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Healthy transfer activity and competitive media markets give hope after Covid



The latest issue of our quarterly magazine goes to press with the top five European football leagues back in full swing. In spite of doom-laden predictions about the impact of Covid-19 on club finances, brisk transfer business continued to be done across the continent this summer, with the moves of Lionel Messi to Paris Saint-Germain and Cristiano Ronaldo to Manchester United satisfying the appetite for stimulating player plotlines and interesting commercial stories.

On page 10 we examine how the Messi transfer has already doubled the prices commanded by the club's Premium Partner tier, giving the lie to the notion that the club signed the 34-year-old Argentinian – on a reported €109.7m (\$128.7m) in wages over the next three years – without a coherent strategy for making a return on its investment.

The Messi transfer took place against the recent backdrop of Ligue 1's chaotic domestic media rights tender. But elsewhere in Europe, a smaller league is challenging the accepted wisdom that only the very biggest

properties will continue to thrive during the Covid crisis and a challenging sports rights market. On page 56 we examine how Italy's second division, Lega B, went into its new season having doubled the value of its domestic media rights deal and quadrupled the value of its international media rights.

Meanwhile, rights-holders further up the scale will be hoping the launch of a new pan-regional digital platform by South Korean company Eclat Media Group (page 14) will help to stimulate similar interest for their rights in Asia-Pacific and make up for the closure of Disney's Fox Sports Asia operation. Properties to have previously held deals with Fox, including Formula 1, MotoGP, UFC and the tennis grand slams have all been on the market in recent months seeking a new buyer. Sellers will also be eager that talk of an outbreak of 'streaming wars' in Australia solidifies into strong competition for rights in that region (page 82).

In the US, Covid-19 has motivated some leagues to liberalise their commercial approaches and create new revenue generating opportunities that ease the financial burden of the pandemic on stakeholders. On page 50 we report on the National Hockey League's new rules allowing teams to sell jersey sponsorships, which follow the decision to allow branding on team helmets. ♦

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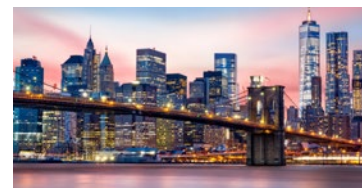
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IMG awarded six-figure damages from TUI in Fifa in-ship rights case

By Martin Ross

Published online 19 Jul, 2021

The IMG agency has been awarded damages to compensate for lost rights fees in its lawsuit against the German arm of TUI Cruises following its live broadcasts of 2018 Fifa World Cup and 2019 Women's World Cup matches on cruise ships in international waters, *SportBusiness* understands.

IMG Media took legal action after TUI took the unencrypted signals from German public-service broadcasters ARD and ZDF via Astra satellites to show matches from the two tournaments. Fifa, football's global governing body, was added as the second plaintiff in the case but announced last month that it had resolved its dispute with TUI.

The Hamburg Regional Court has now ruled that TUI infringed copyright laws when showing action from both Fifa tournaments to its customers in public places and cabins on the 'Mein Schiff' cruise ships.

SportBusiness understands that TUI has been ordered to pay a total of €365,282.27 (\$431,558.40) to IMG Media, plus interest (at nine percentage points above the base rate as of December 28, 2019).

However, IMG Media's request for a 'cease and desist' order for future high-profile sports events, coupled with a €250,000 fine for

TUI should it fail to comply, was dismissed. The court rejected IMG Media's application for an injunction and financial deterrent given it could not be ascertained which sports events the agency would acquire rights to in the future.

The case marks the first time that IMG Media has initiated legal action against a cruise line over in-ship rights. Should the agency have lost the case, it would have had a significant impact on not only IMG's in-ship business, but potentially the sports rights sector generally, with broadcasters emboldened by the availability of ARD and ZDF's unencrypted signal – an issue for pay-television broadcaster beIN Sports previously – and thus threatening rights sales in individual countries.

Fifa had a deal in place with IMG for in-flight and in-ship media rights for the 2018 World Cup in Russia and the 2019 Women's World Cup in France. IMG Media filed its lawsuit in October 2019 and was joined by Fifa nine months later.

In its ruling, the Hamburg Regional Court said: "The right to transmit the basic feed on board cruise ships in international waters and to broadcast it via the on-board entertainment systems was exclusively authorised to the first plaintiff [IMG Media] during

the periods of the World Cup football matches of interest.

"Therefore, the use of the basic feed on which the live broadcasts of the ARD and ZDF channels were based would have required a licence from the first plaintiff. It is indisputable that such a licence did not exist.

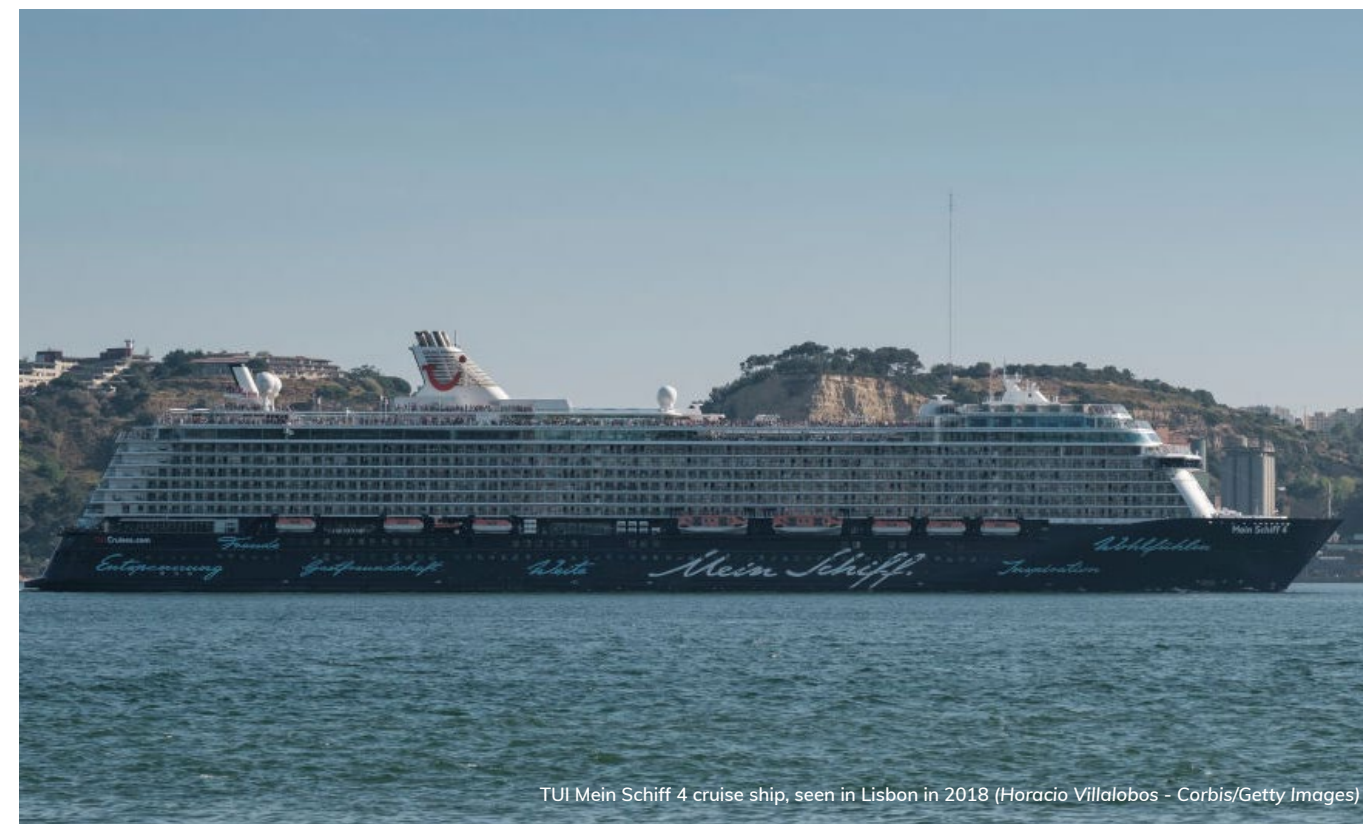
"The fact that the defendant was technically able to receive the unencrypted TV signal of the ARD and ZDF channels from the Astra 1N satellites by means of a satellite dish and to transmit it to the television sets on board its ships does not at the same time establish the lawfulness of this action."

Contacted by *SportBusiness*, IMG said: "We are naturally pleased with the decision in court. It is imperative that the value of media rights owned by sports federations and sold on their behalf by companies such as IMG are protected against any broadcaster televising events without the permission of the rights-holder."

TUI, which can still appeal the decision, did not wish to comment on the ruling.

Fifa announced details of its settlement last month.

It said: "Under the agreed settlement, TUI Cruises recognises Fifa's copyright in the basic feed, which is produced by Fifa and licensed to international



TUI Mein Schiff 4 cruise ship, seen in Lisbon in 2018 (Horacio Villalobos - Corbis/Getty Images)

TV broadcasters. TUI Cruises further undertakes to Fifa that it will refrain from using the Fifa basic feed (even if received from ARD or ZDF) on its ships. This includes by means of the on-board TV system available in the cabins or in the catering and entertainment areas, unless TUI Cruises has obtained a suitable licence from Fifa or its official licensing partner for the in-ship rights."

TUI's German arm did acquire a licence from IMG to show the 2016 Uefa European Championships on its cruise ships. The operator also acquired a licence to broadcast this year's Euro 2020 tournament.

IMG operates its Sport 24 and Sport 24 Extra channels on airlines and cruise ships. However, the World Cup and European Championships were not available on the channels' in-ship service as the agency instead struck deals with cruise lines for a separate licence with a separate feed.

“Fifa had a deal in place with IMG for in-flight and in-ship media rights for the 2018 World Cup in Russia and the 2019.”

The agency and the German arm of TUI Cruises had held fee negotiations over the in-ship rights to the 2018 World Cup and a draft licence agreement was drawn up just over two months before the start of the tournament. However, TUI did not go on to sign the deal and went on to showcase the free-to-air ARD and ZDF coverage instead.

In addition to the damages payment set for the 2018 World Cup and 2019 Women's World Cup rights, the court ruled that a total of 73 per cent of IMG Media's extrajudicial costs must be settled by TUI Cruises (with the remainder paid by IMG). This is in addition to 86 per cent of the court costs to be paid by the defendant

(and 14 per cent by IMG).

The damages payment for the 2018 World Cup equates to \$216,000 for six vessels (or €176,017.61 according to the currency conversion at the time of the draft agreement). The payment instructed by the court for the 2019 Women's World Cup rights is \$213,500 for seven vessels (€189,264.66 according to the currency conversion the day before the tournament started).

Lawyers for TUI Cruises argued – unsuccessfully – that the damages claimed were exaggerated, insisting that most ships were in a port or coastal waters at the time of the tournaments and that it would not have needed a licence for all matches. ♦

Coutts: Title sponsorship, franchise model to navigate SailGP towards profitability

By Martin Ross

Published online 27 Aug, 2021

SailGP, the team sailing competition co-founded and financially backed by Oracle billionaire Larry Ellison, will be profitable once a title sponsorship agreement has been delivered, according to Sir Russell Coutts, chief executive at the series.

Following a hiatus caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, SailGP is now in the midst of its second season, having launched to much fanfare in London back in late 2018.

Ellison pledged to underwrite the series for at least five years but the future addition of a title sponsor and impending sale of team franchises at \$20m (€17m) apiece has led SailGP to be tracking ahead of its business plan, according to Coutts.

Coutts told *SportBusiness*: “To run SailGP profitably, that is not far off now. Once we sell the title partnership, that will turn into a profit centre.

“And then venues [fees] are improving and interest in team franchises is strong.

“We’re definitely on a good pathway right now. Of course, things can change but I’m definitely comfortable with where we are at the moment.”

SailGP is working with IMG on the title sponsorship negotiations, with the agency



Sir Russell Coutts (Clive Mason/Getty Images)

having come on board when parent company Endeavor invested in a minority stake in SailGP at the start of last year.

“We’ve got some discussions [going] in this category now” Coutts said. “But we’re definitely not desperate to sell it. We’d like to be profitable as early as we could, as anyone would, but we want to sell it for the right value.”

While the title sponsorship search remains ongoing, a deal has been agreed for a franchise to join as the ninth SailGP team and will be announced in due course. Discussions are also being held about the ownership of a tenth team.

It is the influx of revenues driven by the franchise model that will be viewed by many

onlookers as the ‘game changer’ in SailGP’s commercial evolution. Along with sponsorship rights, the series also brings in revenues from hosting fees although broadcast rights income is not significant given the emphasis on widespread distribution.

Coutts, who cited “strong” external interest in buying into the series, said: “We’re locking the number of franchises off at ten. Once we’ve reached that then the only way in is to buy into one of the existing teams.

“We’re now getting approaches from various entities and there will be some announcements coming up.”

SailGP launched its inaugural season in 2019 with six centrally-owned teams: Australia, China, France, Great Britain, Japan and the US. China dropped out after the first season and was replaced by Spain. Teams from Denmark and New Zealand also came on board this season.

Coutts said that he expects there to be buyouts in future that lead to the national teams changing.

Given what the series is “delivering in terms of value”, the \$20m entry price is “not a lot of money at this point”, according to the former Olympic yachtsman and ex-chief executive of the Oracle Team.

He added: “I think some of the teams will work financially, some of them won’t, and you’ll see some traded to different countries.”

On the sponsorship search, Coutts flagged up “a really tough market compared to three or four years ago” but said that purpose initiatives, such as the recent launch of the sustainability driven Impact League, have helped to spark interest.

He remarked: “All companies are having to be active and visible in this space now. It’s not going to be acceptable to ignore this category going forward. There isn’t any excuse. So we’re well positioned there.”

While some teams have complained about the perception created about finishing bottom

of the Impact League, Coutts stressed that the initiative makes SailGP “authentic” and encourages teams to “actually take action” using competition as the motivator.

For its first season in 2019, SailGP succeeded in signing Rolex, Land Rover and Ellison’s software firm Oracle, as founding partners. Earlier this year, professional services company Cognizant became an Official Partner of the series. This came after logistics specialist Kuehne+Nagel was added to the sponsorship portfolio under a three-year deal that will run to 2024.

A supplier deal with Maui Jim, the eyewear manufacturer, was announced earlier this month.

Returning to the theme of the

title sponsorship search, Coutts noted: “We don’t want to sell it too cheaply. As the property is building and we are creating more awareness, expanding our venue calendar and number of teams, that draws more interest from those team markets and the title partnership becomes more valuable.

“We’ve got our ideas about which categories would be ideal for us. Obviously, we wouldn’t turn away a great offer but would have our preferences as to which categories fit our purpose objectives.”

The fourth event of the 2021-22 SailGP season took place in Aarhus, Denmark last weekend and the series moves on to Saint-Tropez in France in the middle of next month. ♦



(SailGP)

Messi inspires major uplift in PSG's premium tier with Crypto.com deal

By Matthew Glendinning
Published online 10 Sep, 2021

The 'Messi effect' has kicked in at Paris Saint-Germain with cryptocurrency exchange Crypto.com paying a significant premium on recent deals made for a similar package in an agreement announced today (Friday).

According to industry experts, the new 'Official Cryptocurrency Platform Partner' agreement with Crypto.com is worth around double the club's 'Premium Partner' rate of between €3m (£3.5m) and €5m per season.

SportBusiness understands the three-year deal, from 2021-22 to 2023-24, is worth between €25m and €30m over the term, with an additional revenue share on top from the sales of exclusive club-related Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) on Crypto.com's native NFT platform.

For the first time for an agreement of such a scale, Crypto.com will also pay a significant portion of the sponsorship fee using the cryptocurrency token CRO.

Sector competition

Crypto.com has over 10 million users worldwide and beat a number of competitors in the sector to the deal in a sponsorship market rocket-

fuelled by the addition of superstar Lionel Messi to the PSG squad.

Commenting on the competition for the rights, Marc Armstrong, chief partnerships officer at PSG, told *SportBusiness*: "We've been talking for quite a few months to different players in the [cryptocurrency] market. We were already an attractive, very premium offering, but this is the first deal we've done since Messi and just shows the commercial impact of the Messi signing."

Armstrong negotiated the deal with Gilad Rodkin, senior vice president marketing strategy at Crypto.com and Steven Kalifowitz, the brand's chief marketing officer. The Infront agency helped broker the deal, led by Daniel Maglietta, associate director (global sponsorship) at Infront.

Crypto.com was in advanced talks with the club before the news of Messi's intention to join PSG came out, but the move "certainly sweetened the deal," the brand said.

It is understood that Crypto.com's primary sponsorship objective is the promotion of its cryptocurrency platform, but that further revenue will be generated from a collaboration on NFTs with sales at both end of the value



spectrum – from lower-value multiples to higher value one-off products.

Previously, the club had launched its first artistic NFTs in April with Parisian artist Ludo creating a limited crypto collectible using blockchain technology.

Messi momentum

The momentum built by the Messi acquisition, Armstrong added, has created urgency in the market on other categories, with a car sponsor being highest on the club's wish list.

Given there is only limited inventory for new Premium Partner deals this season, it is important the club closes agreements with the highest-paying categories, Armstrong said, because there is simply not enough inventory to meet all the demand.

Next season will be less problematic in this respect with the opening up of rights to the shirt sleeve, back-of-shirt, back of training kit and training centre naming assets.

More broadly, Armstrong said the new deal demonstrates the club's vision and leadership as a pioneer in areas such as lifestyle, esports and digital.

From the sponsor's perspective, Kris Marszalek Crypto.com, co-founder and chief executive, said: "Our mission since day one has been to accelerate the world's transition to cryptocurrency. We do so by finding the best partners in the world, and Paris Saint-Germain is second to none. Between the brand visibility,

stadium and team access, and collaborative development of NFTs, I have no doubt we'll create new and exciting experiences for football fans around the world."

Crypto.com already has a strong presence in sports partnerships, having recently announced global partnerships with UFC, Formula 1 and Lega Serie A. Earlier this year, Crypto.com became the first crypto platform to partner with an F1 team – Aston Martin – and the first to partner with an NHL team – the Montreal Canadiens. ♦

Sportradar hits public markets with \$8bn valuation

By Eric Fisher

Published online 14 Sep, 2021

Global sports data provider Sportradar has now officially gone public, hitting the Nasdaq market on September 14 at a new company valuation of \$7.98bn (€6.76bn).

Arriving just days after the company's roadshow to preview the initial public offering, the move marked an historic milestone for the company, which previously was not able to complete a merger with Horizon Acquisition Corp. II, a special purpose acquisition company (SPAC) led by Todd Boehly, part-owner of Major League Baseball's Los Angeles Dodgers.

The public stock issue, trading under the ticker symbol SRAD, involved the sale of 19 million base shares at \$27 each, and a 30-day option of an additional sale of 2.85 million shares to underwriters.

As that IPO happened, a group of investors led by Boehly and his investment firm Eldridge also purchased \$159m in Class A ordinary shares through a private placement.

As a result, Sportradar has raised a total of \$672m.

The funds will be used to help scale the company, particularly amid the rapidly expanding sports betting market, and a highly competitive sports data landscape that includes key rivals such as Genius Sports.

"Today is just the beginning

for Sportradar," said Monumental Sports & Entertainment chairman Ted Leonsis. The owner of the National Basketball Association's Washington Wizards and National Hockey League's Washington Capitals has been an investor in Sportradar through his Revolution Growth since 2015, and he bought in at the time along with fellow NBA team owner Mark Cuban and basketball icon Michael Jordan.

"When we look at where the sports industry is today, and where it is going, data analytics is without a doubt one of the most important sports tools for sports teams, for media companies, and for betting organizations. Sportradar has helped eager fans access a more immersive sports experience. And rapid digital acceleration during the pandemic has opened up numerous new opportunities across the industry," Leonsis said.

The IPO will now make company founder and chief executive Carsten Koerl, Sportradar's leader since its 2001 formation, a multi-billionaire, as he held a 34.1 per cent economic interest in the operation as of June 30, 2021.

Sportradar generated \$318.9m in revenue during the first six months of 2021, up 42 per cent from the \$224.5m for the same period in 2020. Net income was \$29.6m for the first half of 2021, up 2 per cent. And the company is looking to take

full advantage of the expanding sports betting market, particularly for the National Football League and the start of its 2021 regular season.

The company now supports more than 900 betting operators around the world, 350 media outlets, and more than 150 sports leagues.

"No organization is better positioned than Sportradar to be the dominating force at the nexus of sports and big data," Leonsis said. "It is evidenced by their unparalleled data science team, their deals with major leagues and media companies in the US and around the world, and their forward-thinking approach to partnerships with companies like DraftKings."

The NHL will also be a beneficiary of Sportradar going public, as following its 10-year data rights extension with Sportradar it gained the right to acquire 1,116,540 Class A ordinary shares for an exercise price of \$9, as well as an amount of Class A ordinary shares calculated by dividing \$30m by the IPO share price of \$27.

Additionally, Sportradar granted the NHL a warrant to exercise 1,353,198 Class A ordinary shares at a subscription price of \$23.57 per share.

The NHL's gaining of an equity stake in Sportradar is similar to the position the National Football League now has in Genius Sports. ♦



Sportradar founder and chief executive Carsten Koerl. (Sportradar)

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Eclat to launch pan-Asia sports TV and digital operation to replace Fox Sports

By Kevin McCullagh
Published online 16 Sep, 2021

South Korean company Eclat Media Group is aiming to fill the gap left by the closure of Fox Sports Asia by launching a new, pan-regional sports pay-television and digital platform in Asia-Pacific.

The company announced rights deals this week for MotoGP and WorldSBK motorcycle racing in 16 markets – South Korea, Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Laos, Macau, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam.

The deals run for five years, 2022 to 2026. Fox previously held the rights to both properties.

Malaysian pay-television broadcaster Astro this week announced a carriage deal for Eclat's SPOTV pay-television channel.

These are the first in a series of rights and distribution deals expected to be announced by Eclat in the coming weeks. The company will launch two pay-television channels, SPOTV and SPOTV2, across the region on October 1, when Fox Sports Asia is switched off by owner Disney. Eclat is also planning a direct-to-

consumer OTT platform, SPOTV NOW.

SPOTV is the brand used by Eclat for its sports pay-television and digital business in its home market South Korea.

Eclat is aiming to replace Fox Sports Asia as closely as possible, by providing pay-television platforms in most of the same markets with most of the same sports content.

Speaking to *SportBusiness* in an exclusive interview, Mitchell Hong, Eclat's chief executive, said: "The immediate goal is to make a replacement for the Fox Sports service for sports fans in the region...when it comes to geographical territories, we're going to be very similar to what Fox Sports' coverage was. For the content, we would like to do as similar a line-up as possible."

Rights-holders that previously had deals with Fox have been on the market in recent months seeking new buyers for their content.

As well as MotoGP, the available rights have included Formula One, the four tennis Grand Slams, the four golf majors, Italian Serie A football and the Ultimate Fighting Championship.

The IMG agency was selling five big properties previously with Fox: MotoGP, Wimbledon, US Open tennis, Open Championship golf and the UFC. The agency brought all five properties to market at the same time, in concurrent sales processes that concluded in late July.

SPOTV is thought to have been bidding for most or all of these properties. It faced competition from other players, including two that also aimed to create a pan-regional business – Aser Ventures and Singaporean company Rewind Networks – as well as existing multi-territory broadcaster beIN Sports, and bidders from individual markets.

Only a small number of deals have been announced so far following news of the Fox withdrawal. Alongside Eclat's deals for MotoGP and SBK, agreements have been announced for: Serie A rights in several territories, with pay-television broadcaster beIN Sports; and UFC rights in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, with Indonesia-based streaming platform Mola TV.

Expansion, localisation

Eclat plans to expand SPOTV beyond a mere Fox Sports Asia clone in the years ahead, Hong told *SportBusiness*. It will build on its experience in Korea, where it has created a successful, multi-platform sports media business.

He said: "Starting next year, in our next phase, we are trying to bring what we're doing in Korea, where our experience covers basic-tier TV, pay-TV, à la carte video content, OTT, social media, we publish the Golf Digest magazine, we have been an event promoter for UFC..."

"We cover a lot of ground in Korea when it comes to sports, so we will be trying to expand that throughout the region...some you'll see immediately. Some

will take a little longer to be out there."

Eclat's SPOTV will be different from Fox Sports Asia in several other significant ways, Hong said.

The company is aiming to create a more 'localised' service, featuring more local-language content for the different markets in the region. One of the perceived weaknesses of Fox Sports Asia was that it did not differentiate its content much across its markets.

SPOTV also intends to publish more digital and social media content than Fox Sports Asia. This is closely linked to the localisation push – SPOTV hopes it can reach bigger audiences in each territory with local-language social media content.

"Fans will see a lot more content and stories published between events," Hong said. "That's something we've done very well in Korea, where we have over five million social media followers on different platforms."

This will have benefits for the rights-holders that SPOTV works with. He added: "From a rights-holders' standpoint, their brand will be communicated to fans in each territory a little bit more directly than it was before. And for the consumers, we'll try to deliver as much localised content as possible around these sports rights."

Building blocks

In the short term, Eclat must put the basic building blocks of its pan-regional service in place.

The company is in talks to acquire several rights properties. In order to manage costs, it may not acquire the whole Fox portfolio and may not strike as many pan-regional deals as Fox did.

Hong said: "We have to be quite smart about what was working and what was not. And if there is any content that didn't

work, we'll probably move to make some adjustments."

Eclat is in talks with pay-television platforms across the region for distribution deals.

This was expected to be a challenge for any would-be Fox Sports Asia replacement. Many pay-television businesses in the region are suffering from stagnating or falling subscriber numbers.

Hong said platform operators had been "cautious" to start but that the discussions had been mostly positive.

The company is assessing what production resources it needs outside its current base in South Korea.

"I don't think we could do everything out of Korea. So there will be some type of production presence in Southeast Asia," Hong said.

"We're having a discussion about the best locations...it could be a technical hub, it could be a production hub, or there could be multiple facilities in key markets. But we don't want to waste facilities...we'll try to be smart but at the same time, we have to balance it well so we can offer a local, distinct flavour to the production, too."

Hong said Eclat was hoping to do "as good of a production job as Fox has done". At the same time, the Korean firm hopes to make savings in production by using

its existing resources and taking advantage of digital production methods.

Motorcycling deals

The press release announcing the MotoGP and WorldSBK deals said the two racing series would play a "starring role" in Eclat's new, expanded business in Asia-Pacific.

The MotoGP rights were among Fox Sports Asia's most valuable properties. Two MotoGP grands prix are currently hosted in the region, in Malaysia and Thailand, with a race in Indonesia expected to be added soon.

Eclat's rights are fully exclusive across free-to-air, pay-television and digital in most markets, except Indonesia where it has pay-television rights only.

The MotoGP and WorldSBK deals were agreed with Dorna Sports, which organises and is the commercial rights-holder for the two series. Dorna was advised by IMG.

SPOTV's linear channels are to carry live coverage of WorldSBK races across the 15 markets, with SPOTV NOW carrying live coverage of the supporting series WorldSSP and WorldSSP300.

The press release said Eclat would invest in significant on-site content production and ancillary digital content production around the two properties.

It read: "A team from Eclat will attend Grands Prix to enhance





(Mirco Lazzari gp/Getty Images)

the media experience for fans by producing tailor-made content... as well as to create a wide range of social media content in order to promote the sport across its territories...

“SPOTV are experts at building brand awareness and the Eclat Media Group will become a vital partner in the promotion and distribution of motorcycle racing across South East Asia – using cross promotion, guest commentators, content collaboration and more, including

localised, native language promotion aimed at maximising fan interest and engagement.”

Announcing the MotoGP deal, Hong said: “For us, MotoGP and WorldSBK stand for thrills and exhilaration and are the best way to commence our growth into Southeast Asia...”

“We are also full of anticipation at the opportunity to work together to bring these incredible events to Korean fans. Together, we can truly raise the bar for sports fans in Asia.”

Manel Arroyo, chief commercial officer at Dorna Sports, remarked: “South East Asia is one of the most vital markets for motorcycle racing, with an incredible passion for the sport in many countries. There are also new markets in which we see incredible scope for growth, and we’re delighted to partner with Eclat not only to provide proven, top quality coverage, but also to begin creating new fanbases and bringing MotoGP and WorldSBK to even bigger audiences.” ♦

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Innovation and networking to the fore as SPORTEL returns to Monaco

SPORTEL CEO **Laurent Puons** outlines how the event, synonymous with the growth of the sports media sector, is ready to bring the industry together once again on its return to Monaco after a pandemic-enforced hiatus.

SPORTEL is welcoming back delegates to its first face-to-face event in more than a year-and-a-half with an agenda underpinned by emerging innovations and long-awaited networking opportunities at Monaco's Grimaldi Forum from October 5-7.

The familiar setting will bring together decision-makers who are ready to explore the latest trends and strategies that are driving the recovery of the industry.

Most importantly, the opportunity to connect in person once again will be an enticing prospect for sports media executives who are set to gather in the Principality from across the globe.

"We are still in the process of recovery, but the quality of participation is guaranteed," says Laurent Puons, CEO of Monaco



MediAx, which organises SPORTEL.

"We are now back with our 100% in-person event and we will continue to develop emerging sectors such as esports, live sports betting and immersive technologies, to offer new cross-over opportunities to our clients. The trend towards the development and adoption of new technology is ongoing, and is still well represented throughout the market."

Global appeal

Inevitably, with ongoing travel restrictions across many parts of the globe, this year's gathering in Monaco will have more of a European feel.

However, a quarter of registered participants will arrive from outside the European Union, and some of the industry's biggest brands from the Americas have also confirmed their attendance.

A broad variety of the sector's stakeholders will be present, including broadcast networks, rights-holders, sports federations, leagues, distributors, OTT platforms and sports technology providers, with more than one-third being content-buyers.

Perhaps most significantly, more than 50 companies will attend SPORTEL for the very first time.

The essence of SPORTEL will be familiar to delegates, with numerous networking lounges providing opportunities to forge fruitful new partnerships.

"SPORTEL will not change significantly," Puons adds. "This is

why we decided to keep it 100% live with many networking lounges.

"Naturally, we have had to adapt to the pandemic, especially with extensive sanitary measures in place. Thanks to the actions taken by the Monegasque Government and the hosting venue, the entire SPORTEL team is working every day towards organising the event with the best possible safety measures in place."

New features

One of the new features at the event will be 'Speakers Corner' – an open space at the heart of the Ravel Exhibition Floor, which will include a combination of innovative presentations, expert panels and engaging masterclasses.

"This conference set up is highly visible, with easy access for attendees to pop in and catch a session in between their busy meeting schedules," Puons adds. "The goal of the SPORTEL masterclasses is to provide key insights and thought-provoking discussions between influential industry executives for our community to evaluate and help them make informed decisions when evolving their business strategies."

Puons highlights esports – which will come under the spotlight at SPORTEL Monaco – as an example of a parallel ecosystem that has developed at the event over recent years.

"We will be highlighting how the crossovers if done well, are opening up new opportunities for partnerships, audiences and data usage, as the lines blur between tradition and innovation," he adds.

"We will also address how digital media and OTT continue to transform the broadcast industry, and debate whether the bubble has burst on media-rights strategies in light of the pandemic.

"Plus, new for this year, we will be looking at how female leaders and audiences are shifting the perception of sport media. It will be an exceptional programme that will be very popular with attendees."



Laurent Puons, SPORTEL CEO

Speakers Corner

Conference presentations at Speakers Corner will provide a platform at the event for exhibitors or delegates to shine the spotlight on their cutting-edge products and solutions.

"They provide a great way to illustrate their innovative services and offer key insights and take-aways for the audience," Puons adds.

The impact of the pandemic will also provide a consistent backdrop to discussions, with executives ready to reflect on the strategies that have helped to steer their companies through a tumultuous time and towards a brighter future.

"The pandemic has been bad for everyone and has impacted all parts of the industry," Puons said. "The essential topics that will be raised at SPORTEL are how they overcame these challenges and which strategies were adopted.

"For example, esports had a decisive advantage, unlike other segments of the sports and entertainment industry, as they were able to continue their operations. They just had to change certain habits and make sure that the players still had a chance to play and the fans had something to watch – and it is what they did by shifting to online-only formats.

"It is the same logic for the fast-tracking of immersive technologies that were offering an array of creative near 'live' and engaging experiences, such as state-of-the-art crowd noise

and virtual fans in stadiums engaging in real-time experiences during games."

Changing landscape

Another key issue that is set to be a major topic at SPORTEL is how the pandemic has changed the negotiating landscape for rights deals between the media companies and content owners, who are packaging up and distributing their offering across a wider range of media partners.

A broader pivot to digital platforms is another subject that is certain to be discussed.

This year, SPORTEL was among the industry organisations to enhance their digital offerings, launching SPORTEL+ eTALKS, a series of free-to-attend webinars.

"SPORTEL Monaco is primarily a convention and marketplace, which our clients have told us works best for them as a face-to-face and physical format," Puons adds.

"During the hiatus we took the opportunity to introduce the SPORTEL+ eTALKS and this successfully enabled us not only to keep connected with the community, but also to welcome newcomers to discover the SPORTEL brand. It's a product we can use to support SPORTEL's messaging as a complement to our live events.

"When we took the decision to organise a 100% live event, we obviously had to adapt our pricing and cancellation policy in order to reassure and secure our participants. Therefore, for the first time in SPORTEL's history, there was a very early bird price in place when registrations opened. Later, we continued to offer attractive rates with a very flexible COVID-19 refund & substitution policy."

With so many of the sports media sector's constituents ready to return to Monaco after such a long wait, it is clear that for the industry's most influential decision-makers, there is nothing quite like meeting in person. ♦

PE poses threat to agencies, but it won't make them irrelevant

Ioris Francini, the former co-president of WME IMG and now specialist commercial advisor to the sports industry, gives his take on the shifting dynamics in rights brokerage and distribution and the spate of private equity deals sweeping through sport

By Ben Cronin

Ioris Francini is well positioned to talk about a range of hot button topics in the sports industry. As the one-time co-president of WME IMG [Endeavor], and current chairman of IMG Media, he knows all about the changes sweeping through the agency space and the shifting tides in rights brokerage and distribution. And now that the long-serving executive's role has changed with the firm, allowing him to branch into consultancy – advising, amongst others, private equity firms and wealth funds – he also has a unique perspective on the sudden wave of investor interest in the sector.

The perception in some quarters is that increased private equity involvement in sport presents a threat to the full-service agency model espoused by the likes of IMG, but Francini remains broad-minded about what it can bring to the sector. Lest it be forgotten, he worked closely with a PE firm when Silver Lake Partners invested in the agency and believes the two can happily co-exist, with one or two adaptations.

“Every time there is private equity investment, there is certainly an instinct – which is understandable – to fuel or boost the in-house capabilities of [sports rights-holders] and therefore reliance on third-party services is more limited to the more difficult tasks, as opposed

to the more basic ones,” he says. “So, to some extent, it does pose a challenge to that agency model, but I don't think, conversely, that agencies will be irrelevant.

“I think one of the areas where agencies operate is intermediation – brokering rights or providing geographical expertise in some areas – and those agencies that invest either in sales resources or in other types of capabilities, for example audience engagement, will be able to provide an expertise that may still very much be required by the entity into which the private equity firm invested.”

Mailman acquisition

Faced with an evolving market, IMG has undergone its own changes recently, with its Chinese arm acquiring the Mailman Group digital agency and its sports consultancy Seven League to bolster its data and audience insight capabilities. Francini argues that the acquisition provides the missing piece in the agency's full-service offering and is exactly the type of adaptation needed to remain relevant.

“There is one challenge, which is this waning interest from the younger generations that are more distracted than ever from other sources of entertainment, whether it's TikTok or other social channels, or Twitch to name a few,” he says. “How do you reach those audiences, when you're still tied to a



business model that assumes you, an agency or a rights-holder, are selling to a broadcaster? How efficient are broadcasters in capturing the full size of the audience that you want to engage?”

In his view, one of the most eye-catching media deals of the year so far was the collaboration between the Kosmos investment group and Madrid-based rights distributor and broadcast company Enjoy Television to acquire the rights to the Copa America in Spain. Instead of going to a broadcaster to show the matches, the two parties turned to influencer and gamer Ibai Llanos who showed the games on his popular Twitch channel, which has more than 7 million followers. “I think that’s an interesting experiment, just because it shows that the agency is looking at engaging audiences in a way that is quite innovative,” he says.

Key clients

Francini continues to keep across the media market in his new role as chairman of IMG Media, advising and supporting relationships with the agency’s key clients, including the International Olympic Committee, MotoGP, and Giro d’Italia, as well as joint venture partner EuroLeague Basketball. He is currently working on the IOC’s next European media tender.

Asked if the days of agencies putting down sizeable guarantees for top tier rights are over, he argues that the recent Serie A international tender showed there is still an appetite for media rights trading among the significant players and there remains a healthy media market in Europe and the US at least.

Under Francini, IMG famously blew its rivals out of the water in the last cycle (2018-19 to 2020-21), paying around

€340m (\$402.2m /£290.8m) per season for international media rights to the Italian league, €12m per season for betting rights, €13.6m per season for access to the global broadcast signal, €8m per season for promotion and marketing of the competition and €12m per season for archive rights to the 20 clubs. To get a sense of how aggressive the overall bid of €386.6m was at the time, this was 90 per-cent more than MP & Silva was paying previously, albeit the total figure would later be revised down to around €370.8m per season when the agency secured discounts in two separate disputes with the league.

This time around, Infront held off competition from Kosmos, SN1 Consulting, Aser Ventures, and a more restrained bid from IMG to secure platform-neutral rights in all territories, excluding betting rights and rights in the Middle East, North Africa and the US for a minimum



guarantee of €139m per season from 2021-22 to 2023-24.

“Still, you saw three or four entities – three agencies and a broader sort of media group in Aser – putting down some significant minimum guarantees,” he says. “I think what’s happening is that there is a greater degree of understanding of rights levels, and therefore the days of aggressive-based guarantees may be over. But hefty guarantees, I think I’ve seen a couple of instances, including Serie A, where they’re still in place.”

This runs rather counter to the notion that the Infront deal represented a sizeable correction on IMG’s huge outlay in the previous cycle. Although he won’t comment on the earlier IMG deal, Francini maintains Infront’s commitment is comparable when factoring in the markets that have been excluded.

“If you add the values of the US in the previous or current new cycle, plus the value of Mena and the betting [rights] for the previous cycle, you get to more than €300m per season, so Infront’s number for the new cycle ex US and Mena is fairly aggressive, given how certain regions such as Latam and Asia have lost impetus versus the previous cycle,” he says. “Of course, Lega’s [Serie A’s] issue is that Mena collapsed from €115-120m to virtually nil, which means Serie A lost a third of revenues – for now.”

The collapse of rights values in the Middle East was down to beIN’s troubles with pirate broadcaster beoutQ, which it alleges is backed by Saudi Arabia. Lega Serie A hardly poured oil on troubled waters when it subsequently sold Supercoppa Italiana hosting rights to the country. But elsewhere, Francini says a combination of clever strategies from rights-holders and other macro-economic factors are working in sellers’ favour, meaning it is wrong to be too gloomy about the market.

“On the positive side, when you look at what the English Premier League did internationally this last round, by smartly also offering in some territories six-year deals as opposed to three-year deals and therefore longer-term partnerships, they managed to maximise the



The Serie A match between AC Milan and Cagliari (Sportinfo/DeFodi Images via Getty Images)

economic results. Territories like the former Yugoslavia are extraordinary outcomes where the rights have gone up extremely significantly.

“I’d say that MotoGP has been very, very successful in territories such as France and others. You look at the tender of Roland Garros in Europe – that is also a financial success, as is the Giro d’Italia from one cycle to the other. So I think it depends on circumstances, specific sports, specific markets.”

Private equity

One of the abiding themes of the Covid-19 pandemic has been the willingness of rights-holders to work with private equity to generate working capital. Serie A came close to an agreement with CVC Capital Partners, Advent International and Italy’s state-backed investor Fondo Strategico Italiano (FSI) but pulled away from the deal at the last minute. The German Football League also broke off talks over PE investment in a new entity commercialising the international media and sponsorship rights for the Bundesliga. However, more recently, 38 out of 42 LaLiga clubs accepted an agreement to sell a 10 per cent stake in the Spanish league to CVC for €2.1bn.

Of the DFL proposal, Francini says: “Bundesliga had a complex type of deal to offer. It wasn’t a straightforward private equity deal, it was partly a joint venture, partly there was some equity, partly there was a minimum-guarantee requirement – for reasons I won’t get into, but effectively, based on tax and regulatory [issues] under German law.”

The regulatory hurdle he is alluding to would have subjected any investment in the new DFL entity to additional tax if it had exceeded 25 years. For that reason, the league had to limit the term of the offering to that time span with an option to extend the investment period at a later stage.

Francini puts LaLiga’s success in concluding a deal with CVC and Serie A’s failure to complete its transaction with the same firm down to “bylaws, leadership and governance”.

