

# CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

February 20, 2016 8:00 a.m.

DETROIT GOLF EXHIBITION MAY BE QUICKEN'S NEXT SCORE IN SPORTS MARKETING

By Bill Shea



Photo by Martin Dokoupil / Associated Press

Rory McIlroy (front) walks on the first fairway with Rickie Fowler at a tournament last month. They may soon square off under the lights in a night match at Detroit Golf Club, which Quicken Loans is working to make happen.

A push to have champion pro golfers Rory McIlroy and Rickie Fowler square off under the lights at **Detroit Golf Club** later this year is the latest high-profile sports marketing initiative from **Quicken Loans Inc.**

The Detroit-based mortgage lender led by real estate magnate and sports team owner Dan Gilbert has devoted up to 30 percent of its enormous annual marketing spending to sports since 2011.

Quicken has branding deals with the **PGA Tour**, motorsports, several pro sports teams, college sports, and earlier this month aired its first Super Bowl commercial.

"We're always looking for the interesting angle or different way we could approach it," Quicken Loans President and CMO Jay Farner said in an interview with *Crain's*. "We're wide open to stuff."

The proposed golf match, first reported by The Associated Press, is tentatively scheduled to be played June 7, the Tuesday before **U.S. Open** week begins at **Oakmont Country Club** in suburban Pittsburgh. The match in Detroit would air live on the **Golf Channel** and **CBS**.

Celebrities Justin Timberlake and Mark Wahlberg are expected to be paired with McIlroy and Fowler for the exhibition, Detroit **ABC** affiliate **WXYZ-Channel 7** reported last week.

Quicken, which is the primary sponsor of 2015 Players Championship winner Fowler, isn't saying much about the exhibition other than it's still in talks to create the event.

"We're always looking for new ways to do exciting things," Farner said. "And if it's in Detroit, that's even better. We're still working through that to see if something might happen."

Sports-based marketing accounts for between 15 percent and 30 percent of Quicken's annual marketing spending since 2011, he said. The company's internal metrics show a return on investment that justifies such spending, Farner added.

Quicken spent \$157 million on U.S. measured-media in the first nine months of 2015, the most recent numbers available from New York City-based data firm **Kantar Media**. For all of 2014, Quicken spent \$361 million in measured and unmeasured ad spending, according to *Advertising Age*.

Quicken was the 10th fastest-growing marketing spender in 2014, up 31 percent over the year before, *Ad Age* reported last year.

The lender isn't discussing its current spending specifics, but it's known it wrote a big check to advertise in Super Bowl 50 on Feb. 7.

It bought a 60-second spot to tout its Rocket Mortgage, which promises consumers the ability to get mortgage approval in as little as 8 minutes on their mobile device or computer.

The product was introduced in November, and Quicken thought the timing with the Super Bowl made sense. "The Super Bowl was staring us right in the face," Farner said. Gilbert approved the Super Bowl buy, he added.

The game was seen nationally by an average of 111.9 million viewers, giving it the third-best American TV audience in history, **CBS** said.

National commercial airtime during this year's Super Bowl sold for \$4.6 million to more than \$5 million, *Advertising Age* reported. Buyers typically get discounts for multiple buys, and often the deals include digital and social media elements.

Quicken's Super Bowl spot showcased the risk in financial services advertising: There was backlash, mostly on Twitter, that Rocket Mortgage could lead to a subprime crisis like the one that fueled the last recession — a criticism the lender has faced for several years.

Quicken's social media team responded with assurances that its mortgage practice follows all government guidelines.



Jay Farner

Quicken believes sports branding is the key to its target customers. "When you start looking at the client segment we want to focus on, sports jumps out," Farner said.

Quicken is targeting adults ages 25-55 who are technologically savvy in their daily lives. "When they choose to take out time to watch programming, they watch sports," Farner said.

People typically refinance or buy a home every five to seven years, Farner said.

"We view ourselves in somewhat of a unique situation from a service or product perspective. We're dealing with a mortgage," he said. "You have to be front-of-mind when they make that decision."

