



## 2024 SPONSORSHIP EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNERS ANNOUNCED

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SEATTLE, November 1, 2024 – The [Sponsorship Marketing Association](#) (SMA) created the Sponsorship Excellence Awards to recognize the outstanding achievements of industry leaders who are revolutionizing the world of sponsorship.

This year's [Sponsorship Excellence Award Winners](#) were announced at the Sponsorship Mastery Summit in Chicago October 2-4.

"It is such an honor to celebrate those who inspire us while recognizing the newcomers who will continue to shape the future of our industry," SMA's CEO & Founder Paula Beadle said.

The following awardees were recognized for their incredible accomplishments that have contributed to the industry's growth:

**Angel City Football Club (ACFC) received the Social Impact Award**, recognizing those who drive local, national, and global awareness and impact social change through powerful collaborations. ACFC is deserving of this award for its incredible partnership with BMO, where 10% of BMO's sponsorship funds are allocated to GPL, reaching over 400 high school-aged girls and non-binary youth in Los Angeles across six locations. Going beyond best intentions, they share their commitment to making an impact with like-minded organizations through the power of sports.

"The leadership academy we created with BMO has begun to transform our community, from providing educational opportunities to players to confronting the barriers of the pay to play model. It is through the close relationships and dedicated support of our partners that we have been able to achieve such meaningful impact thus far," said Kat McDonald, Manager, Partnership Marketing at ACFC.

"Our partnership goes beyond regular sponsorship and delves deeply into social impact," said Christina Silva, Manager Marketing, Sponsorships at BMO. "Their sponsorship model is a great business case and we're hoping this will inspire many more sponsors."

Angel City's 10% model serves as a compelling case study in redefining the role of sports organizations in fostering social impact and community development. This innovative approach, with its significant impact on community development, reflects a new standard

for corporate social responsibility within the world of professional sports, making the audience feel the significance and importance of the initiative.

**The Famous Group (TFG) received the Agency of the Year Award** for their award-winning creative technology company specializing in live events. This award highlights the agency that consistently achieves remarkable success through effective and collaborative partnerships with sponsors and properties. Through a mix of strategy, creative and technology, the company has created unforgettable moments for the biggest brands, venues and events in the world.

These immersive fan experiences have been in partnership with professional sports teams and leagues, concerts, festivals and retail spaces. Key achievements include working with the NFL on the last 19 Super Bowls and innovative projects with leagues spanning the NBA, NCAA, NHL, PGA, WWE and more than 90 professional sports teams and venues. TFG has also worked with some of the world's most recognizable consumer brands, including Verizon, Nike, Pepsi, AT&T, Live Nation, Chipotle, Mercedes Benz and others.

"Being named 'Agency of the Year' by the Sponsorship Marketing Association is a true honor and a testament to our team's dedication to delivering extraordinary fan experiences. We're so grateful to our partners, clients, and collaborators for their trust and support," said Andrew Isaacson, Partner/EVP of TFG.

**The Sponsor of the Year Award was presented to Liquid Death** recognizing a sponsor whose strategic approach to sponsorship propelled the industry forward, supported the properties growth and improved the audience experience. As one of the fastest growing non-alcoholic brands Liquid Death creates irreverent experiences capturing the hearts and minds of fans, while supporting sustainability and wellness.

Liquid Death's partnership with NASCAR demonstrates a best-in-class sponsorship by breaking through the clutter to produce cutting-edge content and experiences that WOW fans.

"As the official of iced tea of NASCAR, we knew that the creative partnership would push the envelope and resonate with the fans," said Jeff Wohlschlaeger Former SVP, Chief Sales Director of NASCAR who nominated Liquid Death. "Their ability to create unique promotions and fun and creative content was one of the primary reasons this partnership would be successful".

Recently, Liquid Death launched an online campaign to solicit 3 NASCAR fans to become Pro Drivers for Liquid Death Iced Tea. Just like an actual NASCAR driver, these three fans will get a paid endorsement contract and drive their own car wrapped in logos.

Ryan Heuser SVP, Experiential Marketing is leading the partnership execution that has led to Liquid Death making its mark on the industry. Heuser graciously accepted the award during SMA's Sponsorship Mastery Summit in Chicago.

"We're thrilled to be honored by SMA for our partnership with NASCAR where we're focused on bringing our infinitely recyclable, ice-cold cans of iced tea to NASCAR fans. We're looking forward to introducing new iced tea flavors and murdering thirst for NASCAR fans for years to come!" said Heuser.

**Spokenote received the Innovation Award** that recognizes bold creators and innovators who set the bar higher and keep the industry on the cutting edge through emerging technology. Spokenote's work leveraging new media to solve problems in an unprecedented and authentic way earned the organization this prestigious award. Spokenote's innovation was demonstrated when the Pacers became the first team in U.S. Professional Sports history to include a scannable code on their uniform.

With emerging technology, they have turned it into "something completely different that allows us to engage our fans in a unique way," said Pacers Sports & Entertainment President and Chief Commercial Officer, Todd Taylor.

"We'd all love to find partners that see the vision of what you're trying to do," said Michael Lake, Sales Director of Corporate Sponsorships of the Pacers Sports & Entertainment. "And John Wechsler, Founder and CEO of Spokenote, saw that vision from the start."

