated in other dairy-industry promotions of the time, such as vitality, strength, growth, and strong bones. This film also serves as an example of a health parable and a vignette-driven promotion. One segment in particular showcases “Milk for Health Week” by presenting scenes with a little girl drinking milk with her dinner, a man in a suit and tie enjoying a glass of milk at a diner, and male factory workers taking a break to drink milk from just-delivered bottles. All those depicted in this short film, it bears noting, are white. About halfway through the film, the scene shifts to a baseball stadium, and sport enters the narrative. Walter Johnson is shown standing on the field in front of an empty dugout in full uniform putting a straw into a glass milk bottle and then drinking from



Figure 1. Washington Senator Hall of Fame pitcher, Walter Johnson, from the 1925 USDA film, “Milk for You and Me.”

it. The image effectively links milk with the national pastime, thus burnishing its image as a desirable beverage. Johnson was also featured in a widely circulated photograph with then-President Coolidge presenting him the “AL diploma” for the Senators’ 1924 American League Championship season.³⁴ Johnson and Coolidge were good friends, and the pairing of the two lent further masculine authority to milk promotion and consumption.

Other significant milk promotions of this time are found in the sport of boxing—notably in conjunction with Millicent Hearst’s charity, the Free Milk Fund for Babies. The Milk Fund was founded in 1918 to raise money to provide milk to “undernourished, cardiac children and sick babies in the homes of needy families.”³⁵ One of the charity’s main sources of revenue came through its association with boxing in New York City. The Milk Fund promoted boxing shows at Madison Square Garden (MSG) and in return received a percentage of the proceeds from the fights. This partnership was mutually beneficial, as babies were supplied with free milk, Garden boxing events enjoyed favorable publicity from Hearst newspapers, and the association with Mrs. Hearst and her charity lent further credibility to the sport of boxing.³⁶ In the 1920s, advertising helped garner serious attention for boxing and position boxers as symbols of the age—developments that made the Milk Fund boxing partnership not only possible but lucrative and culturally significant.³⁷ In 1933, under new management that had grown tired of subsidizing the Milk Fund, the MSG raised the rent on Milk Fund boxing events. This increase led to predictable criticism from Hearst reporters and an eventual break with the charity in February of 1935.³⁸ In the meantime, three Hearst sportswriters partnered with New York City promoter Mike Jacobs to form the Twentieth Century Sporting Club to compete with the MSG in the promotion of New York City boxing matches. The Twentieth Century Club offered Mrs. Hearst low rental rates for Milk Fund events, and the Hearst writers guaranteed favorable press for its boxing shows.³⁹

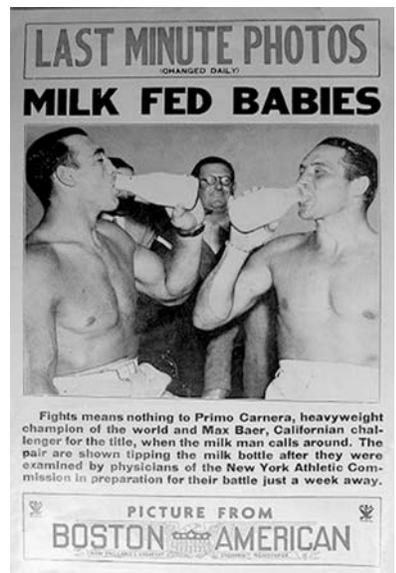


Figure 2. Primo Carnera and Max Baer, in a Milk Fund promotional poster for their 1934 heavyweight title bout.

This association allowed the Twentieth Century Club to undercut the MSG's boxing monopoly in New York City and also set the stage for some of the most striking milk promotions of the 1930s. In a poster touting their upcoming heavyweight title bout in 1934, boxers Primo Carnera and Max Baer are pictured bare-chested, drinking from glass milk bottles after their physical examinations.⁴⁰ Images like this one are redolent of the masculine ideal expressed by turn-of-the-twentieth-century physical culture stalwarts like Eugen Sandow and Harry Houdini—an ideal that celebrated the muscular white male body as an emblem of physical mastery and strength of character.⁴¹ As such, the poster of the Italian Carnera and the Jewish Baer links milk drinking with masculinity, physical prowess, and fitness, thereby reinforcing the newly established dominant discourse surrounding milk and at the same time demonstrating the access to whiteness that Jews and southern Europeans were gradually gaining in the 1930s.