Hence Quicken's heavy spending on marketing to get itself ingrained in people's minds for mortgage consideration.

"If we're not part of their consideration set, we may not get that at-bat," Farner said.

Quicken's strategy also includes getting noticed by media and those who get public attention by talking about marketing. Stories (including this one) are free exposure.

"What are you going to do that's going to rise to the top of the list from a reporter's perspective — different, interesting, creative, that creates discussion in communications, public relations, and social media?" Farner said.

The golf exhibition certainly has drawn local attention. Quicken has heavily invested in the sport for years.

In March 2014, it replaced **AT&T** as title sponsor of the PGA Tour's **Quicken Loans National** invitational tournament that has been played at courses around Washington, D.C. This year's event, hosted and organized by the **Tiger Woods Foundation**, is at **Congressional Country Club** in Bethesda, Md.

Quicken is the official mortgage sponsor of the PGA Tour and senior **Champions Tour**.

While upping its golf marketing, Quicken has reduced its motorsports involvement.

"We wanted to stay in **NASCAR** but also give ourselves the flexibility to try some new things," Farner said.

Last year, Quicken dropped sponsorship of **Michigan International Speedway's** June NASCAR race, but it remains a sponsor with **Hendrick Motorsports** on a limited race schedule.

Quicken is the primary sponsor of the Charlotte, N.C.-based racing team's No. 5 Chevrolet SS driven by Kasey Kahne for three 2016 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series races.

Quicken previously sponsored Ryan Newman and his No. 31 Chevrolet with North Carolina-based **Richard Childress Racing** for two years. Before that, Quicken sponsored Newman when he drove for another North Carolina-based team, **Stewart-Haas Racing**. Those were full-season deals.

Quicken has a presence in other sports, too.

In September 2013, Quicken inked a deal with the **Detroit Lions** to turn 62 seats in one section of the southwest corner of Ford Field into the "Quicken Loans Dream Seat" of black leather recliners embroidered with the company's logo. Large high-definition LCD televisions are mounted in front of each seat.

Quicken has exclusive access, distribution and branding for those seats under what

amounts to a five-year lease, the team said. The seats are expected to be used for employees and clients of Quicken and its sibling companies owned by Gilbert.

As part of the deal, Quicken became the team's official mortgage lender, and it sponsors a club lounge for suite or club-level ticket holders and has branding throughout the stadium.

It also has deals with the **Detroit Red Wings** and the **Detroit Belle Isle Grand Prix**.

Quicken also is investing in collegiate sports marketing.

In January, it announced sweepstakes at 26 colleges, including the **University of Michigan** and **Michigan State University**. Participants will have a chance to win tickets for the 2016-17 season.

Quicken has used college basketball for marketing. In 2011, it was the title sponsor of the "Carrier Classic" between MSU and the **University of North Carolina** played on the flight deck of the **U.S. Navy** aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson.

In 2014, Quicken was co-sponsor (along with **Berkshire Hathaway's** Warren Buffett and **Yahoo Inc.**) of an **NCAA** men's basketball tournament bracket contest that would pay \$1 billion to anyone who correctly predicted the winner of every game. (No one did.)

Sports marketing insiders have been impressed with Quicken's efforts.

"They're definitely going for the wow factor, which is smart," said Mike Dietz, president of **Dietz Sports & Entertainment** in Farmington Hills, which helps companies with sponsorships.

Quicken's contests also are a strategic tool, said Dietz, who has done prep basketball marketing work co-sponsored by Quicken.

"Collecting fan data and leads seems to be an important part of their sports marketing strategy," he said. "Having fans register to win high-value prizes allows Quicken Loans to capture fan information."

The mortgage company also gets free brand recognition from Gilbert's ownership of the **Cleveland Cavaliers**. He bought the **NBA** club in 2005 as head of an investment group for \$375 million, and the deal included a naming rights provision that rebranded Gund Arena as Quicken Loans Arena.

*Bill Shea: (313) 446-1626. Twitter: @Bill\_Shea19*