“You have a very competent, capable leader in president Tebas at LaLiga who’s transformed the governance of the company and who continues consistently pushing towards the evolution of LaLiga into an entertainment media company,” he says. “In Spain the executive powers have been transferred by the clubs to the president of the league.

“On the other side of the coin, why did that not work in Serie A? Well, the lack of empowerment of the leadership, I’d say... There is a greater involvement and influence exerted by the individual presidents and a different type of governance that doesn’t help the managers go about their business in a way that is effective and tangible, including negotiations with the private equity firms.”

On reports that the involvement of some Serie A clubs in the short-lived European Super League project

also scuppered the Serie A CVC deal, Francini is non-committal.

“There were a number of clubs that were fully in favour of the deal going through, and then at some point, decided differently. Whether or not you want to connect that to parallel conversations that were taking place at that time involving the European Super League, it’s a possibility, nothing more.

“When you have these types of investments there are rules that are in the shareholders’ agreements that affect governance, that affect votes, that affect decision making on important themes. And it may well be that clubs who were looking at options and alternatives, wanted to have absolute freedom to move with their own timeline. And so having a third entity being there was fundamentally an unwelcome solution. But I am giving a personal point of view as opposed to an educated one from having spoken to the protagonists. It was all very surprising.”

Opportunities

Drawing on his own experiences of working with Silver Lake, Francini suggests those sports right-holders

which have gone down the PE route will benefit from the experience.

“What a PE firm brings is an incredible amount of knowledge around analysing a business, around asking the right questions and very difficult questions. What are the flaws? What are the risks? Where are the opportunities? What is needed to achieve those opportunities? And they force you into a much deeper thought process and it’s very enriching for anyone who’s a manager or an executive,” he says.

Asked which opportunities sport should focus on, Francini shares the view expressed by former DAZN Group executive chairman John Skipper earlier this week (Monday) that there are benefits that will accrue to sport from documentary making and scripted and unscripted content.

“Netflix with Drive to Survive has been an incredible indirect source of marketing and awareness for Formula One. Thanks to that, the series, drivers, cars and manufacturers are much better known,” he says.

“The Netflices, the Apples, the Amazons are investing more and more money in the space and in entertainment

shows. The same thing applies with the recent WarnerMedia Discovery merger. We’ll see investments into that area – scripted and unscripted [content] will provide, I think, significant benefits to sports.”

He also believes there will continue to be opportunities in cryptocurrencies and says he is excited by the applications for machine learning in audience engagement and betting. These, allied to increased interest among the FANGs for live sports content, gives the Italian grounds for optimism.

“I’d say that there are clearly positive signs: [such as] Amazon’s investment in French football domestically, and just the way Amazon is moving. Disney’s growth and ESPN+’s numbers are very encouraging. Apple has been investing a lot in scripted [content]. Are they going to move into sports?”

“[Google parent company] Alphabet generally is certainly preparing to play a bigger role in sports, and I’m very interested to see what happens with this Discovery WarnerMedia deal once it receives regulatory approval. So I think the backdrop is one that’s quite interesting and the future looks suddenly bright.” ♦



LaLiga president Javier Tebas
(Pierre-Philippe Marcou/AFP via Getty Images)



How social betting will reshape fan engagement

The monetisation and engagement opportunities that are available through social betting on over-the-top streaming platforms have the potential to redefine the viewing experience for sports fans worldwide.

It is increasingly recognised that integrating social elements into sports coverage can help to counter a generational challenge that has been amplified in recent years.

In the US, the average viewing age increased for 23 of the 24 most high-profile sports properties in the decade up to 2017.

Social elements, though – such as social video and audio – can play a key role in bucking the trend.

To illustrate the appeal of social interactions for younger audiences, research has found that 25 to 34-year-olds dominate in terms of Facebook usage worldwide. This, for example, is considerably younger than the average age of nearly 50 for a viewer in the US for last year's NFL Super Bowl.

Furthermore, a pre-pandemic



survey by PwC found that more than half of viewers wanted more interactive features during sports coverage, suggesting a solution to a long-term problem.

With this in mind, more sports media platforms and companies are opting to bring social elements in house to engage and understand a younger audience, generate a new revenue stream, and build brand loyalty through a more tailored, data-driven approach.

Generational challenge

Simultaneously, an increasing number of rights-holders from the US major leagues are joining sports clubs and media companies from across Europe and beyond in

embracing sports betting, as the monetisation opportunities in the expanding sector become irresistible.

As sports platforms and publishers seek a foothold in a global market that, according to Goldman Sachs, could expand at a compound annual growth rate of 40% in the US alone to be worth \$39bn by 2033, there are signs that social betting could prove to be a particularly strong proposition.

In the US, whilst the most recent figures available suggest that most sports fans are over the age of 50, it is the 30 to 44-year-old demographic that is most likely to gamble and wager on sports.

The combination of social and betting elements through social betting can therefore attract a younger audience as part of a more personalised experience.

A refined fan engagement experience

Team owners and media platforms have long recognised how betting on sport can drive engagement. Just a year after a federal ban on sports betting was overturned in the US, research by Global Web Index in 2019 revealed that 60% of sports fans in the country were more likely to watch a game if they had placed a wager on it.

To attract sports fanatics who want to bet on live sports and offer superior wagering experiences, rights-holders need to add a social layer with enabling real-time engagement (RTE) for interactive betting.

With RTE introduced, rights-holders can deliver streams with less than 200 milliseconds of latency worldwide and is well suited to interactive betting scenarios.

“We have the fastest Glass-to-Glass streaming across global footprints from our camera to your screen in real-time to enrich new betting scenarios such as “micro” in-play betting and social betting. It brings a familiar social and interactive element to betting,” says Brighton Shi, Senior Product Marketing Manager at Agora, a social video and audio technology provider.

Social betting

The social element of watching and betting on sports in a group introduces ‘peer-pressure’ scenarios, encouraging the viewers

to participate in a friendly wager – or, as Shi explains, when friends challenge each other to “put your money where your mouth is”.

Despite the rise of mobile and online betting, gambling is set to remain a social pastime for many people for the foreseeable future.

For example, online sports betting is currently active in 19 US states. However, in five states, the activity is only allowed in a retail environment – such as a racetrack or a casino. Across established gambling markets like the UK, betting shops and casinos retain fiercely loyal customers.

In-play wagering

The worldwide growth of in-play betting over the past decade has fuelled further opportunities via real-time engagement.

For the in-play wagering scenario, ultra-low latency and feed synchronisation is essential in the context of maintaining the integrity of placing wagers. With so-called ‘rapid markets’ increasingly offered – enabling bets to be placed at short intervals and in relation to events that are seconds away from happening – viewers can discuss and place wagers on even more scenarios as they watch a game.

For example, a viewer can bet on whether or not a penalty will be converted in football, or whether the next serve in a tennis match will be a fault, and the results of each

bet can be delivered in a matter of milliseconds.

There is the opportunity to generate incremental revenue for a rights-holder that has integrated betting options into streaming coverage, but it is also about building customer loyalty by catering to the needs of viewers who are seeking an experience that is tailored to their interests.

Betting without boundaries

Social betting means punters are not only restricted to discussing and betting on a game with the person they are standing next to in a betting shop. Instead, they can link up with friends across the world to share the experience.

The opportunity to bet without physical boundaries via OTT is made possible by providers like Agora that are able to offer ultra-low latency and high-sync playback, ensuring the viewers are capturing the action simultaneously and virtually in real-time.

“Compared to current CDN broadcasting where the latency is more than three seconds, Agora offers latency of 300 to 400 milliseconds,” Shi says. “It also integrates the video or audio of the friends, so it is like being in a Zoom-style call, but without latency lags. Watching the match together means that the engagement factor is much higher and you can feel much more immersed in the game and open to betting than just watching the stream by yourself in a ‘lean-back’ experience.”

Enjoying shared watching and wagering experiences on digital platforms is therefore set to make a significant impact as sports coverage becomes an increasingly social experience. ♦



If you would like to add social betting to your platform contact Agora by: shiliang@agora.io

DICK'S

Mission-driven strategy yields new levels of success for Dick's Sporting Goods

On the surface, the runaway success of prominent American retail chain Dick's Sporting Goods over the past 18 months does not make any sense.

Long before the Covid-19 pandemic arrived, online retailers such as Amazon, as well as individual brands through their own direct-to-consumer channels, had disrupted, if not outright dismantled, many big-box chains. And for the 73-year-old Dick's Sporting Goods, many of its retail peers both in and out of sports have long since been pushed into extinction, or if still surviving, now just remain as a mere shells of their former glory.

But a potent combination of mission-driven leadership, a clear focus on elevating their category, a willingness to lean into certain areas where others are retreating, and some good luck along the way have provided a series of new highs for the Pennsylvania-based company.

The top line news for the publicly traded Dick's Sporting Goods since early 2020 has represented a steady, upward drumbeat. Multiple quarters of record-level financial results. Two increases in the full-year 2021 sales outlook. Successful entries beyond the core business into more experiential retail avenues such as the new Dick's House of Sport and the outdoors-focused Public Lands. Partnerships with leading sports entities such as the Women's National Basketball Association, Little League International, USA Softball, and others. Continued expansion for its GameChanger youth sports app holding. And a stock that has soared more than 135 per cent thus far this year, despite some broader turbulence in financial markets in the US.

"We're in a great lane right now," said Ed Stack, Dick's Sporting Goods' executive chairman, following the last quarterly earnings report. "We said 2021 was going to be the most transformational year in our company's history, and so far, it certainly has been. The investments we've made in technology,



Eric Fisher
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infrastructure, space allocation, and our team over the past four-plus years are now paying off."

Some of the company's boosts owe to these internal improvements in addition to benefitting from multiple facets of consumer behaviour during the pandemic. During the initial stages of lockdown, Dick's Sporting Goods was particularly active in home exercise and outdoor equipment and gear for more socially distanced sports such as golf and tennis. But as group activities

have begun to return and vaccinations increased, the company has more recently seen a strong resurgence in team sports gear, and has sought to further capitalise on that influx to make their stores as tactile an experience as possible and fully encouraging of product testing.

But a deeper, more core element of the Dick's Sporting Goods escalation has been one of committed drive and purpose. Led in part by president and chief executive Lauren Hobart, Dick's Sporting Goods has zeroed in on the female sports market in a way perhaps unrivalled by any other retailer.

And mirroring the historic growth seen in women's sports at the highest competitive levels, Dick's Sporting Goods has sought to make not only its product mix, but its internal leadership, storytelling, partnerships, and charitable outreach all fully aligned to promote female sports participation at all levels. A similar approach is also in place for youth sports.

Much of the company's marketing has continued in this vein, advocating for broader societal wellness and equality through sports as opposed to merely hawking pieces of discounted equipment.

"We are committed to celebrating, inspiring, and supporting women in sports," said Hobart, who was elevated to her current role nearly a year ago, in an open letter to the chain's customers. "There is still much work to be done to achieve equality in sport, and we are committed to being a part of this change." ♦

Is the Saturday 3pm blackout on borrowed time?

The late Bob Lord is not a name that receives much airtime at industry conferences.

The former chairman of Burnley was, however, the driving force behind a legislative anomaly that continues to spark debate among football stakeholders, rights sellers and armchair fans alike.

The Saturday '3pm blackout' rule resurfaced in many a pub conversation and social media timeline as Ronaldo returned in a match not shown live domestically. Cue outrage and no shortage of misinformation on the subject.

So how did we get here?

The blackout was first enacted in the 1960s, the same decade in which Lord banned the BBC from televising matches at Burnley for its new Match of the Day highlights programme. With ticketing and (betting) pools the only revenue streams of note, Lord convinced other Football League executives to prevent Saturday afternoon broadcasts in order to protect match attendances during an era when all fans paid at the gate.

The legislation has been upheld by England's Football Association and the Scottish Football Association by invoking Article 48 of the Uefa statutes, preventing live broadcasts of domestic or foreign matches during a window of 2.45pm to 5.15pm on Saturdays. Montenegro is the only other European country to have adopted a similar blackout. In its defence of the blackout, the FA flags up the need to protect match attendances and grassroots participation in the game.

Along with the Ronaldo example, the issue has flared up on two other occasions in recent years.

The live streaming of Saturday 3pm matches from international leagues by bookmakers came under the spotlight during a crackdown on the gambling industry and the debate around domestic FA Cup matches being shown by the same betting companies.

Three years ago, Andrea Radrizzani and his Eleven Sports operation flouted the legislation by showing LaLiga matches during the sacred timeslot. In doing so, the broadcaster labelled the UK blackout rule as "one of the biggest generators of piracy", before ultimately backing down.

It's clear to see how the legislation would irk anyone buying or selling rights in the UK. It seems skewed that decisions made by English club chairmen in an era that predated the sale of live rights continue to shape the availability of match coverage in an era of immediacy.

Yet, it's not that simple.

Marcelo Bielsa, the manager at Radrizzani's Leeds United, has described the rule as 'magnificent' for



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Global News Editor
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prioritising the game over commercial interests. And therein lies the beauty. The rule is in place to defend revenue streams further down the food chain, not to top up the commercial revenue streams of football's elite.

It is there to encourage the casual supporters who turn up at lower-league matches and provide clubs with vital ticketing and food kiosk revenues to add to season ticket monies from fans who would be in attendance anyway, blackout rule or not. It's about encouraging habits that, coupled with scraps from the table

of football's elite, help to keep the football pyramid alive.

Yes, that argument won't wash with anyone devising a model to drive up centralised revenues for the leagues in England or in Scotland, where the live rights to just 21 per cent of Scottish Premiership matches are sold. Any other European league of note sells rights to all of its domestic matches.

The legislation is also on shaky ground legally. In 2012, the European Court of Justice cast doubt on whether the blackouts encouraged attendance at all. There was a feeling that the rule could have been scrapped had Eleven challenged it through the courts.

Yet, I can't bring myself to bow to commercial or legal logic. The 3pm blackout rule feels like the last bastion of football from a bygone era. An exclusivity reward for season ticket holders who know that attending the match is the only way of watching it live (unless you're au fait with illegal streams, hiding your IP or pubs with illegal decoders). A unique quirk of the working-class history of the UK game.

Even the debate around it seems to split generations. Fans growing up in the digital era shuddered at the thought of having to wait until 5.15pm to access (legal) footage of Ronaldo's goalscoring bow against Newcastle United on Sky's website and app. Despite gorging on any Uefa club or national team competition match live, or the majority of matches from Europe's other major leagues, UK-based fans felt they were being 'robbed' of one of the major appointments during an appointment-to-view era.

The frustration also comes off the back of a season in which the pandemic led to the temporary lifting of the rule. And when the Premier League is once again selling all 380 live matches to broadcasters in continental Europe.

It's a tough one for fans to get their heads around and an easy one for the industry to criticise.

But any financial gains at lower league level are worth protecting. As global football threatens to eat itself with biennial World Cups and breakaway threats, the retention of the legislation feels like a victory for the footballing purist and the little guy. And it's how the Lord would want it. ♦

Vital signs detected in Asia-Pacific media rights markets

As a torrid pandemic period drags on, welcome green shoots have emerged in recent months in Asia-Pacific media rights markets.

Conditions in the region's diverse markets are varied but, broadly, media-rights values have been trending downwards for several years. This was the case even before the pandemic struck. Covid looked to have applied the coup de grace to rights-sellers' hopes of value growth.

Several major rights-holders were caught in the teeth of the storm, selling rights last year during the period of greatest uncertainty. The German Bundesliga and agency Football Marketing Asia, selling Asian Football Confederation rights, were among them.

A host of leading rights-holders, including most of the 'Big Five' European football leagues, took big hits in China when market-leading sports streamer PP Sports all but collapsed.

Sellers that avoided the worst of last year were bracing for impact in upcoming rights sales cycles.

But the last few months have seen some promising developments in important markets.

This month's emergence of South Korea's Eclat Media Group to fill the gap left by the closing Fox



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Sports Asia is one. Fox was a powerhouse in the Asia-Pacific sports broadcasting business, albeit one that had declined in recent years. Its exit threatened to reduce competition for rights in around 20 markets. Some of the pay-television platforms that traditionally carried Fox channels spied an opportunity to cherry pick its best content and drop the rest, cutting costs.

Eclat's launch is a big endorsement of some important elements of the Fox Sports Asia model that had been called into doubt.

First, pan-regionality: like Fox, Eclat will buy rights and create channels that serve more than a dozen markets. There had been question marks over whether this model still made sense, given the diversity of the markets and growing demand for 'localised' content. Eclat has promised a more localised service than Fox, for example with more content being produced in local languages.

Eclat's move is also based on confidence that linear pay-television will remain a big part of the video entertainment industry across the region. Linear pay-television companies have struggled in recent years in the face of competition from streaming platforms.

Eclat's CEO Mitch Hong told *SportBusiness Media*: "I don't think pay-TV will go away. I'm a strong

believer in pay-TV's role for delivering sports content and also for fans enjoying sports content."

Eclat's emergence does not mean a certain resumption of rights-value growth in its covered markets. Indeed, the company will be looking to pick up Fox's rights at a discount. But it is nevertheless welcome news for sellers. And if Eclat fulfils stated ambitions to become a bigger, broader, more localised sports media company, it could play an even bigger role in sports industry growth in the region in the coming years.

Australia is another market to have witnessed green shoots emerging from ground scorched during 2020. A local outbreak of the global 'streaming wars' has revived competition for rights, with new platforms jostling for market share. Nine's Stan Sport and 10 ViacomCBS's Paramount+ emerged in the last year as important new factors in the sports rights market. Amazon also made a low-key first acquisition.

Again, few mature properties can expect significant rights value growth in Australia. And the last year also witnessed a dramatic flameout in the sports streaming sector as surprise package Sports Flick tried and failed to establish itself. But the market looks healthier than it did mid-2020.

In India, intriguing tectonic shifts are taking place with potentially positive consequences for sports rights values. Values in India have for several years been negatively affected by consolidation that saw its field of four major buyers several years ago: Sony, ESPN Star Sports, Ten Sports and Neo Sports, cut to two: Sony and Star.

In the last couple of months, there have been reports in local media that giant conglomerate Reliance wants a sports broadcasting platform. Reliance's part-owned broadcaster Viacom18 – jointly owned with ViacomCBS – has made several recent rights acquisitions.

Reliance has been a major player in the Indian sports industry for years, including via its agency Rise Worldwide (previously the joint-venture IMG-Reliance); its ownership of the company that manages the domestic football league, the Indian Super League; and its ownership of Indian Premier League team the Mumbai Indians.

Reliance is also a telecoms giant, owning mobile network Jio, which has been credited with getting hundreds of millions of Indians onto 4G data plans. The company will soon launch a low-cost smartphone which it hopes will give another 300m consumers access to 4G and all the content and services that entails, including video entertainment.

In recent days, Sony merged with pay-television channel operator Zee in a move that is considered to have created a new giant in the Indian television business. Sony has been a distant second to Star in the pay-television business in the last few years, with the latter strengthened by its control of the rights for most major cricket properties.

A major battle for the market's most valuable sports rights property, the IPL, between Star, Sony-Zee and Reliance-Viacom18, is considered possible. The rights are up for renewal after next year's tournament IPL.

Overall, Asia-Pacific remains a challenging region for sports rights sellers. It will take more than the developments above to shift the dial back towards growth in rights fees. In certain markets, like China, recent rights fee high water marks are not going to be witnessed again for the foreseeable future.

But each development is a significant improvement in the outlook in the affected markets. No one will be expecting a return to the glory days of the late noughties and early 2010s, when big percentage rights fee increases were commonplace. But the picture is not as bleak as it was 12 months ago. ♦

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The screenshot displays the SportBusiness Sponsorship website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'HOME', 'FILTERED SEARCH', 'INDUSTRY', and 'FAQ'. Below this, a 'DAILY DEAL UPDATES' section features a bar chart showing deal counts over time. A 'DATA SNAPSHOTS' section provides a breakdown of deals by sport (NBA, EUROPEAN FAS, MLB, GOLF, TENNIS) with metrics like 'Number of partners' and 'Total Value'. A '10 FEATURED SPORTS' section lists various sports with their respective deal counts. The 'ACTIVATIONS' section on the left highlights several case studies, including 'Best Seat in the House - Experience Kissimmee & West Ham Utd' and 'Jersey Takeover Sydney Rooftop'.



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Milwaukee Bucks look to leverage NBA title to spark global growth



(Stacy Revere/Getty Images)

- Future of mixed-use development to be shaped by unprecedented attendance during NBA playoffs
- Champions secure immediate spike in season-ticket sales and interest from potential sponsors
- Small-market team to also capitalize on Antetokounmpo's popularity to seek new revenue streams overseas

By Bob Williams

The Milwaukee Bucks are looking to capitalize on their historic National Basketball Association championship run to spur commercial growth both locally and internationally, specifically by expanding the Deer District mixed development area around the team's Fiserv Forum arena and by developing its global presence.

Led by their inspirational superstar Giannis Antetokounmpo, the Bucks last month defeated the Phoenix Suns 4-2 in the NBA Finals to secure the franchise's first league title since 1971.

Such was the excitement locally in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, that approximately 100,000 Bucks fans watched the clinching Game 6 on July 20 over multiple television screens in the Deer District, which surrounds Fiserv Forum.

Over the course of the NBA playoffs, unprecedented numbers of Bucks fans visited the 30-acre mixed use development to cheer on the team, soak up the atmosphere, sample the amenities, and experience the Bucks' historic title run first-hand.

Crowds rose from around 15,000 during the Eastern Conference semifinals to as much as 100,000 for Game 6 of the NBA Finals, according to figures by local police. Tens of thousands of fans also visited the Deer District for the championship parade a few days later.

For the Bucks' ownership group of Marc Lasry, Wes Edens, and Jamie Dinan – as well as investor Mike Fascitelli – it was the fulfillment of a dream to not only make the Bucks a championship-winning team but to also make the Deer District a legitimate year-round destination place for the residents of Milwaukee.

According to Bucks president Peter Feigin, around 30 to 40 per cent of the ticketed visitors to the Deer District during the NBA playoffs had never been to the



Greek superstar Giannis Antetokounmpo led the Milwaukee Bucks to a 4-2 victory over the Phoenix Suns in the NBA Finals to secure the franchise's first title since 1971 (Getty Images)

development before. There was also sizable demographic diversity among the attendees, from 12-24 year olds, diehard fans, and family units.

It is widely expected that many of these Bucks fans will return on a regular basis to the Deer District, which opened alongside Fiserv Forum in 2018 and has been a site for community events such as farmer's markets, yoga and Zumba classes, holiday festivals, nighttime movies, and beer festivals.

The Deer District has expanded significantly in the three years since it opened while there are major plans to enhance the development going forward including a premium boutique hotel, office spaces, apartment complexes, retail and restaurant spaces and a movie theatre, among numerous other projects.

And the amount of people who visited the Deer District during the NBA playoffs – and their varied make-up – will directly help shape the future of the expansive real estate project in the coming years.

"The dichotomy of the audience was pretty interesting. It was incredibly diverse," Feigin tells SportBusiness, "which opened our eyes to really what the potential is to try to create other content that might be attractive to other demos as we think in terms of how to position the Deer District...to create traffic and attendance in terms of ticketed events and other things in the future.

"We were aggressive in terms of the development of the Deer District and it had to come to a screeching stop [due to the Covid-19 pandemic]. For us, [the championship win] gets us back to full-scale development of our undeveloped pieces and probably has us pivot and have us think about the potential a little differently following this experience of the NBA playoffs," Feigin says.

Immediate season-ticket and sponsorship sales boost

Like every other professional sports organization in

North America, the Bucks were hit extremely hard by the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, as gameday income dramatically declined for an extensive period due to the lack of fans at games.

The team's extensive playoff run to the NBA Finals, though, helped mitigate projected losses, with the team

being allowed a capacity 16,500 fans to attend home games for the majority of the playoffs with the easing of local pandemic-related restrictions.

The Bucks began the 2020-21 season without fans in attendance and this figure gradually increased to 3,300 fans and then 9,100 as the campaign progressed.

This late-season spike in ticket, concessions and merchandise revenue from inside Fiserv Forum – as well as the removal of capacity restrictions throughout the Deer District – plus the ability to sell season tickets and premium tickets to a highly-receptive fanbase this summer, represents a distinct immediate financial boost for the Bucks in lifting the NBA title this season.

"Coming out of the pandemic, we were in a very deep hole," Feigin says. "Like other professional teams and entertainment venues, where we had literally gone from zero to scaling up our business. Literally not until June did we have significant attendance in our arena.

"We were forecasting it would take us a year and a half plus to get us back to par with the 2019-20 season. What has happened with a championship and a big Finals run is we're able to have an aggressive [season-ticket] selling cycle go through July, and be able to recoup a lot of our season-ticket holders as well as

acquire new season ticket-holders, which you never get to do. It's a real advantage," he says.

In recent months, the Bucks have secured a number of commercial deals, including a multiyear jersey patch deal with American telecommunications company Motorola, as well as partnerships with the likes of Hennessy, SC Johnson, Tanduay Rum, MeiGray Group, and I Got It.

Going forward, the Bucks are expecting to secure more sponsorship, advertising, and marketing partners on the back of the NBA title, not unlike other title winners.

Indeed, Feigin says that numerous national and international companies are now contacting the Bucks about partnering with the team "in a big way," which is in sharp contrast to when he first took the role in October 2014 when the then-largely irrelevant franchise was mostly only able to secure deals on a local level.

"In terms of sponsorship sales, I see exponential growth and the possibilities of being ahead of schedule in terms of double digit percentages as we get into next season," Feigin says. "Percentage-wise we projected ourselves before the NBA playoffs that we would be at an incredible deficit in comparison to the last full year. So



Bucks co-owner Marc Lasry lifts the Larry O'Brien Championship Trophy (Getty Images)



The Bucks took part in the inaugural NBA regular-season game in Paris in January 2020 (Getty Images)

“The Bucks’ wide-ranging partnership with Motorola is indicative of how global companies are now looking to align with the team.”

align with the team, and the possibilities that lie ahead.

Not only is Motorola a founding partner of the Bucks, as well as the jersey patch and official mobile smartphone partner, the telco will be able to market its partnership internationally as part of the NBA’s International Team Marketing Program.

The Bucks are now formulating a plan to take their international reach to a new level, including introducing digital and social media content in a number of foreign languages to better connect with the team’s expanding global fanbase.

“It’s rethinking country by country. How do we localize our digital and social channels in specific languages to talk directly to fans, how do we monetize them, retail to them?” Feigin says.

The Bucks’ title glory has given the franchise an unprecedented “global commercial,” says Feigin, and efforts will be concentrated over the next 12 months, while the Bucks can call themselves NBA champions, to make the most of this moment.

“If you think about this as a building block, it obviously thrusts the Milwaukee Bucks further into the global footprint,” Feigin says. “On a local side, we have renewed interest in partnerships, we’re developing real estate, people are calling us versus us prospecting and selling in a big way. On a global level, we have a prospect list and pipeline of global brands interested in leveraging the Milwaukee Bucks brand on an advertising, entitlement and sponsorship basis.”

The Bucks’ title win is seen by many as an unlikely triumph for a Midwestern, Rust Belt city that sees itself as an underdog. On a marketing level, the Bucks want to capitalize globally on the efforts of a small-market town making a big impression in the NBA.

“How can we be this irreverent, champion, underdog team for the world? There’s no reason why we couldn’t create affinity for this brand and this team and this city around the world,” Feigin says. “You just raise the bar – and for us raising the bar is going to the world.” ♦

not only have we made up that hole but we think we will surpass that.”

While the Bucks will look to maintain good relationships with the franchise’s founding partners, Feigin anticipates the team will be able to charge more to new companies who want to associate themselves with the franchise, as well as certain partners who will look to renew partnerships.

“The nice thing about this business is you can justify a lot of increases and decreases metrically, whether that’s in impressions, dwell times, views on videos. There is some science to it,” Feigin says. “As partners renew, we’ve got the greatest thing in sports, we’ve got

factual versus aspirational. Kind of part of our promise was, ‘We will be a championship team. We will spend money to really compete.’ Now on a factual basis, we are a championship team, we’ve got a nucleus to compete at a championship level.”

Becoming an underdog city for the world

As a team in one of the smallest media markets in the NBA, the Bucks are somewhat limited in terms of the business they can conduct on a local basis to boost revenues.

Milwaukee is just the 35th biggest media market in the US, while the Milwaukee metro population is

the 40th biggest at 1,577,676. By contrast, the metro population in Los Angeles, the home of the 2020 NBA champions Los Angeles Lakers, is more than 13 million.

It is for this reason that the Bucks are looking to expand their efforts overseas – in large part thanks to the presence of their Greek superstar Antetokounmpo – to grow their international fanbase, and in turn, revenues.

This process was kickstarted in January 2020, shortly prior to the pandemic, when the Bucks took on the Charlotte Hornets in the NBA’s inaugural regular-season games in Paris.

The Bucks’ wide-ranging partnership with Motorola is indicative of how global companies are now looking to



Copenhagen's Football Village sets the bar

Copenhagen's Football Village attracted widespread praise during Uefa Euro 2020 – and the concept is set to be revisited next year.

With widespread restrictions on travel and strict pandemic protocols in place, host cities faced an unenviable challenge in creating anything like a normal fan experience during this year's Uefa European Championship.

Therefore, it is even more impressive that organisers in Copenhagen were able to deliver a fan zone that, from the perspectives of many visitors, set a new benchmark.

The Danish capital's Football Village proved to be a hit with supporters and industry stakeholders alike.

"I must be careful in calling it the best fan zone in the history of the tournament, but I will allow myself to say that I don't remember seeing anything like it before," Uefa general secretary Theodore Theodoridis told Danish broadcaster TV3 during a visit to Copenhagen.

Picturesque setting

The Football Village was located at Ofelia Plads, a harbourside space, and organisers used the picturesque setting to create an experience that



proved welcoming for fans of all ages and orientations.

Inevitably, given the challenges of the pandemic, the Football Village project itself had to overcome some hurdles.

The fan zone had been planned and designed before the pandemic hit, and the eventual postponement of the tournament by 12 months led to the project being refinanced.

"On top of this, suddenly Euro 2020 overlapped with Copenhagen hosting the Tour de France Grand Départ," explains Ulrich Amundsen, host city manager for Copenhagen during Euro 2020.

"This demanded extreme amounts of collaboration to be able to co-host these two mega events with their different partners and extensive plans for visibility. We manged, but in the end the Olympics was also moved, and this led to the Grand Départ in Copenhagen being pushed to 2022.

"Finally, we were back on track

and with the tournament moved back a year we didn't really expect Covid to prove too much of challenge."

Scenario planning

Of course, the pandemic was far from over by the time Euro 2020 eventually kicked off on June 11, 2021. Amundsen and his team worked on a number of different scenarios before a plan of action was finalised just two months ahead of the big kick-off.

"A big challenge was how the framework conditions kept changing due to the pandemic," he says. "Just before the start of Euros we had to introduce a ticketing scheme to the viewing area in order to control the amount of people visiting during matches.

"This was not planned and demanded a new set of skills, but even though this was not an expertise of ours, adapting to circumstances certainly was. This change led to a communications challenge as people were not sure how to visit and it took a week or so to get the message completely understood.

"Owing to restrictions in numbers we also had to introduce much

more rigorous security as many people wanted to get in and we even experienced people trying to make their way to the area by swimming."

Concepts

Copenhagen's Parken Stadium hosted four matches during Euro 2020 – Denmark's three group stage games and the round of 16 clash between Spain and Croatia. A week into the tournament, restrictions were eased in the city and, according to Amundsen, the fan zone ended up being "true to the original plan".

That plan centred on three main concepts: Park Life, which was inspired by the city's green areas and allowed visitors to have a kickabout with friends while at the fan zone; Street Life, which called on Copenhagen's bicycle culture and offered festival activities such as street-soccer, DJs and musicians; and Beach Life, which paid tribute to the harbour and swimming facilities, with a temporary swimming zone set up for guests.

"The ambition of the Football Village was to create a beautiful and engaging activity zone, modelled after Copenhagen and reflecting different aspects and areas of the city," says Lars Vallentin, senior manager at Wonderful Copenhagen, the official tourism organisation of the Capital Region of Denmark.

"It was important for Copenhagen that the fan zone was uniquely Copenhagen and different from the classic fan zones. It had to be an area that appealed to a broader

group of people and showcased what Copenhagen has to offer.

"The clean water, beautiful architecture, great food, diversity and togetherness; it had to be an area worth visiting for locals and visitors alike, and an area of culture and sport, but not only football. The great success of the area was down to us succeeding in both attracting the classic football audience and also many other people, not least families."

According to Vallentin, the fan zone took years of planning. A number of local organisations were called upon to keep the site busy during times when matches were not being played, with 60 to 70 outreach activities set up to keep visitors engaged. Other tournaments such as the Pride Cup and Embassy Cup demonstrated Copenhagen's inclusivity.

"We wanted to put a focus on inclusivity and involvement," says Vallentin. "People should not just be bystanders looking at activities, but be involved in the sport activities, join the matches on the football and basketball pitch and go for a swim.

"We wanted everyone to join in no matter your age, gender, sexual orientation or if you were blind. This is a focus of the football clubs, and the Football Village was therefore a natural extension of their focus – football is for everyone."

Eriksen Wall

A Danish heart organisation was also on hand to raise awareness of

heart failure following the collapse of Denmark midfielder Christian Eriksen during the match against Finland.

"Another very popular feature in the Football Village was the Eriksen Wall," adds Vallentin. "People could write messages to him, and many people came by to share messages and maybe use it as an outlet for their emotions and a bit of catharsis after a traumatic experience. The wall became quite an attraction and international TV crews flew in to do stories."

The fan zone attracted 96,000 visitors over the course of the tournament. This was less than originally anticipated when the project was first formulated, but in line with realistic expectations given the lack of international tourists and pandemic restrictions.

However, the concept will be revisited next year as Copenhagen finally welcomes the Grand Départ. An official fan zone will be complemented by a "less commercial" experience known as FestiVelo.

"This area will also be an experience-driven centre of activities for everyone. The Football Village definitely set the bar for fan experiences in Denmark," says Vallentin, who adds that the zone will once again represent "the Copenhagen way of doing things".

Given its success in delivering a redefined fan zone concept, do not be surprised if other cities take note of "the Copenhagen way" for future major events. ♦

Sarah Hirshland pursues dramatic new path for USOPC



Sarah Hirshland, executive director of the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee. (Jamie Schwaberow/Getty Images for USOPC)

- Former US Golf Association, Wasserman executive has pursued large-scale governance reform within national Olympic committee
- Hirshland led efforts to rebrand organization in 2019
- Priorities have included a sharply heightened focus on athlete wellbeing, including mental health

By Eric Fisher

Sarah Hirshland recently hit the three-year anniversary of her being appointed as chief executive of the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee, and there has scarcely been a moment to slow down amid some of the largest changes in the history of the national Olympic committee (NOC).

Hirshland, a former executive with the US Golf Association and Wasserman Media Group, immediately inherited a brutal scandal with the long-running sexual abuse of former USA Gymnastics team doctor Larry Nassar, a situation that helped lead to the departure of her predecessor, Scott Blackmun, and others within the organization.

She immediately set to work on dramatically reorganizing the body's governance and overall operating structure, retooling the board of directors, the governance model, and pursuing a sharply heightened focus on athlete wellness, including mental health. Hirshland also engineered in 2019 a formal name change of the USOC, incorporating the Paralympics as an equal part of the overall branding.

More recently, Hirshland has also faced widespread challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic, implementing large-scale personnel cuts, and budget reductions, as well working with the International Olympic Committee and Tokyo 2020 organizers on helping ensure athlete safety during the recent summer Olympics in Japan, an event ultimately held without mass spectators. And the USOPC under Hirshland has been outspoken in its firm opposition regarding any potential athlete boycott of the upcoming 2022 Beijing Olympics due to human rights abuses in China.

But amid all those headwinds, Team USA concluded Tokyo 2020 with the most gold medals and by far the most overall medals. Hirshland has also been aiding LA28, the organizing committee for the upcoming 2028 Olympics in

Los Angeles, California, in their frenetic run of activity that includes a large-scale hospitality deal between the IOC and Endeavor, and a series of major sponsorships that has left the upcoming Games in a strong position still more than seven years ahead of Opening Ceremonies, while also pursuing a US-hosted Winter Olympics.

Hirshland spoke from Japan with SportBusiness US Editor Eric Fisher, where she observed both the Olympics and Paralympics on site.

What were your impressions on the ground in Tokyo during both the Olympics and Paralympics, particularly given all the pandemic-related issues these events encountered? What perhaps surprised you there?

From an Olympic Games perspective, we feel incredibly good about the success of the Games. Set aside the pandemic. They were a wildly successful Games. The pandemic created a layer of complexity and modifications to all the things we had to do. The unfortunate piece was the elimination of all the [in-person] support that comes from spectators, our donor base, friends and family, and all of those groups. But everybody just found a way, and it all went beautifully. It's been an awesome experience, albeit I think there will always be the asterisk that we wish more people could have shared in it.

How much was the 13-hour time difference between Tokyo and US East Coast a factor in affecting the lower American fan interest in these Games?

The time difference is always challenging, particularly when you are in Asia. But you have to take that in context with where we are in society and where we are in the world at any moment in time. And we continue to find ourselves in an ever-evolving world of behavior patterns and content consumption patterns. So I think the time difference does have an impact on the way content is being consumed, for sure. If there's a difference in 2020 around the Tokyo Games [compared to prior Olympics held in Asia], I think it's in the context of compared to what it might have been in say, 2008 [and the Beijing Summer Olympics], which, of course, was such a different time.

But certainly the time difference is a factor, and what is consumed live and in the moment versus what is sort of appointment viewing. And those are all considerations that are going to continue to evolve as we think about changes in content consumption behaviors.

You just hit the three-year anniversary of your appointment to this role. How would you assess the progress to date of your reform efforts within the USOPC?

Governance reform and organizational reform is at times a methodical and slow road, and not always particularly fun or interesting. But this is really important work, and I feel terrific about the progress we've made in the three years. We really started with some foundational work, looking at the missions, making sure we had our eye on the right North Star, and reorienting to that in order to expand beyond just focusing on competitive excellence and instead ensuring we had an equal focus on athlete wellbeing.

It's now about the integration of those two things in driving success for Team USA athletes. And that set us on a journey that we continue to be on. And I feel really good about where we've come in both redefining the mission and focus of the organization and aligning our bylaws to ensure our governance reflected that focus and aligning our organizational and operational structure, and beginning to implement some programmatic items. Notably, that includes a mental health focus, improving our athlete health and wellness programs, sports medicine, but also the way we think about athlete insurance, utilizing our medical network partners, and



The team from the United States celebrates after winning the gold medal in the women's 4 x 400-meter relay at the 2020 Summer Olympics, in Tokyo, Japan. (David J. Phillip-Pool/Getty Images)

focusing on the performance side from a technology and innovation perspective. We've really doubled down on how we utilize the expertise of those in our country to drive technology and innovation enhancements that will improve performance.

And we've also focused on fostering an inclusive, safe, and fair culture, and worked to drive that culture. That was the next, big piece of this, understanding the culture as it stood [before], defining what we wanted it to be, and starting to chip away at it. You've seen us make some pretty strong statements about inclusion and fostering belonging, about safety, and about fairness, whether that's doping or creating an equitable playing field.

The last piece of this is that we're a fairly small, scrappy organization, but we live in a pretty big, complex universe. So how do we then engage all of our partners and supporters to swim in one direction? And between corporate support, the incredible philanthropic audience and base that we have, all of the partner organizations that we work with, if you can align that momentum in one direction, there's some real power there.

What would you consider within that whole effort your greatest success thus far and your greatest disappointment?

That's a really hard question, but I'd have to say there's nothing at this moment I'm more proud of than walking into our board of directors with a recommendation to change the name of the organization. Not because it was about changing the name, but because it was about making a commitment, that we were going to be focused on creating parity and equity around the Paralympics, and living up to the duty and opportunity that we hold as an organization.

That was a big moment. And you can imagine that for me, about two and a half years later being at my first Paralympics, having the opportunity to interact with a number of these athletes and hear and see how much this was a signal and a trigger for change in the Paralympic movement, both in our country and around the world, I don't think I will fully appreciate and be able to understand for a long time how important that single moment was. But it was a catalyst for some really good things to come.

You mentioned mental health before, and your organization was outspoken in its support of Simone Biles during the Tokyo Games as she stepped back from much of her planned competition. Do you anticipate that moment ultimately being looked back upon as a turning point for how athlete wellness is viewed?

I think to have someone with the visibility of Simone Biles on the platform in which she has her loudest voice make that statement is forever gamechanging. Society will now have a different conversation about mental health going forward, and that's not to suggest that one moment solves all ills. But that one moment did create a conversation that is one where a lot of organizations, entities, and individuals now have a different level of permission to engage in and a different level of comfort to explore what mental health means, and not just for elite athletes. Sometimes just opening the door to conversation is enough to be a catalyst for change.

