

Henry's star shines bright for Puma

THIERRY HENRY has once again shifted his football boot and sportswear allegiance, this time to German-based brand Puma.

Described as a multi-year deal the value of the contract is unknown but, according to US sports marketer Jared Melzer, the New York Red Bulls striker is a hot soccer property stateside and is likely to fulfil Puma's ambitions in the MLS as an ambassador for their "joyful and lifestyle-centric" mantra.

"Henry fits the bill for Puma's general outlook which is one of joy and culture," says New York-based Melzer. "Where Nike and Adidas (who sponsor the US national teams and the MLS organization respectively) focus on performance and improvement, for Puma it is more about the lifestyle that the brand promotes.

"Henry has played at the highest level for Arsenal and Barcelona in Europe and now he has taken on a new challenge by playing in the States in a league which is less competitive than the English Premier League and La Liga.

"As a result, I think Henry's association with Puma reflects a stage in his career that sees him looking for a different experience of the game where he is more focused on lifestyle and enjoyment of soccer – it's a good play by Puma."

During the prime of his career with Arsenal and then Barcelona, Henry was earning between £15m and £20m per season via various endorsement deals with brands such as Nike, Reebok, Pepsi, Gillette and Renault. His inclusion in the Gillette campaign in particular, where he starred alongside Roger Federer and Tiger Woods, has played a pivotal role in Henry's recognition as an attractive property in the American soccer market for Puma.

"The Gillette deal certainly helped," explains Melzer. "It showed the credibility of Henry being associated with big players. MLS fans all know Henry and he is one of only a handful of soccer players that most sports fans know as well.

"It's now down to Puma to decide how to leverage and activate the partnership but they definitely picked the right person in Henry. He will promote the joy and style of Puma which is what the brand is all about."

While Henry may not receive the same £9m he pocketed when leaving the Nike roster for rivals Reebok back in 2006, the Frenchman is still likely to command a competitive price from Puma. With his status as the second highest paid athlete in the MLS and the sixth highest paid star in the world soccer, as well as currently co-leading the golascoring chart in the MLS, Thierry Henry is far from a spent force.

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