

Nadal and Federer Went Mountain High for a Louis Vuitton Ad

The tennis legends, friends off the court, feature in the latest "Core Values" spots.

Why would you wear a short-sleeve shirt on a snowy mountaintop in the Dolomites when the temperature sits at -5 Celsius?

If you have biceps as impressive and recognizable as Rafael Nadal's, and if you're posing for a major Louis Vuitton advertising campaign, why wouldn't you?

The Spanish tennis legend and his equally revered rival Roger Federer are the faces of Vuitton's latest "Core Values" campaign, signaling the ascent of sports heroes as coveted ambassadors for luxury brands — and reinforcing LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton's power play as a premium partner of the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris.

"How appropriate is it to come back with two people who incarnated in their careers, and nowadays as well, this Olympic spirit of being competitive to death on the field, and then being able to be friends outside? How important is that nowadays?" Pietro Beccari, chairman and chief executive officer of Louis Vuitton, asked in an exclusive interview. "Their friendship off the court is a real one, it's very rare, and I would say moving and very touching. It stands very much for the Olympic spirit we want to present and what Vuitton stands for."

The campaign, lensed by Annie Leibovitz, broke Saturday in HTSI (the Financial Times supplement formerly known as How to Spend It) and T Magazine International, in addition to Vuitton's digital channels. It will also appear in other marquee newspapers and magazines, and on billboards worldwide.

In addition, there will be a short film featuring the two tennis deities in conversation, both men seated on Vuitton trunks as a snowstorm swirls behind them.

Beccari, who attended the shoot, couldn't help but marvel at the sight of the two men, each toting a Vuitton backpack in its signature brown Monogram canvas and squinting into the horizon.

It was Leibovitz who requested Nadal show off his muscles, he noted. Swiss-born Federer, though surely more familiar with low temperatures and high altitudes than his hiking companion, opted for a long-sleeve shirt.

Beccari explained that the 3,000-meter summit served as a visual metaphor for their careers — collegial competitors on a shared ascent: Federer logging the then-record-setting 20 Grand Slam titles; Nadal earning the King of Clay nickname for his 14 French Open wins among his 22 Grand Slams.

A professional soccer player before he started his career in fast-moving consumer goods and later luxury, Beccari finds many parallels between sports and the fashion business, both requiring discipline, sacrifice, commitment and passion.

“And then you have to forget that you won last year’s championship, because there is a new one starting again,” he said, flashing a big smile.

Athletes like Federer and Nadal also symbolize optimism, positive energy, excellence, precision and a relentless quest to surpass their limits, he said, noting these are also important qualities for a brand like Vuitton, the industry’s largest player in fashion and leather goods and one of its most active in terms of fashion shows, events, exhibitions and media placements.

A driven, audacious and exacting executive, Beccari worked for Reckitt Benckiser, Parmalat and Henkel before joining Vuitton in 2006 as director of strategy and marketing coordination, eventually becoming executive vice president of communications and marketing. It was during this period when he and Antoine Arnault came out with the Core Values campaign as a complement to Vuitton’s various fashion campaigns.

Initial ones featured the likes of Pelé, Maradona and Zinedine Zidane playing table football; Russian politician Mikhail Gorbachev in the back of a limousine, and Angelina Jolie reclining on a wooden boat in a verdant, lakeside landscape in Cambodia’s Siem Reap province.

“I know how many important icons have been part of this campaign, so for me personally, being part of it is something that I am very proud of, especially sharing it with Roger: He has been my biggest rival and now a close friend today,” Nadal said. “In my career, I achieved more than I ever dreamt of, so at the end of the day, the legacy in terms of human beings is the most important value.”

Federer also relished the opportunity to appear in a campaign with Nadal.

“How we could be such rivals and then at the end of our careers be beside each other doing this campaign has been very cool,” he said. “And where we are here today, I think it also embodies everything: at the peak of the mountains. For us it is something meaningful and special.”

Vuitton resumed doing “Core Values” campaigns two years ago, depicting soccer rivals Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo squaring off at a game of chess just ahead of the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar.

Beccari returned to Vuitton in February 2023 at the management helm after stellar stints running Fendi in Rome and Dior in Paris.

“I’m particularly attached to this campaign, you can imagine,” he said in the interview. “For me, it has been quintessential for the development of the brand in the past. And I think when you have occasions like this — bringing together Federer and Nadal — you should not miss it.”

The tagline for the campaign reads, “There are journeys that turn into legends.”

“In sports, there is a notion of progress, of wanting to surpass oneself again and again, and not being happy with where you are, always wanting to progress. And I think that’s very Louis Vuitton,” Beccari said. “The brand is about travel, but when you arrive at a new place, you want to go to another one, you want to discover further, you want to go beyond.”

Asked how “Core Values” fits in among Vuitton’s myriad campaigns dedicated to fashion, leather goods, watches, fine jewelry, fragrances and such, Beccari described the brand as a “diamond with many facets.”

“To be a luxury brand implies a certain complexity, a multitude of these facets, which are sometimes coherent, sometimes not so coherent, but together represent the richness and the depth of the brand,” he said. “There will always be many campaigns for many categories, because we stand for many things, we don’t sell just products.”

To wit: The Federer-Nadal campaign features the Christopher and Eclipse backpacks, but they are not the protagonists. Rather “it’s the values that these two athletes incarnate and I think that gives coherence to everything we do.”

Beccari said both athletes came to the shoot with their tennis rackets, incongruous with the slopes, but nevertheless captured in private pictures away from the main shoot.

Nadal also brought out his racket while waiting at the airport for his flight, and practiced his serves.

In the spirit of what it takes to turn into legend, “he didn’t want to miss a day of training,” Beccari said.