John humbly accepted the award at the Sponsorship Mastery Summit in Chicago and shared, "Innovation is at the heart of everything we do at Spokenote, and we're thrilled to be recognized by the Sponsorship Marketing Association. This award reinforces our mission at Spokenote to use video as a tool for connection and engagement. Our partnership with the Pacers is just one example of how we're using cutting-edge technology to enhance fan engagement."

Spokenote is setting a standard for innovation, using technology to create the ultimate fan and player experience on and off the court.

**American Family Insurance and Summerfest received the Best in Show Award** which recognizes a sponsorship activation that delivered remarkable audience engagement and maximized success. The AmFam house activation delivered something unique and impactful to the Summerfest fan experience.

"The AmFam house puts fans just feet from their favorite musical artists for free, intimate performance and meet and greets," said Ashley Dye, Sponsorship Manager of the Milwaukee World Festival, Inc. / Summerfest.

“Beyond its impressive house-like stature and footprint, we were impressed by the brand’s ability to bring music fans closer to the action,” said Adam Mitchell, CEO of SponsorPulse and Awards Selection Jury member. “The brand’s ability to connect fans with artists and build meaningful experiences that deliver on its brand promise of life is better under our roof are what earned it this year’s Best in Show Award.”

American Family’s clear vision and commitment to building upon brand equity with the return of this activation year after year and the success of the activation when it comes to measurable growth in KPIs YOY makes this activation best in show.

**The Rising Star Award was given to Alex Kopilow.** This award recognizes an emerging sponsorship marketer in the industry who exhibits exceptional growth and contribution to the profession. As Founder of Sponcon Sports, Kopilow is becoming a leader in the world of sponsorship activation on digital and social platforms with a focus on the lucrative world of sports and entertainment.

“Alex has done so much to teach us, to make us all better, to give us examples of best practices in action, to give us a framework to how to think about these things,” noted Neil Horowitz, Senior Customer Strategist of Greenfly, Inc.

Kopilow’s vision is helping organizations connect the dots across departments and realize new revenue and innovative content and programs that truly raise all ships and benefit all parties (sponsors, fans, properties). Sponcon has become a necessary resource as an industry newsletter that provides useful insights through sponsorship and sport.

**The Lifetime Achievement Award was given to Kareeda Chones Aguam** which celebrates a sponsorship leader who has dedicated their career to the advancement of sponsorship and demonstrated an extraordinary level of expertise and dedication. As Senior Vice President of Partner Strategy and Management, Chones Aguam has achieved a level of astonishing success. Deserving of this nomination for her unwavering commitment to growth, leadership, and resiliency. Spanning 26+ years of her sports marketing career, Chones Aguam has achieved personal and professional growth through leadership and resilience.

“Kareeda has achieved a level of success and excellence that is not easily matched,” said Beadle. “A long-time sponsor said that Kareeda treats sponsors like family. She’s always accessible, planning is collaborative, ideas are welcome, the wins are celebrated, and the losses are mourned together.”

Today Chones Aguam leads a team that manages nearly 100 local, national and global partnerships that are a critical revenue stream for the Milwaukee Bucks and Fiserv Forum.

**Atlanta Dream was the recipient of the Property of the Year Award.** This award recognizes the property whose creativity aligns sponsors with audiences in unforgettable and impactful ways. The property goes beyond a typical sponsorship to create a true partnership that results in the growth of audience, revenue, engagement, or participation.

The Atlanta Dream's Partnership Team led by Laila Brock, SVP Strategic Partnerships and Community Impact embodies this award in nearly every facet of what they do. The Atlanta Dream is named after MLK's "I have a dream" speech and is proud of its historic roots. The Partnership team leads with this message and brings community to the forefront in their activations with messaging including "Representation Matters" and "Community Impact" used right at the beginning of every sponsorship presentation. Off the court, the Dream's roster of talent also serves as a pillar in the community often reading in classrooms and participating in charity events around the Atlanta area. It is this culmination of social impact both on and off the court that sets the Dream apart.

The recipients of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Sponsorship Excellence Awards are leading the future of sponsorship.

### **About the Sponsorship Marketing Association**

The Sponsorship Marketing Association believes in the power of sponsorship marketing. The Association's mission is to strengthen, unify and advocate for the continued growth of sponsorship marketing and raise the level of excellence across the industry. SMA provides resources, insights and inspiration to help sponsorship marketers thrive. To learn more, visit [www.sponsorshipassociation.com](http://www.sponsorshipassociation.com).

### **About the Awards Selection Jury**

The Selection Jury is comprised of a distinguished group of industry leaders with extensive experience in sponsorship, activation, and strategic partnerships. The panel brings together a range of perspectives and expertise, ensuring a comprehensive and fair evaluation process, whose collective insight and commitment to excellence are crucial in recognizing and honoring the outstanding achievements of sponsors, agencies, and properties across various categories. To learn more, visit [www.sponsorshipassociation.com/sponsorship-excellence-awards/](http://www.sponsorshipassociation.com/sponsorship-excellence-awards/)