NATIONAL CUP FINALS
BUSINESS ARTICULATION
**It’s a knockout: The National Cup Finals!**

**When?** 14 and 15, April 2018

**Where?** The National Volleyball Centre, Kettering

**What’s so good about it?**

The National Cup is the FA Cup of volleyball. The most prestigious knockout competition in English volleyball, it has the magic of matching teams against each other from different levels of the game and all roads lead to the biggest showcase event in Volleyball England’s calendar: The National Cup Finals weekend. It’s an incredible couple of days featuring eight matches – all of them cup finals.

This season’s National Cup competition began last September when 60 men’s and 54 women’s teams entered the fray. Teams compete from all over the country, from Kernow Truro volleyball club in far flung corner of Cornwall in the southwest, to Team Northumbria in their North-East outpost.

For teams which were eliminated the first two rounds, they went into the Shield competition – so they get a second chance of Finals Day glory.

The Shield finals are played before the National Cup finals on the Saturday of the Finals weekend, before, on the Sunday, the juniors take centre stage as the Under 16 and Under 18 boys’ and girls’ national championships reach their finales too.

Hosted at the National Volleyball Centre in Kettering, the atmosphere in the arena is electric. The drama of 16 teams all battling for their chance to lift a trophy is a cocktail of gripping tension and thrilling action. Last year, the National Cup Finals weekend had over 500 spectators, making it one of Volleyball England best attended events.

As well as a bumper crowd, the event features around 100 athletes and coaches on each day. The incredible interest in the National Cup and Shield knockout competition is also evidenced on the Volleyball England digital platforms. Stories, results and updates from the competition reached in excess of 30,000 on social media and the Volleyball England website, with one story alone attracting 4000-page views in 2017.

The National Cup and Shield competition has been running for around 35 years and remains the only opportunity non-National League teams to compete alongside their peers during the indoor season. It gives teams from the lower echelons of volleyball the opportunity to benchmark their progress and see what is possible, while for those teams already competing in the National Volleyball League, the competition is a welcome and entertaining distraction from their league campaigns. Teams having an indifferent season get their chance to do something special.
The cream of English volleyball is on show too. Teams from the Super 8s, the top level of English volleyball regularly reach the National Cup Final. This year’s final will see stars from the men’s and women’s England teams in action, including the men’s captain Adam Bradbury. Some of these players will have professional volleyball experience too, having played in top European leagues.

Volleyball England is now actively looking for commercial partners who may want to be part of the ongoing success of the National Cup and Shield competition. With public funding for national governing bodies being reduced, we are keen to secure the investment we need to sustain this event, which is a showcase for the whole sport in this country.

We are firm in our belief that volleyball – and the friendly competition which it engenders - is an ideal way of improving levels of activity, health and well-being, especially among young people. We are keen to find partners who share that belief and who would like to work with us to ensure volleyball can continue to have a positive impact on people’s lives.

**How might a commercial partnership work?**

As the weekend is a showpiece event, the court for each final is set-up to the highest standards with courtside advertising boards providing the boundary for the playing area and prime opportunity for promoting brands. Traditional advertising can also be deployed in other areas of the National Volleyball Centre, such as the balcony viewing area, sports hall entrance, changing room areas and other break-out rooms.

In addition, any commercial partner could expect significant coverage on the Volleyball England website and social media pages. The event will be live streamed on the Volleyball England Facebook page which has over 10,000 followers.

There are numerous other ways in which a partner’s brand could be profiled in connection with the National Cup Finals, including:

- Competition naming rights and prize-giving;
- Extensive co-branded content (print and video), focusing on the benefits of both volleyball and our partner’s products and services, published on the VE website throughout the year;
- Branded product give-aways at the competition - e.g. warm-up T-shirts for all players to wear throughout the competition or free samples to be distributed to spectators;
- Opportunities for on-site merchandise sales or service promotions;
- Senior VE personnel (coaches, executives, England players etc) being made available for joint publicity opportunities at our partner’s request.

This is by no means an exhaustive list; merely an indication of the kind of collaborative activity which Volleyball England would happily consider undertaking. With earlier rounds being played throughout the regular season, the competition stays in the consciousness of the volleyball community all year round, not just two days in April.
Who might this appeal to?

Being the pinnacle of the sport in this country, the appeal of the event would be felt very keenly among manufacturers and retailers of sports clothing and equipment. Technology plays an increasingly important role in volleyball, potentially making the National Cup and Shield Finals attractive to wearable technology brands and software suppliers. The players on show are excellent athletes meaning the event has an obvious synergy with healthcare, lifestyle, and healthy eating brands too.

The event brings together the whole volleyball community, highlighted by the fact the event sees the presentation of the Volleyball England Annual Awards as part of the weekend’s celebration. The volleyball community is forward thinking and conscientious group and a market many companies would find worthwhile connecting with.

The Sunday programme of events of the junior finals, could also be a handy shop window for academic institutions keen to showcase their range of higher and further education options, or other business wanting to promote values of family, self-progression and youth.

Finally, the Cup and Shield competitions may also prove attractive to any corporate organisation wanting to promote activity and/or diversity as part of its corporate responsibility programme. While a minority sport in England, volleyball is nevertheless the second most commonly played team sport in the world. Its popularity elsewhere in Europe means that the English game currently features an incredibly rich, ethnically diverse player base. Volleyball isn’t just diverse though; it’s also inclusive – with sitting volleyball providing an incredibly rare opportunity for able-bodied and disabled athletes to play alongside each other in mixed gender competition.

What else do I need to be aware of?

Even at a time when changes are being made to our competitive calendar, Volleyball England remains firmly committed to the National Cup and Shield Finals. It is the showpiece event of the indoor volleyball calendar.

What happens next?

With no existing partnership programme in place for this event, we are open to any suggestions of commercial support, especially if that creates a template which can be repeated in future years. To start the discussion, do please get in touch with Stewart Dunne at Volleyball England on 01509 227722 or email s.dunne@volleyballengland.org