Universities join beer can brouhaha
IU, Purdue are latest to protest Bud Light cans in school colors

By John Tuohy

The state’s Big Ten schools are frothing over Budweiser’s latest promotion.

Indiana and Purdue universities have joined a coalition of colleges in calling for Anheuser-Busch InBev to stop selling its Bud Light “fan can” -- a regular-size aluminum can of beer decked out in school colors in college towns across the nation.

Liquor stores near Indiana University in Bloomington are selling red-and-white Bud Light cans, promoted as “King and Crimson,” in six-packs and cases, liquor retailers there said. And Lafayette-area liquor stores and bars are selling the beer in cans in Boilermaker black and gold.

Both schools have fired off letters to Budweiser corporate headquarters asking the company to “cease and desist” from selling the college-colored beer cans near campus.

“We don’t want to be affiliated or engage in activity that makes it more appealing for people to drink,” said IU spokeswoman Susan Williams.

Teri Lucie Thompson, Purdue’s vice president for marketing and media, said the promotion “implies that Purdue is associated with that certain type of product,” when it has no link at all.

So far, the beer maker has agreed to pull promotions near the University of Notre Dame, Texas A&M University, the University of Colorado and other college communities.

Notre Dame spokesman Dennis Brown said the school asked that the promotion be dropped because it would infringe on the school’s trademark and hurt efforts to curb binge and underage drinking.

Cans in Ball State University’s red and white also were being sold in Muncie, store clerks confirmed. Ball State officials on Thursday did not have an immediate response to the promotion.

Stores in Lafayette and Bloomington were still selling the beers Thursday.

Anheuser-Busch, which was bought by Belgium-based InBev last year, did not respond directly Thursday to questions about IU’s and Purdue’s requests. However, it did issue a statement noting “certain cans are not being made available in communities where organizations had asked us not to offer them.”

The company said the promotion is meant to “connect with fans of legal drinking age in fun ways in select markets across a variety of sports.”

The cans have no college logos, names or other identifiers -- just 27 color combinations. But the program coincides with the start of the college football season.
IU’s Williams said the decision to send the letter Aug. 24 was made by Valerie Gill, director of licensing and trademarks. The letter demanded that the company stop selling the can in the “general vicinity” of the campus. The school had not heard back by Thursday.

Dan St. John, owner of the four Village Bottle Shoppes in West Lafayette, said he has been stocking the black-and-gold can for a few weeks.

“I don’t see it being an issue with just the colors on the can,” he said. “If they used the logo, then it would be different.”

But Purdue officials said the cans are still an infringement on its brand and could be seen as promoting underage drinking.

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