



Olympian Savoir Faire

LVMH's **ANTOINE ARNAULT**, describes the luxury house's elegant partnership with the Paris Olympics to **NIKHIL DEOGUN**, Brunswick's CEO of the Americas.

In its partnership with the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, luxury icon LVMH's influence is significant and understated. As the July 26th Opening Ceremony made clear, the 2024 Games stand out for their elegance, beauty and style. Less obvious is the influence of LVMH, the parent of 75-plus luxury brands.

• *Over lunch in a restaurant close to LVMH's Paris headquarters, Brunswick's Nikhil Deogun talked with Antoine Arnault about the Olympics partnership, the connection between luxury and sport, and more.*

AS A PREMIUM PARTNER AND THE FIRST-ever Creative Partner of the Paris Olympics, LVMH is reported to have invested about 150 million euros in the Summer Games. But in keeping with its culture of understated excellence—excellence that speaks for itself—LVMH isn't seeking any big bang for its buck. "Our plan was not to plaster our name on billboards or the sides of stadiums, our plan was never to sell even one more handbag," says Antoine Arnault, Head of Image and Environment at LVMH, as well as Chairman of both Loro Piana and Berluti, two of the company's Maisons. "Our goal is elegance."

If its tone as a sponsor is non-splashy, its influence has been profound and perhaps unprecedented. Eager from the outset to provide not only money but also the human resources within Maisons like Louis Vuitton, Dior and Moët & Chandon, LVMH accepted the role of Creative Partner of the Paris Olympics and fulfilled that promise in earnest. One LVMH Maison, the French jeweler Chaumet, designed the Olympic and Paralympic medals, Louis Vuitton crafted the trunks that carried the medals and torches, Sephora celebrated the arrival of the torch in cities across the country, Berluti created the apparel for the French team—and on and on, including a significant LVMH role in the Opening Ceremony.

LVMH believes that a multiplicity of elegant touches present a subtle, positive impression of LVMH—and an unabashedly proud impression of its home country. Ahead of the Opening Ceremony—at a moment when he had a dozen balls in the air—Arnault sat down with Brunswick to express pride in the host city. "There's no need to explain how great this is for France," he says, "how great this is for the city of Paris, the return of this great event, on a billion and a half screens."

Clearly proud of his nation's role in reviving the Ancient Olympics—French is still the official language of the Olympic Games—Arnault notes that LVMH was present at the start of the campaign for the 2024 Summer Games. "We were partners in the Olympic

candidacy of the city of Paris going back to 2015. Strategically, it was absolutely evident that it would be great for us to be part of this international event."

For a collection of well-run brands accustomed to autonomy, "it's difficult when you try to centralize; there were questions because this is not our usual way of operating," says Arnault. "But when we got down to details, the role of various Maisons became clear."

Just as Paris and the Olympics go way back—to the 1900 and 1924 Games—luxury brands have long appealed to athletes. "The connection between our world and the world of sports has existed for decades. What has changed is the magnitude of athlete celebrity. The superstars of sports became probably the biggest stars in the world. Just look who has the most followers on Instagram: Cristiano Ronaldo has more than 600 million. Leo Messi, I think, has 500 million.

"But again, this is not new. Jean Patou, one of our smallest brands, and to this day a very chic French name and French brand, was dressing Suzanne Lenglen, a woman who won Wimbledon six times in the 1920s."

Its sponsorship of the 2024 Games electrified employees across LVMH, says Arnault, in part because internally the effort was highly visible. Thinking aloud, Arnault notes that the company rarely brings attention to its philanthropic efforts, its efforts to train youth, its efforts to preserve knowledge and expertise. "This Olympics sponsorship makes me wonder how we can even better communicate internally about our efforts to benefit society."

As a sports fan, Arnault will sidestep soccer and tennis ("I've been to Roland Garros many times") in favor of sports he has never seen in person: "I want to discover fencing in the Grand Palais, and I want to discover my first equestrian jumping competition in the garden of the Château de Versailles. I want to discover judo—my son does karate. I want to discover the newer street sports, like BMX, rock climbing, breakdancing. We're also going to see Félix and Alexis Lebrun, these French twins, two young kids who are super good at table tennis. I have tickets for all of those. I want to check them out and get in the Olympics vibe. And then of course, I'm going to go see swimming, where we have great athletes like Léon Marchand. Two days after we announced him as an ambassador of LVMH, he beat one of Michael Phelps's world records."

In what sport would he himself most want to compete as an Olympian? Arnault pauses for a moment.

"Probably pole vault," he says. "I'm drawn to that instant when they know they did it, that split second when they're falling through the air knowing they cleared it, they've won the gold medal." ♦



NIKHIL DEOGUN is Brunswick's CEO of the Americas and US Senior Partner. Previously, he was Editor in Chief and Senior Vice President, Business News at CNBC.