And there are number of others who have also worked hard to do that. Michael Phelps is certainly one, and has been a key driver, and is also someone with a really big platform. We're now starting to see a critical mass of some really powerful voices swimming in the same direction on this topic. There's also an increasing amount of infrastructure to do something about this, real infrastructure. Collegiate athletic programs are bringing mental health professionals to bear, certainly pro teams, and we're starting to create a delineation between a sports psychologist who may be very performance driven from a mental health professional who is focused in a very different area. And that delineation for us as an organization has been critically important. It's important

for athletes to understand the distinction and understand the moments when each of those support professionals can add value into their lives.

We're now at a point where we have a mental health professional to support our staff, and those things are growing and the conversations are happening. We still have long way to go for people to really know when and where and how to take advantage of these resources, but we're learning, and learning together is what is going to move things forward.

Shifting over to the upcoming Beijing Olympics, you and the USOPC have been clear in your opposition to a potential boycott of those games amid the political situation in China. How do you see that situation unfolding as the Games approach?

I certainly hoped we would find ourselves in a different Covid environment heading into Beijing than I think we're now finding ourselves in. So my optimism around Beijing is tampered dramatically by the realities of what we're seeing around the pandemic. And that is going to create real complications for all of us. Having lived through Tokyo, it's really hard to navigate this Covid environment. And we're in a more difficult position today than I think we were [before]. So that's probably my single greatest concern there.

The geopolitical climate between the US and China is not new. And it's going to have its ebbs and flows. And our hope is that our government focus on that from a government level, and that from a sports perspective, we have the opportunity to set that aside and go live the values of the Olympic movement in a safe and healthy way with our team in Beijing.

Your point about Covid is well taken. My question was really with regard to the Uyghurs.

A: It's a challenging environment. Many in our government have called for a diplomatic boycott. I will stand in support of the decision of our government in that regard if that's a determination they make. But we can't stand in support of them either suggesting or promoting an athlete boycott or punishing those who support us, from a corporate perspective or otherwise. We need the support of sponsors, donors, our broadcast partners in order to survive and in order to thrive. So we're asking very clearly for the government to allow that ecosystem to go do what we do, to compete, and to allow our athletes to shine.

Do you fear becoming a political cudgel or otherwise caught in the middle of this situation, where if the White House supports your participation in Beijing, the Republicans will automatically oppose it, or vice versa?

We believe very deeply that we represent 100 per cent of

our country. As Team USA, we're a microcosm of the diversity of this country. And we're the most diverse [Olympic] team in the world. That inherently makes it complicated because there are a lot of different viewpoints. But our view is that we want to go stand united as a team and show the world what we are capable of.

We seem to be on a particular precipice of change with the Olympics, with large, given all the new sports being added to the program and the different approaches now being attempted with regard to bid organization and venues. Where do you see all those changes headed?

It's a natural evolution, and we have an opportunity to drive really significant change. And a lot of that will be driven our ability to host [the Olympics in the US] with a Summer Games, and hopefully a Winter Games. That draws an added layer of attention and an ability to set an example. We are the biggest NOC on the Summer side, and the most successful NOC from a performance perspective. And by virtue of holding that position, we have the

privilege and duty to set an example in many ways. By hosting the Games, that obligation and opportunity gets expanded tenfold. So we're working really closely, as you might imagine, with the LA28 organizing committee, and also the IOC and IPC to say, 'what is it that we want to accomplish together and how can we leverage LA28 to do that?' And it's about not waiting until 2028 but doing some of that work now. So there are some really big opportunities to set an example.

With regard with LA28, there's been a lot done already, with several sponsorship deals and the big agreement with Endeavor already completed. What do you see as the impact of all that early work?

They are fortunately past the point of being about just raising the money [to stage the Games] and simply executing. Those things they have a nice headstart on, which will give more ability to focus on the broader impact and what will be the legacy. Often we use the word legacy with regard to what you'll leave behind [afterwards]. But

“ We believe very deeply that we represent 100 per cent of our country. As Team USA, we're a microcosm of the diversity of this country. And we're the most diverse [Olympic] team in the world. ”



the motivation and ambition here is to not wait until after, but rather, let's get ahead proactively and think about where we know we can make great impact on the front end. Their focus will be heavily on leveraging the Los Angeles market to set an example, drive new kinds of programming, and focus on safe environments.

What will be your other major priorities, particularly within the next six to 12 months?

Number one is closing the books on Tokyo, finishing strong, and making sure we understand what we can learn from these Games. Number two is applying all of that to Beijing so that is wildly successful. And we are also setting our sights on building the long-term plan for not only LA28, but also Paris [in 2024]. That is now just three years away and is going to come quickly. And we want to make sure the context of Paris is another learning opportunity as we head toward LA. That will focus on the same areas, continuing to advance athlete wellbeing alongside the performance and continuing to advance the sport culture. ♦



Wesley Hitt/Getty Images

Cutting through the noise: Why sports need to own the fan engagement journey

Sports fans have never had more information at their fingertips. Before, during and after every moment of any game, fans can gorge on vast amounts of content, delivered to them by multiple parties.

For the individual fan, this is hugely appealing. But for sports leagues, federations and clubs it is a growing issue.

Increasingly, fans are consuming content from third parties rather than from the rights-holder. And the less an individual fan interacts with a sport's digital channels, the less valuable they are to the rights-holder and their sponsors.

Unless sports own the fan journey, they will struggle amid an increasingly competitive world for a fan's attention and fail to realize the full value of their audience.



Competing in an attention economy

Leagues and clubs aren't just competing with other content producers in the sports industry. They are in a constant battle with other forms of entertainment, jostling for that increasingly valuable commodity – a fan or consumer's attention.

A fan's attention can be spent on anything from reading a game summary to watching highlights or purchasing tickets for upcoming games. The last 18 months of empty stadiums have stretched the notion that 'sport is nothing without the fans' to near breaking point. But the sentiment still holds because

whether in-person, digitally or through broadcast, fans and their attention are the vital ingredients that make sports relevant and financially stable.

Leagues and clubs are in an enviable position compared to content producers in other industries. Sport is one of very few forms of entertainment that is still at its most engaging when consumed live, creating a natural content cycle before, during and after game-days.

But some rights-holders have become too focused on game-day content, creating a vacuum where brands and publishers would hope to capture fans' attention and dollars during other windows. As Brent Lawton, VP, Media Strategy & Business Development from our partners at the NFL recently outlined, telling stories outside of

the live game window is a central part of our new partnership.

Like many sports, through their data, video and reach, the NFL have amazing assets at their disposal – assets we're putting to work through "adding to or supplementing what's going to happen on a Sunday by telling those broader stories, keeping the momentum and interest in what's going on between game days".

But for sports to stand out from other entertainment businesses, in and outside of game-days, they need to develop the right engagement strategy for the right fan.

Creating super fans

Without the attention of fans, sports can't exist. But attracting that attention and the revenue opportunities it brings can't be done with a one-size-fits-all approach.

Different fans want different types of content but even if sports don't have the tools to deliver an entirely personalized experience to each individual consumer, they can still tailor their content for multiple layers of fan.

For example, to re-engage dormant fans, leagues can use simple, quick-fire tools such as quizzes and polls. These free-to-play games are effective at grabbing a fan's attention, particularly when based around major recent sports events and topics.

Casual or part-time fans are another key group for sports to

target, to make them more engaged and increase their monetization potential. Moving them up this scale may require a greater degree of personalization in the form of bespoke fan videos that could provide a behind-the-scenes tour or messages from high-profile players and coaches.

For the most ardent sports fans, leagues and clubs need to go further, delivering content and platforms that they can engage with every day. Season-long fantasy sports games are a staple part of this, providing consistent content that can accompany the game-day essentials such as live game statistics, highlights and interviews.

Sport's global appeal is rooted in its unpredictability. No two plays are the same and leagues must recognize that the same is true of their fans.

Unique Fan Experiences

The degree of personalization a sport will be able to deliver will depend on how much value they provide to their fans.

The more content and value a sport provides to its fans, the more information they can get back. But ultimately a sport must understand what content the fan wants for this value exchange to take place, something that has become more complex as fans consumption habits continue to fragment.

Ultimately if sports continue to provide more and more content

and engagement opportunities, they can then further tailor their content, and the time at which it is delivered. To cut through the noise and build meaningful connections with their fans, sports must be able to personalize each fan experience based on an individual's content preferences, purchase history, and more.

At Genius Sports, our major focus over the last year has been developing our media and fan engagement solutions for sports. Through our partnership with the NFL, acquisitions of FanHub, Second Spectrum and now Spirable, we can unlock huge value for our partners at each step of the fan lifecycle.

We know what the modern fan consumes, how they consume it and are now at a place where we can enable sports to capture the interest of the most casual fan through to the ultimate supporter. Our technology helps sports combine their game and fan data to be used in meaningful ways both internally and for official sponsors.

The opportunity here is enormous. Live sports events have always attracted the largest TV audiences and advertising budgets and, while that spend has been increasingly divided amongst multiple content producers, leagues and clubs are still in the box seat.

It's time for sports to take more ownership of the fan journey and deliver the entire experiences their fans demand. ♦



Timothy T Ludwig/Getty Images

NHL ensures teams will have full flexibility to maximize jersey sponsorships



An example of a NHL practice jersey sponsorship patch (Getty Images)

- Clubs free to put logos on one of four different positions on uniforms
- Different sponsors, locations for home and away jerseys will be allowed
- Flexibility should help generate more interest, says NHL executive Wachtel

By Bob Williams

The National Hockey League is undertaking a series of measures to ensure that its teams can secure maximum value from jersey sponsorships when the landmark inventory is introduced in the 2022-23 season.

The patches, which will be 3 inches by 3.5-inches in size, are permitted to be located on one of four designated spots on uniforms: the left and right shoulders, and left and right chest.

This lack of uniformity will allow teams to work around their varying jersey designs and to give both teams and sponsors flexibility to decide on a position that works best for both parties.

In addition, teams will be allowed to have different sponsors for both home and away jerseys, if they choose, and put the logo patches on a different location on the away jersey than the home jersey.

Part of this strategy is related to the allowance of sports betting uniform sponsorships. According to NHL rules, teams will only be allowed to sell helmet and jersey sponsorships to gambling companies on their home uniforms and in jurisdictions where single-game sports betting is legal.

This is designed to prevent sports betting forms from being showcased in states and jurisdictions where the industry is not yet legal.

Teams have also been given a year to secure these deals – which could potentially generate between \$4m-\$6m (€3.39m-5.08m) a year for each franchise, according to early estimates – in order to spend a significant period of time to find a jersey patch partner.

This time frame gives jersey manufacturer Adidas requisite time to produce the jerseys with the new logos on them. It also allows for sports betting to be legalized in Canada, which is expected to happen on a province-by province basis by the end of the year.

Furthermore, NHL teams are not obligated to put sponsorship logos on their jerseys if they are not comfortable with the idea. Likewise, some

traditionalist fans who may be against the initiative will be able to buy replica jerseys without logos.

In short, flexibility is the key for the NHL's much-anticipated revenue-generating move, which follows the league's introduction of sponsors on practice jerseys in 2010, and then helmets starting last season amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Indeed, former NHL chief operating officer John Collins proclaimed back in 2014 that jersey sponsorships were "coming."

The NHL is following precedents in the sport set by the American Hockey League, National Women's Hockey League, and many European pro leagues.

Meanwhile, among non-soccer team sports in North America, the Women's National Basketball Association introduced jersey sponsorships in 2009 and the National Basketball Association followed suit in 2017. The Canadian Football League has also allowed jersey sponsorships for a number of years.

It seems highly likely that Major League Baseball – which this summer allowed sponsors on its umpires' uniforms for the first time – and the National Football League will allow jersey ads in the near future.

Keith Wachtel, the NHL's chief business officer and

senior executive vice president, spoke to *SportBusiness* about the strategy and decision-making process behind the initiative.

To what extent did the success of helmet sponsorships directly lead to the decision to allow jersey sponsorships?

It was certainly indirect. The only correlation between the two was just seeing the success that our clubs had from generating revenue. The second piece, perhaps was – but we knew it – was the lack of concern, if you will, by the various constituents about the sanctity of the NHL uniforms and things like that.

That had a little bit to do with it but we've been talking about jerseys, quite frankly, for years and helmets were never in the discussion. During the pandemic, the thought of the helmets was it was a simple and easy opportunity for the clubs. The helmets came about in much different circumstances that were not nearly the years-long process like the jersey has been for all of sports properties and certainly for us, which has been a discussion for a very long time.

Did anyone in the league push for jersey sponsorships to be introduced in the 2021-22 season?

No. Our clubs understand the importance of, in any asset, generating the most value they possibly can. In order to do that, in almost any aspect in any business, you need time. Time is always your friend or your enemy so we wanted to take a thoughtful approach. There are so many dynamics that go into this – the location, the size, the go-to-market strategy, the actual retail component...there are so many intricacies that needed to be worked out that it wouldn't have made sense [to initiate the program sooner]. All of that led us to come to what we think is a great opportunity, one which we wanted to make sure the clubs had enough time to maximize the opportunity.

There is a lack of uniformity on the locations of these logos. Why is this exactly?

The interesting thing about our uniforms comparatively is there is no uniformity. Not only is there no uniformity team to team but some of our clubs have different away jerseys to their home jerseys [in design].

That is the unique nature of our sweaters. So at that point we wanted to analyze the various locations that could make sense in partnership with Adidas and ultimately came to the conclusion that because there is no uniformity, let's provide flexibility. There is only one patch available and it is only available on one of those four locations. The club will choose what makes the most sense for their jersey and also what makes sense for the partner they are talking to.

Continuing on the theme of flexibility, teams can also choose a different sponsor for your home sweater and your away sweater. So you can have two different jersey partners each having a different location, one on the home jersey and one on the away jersey to provide that flexibility depending on what the marketplace will bear. Flexibility should help generate more interest in the product.

Some clubs will sell one sponsor, some clubs can have two sponsors, and the club has the choice to not do this at all. We are not mandating that our clubs sell it – if a club does not want to sell [a jersey sponsor], they don't have to.

Is there a guideline for how many years the initial jersey sponsorships will be in length?

It has to be for a minimum of three years.

Most NHL teams brought in existing commercial partners as their helmet sponsors, do you expect something similar for jersey sponsorships or do you think there will be an influx of new companies for this opportunity?

We think it will be an influx of new companies not only for the jersey but also for the helmet. The helmet was primarily used to manage existing partners in retaining revenue that was being lost based on the shortened season and the pandemic. Now you will see new companies and new categories that might not necessarily be interested in traditional club sponsorships.

So we think that is a great opportunity for our clubs to speak to existing partners and new partners in traditional categories but also non-traditional partners that haven't necessarily been interested in hockey from a local sponsorship standpoint.

I think you'll start to see a significant group of global entities that see the opportunity to provide signage for a global sport, where our broadcasts are all over the world on a nightly basis and in certain countries where the NHL is the No. 1 sport.

To what extent will the introduction of jersey sponsorships affect the valuation of helmet sponsorships?



The National Hockey League is following a precedent set by the National Basketball Association in the 2017-18 season (Getty Images)



The National Hockey League has allowed sponsorship logos on practice jerseys since 2010 (Getty Images)

Because it's such a scarce resource, only having the opportunity to have two partners to own this real estate, we don't think it will diminish it at all. We have seen a lot of interest from the existing partners who were on the helmet before about continuing. So having the scarcity that we have...we think it will provide a great opportunity for each.

Does the speed of ice hockey affect the valuation of jersey sponsorships compared to other sports, such as the NBA?

We've done the analysis for the jerseys, and the value and time on broadcast [is] more for the NHL than the NBA. These logos, it's not necessarily during the action where you can see it, it's moments where time has stopped. You'll see a lot in the NHL game, you'll see the benches, you'll see the players coming on and off the benches, you see it during face-offs, during power plays when the game slows down a bit...from that standpoint we have a significant amount of time on air.

But the key to this property is not just about the live game. In today's media environment, highlights, social media, all the marketing that the team does, a billboard on the highway...every single thing we're talking about you will see the logo. We have done the analysis, it is

a great game because it's fast but there are plenty of opportunities for that brand awareness.

What kinds of measures are you taking to appease some fans who may be against the idea?

We're trying to be as flexible as we can, there will always be critics of anything we do and that's OK. We understand that there is some concern. The biggest thing we have done to address that is that if a fan wants to purchase a jersey that does not have the partner logo on it, they can do so. Like anything else, over time I think people will adjust to what is the new normal and I don't think the patch will affect the fandom.

Finally, Major League Baseball has just introduced jersey sponsorships for its umpires, would you possibly consider that for NHL referees?

We'll consider anything if it makes sense but it's not something that we're looking into right now and I don't necessarily see it in the foreseeable future but we are always open to opportunities. At some point, if it makes sense [to have NHL official jersey sponsorships] we could, but between our helmets and jerseys, we are in a good place for the foreseeable future. ♦



The view from

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The best of our European coverage

Innovation, community and a commitment to youth: How Italy's Lega B became European football's surprise success story



Mauro Balata, Lega B president

- Italy's second-tier league enjoys big growth in media rights value despite wider crisis
- League has had private equity interest but is focusing on cementing the foundations
- Commitment to developing youth is league's calling card but is 'not adequately rewarded'

By Frank Dunne

Against a backdrop of financial crisis and a soft sports-rights market, in which accepted wisdom says only 'must-have' properties can prosper, one European league is bucking the trend: Italy's second division, Lega B.

England's Premier League managed to keep the value of its domestic media rights flat through an unusual roll-over arrangement with incumbent rights-holders, allowed by the government and regulators because of Covid. The value of domestic German Bundesliga rights fell slightly. Italy's Serie A also experienced a drop. LaLiga is concerned something similar will happen in Spain.

Lega B heads into a new season – which opens next week with the match between Frosinone and a Parma side featuring goalkeeping legend Gianluigi Buffon – having doubled the value of its domestic media rights. It has also quadrupled the value of its international media rights, albeit from a low base. And it has increased the value of its central sponsorship revenues.

For the new cycle, 2021-22 to 2023-24, domestic rights income currently stands at €46m (\$54.5m) per season, with free-to-air highlights rights due to be awarded this week. This compares with the €24.2m per season earned in deals with DAZN and state broadcaster Rai. International media rights income has increased from €700,000 per season in a deal with Perform, to at least €2.5m per season for the next three years.

With the additional income from the domestic highlights, Lega B could overtake the second-tier Spanish league, the Segunda División, for domestic media-rights income. The second Spanish league earns €47m per season. Lega B still trails England's second-tier Championship and Germany's 2. Bundesliga.

In February, Lega B's naming rights sponsor BKT renewed for a further three years, from 2021-22 to 2023-24, at its existing fee of about €2.5m per season. The league was rebranded Serie BKT as part of the original deal and will retain the branding. Indian off-road tyre manufacturer BKT first agreed to sponsor the league for

the 2018–19 to 2020–21 cycle. The deals were brokered by the Italian division of Havas Media Group, the commercial adviser to the league.

The results are the product of over two years' work begun by current league president Mauro Balata. This has been based around building a distinctive brand identity as a league committed to youth, with deep roots in the local community. The league has also adopted innovative commercial strategies. The league's website carries the phrase: "Lega B: For football which is more authentic and attentive to social responsibility."

Talking exclusively to *SportBusiness* this week, Balata said: "We consider that we fill a void in the Italian football system. If you look at Serie A, which is the most important league in Italy, there are many clubs whose focus is increasingly on the international competitions. We are interested in protecting the 'Italianness' of our championship, promoting talent and developing young players in a concrete way."

Balata, who became president in 2017, explains how Lega B positions itself: "The values we want to communicate are ethical behaviour, faith in young players, talent development and the Italian identity of the league. We want to tell the story of the cities where we are represented, including their social and economic realities, so we can create an empathy with all those people. Through our football, we tell the stories of their territory and of our country as a whole."

He added: "The BKT renewal and the media-rights deals are the fruit of the work, together with the clubs, of stabilising the league, strengthening its credibility and brand through incorporating best practice. We hope it's part of a journey towards the financial sustainability of the clubs."

He said that BKT's continued commitment was an important sign. "They married the philosophy of Lega B of taking its story into the towns and cities across Italy, trying to tap into the reality of fans' lives, recognising their social realities," he said.

Balata said that the commercial performance of the league needed to be set against a crisis which was costing the football system "hundreds of millions of euros" and was not yet over. "We're proud of the ability of the league, in a moment of profound crisis, to create the conditions where we can help the clubs find stability. The market clearly considers Serie B as a credible football project. We are putting in place a system which is stable in a definitive way."

The commercial growth of the league has not gone unnoticed. There have been expressions of interest in Serie B from private equity companies. For the moment, however, there are no concrete negotiations and this is not seen as a priority. "First we want to stabilise our brand and establish our economic value in the market," he added.

Innovative media strategy

When Lega B unveiled the invitation to tender for its domestic media rights earlier this year it was not easy to find commentators willing to express a view about it. Quite simply, nobody had seen a model like it before, one based on non-exclusive packages of rights whose price changed according to how many partners came on board.

The league offered two packages of rights covering all games, one for satellite and digital terrestrial and one for digital and mobile rights. The novel element was that the fee was based on a sliding scale of exclusivity. A

bidder could acquire one or both packages, with the final amount paid depending on the number of buyers for each, and therefore the degree of exclusivity. At the time, rights consultant and former Canal Plus executive Pierre Maes said the new model was "the future".

Sky acquired satellite rights. As the de facto exclusive broadcaster, it will pay €16m per season. Sky, DAZN and Helbiz Media acquired non-exclusive digital rights at €10m each per season.

To some extent, the league's thinking was conditioned by the fact that Sky Italia, the country's dominant pay-

television platform, could not acquire rights for digital services on an exclusive basis, as a result of regulatory intervention in 2019, which was upheld in 2020 after Sky's appeal. However, there was also wider strategic thinking at work.

"It was born out of an intuition we had in the league," Balata said. "The objective was to achieve much more widespread exposure to reach all of the fans of the league. Opening the market up to multiple operators means there are different entry points for fans, both from the economic point of view and because there are fans who have new and

(Roland Krivec/DeFodi Images via Getty Images)



“We didn’t risk anything by going with a new player. We increased both our revenues and our exposure. That’s the ideal outcome.”

innovative ways of accessing content. It meant reaching out to fans across non-traditional methods too. It’s no longer just about the TV.”

Helbiz ‘not a gamble’

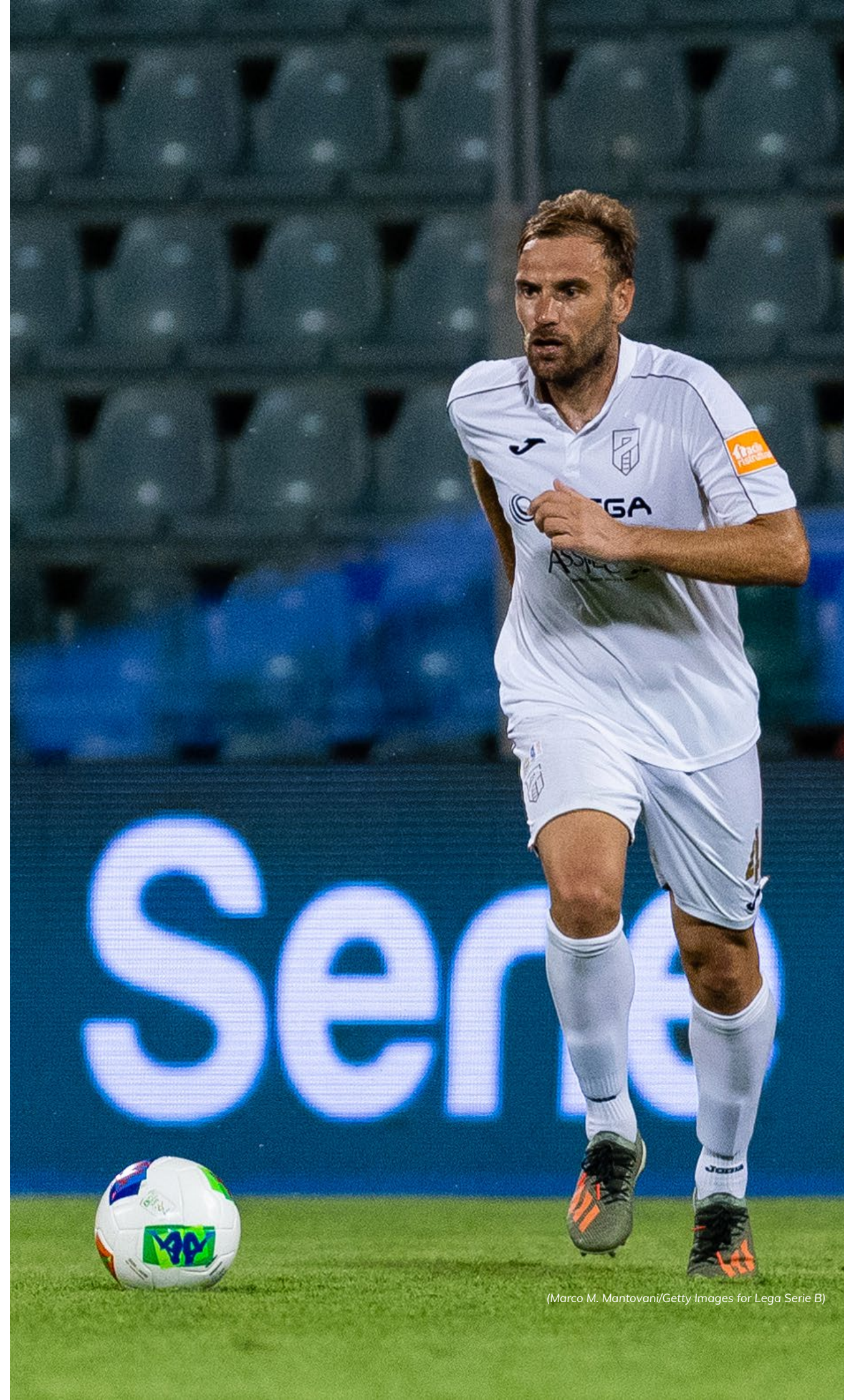
When the league awarded its rights in June this year, one of the partners was a name completely unknown in the industry: Helbiz. The US-based micro-mobility and lifestyle company created a new division, Helbiz Media, with former senior Sky Italia executive Matteo Mammi as chief executive. The company acquired domestic digital rights and international rights and became the league’s ‘Official Micro and eMobility Partner’.

Helbiz’s strategy is to combine football and entertainment with micro-mobility through a subscription and cashback model. Its digital platform, Helbiz Live, will offer Serie B content in three different packages: a monthly subscription to Helbiz Live at €5.99, of which €4 will be made available to the customer as credit for micro-mobility services; an annual subscription, at €49.99, with €30 of credit; and a package with unlimited access to its micro-mobility services for €39.99 per month.

Although international distribution has never been critical to Serie B’s finances, handing global media rights – and entrusting the global image of the league – to a complete newcomer appeared to represent something of a gamble, even though the lifestyle company was guaranteeing four times what the previous international distributor, Perform, had been paying. On top of the €2.5m per season minimum guarantee, the league and Helbiz share any upside earnings on top of that 50:50. Just as important as the increased fee was the confidence Helbiz had in securing coverage.

Last month, Helbiz agreed a deal with German lifestyle company CLIQ Digital, covering Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The deal was brokered by the Sports Media Venture consultancy operated by former IMG executive Floris Weisz. This week, it announced further broadcast deals across Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria, the Balkans and Latin America. These deals were done through the Kosmos agency, the company co-founded by Barcelona player Gerard Piqué. The league is still in talks in multiple other markets, including China.

Balata said: “The process of trying to bring the league to wider audiences was also extended to international



(Marco M. Mantovani/Getty Images for Lega Serie B)

markets. There was a strong economic commitment, which is a good result for Serie B. We increased the value of the rights by a factor of four. The sales process continues and there are many new markets coming on board. There are territories where we are now closing deals where, in the past, we were not only invisible but not even taken into consideration by broadcasters. There is a huge interest out there for Italian football and, increasingly, for our championship.”

He added that the league was “absolutely satisfied” with Helbiz. “We didn’t risk anything by going with a new player. We increased both our revenues and our exposure. That’s the ideal outcome.”

Commitment to youth

As part of its drive to differentiate itself from the top division, Lega B introduced a rule that clubs could register a maximum of 18 players over 23, and an unlimited number of players under 21. Additionally, one of the criteria by which mutuality revenues are divided is the number of minutes a club plays U21 players in their first teams. It’s not a box-ticking exercise. The players play. “There are players in Serie B who play a full season at 17. We have the highest number of minutes played by U21 players of any league in Europe, according to Uefa statistics”, Balata said.

In Roberto Mancini’s triumphant Euro 2020 Italy last month, 17 of the 26-man squad had been formed in youth academies at Lega B clubs. In the Uefa Euro U21 tournament in Hungary and Slovenia in May and June, 13 of the Italy squad currently play in the second division.

The second tier became commercially and politically separate from Serie A in 2010 and was rebranded as Lega B. It receives solidarity payments from Serie A of six per cent of the latter’s annual media-rights income, as well as the income it earns for its own commercial rights. Additionally, the three clubs relegated from Serie A have been contributing 20 per cent of their parachute payments to a central league fund since the 2018-19 season. Balata believes that the existing solidarity mechanisms do not adequately reward the investments in player development made by the second-tier clubs.

“The concern we have is that the clubs may struggle to continue this level of investment, especially in the middle of a financial crisis. The young player that comes out of Lega B is now like the student that comes out of the world’s best university with the top grades. The clubs invest heavily in this. Investing in academies and infrastructure does not come cheap.”

He added: “At the moment, the national football system does not adequately reward the clubs for this. These young players go on to deliver for the national teams at various levels and for the teams in Serie A. They need greater support from the wider football system, because ultimately the work done by the Lega B clubs is in everyone’s interests.” ♦



Abu Dhabi ready to make a splash with game-changing FINA Worlds

Abu Dhabi will host the FINA World Swimming Championships (25m) in December 2021, cementing its position as a capable, adaptable and innovative host of major sporting events.

Abu Dhabi's reputation as a first-class sports destination has been enhanced by numerous high-profile football, cricket, golf, tennis and mixed martial arts events that have been staged to widespread acclaim over recent years in the capital of the United Arab Emirates. However, this December, three days after the chequered flag is brought down on the 2021 Formula 1 World Championship at Abu Dhabi's Yas Marina Circuit, one of the most eye-catching events so far will take place just a five-minute drive south on the stunning Yas Island.

From December 16-21, the FINA World Swimming Championships (25m) will be held at the state-of-the-art, 18,000-seat Etihad Arena, which opened to spectators in January 2021.

Abu Dhabi has invested in building multiple dedicated aquatics venues as part of a transformation of its sporting infrastructure over the



past 15 years. Reconfiguring Etihad Arena as the centrepiece of the World Championships, though, will give the event an extraordinary home.

Furthermore, the project will represent an immense feat of planning and logistics, underlining Abu Dhabi's efforts to set new benchmarks in terms of the experience for spectators, officials, commercial stakeholders, media representatives and, of course, competitors.

Etihad Arena transformation

Two swimming pools, measuring 25m x 26m and 25m x 20m, are being shipped from Italy to the UAE via 10 containers. The pools will be surrounded by a 3,000m deck raised

by 2.2m to pool level.

It will take between three and four days for the water to be pumped into the pools by tankers as part of a 14-day set-up, and then four days to dismantle the facilities.

One of the key benefits of situating the event at Etihad Arena is its close proximity to numerous hotels, with more than 22,000 room nights required to host the 3,000-plus athletes, teams, officials and media members.

"The FINA World Swimming Championships (25m) will be by far and away the biggest event to be hosted at Etihad Arena since its opening and, as such, a huge level of collaboration is required to ensure that all the systems and infrastructure are ready to host an event of this scale," says Abdulla Alwheibi, the Championships' tournament director at Abu Dhabi Sports Council.

"Thankfully, the collective efforts so far have helped to ensure

everything is on course for the venue to host what will be a truly breathtaking spectacle.

"The first key milestone was bringing together a world-class local organising committee – namely the Abu Dhabi Sports Council, which has a long-established record of delivering world championship-level events – and we have harnessed our experience and knowledge to assemble a team capable of delivering at the highest level.

"The partnership with Yas Island and Etihad Arena, enabling us to develop a purpose-built swimming venue inside the MENA region's largest state-of-the-art indoor entertainment establishment, was another major milestone."

Project delivery

Delivering such a project, whilst simultaneously implementing Covid-19 protocols to protect participants and attendees, will demonstrate Abu Dhabi's capabilities as a host and its adaptability, which has been amplified during the pandemic.

Back in January, an Ultimate Fighting Championship spectacle was staged at Etihad Arena, with a capped capacity of 2,000 and strict 'bubble' format ensuring its success, establishing a blueprint for many other event operators worldwide.

"A huge amount of collaboration between the Abu Dhabi Sports Council, government entities such as NCEMA (The National Emergency Crisis and Disasters Management Authority) and key stakeholders has been required every step of the way," Alwheibi explains.

"The World Championships will be one of the first events in the region to be hosted with spectators and integrating athletes outside of a 'bubble' format. Putting together a robust and comprehensive Covid-precautionary plan is a top priority for us to ensure the safety of all involved."

The overall project to host the

Championships has been "years in the making", Alwheibi adds.

The hosting rights were secured nearly three years ago, but Abu Dhabi has nurtured a fruitful relationship with FINA, the global governing body of aquatic sports, over many years. Since hosting its first open-water swim back in 2015, the UAE capital has staged a number of FINA World Cup events, helping to drive engagement and increase interest locally.

Engaging visitors

Organisers will also make significant efforts to engage visitors through a 'Market Street' village at the event. Open from 10am to 10pm every day during the World Championships, this space will offer athlete appearances and brand activations, as well as access to hotels, retail outlets, restaurants, seating, screens, entertainment venues and family-friendly attractions.

There will also be an Aquatics Festival, providing a performance platform for elite athletes across a range of disciplines, such as high diving and open-water swimming, with a 27m high dive tower built into the waters of Yas Bay.

"The World Championships will shine a spotlight on some of Yas Island's recently launched assets which, along with the newly-launched Etihad Arena and Yas Bay, include the Hilton Abu Dhabi Yas Island hotel and conference facility, and Pier 71, a new and popular venue that features a host of exciting food and beverage outlets,"

Alwheibi says.

"This flagship event will showcase the full development, and really put Yas Bay on the map – not only from a global perspective, but also within the local communities here in the UAE."

Worldwide interest

Global exposure of Abu Dhabi is guaranteed via broadcast coverage that is expected to take the event into more than 190 countries, while more than 150 journalists are expected to be accredited to work at the on-site International Media Centre.

This worldwide interest will undoubtedly strengthen Abu Dhabi's standing as an elite event location. The UAE capital has been crowned the World's Leading Sports Tourism Destination for eight consecutive years at the prestigious World Travel Awards – and thoughts are already turning to what the future may bring.

"Abu Dhabi's fast-growing reputation as a global sporting hub has been aided significantly by its ability to host events such as the FINA World Swimming Championships (25m), and it is through key relationships, such as the one we enjoy with FINA, that the UAE will continue to shine under the global sporting spotlight," Alwheibi adds.

"The competition will bring the curtain down on a huge year of sport here in Abu Dhabi and, with many of the world's best short-course swimmers set to be involved, the theme of Abu Dhabi hosting and attracting the world's biggest sports' names looks set to continue." ♦



Brighton reaping benefits of Barber's community focus



(Nigel Roddis/Getty Images)

- American Express stadium and shirt sponsorship one of largest deals outside Premier League top six
- Brand leverages the deal to enhance its status as one of largest employers in the city
- Chief executive says failed ESL project shows football pyramid needs to be sustained

By Ben Cronin

It has become increasingly commonplace for football clubs to talk about the importance of 'community'. In an age where most major teams have become global media entities, perhaps there is a recognition of the need to retain a sense of belonging and authenticity. Without being too calculating about it, it also makes commercial sense to be a good citizen when sponsors are increasingly preoccupied with corporate social responsibility themselves.

Brighton & Hove Albion chief executive Paul Barber can claim to have more of an affinity with the word than most. During a spell as the commercial director of the English Football Association (FA), he oversaw the renaming of the FA Charity Shield to the 'FA Community Shield' while recalibrating the organisation's sponsorship programme to help every level of the game in England. Now he finds himself at the Premier League club, it's no accident that its own title-sponsored home also goes by the name of the American Express Community Stadium.

It was a surprise when Barber, whose career also included a spell as executive director of Tottenham Hotspur and two seasons with the Vancouver Whitecaps in Major League Soccer, elected to join Brighton in 2012 while the team still sat in the second-tier EFL Championship. Yet the family-friendly club has arguably allowed him to give the fullest expression to his public-spirited philosophy. Bankrolled by owner and long-time supporter Tony Bloom, the club built the new sponsored stadium in 2008 and has risen through the ranks to the point where it is approaching its fifth season in the Premier League, while all the time retaining its core identity.

"I think the club has managed – and we've worked very hard at this – to not lose our sense of responsibility to our community," Barber tells *SportBusiness*. "So even though the club has gone from attendances of 6-7,000, at a converted athletic stadium



Paul Barber, chief executive, Brighton & Hove Albion
(Mike Hewitt/Getty Images)

that we didn't own, to 32,000 sell-out crowds in the Premier League, we've stayed very closely rooted to our community.

"Our community programme has grown not shrunk, our accessibility to fans has increased not decreased. We've tried, where we possibly can, to keep ticket prices at a level where people can afford to come to games, even in the Premier League."

American Express

Barber believes the approach explains why Brighton boasts one of the largest sponsorship deals outside the Premier League's 'big six' clubs. The 12-year renewal of American Express' agreement with the club, agreed in 2019 and encompassing the naming rights to the stadium, the front of shirt sponsorship for the men's and women's teams as well as sponsorship of the club's training ground, is understood to be worth more than £100m (\$72m/€84.5m), and was reported to be a 20-fold increase on the previous 10-year deal agreed prior to promotion to the top-flight.

He concedes that the club is lucky that the financial services company's headquarters is based in the city, and many of its employees or their families are fans of the team. In addition to brand exposure, he believes the sponsorship deal allows the firm to root itself in the city

and support one of its most significant assets.

"We started out from the position that we were never going to make American Express more famous," he says "They were already one of the top ten brands globally. But what we were able to do is to help them become more liked and respected in the community from which they employ a lot of people."

The focus on exposure and community has insulated Brighton against the full impact of Covid-19, Barber argues. With Premier League games taking place behind closed doors since June 2020, the club has dialled up the visibility of the brand in the stadium while maintaining or creating additional promotional opportunities. The club was the only Premier League side to continue to hold weekly press conferences when games were postponed and granted the club's digital channels enhanced access to the Amex-sponsored training ground where possible during the crisis, with footage subsequently shared with the wider media. For our own virtual call, he shows how his office has been fitted with a retractable backdrop featuring the club crest and the logos of main sponsors American Express and Nike.

Of American Express he says: "The primary brand exposure, if anything, has been enhanced. For a start, every game has been live on TV, so that's obviously

additional value.

"They've taken a very considered view, which is actually that the pandemic, from a branding point of view, has probably gained more exposure for them. Where they've lost slightly is obviously on matchday hospitality and being able to use the stadium on a non-matchday for their events. But those are things that, relatively speaking, we're able to cope with quite easily."

In addition to the increased exposure, Brighton has doubled down on the community outreach efforts that are so important to the brand. First it allowed the stadium to be used as a Covid testing centre and PPE storage facility for the NHS, then as a vaccination training centre. The club also segmented its database to identify elderly fans, and Barber estimates club staff – including himself, manager Graham Potter and technical director Dan Ashworth – have made around 10,000 outbound calls to support isolated individuals during the crisis.

Non-matchday income

There are areas, though, where the team's symbiotic relationship with the surrounding area has worked against it. Unlike a Manchester United, or Barber's previous club Tottenham Hotspur, which can fall back

on global e-commerce platforms, a large proportion of Brighton's shirt sales comes from local fans spending money in the club store at the stadium on matchdays.

Barber estimates Covid-related losses will be between £40m and £50m across the two seasons to have been affected by the pandemic so far. The figure includes ticket refunds, some smaller sponsor rebates, broadcaster rebates, the loss of merchandise sales, and the fallout from non-matchday events not taking place.

"We host everything here from university graduations, through to school exams, weddings, bar mitzvahs, funerals, wakes, 21st birthday parties, 40th wedding anniversaries – the name above the stadium literally says what we do: it is a community stadium," he says. "And obviously, during the 15-16 months we've experienced Covid, all of that non-matchday event business has just collapsed to nothing."

"Although each one of those events doesn't make us rich, collectively and combined it's a decent business. And of course, the other thing that it does is it drives interest in the club and sales of tickets for matches."

European Super League

Yet perhaps the greatest threat the club has faced during the pandemic has come from within the Premier League.

