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Belgian beer maker buys Anheuser-Busch for \$52B

by [Joseph R. Perone](#) and [Tom Johnson](#)/The Star-Ledger

Tuesday July 15, 2008, 1:46 PM



Amanda Brown/The Star-Ledger

Chuck Briscoe of West Orange downs a Bud Light at the Harrison Avenue Tavern. St. Louis-based Anheuser-Busch agreed Monday to a takeover by InBev.

At the Harrison Avenue Tavern Monday, most of the customers were nursing Budweisers. It was a typical day except for the disturbing thought of another American beer -- their beer -- being swallowed by a foreign competitor.

"It just shows American products are going down the tubes," said Chuck Briscoe, who lives in West Orange. "When they sold Stroh's, I stopped drinking it. I'll go back to an American product."

The problem may be finding one.

Anheuser-Busch -- the St. Louis company whose marketing prowess has been defined by everything from Clydesdale horses to warm and fuzzy holiday commercials to the Bud Bowls of years past, agreed yesterday to a \$52 billion takeover by InBev of Belgium. The deal will create the world's largest brewer and leave the three dominant beer-makers in the United States under the control of foreign-based companies.

The takeover of a 150-year-old iconic American brand shows no U.S. company is safe from foreign hands when the dollar is weak and an industry is consolidating among a handful of global players, experts said. The good news for the 775 workers at the 57-year-old An heuser-Busch brewery in Newark is InBev pledged again Monday it will keep the company's 12 U.S. plants open.

"Their tendency has been to acquire beer

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companies, and allow them to operate independently said Jeffrey Krug, associate professor of strategic management at Virginia Commonwealth University. "Transporting beer is expensive, and it is perishable. It has to be brewed and distributed locally."

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters, which represents hourly workers at the brewery, declined to comment.

But there are still doubters.

Carlos Oliveira, a manager at Valenca Bar and Liquor Store in Elizabeth, sells packaged goods just two miles from the Anheuser-Busch plant in Newark. He lamented the coming takeover of Anheuser-Busch, which brews 30 brands that include Budweiser -- the self-proclaimed "King of Beers."

"If you sell to a foreign company, they will make changes. It's like a relic in this country, and you don't want to lose it."

The transaction would be the biggest-ever all-cash deal, beating AT&T's \$41 billion takeover of Cingular Wireless in 2004. Anheuser-Busch is the largest U.S. beer maker, followed by other companies with foreign ownership, including No. 2 SABMiller, formed through the 2002 merger of South African Breweries and Miller Brewing, and Coors Molson, a merger of American and Canadian companies.

This Bud, c'est pour vous
 American beer drinkers' top choices for a brew may not be as all-American as you may think. With the takeover of Anheuser-Busch by Belgium-based InBev, that will make the top three brewers in U.S. share — with more than 90 percent of the market — wholly or partially based in another country.

Top U.S. beer producers and their brands			
Company	Country	Market share	Major brands
Anheuser-Busch	United States	46 percent	Budweiser Busch Michelob Rolling Rock
SABMiller	South Africa	25 percent	Miller Icehouse
Molson Coors	Canada/U.S.	20 percent	Molson Coors

SOURCES: Anderson Economic Group, Chicago; the companies — Eric Strauss

"This

merger will put pressure on SABMiller," said David Stone, a mergers and acquisitions attorney with Neal Gerber Eisenberg, a Chicago law firm.

InBev will use Anheuser-Busch's marketing prowess to push the Belgian company's brands such as

Beck's, Bass and Stella Artois, Ed ward Jones analyst Jack Russo said.

"Anheuser-Busch is a marketing machine," he said. "They've got advertising and marketing that is second to none."

The company also has a vast distributor network it can use to push the European brands, Ilhan Geckil, senior economist for Anderson Economic Group in Chicago said.

"There strength is in distribution," he said. "Anheuser-Busch wants its wholesalers to only sell Bud products and some imports. They always want to be the big brand."

As a result, the company is known for bare-knuckle tactics when it comes to competitors, said Gene Muller, founder and general manager of Flying Fish Brewery of Cherry Hill, now the largest American-owned brewery in the state.

"They could be a bit of a bully," he said. "Whenever a new stadium goes up, you always see a Budweiser sign there."

David van Wees, co-founder of Latis Imports, a Connecticut beer importer and a former vice president of marketing for Stella Artois, said the European management will make the merged company leaner.

"You will see an invigorated, renewed and tougher Anheuser-Busch," he said.



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But back at Harrison Avenue Tavern, the regulars weren't moved by the thought.

Jack Lapsley, a roofer from West Orange, switched from Budweiser to Coors Light yesterday in protest.

When told Coors had been acquired by Molson, a Canadian beer company, he replied: "Well, at least that's a lot closer."

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