Five Tips to Help SMBs Harness the Power of Sport in their Marketing Year-Round

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London – 18th February 2022 - With the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Beijing 2022 ongoing, iStock, a leading ecommerce platform providing premium visual content to SMBs, SMEs, creatives, and students everywhere, has revealed five key strategies to help businesses effectively capitalize on the power of sport to connect with customers on a deeper level.

According to Visual GPS, an iStock research initiative, consumers across the globe are interested in deeper visual representation when it comes to sports, with 81% of people in the UK agreeing that sports should be accessible to everyone. The research also reveals that the emotional wellbeing that sports offer is more compelling than the physical benefits, with 72% of British people agreeing that engaging with sports is good for one's mental health.

"*Consumers crave a new type of athlete – it's less about strong sports heroes with struggles, triumphs, and relatability, the nuance now is much more focused on the holistic journey and vulnerability of athletes as real people, and how sports organisations need to take more care of them*," said **Jacqueline Bourke, Head of Creative Insights for EMEA at iStock**. "*The psychological challenges of sports have been talked about for ages, but in 2021, athletes in a number of disciplines took action to shine a light on the vulnerability and destigmatisation of mental health within sport at all levels. Although we've seen strides depicting mental health, body positivity and inclusion since then, there's still a marked opportunity to build upon this and deepen the representation we tap within marketing to foster truer, more authentic connections with global audiences who look to sports for inspiration*."

Below, iStock reveals five tips for businesses of all sizes to help elevate conversations and stories around mental health, wellbeing, and inclusion in sport within their marketing year-round:

- **Focus on the positives**: Sports empower people to focus on physical pursuits that benefit their mental and physical health. iStock's Visual GPS data reveals that 31% of people in the UK consider sports as a stress reliever, while 27% believe they help their mental wellbeing. Marketing campaigns centered around sport and fitness can improve effectiveness by capturing this sentiment. When selecting visuals, consider showing athletes relishing time with teammates, the rewards and joy of training, and the gratification of completing a strenuous activity. Ultimately, these depictions will promote sports as a healthy outlet, both mentally and physically.

- **Don't shy away from mental health:** While elite sports traditionally depict physical triumphs, there's room to showcase mental health victories, as well. 63% percent of British people now agree that athletes and sports leagues should openly discuss mental health, while 62% agree that improved mental health is the biggest benefit of playing sports. By incorporating more authentic, accurate images that represent the nuances of mental health in sports, this will inspire these conversations more frequently. Businesses have the power to support and cultivate empathy among fans and athletes in their marketing strategies, so be sure to take a mindful and respectful approach when showcasing these moments to avoid overstepping personal boundaries.

- **Showcase inclusion at all levels:** iStock research reveals that almost a third of people in the UK (29%) want to see everyday people like themselves represented in sports. Along with, people of different ages (32%), genders (33%), physical disabilities (27%), all body types (24%) and people from different backgrounds (28%), all as essential factors to visualising inclusive sport. With visuals typically dominated by muscles and tone, consumers prefer to see a range of skill levels and body types included in sport and fitness visuals.

- **Focus on accessibility to all**: Another important factor inspiring inclusion in sport lies within visualising where and how sport is accessible. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the urgency of sports and fitness accessibility for all. Throughout this time, finding opportunities to make the everyday world a gym has been key to appealing more broadly to consumers impacted by the pandemic in different ways – whether that's been finding space in their living rooms, backyards, parks, or community groups to work out. When choosing imagery, videos or illustrations for your marketing campaigns, consider taking a more thoughtful, proactive approach to better engage customers more authentically and effectively during these times.

- **Depict female athletes as strong and relatable:** While we've seen strides around gender

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equality in sports, a significant gap still remains. 71% of people in the UK noted a desire to see female athletes portrayed in an authentic way that focuses on their skill and athleticism, rather than their beauty, glamour, or sex appeal. There is a tremendous opportunity for businesses and marketers to feature women engaged and succeeding in team and individual sports. Sharing visuals of this nature will put forth an accurate portrayal of female athletes, showcasing their power, strength, and vulnerability, while also inspiring current audience members and the next generation of female athletes.

To find more sport and wellness-related imagery and videos, visit https://www.istockphoto.com.

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