The American Express Community Stadium.
(David Horton – CameraSport via Getty Images)



The response of the ‘big six’ clubs in the division to the constrained financial environment was to sign up to the deeply unpopular and quickly aborted European Super League. Barber says the fundamental flaw in the project was that it placed a ceiling on the ambitions of upwardly mobile clubs like Brighton.

Some of the architects of the ESL also described it as a necessary response to declines in media rights values and changing consumer habits. But outside of the temporary problems caused by the pandemic, Barber thinks there is not much wrong with the existing Premier League product.

“We’ve just renewed the UK domestic deal at the same levels, we’ve got international deals that are still growing. I think the media market is evolving and that may mean that in some areas, you’ll see a change in the way media is consumed. And that may affect values over a period of time in different ways, but what we have got still is live content that is hugely desirable.”

As the UK government conducts a review of the sport, he thinks there are important lessons to be learned from the “ill-conceived, ill-timed and ill-judged” ESL concept.

“We’ve got to be very conscious that actually, the one thing that the fans spoke out against was any kind of closed shop. What we can’t do is ignore that message that they want the football pyramid to be healthy. And that means not just the Premier League, but the levels below that as well. How we create that healthiness, how we ensure that that pyramid is sustained, has to be debated.

“What we can’t have are small groups of clubs thinking that they have all the answers, and everybody else doesn’t, or small groups of clubs thinking that they drive all of the value and that everybody else drives none of the value. That sort of thinking, those sorts of behaviours have to stop, otherwise we will damage forever the one thing that our fans, our consumers absolutely love.”

Former UK sports minister Tracey Crouch, who is leading the review, has already criticised the way revenues are distributed throughout the game, reserving particular criticism for the Premier League’s parachute payments mechanism. She recently said the payments – which are designed to soften the impact of relegation from the top-flight – distort competition and drive “unsustainable financial activity” in the EFL Championship, while EFL chairman Rick Parry has called for the abolition of the contributions altogether. Having spent time in both leagues, Barber can see both sides of the argument.

“First of all, it is possible to get promoted from the Championship without parachute payments – we did, Brentford FC did it, other clubs have done it. But it does require a huge amount of planning and organisation and

hard work and good recruitment and stable management over a period of time. It took five years of hard work to get us promoted and we had to compete against clubs with parachute payments the whole of those five years.

“Once you’re in the Premier League, you’ve got a difficult decision to make because if there aren’t going to be parachute payments, the clubs that are promoted are not going to be able to invest significantly in new players with decent contracts. Because if those contracts are signed, and the club gets relegated without the

benefit of a parachute payment, they’re going to go bust, they’re not going to be able to fulfil those contracts.”

Major League Soccer

Barber says his experience of the open, meritocratic English system was endlessly fascinating to his peers in Major League Soccer during his time with the Vancouver Whitecaps.

“I can honestly say that my time in MLS was constantly punctuated with requests from MLS



owners and other MLS team executives, to talk them through how promotion and relegation worked,” he says. “They were intrigued by it, they were fascinated by it, they were excited by it, but whenever it came to anything like a proposal for the same thing to happen in MLS, the conversation just stopped.

“In fairness, the league there is at a very different stage of its evolution. MLS survived because a small group of very loyal owners kept the league alive when it was haemorrhaging money. At various times, they owned several teams each in order to keep it alive. Since then, it’s grown and started to stand more on its own two feet and more owners have come in and people have invested more money in stadiums and subsequently in facilities, which is fantastic.”

If the same MLS owners can’t overcome their protectionist instincts to create a more open system with more excitement and jeopardy, he thinks the league will struggle to ever match the media rights revenues earned by the Premier League. Similarly, without a lifting of the league salary cap, it will always lose homegrown players and exciting young talent to the top five European leagues where they will be better remunerated.

The Football Association

Turning to his time at the FA, Barber says the need to support young talent and the grassroots of the English game were what motivated him to radically shakeup the organisation’s sponsorship programme during his time as commercial director. Prior to his joining, the organisation had had title sponsors for its premium assets, the FA Cup and the England team, but he says his ‘purist’ instincts motivated him to take a different approach.

“I didn’t like the fact that the FA Cup was owned by a partner, and likewise the England team. On the other hand, I’d seen how well Uefa had done with the Champions League model of multiple partners sharing rights.

“I put it to the FA board that I wanted to pursue the Champions League model – take away the title sponsorships – and the way I wanted to do it was to try and connect the top of the game with grassroots football.”

After receiving the green light, Barber reconfigured the programme so that sponsors were no longer able to align themselves with the FA’s top-tier assets unless they also supported other levels of the game.

“You couldn’t be a partner for the England team or the FA Cup or any of the properties that we had at the top level, unless you were prepared to commit to the bottom level as well, whether that was women’s and girls’ football, whether that was a community programme of coaching, youth teams,” he says. “You

couldn't get involved in the FA Cup unless you were prepared to support the FA Trophy [for semi-professional teams] and the FA Vase [for National League teams].

"I think a few people in the FA thought I was bonkers, and maybe I was. Certainly, after the first six months promoting this and selling it, I did start to question my own sanity and whether it would be just easier to go out and find another title sponsor. But we then started to get a bit of traction and we managed to land some deals."

He says he was especially proud of a deal for McDonald's to sponsor the renamed FA Community Shield, under which the fast-food restaurant chain's staff were also granted 1,000 places to become level-one football coaches, thereby plugging a shortfall in volunteers at this level of the game. One of the benefits to McDonald's was that these coaches would then take their teams into restaurants after training.

Women's football

Barber credits the revamped FA sponsorship programme with the improvement in facilities and equipment for women's football in the country. He sees a similar

virtuous circle developing at Brighton, where American Express' sponsorship is allowing the club to support the development of the women's team, which in turn enhances the sponsor's brand.

He says: "Women are a very important part of Amex's workforce – as they are for a lot of financial services companies – and they've been really pleased that we've significantly invested in our women's football programme and our girls' football programme, to the extent that we've just invested another £25m at our training ground – which bear in mind is only six years old – to create a women and girls' headquarters building."

The overriding impression is that the ESL clubs would have done well to familiarise themselves with Barber's philosophy before they embarked on their breakaway project.

"It all comes back to what football clubs exist for, which is really to give their community pride and to give their community identity and hope," he says. "And if you take all of that away because you create a closed system, then you lose so much more than just a football pyramid." ♦

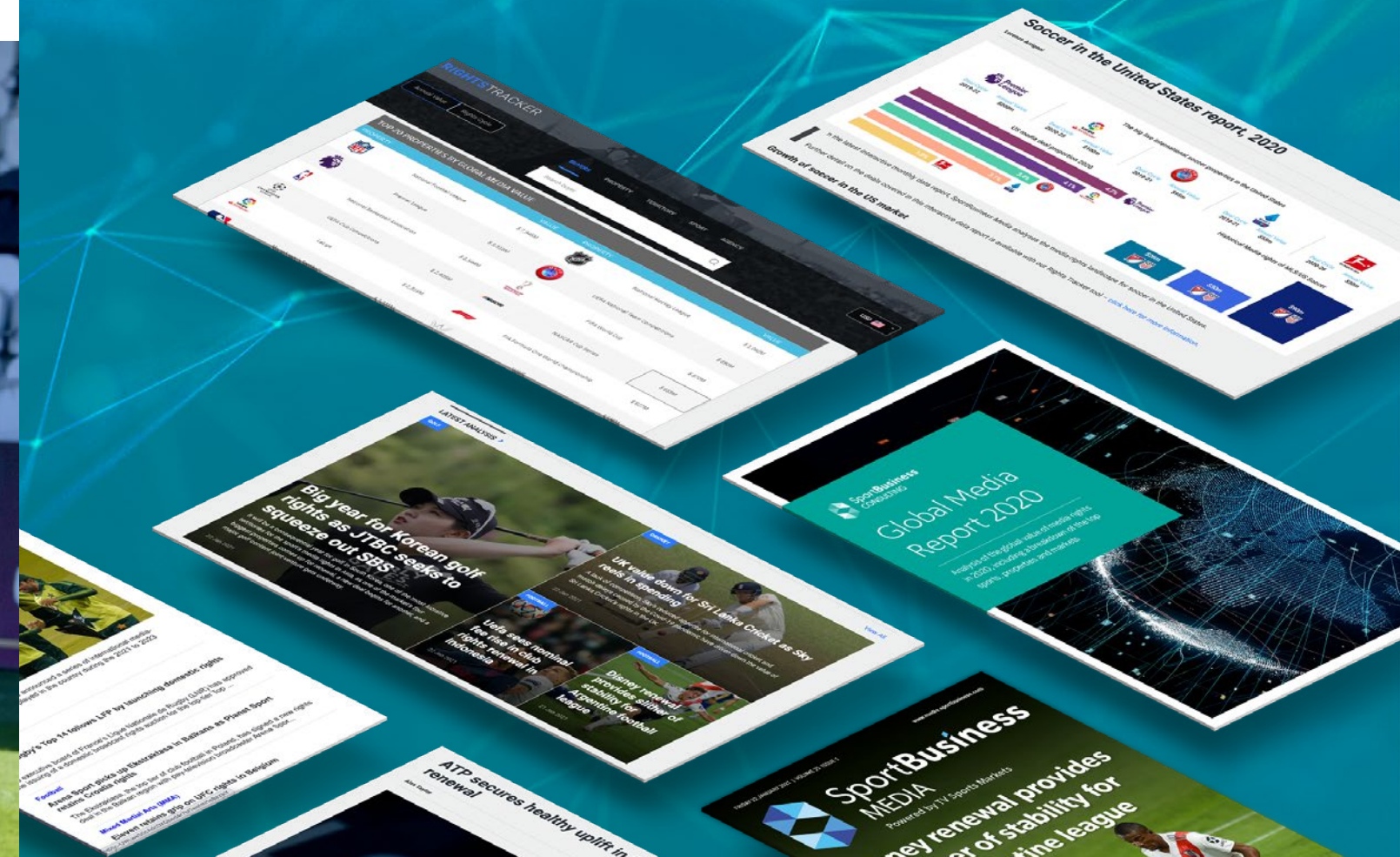
Maya Le Tissier of Brighton takes on Katie McCabe of Arsenal during the Barclays FA Women's Super League match between the teams. (Photo by David Price/Arsenal FC via Getty Images).



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LaLiga Tech's digital transformation opportunity

The marketplace has responded with enthusiasm to LaLiga's decision to open up its data-driven digital transformation services and products.

Spanish football league operator LaLiga has been a prominent advocate of using technological innovations to drive growth through digital transformation for the best part of a decade.

Now, though, it is sharing its knowhow and services with a wider audience.

Late last year, it was announced that the LaLiga Tech division would be separated into a standalone business, pooling the league's data and digital transformation services to be commercialised via a single entity.

Mirroring the increasing acknowledgement of the importance of digital and data in the sports industry, LaLiga Tech has grown significantly since beginning with a handful of technology innovation leads to count more than 140



specialists on its staff roster today. The operation has been entirely self-financed by LaLiga.

"LaLiga became a data-oriented organisation seven years ago when we started bringing in data engineers, architects and scientists to design new solutions that were focused specifically on our industry," Tom Woods, marketing and communications lead at LaLiga Tech, says.

"Digital transformation was not something that had been widely contemplated by sports organisations at the time, but now there is a good general awareness in the industry. We are in a somewhat privileged

position of having built up these technologies and services and having tested their effectiveness for an organisation that is the size and stature of LaLiga.

"It became very clear that there was a wider commercial opportunity for us to offer those same managed services for other sports and entertainment organisations. It's not just the technology we provide, but also the expertise behind it."

Marketplace response

With numerous sports organisations turning to digital solutions during the pandemic, there is a greater focus on the services provided by the likes of LaLiga Tech than ever before.

Sports clubs, leagues, associations and federations have had to seek creative ways of engaging with followers on digital platforms as, for

lengthy spells over the past year-and-a-half, they have been unable to welcome supporters in person.

"For many sports organisations, the ability to reach fans in a personalised way through channels of their choice and create engaging experiences is something that become a very clear need during the pandemic," Woods says.

However, the development of LaLiga Tech, and the ultimate commercialisation of the unit, was in the works long before the pandemic.

So far, the reaction from the marketplace has been extremely encouraging.

"It's been a very positive response," Woods says. "We already have a sizeable group of clients. We have agreements in place with global broadcasters, leagues, clubs and federations across different continents. We offer an approach that can be as broad or narrow as the client wants it to be to meet their needs."

The solutions themselves have been designed with modularity and scalability in mind, meaning that they can be applicable wherever the client is on their digital journey.

Crucially, all of the products can be connected through a single data-driven ecosystem, so that different areas are not working in siloes.

This is complemented by partnerships with specialised third parties, one of which is Microsoft, which expanded its global technology and innovation partnership with the league earlier this year in order to collaborate on developing solutions for media and entertainment businesses and to support the commercialisation of LaLiga Tech.

Fan management

LaLiga Tech products and services are split into the three areas of fan engagement, content enhancement and protection, and competition management.

The fan engagement offering covers smart venues, over-the-top (OTT) platforms, fan activations, mobile applications and web platforms.

In terms of the well-documented growth of OTT, for example, LaLiga was an early adopter and supporter of such digital endeavours in sport – and not only in football.

Having spearheaded the launch

in 2016 of LaLigaSports, a project designed to drive growth across 64 national sports federations in Spain, the emergence of OTT served as a further catalyst, elevating LaLiga's collaborative approach to new levels.

LaLigaSportsTV launched with coverage of 20 different sports competitions in 2019, providing a valuable platform for niche and growing sports across Spain.

Speaking broadly about the fan engagement solutions, Woods explains: "These are our solutions for understanding fan behaviours and engaging with them where they are and on their terms, with the view of driving a more prosperous relationship with them and delivering more lasting experiences."

"We can offer to rights-holders a platform for creating unique fan activation campaigns, competition applications, web platforms, fantasy games and also a solution available for stadiums that combines digital access in-venue with personalised experiences.

"The concept behind all of this is to be able to create engaging, modern and relevant platforms for fans wherever they may be looking



for content regarding a sport, competition or brand.

“The technology is designed to keep up with their movements, but everything is still connected to that central ecosystem. So, that allows campaigns and fan offerings to be created that are more relevant and targeted to the needs of individuals.”

Content enhancement

In the area of content enhancement and protection, content integrity and protection products are available, as well as Mediacoach, LaLiga Tech’s data analysis and visualisation tool.

Mediacoach can capture more than 25 frames per second and track thousands of data points per player, per match. The technology was made available by LaLiga to all clubs in the country’s top two divisions, providing opportunities to the minnows, as well as the giants.

Whilst analysing such data has been used to help prevent injuries by allowing coaches to boost their understanding of the players’ physical loads at any given moment, for example, Mediacoach has also been incorporated into coverage of live matches.

Visualisations can include individual player heatmaps or tactical circles and lines being superimposed on the pitch to highlight a team’s

changing formation.

“Broadcast partners can exploit that data to create more engaging narratives before, during and after a game. Mediacoach is an enormous resource,” Woods says.

The content protection strand focuses on anti-piracy efforts, enabling real-time monitoring and reporting across online platforms, powered by artificial intelligence (AI).

“We reliably report a removal rate of upwards of 90 per cent for illegal content that we find. One part is detecting the content, and the other part is working with organisations like Facebook, YouTube and Google to get it removed,” Woods adds.

“We also have a tool used for real-time monitoring of betting markets, so you can see betting patterns and detect anomalies. These anomalies suggest a potential integrity issue, a potential infringement or at least the risk thereof, and that is backed up by a team of analysts who can alert the relevant parties.

“So, within the content area it’s about using real-time data to retrieve new information constantly, and to make the most of the content available by maximising its value.”

Competition management

Competition management spans business intelligence services and

competition management apps. In essence, it comprises digitising key processes surrounding an event, such as having an AI tool that suggests optimum kick-off times to reach certain markets worldwide.

There are other practical tools associated with this area from an operations perspective, like centralising referee reports, team selections and kit selections, all in the same digital environment.

Across all three areas, there is the ability to generate custom data and tailored data dashboards, connecting all of the solutions and enabling clients to take a granular look at how certain environments are performing.

For example, media companies can analyse how fan-facing campaigns are performing, and how OTT is engaging viewers versus television broadcasts.

“It can all be visualised quickly via these dashboards that we offer, and there are many different types that can be created,” Woods says.

“Essentially, it’s about having insights into how things are performing holistically. I think that has been one of the keys in terms of helping to turn LaLiga into a data-driven organisation, and I think that it will be a key for other organisations as well.

“The more insights that they are bringing together from across those three core areas, the better understanding they will have of what their growth paths look like.”

Fan engagement

In the increasingly competitive and fragmented media and entertainment sector, engaging fans has become considerably more challenging.

According to Woods, though, there is a growing acknowledgement from rights-holders of the need to place data analysis at the heart of engagement strategies.

“We are having a lot of interesting conversations with rights-holders across the world around different

solutions that are focused on fan engagement and competitions,” he says.

“We are seeing a growing awareness that a data-driven approach can be really central towards future growth. Over the course of the coming year, I think we will see more organisations looking at things holistically and how to evolve key parts of their competitions around that central premise.”

Sports rights-holders and businesses related to the sports industry are also increasingly aware that a tailored approach is required – not only in terms of communicating with fans and customers to enhance personalisation, but also in terms of internal operational and strategic processes.

“The fact that LaLiga Tech has built up this level of expertise over seven years is something that I think puts us in a compelling position for future growth,” Woods says.

“We’re busy, we’re seeing a lot of demand, and I think the fact that we are a managed service coming from sport means that we have a lot of value to offer. You can’t just install an off-the-shelf product with sports organisations. It has to be tailored.”

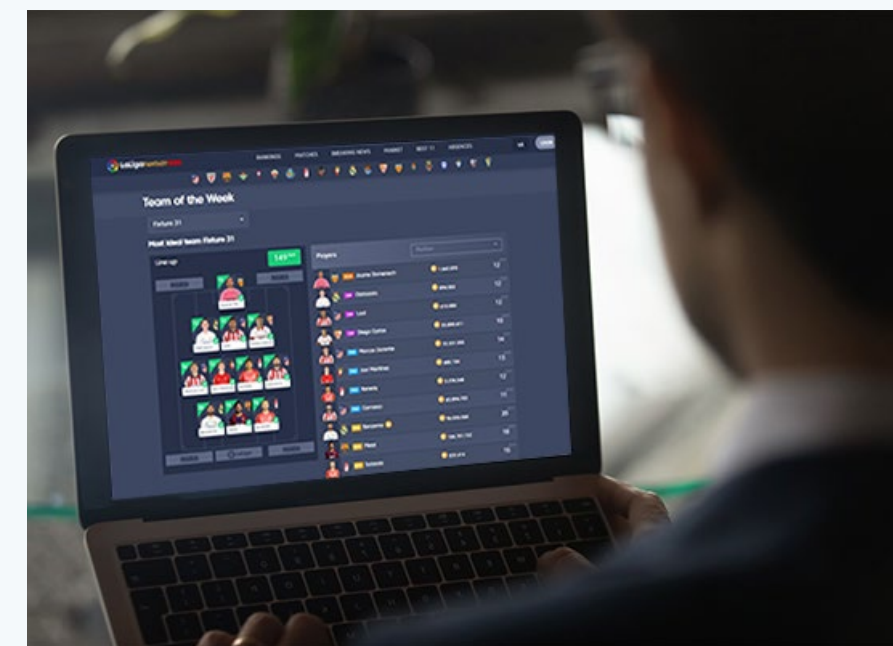
Lessons

Looking back on vital lessons that have been learned from LaLiga Tech’s development over the past seven years, Woods is keen to stress the importance of data in helping to bring about positive change.

“It has been pivotal towards our growth as an organisation and it is integral to everything we do,” he says.

“We have been managing these services for ourselves, and for LaLiga clubs, for years, so we already have this data-driven approach baked into our proposition.

“Sometimes you see other adopters doing things in a slightly more piecemeal way – perhaps by buying a platform for their OTT service or investing in certain types



of apps or campaigns – but they are not necessarily able to bring them together.

“We have built up steadily, from getting that central data engine in place and then expanding it, using the insights we generated to make the next step..”

The holistic approach that is possible through a centralised system can also allow rights-holders, businesses and organisations to respond more quickly to opportunities.

“One of the big shifts we have seen is that of fans towards digital consumption,” Woods says. “There has been an overwhelming demand for content away from the 90 minutes of a match.

“Over the course of a week, any organisation in sport that does not consider broader, holistic engagement from Monday to Friday is missing an opportunity. It is one of the reasons that our offering evolved into one that sought to engage fans on the platforms that they were looking at, with the type of content they were expecting to see.”

Future

Looking to the future, Woods anticipates the bulk of LaLiga

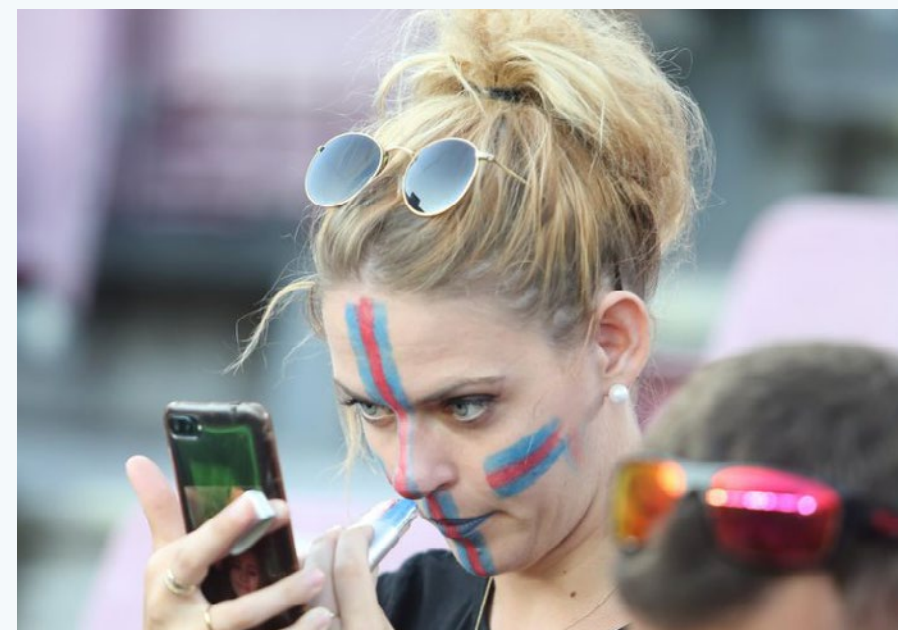
Tech’s clients to be sports rights-holders such as clubs, leagues and federations, although there will be clients from various strands of the sprawling sector.

“Our heritage and the core area of our expertise is with rights-holders,” he says. “We know that other organisations are on a similar journey to us, so there may be some that are more advanced in their digital transformation and just need to introduce certain elements to gain more valuable insights. However, there are others who have not really started, and they will need to bring in that external expertise.”

However, that does not mean there will not be key initiatives in other key segments, like the broadcast and media space, for example.

“We have been a broadcast innovator for a long time, and we already work with some high-profile broadcasters,” Woods adds. “Media will be a very important part of our future, and there will also be targeted work with betting organisations and other brands associated with sport.

“This is not a football play; this is about the evolution of the sports industry. What LaLiga is doing with LaLiga Tech is something that no-one else is doing.” ♦



Nent's ambitious expansion plans are good news for rights-holders but highly risky

- The Nordic pay-TV operator is embarking on an aggressive roll-out of OTT service Viaplay
- Incumbents in targeted markets are already gearing up for rights battles
- Organic, market-by-market expansion is expensive, but so is M&A

By Frank Dunne

Most sports fans outside the Nordics have probably never heard of Viaplay, the subscription OTT service operated by the Nordic Entertainment Group (Nent). But that could all be about to change. The company has embarked on an aggressive plan to make it Europe's number one streaming service, with sport at the heart of its offering. If successful, the brand will soon be as ubiquitous as Sky or ESPN.

Nent was created as a standalone company in July 2018, when it was split off from the rest of the Sweden-based media giant Modern Times Group (MTG). It is listed on the Nasdaq Nordic exchange. In February, the company raised SEK4.35bn (€443m/\$523m) through the issue of 10.6m class B shares to fund growth.

Its 'domestic' territories are Denmark, Norway,

Sweden and Finland. Viaplay is available across these markets, and has already been rolled out in Iceland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Poland will be added in August, with the Netherlands coming online next year. It will also be rolled out this year in the US. By 2023, it will be in 15 markets.

Viaplay currently has about three million subscribers across the Nordics. It plans to double this by 2025 and add a further 4.5 million international subscribers, taking its total to 10.5 million.

When unveiling the expansion plan in November, Anders Jensen, Nent president and chief executive, was bullish: “Viaplay is a proven Nordic success story and we are now ready to expand internationally and become the European streaming champion,” he said. “We have one of the world’s most flexible and scalable technology platforms and aim to be the most diverse and inclusive storyteller with our amazing range of original, acquired, local and live content that offers something special for everyone. We have already signed up key content rights in our target markets and are in discussions with distributors about exciting new partnerships to ensure that Viaplay is available everywhere.”

Success will depend on Viaplay’s ability to secure sufficient penetration in an increasingly saturated OTT market. In addition to global subscription OTT services like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+, Paramount+, Apple TV+ and others, it will face competition from domestic streamers, telcos and legacy media companies pivoting to IP-based distribution and cheaper content bundles.

Rights grab

In its home territories of the Nordic region, where MTG long enjoyed a strong position in sports broadcasting, Nent quickly built a reputation as a fearsome adversary in the sports-rights market. This was not lost on sports rights-holders, with the Nordics becoming the market of choice to kick-off cycle sales in the hope an eye-catching result would set a high benchmark for subsequent deals. It has struck big deals in the last two years with the Premier League, Formula 1, the National Hockey League and the International Ski Federation.

To help consolidate its place at home and ignite its initial expansion into Europe, in May the company signed an eight-year deal, from 2021-22 to 2028-29, with Germany’s Bundesliga, worth €500m, or €62.5m per season. The deal, with Bundesliga International, the commercial arm of the German Football League (DFL), gave Nent exclusive rights to the Bundesliga, second-tier 2. Bundesliga, the annual German Supercup and Bundesliga relegation play-offs across nine countries: the Nordics (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), the Baltics (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and Poland.

The size of the rights fee raised eyebrows in the

industry, but the company’s executive vice-president and head of expansion and sport, Peter Nørrelund, told *SportBusiness Media* the company was confident about the strength of the league and Nent’s ability to monetise the rights. The Bundesliga, he said, “has a very prosperous future if you compare it to some leagues which are a bit more south in Europe. We have been looking at sports for 25, 30 years. We have seen how it works in many different markets. We see the developments of the different leagues, the different sports. We know the people behind the steering wheels in the different organisations.”

The same month, Nent underscored its aggressive intentions in the Netherlands, where it will launch Viaplay in the first quarter of 2022, with a massive deal for the rights to the FIA Formula 1 World Championship, displacing incumbent rights-holder, the telco Ziggo. Nent will pay €34m per season, for the seasons 2022 to 2024, an increase of over 200 per cent on the €10.5m per season Ziggo pays. The F1 deal was followed in early July by a six-year deal for the rights to England’s Premier League across five markets, including the Netherlands.

This week Ziggo hit back, buying the rights to France’s top football league, Ligue 1, as well as extending deals for its rights to motor racing’s IndyCar series and Formula E, and rugby union’s Six Nations.



(Claus Bonnerup / FrontZoneSport via Getty Images)

If the Netherlands proves to be anything like a template for Viaplay’s other new markets, rights-holders will be salivating. In general, growth in the value of sports rights across Europe in the last two years has slowed, as traditional pay-television markets have matured and competition cooled. The hopes of this changing significantly are bound up in the streaming ambitions of both the established players and the new entrants.

Organic growth v M&A

Traditional media companies, whether working in single markets or across a small number of markets, are faced with the threat posed by global streaming operators with cheaper, more flexible content offerings and using a technology that opens up a much richer user experience. For the so called ‘legacy’ media companies, this presents an existential choice: scale or die.

Rupert Murdoch, typically, saw this before many others in the industry. He knew his 21st Century Fox operation was subscale and there was no obvious route to the kind of scale required, prompting him to sell most of the assets in Fox to Disney for \$71bn in 2019.

For those staying in the game and looking to scale, there is another question: organic growth or M&A? Neither growing market-by-market nor in one leap

through mergers and acquisitions comes cheap.

In May, US telco AT&T joined the fray, with another huge M&A deal. It spun off its media arm, WarnerMedia, and merged it with another US colossus, Discovery, in a \$43bn deal. The new company is projected to have revenues of \$52bn by 2023. Discovery owns the pan-European satellite platform Eurosport, OTT sport and entertainment service Discovery+ and premium service GolfTV. WarnerMedia owns assets such as Turner Sports, which has a powerful sports portfolio across the US and Latin America, as well as entertainment platforms such as US pay-television operator Home Box Office (HBO), which operates the HBO Max OTT service.

Discovery chief executive David Zaslav told investors: “Combined, this makes us the best entertainment company in the world.” He predicted it could one day reach 400m subscribers globally.

Nent’s Jensen described the deal, which requires regulatory approval and won’t close before the second half of 2022, as follows: “This is the tip of a consolidation iceberg because the changes in consumer behaviour are so dramatic. Scale needs to be created so you can capitalise on those changes. If you are a local broadcaster, you will be subscale so you will be searching for consolidation opportunities.”

Sports-rights consultant Dan Cohen, head of Octagon’s Global Media Rights Consulting division, told *SportBusiness* the deal would lead to coordination across rights, production and distribution. “The increased reach of the newco will allow the advertising sales departments to simplify offerings and increase revenues. Prior to this merger, HBO Max, Discovery+ and Eurosport Player all faced an uphill battle as standalones. The newco – like Disney – can scale up, offering a horizontal suite of products under one subscription that is more compelling to a consumer and more competitive when challenging Netflix, Disney and Amazon. I wouldn’t be surprised if the newco eventually turns its attention to Asia as well, a market where each group respectively lags behind Disney and others.”

He believes there are more merger deals to come. “In the first half of 2021, we have already witnessed \$745bn in TMT [technology, media and telecommunications] M&A activity, of which media and entertainment comprise roughly \$100bn. Specific to Europe, BT Sport [in the UK] and TF1/M6 [in France] have already made their intentions clear. An obvious target is [Italian operator] Mediaset. Their move to relocate their domicile to the Netherlands is indicative of a scale-or-sale play. I wouldn’t be surprised to see Comcast [US media company and owner of Sky] make a run at [French pay-television operator] Canal+ either. Europe must follow or else these stand-alone operators will lose both customers and relevance.”

Jensen has said that Nent too would have considered

the M&A route to growth, but there was no suitable vehicle to target. With most sports rights in Europe sold market by market, conquering Europe requires an aggressive acquisitions strategy in every new market entered to outbid incumbents, such as Ziggo in the Netherlands, on a regular basis. Nent, however, is not daunted. Nørrelund expects there will be many ways that Nent can collaborate with incumbent operators, so it will not always be drawn into head-to-head competition for exclusive rights.

He added: "We are a listed company, did a share issue and got something like €450m to spend on this. Our expansion is financed, and I guess also for the rights-holders, that's also a good security." Nevertheless, the group is looking for fresh investment. Nent is talking to its shareholders about raising a further SEK3.5bn. It is also considered a secondary listing in the US.

The roll-out could have an ironic outcome. If Nent succeeds in building scale on a market-by-market basis, it could make the company an extremely attractive M&A

target for one of the bigger beasts of the global TMT industries. Nent denies that this has always been the real objective of its growth strategy, but it doesn't need a for-sale sign to be coveted.

The 'streaming wars' have taken off in the US, where ESPN+ and Paramount+ are using sport to rapidly build market share, driving rights inflation. And in Australia, where Nine network's Stan service and Foxtel's Kayo Sports are under pressure for rights from Paramount+, with ESPN+ expected to launch in the next two years. They have yet to fully ignite in Europe, but sports rights-holders will no doubt welcome a new OTT player to the market, along with DAZN, Amazon, Eleven and others.

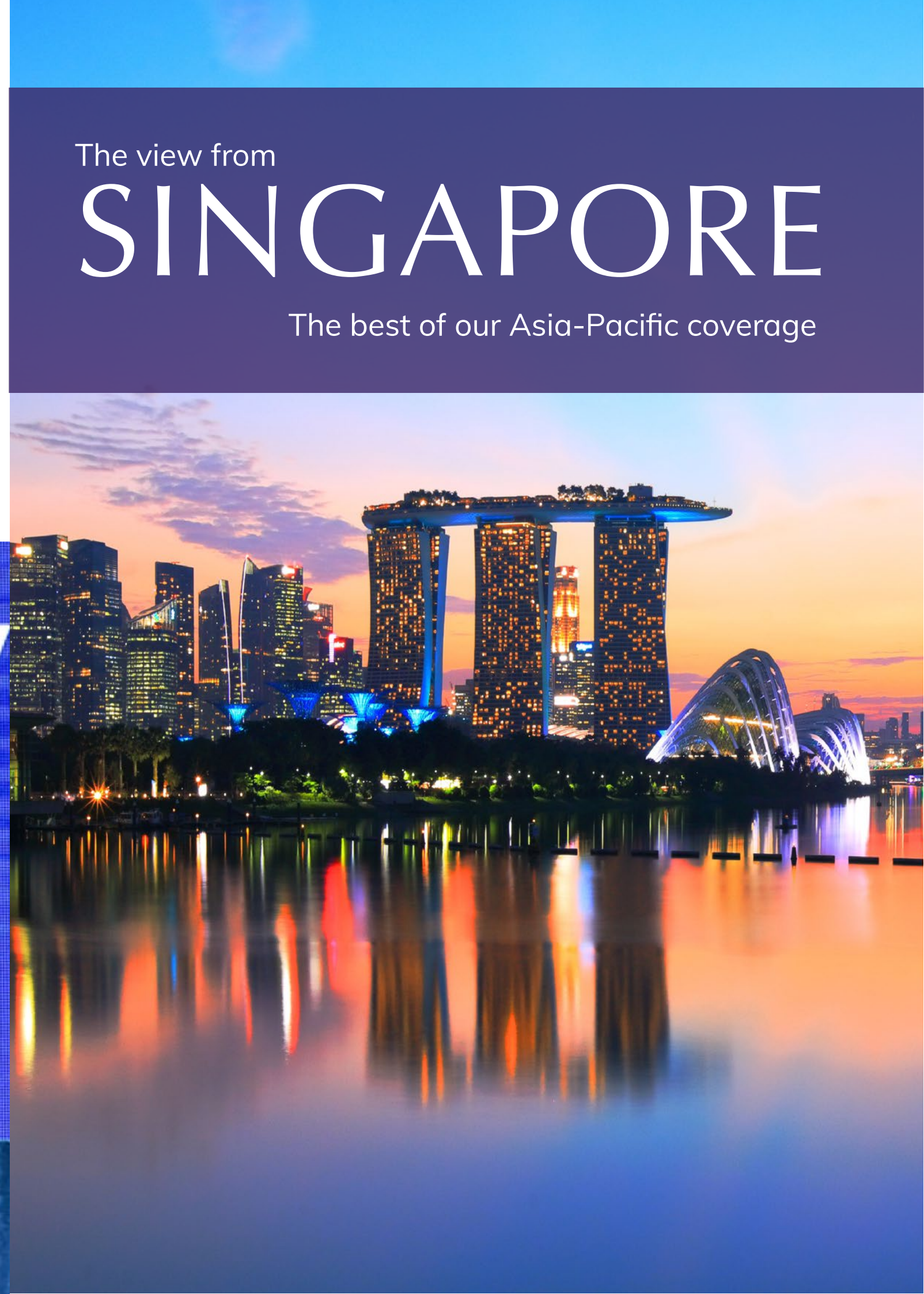
Media companies are taking different routes to secure an international or global footprint. But all ultimately share the view of Zaslav, who will run the combined WarnerMedia/Discovery company: irrespective of how the industry evolves, sport will always be a key differentiator. ♦

The view from

SINGAPORE

The best of our Asia-Pacific coverage

Discovery president and CEO David Zaslav (Amanda Edwards/Getty Images for Discovery)



Streaming launches stir Australian rights market, but deeper challenges limit rights-holder upside



Khaled Desouki/AFP
via Getty Images

- Competition for rights has increased due to new sports streaming platforms
- No rights fee boom yet, with some properties instead merely avoiding large decreases
- Upcoming sales of big domestic properties will test new players' appetites

By Kevin McCullagh

Rights competition in Australia has been spurred in the last six months by the launches of new platforms Paramount+ and Stan Sport. There has been surprise competition from formerly niche player Sports Flick and a long-awaited first deal for Amazon. Established players, including Foxtel and Optus Sports, have moved to protect their positions with new rights deals.

These developments have helped the market bounce back from a series of renegotiations last year. In the

teeth of the pandemic, Australia's biggest rights-holders accepted falling or flat fees in return for the security of long-term deals.

However, few are predicting a rights-fee boom. Australia's broadcasters have been battered in recent years by the shift of audiences to digital platforms and the pandemic. The new competition has so far mostly helped rights-holders stave off big falls in rights values, rather than generate big increases.

Nevertheless, the action has been a welcome development for sports rights-holders during a bruising period.

Australian landscape

Australia's sports media rights market has for decades been dominated by News Corp-owned pay-television broadcaster Foxtel and the major free-to-air commercial broadcasters Seven, Nine and Ten. Nine is the biggest and most powerful of the latter. It is part of a broader media group, Nine Entertainment, that also controls a large proportion of Australia's newspaper business.

Foxtel has been the swaggering giant in the market during the pay-television era, dominating sports broadcasting with deals for the biggest domestic properties.

Domestic properties in Australian Rules football (AFL), cricket (Cricket Australia), rugby league (NRL) and rugby union (Rugby Australia) are the market's most valuable. Australia's passion for sport has meant there is also a healthy market for a host of second-tier properties including domestic football, netball and basketball, as well as overseas properties in cricket, European football, rugby union and league, motorsport and others.

An extensive list of sports events preserved by law for free-to-air competition – 'anti-siphoning' legislation – has allowed free-to-air broadcasters to keep a strong foothold in sport. Australia's biggest domestic sports have generally in each rights cycle agreed a deal with one of the three commercial broadcasters alongside a deal with Foxtel.

Anti-siphoning has also helped public-service broadcasters ABC and SBS remain players in the market for smaller properties.

Telco Optus joined the sports fray in 2016 and has built a strong football rights portfolio.

Two international operators, beIN Sports and ESPN, compete for second-tier rights. BeIN is built around European football, while ESPN's main properties are American sports.

Record revenues

Australia's big domestic properties hit record rights fee income in their cycles leading into the pandemic. Foxtel and the commercial broadcasters paid big fee increases for AFL, NRL, Cricket Australia and Rugby Australia rights in a series of deals agreed between 2015 and 2018.

Most second-tier properties were also at all-time high values, helped by competition between the commercial broadcasters, the launch of Optus Sport, and continued activity by beIN Sports and ESPN.

However, as in other parts of the world, this period now looks like the high-water mark of the linear television business that underpinned those record valuations.

Foxtel and the commercial broadcasters have in the past five years come under pressures familiar to linear operators the world over – competition from cheaper online streaming services and shifts in consumer screen-time towards digital platforms. Linear subscriber and audience growth went into reverse and the companies began making heavy losses.

The belated completion of Australia's National Broadband Network over the past few years laid the foundations for audience migration to digital. The

country had been a laggard among developed nations in terms of high-speed internet access.

Netflix launched in 2015 and achieved rapid growth. It does not release Australian subscriber figures but is thought to have around five or six million, in a market with a 25 million population and around 8.3 million households.

The company got near its current mark before even opening an office in Australia, which it eventually did in 2019. Foxtel, by comparison, has just under four million subscribers across linear and digital.

One Australian television industry insider told *SportBusiness*: "The huge success of Netflix shocked the market into action and demonstrated that streaming was not only a viable business, but that it was a lucrative one."

Nine's non-sport, general entertainment platform Stan was the first of the current crop of streaming services to launch, even before Netflix, in January 2015.

Optus Sport launched in 2016. The Singtel-owned telco has sought to use a football-focused service to support the development of its mobile and home broadband business.

Foxtel revamped its OTT service Foxtel Now in 2017,

before launching a second generation of OTT products more recently. Kayo Sports launched in November 2018 and general entertainment service Binge launched in May last year. They have achieved impressive subscriber growth and now account for more than half of Foxtel's overall video subscriptions.

Despite all this action, the signs were not encouraging for the Australian sports rights market even prior to the pandemic. The streaming businesses were still in investment and growth phases, and not delivering significant profits. And the traditional linear businesses were still in decline.

Tough 2020

When the pandemic hit, and rights-holders were unable to fulfil contracts due to event postponements and cancellations, Foxtel and other broadcasters moved quickly to renegotiate several of the biggest deals in the market.

