

Saatchi's Ads Dissect Olympic Spirit

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By Andrew McMains

NEW YORK Christopher Reeve, Nelson Mandela and Kofi Annan are among the iconic figures who serve as brand ambassadors in Saatchi & Saatchi's first work for the International Olympic Committee, a global splash for this summer's Olympic Games in Athens.

Four TV spots were sent last week to networks around the world that will air the Games, which begin Aug. 13. A fifth spot, featuring Annan, the United Nations secretary general, will be shot in New York this week. The campaign also includes four print ads.

The tagline, "Celebrate humanity," carries over from the work of previous shop TBWA Worldwide, but Saatchi presents it in a cursive typeface that evokes a more personal touch. "The purpose of the spots is to promote the spirit of the Olympics. The sport is the medium, but it's not necessarily the message," said Tod Seisser, chief creative officer at Saatchi in New York.

The ads will run in up to 200 countries, said Bob McKinnon, director of new-business development at Saatchi who manages the IOC account. The networks run them as part of their contracts to carry the Games; were the media paid, it would be worth some \$100 million globally, sources said.

Each spot begins with a shot of the Olympic rings against a white backdrop and segues into a montage of Olympic action married to original music and a voiceover. Toward the end of each ad, the source of the voice is revealed with a shot of the famous figure. The spots end as they begin, with the rings, this time accompanied by the tag and www.olympic.org address.

In "Heart," Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli marvels at a gymnast who has the "reflexes of a cat" and swimmers who have the "kick of a dolphin," yet concludes (over an image of Muhammad Ali), "You will not have greatness until you understand that the strongest muscle is the heart. To me, that's the soul of the Olympic Games."

Another spot, "Strength," depicts a stumbling power-lifter and a sledder going off track. "Funny, isn't it? An athlete aspires to be the best his or her country has to offer and ends up representing the best humanity has to offer," says Reeve. "That's the strength I find in the Olympic Games."

The Mandela spot praises the camaraderie of competing athletes, whom he describes as "soulmates," while in a spot called "Play," pop star Avril Lavigne asserts, "All that matters is that you give it everything you've got."

Saatchi sought figures who represented different nations, appealed to different age groups and personified Olympic ideals such as friendship and fair play, McKinnon said. Some of them, including Reeve and Mandela, were proposed in the pitch Saatchi made to win the business last summer.

The talent all volunteered their time, so Saatchi's creatives flew to them, be it Bocelli's home in Via Reggio, Italy, or a parking lot outside Mandela's office in Johannesburg, South Africa. "Being there with Nelson Mandela will be something I will never forget," said Doug Pippin, a writer who served as creative director and partner to producer Jerry Boyle. "You could feel the generosity of his spirit, his warmth."

