**Has the FA Cup lost its magic?**

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It's the   Emirates FA Cup first round draw on Monday which is being heavily supported by BBC (see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/football/34607755>) and I was reminded of a post I wrote back in January in response to a question I'd been asked...

Has the FA Cup lost its magic?

Firstly it’s important to recognise what the FA Cup offers. It’s a competition with an incredible history and a unique ability to reach through to the lower divisions in England.  Then there is the exposure platform, UK and Internationally, which is built up over the course of the competition and peaking with the final. All valuable assets that would interest a range of potential sponsors.

But an issue for the Cup has emerged over the last couple of sponsorship cycles as the monetisation of other sponsorship rights in English football have caught up and overtaken it.

Historically, the Cup could place itself alongside the very top English football sponsorship opportunities, but nowadays it falls into a kind of second tier, competing for sponsor pounds with the large, but not the largest clubs in the Premier League. In that context, and from a brand exposure perspective, it is difficult for a competition with the top teams playing a maximum of just 6 rounds to compete with a competition run over 38 rounds.

But brand exposure isn’t the only measure of value.

At the investment levels being discussed, brands will often be looking to have some headline occasions where they will be able to showcase themselves as “the big show in town”. And additionally here is where there FA Cup has seen its “magic” eroded over recent years. The tinkering with match dates and kick off times is evidence of the pressure on the Cup to react to the interest in other premium club football competitions, notably the UEFA Champions League and the Barclays Premier League. This has only been compounded during the life cycle of this latest sponsorship by not consistently being able to guarantee that the final is even the biggest English football match on offer that day.

This last issue appears to have been rectified for the time being at least but it has certainly damaged the offering in the short term.

So where does that leave the cup for this year?  It is certainly very late in the day for a sponsor to maximise its association to the competition unless it had some particular time-sensitive reason for doing so. In other cases it could make commercial sense to wait. Similarly, the FA would be mindful not to undermine the value of the competition at large by allowing a deal for the final rounds only, hoping that it can regroup and repackage the rights around a complete set of competitions.

These challenges will inevitably be a spur to the FA to consider carefully how it packages its sponsorship rights whether that is to include

* enhancement of the rights themselves perhaps including *real* title sponsorship
* packaging up with other rights available within the FA stable, or
* continuing to build equity into the competition, re-establishing its unique identity and opportunity to find and celebrate the “best” team in the country

Each of these options or even a combination of them will certainly help The FA when the 2016 negotiations begin.

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