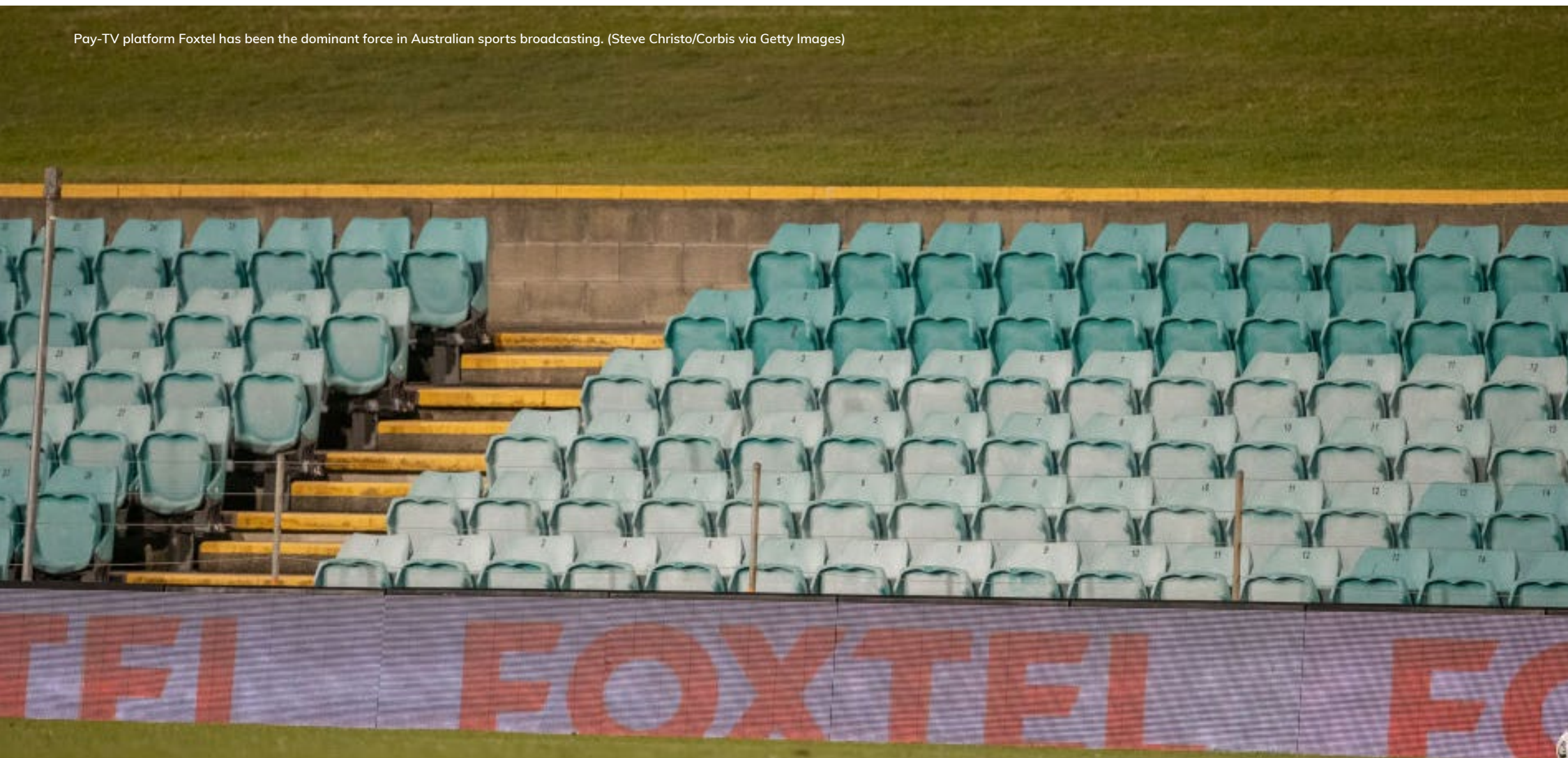
The most significant adjustments included:

- **AFL** – Foxtel's deal was reduced in value by around 14 per cent over the remaining three years of its current contract, 2020 to 2022. The deal was also extended by two years, to end-2024. Seven's free-to-air deal was reduced in value and extended by two years to end-2024
- **NRL** – Foxtel and Nine reduced the values of their deals by around 15 per cent. Foxtel secured a renewal for the next cycle, 2023-27
- **Rugby Australia** – Foxtel negotiated a heavy discount, of at least 30 per cent, in what was the final year of a five-year deal
- **Football Australia** – Foxtel ended its six-year deal half-way through its term and agreed a one-year deal at a much lower value
- **Cricket Australia** – Seven tried but largely failed to reduce the value of its deal in an ugly dispute that involved barbs traded in the media and, eventually, arbitration.

The renegotiations were blows for the rights-holders, but they could have panned out worse. The broadcasters did not in most cases gouge large rights fee reductions. And long-term, secure income in the new deals was welcome at a time when other revenue streams had been blown away by the pandemic and it was unclear when they would recover.

But the renegotiations nevertheless did not bode well for rights-holders preparing to come to market. They appeared to draw a line under hopes for rights fee growth.

Pay-TV platform Foxtel has been the dominant force in Australian sports broadcasting. (Steve Christo/Corbis via Getty Images)



Something stirs

In the latter half of 2020, Nine announced the launch of Stan Sport. The sports service is a buy-through add-on for subscribers to the general entertainment Stan service.

Stan Sport is aiming for a slice of a sports streaming market that has already been proven by Optus Sport and Kayo Sports.

Optus reported 870,000 subscribers last year, with a portfolio almost entirely based on football, traditionally a second-tier sport in Australia.

Kayo Sports has become one of Foxtel's most important growth stories. It had 1.05 million paying subscribers at end-June this year. It offers access to the Foxtel sports content portfolio via cheaper and more flexible subscriptions than the pay-television platform.

Nine needed premium content for the Stan Sport launch. In its first major acquisition, it outbid Foxtel for Rugby Australia rights, securing a three-year deal for 2021-23. RA is the weakest of the traditional, big domestic properties. But is still a significant one and Foxtel had been its rights partner for 25 years.

RA did not secure an increase in the value of its rights but the Nine/Stan v Foxtel competition helped stave off a potentially large decline. The value of the rights was hit by the disintegration of the Super Rugby competition during the pandemic. Australian rugby had a host of other challenges too, including poor performances in recent years by the national team and Super Rugby teams, and turmoil in RA's finances and governance.

Nine/Stan followed up the RA deal with agreements for French Open and Wimbledon tennis rights.

Foxtel hit back in January, snatching from Nine the rights for domestic netball. Nine was aggrieved, with its free-to-air coverage having played a significant role in helping establish the Super Netball league over the previous four years. But Foxtel offered Netball Australia a significant fee increase, whereas Nine wanted to renew its revenue-share based deal.

Nine/Stan made a significant move into football in June, taking over from Optus the rights for Uefa club competition football.

Paramount importance

In May, Ten made a dramatic comeback to the Australian sports rights market with a deal for domestic football league rights, with league managing body Australian Professional Leagues. This was followed by a deal in June for national team football rights, with federation Football Australia.

Ten's sports portfolio had withered in recent years, with the broadcaster cutting content and costs under heavy financial pressures.

The catalyst for its re-emergence was the impending launch of Paramount+, the streaming platform being rolled out in selected markets around the world by Ten's



Nine Entertainment chief Hugh Marks, Rugby Australia chief Rob Clarke, and Stan Entertainment chief Mike Snees at a press conference for the announcement of a rights deal with Nine Entertainment. (Joel Carrett/AFP via Getty Images)

US owner ViacomCBS.

As one Australian industry insider said: "It's an old story: a new player needs content. [The deals were] driven by the fact Paramount+ is launching in Australia on August 11. They needed content that came in in the second half of the year."

The football deals deliver content from September onwards, starting with eye-catching men's national team World Cup qualifying fixtures.

To paraphrase a famous Australian, sport was once again being used as a "battering ram" by a new player seeking to enter the video entertainment industry.

ViacomCBS is keen on football and its US management put its weight behind the Australian acquisitions. Football is at the centre of its Paramount+ rollout in the US too, where ViacomCBS has acquired rights for the Uefa Champions League, among other properties.

The APL and Football Australia deals were reported with headline values of A\$200m (\$148m/€125m) over five years and A\$100m over three-and-a-half years, respectively. However, the cash values of both are considerably lower – each includes a large amount of value-in-kind 'contra', including airtime for the rights-holders.

Both rights-holders will, in fact, see falls in cash income from their rights in the new cycles.

However, they would have faced much steeper drops if it had not been for the emergence of Paramount+. Ten outbid Nine/Stan for the league rights and outbid Optus

for the national team rights.

Luke Bould, director of commercial sports consultancy Alacria and former chief commercial officer at Football Australia, told *SportBusiness*: "Without Nine Entertainment and ViacomCBS both [properties] would be much worse off than they currently are."

The football rights-holders were coming off the back of a record deal with Foxtel that was always going to be hard to beat. The pay-television broadcaster, a long-time backer of Australian domestic football, had paid a significant increase in a six-year deal from 2017-18 to 2022-23.

While the new competition only served to save the football rights-holders from big value drops, it has contributed to notable rights-fee increases for several other properties:

- **Uefa** earned an increase of about 20 per cent in the value of its club competition rights in a deal with Nine/Stan.
- **Fifa** secured a major increase in the value of Fifa Women's World Cup rights. Optus responded to its loss of the Uefa rights to Nine/Stan by securing the rights for the 2023 women's tournament, which is being jointly hosted by Australia.
- **Netball Australia** earned a large fee increase when Foxtel beat Nine/Stan to its rights.

- **ESPN** paid a significant increase, from a low base, to renew its rights for the domestic National Basketball League.

Smaller shoots

Two other sports streaming moves in the last six months are worth noting.

Niche platform Sports Flick stunned the market by outbidding established players for the Uefa club competition rights in February. Sports Flick was previously unheard of, with a niche, eclectic rights portfolio that included properties such as Nicaraguan football and Serbian rugby league.

The platform's chief executive Dylan Azzopardi told media the company aimed to move into "tier one" sports and become "a home for football" in Australia.

However, Sports Flick's Uefa bid was later withdrawn. Most industry insiders believe the platform struggled to secure financial guarantees required by Uefa. Sports Flick said it had secured the guarantees but decided not to proceed with the deal due to uncertainty created by the announcement of the European Super League.

The saga damaged Sports Flick's standing, although it has continued to acquire rights and make bids for significant properties.

It is thought to have made a major bid for Italian Serie A rights, currently on the market for 2021-22 to 2023-24. The rights are yet to be awarded. It is also understood to have made a big bid for the now postponed 2021 Rugby League World Cup.

The platform has added several minor rights properties in recent months, including the Chinese Basketball Association, the 2021 Concacaf Gold Cup, Nepali cricket and North American rugby league. It has also agreed a deal with cloud production specialists Grabyo.

Amazon made its first rights acquisition in Australia in February, a deal with Swimming Australia. The company had been mooted for some time as a potential buyer of sports content.

The SA deal is a modest start for Amazon. It is a low-value package, although had significant audience potential this year due to the Australian Olympic swimming trials.

The acquisition follows Amazon's measured approach to sports content in other markets around the world. It has invested in low-value content to start with and carefully measured its performance before moving onto higher-value content.

The Australian streaming market could yet get busier. Disney is thought to be aiming to launch its ESPN+ sports platform there within the next couple of years. ESPN+ has so far only been launched in the US. But the company has a strong base in Australia and New Zealand, with a profitable ESPN linear television business that has held its own in the competitive market.

DAZN has said it is interested in expanding in Australia and New Zealand. Currently, only its basic, global boxing content is available there. Earlier this year, its chairman Kevin Mayer, speaking about the company's growth plans, told the APOS 2021 conference: "Let's not forget Australia, New Zealand – those are sports-focused countries and we think we can make a business there."

Seller opportunities, risks

There is no doubt the new streaming players are a positive development for rights-sellers in Australia – they have clearly increased competition for rights.

It is not clear, however, how much rights fee inflation they will stimulate. And the shift to streaming is also creating new challenges.

Asked how positive the recent developments are for sellers, one local expert said: "Very...Rights fees would have trended down but now the market has become much more competitive."

Luke Bould said: "It's positive, but I don't expect to see an explosion in rights value."

One challenge for sellers is learning to navigate a new, changing landscape.

One of the most important shifts has been Foxtel switching strategy from being "the home of all sport to being more selective", as one expert put it. This is evidenced by the broadcaster's scaling back commitments to football and rugby union.

The newer, or newly ambitious, players also present risks for rights-holders, in that they are less established and have a smaller reach. Very new platforms like Sports Flick or Amazon pose the greatest risks. But even Paramount+ has its downsides – as yet, it has no subscribers.

Such concerns could be offset by a sport getting centre-stage on a newer platform. As one industry expert said of Ten's APL deal: "(APL) will get a lot of attention on Ten and Paramount+. It's going to be 'their' sport. They need it to be their sport because they don't have much else."

The new landscape also poses challenges for consumers which could yet spill over into problems for sports and their broadcasters.

For example, premium football content is now split across four platforms in the market – Ten/Paramount+ (domestic league and national team), Optus (English Premier League, Fifa Women's World Cup 2023, among others), Foxtel (various European leagues, via beIN Sports carriage) and Nine/Stan Sport (Uefa Champions League). Until last year, football broadcasting was dominated by Foxtel and Optus. Prior to 2016, football fans could get all the top content by subscribing to Foxtel.

Bould says: "The splintering of sports – from one pay-television player plus the free-to-air, to many streamers – means that fans have to pay for multiple subscriptions... there is a limit to this."



James Johnson, Football Australia, Beverley McGarvey, ViacomCBS, Jarrod Villani, Network 10, and Sarah Walsh, Football Australia, during a media opportunity announcing the deal between Football Australia and 10 ViacomCBS (Mark Evans/Getty Images for Football Australia)

Tests ahead

The Australian rights deals in the last six months have been for second-tier sports properties. The real test of the changed state of the market will come when the big domestic properties are up for renewal.

The first cab off the rank in that regard is NRL free-to-air rights, up for renewal by end-2022. AFL pay-television rights are up for renewal after 2024, and the Cricket Australia deals with Foxtel and Seven run out after 2023-24.

Bould told *SportBusiness*: "There is a lot to play out and there is a lot of risk at the moment. I think that means a more subdued market in terms of increases,

although the lower-risk, larger sports like AFL and NRL will likely be the beneficiaries of any growth in the short term."

Behind the market specifics in Australia, there are bigger, open questions around the sports streaming business that will have a bearing on rights revenues in the market.

It is not clear whether the streaming business will be as lucrative as linear television was, particularly pay-television. Some core features of streaming products seem to count against this, such as lower costs to the consumer, shorter contract terms, and frictionless unsubscribing.

Also, changes in viewing habits appear to be reducing

appetites for watching entire sports events, with shorter-form video satisfying many viewers. And there is ever-increasing competition from other content for consumer viewing time.

Australia's video entertainment business is, like others around the world, in flux, and it's hard to see yet what the outcome will be for sports rights buyers and sellers.

For the short term, at least, there is an increase in competition for rights. This may not translate to large rights fee increases across the board, as in the decades of the pay-television boom. But it's a glimmer of good news for rights sellers, who are operating in a business that is getting tougher year-on-year. ♦



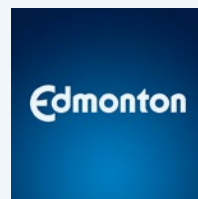
What will be the legacy if Edmonton stages 2026 Fifa World Cup games?

The impact of football's biggest tournament on the development of the sport in the city, region and Canada would be significant, given previous successful Fifa events.

If Edmonton succeeds in staging fixtures during the 2026 FIFA World Cup, the legacy impact on football in the city, region and Western Canada is set to be highly significant.

The city's love for the beautiful game runs deep. Local professional men's club FC Edmonton competes in the Canadian Premier League, while Edmonton's own Alphonso Davies stars on the global stage for Bayern Munich in Germany.

Having hosted the 2002 Fifa U19 Women's World Championship, the 2007 Fifa U-20 World Cup, 2014 Fifa U-20 Women's World Cup, and the 2015 Fifa Women's World Cup Now, the city feels better prepared than ever to take the next step in using football as a catalyst for long-lasting progress, on and off the field.



"For the last 20 years we have been building momentum as a great host city", says Maggie Davison, interim chief executive at Explore Edmonton. "With each Fifa event, we saw greater success, we set higher attendance records, brought greater economic impact to our region and fostered the pride of fans across Alberta. Now we have the opportunity to take that energy and host the largest sporting event in the world."

With Edmonton being one of Canada's youngest and fastest growing cities, the prospect

of hosting matches of the Fifa World Cup 2026 presents unique opportunities in a variety of areas.

Long-term planning

Long-term planning is always at the heart of decisions made relating to whether to bid for and host a major event in Edmonton. The World Cup is no different.

Away from football, the tournament will be leveraged to inspire greater sustainability and cultural understanding.

For example, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission outlines in action number 91 that states where major sports events take place in Canada must ensure that the territorial protocols are respected and the indigenous communities are engaged in the planning process.

In addition, as part of the event, ISO 20121 provides a recognised framework for identifying the potentially negative social, economic and environmental impacts, so those delivering the tournament can focus on providing amazing football-related memories for many years to come.

In a sporting sense, the growth of football in Edmonton and Alberta is ready to accelerate.

"It is about planning and fulfilling a legacy that lasts well into the future, which is why we have built into our budget a \$5m legacy fund on top of what Canada Soccer and Fifa will contribute. We will work with all stakeholders to plan the most meaningful impact for children and youth in our province," said Janelle Janis, director of Edmonton Events.

"We want to support initiatives like Free Play that put our most vulnerable kids on a team and gives them a sense of belonging. We have started engaging with Indigenous groups, social agencies like End Poverty Edmonton, and other priority populations to determine how we can work together so this event benefits more than just soccer players."

Inspirational

Being named as an official host city for the 2026 Fifa World Cup would allow Edmonton to inspire citizens locally and around the

world by sharing stories such as that of Edmonton's own football star, Alphonso Davies.

In partnership with FIFA and Canada Soccer, Edmonton is leveraging the tournament to grow the game exponentially and ensure that even more remarkable soccer stories begin in Edmonton and across the country.

Edmonton has also vowed that community facilities will be enhanced through capital investments at the training sites. Meanwhile, as North America's first Human Rights City, Edmonton continues to embrace initiatives to protect and advance the rights of Indigenous people, new Canadians, LGBTQ communities, and other groups. This will be incorporated into the Fifa World Cup hosting plan.

As one of the most inclusive sports, Edmonton's bid leaders believe there is room for everyone to be part of the beautiful game, but they need to have access to it. This is why Edmonton is exploring options to invest in a local legacy fund to target and inspire priority populations in our city, especially marginalised children and youth, to access and participate in the sport.

The right timing

As part of Edmonton Events' Major Sport and Cultural Attraction Plan

that was approved by City Council in 2018, Edmonton will look to host a mega event once every 20 to 30 years.

In terms of infrastructure plans, many of the stadium upgrades were planned before the World Cup became a bidding opportunity. Therefore, timely stadium investments will ensure facilities remain relevant for years to come.

Edmonton's bid leaders believe that being named an official host city for the World Cup will allow all three crucial boxes to be ticked on the checklist, covering the areas of economy, reputation and social that typically influence the events the city is considering.

A healthy return on investment is projected, although the impact on football will stretch long into the future. The branding opportunity is priceless, and the community benefits are meaningful and far-reaching.

It is the potential impact of the tournament on football in Edmonton and the wider region that offers the greatest hope to many.

Edmonton hosting games during the biggest football tournament on Earth in just under five years' time would represent a long-term triumph for the sport across the region and country. Edmonton has an existing appetite for football and the experience required to deliver an outstanding fan experience. ♦



Chinese esports rights mega-deals may not signal burgeoning market

- League of Legends rights in China have hit \$60m-plus annual valuations
- High-value, exclusive rights deals remain unusual in esports
- Different competitive and audience dynamics are at play in different markets

By Kevin McCullagh

As the esports sector emerges, there are questions about whether it will develop a media rights market as vibrant and valuable as that for traditional sports.

Recent activity in the Asia-Pacific region suggests there is potential for highly valuable esports rights deals. However, such deals remain rare and may not indicate the emergence of a big new rights market.

In China, there have been two extraordinary deals in recent years for rights for *League of Legends* esports properties.

In April this year, streaming platform Huya agreed a deal worth \$310m (€263m) over five years, 2021 to 2025, for exclusive rights for the LoL Pro League. The LPL is the title's top professional league in China.

In December 2019, streaming platform Bilibili agreed a deal worth more than \$110m for exclusive rights for the annual LoL World Championship for three years, 2020 to 2022.

These rights valuations are on a par with those for major European football properties in China.

However, looking elsewhere in Asia-Pacific, there are no parallels for these deals. In Southeast Asia, for example, properties struggle to get six-figure US dollar fees.

The differences between the China and Southeast Asian esports media rights markets are not just down to the sizes of the respective background economies. Different dynamics are at play in each, including very different approaches being taken by the leading esports streaming platforms.

Publisher incentive

An important dynamic at the heart of esports, that has a major bearing on its media rights markets, is that the IP is ultimately owned by games publishers. For publishers, esports is not a revenue-generating business. In most

A giant model dragon named 'Elder Dragon' by League of Legends is seen at Oriental Pearl tower on October 25, 2020 in Shanghai, China. (Hu Chengwei/Getty Images)

cases, it represents marketing spend.

Publishers create or license esports competitions featuring their games in order to drive player numbers for the games. Revenues are generated either from game purchases or in-game transactions.

Jamie Lewin, managing partner at Singapore-based gaming industry consultancy Mana Partners, says: “Publishers don’t see esports as a standalone business line, as the economics just don’t stack up in comparison to their core business. The monetisation of audiences is a highly sophisticated practice, which happens within the games themselves. If they can break even with their esports endeavours, that’s fine with them. They largely use esports as a retention mechanism.”

In sport and other video content genres, rights value is driven by exclusivity. But exclusive rights deals for esports events are not generally in games publishers’ interest. They want exposure for their games on as many platforms as possible in their target markets.

In the esports world, the media platforms in question are overwhelmingly digital, rather than linear television-based. They include the likes of Twitch, Facebook and YouTube in markets outside China, and Huya, Bilibili and Douyu within China.

These platforms compete for the same audiences, and so exclusive content is in theory of significant value to them. But exclusive rights deals for esports properties are not commonplace, largely due to publishers’ desire for exposure.

There is something of a parallel in traditional sports, where certain rights-holders prioritise exposure over rights fees, for example choosing to do free-to-air television rights deals rather than higher-value pay-television deals. There are usually two motivations for this – first, to nurture fanbases and, second, to secure large audiences for sponsors.

China deals

The big LoL rights deals in China with Bilibili and Huya did not follow the usual esports logic – these were exclusive deals. This exclusivity helped drive the big rights fees, as there is currently huge competition for audiences between the market’s two biggest games-focused streaming platforms, DouYu and Huya, and rising challenger Bilibili.

“The incredible platform wars going on in China, with Tencent vying for ever-greater share of the attention economy, are driving the likes of the Huya-LoL deal,” says Lewin.

Tencent is a central player in the gaming and esports businesses in China, with remarkable reach that has recently drawn the attention of competition regulators. It is the publisher of LoL in China, and its competitive gaming division TJ Sports runs the LPL and LoL World Championship. It also has stakes in all three of Bilibili, DouYu and Huya.

Revenues for the streaming platforms’ esports content are growing strongly on the back of booming audiences. Note that, for these platforms, competitive esports accounts for only part of their content. Another major part comes from popular users – ‘streamers’ – creating entertaining streams of themselves playing games non-competitively. The three platforms also host content in other genres, beyond gaming.

The platforms typically generate revenue from two sources. The biggest source is virtual gifts. Platform users can pay their favourite streamers via ‘gifts’, or donations, and take a cut. These are usually microtransactions, but add up to significant revenue across tens or hundreds of millions of users. This usually accounts for 60 to 70 per cent of platform revenues, says Jasper Mah, director of esports in Apac at marketing agency Sportfive.

The second major revenue source for the platforms is advertising. Mah says: “There is growth in digital advertising in recent years and during the Covid period. Advertisers are looking at significant media buys on streaming platforms, bringing in revenue for the platforms that is helping them justify spending millions of dollars on exclusive content.”

However, these revenue sources are not yet enough for the platforms to turn profits. Most are “burning cash and finding it hard to break-even”, Mah says.

Bilibili has not deemed it necessary to retain total exclusivity over its LoL World Championship rights. In 2020, it sublicensed rights for the event to both Douyu and Huya, recouping some of its investment in the process.

LoL ‘unique’

Industry experts say LoL’s ability to drive the rights values seen in the recent China deals may be unique. LoL is by many measures the world’s biggest esports title and is among the very top titles in China too. Online coverage of the 2020 World Championship drew 45 million viewers. The 2020 season of the LPL claimed 100 billion ‘views’ of its content.

Mah says what sets LoL apart from other titles is: “A successful and established fanbase with the right strategy, a publisher that is deeply involved with its esports ecosystem, and a game that is constantly maintained and regulated to keep audiences excited and passionate.”

Reporting on the Huya deal, esports business news website Esports Insider said: “This is perhaps one of the most important moments for esports media rights in the industry’s history. However, it’s important to note that League of Legends stands on its own as an esports and is huge in China. Media rights deals in the most popular esports, in the biggest region, are not necessarily reflective of the industry as a whole. Nevertheless, this is as big as it gets in esports and may well set the tone for broadcast deals moving forward.”



In this screenshot taken from the League of Legends Mid-Season Cup, Hung “Karsa” Hao-Hsuan of Top Esports competes during the League of Legends mid-Season Cup Grand Final at the LPL Arena in Shanghai, China. (Getty Images/Getty Images)

Tencent factor

Tencent’s push to grow its gaming business undoubtedly also helped to fuel the big Bilibili and Huya deals. Gaming is one of the company’s biggest business lines, accounting for ¥39bn (\$6bn/€5bn) in revenues in the fourth quarter of 2020, out of total quarterly revenues of ¥134bn. The company is investing heavily in esports to help grow this further.

Bloomberg recently reported that “Tencent has placed pro gaming at the heart of its ambition to dominate online entertainment, from mobile games and video streaming to social media”. The company is investing heavily, via TJ Sports, not only in esports competitions, but also in creating content around esports stars and teams, including reality shows and e-commerce-driven live streams.

“Competitive play in Tencent-published games like Honor of Kings and PUBG Mobile enhances the longevity of the firm’s biggest cash cows and feeds its content divisions,” Bloomberg said. Honor of Kings and PUBG Mobile are two of the other major titles Tencent publishes in China.

Tencent’s gaming ambitions experienced a setback this week when its effort to merge Douyu and Huya was blocked by China’s competition regulator. In a statement on its ruling, the State Administration for Market Regulation said Tencent’s strong positions in both games publishing and the games streaming business threatened healthy competition.

“Tencent has more than 40 per cent of the upstream online game operation service market, ranking first. Huya and Douyu have more than 40 per cent and 30 per cent

of the downstream game live broadcast market share, ranking first and second, and totaling more than 70 per cent,” the statement said.

“Currently, Tencent has sole control over Huya and joint control over Douyu. The merger of Huya and Douyu will allow Tencent to independently control the combined entity, further strengthen Tencent’s dominant position in the game live broadcast market, and at the same time give Tencent the ability and motivation to implement closed-loop management and a two-way vertical blockade in the upstream and downstream markets.”

Esports industry experts say Tencent has been willing to allow competition between Douyu, Huya and Bilibili for esports media rights.

“Tencent has a long view and is to a large degree pragmatic. It will let competition happen,” says Lewin. He says the company believes that competition between the streaming platforms is healthy for the gaming industry, and that it stands to profit no matter which platform succeeds.

Mah says Tencent wants to support different parts of the gaming ecosystem, because of the huge business it has in it: “It sustains the ones who are doing things right, and helps the ones that need help growing, because of the business they can generate for Tencent’s gaming activities.”

Different picture

Esports and gaming streaming audiences are also booming in Southeast Asia but the rights picture is very different to that in China. Appetite from gaming-focused

streaming platforms for exclusive rights deals has fluctuated in recent years, and esports properties have in general not been able to command significant rights revenue.

Southeast Asia comprises a diverse set of countries and its esports markets are also diverse. The popularity of different esports titles varies between the markets, as does the strength of different streaming platforms.

“Audiences are quite tribal and linked to local teams,” says Lewin. “Also, different games are dominant in different geographical regions.”

Mobile Legends, for example, is “totally dominant” in Indonesia and the Philippines. In Thailand and Vietnam, Tencent’s Arena of Valor – an international adaptation of Honor of Kings – is a major title.

Facebook and YouTube are broadly the strongest platforms in the region. They, too, have varying strengths. “Philippines is all Facebook, Indonesia is all YouTube,” Lewin says, giving two examples.

Other platforms are looking to take market share from them, including Nonolive, which is big in Indonesia, and whose investors include Douyu and Chinese internet giant Alibaba. Twitch is also looking to make inroads in the region.

The platforms in Southeast Asia are looking to a different model than exclusive rights deals in order to drive audiences.

“More recently, Facebook and YouTube have moved away from acquiring big-ticket content,” says Lewin. “They’re finding it more cost-effective to, for example, pay a streamer in Indonesia \$800 per month to stream a certain number of hours to a certain number of users. Then

if, for example, the likes of Riot Games comes along trying to sell rights for 1000x what a platform pays one streamer, you can imagine how that conversation will go.”

Lewin is referring to what has become one of the central strategies for the platforms to drive audiences – employing streamers with large followings and paying them to produce a certain amount of content each month. In low-wage markets like Indonesia – where the average monthly salary is \$180 (International Labour Organisation, 2019) – this can be a cost-effective approach.

Indefinite market

The picture is still fuzzy for esports media rights markets in Asia-Pacific.

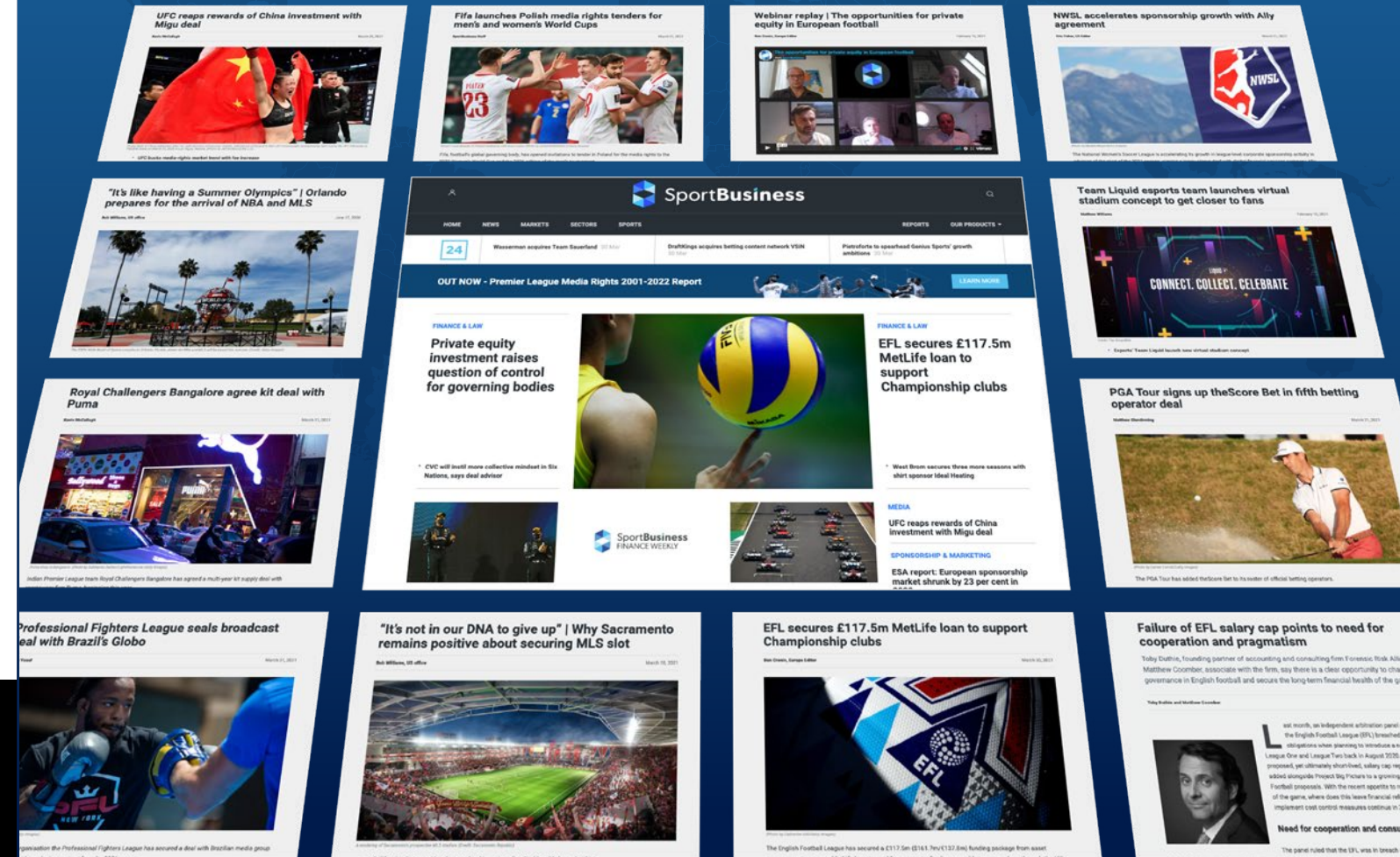
In general, with a few outstanding exceptions, rights fees have been relatively small compared to those for traditional sports.

“Most of the deals going through are in the mid-five-digits to mid-six-digits, in US dollar terms, for an annual licensing deal of an event organiser’s entire catalogue of content,” Mah says. Major event organisers include the likes of ESL, which runs stadium-based esports events around the world.

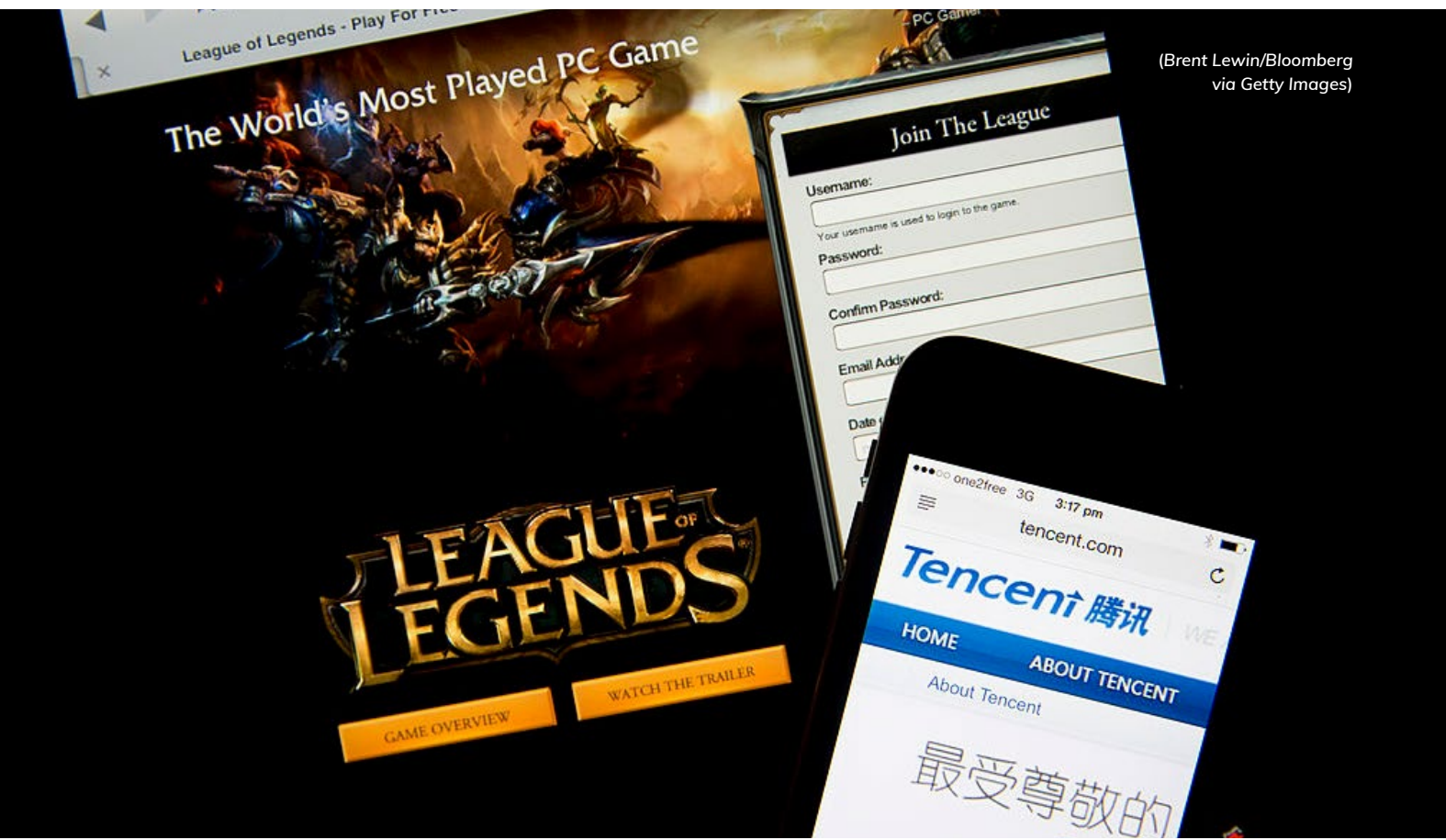
This could change. The big and growing audiences, and the growing gaming streaming platforms that are serving them, hold potential for rights value growth. But publishers’ need for exposure for their games is a heavy counter against exclusive deals.

It is another area where the esports business shares intriguing similarities with the traditional sports business but has its own unique dynamics that could yet take it in a completely different direction. ♦

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(Brent Lewin/Bloomberg via Getty Images)



Women's World Cup provides tentpole as Football Australia enters new era

INTERVIEW PART 1

In the first part of a two-part interview, the Australian football federation's commercial head **Tom Rischbieth** outlines the organisation's plans to capitalise on the upcoming Women's World Cup.

(Atsushi Tomura/Getty Images)

- Australia's football federation plans sponsor-powered legacy for 2023 Women's World Cup
- Pandemic recovery to be built on strong national team brands and participation rates
- Interview with Tom Rischbieth, head of commercial at Football Australia

By Kevin McCullagh

Even by the standards of the Covid era, the last year was a tumultuous one for Football Australia's commercial business.

The federation suffered direct, pandemic-linked setbacks, including broadcaster Foxtel ending its domestic media-rights deal early and sponsor airline Qantas announcing it would no longer pay cash rights fees.

FA also had to navigate a major restructure – Australia's domestic leagues were split from the federation to run as a separate entity at the end of 2020. This was long-planned but nevertheless left the federation facing a stark new reality, deprived of the

safety net of substantial club football revenue.

But FA is holding several strong cards that mean it is looking to the next few years with optimism, Tom Rischbieth, the organisation's head of commercial told *SportBusiness* this month.

Prime among these is Australia's joint hosting of the 2023 Fifa Women's World Cup, which will be the biggest sports event hosted by the country since the Sydney 2000 Olympics. The federation also sees commercial growth flowing from the current, strong popularity of the men's and women's national teams; football's big youth participation rate; and a new domestic media rights agreement with the ambitious broadcast group 10 ViacomCBS.

Referencing the national teams' colours, Rischbieth

says: "We can leverage those big, 'green and gold' moments of national pride with this huge grassroots participation base that we have, which is a really attractive proposition for partners at the moment, especially off the back of a pandemic, where brands are looking to support the community more than ever."

Women's World Cup

The June 2020 award of the Women's World Cup hosting rights to Australia and New Zealand was the undisputed highlight of the last year for football down under. The joint bid saw off competition from Colombia to secure the rights. With women's sport in general, and women's football in particular, highly popular in Australia, a blockbuster event is expected.

FA is determined that the usual major event ‘legacy’ talk will be more than platitudes. It has a five-pillar plan, titled ‘Legacy 23’, aimed at building new structures for women’s football. Each pillar has commercial opportunities attached, inviting sponsors to play a part in the story of the development of women’s football.

Rischbieth says: “Around major events, a legacy programme is always something that’s spoken about, but often it sits with the local organising committee and the reality is they get disbanded soon after the closing ceremony. We wanted to ensure that Football Australia takes on the legacy programme, and set out how we’re going to capitalise on that moment.”

The five pillars of Legacy 23 are:

1. **Participation** – aimed at adding more than 400,000 new female football participants and reaching 50:50 gender parity in participation by 2027
2. **Community facilities** – aimed at improving grassroots playing facilities for women, as well as building a new headquarters and player development facility for Football Australia
3. **High performance** – aimed at improving Australia’s elite women’s players
4. **Tourism and international engagement** – using the tournament to strengthen trade and tourism links with neighbouring countries in Indo-Pacific
5. **Leadership and development** – educational programmes for the development of female leaders within sport.