Even more striking, perhaps, is a 1935 Free Milk Fund for Babies promotional photograph featuring a young white girl sitting on the lap of African American boxer Joe Louis as he pours her a glass of milk.⁴² Louis was the first boxer of note signed by the Twentieth Century Club, and the Hearst newspapers went to great lengths to promote him in advance of his first New York City fights in the summer of 1935. That a black man was photographed with a white girl in mid-1930s America speaks to the cultural position the sport of boxing had attained and the overwhelming popularity of the twenty-one-year old Joe Louis, despite the prevailing racism of the time—a racism that remained evident in many media depictions of Louis, even as he was hailed as the nation's next great heavyweight.⁴³ The image in this photograph links milk with fitness, health, and a tender version of masculinity, while upholding earlier cultural associations between milk drinking and the well-being of children. This photograph can also be read as a disruption of Jim Crow prejudice (insofar as one image can be) and a symbolic amelioration of tensions between the African American and Italian communities in New York City as news of Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia spread in the United States and was followed particularly closely in Harlem before Louis's fight against the Italian Carnera. The Milk Fund even considered canceling the fight over fears of race riots, largely stoked by the white press, and took the unprecedented precaution of hiring armed police officers to surround the ring during the fight at Yankee Stadium.⁴⁴ It is worth noting, however, that these readings of the photograph can only be conjecture, as information about its provenance is scarce and there is as yet no evidence of its publication. Perhaps, then, this staged photograph of the black Louis serving a white girl with his eyes averted is best interpreted as a too-provocative attempt to curry public favor for Louis and project a nonthreatening, even subservient, image of the boxer to further separate him from Jack Johnson in the public imagination—even as he is occupying center stage in American sport culture.

As the social influence of boxers and other male athletes grew in the 1930s and 1940s, the dairy industry also benefitted from WPA promotions of this time period. Many of these promotions exemplify how ads were used to promote government relief programs. A representative dairy example can be seen in a 1940 Ohio WPA Art Program poster designed for the Cleveland Division of Health. The text of the poster links milk with "health, good teeth, vitality, endurance, and strong bones."⁴⁵ A 1941 WPA school-lunch poster created by the WPA Oklahoma Art Project reads, "A good lunch—one hot dish,

meat, vegetables—sandwich—fruit—milk.”⁴⁶ A silkscreen poster, also developed by the Ohio WPA Art Program, features an illustration of an outdoorsy, active woman dressed in winter clothing holding a glass of milk. The words “energy food” appear above the glass, while the tag line of the poster proclaims “Milk—for Warmth.”⁴⁷ These government-sanctioned milk-promotion posters fit the advertising trends of the 1930s and 1940s and provided valuable support for the dairy industry.

Government-sponsored and dairy industry-promoted “milk-for-health” campaigns continued throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century. Dairy Council publications advocated milk drinking as part of the broader ideology of a healthy body.⁴⁸ Advertisements of the 1940s and 1950s still featured children and focused on the health properties of milk and thus fit the era’s pattern of ads intended to persuade kids to eat healthy foods and engage in positive habits. In these ads, health was equated with huskiness and milk drinking as the means of achieving that health.⁴⁹ For example, a 1944 Carnation Milk advertisement featured an illustration of two boys playing marbles and a Marine soldier walking by in the background. One of the boys looks admiringly at the soldier and is quoted as saying, “Bet he always ate his milk, too!”⁵⁰ The text of a 1944 advertisement for Nabisco Snow Flake Soda Crackers proclaimed, “To Grow Big and Strong Drink Milk Every Day.” A sketch of a boy measuring his height against a door frame accompanies the headline.⁵¹ A circa-1955 H. P. Hood and Sons Milk poster boasts, “It’s Smart to Drink Milk!” in the center, with a tagline at the bottom that reads, “Milk Builds Strong, Healthy, Energetic Bodies.” Three of the four illustrations at the corners of the poster highlight athletic competition: one shows older boys playing football, another shows them playing baseball, and the third features a rarely depicted scene of girls engaged in athletic behavior, playing basketball. The fourth corner illustration is of a young man and woman walking



Figure 3. H. P. Hood and Sons Milk poster, circa 1955.

together in formal attire, perhaps headed to a prom.⁵² As noted in the previous examples, all those depicted in these promotions appear to be white. As such, these ads further reinforce the milk discourse of whiteness, health, fitness, vitality, and strength and link milk consumption to burgeoning masculinity and military service—the latter a common theme in World War II-era advertisements.

Many of the advertisements that featured athletes or sport themes paired milk with other already established food products—most commonly, breakfast cereals. During the Progressive Era, advertisers like Kellogg pushed to frame breakfast cereals as part of a healthy regimen for Americans. By the 1920s and 1930s, advertisers explicitly targeted children who had been raised on cereal by stressing how cereal consumption provided the energy needed for a productive day of work or study.⁵³ Wheaties continued this line of advertising with its use of marquee athletes on its cereal boxes and in print advertisements for its “Breakfast of Champions” campaign. Although not directly advertising milk, Wheaties advertising was an early example of what would later become a significant marketing strategy for the dairy industry—the pairing of milk with complementary, popular American foods. This strategy was the basis for the 1993 milk-deprivation commercials and is seen in the current “Food Loves Milk” campaign.⁵⁴

