Inside the NBA’s Strategy for Big Brand Plays During All-Star Weekend

When it comes to NBA All-Star Weekend, the league is helping brands have a solid game plan.

This year’s All-Star activities kick off this weekend in Los Angeles with events such as the Castrol Rising Stars game on Friday; the Kia Shooting Stars, the State Farm 3-Point Contest, and the AT&T Slam Dunk Contest on Saturday; and the All-Star game on Sunday, with the competition featuring a new U.S. vs. the World format.

With so many options to be a part of a premier live event, the NBA All-Star Weekend has been a major draw for advertisers. NBCUniversal announced an ad-inventory sellout in January. Plus, throughout the weekend, more than 60 brands are participating in the festivities with on-the-ground fan activations, licensing opportunities, and merch and retail. According to Lauren Sullivan, svp, head of marketing partnerships, NBA, the integrations are designed to make an impact.

“It’s way beyond just having a visible brand presence in signage and out of home around the venues that we’re having our events,” Sullivan told ADWEEK, noting that the key for brands is to lean into their unique offerings.

As an example of how brands are showing up, Sullivan points to NBA Crossover, an immersive fan event taking place in the Los Angeles Convention Center from Thursday to Sunday. The event showcases around 40 different brands building expansive activations for fans, including Xfinity creating an immersive fan experience called the X Vault, Ruffles bringing some trick

shots, and CeraVe showing up for the first time with a barbershop experience.

Sullivan noted that the start of planning for an All-Star Weekend truly begins right after the weekend is over, with a debrief to help prepare for the next year. With that in mind, the NBA svp of marketing partnerships outlined the learnings and themes behind the strategy for brand partners in 2026:

Leaning into culture

Though culture and lifestyle have always played a role in NBA marketing, Sullivan said brands are becoming more intentional about creating meaningful impact during All-Star Weekend.

“That’s even more at the genesis of what partners are doing this year because of the market we’re in, so that’s certainly one thematic you’ll see—a lot of partners showing up and leaning into fashion, music, art, and entertainment,” Sullivan said.

Among the integrations, American Express partnered with Fanatics Real Vintage to give fans access to a vault-inspired experience featuring a curated vintage NBA merchandise collection. Meanwhile, DoorDash builds on its “In Your Bag” campaign by building a hands-on experience at Crossover, where fans can design their own mini DoorDash bags with patches and charms while NBA stars like Tyrese Maxey, Rip Hamilton, and Stephon Castle make appearances.

Showcasing the retail aspects of the activations, Adidas is partnering with Foot Locker for an Anthony Edwards experience featuring a drop for the Anthony Edwards 2; PUMA teamed with Universal’s Fast and Furious franchise and NBA star LaMelo Ball for an exclusive collection; and KITH is showcasing its first multi-team collection with the NBA.

Brands are also teaming up with influencers to surround the

festivities with content, with Variety reporting that the NBA is bringing more than 200 influencers to All-Star Weekend.

A rendering of DoorDash activation at NBA Crossover.*DoorDash*

Brands go global

With the NBA's updated All-Star format featuring the USA vs. the World tournament, brands are expanding their scope and thinking internationally, too.

"The ecosystem of our partnership business and the partners that show up in and around All-Star is becoming more global in nature," Sullivan said. "We have global brands like Emirates, Tissot, and Anheuser-Busch, which activates all around the world."

Sullivan said the global nature of the weekend was built into several events featuring international brands and players, with pop-ups and events throughout L.A.

Among the activations, Emirates, the Official Airline Partner of the NBA, is looking to bring fans closer to the game by spotlighting Team World players during the weekend. Additionally, international players will be featured throughout the weekend, with brands such as Converse spotlighting players like Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and bringing his story to life through products, experiences, and retail moments.

“More and more international players are going to be out and in the community, participating in NBA events, our NBA Cares day of service, our partner events, and really helping expand the relevance and the reach of All-Star Weekend in the world,” Sullivan said.

Giving back to the community

As a third pillar for brands, Sullivan noted that some are standing out by giving back through donating money and services.

“Our partners and the NBA always want to make sure that we’re thinking about giving back, having a presence in the community, and being accessible to fans here in L.A.,” Sullivan said.

During All-Star Weekend, Foot Locker will serve as an Associate Partner on AT&T’s HBCU Classic and donate $25,000 to each school in the game, Evernorth will host a Total Health walk and conduct free skin cancer screenings, and State Farm, the Title Partner of the NBA 3-Point Contest, is donating $15,000 to Habitat for Humanity for “every made deep shot,” according to the NBA.

Plus, Gatorade, which will be seen on the sidelines throughout the weekend as the Official Sports Drink of the NBA, is teaming up with Luka Dončić, a Lakers star and Gatorade athlete, to offer community support through his foundation.

Overall, Sullivan said the weekend will reach all types of fans. There will be concerts by Ludacris, Shaboozey, and Two Friends; bespoke events such as a wine tasting with Kendall-Jackson; and interactive technology activations, with Google creating an AI-powered “Search Bar” at NBA Crossover.

“The volume of touch points for fans, and how the NBA really is able to come in and have such an important and big presence in the markets that we do, is what I typically walk away from the weekend thinking, like, ‘Wow, how did we just do all of that?’” Sullivan said.

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