The project is being led by former national team player Sarah Walsh, now the federation’s ‘head of women’s football, Women’s World Cup legacy, and inclusion’.

Rischbieth says the plans are live, with certain programmes already budgeted for, and the pitch to brands is: “If you come in and invest, then you help us get there faster. And you can own a part of that narrative, which has got a benefit for your brand.”

FA is looking for brands that will take a long-term view and really help to grow the women’s game, he says, as opposed to those “coming in for a year or two to ride the coattails of the 2023 World Cup”.

The new women’s national team naming rights sponsor Commonwealth Bank of Australia is an example of the type of partnership the federation is seeking.

The four-year deal, running from this year until 2025, will see CommBank’s fee going towards grassroots women’s football programmes. “We are ring-fencing a proportion of their investment that’s going to go directly



Chris Nikou, Chairman of Football Australia along with officials and players react as FIFA announced Australia as the hosts to the 2023 FIFA Women’s World Cup at the FFA Offices (Jenny Evans/Getty Images)

into funding community programmes to grow the game for women and girls,” Rischbieth says.

CommBank’s activation around the deal is also an exemplar for FA: “They were already out with an incredible out-of-home campaign this month, adapting their ‘Can Lives Here’ slogan to ‘Dedication Lives Here’ and including some beautiful imagery of girls playing football. This month that turns to ‘Matildas Live Here’ and a hero image of the team celebrating together. It’s exactly what we’re looking for from partners...”

“We’re wanting commitments to not only invest in a partnership rights fee, but to commit to above-the-line campaigns to celebrate football within advertising, and really promote the concept of ‘If you can’t see her, you can’t be her’.”

Matildas and ‘Roos

One of the reasons the Women’s World Cup is expected to be a success in Australia is the high standing of the Matildas among the public. This is also true for the men’s national men’s team, the Socceroos.

This popularity has endured despite neither team being at historical highs in terms of on-pitch performances. The men’s team remains popular despite not having as many players in the major European leagues as it did a decade or more ago. The Matildas had a disappointing 2019 Women’s World Cup in France, going out in the Round of 16, having reached the quarter-finals at the three prior tournaments. However, they bounced back somewhat with a fourth-place finish at the Tokyo

2020 Olympics. They also have a major star in their ranks in Sam Kerr, one of the top players in women’s football globally and currently playing with Chelsea in England’s Women’s Super League.

“The brand sentiment around the Socceroos and the Matildas has remained incredibly strong,” Rischbieth says. “The Socceroos have the largest number of fans of any football product in this market and still command a huge amount of attention...It’s quite a unique proposition in Australia that you have two national teams, men and women, that have genuinely large audiences, and that perform well globally as well as domestically.”

An average television audience of 1.87m tuned in to watch the Matildas’ losing semi-final match against Sweden at this summer’s Tokyo Olympics. It was a record Australian television audience for a women’s team sports event.

The men’s ‘Olyroos’ Olympics team achieved a 1.97m highest peak television audience, during their match against Spain. An Olyroos Tiktok post celebrating their win over Argentina achieved 1.8m views, one of the best performing Football Australia social media posts during the tournament.

“What happened in the Olympics over these last few weeks is showing that Australian fans love getting behind their national teams when they’re trying to punch above their weight on the world stage,” Rischbieth says.

The Matildas will be a big focus in the lead-up to the 2023 Women’s World Cup. Before that, the men’s team

has a World Cup qualification competition to navigate, and a potential appearance at the 2022 tournament in Qatar at the end of next year. These mean a high volume of attractive sports content for Australian audiences and media to get their teeth into in the next few years, which has strengthened FA’s arm in recent talks with broadcasters and sponsors.

“With that heavy period activity coming up...we’ve got a really strong platform for partners to capitalise on,” Rischbieth says.


Another source of confidence for FA for the future is football’s high participation rate in Australia. It is the fourth-ranked participation sport in Australia, with more than 1.1m participants, representing 5.4 per cent of adults aged 15 and over, according to the national Ausplay survey. Running/athletics, swimming and cycling are the top three participation sports. Among children aged up to 14, football is the second ranked sport after swimming, with a 14.6 per cent participation rate.

“We have by far the highest participation rate of any of the major broadcast sports in Australia, which for the long term is really positive,” Rischbieth says.

This participation rate means that, although football is not one Australia’s traditional major sports, it is considered to have significant untapped potential.

The task ahead for FA and Australian Professional Leagues, the new body running the country’s leagues, is to turn the clear interest in the sport into bigger audiences for Australia’s own teams and competitions. ◆

Football Australia team poses on the occasion of the launch of its deal with 10ViacomCBS. Featuring: Peter Filopoulos (back row, second from left) and Tom Rischbieth (back row, fifth from left). (Football Australia)



Paramount+ deal underpins Football Australia commercial confidence

INTERVIEW PART 2

In the second part of a two-part interview, the Football Australia commercial head **Tom Rischbieth** and comms head Peter Filopoulos discuss the landmark domestic media-rights deal with 10 ViacomCBS and the fed's global outlook.

By Kevin McCullagh

- Federation strikes critical media and sponsorship deals
- Commercial revenue to double after pandemic-afflicted 2020-21
- FA is leveraging its connections at Fifa and AFC to improve its standing

When Australia's leading pay-television broadcaster Foxtel broke off its six-year domestic media rights contract with Football Australia last year, the omens were not good for the federation. This was its most valuable and important commercial rights contract, worth A\$58m per year across rights for domestic league and national team football.

Compounding the concern, FA was planning to split off Australia's domestic leagues to be managed by a separate entity. The leagues had accounted for around 80 per cent of the value of the Foxtel deal. FA's media rights revenue stream now relied solely on national team matches and the domestic club cup competition,

which would have to stand on their own in the market as a new, separate rights package.

It was among the toughest of the challenges faced by FA during the last, pandemic-afflicted year.

In a two-part interview, the first part of which can be read on page 98, FA commercial head Tom Rischbieth and head of marketing, communications and corporate affairs Peter Filopoulos told *SportBusiness* why the organisation remains optimistic about the period ahead.

The upcoming 2023 Women's World Cup, jointly hosted by Australia and New Zealand, is a big part of the optimism.

But before World Cup nirvana is reached, more earthly and immediate matters of domestic media and sponsorship rights must be addressed.

Media rights turnaround

Foxtel and other Australian broadcasters, under heavy pressure during the pandemic, last year renegotiated a series of major domestic rights deals, seeking lower fees or extended deals. But while Foxtel's biggest properties, the Australian Football League (the Australian Rules championship) and National Rugby League, got multi-year deals at close-to steady rights fees, Football Australia got a one-year contract at a much-reduced A\$32m.

Foxtel, a long-time backer of football in the country, appeared to have gone cool on the sport. Meanwhile, other broadcasters in the market were battered and bruised from the pandemic and longer-term decline in the linear television business.

The newly-separate Football Australia, offering

national team matches and the cup, and Australian Professional Leagues, offering league football, appeared set to sell their domestic rights into the toughest market for years.

But a remarkable six months in the Australian television industry changed the rights-holders' fortunes. Two major new streaming platforms burst onto the scene, injecting life into the rights market. In November 2020, media group Nine Entertainment announced the launch of sports streaming platform Stan Sport. In May 2021, commercial broadcaster Ten made a surprise comeback to the sports rights market, acquiring the APL rights for its soon-to-launch streaming platform Paramount+.

Ten, with the support of powerful American owner ViacomCBS, followed this by snapping up the FA rights as it sought to position itself as the home of domestic Australian football.

"The last 12 to 18 months has been an incredibly interesting one in the broadcast rights market. Between May last year and July this year, there's been an incredible amount of commentary around where the market's going, what the best structure of deal is, new market entrants," Rischbieth says.

"We had a very clear strategy to capitalise on the fact that over the next few years we have some really major moments for our national teams."

The standout upcoming activity for the national teams is the men's team's qualifiers for the 2022 Fifa World Cup and then the women's (Matildas) build-up to the 2023 World Cup.

The third round of the men's AFC Asian Qualifiers tournament began this week, with Australia facing off in a group against China, Japan, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam. The top two teams in the group will automatically qualify for the World Cup.

FA bolstered the value of its rights package ahead of approaching Australian broadcasters by acquiring the rights for the Australian market for AFC national team competitions including the World Cup qualifiers. This allowed FA to present to the market a full set of national team matches over the next few years, including the 2023 Asian Cup continental championship.

"We have a really clear narrative that, whenever our national teams are playing, our fans know where they can watch it – and that is with Football Australia's partners. That was a really key part," Rischbieth says.

Ten platform

While FA is not thought to have secured cash rights income at the same level as the terminated Foxtel deal, its deal is still considered a positive one.

The previous Foxtel deal was a record deal for the federation, agreed in a much stronger rights market back in 2016, that was always going to be hard to match in cash terms.

But as well as a significant cash rights fee this time, Ten is committing to a large amount of additional content as well as marketing and promotional activity for football in Australia. This includes the commissioning of an animated cartoon series for children based on women's football and the integration of Australian football stars into other major Ten programmes. It is mooted that players may make appearances on popular non-sports formats such as Masterchef, dating show The Bachelor or chat show The Project.

"One of the principles is to ensure that the Matildas' and the Socceroos' positions as iconic Australian brands is truly elevated," Rischbieth says. He adds: "10 ViacomCBS were really excited to partner with us, not only on the live rights, but also to make some serious commitments to supporting the game all through the line."

With the addition of the APL rights, Ten is positioning football in Australia at the centre of its activity in the market, and notably as a major feature of its new Paramount+ streaming service, which launched in August.

Sponsorship and strategy

FA has in the last year been seeking replacements for three key sponsorships that ended at the end of 2019 and start of 2020.

These were: oil company Caltex's four-year naming rights deal with the men's national team, worth about A\$2m a year; supermarket Aldi's three-year agreement which included naming rights to the organisation's childrens programme; and National Australia Bank's 15-year relationship with FFA, worth about A\$2m annually.

During 2020, airline partner Qantas announced it was stopping cash rights fees in its Australian sponsorship deals, although would continue value-in-kind components.

Since then, FA has signed several new deals, notably with the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, to become the new naming rights partner of the Matildas. CommBank took over the rights from mall operator Westfield. There have been several other deals in support of grassroots and women's football, including with haircare brand Pantene, sports retailer Rebel, baby cucumber brand Qukes, and Priceline Pharmacy. Compeat Nutrition extended its support of the women's teams to also cover men's teams.

"With Covid meaning last year was obviously a challenging period, we've been really happy with the partners that have come on board," Rischbieth says.

Ongoing sponsorship work includes seeking another major partner for the men's national team. The federation is also currently "reconstructing" the commercial programme for the FA Cup and seeking a new naming rights partner for the competition.

Head of marketing, communications and corporate

affairs Peter Filopoulos said the FA commercial and marketing teams had been carefully aligning sponsorship deals with the federation's wider strategy. That strategy involves a 15-year vision, captured in 11 principles, published by FA last year.

"Tom and his team have recreated the value proposition of our sponsorship properties bottom-up. It's been a real linkage to the new, 15-year vision and strategic agenda. They're embarking on all partnership discussions beginning with aligning on values, on vision, on strategy, and making sure that whatever we're putting forward will meet the ROO and ROI expectations of the sponsor, first and foremost, and at the same time is consistent with the strategic agenda of FA."

Global outlook

Rischbieth says the pandemic will continue to pose challenges for FA's business. Australia has largely maintained a 'zero-Covid' approach to managing the pandemic. This has meant sharp lockdowns upon the emergence of very small numbers of disease cases, which has resulted in severe disruption for sport.

"Whilst we feel we've had a positive commercial past 12 months, there's still some inherent challenges that the pandemic hits us with...the same as many sports rights-holders," he says.

Nevertheless, in a positive signal, Filopoulos says FA expects to double its revenue in the 12 months from July 1 this year, compared to the prior 12 months.

The upcoming Women's World Cup and the promise inherent in the new domestic media rights deal give FA two particularly strong foundations to build on.

Challenges ahead include figuring out the new landscape in which the federation sits separately from

the leagues. The two sides have had a fractious recent past – for years, clubs agitated for greater control over league operations and revenues.

"The whole intention of the unbundling is that all the ships will rise in Australian football, which is going to be good for the long term," Rischbieth says. He adds: "There's still an openness and sharing of information... We're working together to work out how we best sell the game, broadly."

One interesting FA ambition for the years ahead is to use its relationships within Fifa and the AFC to increase Australia's standing in the world game. FA chief executive James Johnson is a former senior official in both organisations.

Rischbieth says: "With our CEO's position in the world game, I think Football Australia is leveraging its position within the global game better than it ever has before, focusing on our links to Fifa, to the AFC, to other Member Associations, and to some of the biggest clubs in the world."

This outreach, he says, is aimed at understanding international best practice, communicating FA's activity to the wider football world, and, ultimately, making sure the organisation is a leader in the Australian and Asian market.

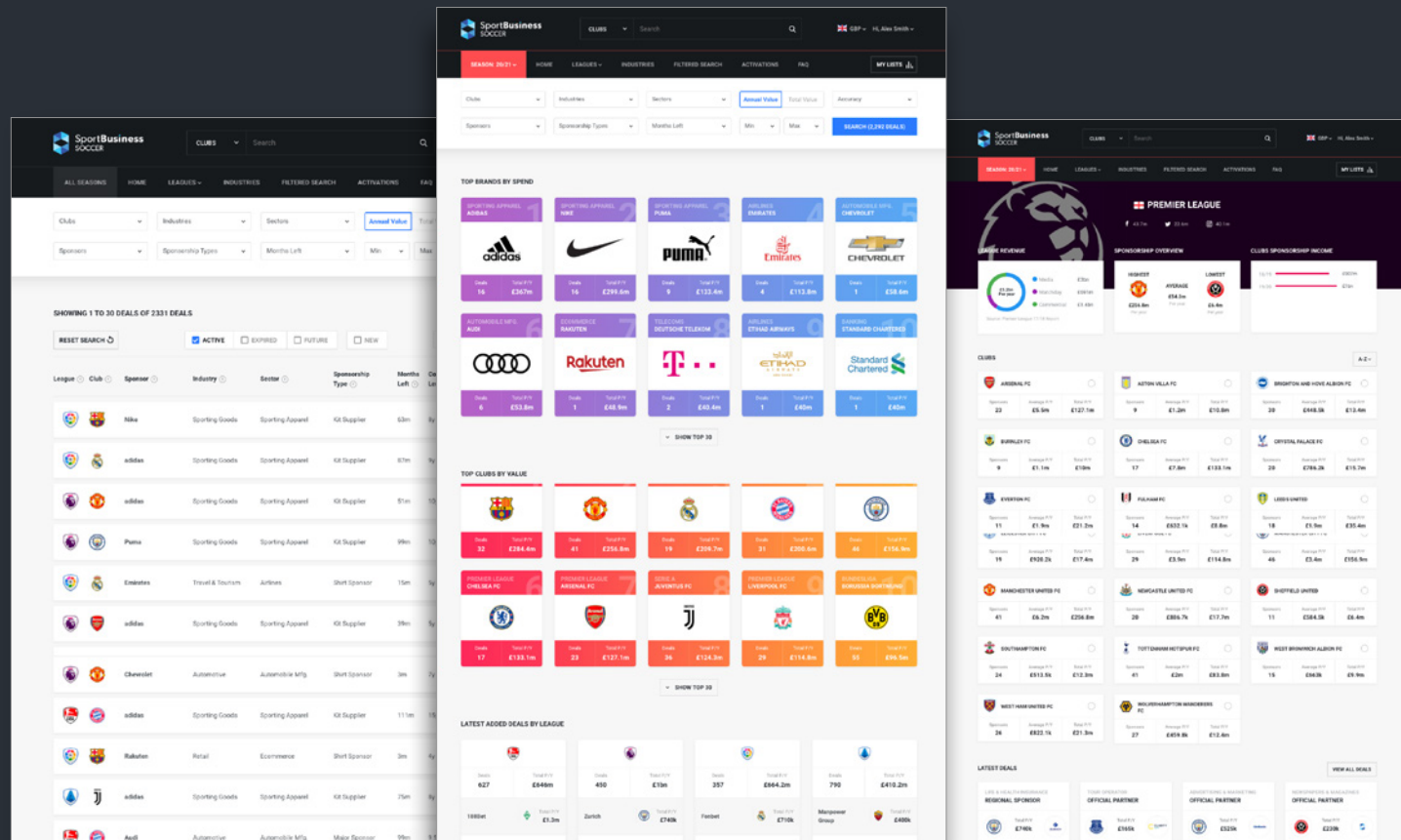
Building on the 2023 Women's World Cup and being a centre for women's football in Asia are very particular goals in this regard:

"We've got a really great relationship with Fifa, both in Zurich, and locally. And we think that's going to really make for a good result in the tournament itself. We are determined to ensure that small window of two months in 2023 has really great positive outcomes for the sport the next 15 years." ♦

Football Australia pose on occasion of launch of Commonwealth Bank of Australia sponsorship of the Matildas. (Football Australia)



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School of Sport, Tourism and Hospitality Management

PGR

POSTGRADUATE RANKINGS 2021

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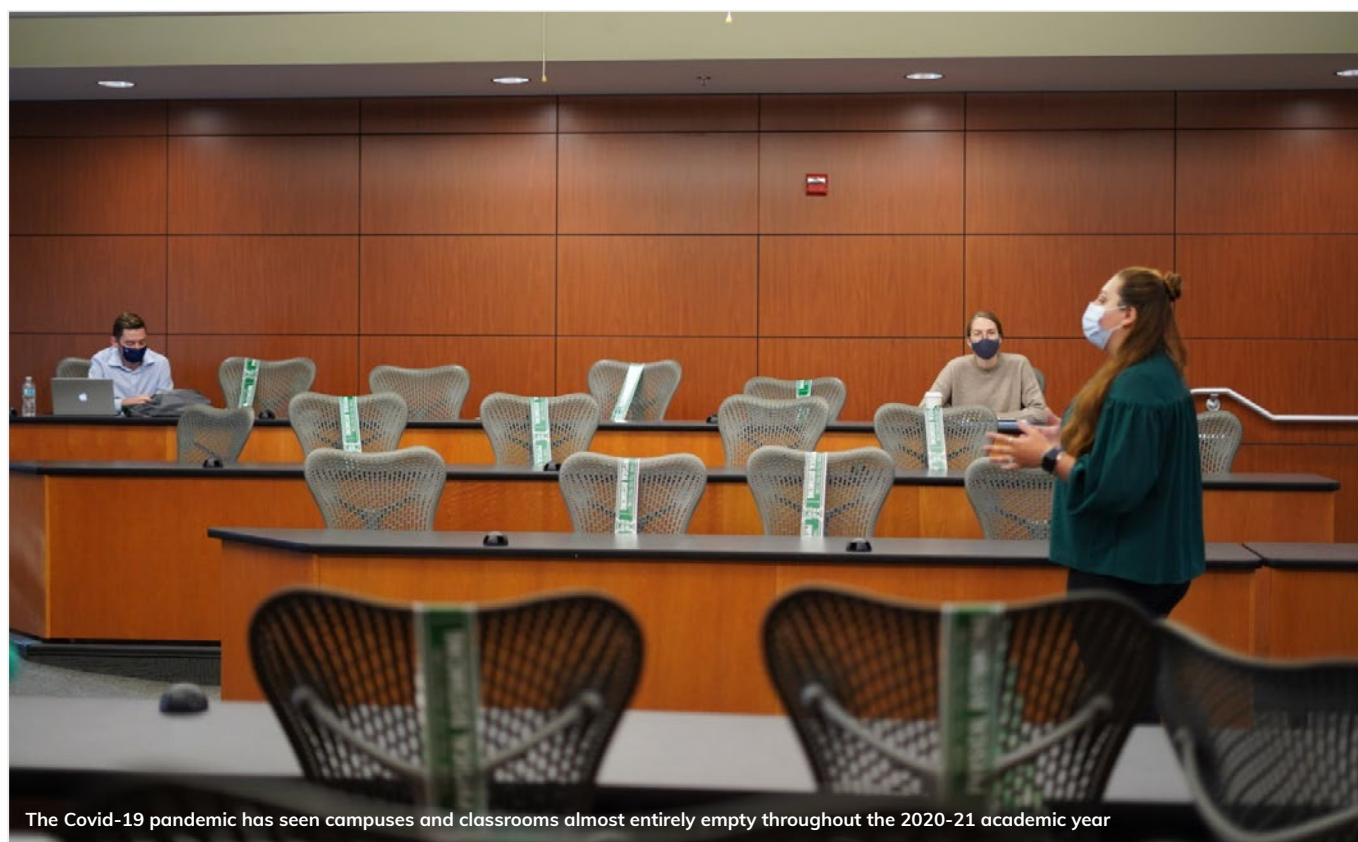
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Welcome... to the 2021 SportBusiness Postgraduate Course Rankings



The Covid-19 pandemic has seen campuses and classrooms almost entirely empty throughout the 2020-21 academic year

It's hard to believe it's been a year since we published the last edition of these rankings. There is no question as to the dominant narrative of the 2020-21 academic year, with university campuses as well as offices across the globe sitting empty due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the world only now looking to make a tentative return to normality.

The events of the past 18 months have undoubtedly left their mark on the education sector. Several course leaders this year told us that, while applications to master's programmes have risen, there has been an increase in the number of people declining to take their places, indicative of an uncertain atmosphere in which more people are looking to continue their education or retrain but have often chosen to remain in or take up employment instead of going back to school.

That only serves to make our

task here more important, and we hope this publication can provide a helpful guide to all who are considering further education in sports management to choose the right course for them.

As it has been for 10 editions of these rankings, our goal is to provide students and course leaders alike with the most dependable and reliable ranking system for postgraduate sports management programmes around the world. That aim grows in complexity each year, as more and more courses are launched and enter the rankings and we continue to fine-tune our methodology, but it has arguably never been so difficult as this year.

Despite the challenging environment, this is, in every sense, the biggest edition of our rankings so far. We received well over 1,000 responses from graduates of courses around the world, and more applications to enter from more courses than ever before. More

than in any previous year. The top 40 represents the true cream of the crop globally, and inclusion on our list in any position is an indication of a top-quality sports management programme.

We have also produced more content than ever to contextualise the list, with a renewed focus on helping potential applicants understand the differences between the top three courses in both the US and Europe and guide them in making their decisions. For each of the leading schools, we spoke with a course leader to learn about the application process, studying on their programmes, and the post-graduation support they offer, as well as featuring profiles with alumni who have gone on to enjoy successful careers in the industry, and articles offering examples of the kinds of work and research that is carried out at these universities. We hope this provides interested parties with an overview of what

each of these courses can offer.

There are also features focusing on some unique institutions and an assessment of the impact of the pandemic through the lens of two universities, in the UK and US, while elsewhere we look back over the 10 editions of this list to date, hearing from course leaders of the three universities to have taken the coveted top spot.

And the winners are...

Ohio University's MBA/MSA and Master of Sports Administration once again comes out in first place overall on our list. It is the eighth time in 10 years it has topped the rankings, and its lead this year is even more impressive than in previous editions, with the overwhelmingly positive responses from its 2018 alumni ensuring it was clear at the top by more than two points over the second-placed programme.

Overall, it secured scores of 100 – the maximum possible – in four separate categories (current employment, extra-curricular support, alumni network and industry networking score), something no other course achieved, while it missed out on top marks in a fifth, value for money, by just half a point. Across the board, it consistently posted scores in the 90s in every other category, with no weaknesses in either its alumni responses or its status among course leaders. Ohio was the first school in the world to launch an MA in sports management, in 1966, and its decades of experience combined with its continuous ability to modernise and keep up with sports industry trends has made it the undisputed standout school of the first ten years of the SportBusiness Postgraduate Course Rankings.

University of Massachusetts Amherst's MBA/MS Sport Management and MS Sport Management finished in second place for the second year in a row, and the fourth time in five years, having topped the table in 2019. It also claimed the Professors' Choice award for the third year in a row, with course leaders at other institutions continuing to rate the UMass research and teaching

faculty as the strongest in the world. Celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, the consistent performance of the programme at UMass is also a testament to that heritage and the depth of its alumni network.

If the top two courses are familiar faces, the third-placed course in 2021 demonstrates the ever-diversifying nature of these rankings. The University of South Florida's Vinik Sport & Entertainment Management Program has posted impressive scores before, finishing fourth in 2018 and 2019, but in going one higher this year, it becomes the first course founded since the first edition of this list was published to make the podium. Its rise has been impressive, from making its debut on the rankings in 2017 to rounding out an all-American top three just five years later. Its relatively low score in the peer review category is probably indicative only of the course's relative youth, and a stronger result there in subsequent years, as the Vinik Program continues to establish itself, could see it climb even higher.

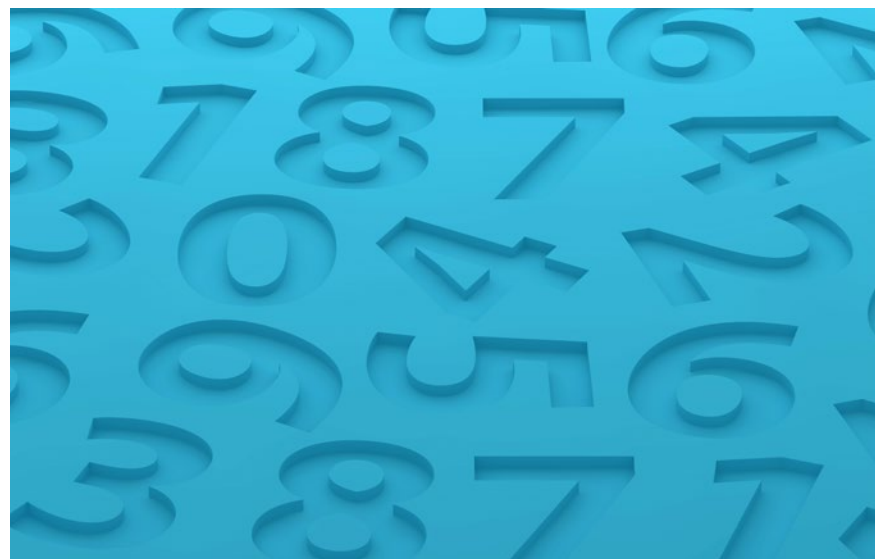
On the other side of the pond, the Fifa Master at the International

Centre for Sport Studies once again came out the highest-ranked course in Europe, the ninth time in 10 years it has done so as the pan-continental programme continues to go from strength to strength. It finished in fourth place in the overall table, one of only two non-US courses in the top ten, and was ranked third in the peer review category, behind only Ohio and UMass. The array of sport industry expertise offered by its three universities – SDA Bocconi, De Montfort and Neuchâtel – continues to make it the most well-regarded course in Europe among fellow academicians.

The masterSport International Masters at the Universities of San Marino and Parma, meanwhile, put up an exceptionally strong performance in 2021, with the responses from its 2018 graduates not only propelling it to a third-place finish in Europe (and 12th in the overall table) but ensuring the course claimed our Graduates' Choice award, given to the programme with the highest student satisfaction scores. It was also judged to be the most valuable course in furthering its students'



Ohio campus in Athens



careers, an indication of the esteem in which both the course and its industry practitioner faculty are held in Italy. MasterSport took the maximum score of 100 in three of the alumni survey categories – extra-curricular support, alumni network and industry networking – indicating very high levels of satisfaction from its class of 2018, while its quality of teaching was also highly praised.

It was the joint-highest rising course, moving up 15 places over last year, and is part of a strong year all-round for European programmes, which provide 18 of the top 40, the highest proportion ever from the continent. While the top end of the rankings remains weighted toward American schools, European sports management education has demonstrated its growing strength by populating more and more of this list each year and may soon start to push further

into the top 20 and top 10 as the industry matures.

Methodology

Our rankings are based on two surveys, completed by course leaders and alumni who graduated three years prior to publication – meaning the 2021 edition is based on responses from the classes of 2018. Each course is ultimately given a score out of 100 based on a weighted average of results from both the graduate and course leader surveys.

This year, we worked more closely than ever with our advisory board, made up of eight leading names from across the sport management education sector, to understand how we could improve and fine-tune the rankings even further.

“The more collaborative the effort is, the more inclusive it is, the better the methodology is going to be,” says Scott Rosner,

academic director of the Master of Science in Sports Management at Columbia University and a member of our advisory board for the past three years. “It’s important that SportBusiness, as the only real ranking of this kind, takes this ranking very seriously, and it does. If it’s going to be effective, it needs to be inclusive of those of us who are practicing in the field to help to add a level of depth and gravitas to the rankings. It’s not a publication that is coming up with a seemingly random survey, it’s rigorous, and it needs the input of practitioners in the field.”

There are, inevitably, disagreements among the board in how the rankings should break down. “We’re always going to have debates about the weight of certain factors and what is included and what is not,” he says. “But it’s a healthy dialogue, and it’s not to do with putting our own programme in a more favourable light. The rankings are what the rankings are – we’re trying to ensure they have integrity and represent the best of what we do. It’d be great if SportBusiness listened to everything I said and made the rankings of the World According to Scott Rosner, but that’s not the way it works.”

As a result of these discussions, this year saw the introduction of a completely new category for scoring, with three points now available based on the percentage of applicants to places – an effort to reflect the demand for and exclusivity of the programmes;

important, says Rosner, “because it gives an impression of the quality of students coming into the programme and how desirable that programme is. We didn’t want to give it too much weighting, because at some point it becomes self-fulfilling – if you have the best programme in the rankings, you get more applications and are more over-subscribed – but it’s an important metric to throw into the mix alongside the existing measures.”

We also upped the weighting given to students’ current salaries, listening to feedback from our advisory board that this was an appropriate way to judge how successful time spent on a course had been in not just getting students into jobs, but getting them senior-level, well-remunerated jobs. “It’s the ultimate objective for so many of these programmes really,” explains Rosner. “We need to get them jobs where the level of compensation is commensurate with what they’re paying for the programme, which, as we know, can be a lot of money. It’s also a reflection of the quality of the job and the graduates’ standing in the industry having come through the programme.”

To allow for these changes, the number of points allocated to the course leader choice have been halved, from 10 to five, placing less emphasis on the peer review category, which our advisory board felt had grown slightly less relevant as more courses are introduced to the market and it becomes less possible to be aware of all the work being done in the sector.

Analysis

As part of our employability metrics, we consider alumni employment status at both six months after graduation – to get a sense of how quickly students can enter the sports industry with a degree from one of the courses – and current employment – to understand how many graduates have continued and progressed within the sports industry. That means this edition is the first to be impacted by the pandemic, as our 2020 surveys went out just as the initial wave of Covid-19 was sweeping the globe.

In 2021, alumni responses indicated the careers of sports management postgraduates are relatively resilient to the impact of the pandemic. Just seven per cent of respondents had been made redundant, while 14 per cent were furloughed (counting as being in employment for the purposes of the rankings). The majority reported their workload either stayed the same (30 per cent) or increased significantly (26 per cent). A further 17 per cent reported a decline in workload without being furloughed, while 14 per cent were promoted during the pandemic.

Another interesting data point is the boost to career chances and opportunities offered by studying on any of the courses in our top 40. Considering all the 2018 respondents, about 20 per cent of students in both North America and Europe were working in the sport industry before joining one of the programmes. At both six months and three years out from graduation, those numbers jump to over 60 per cent in the US and just under 60 per cent in Europe, underlining that the practical and theoretical knowledge taught by these courses is highly valued by sports organisations and their hiring managers.

The survey responses showed that the 2018 graduates have taken up a range of positions, demonstrating the diversity of skills learned on the programmes we rank. The highest proportion, almost a quarter, are now working in either a sales or marketing department, while operations, business development and media and communications make up the next biggest categories, with around eight per cent of the graduates saying they now work in each of those fields.

In terms of seniority, a quarter of those currently in employment are now at manager level, seven per cent are senior managers or heads of department, while nine per cent said they were in director-level roles. Ten respondents said they were now serving as chief executives. ○

Adam Nelson,
SportBusiness University editor

How the PGR score is calculated

Number of points shown here is the maximum possible score

STUDENT MEASURES

Quality of teaching: **10 points**

Support in finding a job in the industry: **7 points**

Quality of extra-curricular support: **5 points**

Opportunities to connect with the alumni network: **7 points**

Ability to network with industry executives: **7 points**

Value for money provided by the masters program: **7 points**

Value of the degree in furthering career: **5 points**

Usefulness of the skills and knowledge provided by the programme in current position: **5 points**

EMPLOYMENT

Employment status at six months: **12 points**

Current employment status: **13 points**

OTHERS

Course Leader choice: **5 points**

Current salary: **5 points**

Percentage of applicants to places: **3 points**

Percentage of female students: **3 points**

Percentage of female teaching staff: **1 point**

Percentage of international students: **3 points**

Percentage of international teaching staff: **1 point**

Work placement: **1 point**

The advisory panel

As ever, profound thanks go to our advisory board, whose help and input has been invaluable in defining the shape and direction of the 2021 SportBusiness Postgraduate Course Rankings.

Steve McKelvey
Department chair and graduate program director at the Mark H. McCormack Department of Sport Management, UMass Amherst

Mike Finkelstein
Executive director of Global Sports Business M.S. Program at Rutgers University

Kevin Tallec Marston
Research fellow and academic project manager at the International Centre for Sport Studies (CIES)

Michele Petochi
Business development director, Josoor Institute

James Strode
Department chair of sports administration at Ohio University

Scott Rosner
Academic director of the Master of Science in Sports Management at Columbia University

Claude Stricker
Executive director of the International Academy of Sport Science and Technology (AISTS)

The top 40 Postgraduate sports business courses

Rank	Provider / Course	Total Score
1	Ohio University MBA/MSA and Master of Sports Administration	91.89
2	University of Massachusetts Amherst, Mark H. McCormack Department of Sport Management MBA/MS Sport Management and MS Sport Management	89.58
3	University of South Florida, Muma College of Business MBA/MS - Vinik Sport & Entertainment Management Program	88.01
4	The International Centre for Sport Studies (CIES) The FIFA Master	86.03
5	Columbia University MS in Sports Management	84.33
6	George Washington University Masters in Sports Management	84.11
7	University of Oregon Warsaw Sports Marketing Center, MBA in Sports Business	83.79
8	AISTS - International Academy of Sport Science and Technology Master of Advanced Studies in Sport Administration and Technology	83.75
9	The Ohio State University Master of Science in Sport Management	83.46
10	University of San Francisco Master of Sport Management	83.06
11	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Masters of Sport Administration	81.93
12	University of Parma & University of San Marino MasterSport – International Masters in Strategic Management of Sports Organisations, Events and Facilities	81.32
13	University of Vigo Master in Business Administration of Sport	81.30
14	Virginia Commonwealth University Center for Sport Leadership Master of Sport Leadership	80.66
15	Coventry University MSc Sport Management	80.31
16	University of Central Florida DeVos Sport Business Management Program	79.74
17	University of Ottawa Masters in Human Kinetics - MHK in Sport Management	78.97
18	Georgia State University Masters of Science in Sport Administration	78.61
19	Florida Atlantic University MBA Sport Management	77.82
20	University of South Carolina Master of Science in Sport and Entertainment Management	77.74

Rank	Provider / Course	Total Score
21=	University of Windsor Master of Human Kinetics (MHK) in Sport Management	77.14
21=	Real Madrid Graduate School MBA in Sports Management	77.14
23	University of Liverpool Management School MSc Sport Business and Management	76.55
24	NYU Tisch Institute for Global Sport MS in Sports Business	76.07
25	University of Liverpool Management School MBA Football Industries	76.05
26=	Russian International Olympic University Master of Sports Administration	75.60
26=	Bayreuth University MBA Sport Management	75.60
28	University of Stirling MSc in Sport Management	74.63
29	University of Tennessee Master in Sports Management	73.69
30	Temple University / School of Sport, Tourism, and Hospitality Management Master of Science in Sport Business	73.66
31	Seattle University MBA Sport and Entertainment Management	72.81
32	Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey MS Global Sports Business	71.84
33	Washington State University M.A. in Sport Management	71.78
34	University College Dublin MSc Sport Management	71.61
35	Sheffield Hallam University MSc Sport Business Management	71.10
36	AMOS Sport Business School Master in Sport Management	70.97
37	Venice Ca' Foscari University Master SBS - Sports Business Strategies	70.84
38	Centro Formación Fundación Valencia CF - ESBS Master in International Sports Management	70.83
39	Vrije Universiteit Brussel Postgraduate Sports Management Course (PG SPORT)	69.58
40	Loughborough University MSc Sports Management	69.30

Ohio University's Master of Sports
Administration

The Master of Sports Administration degree at Ohio University is now into its 55th year, having launched in 1966, and has finished in first place in eight of the 10 years since SportBusiness launched these rankings. Based out of Ohio University's College of Business in Athens, Ohio, the AECOM Center for Sports Administration offers an MBA/MSA dual-award program, combining classroom-based learning and practical experience to help educate the industry leaders of the future. Scoring highly across the board, Ohio was the only school to receive the maximum possible score in four different categories – current employment, extracurricular support, alumni

network and industry networking – while receiving impressive responses from its 2018 alumni for value for money, career value and overall usefulness.

Jim Strode, chair of the sports administration department, gives SportBusiness the rundown on the course.

How many applicants do you receive to study on the course each year, and how many of those are successful?

We receive in the range of 150–160 applicants each year, and we interview between 35 to 50 per cent of those, and then make offers after that. For the coming year, we had 154 applicants for our MBA/MSA and MSA exclusive and are seating

30 of those. So it's very selective. We put a lot of stock in those interviews. I've been a part of some programmes where the interviews are just sort of like the rubber stamp at the end of the process, but for us it's a really important part of the process to figure out if someone is fit for Ohio. We still bring in a lot of people for interviews, and some of those are the right fit and, unfortunately, some are not.

What are you looking for in applications and interviews? What makes a candidate a good fit for Ohio?

It's pretty holistic. Certainly, we're looking at your academic background, your success in the classroom. We get students from

your exclusive universities, from small, private liberal arts colleges, and from big state institutions. We really run the gamut when it comes to where our students come from, but they have in common academic success.

On the MBA/MSA dual degree programme, we are looking for some level of significant experience: students that have done a variety of practicum or internships. It doesn't necessarily have to be focused, it doesn't have to necessarily be that someone has decided they're working in marketing and sales and that's their route, but we do look at students who try to experience a variety of different areas because, frankly, students should still be trying to figure out what they want to be when they grow up, so finding that that balance is important. We've had some students with some pretty amazing experiences coming in – they've worked at the Fiesta Bowl every year, or they've gone to England and worked at the Premier League – which adds so much value to the classroom.

What's the general background of your students, in terms of their career journey and where they're coming from globally?

Anecdotally speaking, most of our students are coming directly from their undergraduate-level studies. We do have a handful of students that might be in the mid- or late-20s range, but oftentimes, if students have work experience, and are maybe already in the workplace, we push those students to consider our professional master's programme, our PMSA. When it comes to where our students come from, we get students from all over North America, and we have students right now from Italy, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Germany and more. And we are targeting other areas. In the 2000s, we had a pipeline of students coming from Japan, and we are looking at Asian markets again to raise awareness about our programme to diversify our applicant pool. Most of our students are from the United States, but we do have a mix of international students as well.

What is the size of the faculty in the department and wider teaching staff?

We have 11 full-time faculty in our department, all sports administration. Depending on the expertise area of our faculty, we may rely on special adjunct faculty to come in. By rule, though, we don't use adjuncts unless we have an absolute drastic need to fill a gap and we know that a particular person can level up our programs.

We also bring in a tonne of guest speakers. It's our USP, really. Everyone is well aware of our alumni network, and just having the ability for these folks who came through our programme over the 55 years it's been active and are now senior in the industry to come and talk to the students is a key part of our offering. Now that we all know how to use technology better than we did pre-Covid, we've really been able to tap into a segment of the population that couldn't get to Athens, Ohio to be guest speakers for us, but rather we would get them if we went to a conference, or we took our students to those locations. Now, we can pop them on the screen, and bring them into the classroom and hear from some of the more established alum.



Jim Strode | Chair of the sports administration department

What are some of the key areas of expertise you have on the faculty?

Our programme has always been rooted in application-based learning. We are very big on the practitioner, very big on making sure that students understand the

industry trends, but also get that theoretical piece as well as from our academic researchers, so that they can apply and use theoretical models to be able to understand and provide real-world solutions in the sport industry. When we look at our research and tenure track faculty here, we have expertise in data analytics and machine learning in Dr Liz Wanless – we're very fortunate because we know that having a full-time faculty member who just teaches Big Data classes, not only in sport but also in general business, is imperative. We're also doing some research on consumer behaviour and branding, where Dr Melissa Davies is just entering her third year on the faculty with that as her interest area and she's moving the needle in that subject. Dr David Ridpath is known for his knowledge of collegiate athletics. And then my research is on leadership and is specific to leadership and gender and administration.

Could you identify a USP of the program at Ohio?