Notable male athletes who appeared on Wheaties boxes during this era include baseball’s Bob Feller (1938) and Hank Greenberg (1947), who were preceded by Lou Gehrig as the first athlete to appear on a Wheaties package in 1934. Although he was not an official spokesperson for Wheaties, Max Baer testified to eating the cereal regularly on a radio program in the 1930s.⁵⁵ Wheaties also ran extensive print advertising campaigns during this period. The lead text of a magazine ad featuring Gehrig and other baseball notables Jimmie Foxx, Mickey Cochrane, and Lon Warneke boasts, “When Served with Plenty of Milk or Cream and Some Kind of Fruit, It’s a ‘Breakfast of Champions’ That Famous Athletes Rave About.”⁵⁶ These Wheaties promotions reinforced baseball’s color line, as the ball players depicted were white. Greenberg was Jewish and gaining wider social acceptance, as was his ethnic contemporary, the Italian great Joe DiMaggio (who also appeared in Wheaties magazine ads). Feller was featured in a number of Wheaties print ads, including one from 1941 in which he is being served breakfast by a black male waiter who is quoted as saying, “You Sure Do Like Your Wheaties, Mr. Feller!”⁵⁷ This image reinforces the racial segregation of the era by presenting a black man in service to a white man and also underscores the color line that still existed in Major League Baseball.

In addition to the inclusion of milk on the breakfast table, the copy of the above-mentioned Wheaties ad emphasizes the cereal’s nutritious qualities and recommends it be enjoyed with milk, exhorting consumers to “Help Yourself to a Generous Bowlful of Wheaties . . . with Plenty of Milk or Cream and Some Fruit.” Also included in this full-page ad is an inset of Bob Feller depicted pitching in a baseball uniform and in an army uniform, with the text “Ready! Aim! Fire! If that baseball were a hand-grenade it would be bad news for anyone on the receiving end. Bob should be a natural as a grenade-thrower.” The text and illustrations in this Wheaties ad have the collective effect of promoting milk as an important complementary food and fusing fitness, white masculinity, and patriotism with dairy consumption. These images and endorsements effectively forged a cultural association between milk, health, and athletic success while promoting breakfast as the

to champion the prominent inclusion of milk in the American diet, thereby convincing Americans to increase their milk consumption and securing a healthy profit margin for the industry.

The discursive link between milk and sport established in early twentieth-century dairy-advertising history has persisted in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century campaigns. Milk was firmly entrenched in U.S. culinary culture, national identity, and agricultural economy by the latter third of the twentieth century. The milk question, however, shifted from the nineteenth century's "Is milk safe?" to "Should we drink milk?"⁵⁸ To address concerns regarding the nutritional value of milk, as well as confront the perception of milk as a boring beverage, the dairy industry devised a new advertising campaign. The California Milk Processors Board responded with the 1990s milk-deprivation series of television commercials that promoted milk as the perfect—and only—complement to Americans' favorite foods, a strategy encouraged by the National Dairy Council in its 1954 industry review paper and seen in earlier breakfast-cereal advertising.⁵⁹

The success of these television commercials bred the "milk-mustache" print ads, which featured photographs of white-lipped celebrities supposedly caught in the act of drinking milk. These images were eventually fused with the "Got Milk?" slogan. By 2002, over one hundred celebrities appeared in "Got Milk?" ads, including numerous athletes. The late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century celebrity athlete ads promote variations on the earlier theme of milk's nutritional value, yet are more diverse, featuring both male and female athletes, athletes of color, and a wider range of sports than ads of the early and mid-twentieth century.⁶⁰ In its most recent iterations of milk boosterism, "Refuel: Got Chocolate Milk?," "Milk Life," and "Food Loves Milk," the dairy industry is touting the fluid as a postexercise recovery beverage, a protein-rich addition to meals, and the perfect accompaniment to chef-inspired food pairings, and in the process reifying the healthful discourse surrounding milk consumption.⁶¹



Notes

1. Melanie E. DuPuis, *Nature's Perfect Food: How Milk Became America's Drink* (New York: NYU Press, 2002).

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3. John Clark, "Marketing Principles Applied to Sport Management," in *Principles and Practices of Sport Management*, ed. Lisa P. Masteralexis, Carol A. Barr, and Mary Hums (Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning, 2015), 50–70; Sam Fullerton and G. Russell Mertz, "The Four Domains of Sport Marketing: A Conceptual Framework," in *The New Sport Management Reader*, ed. John Nauright and Steven Pope (Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology, 2009), 103–32; Bert Sugar, *Hit the Sign and Win a Free Suit of Clothes from Harry Finklestein* (Chicago, IL: Contemporary Books, Inc., 1978).

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5. DuPuis, *Nature's Perfect Food*, 8.

6. Robert Hartley, *An Historical, Scientific and Practical Essay on Milk* (New York: University Press, John F. Trow, Printer, 1842).
7. Jacqueline H. Wolf, *Don't Kill Your Baby: Public Health and the Decline of Breastfeeding in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2001).
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