

Manchester United sponsorship boosts Aon's profile in D.C.

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It isn't exactly a new thing for European soccer powers to take summer tours of the U.S. In the last decade, with stateside interest in the beautiful game growing, clubs have made trips almost annually to tune up for their league seasons, earn appearance fees, greet fans and sponsors and grow their brands.

For [Manchester United](#) — which is in D.C. to play Italian club Inter Milan on Tuesday night at FedEx Field — its 2014 tour is one in a long line for the British side.

"In 1950, Sir Matt Busby brought a very young team over to the United States by steamship," United's Group Managing Director [Richard Arnold](#) told me Monday at the Mandarin Oriental, where the team is staying. "They played 14 games over three months. The engagement we have with fans is something that's a long-standing history."

While the fandom has remained strong through the decades, the business of sports has grown and changed in many ways since "Busby's Babes" made that trans-Atlantic voyage.

Sponsorships and satellite television have gone a long way in spreading the reach of European soccer clubs and helped turn Manchester United into arguably the biggest sports brand on the planet.

Arnold, the most senior figure with the club on a day-to-day basis, was quick to roll out the numbers, claiming the club has fans — some 659 million in total — in every country, with roughly 4 billion TV viewers in a given season.

London-based [Aon](#) — a company that specializes in risk management, insurance and reinsurance brokerage and human resources services — tapped into the club's immense reach in 2009 when it struck a deal to be Manchester United's official jersey sponsor. The initial deal, [worth \\$23.25 million a season](#), opened the doors to a larger partnership between the two entities; [Aon later purchased naming rights to United's storied Carrington training grounds](#) and has served as sponsor of the club's preseason tours, including its current trek through the U.S.

"We average a Super Bowl a week in terms of exposure. We have 100 million people watching Manchester United each week," Arnold said. ([Super Bowl XLVIII drew a record 112.2 million viewers in February](#).) "That ubiquity means then you've got this engaged fan base around the world and the Aon branding will be seen in every city around the world."

Arnold said United was attracted to Aon because of its reputation as a high-performing global company. Arnold says he sits down with local managing directors in every country the club visits — from the U.S. to Asia.

[Otis Tolbert](#), the resident managing director of Aon's D.C. office, said the affiliation as done wonders to promote the company in Greater Washington.

"I think the partnership has been excellent for us from a brand awareness standpoint and within the region here it has helped us immensely by exposing clients to who we are and what we do," he said.



Otis Tolbert, the resident managing director of Aon's D.C. office (left), and Manchester United's Group Managing Director Richard Arnold sat down Monday ahead of the club's exhibition game Tuesday night at FedEx Field.

Arnold said the partnership has outperformed his initial expectations, as Aon has advised the club on everything from financial to cyber risks. When the club made an initial public offering in 2012, Aon was among the underwriters.

"I think what we have done with Man U is help them understand all the moving parts as it relates to risk and people and then they take that info and make business decisions based on it," Tolbert said.

Chevrolet recently moved into the prime real estate on Manchester United's jersey — [Chevy is paying the club \\$559 million over seven years to appear on the club's shirts](#) — but Aon's partnership continues. The deal to sponsor the Carrington training ground is ongoing and Aon's logo will adorn the club's training uniforms.

"It's not just a sticker on the shirt," Arnold said.