The number of real-world projects that our students get is a differentiating factor. Our students are consistently being used by the industry to make presentations, make proposals, to actually do some of the work that puts the students not only in a real-world situation, but also puts them in front of potential employers. The amount of experiential learning that we provide as well is unique. We have a week in Europe, where all our students will work with Adidas or Puma or our partners at the University of Bayreuth in Germany. In January, we send our students to North Carolina to do the tours of some college athletic and professional sports facilities, including the Charlotte Motor Speedway. I'm pretty sure our students don't sleep a whole lot. They eat, drink, sleep, breathe sport in our programme. If they're not in the classroom, they're probably out on the athletic fields doing something with our athletic department, or on a trip somewhere. It's a pretty fast experience for our students.

You score very highly for student employment rates and employability in our rankings. Where do your graduates usually go on to work?

I think it depends on the student. We've been finding many of our international students are looking to stay in the United States or in North America but, for the most part, they are not bound to a geographic area. Our students are typically looking for the best job and the best fit for them, regardless of where it is.

In terms of sector, we have a lot of students that will go on to athletic fundraising jobs, they may work for private agencies or work in some sort of revenue generation in professional sports, but we do find that a significant amount of our students will go into some sort of revenue generation area. We're also seeing more of an uptick in Big Data, in data analytics. We're certainly admitting more students that have this interest, and we're seeing more and more students going down that strategic business decision-making route.

We're definitely adjusting to the trends of what the sport industry needs; our curriculum is consistently being reviewed and tweaked. We have flexibility in some of our elective classes, so we can provide a class on sport gambling to our students, which is an area that, if you want to work in professional collegiate sport, you had better have a working understanding of the legal issues associated with that, and we're able to offer a one-credit class where our students are going to get the most up-to-date, relevant information in that particular area.

What is the alumni network and community like? How do you continue to support graduates after they've left Ohio?

It's the ethos of our programme. When we use this 'Ohio family' moniker, there's an expectation that when you're in the Bobcat family, you are always finding ways to be able to give back time, treasure and talent. We have just added eight new members to our alumni advisory

board, which hits our MSA and our PMSA programme, and we have subcommittees that are working for us to make sure our students are getting the best opportunities here as well as the best opportunities when they graduate. Our students each have a graduate mentor, they flip through the alumni directory to pick their mentor, and it's broken down by geography and by industry. If a student wants to seize a position with the Portland Trailblazers, we can say, 'well we've got X, Y, and Z working for the Portland Trailblazers, we're going to contact them and get you that inside track'. But of course, we always tell our students, 'we're going to tee it up for you, but you're still going to have to hit the ball, you're still going to have to sell yourself, to make sure that you're grinding and working and have the skills necessary for those positions'. But you will get those opportunities to have your resume taken off to the side if the Bobcat network is being as effective as we want it to be. ○



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Derrick Hall, president and chief executive of the Arizona Diamondbacks

Derrick Hall graduated Ohio University with a Masters in Sports Administration in 1993 and was the recipient of the department's Charles R. Higgins Distinguished Alumni Award in 2006. He joined the Arizona Diamondbacks in May 2005 as senior vice-president, communications and served in numerous capacities prior to being named the team's president in 2006, adding the title of chief executive in 2009.

What made you decide to take a postgraduate degree in sports management?

I loved baseball, wanted to have a career in baseball, but didn't know how to get started. My father called me up one day and said, 'turn on ESPN' – they were doing a feature on Ohio University, and I realised it was the place for me. Applied and made it to the interview phase, interviewed, thought I did very well. Got home, told my wife that it went well and that we were moving to Athens. A few weeks later, I received the rejection letter.

Looking back on it now, I was so green, and it was a very high pressure, in-your-face interview, and I didn't know nearly half as much as I should have. I decided to go to Miami, Florida, where they were having the winter baseball meetings, to try and do it on my own. I paid and registered to be part of a career search, so here I was in this room with 300 other people wearing bad suits trying to get a job – they would come in and post it up, and we'd all run over and try and tear down a flyer to see when you could interview in the lobby. I quickly got discouraged. I had spent all my savings to go to Florida to make this happen. I was in the lobby of the Fontainebleau Hotel, and I saw that there was an Ohio alumni reception in one of the suites that night, so I called my wife and said, 'I'm going to crash that party', which I did. I went into the alumni reception and saw [former program director at OU] Doc Higgins in the back. I walked up to him, poor guy, and asked if he remembered me. I told him 'I think you made a mistake not admitting me, and let me tell you why...' I did everything wrong in this encounter.



But he told me to come back and try again, and I did, and got in. And then it was my goal to make sure that I could get the internship with the MLB in Vero Beach. Everybody knew what my intention was, but there were a lot of us that were interested in baseball and that was really the prize of that collection of internships. Fortunately, it happened, and one thing led to another, and it started my career.

What are the main ways Ohio helped you?

I wouldn't be where I am today without Ohio University. It was the best decision I made in my life. It was the curriculum, obviously, it was the hands-on practical experience that we got, but even more so, it was the networking. It's

a really special group, a fraternity and sorority of individuals who are like-minded but so diverse. When you look at the experience and success in so many different fields, whether it was collegiate athletics, facilities, administration, coaching, mentoring, philanthropy – there are so many different directions in which my classmates and others went. For me to be able to stay in contact with so many that were on faculty at the time, so many of my classmates and those who came before and after, is invaluable. I will never turn down an Ohio University outreach. If someone reaches out to me and asks for help or for advice or asks for an interview, I'm going to do all I can to help that individual. If he or she is looking for an extension of a contact or for me to reach out and ask if others can help that individual, then I'm going to, because I know they helped me, and it just never stops.

What advice would you give to a student starting out on the course?

Let the system work for you. And it will. Don't focus so much on what you think you want going in; have an open mind and listen to others and learn from others. I look back and – granted I was stubborn, and I knew which direction I wanted to go, and fortunately it's worked out – I've watched so many of my classmates who pivoted and it's because of what they were learning, what they were hearing, their conversations, their classes, those hands-on approaches outside of Ohio that we were able to visit. Have an open mind and learn as much as you can to determine what you want to do, because your course could definitely change once you've been a part of it. ○

Text data, natural language processing, and the future of Ohio University sport leaders

Dr Liz Wanless, assistant director of analytics and assistant professor of sports administration at Ohio University, on how the growth of natural language processing is changing professional sports and sports education.

The value of text data jumps off the page. Customers share their sport product sentiments on social media outlets, review their sport experiences on varied platforms, and respond to sport influencers in the public narrative. I wanted to know, however, how readily sport organizations harnessed natural language processing (NLP) to bring those insights to life. Massive text data volume requires effective analysis tools to alleviate the inefficiencies of considering text data by hand. NLP, the computer capability to recognize and reproduce the human language, offers a series of efficient algorithmic approaches.

My curiosity would lead to academic publication, a new research line, and a new direction for Ohio University sport leaders.

As I started my investigation, signs of NLP adoption in sport were easy to find. Anecdotal trade articles attributed NLP-driven chatbots (automated conversation agents) with streamlining the pre-qualification phase of the sales process (cf Conversica and the Sacramento Kings). I recognized additional uses in conversations with industry clients and collaborators. Sport analytics teams harnessed sentiment analysis to gain widespread insight to how customers felt about various product offerings, teams, and players. I wanted the full NLP adoption story. How, how quickly, and why did professional sport organizations adopt this advancement?

This unknown sent me and my research team on a fascinating data collection process and eventual study entitled "The Diffusion of Natural Language Processing in Professional Sport," a forthcoming publication in *Sport Management Review*. The paper's purpose as stated in the introduction was to "explore NLP adoption in professional sport,



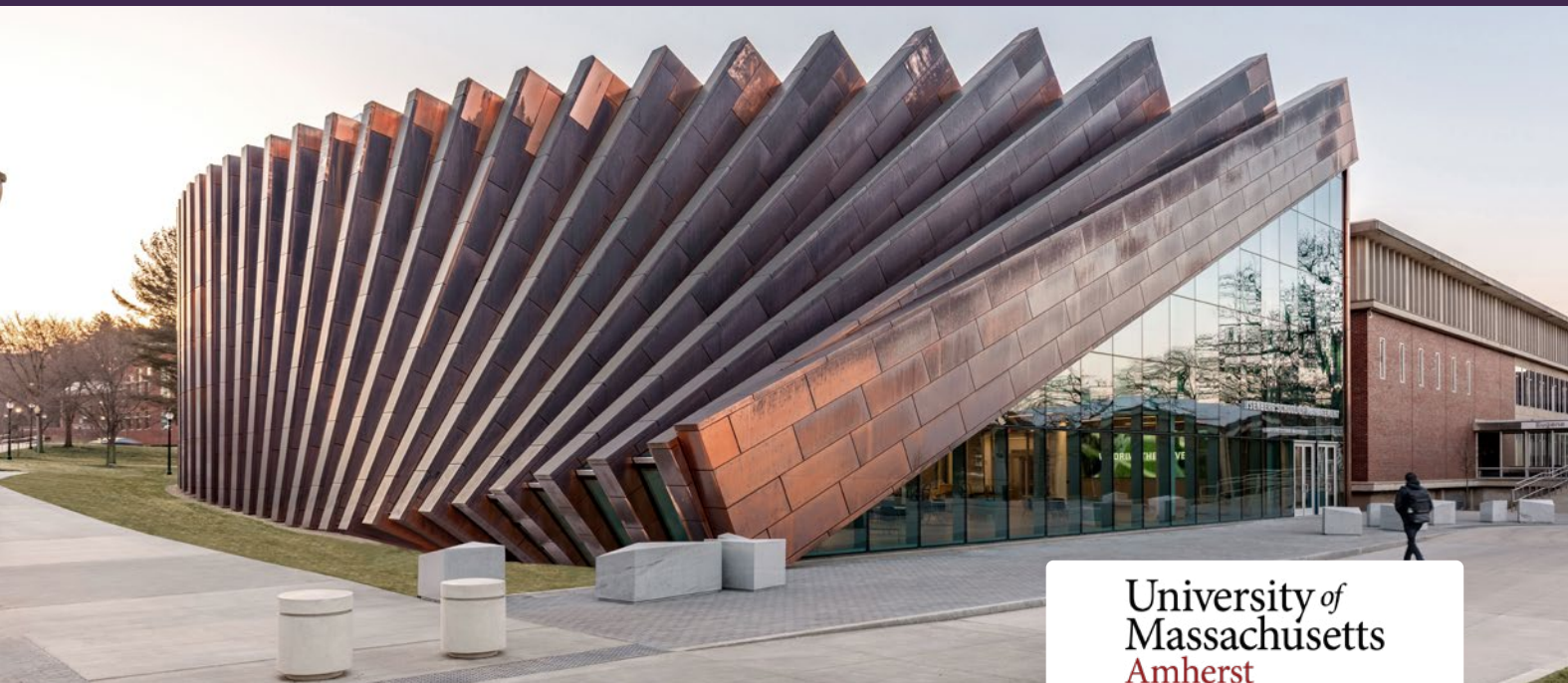
specifically the timing, mechanisms and key influences associated with NLP investment among professional sport teams." The study serves as a platform by which I now apply NLP approaches (topic modeling and beyond) to sport management research methods.

Through both quantitative (discrete Bass model application) and qualitative methods, the study revealed a taxonomy of NLP use cases for the sport industry, the pace of NLP diffusion throughout professional sport, and the influences catalyzing NLP adoption. Potential NLP uses and corresponding advantages are wider than we think and progressing through the sport industry faster than we think. Forty-eight of ninety-one (over 50%) of the participating Big Four teams adopted NLP for sport business use by March 2020; teams declared over 300 distinct NLP uses ranging from chatbots and sentiment analysis to monitoring digital conversations in real-time to automating personalized content for consumers. While many thought analytics personnel would be the dominant influential figures in NLP adoption, they were not. Respondents cited sport organization executives as the make-or-break influencers (in addition to other identified internal and external influences). The success and true utility of new-to-sport tools and applications depends not only on technical expertise, but

also the sport management personnel surrounding the analytics team. Data-driven initiatives meant to advance sport business might fail because of ineffective organizational structures, unaccepting cultures, hazy goals without clarity, over-investing in data cleaning in the short-term, underestimating analytics benefit to revenue generation in the long-run, and unproductive organization-wide facilitation. Acquiring the Lamborghini of data warehouses, for example, is only one step in a challenging process; implementing and norming that system is another huge set of hurdles. It was clear from the results of the study that an intervention for our students not only made sense but could also be a source of competitive advantage for emerging sport leaders.

The way we educate our future sport leaders changed at Ohio University. On the first Tuesday of fall classes, I stood before students in the inaugural delivery of the Sport Data Strategy and Innovation class, a new requirement for the Ohio University undergraduate sports administration program. This course represented a new direction for Ohio University's future sport leaders and a significant recognition that successful sport analytics initiatives depend not only on the technical skill of the analytics team but also on the executive's ability to strategize and organize. In the new course, students adopt the executive's vantage point as they address sport data strategy, as well as making the most effective investments in people, data, systems, and organizational structure to support sport innovation. Students will learn analytics personnel job types, skills, and responsibilities. They will synthesize strategies to promote the type of data-driven and innovative culture that supports data-driven success. ○

University of Massachusetts Amherst's MBA/MS Sport Management and MS Sport Management



University of
 Massachusetts
 Amherst

Celebrating its 50th anniversary in the 2021-2022 academic year, the University of Massachusetts Amherst's MBA/MS Sport Management and MS Sport Management is the second-oldest course on our list and is once again ranked second in 2021, a position it has occupied for the last two years since coming out on top in 2019. Based in the university's Isenberg School of Management, the dual degree program pairs the full-time MBA with an MS in Sport Management and offers an experiential-based curriculum to give students a complete view of the sport industry.

It is also the recipient of our Professors' Choice award for the third year in a row, a sign of its standing in the sport education sector and the esteem with which fellow academicians view the course, its academic rigor, and the quality of its full-time faculty. UMass narrowly missed out on receiving the maximum score for its alumni network and for industry networking, and posted the joint-highest score in the top ten for its quality of teaching.

Steve McKelvey, the graduate

program director for the past 13 years, will step down at the start of the new academic term, to be replaced by **Will Norton**, who is currently a faculty lecturer and director of UMass' McCormack Center for Sport Research & Education. *SportBusiness* spoke to Steve and Will about life as a student on the course.

How many applicants do you look at each year?

SM: We receive on average about 125 applications. It may not sound like a lot, but we're only accepting about 25-30 students, and we have a very high matriculation rate, so we'll end up with about 23 new faces each year. It's certainly an aspirational programme.

What would you be looking for to get an applicant into that final 30?

SM: Real world work experience is one of the first components we'll look at, frankly, as much as or more so than a standardised test score or GPA. It can be work within the sport industry, or not: a lot of the applicants we get are not currently working in the sport industry, but

they have a sport background and business experience. We've also accepted applicants who have no sport-related experience or playing background but who have a strong business experience and who are looking to change careers and pivot into the sport industry.

In terms of the personal statement, it's very important to see how the applicant connects the dots from studying at UMass to what they want to do as a career. We're interested in people who can articulate a clear path and can evidence some interest in being a leader, and having a senior role in industry. Is it realistic? Do we think that we can help that person get there? How easily will this person be placeable in industry? These are all questions we're asking ourselves as we evaluate an applicant.

WN: As one of the only sports programmes that's based in a business school, if you're applying to our dual degree programme and you want to do the accelerated MBA, there's a quantitative lens to consider. You're going to take accelerated MBA courses that are not necessarily sports-centric.

So in that case, we look for the industry experience and also a little bit of quantitative rigor in their application, either from undergrad or from their job, that lends itself to being able to hack it in those courses. If you're applying just to the MS, you will still take sport finance, economics, and most likely analytics, but it's somewhat of a different profile candidate compared to the dual degree.

What is the background of an average intake?

SM: So out of the 35 grad students, typically around 30 per cent will be international students, but it's very broad international students: for example, there may be two from India, two from China, two from UK, two from Canada, one from South America, and one from Australia. That's how we prefer it, and that's what our numbers reflect. And then geographically in the US, it's pretty well diversified. The least percentage is going to be from the West Coast, but up and down the East Coast, we're very strong, out into the Midwest. It's not just Massachusetts and Connecticut by any means.

What can you tell us about the faculty?

SM: We have 12 full-time faculty members.. We don't have a lot of adjuncts, we may have one a year. We have several of the top published academics in the space of sport marketing, consumer behavior, and fan networks; these full-time faculty are publishing in premiere, A-list sport management journals and this research drives the quality of our educational offering. We have Dr Matt Katz, Dr Liz Delia and Dr Janet Fink working in that area. We're very strong in diversity and inclusion, and leadership, between Dr Nefertiti Walker and Dr Nicole Melton. Dr Melton's recently formed LIDS (Laboratory of Inclusion and Diversity in Sport) has added to this strength. And then the third area would probably be sport law. We've historically been very good there and we have a strong reputation in the legal aspects of sport.

WN: I think it's important to note that Steve is a lawyer and he teaches sport law. We have an economist who teach sport economics; we had a data science professional teaching our data analytics class. It's all applied,

but there are subject matter experts in the room from a larger industry standpoint, which gives a valuable, macro view to subjects. Almost half the faculty have lived and breathed in the industry and have not just gone through a PhD straight into a teaching role. I think that that's a nice hybrid mix that we offer. Students find that they get the best of the theory and research and then also a lot of the applied, experiential elements of the programme.

Is that what you'd identify as the standout element of studying sport management at UMass?

SM: Yes, historically it's been our experiential learning. It's building in the real-world projects with real-world companies. All of these involve very in-depth research, presentations, strategic thinking for clients. Some people think experience learning is having guest speakers – we do that all the time – but I'm talking about assignments that simulate full-time industry work. These demand that our students roll up their sleeves, work with a real client, and build mature student-client relationships.



McKelvey (first row, second from right) and Norton (second row, third from left) with the rest of the McCormack Center sports faculty



WN: Integrating with the business school, and a having a link directly into a management curriculum, it's much different than being in a school of public health, or a school of physical education or professional studies. And this being our 50th year, the intimate connection into industry with over 3,000 alums we have working in industry, I think those are differentiators that students see as a USP when they're in the programme, because they feel that connection and access and exposure.

I was recently talking to some alums and they said one of the things they appreciated about our curriculum was that they left the programme understanding some of the critical socio-historical foundations of how the sport industry has been built, marketed, and consumed. That might not help you in a pitch to a client, or it might not help you at the Super Bowl if you're activating for Pepsi, but it builds a well-rounded mindset for the students and that helps them become leaders.

How important is the alumni network, and how do you continue to support students after graduation?

WN: It's everything to me. It's what makes the UMass experience truly special. It's such a caring community of people who are really thoughtful about how they can help. If they

see evolutions in the industry that we're six months removed from in the classroom in Amherst, they will volunteer that insight and say 'this is coming, and this is what students should or could be aware of that might help set them apart.' This allows us visibility to what's occurring upstream in the industry, and gives our students an edge.

We've got alums who'll come to us and say 'we've got five jobs coming and we'd love to take a look at the best and brightest of the programme today', and that's the type of feeder system I think that shows the commitment to the network. And when students get that rope given to them and when they enter industry, they are chomping at the bit to give

back in the same way that a mentor gave back to them.

SM: There's a tremendous sense of pride in being a UMass sport management graduate, so there's a really strong sense of wanting to give back. I routinely get alumni who send me job postings. We have a very active alumni LinkedIn group with around 1,500 members, and we regularly post jobs there that alumni have sent us. To give you an example, in May, we posted 27 jobs, at all levels. We have alums that are constantly sending us job postings, looking to hire our students. And so I think that that kind of speaks to how highly people who have been through the programme think of the programme. ○



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Heidi Pellerano, chief commercial officer at Concacaf

Heidi Pellerano took UMass' MS in Sport Management in 1997-98, and afterwards joined the WNBA as coordinator of communications and eventually player personnel. Across a 20-year career in sport since graduating, Heidi also worked at Russell Athletic, OnSport and Wasserman before being appointed chief commercial officer at Concacaf, the governing body for soccer in North America, in 2019.

When did you decide that you wanted to study sport management?

I was a career switcher. I was an electrical engineer, but in 1997 I started to have second thoughts about my career pathways in engineering and began to explore other options. The one thing I was always passionate about was sports. I started to figure out whether there were opportunities for me to take my skills into a different industry that I was more passionate about. That's how I was introduced to these sports management programmes. I felt that was a great opportunity because it meant that people would know I was serious, that if you're making that commitment not only in time, but financially, to get that level of education, then that would signal to the world that I was not just a bored engineer who loves sports, but that I was really committed to finding a long-term career in the industry.

Why did you choose UMass?

When I visited UMass and when I went through my interview, there was something about the support system that they offered. I think they 'got' me. It was the first time I felt it wasn't crazy for an engineer to want to switch to a career in sports, because prior to that everywhere else I had been looked at me like I had two heads. The things I was told through that process were scary and discouraging, but UMass was the first time I actually felt they got it – they actually saw that I could add value to the industry and wanted me. After I finished my interview, I was walking out and one of the professors approached me and said, 'you're fantastic. You're the type of person we need in our programme, that diversity of thought, that different



perspective, so we want you to come here. And we'll go ahead and help you even economically to make sure that you choose us if you become my teaching assistant.' To me that meant the world, because again it finally validated what I was thinking and feeling.

What the main ways it prepared you for your career in sports?

When you don't work in this industry, what you don't understand is that even though this industry is big, it's also very small. When you're on the outside looking in, it's really hard to find a way in. UMass not only validated me but gave me the resources and tools to navigate the industry. A lot of my rationale for going to the school was because I knew I would have to do an internship, so I would get a first role in the industry and get more experience that will prove that I deserve to be in the industry. What I was surprised by is how much support they gave us to find that internship. It wasn't like, 'okay, good luck to you.' There was support to get the internship and a lot of advice throughout the process. That was the real difference maker, to be able to have that network of support within the programme and after the programme. And I have stayed part of the UMass family. I do

a lot of mentorships because I felt that when I was going through it. It's about paying it forward. I don't care how busy I am, I don't care if I'm drowning, I will always make time, because somebody made time for me.

What advice would you offer to someone who's starting the course this year?

The first thing is that networking is really important. Again, it's a big industry but it's really small. Everybody's connected – it's not the Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon, it's the Three Degrees of the Sport Industry. It's crazy how you say something and within two names, you're already connected to another person.

I would also advise people to be open to possibilities. This is an industry that it's evolving so fast. I remember when I started, having an MBA was frowned upon a little bit. Now, with the emergence of data and insights in everything, suddenly, having that kind of background is taken a lot more seriously. Then you have everything that's going on with the digital revolution. So a lot of times people come in and say, 'I'll never do a ticketing job'... Why not? You'd be amazed at what you can learn in terms of hustle and creativity if you have a ticketing job. So that's the part that I always tell people: you need to look at your career in totality. If you look up CEOs in most corporations, what has made them CEOs is that they probably worked in most departments and in different organisations; they've been in sales, they've been in marketing, they've been in operations, etc. Those are the people that make it to the top. You might not aspire to be a CEO, but the more you touch across different organisations and different roles, the better you will be at your job. ○

The conflict and cash of rivalries

Dr B. David Tyler, co-founder of the Know Rivalry Project at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and Northern Kentucky University, explains how the project aims to measure and dissect the risks and revenue of sporting rivalry.

Yankees suck! Yankees suck! Yankees suck!" If you have ever attended a Major League Baseball game at Fenway Park in Boston, you have probably heard this chant from Boston Red Sox fans, even when the opponent is not the New York Yankees. Why do some opponents produce such fan fervour, while others are practically ignored? Answering this question is important because the clubs, leagues and brands that leverage rivalry effectively see returns in increased ticket sales, broadcast viewership and brand affinity. For example, Heineken has served as the title sponsor of Rivalry Week in Major League Soccer since 2015. When first introduced, MLS fans questioned the authenticity of some of the 'rivalries' (or derbies) included in Heineken Rivalry Week. The league astutely adjusted the programming and presentation and has since maximized Rivalry Week's exposure and fan acceptance.

Based on over 30,000 sports fan surveys, research from the Know Rivalry Project is helping illuminate a path toward responsible and strategic resolution of this dilemma. The Project emphasizes faculty-student-professional collaboration to measure sport fan feelings and behaviours toward their favourite team's opponents. The Project's website, KnowRivalry.com, displays fan survey results for teams across the United States, Canada and India, and the survey data collection now includes 50 sport leagues across six continents.

As a foundation, three basic tenets of rivalry emerge from the research – rivalry is nonexclusive, continuous in scale, and bidirectional.

1. Nonexclusive: Fans perceive multiple rivals, typically three or four
2. Continuous in scale: Rivalry intensity varies among rivals



3. Bidirectional: Opposing fans rarely share equivalent perceptions of the rivalry

These tenets are illustrated by the Project's compilation of the Top 10 most intense and unbalanced rivalries in each studied league, where fans of each club are given 100 rivalry points to allocate across their favourite team's opponents. The most intense rivalries are measured by aggregating the average points assigned by each team's fans to the opponent within a rivalry dyad. The most unbalanced rivalries are indicated by the disparity between rivalry points within a dyad, where one team's fans are focused on a particular opponent whose fans do not reciprocate the perception of rivalry. To address the question of why certain opponents rise to the level of rival, while others fail to attract such focused attention from fans, consider three categories of ingredients that commonly formulate fans' perception of rivalry: the conflict conditions, strong similarities, and deep differences associated with two particular clubs.

Each category contains several elements of rivalry:

Conflict Conditions

- Consistency: Frequent or recurring competition between the opponents
- Conspicuous Moments: Specific incidents – positive or negative – between competitors
- Conspicuous Characters: Extraordinary individuals (performers, personalities, legacies)

- Competitiveness: Comparable success (recent/historic) or uncertainty of outcome

Strong Similarities

- Spatial Proximity: Competitors are located close to each other
- Synonymous values/appearance: Shared values/appearance between opponents or supporters
- Shared Supply Pool: Competition for labour talent and resources

Deep Differences

- Dominance: One competitor aspires to overcome the historical success or dominance of the other
- Disparate values/appearance: Conflicting values/appearance between opponents or supporters
- Discrimination by authority: Perceived preferential treatment by competition regulators

By considering how these ingredients mix within an existing rivalry or new match-up of opponents, sports marketers and administrators can compose strategic promotional campaigns that achieve dual organisational goals:

1. Maintain authenticity with fans
2. Spark a rivalry fire that does not denigrate opponents

Smart rivalry strategy starts by accurately measuring your target audience's perceptions of their favourite club and its opponents. While in some cases the top rival is apparent, the ingredients that mix to fuel the rivalry are often dynamic and less transparent. Furthermore, the intensity and salient elements of secondary and tertiary rivalries can be more challenging to accurately assess, but the knowledge is just as vital to marketing authenticity. The most intense rivalries in sport often involve the most valuable franchises. Through discerning the antecedents and consequences of rivalry, organisations and scholars can better understand that connection and responsibly foster exciting rivalries. Stay tuned as the Know Rivalry Project continues. ○

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Juliana Correa, Senior Brand Manager at FIFA and FIFA Master Alumna

ADVERTISING FEATURE

The Brazilian-Portuguese Juliana Correa trailed a diverse and rich path until getting to FIFA, where she currently works as Senior Brand Manager. Before working in sports, she studied Business and Hotel Management but soon realised that the hotel industry wasn't for her. She then started working in banking and specialised in marketing, through a masters' degree, and after four years, decided to change industries again. That's when she enrolled in the 8th edition of FIFA Master (2007-08). "That was a pivotal moment in my career", Juliana says. "My objective was not only to enter the sport industry, but also work on a global level", she explains.

After graduation, she leveraged on her previous marketing experience, land a job with Adidas, at their headquarters, in Germany, which in turn, opened doors for her at AIBA, the International Boxing Federation, and FIBA, the International Basketball Federation. "During the seven years I have spent at FIBA, I have solidified my career in sports, being able to experience different areas in marketing, such as licensing, sponsorship rights and brand management", she says.

Since joining FIFA, in 2017, Juliana has been responsible for the FIFA Events brands, in special the FIFA World Cup. "This entails the development of each tournament brand, from strategic positioning and visual identity development to the brand implementation across different touchpoints (promotional activities, event dressing, trophy tours, etc.)", she clarifies. Read more of the interview with Juliana Correa:

What is the thing that you love about your job?
Delivering sports events is really something special. Seeing the event coming to life, after years of preparations, and how this impacts different stakeholders (from players to fans) and brings the team together is a really unique experience. I also like to work in a very international environment, dealing with different cultures, which makes each project very unique.

What would you say was the biggest achievement of your career so far?
That is a difficult one. I believe every single event I had the chance to be part of was a great achievement. Highlights would be the FIBA Basketball World Cup Spain 2014, the FIFA World Cup Russia 2018 and in special the FIFA Women's World Cup France 2019, which was definitely a big game changer for

not only women's football, but for women's sports.

Sport is viewed as a men-driven industry. What are the particular challenges of being a woman working in sport? Is the environment for women improving?

It is a very male driving environment and women working on this industry definitely need to be resilient and ready to work harder in order to have the same recognition as men. Unfortunately, a lot of sexist behaviours and comments are widely accepted as normal. There are efforts to change but this is a long road to go. Until we have women in very high positions, not only on the administration side, but on the political bodies, such Executive Committees and Councils, the women point of view will hardly be perceived.

How important was the FIFA Master for your career?

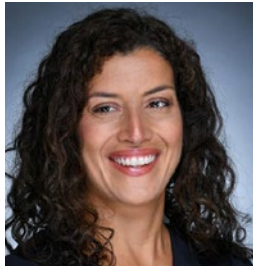
The FIFA Master was fundamental for my career in sports. I believe I could still have made my transition to sports in a different way, but I feel it would have been a much longer journey to what I have achieved so far.

Are you still in touch with classmates or other alumni? How important is that network for you?

Yes, I'm still in contact with many of my classmates and some of my closest friends currently come from the alumni network. Going through the course is a unique experience and only those who have done it, can understand it. It's amazing how alumni create an instant bond and predisposition to help fellow alumni. The network is definitely the strongest asset of the course, especially after you've done it.

What advice would you give to the current (or future) students of the FIFA Master?

Don't focus only on the immediate opportunities, but think where they can lead you in the future. Use the network that the course provides wisely. Focus to actually get to know who the fellow alumni are and not simply what they do.



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The University of South Florida began offering its Vinik Sport & Entertainment Management Program in 2012 and is celebrating its 10th intake in the 2021–22 academic year. The course has enjoyed a rapid ascent up our rankings, finishing fourth in 2018 and 2019 and finally breaking into the top three this year.

The University of South Florida began offering its Vinik Sport & Entertainment Management Program in 2012, and is celebrating its 10th intake in the 2021–22 academic year. The course has enjoyed a rapid ascent up our rankings, finishing in fourth place in 2018 and 2019 before breaking the top three this year.

Established by and named after the Vinik family, owners of the back-to-back NHL Stanley Cup champions the Tampa Bay Lightning, USF offers the programme as a dual-award MBA/MS, giving its students a rounded approach to studying the business of sport, as well as benefiting from the school's location, with the NFL's Buccaneers and the MLB's Rays also based in the city. Alumni surveys showed the school's strengths in employment after six months and post-graduation job support, where it posted the second-highest scores in

the top 40.

Michelle Harrolle, who took over as director of the Vinik Sport & Entertainment Management Program in 2019, talks *SportBusiness* through the application process and the strengths of the programme.

How many applications do you usually receive, and how many of them are accepted? Has this been affected by the pandemic?

This past year was an increase. During both Covid years, we've had 100–120 applicants. We accept 35 to 40 of those, and then we end up with a class of about 32.

Applications went up a little bit for us, year over year, but we're a younger programme, so we're still brand recognition is still growing. The age of the program really helps in terms of every year incremental increases in applications.

What do you like to see in applications?

We take a very holistic approach when reviewing applications. We also interview every student, and it's not so much that there's specific criteria we're looking for. We're more looking at, are we going to be able to help you be successful in whatever career path

you want to go down? If you want to be in media, broadcasting, we're not a great fit for you. If you want to be a general manager, we're not a good fit for you. We need to be sure people are coming here for the right reasons and that we can help achieve their goals.

We're also looking for diversity in terms of experiences, because we don't want everyone interested in sales, we don't want everyone interested in analytics, and we don't want everyone interested in marketing. Likewise, in terms of geography: we don't want everyone from Florida, we don't want everyone from Montana. We want a diverse group, in terms of their backgrounds, experiences, interests, and what they bring to the VSEM Family

And then, most importantly, are you a good person? Do you think of others? That's become really important to us over the past year. So we've changed our interview questions this past year, and the two that we added were: Since the pandemic was declared, what have you learned about yourself? And how have you used these lessons to serve others? Those individuals who lived through a pandemic and lived through the social injustice and racial injustice that we've had specifically

in the United States, have they improved themselves? The students who cannot answer that are not a great fit for us.

Do you take steps to ensure that diversity and advertise the course to people from minority ethnic or underprivileged backgrounds?

We do, intentionally. For example, we recruit at universities that are historically black colleges and universities. In the past, we have taken recruiting trips with our African-American alumni to help us recruit from their undergraduate alma mater. Additionally, when you look at our website, you can see what our students look like, you can see the surface-level diversity within the cohort or across the cohorts, and you can read about the deeper-level diversity weaved throughout website, which is extremely important for students to not only see someone who looks like them, but be reminded that they belong in our programme. We've had students come to us and say, 'we looked at your cohort to see if we would fit in.'

To reach prospective students, we do virtual recruitment, particularly engaging people who may not be able to afford to travel to us – which is another component; our cohort is diverse in terms of socio-economic status as well.

What was most interesting for me, in my second year as the director, I had two women students in interviews who said they applied to USF because there was a female director. I think that shows how diversity can become a virtuous circle.

What is the size and make-up of the faculty on the Vinik Program?

We have four full-time faculty – two women, two men – and we have four adjuncts who are sports-specific, who teach classes like social media and law. And then we have the general MBA faculty because our students take four classes with the MBA faculty who are from the university's college of business.

What's really cool is all of our faculty do research in different areas and are able to bring their research and practice to the classroom. So Dr Wells focuses on organisational behaviour and gender equity in

sports. Dr Mondello researches finance and analytics. Dr Greenhalgh studies and teaches sponsorship. I do consumer behaviour and fandom, and then we all collaborate on projects. That's really exciting for us because that covers most of business. It's great for our students, as well. When Dr Wells teaches her organizational behaviour class, she's really bringing her own research perspective along with the research of others. Dr Mondello, when he teaches finance analytics, he has that background. Our law professor is a lawyer. Overall, the majority of our faculty either are practitioners or have been at some point in their career, which is an added value for our students.



Is there a particular area where you think the programme is unique?

I think for us it's about opportunities. I would say 95 per cent of our classes are hands-on experiential-based learning. In our marketing class, you are working with the NFL's San Francisco 49ers, you are working with United Soccer League, you are creating your proposal. Pre-Covid, our students worked with alum in the UK on a Global project for Harlequins. Every class touches a corporate partner who we're working with to help our content, help to develop our curriculum so that it's very hands-on. And it's across the board, all of our classes are that way.

Another thing is opportunity in the Tampa Bay area, to use Tampa as our classroom. You have an opportunity to work with the Lightning – we have several alumni and one recent grad in the parade for the back-to-back Stanley Cup winners, the alumna specifically worked with the Lightning this past year while getting

her Master's and then she was offered a full-time job there. That is very unique to Tampa Bay; there's just so many opportunities to work in sports. We have a student who is working with Feld Entertainment [based in nearby Ellenton] who worked there while going to school. We have a student working with United Soccer League [headquartered in Tampa]. We have student working for the NBA G-League. We even have several students working for the Super Bowl champions.

Where do your graduates usually go on to work?

The current students are getting jobs and they're getting jobs everywhere. What's nice is probably 25 per cent are getting remote work. They're working with companies like SponsorUnited and they can work remotely, or they're doing data analytics and can work remotely.

There's also students who are getting jobs at teams – the Tampa Bay Lightning took one on, another just got a job at the 76ers. But it's all across the US. We have students just this year who have taken jobs in Seattle, New York City, Charlotte, Washington DC. We do have people that want to stay in Tampa Bay, and you would expect that, but it's a low percentage, and we encourage them to go out and work across the US and internationally because that's better for us, and it is an opportunity for them to grow.

What kind of support do you offer to students after they've left, and what is the alumni network like?

I have every single alumni's phone number on my cell. I can text every single one of them and say, 'how are you doing today', and they will respond back. That relationship is instrumental, not only with the programme and the faculty, but with each other. This past year, all of our incoming first-year students were given alumni mentors.

And we have alumni reaching out when they're looking for job placements. They are coming to us to see if we have anyone available, and usually what's so sad is I have to say, 'I'm sorry, they're all placed! You're too late, you gotta speak to me in January, February.' ◉

Philicia Douglas, director of sales at the Birmingham Squadron

Philicia Douglas is an alum of the University of South Florida's Vinik Sport & Entertainment Management Program, which she graduated in 2015. She joined the Miami Dolphins as an intern that year, later becoming manager of inside sales for the New Orleans Saints and New Orleans Pelicans. In 2021, she was appointed as director of sales for the Birmingham Squadron, the Pelicans' G-League Affiliate team, which is set to launch next year.



Why did you choose a postgraduate degree in sports management?

I wanted to be a journalist, so I went to school for journalism and then when I came out of school with no job, I was completely confused on what I wanted to do. I'm from Orlando, so I went to Universal Studios and did a job engraving leather bracelets after college. And I was just like, 'this sucks. I cannot believe this is what I'm doing right now, after college, I gotta do more with my life'. Being from Orlando, Tampa is not that far, and I saw an ad for the USF programme, and I thought, 'this could be it'. So I took a day off of work and I drove over there. I was not a good student in school – I was okay, but I wasn't the stellar student where they would look at my application and go 'oh my God!' But I am good in person, so I drove there, walked into the office and told them I was interested in the programme, and that was how it started. Had I not driven over there and talked to them in person, I don't know if I would have got in, because of my scores. But they gave me a chance and I promised then that if they gave me a chance, I wouldn't let them down.

USF has said it tries to create a

space for diversity and helping people of colour and women into a sport industry that is still largely dominated by white men. Did you feel that support?

They not only supported it, they emphasised it. They're advocates for it. [Vinik Program director] Dr Harrolle don't play no games. I remember one day I walked in and I said, 'hey, did you see that girl on the news?' And she was like, 'excuse me, she's a woman. You need to make sure that if you're gonna say "woman" it's "woman", "man" it's "man"'. They emphasise it; they want to make sure that there's equality and inclusivity. Even in their curriculum, they're very intentional about what they're teaching. They pump up the guys, too, it's like: 'you need to help the gals, you all need to encourage them. If you're in a boardroom and you see all white males in that boardroom and no females, you should look around and be like, what's going on?'

What was it about the course at USF that stood out to you?

The fact that you get an MBA and a Master's in sport entertainment management – that was huge, that I would receive two qualifications where other schools I was looking at were offering them as separate courses. And the fact that they place you in organisation, they connect you with an organisation and give you that foot up into your first connections and roles in the industry. The way they emphasised and advertised all this up front was very well done, so I knew exactly what to expect and what I was going to gain from going to USF.

How did you time there set you up for your current role?

I wouldn't be here without that programme, 110 per cent fact, I know that. The networking opportunities it's given me are crazy. [Former programme director] Dr Sutton and Dr Harrolle placed me with the Miami Dolphins [for an internship], but not only that, I had so many other networking opportunities with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Tampa Bay Lightning, and I still talk to the people from the Lightning and Bucs to this day. Dr Sutton connected me with Deno Anagnost, the vice-president of ticket sales with the Bucs, and he's the one who first said to me that I should try sales.

I think one of the issues in our industry is knowledge. A lot of people just don't know what they don't know. And I didn't know about any of the ways you could be involved in sports, I thought the only way to be in sports was either to play it professionally or to be a journalist. I had no idea about all the other avenues of sports, I didn't even know about ticket sales at all. I learned that through the course. I didn't know about partnerships. I didn't know about marketing. They exposed me to all those parts of the business.

What advice would you offer to a new student starting at USF this year?

Be open. I was actually very closed off to doing sales. I said 'no, I'm not doing that, I don't want to do it' – because I didn't know what sales was! I thought that it was a person in the box office selling tickets. But then when I was open and I sat down with Deno and I listened to what sales really is, I realised this not what I thought it would be at all. So just be open, keep your options open and be prepared to learn about things you don't know you didn't know. ○

Universities are rising to the challenge of educating first generation of esports leaders

Michelle Harrolle, director of the University of South Florida's Vinik Sport & Entertainment Management programme, writes that universities have a chance to get in on the ground floor by offering cutting-edge education to the esports leaders of the future.

Every major professional sports league has a breakout moment. With the Fifa World Cup, perhaps it was the Brazil v Italy World Cup final match at USA 94? Or the Italy v Brazil – 1982 match? For the NBA, might this have been with expansion into China in the 1970s? Wimbledon? Maybe it was Arthur Ashe upsetting Jimmy Connors in 1975.

Now, the Fifa World Cup is one of the largest sporting events in the world, NBA is incredibly popular across the globe, and Wimbledon is one of the most iconic sporting competitions on the planet. What major event will shift the sport industry again?

We are now seeing another evolution of sports, and it is likely to be the next 'Big League', in real time: the emergence of esports, not just as a trend among young people around the world, but as a multi-billion-dollar business that could globally eclipse all other sports within a decade or two.

Esports grew as much as 15 per cent in 2020 while the world was struggling through a pandemic. Professional gamers now average an annual income of \$500,000. Nearly eight of every ten esports viewers are under 35, so the future looks bright for leagues, competitions, and viewership – all of which promise lucrative opportunities for not just the players, but also for managers, event coordinators, accountants, marketers and other front-office personnel, who are just beginning to see the potential of this enormous movement.

To be successful, esports needs more than just talented gamers. It needs determined, creative and data-driven business professionals to guide them toward success. Universities around the world, including the University of South Florida, are

beginning to offer programs via which students learn the complexities of the esports business to ultimately thrive in this new industry.

The rapid growth of esports offers universities a chance to get in on the ground floor by offering cutting-edge education, so students can seamlessly enter organizations ready for success.

To thrive within the esports landscape, organizations must be authentic. Esports and gaming fans can spot a fake a mile away, and brands wanting to get into the space need savvy business executives to succeed. Thus, we must educate the sport and entertainment industry, ranging from the traditional sport vice-presidents, chief executives and chief revenue officers, all the way down to the entry-level college graduates.

We at the USF's Vinik Sport & Entertainment Management (VSEM) Program have embraced this growing industry segment and staged two esports summits – one in-person and one virtual – to business professionals and students who want to get into the field. And in 2019, we hosted the first esports activation within a PGA Tour, the Valspar Championship. Uniquely, this activation was 100 per cent student-led and executed.

As with any new market segment, the opportunity for research is endless. Our VSEM faculty are beginning to examine esports through understanding the negative environment of gaming for women gamers. Not surprisingly, we found that the environment is extremely toxic and not improving as quickly as it should. Next, we are looking to understand the hiring practices of the esports industry and job market comparison between traditional sports and esports, to assist our students with job placement within



this industry segment.

While hands-on experiences are vital to a student's education, the curriculum surrounding that knowledge must be grounded in theory and practice. As such, we are building courses that offer an understanding of the business of esports while providing experiential learning. This year our students are producing an esports tournament and we are hosting one of the first university esports jobs fairs.

And this summer we hosted the first ever Summer Virtual Esports Camp for both gamers and their parents. Within most industries, parents possess vastly more knowledge than their children. However, in esports and gaming, the gamers, their children, hold all the knowledge and most parents are clueless as to the opportunities.

We, like many other business colleges around the nation and world, are poised to unleash savvy managers and executives into the esports landscape, ready to innovate and create paths that will result in permanence within this growing entertainment and sporting segment. If you are not on board now and learning as much as you can about the esports industry, we suggest you run as fast as you can to catch up to this speeding train. ○

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The Fifa Master celebrates 20 years of success



Students from the 21st edition of the FIFA Master during a visit to Fifa headquarters in June 2021



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The Fifa Master, which took its first cohort in the year 2000, is operated by the International Center for Sport Studies (CIES) in Switzerland, but is run as a pan-European course, with candidates studying at De Montfort University in Leicester, SDA Bocconi School of Management in Milan and the University of Neuchâtel in Switzerland during their year on the programme. Graduates receive a diploma jointly awarded by all three institutions.

This year, it has once again come out as the top European sports management course in our rankings, as it has in nine of the 10 editions of this list to date. It is also one of only three courses to top the rankings, which it also achieved in 2014. Its 2018 graduating class ranked the course highly for both its alumni network and industry networking opportunities, while fellow course leaders gave the Fifa Master the third-highest score available, demonstrating the reputation it has built for itself in its first 20 years.

Denis Oswald, director of CIES,

speaks to *SportBusiness* about the application process, studying on the Fifa Master, and post-graduation life.

How many applications do you receive each year?

Over the last ten years, it has varied, but we regularly get anywhere from 150 to 220 completed applications, and a total of around 600 candidates creating application profiles.

How many of those applications are successful? What's an average class intake at your university?

In order to maintain the highest level of education, we want to preserve the interaction with the teaching staff and also among the students themselves. So while we interview around 65-75 candidates each year who we believe have the potential to succeed, we can only offer a maximum of 32 places. It is encouraging to see many candidates reapply after an initial application or even interview and be offered a place in a future edition. This shows us that more and more candidates

are preparing their applications early on – we even had one woman recently who had identified the Fifa Master as her future while still in high school and prepared everything for years to apply to us.

How have applications been affected by Covid?

Surprisingly, and thankfully, they haven't. It did seem logical to expect a drop, so we were bracing ourselves for one. Intriguingly, while the number of overall application profiles decreased, we actually had a higher number of submitted applications for 2021-22 than for 2020-21 and the highest ever number of user profiles created. We have, however, seen Covid continue the trend in increased scholarship requests.

What do you look for in applicants? Is it all around academic achievement or do you have other criteria?

Without question we look for candidates with strong academics. Given that we are focused on sport at the global level, we expect our

students to be open-minded and curious as well as intellectually sharp and internationally-oriented. We want well-rounded applicants who are hungry to learn and ask questions. Obviously, prior work in sport will help students draw on their experience during the learning journey. Being a team player is also essential, since much of the year is dedicated to group work.

What is the background of your students?

Our students literally come from all four corners of the world and we have students with diverse academic backgrounds – interdisciplinary learning is at the core of our programme – and all sports from fencing and biathlon to football and basketball. The age range is consistently between 25-32 years old, with regularly a few younger students who have demonstrated maturity, as well as a handful of more experienced individuals looking to go back to school for a year.

What kind of grants or stipends are available to students?

We have a number of scholarships available each year, a small number of which are restricted to certain geographical areas. We generally divide our scholarships to help as many students as possible. We are constantly trying to find more support, but for 2021-22 we are excited that more than half our students will be receiving some form of financial aid.

What is the size of your faculty?

Our faculty is spread across three universities and currently includes 24 full-time academic staff and, last year, we invited 36 guest lecturers from other universities (one-third of whom were women). We have two to three dedicated scientific directors for each of our three taught modules. Throughout the year we also invite many guest industry speakers to the classroom or meet them on field visits to sports organisations. We had 117 last year. Covid has actually helped us broaden our reach, with more round tables or speakers from across the world. For example, last spring we had a virtual visit to CAF in Cairo, and their top staff spent a day

online with the class sharing their experience about African football.

Tell us about some of the areas of expertise you have on your faculty. Where do you stand out in terms of teaching strength?

At each of our universities, our staff have traditionally been leaders in their fields in the humanities, management, and law. Whether it is the study of Olympic history or football diplomacy at De Montfort, leadership and managerial culture through SDA Bocconi's Sport Knowledge Center, or anti-doping and arbitration at the University of Neuchâtel, our staff are at the forefront of both theory and practice.

Is there a particular USP for your institution? Do you have a focus on an area you don't see many others working in across the sector?

We have an international focus and we place value on interdisciplinary learning. From our student body to the content of the classes, our programme has always been centred on understanding sport as an international phenomenon. We know other programmes have international partnerships or visits abroad, but spending one year studying at three completely different universities while moving through three different countries with a truly global cohort of students is pretty unique.

Where do your graduates usually go on to work?

In recent years, a number of have taken jobs in the International Federation hub in Switzerland, with nearly 50 working at Fifa. Many others choose to work across the

globe for a few years and then return to their home country to work in sport there.

What about in terms of sector?

Most of our graduates work in international or national sporting organisations as well as clubs, teams, and agencies. In particular, we have a high number working in the international federation and global event sector. We also have a growing number of entrepreneurs as well who have started a host of businesses in various sectors of the sports industry.

How do you support your alumni? How strong is your alumni network?

We prefer to speak about our Fifa Master alumni as a "community" rather than just network. A network is simply a set of links, whereas a community is a living, breathing entity. The CIES communications staff work closely with the Fifa Master alumni, and we have vibrant communication channels like regional WhatsApp/messaging groups or subgroups for specific interests, such as a dedicated sports law group or even a budding group for alumni in academia or doing sports-related PhDs. The community gathers most often around sports events – we had our last major one pre-Covid at the Women's World Cup in France – to discuss alumni association matters, share updates or job openings, create new opportunities, and also just kindle old friendships. CIES and the universities remain close to the alumni association which has a seat on the course's executive board and many alumni are involved in university activities giving back to the course. ○

Jair Bertoni, director of member associations for the Americas at Fifa

Jair Bertoni completed the Fifa Master in 2005 and afterwards went on to work for the European Professional Football Leagues for almost a decade. He left that role to found his own company, 4Goal Consulting, and in 2016, joined Fifa as director of member associations for the Americas.

Why did you take a postgraduate degree in sports management?

I'm an Argentinean national and was in Argentina working in sport marketing. At that time, back in 2003, I was eager to learn more in a professional environment about the development of sport, because the industry in Argentina was pretty new in terms of the professionalisation of the business of sport. I thought that a Master in sports management was a great opportunity to learn from an environment that would provide me with the necessary knowledge to continue growing in my career. I came across the Fifa Master and decided to give it a shot; it seemed like a great development in terms of sport, especially as a Master promoted by Fifa. As an Argentinean, coming from such a strong footballing country, Fifa is like a dream employer, so that connection was important. And I was attracted to the idea of learning more from around the globe, with it being an international Master, and I really wanted to increase my knowledge and my skills with the idea, which I'm now accomplishing, and to bring a lot of that knowledge back into the region.

How did you hear about the Fifa Master and why did you choose that course in particular?

I was attending a couple of courses in Argentina on sports management and in one of the courses there was a professor from CIES who put on a lecture open to the general public. I participated in the lecture and they explained a bit about this Master. I found out that one of my Argentinian colleagues had done the course and finished in 2004, one year before I started. I contacted her and she recommended that I apply, and provided me with a good insight about the strength of the

alumni network and explained all the activities and lectures that they had and the professionals involved, and it was definitely something that I was looking for. Because it is promoted by Fifa, I was attracted to the football component, but eventually, I saw that there were also a lot of other sports involved in the Master and I actually got more enthusiastic about that, because then I would have a wider perspective on sport.

How did that perspective help you get started in your career?

It's giving you a very broad look at the theoretical aspects of sport. Having the possibility to review the three key pillars of management, law and humanities was hugely important. I was not so knowledgeable about the legal side but the role of humanities especially is a very positive element, because as a sport manager, you are not only involved with one single task. You need to be fully aware about the context of sport, the history of sport, the legal framework of sport. So having the Master before I started those steps in my professional career here in Europe was very positive in order to understand the different components.

I would also say that the quality of the organisations that you visit, getting to understand how they work from the inside, gives you a flavour both in terms of the managerial side but also the culture of the organisation and how you could fit into it. It was a tremendous opportunity as well to share a space with colleagues from other parts of the world, to understand how sport is framed in other parts of the world. It gives you a lot of very broad cultural awareness in sport and that is important because it's not only about marketing, finance, development or event management, but it's also



about having this 360-degree view, locally and globally.

Does the alumni network you mentioned continue to support you, or do you support other alumni?

I always say this is the strongest point of the of the Master. I was very keen on the Master because it changed my life professionally but also personally, accomplishing my dreams to work in Europe, to work in football, so I tend always to go back to my fellow colleagues in the region where I come from – South America, Central America, Latin America – to promote the Master, tell them what they should expect when they do the Master, especially the positive social side of it, sharing space with people from different cultures, learning not only about sport but about cultures in general.

The biggest thing I tell them is the support that the CIES gives you after you finish in terms of looking for the right job opportunity, as well the networking if you want to start your own initiative, your own project. No matter where you go in sport, you always meet different people who have studied the Fifa Master and I think that gives us all something in common, of having had this great experience. ○



A gathering of the FIFA Master Alumni Association in Lyon, France during the 2019 Fifa Women's World Cup.

Sport during wartime

Matthew Taylor, Professor of History at the International Centre for Sports History and Culture at De Montfort University, Leicester, discusses the research behind his book, *Sport and the Home Front*. Published in 2020, the book was shortlisted for the North American Society of Sports History monograph of the year and the British Society of Sports History Aberdare Prize for best book of the year.

As an historian of sport, I have always been fascinated by how and why sport has survived at times of national and international crisis. My first academic publication, completed back in 1995 while I was writing my PhD on the history of professional football in England, focused on the so-called 'people's game' during the Second World War. Around a decade ago, I was ready for a new research project and the history of sport in Britain during wartime seemed as vital as ever. In developing the project, I found that while sport and war have frequently been linked metaphorically, by politicians, journalists and writers such as George Orwell, there had been little research on the precise role and significance of sport during wartime for governments, communities and individuals.

My research took me to dozens of archives across the UK. At the National Archives in London I explored the files of government departments who decided how much organised sport could be safely played, examined the value of physical activity for war workers, and balanced the space available for sport against the need for food production and military training. The records of governing bodies and clubs revealed the strategies developed for 'carrying on' at a time when members were often scattered across the country and the continent. In the BBC Written Archives, I was able to trace the central role allocated to sports broadcasting in the development of the new Forces radio network – designed to cater for men listening in military barracks but proved popular to all sections of the population.

One of my main aims was to examine the individual impact of



war on sporting lives. Here I found the diaries in the collections of Mass Observation and the Imperial War Museum invaluable. Although sport was sometimes dismissed as frivolous at a time of national crisis, these personal sources showed what it meant in the lives of so many people. Playing tennis or watching cricket may have been an ordinary pastime but during wartime it became crucial for the morale of the population and therefore vital for the war effort. At the heart of these accounts was the tension inherent in the idea of sport and 'play' at a time of war and between the clashing notions of sport as normality and exceptionality, routine and disruption and the everyday and the extraordinary.

After almost ten years of research, in June 2020 my book *Sport and the Home Front: Wartime Britain at Play, 1939-45* was published by Routledge. Across seven chapters, it examines government attitudes to sport; the financial and logistical difficulties faced by sports clubs; problems of access to and control of sports spaces; the connections between work, fitness and sport; the role of sport in everyday wartime

life; radio broadcasting of wartime sport; and the myriad associations between sport, war and the nation.

As Covid-19 took hold across the world in 2020, my research was applied to explore the parallels between the treatment of sport in the war and the pandemic by *The Times* and BBC Sport Online among others. Indeed the significance of the past in informing and aiding our understanding of the present was as evident in 1939 as in 2020. Government departments and sports associations frequently drew on previous decisions and precedence, the experience of the First World War offering models to be copied as well as lessons to learnt.

My hope is that in the long-term this research will encourage more work on the social and cultural history of sport during wartime, adding to our knowledge of periods that are much discussed but often mythologised. I would also be delighted if the book found its way into the hands of sports administrators and policy-makers, reassuring them, perhaps, that the past was every bit as complex and contested as the present. ○

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The International Academy of Sport Science and Technology (AISTS) in Lausanne, Switzerland was founded in 2000 by an association of eight institutions, including the International Olympic Committee, with a goal of responding to the growing need for specialised technical and practical knowledge across the sporting world. It has been a fixture in our rankings in across all ten editions and has finished as the second-best course in Europe for each of the past two years. In the overall list, it moved up one place in 2021, from ninth to eighth.

Its international appeal is reflected in our survey results, which show all but one of the students in 2018 came from outside Switzerland, while its strongest scores were largely in the employment and usefulness categories, with alumni reporting that being an AISTS graduate has had a highly positive impact on their career.

SportBusiness spoke to **Claude Stricker**, executive director of the academy, to get his perspective on the student experience and hear how the course has developed over the years.

How many applications do you receive each year for people to study at AISTS?

It's between 80 and 90 after the first screening, when we look only at the ones that really meet the requirements, which means a university degree and proof that the English language is mastered. In an international programme, you have all kinds of variation. We need to be a bit flexible because we know that it's also part of international sport to have all different backgrounds and different languages around the table. But still, everything here is in English, so it's important to have a good understanding, especially with the teamwork. All the teaching is in English anyway and all the production, projects, reports, interviews, collection of data et cetera. In general, we take around 40 students per year.

The problem has been that with Covid-19, you have cancellations after people have been accepted. People might have no job or want to change their career and be in the mind to use the time to reskill, but then if they get a job offer or have a perception that the sport economy is not that great, they might change their decision.

That's the big change we've noticed with the pandemic.

What makes a successful applicant?

We look for some form of sport in their experience. It can be, for instance, an athlete that might have been at a very high level, competing for their national teams or in international events. We might have someone 23, 24-years-old who has a Bachelor's degree, but with this experience in sport, we can consider their application.

If it's someone has no professional or athletic experience in sport, then we look at professional experience in a non-sport sector, and if you only have a Bachelor's degree, it needs to be a minimum of five years working experience. If the person has a master's degree, which is given after four-and-a-half or five years of study, then we don't need so much professional experience, maybe one or two years is okay, because the criteria to enter a Master of Advanced Studies in Switzerland is a master's degree.

What's the background of your students?

It's quite diverse. You will have a people who have graduated in very different areas – psychology, the arts, engineering, business, sport science. It's quite diverse academically. In terms of work experience, same thing – I would say we don't necessarily have a domination of one sector over another sector. It's quite diversified between hospitality, tourism, law, marketing, science, arts and so on. What we like is to have people who bring this experience from their own country as well. It's always good to have all the specificity of different parts of the world around the table, and we have always 20 or 25 nationalities represented. It's quite impressive. We like candidates who have been exposed to multicultural environments, so they adapt well here. If you have a young student who has never been out of their country or never exposed to other cultures, they might need a bit more adaptation.

What can you tell me about the faculty and the teaching model at AISTS?

We are not like a normal school. It varies year to year, but we have between 100 and 140 invited lecturers who are professors in their own universities or professors in our founding schools around here in Lausanne, as well as guest speaker from the industry. So if you count everyone, we have over 100, depending on the year.

Then we have over 10 permanent full-time staff in the group here, to be in class with the students, supervise their projects, provide them all the support they need on the academic side. We have some people who also hold a professors' chair in another school but, beside myself and two others who have PhDs, it's mainly people specialised in education who provide the support to the academic lecturers and to the students in coordinating their different projects and exams.

What are the areas of expertise or focuses of the curriculum?

We are developing on the sport technology side. Everything related to digital innovation is going to be something important for us in the coming edition. We have a new

staff member with an engineering background starting in August, who has over 10 years of experience in sports sector. So on that path, we definitely put a focus on digital innovation, impact on sport, innovation processing and new business models, the transformation of the industry.

We also have a part related to finance, so business of sports, finance for people without a financial background, working with our close faculty. We will develop this part in the near future, both inside our organisation and with our guest lecturers.

So I would say digital innovation, sport technology, and also financial, budgeting, planning, and performance analysis, are the real focus for us now.



Claude Stricker | executive director of AISTS

What make AISTS stand out on the marketplace?

It remains the value proposition we offer from the start, which is a balance between our five central sciences: medical science, technology, business management, law and sociology. Of course, we have a bit more focus on the management and business side, but still we have, for instance, three full weeks on sport medicine. The idea is to have professional sport physicians, sport physiologists, sharing their expertise with the class. It is useful for future managers to understand the health issues, understand how to organise a good medical service in sports events, but it can be also linked to when you plan for sustainability or legacy, or when you are working

in a federation and you want to understand what you can do better in terms of athlete health and safety. It's the 360-degree view across these five sciences, taught by experts, that make our course different than the standard MBA-type of course where you would focus mainly on the business and management aspect.

Where do your graduates tend to go on to work?

It remains the case that a good half go on to work in sports associations or confederations, International Federations in the region here, so IOC, Uefa, Fifa and so on. Then I would say a second sector that is growing for us is agencies or other sport industry companies who are providing infrastructure, organising events et cetera. Then after that it is very mixed. There are quite a few from last year who are now at the International Testing Agency in Lausanne working in anti-doping and integrity.

Is there a strong community of AISTS alumni?

Yes, there is. First, there is a natural community which is formed because these people have been together so much during one year with a lot of things going on, so friendships have developed. That's bit less with Covid, unfortunately, but in a normal year they bond and keep in contact, so there is the natural year-by-year, peer-group network that is built when you spend nine months together working on a project that is quite intense and strong.

Then we have the Alumni Association, which hosts events and offers different services, where we provide a lot of support. For instance, during Covid we organised panel sessions, inviting the alumni to speak and share their career development. We also provide quite a lot of career development support, we have a professional career coach who is there for the alumni and for the class as well and so any alumni who is changing roles or looking for another job can be in contact with a career coach and receive free advice, information about whatever openings, even support to prepare for interviews. That's a very in-demand service. ○

Hisham Shehabi, co-founder and chief operating officer of N3XT Sports

A former Olympic swimmer, Hisham Shehabi took the Master of Advanced Studies in Sport Administration and Technology at AISTS in 2014-15. While studying he began an internship with the International Olympic Committee, going on to work there in various roles for four years, before leaving to found his own company, N3XT Sports, a strategic consulting agency focusing on digital innovation in the Olympic movement.

When and why did you decide to study a sport business postgraduate degree?

I started in 2014. I decided to do it because I was exposed to an international sports certificate back in Bahrain in 2012, and that opened my eyes to the world of sports that existed beyond my small country. I got curious about the international sports scene and thought I'd like to get a career in it. I used to be a swimmer for Bahrain – I swam in the Olympics in 2004 and I'd always been around sports. I started my career in investment banking and public policy, but I volunteered a lot of my time in sports and thought, if I enjoy volunteering all of time my for it, I think I would probably like to spend my career doing it as well, which is how I ended up kind of doing that certificate in Bahrain, being exposed to the world of sports, and then choosing to go to AISTS to pursue the degree.

What was it about the offering at AISTS that appealed to you and made you want to apply?

That fact that it was such a diverse offering – there were areas such as law, technology, sociology that I was not exposed to before, so I liked the diversity of the programme. It being in Switzerland, in Lausanne, also appealed to me, because it was not only the seat of the IOC but of all these other Federations as well. So those were the two main things that attracted me there. In retrospect, the alumni network is also a really good one, and a lot of people that I currently work with are actually from the programme, even though we didn't do the programme at the same time. I have a few different collaborators I work with now, a few experts



“Being exposed to the whole Olympic Movement really helped me, because that's what I work on now.”

on digital and a few consultants that came from AISTS as well. We're always launching these small collaborations with different alumni.

And how would you say that it helped to prepare you for working in the sport industry?

It's helped with the network, first and foremost. Not just AISTS itself, but also being in Lausanne. Because I was there doing AISTS, I got to also interact with that wider network. Being exposed to the whole Olympic Movement really helped me, because that's what I work on now, my business is based on digital transformation within the Olympic movement. Obviously, the IOC had a big role in defining

this path for me, but AISTS was the launchpad for that.

How does being an alum continue to impact your life and work?

I was part of the Alumni Association a few years ago because I was trying to strengthen the network and services to alumni, and so that got me closer to the programme of administration. I have kept in touch with the career counsellor, who I ask for candidates, and try to place them in the company, whether it's in freelance roles or full-time positions that we create at the company. We've had a good stream of candidates apply. We actually have one open at the moment, for a senior consultant, and I've interviewed a few from AISTS that made the shortlist.

What would you tell someone who is just about to embark on the course?

First, I hope it's not remote and that they get to experience as much of Lausanne as possible! And then I would say, be active in the programme, be proactive. Reaching out and being part of different activities that AISTS does, but also things that are happening in and around Lausanne and tapping into the network out there. I think the programme has done a good job in terms of connecting local alumni, those based in Lausanne, with the class. I would really recommend make the most of those interactions and to strengthen and focus there. Because we are in an industry that's built on networks, and who you know, and what you know about them, so I think even if the person starting today is going back to their home country afterward, having that link to Switzerland is critical. ○

Social value creation through mega sports events

Three AISTS students from the 2021 edition of the course – Yasmeen Shabsough, Martim Ramoa and Yoko Yamagishi – discuss their master's research project, carried out in collaboration with professional services firm Arup.

Social value is becoming increasingly important as governments and cities shift their focus into the wider outcomes and legacies of their activities. This shift in attitude, from outputs to outcomes, has meant that governments and investors are requiring evidence on how the project or programme will deliver social equity and inclusion. Increasingly, this is even a legal requirement, as it in now is in the UK and New Zealand. Major events offer huge opportunities to make a significant and long-lasting difference both in sport and to the lives of citizens.

The current Covid-19 crisis is presenting challenges for all and everyone is having to come to terms with the “new normal”. Governments and cities are having to review and re-allocate their funding needs and budgets, and the economic impact over the longer term will be significant. For major events to be viable, and palatable to citizens and their elected officials, they will have to deliver much more in terms of outcomes, and in areas that previously may not have been considered.

With this background, professional services firm Arup, which specialises in engineering, design and project management, was interested to understand this new model in more detail and was seeking research to be undertaken to explore how social value can be delivered through major events, against Covid-19 and a new normal. Thus, as a part of the AISTS Master of Advanced Studies in Sport Administration and Technology's Client Team Project, a collaborative research project between Arup and AISTS, “Building a social value legacy through mega sports events”, was launched and developed.

The collaboration began in November 2020 and the team



delivered a written report and an oral presentation at the end of June 2021. The project was delivered by Nic Merridew, director of Arup's Host Cities team and Laetitia Lucy, senior consultant, as the project's clients, and three students from AISTS as researchers and supervised by Nalain Naidoo, head of business development at AISTS. Team Arup was deeply involved in the delivery of the project, from having online meetings with the students every two weeks to discuss the delivery of the project, to providing interview opportunities with people from different host cities' local governments.

The aim of the research was to create a playbook with recommendations on how to create social value from major events, to be used by host cities and communities. Alongside the rich data collected from academic literature, published documents and reports from previous mega sports events, the team also conducted 21 interviews with top-level professionals who have been involved in hosting mega events, especially in the area of social value and legacy development. The interview participants came from various agencies and sports associations, including the International Olympic Committee, Commonwealth Games Federation, and local governments which have hosted or will host mega sports events. The analysis of the interview

participants' experience and knowledge enriched the scope of the project further.

One of the major takeaways of this project was that when developing the strategy for social value legacy, it is important to understand the needs and issues of the cities and communities, and to respond to them throughout all three stages which event organizers often experience when hosting the events: (I) the planning and/or bidding phase, (II) the implementation phase, and (III) post-event phase.

In addition, it was highlighted that host cities and organizers should plan ahead the strategy, especially the five levers which should be actively sustained throughout the three stages for the successful creation of social value legacy, and the levers are: (a) Legacy Foundation, (b) Funding, (c) Partnership, (d) Initiatives and (e) Measurement. In order to assist this planning and decision making, four fundamental pillars were proposed: (1) Sports Participation, Health and Well-being, (2) Economic Growth, Employment and Innovation, (3) Urban Development and Environmental Sustainability, and (4) Social and Cultural Inclusion, allowing to holistically reach different areas and needs of local communities. Another significant conclusion is that organizers should be aware of the dynamism of the world around them, especially in this post-pandemic world that is now beginning. The challenges that Covid-19 brought to communities should be embedded into the strategy of the social value legacy.

In conclusion, the research findings and recommendations will support cities, government bodies and event agencies around the world to understand, and implement the creation of a social value legacy arising from mega sports events. ○



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#3 IN EUROPE – MASTERSPORT



MasterSport International Masters
in Strategic Management of Sports
Organisations, Events and Facilities



The masterSport programme was launched in 1996 by a group of senior Italian sports executives seeking to establish a sports education offering that allowed students to learn directly from high-profile practitioners. With joint bases in the University of San Marino and University of Parma, the course has been a staple in the European top 10 since the start of our rankings, with its third-placed finish this year matching its achievement from 2019.

It also takes our prestigious Graduates' Choice award this year, with its class of 2018 offering overwhelmingly positive responses about their experience on the course, and was the highest-rated school in the top 40 for value in furthering graduates' careers. It secured the maximum possible score in three separate categories – extra-curricular support, alumni network and industry networking – and was third-best for employment after six months, an indication of how the programme is viewed in its native Italy, with graduates securing work quickly after leaving the course.

Marco Brunelli, head of masterSport since its inception, as well as secretary general of the Italian Football Federation (FIGC), spoke to SportBusiness about the history of the course, the impact of the Covid-19

pandemic, and the promise it makes to its students.

Tell us about the application process for the masterSport.

It depends on the specific circumstances of each year, but having 25 places available, we receive at least double that in applications. In our record year we had more than 100 but, on average, over the last 10 years, we have had between 50 and 60 applications for 25 seats available.

We also have a few people who can attend the course without receiving their degree certificate, because they just attend a single module to sit in some of the lessons, but without being formally registered as students. So in the end we are between 25 and 30.

We are mainly looking at people with strong academic credentials, who are motivated. Our course is mainly receptive to younger students, who are coming to us after a three- or four-year bachelor degree. So it's difficult to find people who have very strong or deep-rooted professional experiences.

But we look for a mix of elements, and we do want to see some experiences which give us the idea that they are really and concretely interested in the sporting world and in their professional development in this field. That can be experience

as a player at a certain level, or experience as officials or organisers of small events, or having made a final academic thesis or project with specific reference to sporting issues. These are considered as preferred elements which complete the profile of our ideal applicant. But the main evaluation is based on the academic records so far, because people are 24, 25 years old without much professional experience.

Are your students mainly coming from within Italy, or do you get some from further afield?

We teach and work in Italian, so they are basically all Italians, from all regions of the country. Usually every year out of the 25 students, there are a couple of people from other countries, often because they are already here for work or studying. We had a Japanese student who had studied in Italy, a Brazilian who had started studying in Italy, however it is not so common that someone comes to Italy from abroad specifically for the masterSport course. As far as their academic backgrounds, they usually come from a legal, economic or business environment.

Your teaching model is based around bringing practitioners into the classroom. What can you tell us about that?

We have a permanent faculty which is made of around 10 people each year who are academics, professors, who have regular courses in other universities and come to teach a module in our master.

But the main characteristic of the course from the beginning, 25 years ago, has been that we wanted to bring into the classroom the concrete experiences of people working in sport – with concrete professional experiences who are able to teach concrete stories. People who have done significant things in the field of management in sport and are able to speak about that and to teach and to interact and to share their experiences with students. This was helped by the fact that the founders of the course, myself and some friends, also already had regular jobs in the field of sport, so we could bring that added value to the classroom immediately, and rely on that personal network of people who we would meet every day for professional reasons and who can easily come to give a lecture, because they know us and we have credibility from our regular jobs.

So when we say to a top manager of a sporting organisation, a club, federation or company that we also run a university course and we would like them to give a lecture or to interact with our students or to disseminate their knowledge, generally speaking, they are absolutely available because they know us, nowadays they know the course and they consider it an outstanding one, and above all they consider us to be credible people. So when we invite them, they accept.

This course is made of a few academics, which are necessary of the because of the theory, the fundamentals of the different matters. But a huge number are guest speakers. Over a one-year course, we host 80 or 90 people directly from the industry. This is really appreciated by our students, because after studying at a traditional university, they meet with people discussing concrete experiences. Then there is the final phase project work, a placement within an organisation, and this completes their academic background with a close link to their professional life, which should hopefully start

immediately after the end of the course.

Where do their professional lives start?

Mainly they work in sports organisations in Italy. But after 25 years – which means more than 500 students have completed the course – when I am traveling internationally I meet many graduates from the course. I met one of my previous students, who was working for the International Handball Federation in Qatar when it was organising the World Cup there. We have a graduate who went on to work in Hong Kong. There are several former students who are looking for work internationally, and there are people working in Italy but with organisations that have a strong international approach. Our students interact at the international level so much.

How did the pandemic affect the operation of the course this year and last?

We were surprised that Covid didn't really affect the number of applications. It's been steady for the past two years and we have just gone to open applications for the next edition, they will be open from September until December and we expect the regular number of applications for 2022 as well.

What has been affected has been the way of developing the course for the master, because it seems that a year or more ago we were obliged to move or to cancel the lessons and the lectures in person and we had to move to a different model. We are really proud that we were the first university in the Italian system to move from the old way to the new system. We were very quick to move to a digital platform to host our lessons and to interact with our students, so we practically didn't

lose a single week, because we were able to shift immediately when Covid happened. We were very creative. We introduced new formats, new kinds of lessons, invited people who were never able to be involved in the past but now were involved thanks to these new technologies. But also we were creative in terms of finding, as soon as it was possible, ways to host the lessons in open spaces. We moved to have lessons on the terraces of a stadium instead, or in a park. So we were very innovative in these respects.

How do you continue to support your alumni after graduation?

We can get in touch with each one immediately if we need, because we still receive requests from companies who are hiring. Not just looking for people who have just completed the course, but also more skilled people, because sometimes companies ask for former students with a little bit of a professional career already. We keep a file of where everyone is and what they are doing now in case something becomes relevant so we can pass them on and propose some names and help our alumni.

There is an alumni network that exists informally. Since the very beginning, the network was created more than 20 years ago by the alumni themselves, for themselves. It is very very interesting because it is not a formal association, not supported by an organisation. But I think due to the fact that is a spontaneous one, something the students created for themselves, it works very well. When one of the former students has an opportunity or knows somebody who is looking for someone, they contact their former masterSport colleagues. We hear stories of people getting opportunities for new jobs through the alumni network sometimes many years after they have finished the masterSport. ○



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Susan O'Malley | *first female president of a professional sport franchise*

Stephen Shapiro | *editor of Sport Marketing Quarterly*

Sporty Jeralds | *consultant and former manager of the Charlotte Coliseum*

Todd Koesters | *past VP of marketing and sales for Churchill Downs Entertainment Group*

Khalid Ballouli | *president-elect of the Sport Marketing Association*



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Susan O'Malley



Stephen Shapiro



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Paolo Arsillo, director of the Vivo Azzurro fan group at the Italian Football Federation (FIGC)

Paolo Arsillo attended the MasterSport international master's in strategic management of sports organisations, events and facilities in 2003, and joined the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) the following year. He currently heads up the official Italian national team fan club, Vivo Azzurro.

Why did you decide to study on the MasterSport programme?

I took my first degree on communication in Rome, where I was born. I've always had a great passion for sports. During university, I studied communications, but in the last two years I took part in a students' forum that organised some meetings on football and the business side of sport. This was the first experience that I had with the sports industry, and it helped me deepen my knowledge relating to communication and marketing about sports. As part of my degree, I did my thesis about sports marketing, specifically about the marketing of the motorcycle federation in Italy.

My goal was to take a postgraduate master's degree on this because my dream to work in sport was the same dream as lots of other people, so I wanted to do something to stand out. During my research, I found the MasterSport in San Marino and Emilia Romagna, and when I attended it was run with Bologna University; now it is with University of Parma, and San Marino is still the main school.

I attended the course in 2003-04, 18 years ago, and at that time, there wasn't a lot of postgraduate courses dedicated to sports available in Italy. I chose MasterSport because it looked like the most professional one. The curriculum, the different items that they taught, it looked like the best one for me. So I made the request, I went there to take the test, and had to move from Rome to spend six months of my life in San Marino.

How do you feel the course prepared you for your current role with the FIGC?

The stress of MasterSport was to make the students understand that



working in sports management is not only driven by passion, but has to also come with a great deal of preparation in terms of academic and professional matters. This is the most important thing that I learned from the course. The quality of the teachers and the professors that we had, and their ability to talk around a lot of things about sports in general – economic matters, financial matters, historical and sociological matters – that, from my point of view, is one of the most important things, because I came from a sociological university and I really appreciated this approach that they took to sport. It's important to understand the sociological basis of sport in order to create economic opportunities and to manage them successfully.

Have you remained a part of the alumni network?

Networking is very important. The first network that I had in the industry was with the course mates I had 18 years ago, because we had the opportunity to live together as well as study together. There were people coming from all parts of Italy – from the north, south and the centre, and we spent six months together, not only studying but also socializing. This was the first network that the MasterSport created for us. I still have calls with lots of them to this day, because they also work in football, but also for leisure still, we are still friends. And the MasterSport keeps making that network bigger and bigger, because it's not just the students of a particular course, but all the students who attend before me and after me. When I hear from someone who is coming into our federation that they went to San Marino, it's a pleasure for me because I see myself when I was younger, with the same passion and the same dream. But it is also a way to speak the same language about the approach to sport matters.

How would you advise someone who is hoping to take the MasterSport course?

All the students that approach this program are driven by passion for sports, so my advice is to try to be able to exploit the treasure and rewards that the MasterSport can give you in order to increase your professional competence and knowledge. Try to match your passion with the knowledge that the MasterSport can give to each student, because this is certainly the best course we have to offer in Italy and probably one of the best in Europe too. ○

Stadiums of the future: A competitive factor for Italian football

Marco Brunelli is the founder and director of the MasterSport International Masters in Strategic Management of Sports Organisations, Events and Facilities, which is based in the Universities of San Marino and Parma. Here, he presents an extract from an article on the underdevelopment of Italian stadium infrastructure and its impact on the wider sports landscape in the country.

It is widely believed that the backwardness of sport facilities in general, and of stadiums in particular, is one of the main reasons why the Italian football system is less competitive in comparable social, economic, demographic and cultural terms.

Think, for example, of the infrastructural level reached by sport facilities in some European countries such as Switzerland, France, Germany and England and, to a different degree, Spain and Portugal. One could think, with good reason, that an actual "stadium factor" as a new paradigm of reference may play a strategic role in the process of modernisation and rehabilitation of the Italian system of sport infrastructure within the now undelayable effort to fill a dramatically evident infrastructural gap.

Within the European context, sport infrastructures are considered as strategic elements for the promotion of policies aimed at the improvement and implementation of the cultural and entertainment offering directed at a wide audience (well beyond that of football fans). On the other side, they are considered as indispensable factors in the achievement of economic viability levels for football clubs.

The explanation for the negative peculiarity of the Italian situation is that, while the quantity and quality of the TV offerings have grown over the last decade (while remaining in line with or even surpassing that of other countries), other European countries have also developed their infrastructures with an increase in terms of quantity and quality of services to the audience, activities, functions and entertainment for different social groups (families



among others), and hyper-technological arenas.

In Italy, the dramatic increase of broadcasting rights gave football clubs the means to operate without feeling the need to launch a systematic intervention on their facilities. This, in addition to the public ownership of nearly all Italian sport facilities, has created a sort of still unresolved political-economic short-circuit on a decision-making level. Other European countries have focused on stronger policies aimed at "serving the audience" with an increasingly diversified and multi-faceted entertainment offer tailored on different socio-cultural targets. On one side, this has basically allowed to address the requirements of all user groups and, on the other side, to maximise the profits coming from sources other than football.

This is precisely the paradox – on one side, the interest and passion for football has never been stronger in Italy (there is no other country in the entire world where football has a higher following and mass-media influence – just think of the extraordinary spin-off associated with the publishing business). Such interest is transversally shared by the most diverse social groups and, precisely for this reason,

potentially expresses a requirement for just as diverse services. On the other side in Italy, stadiums – and more in general sport and leisure facilities – are in such a condition that they cannot satisfy, if not in minimal and insignificant ways, the users' "hunger" for facilities and services associated with the football phenomenon.

The current gap between the football system in Italy and in other European countries is likely to grow wider. Without a modernisation plan for the huge real estate heritage represented by stadiums, Italian football is bound to lose further ground, as broadcasting rights – after a decade of exponential increases – are likely to stabilise. Therefore, new infrastructure will play a key role in boosting clubs' commercial revenues.

Fans are deeply involved in everything concerning their football clubs and the brand loyalty of a customer-fan is unimaginable in any other kind of company. If the loyalty of customers is a primary goal for other companies, in football such a result is sure and has been taken for granted since the beginning. If, in a first phase, broadcasting companies tried to bring the stadium experience into every home, now, on the contrary, stadiums – in the rest of Europe – are trying to incorporate the experience of television.

The stadium embodies the physical materialisation of a global experience. In the near future Italy will hopefully excel once again in the architecture of sport infrastructure as it did at the beginning of last century. ○

This is an edited extract from an article which originally appeared in the volume Sport Architecture: Design Construction Management of Sport Infrastructure, published by Lettara Ventidue.

Josoor Institute aims to provide a long-term educational legacy from Qatar's World Cup



The Josoor Institute was established in 2013 as the educational arm of Qatar's World Cup 2022 organising committee, with a goal of securing a long-term dividend from that event by significantly boosting the country's capacity to host major events. *SportBusiness* spoke with major stakeholders to discuss how it is working to secure that legacy, and their ambitions for Josoor's future.

The benefits of securing hosting rights for the World Cup," H.E. Hassan Al Thawadi, secretary general of Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC), tells *SportBusiness*, "don't stop with the lifting of the cup in December 2022." One of the main legacy projects of the SC, he says, "has to do with human capital: with strengthening the skillset of the population here so that they can perpetuate the impact of the tournament itself. That's why Josoor Institute started."

Since its inception, Josoor Institute has been educating the executives who work in the SC and are responsible for organising the World Cup itself, giving them the skills to not only make that event a success but to continue to make a major impact in the sports industry in Qatar and the wider Arab region for years to come.

The institute's flagship

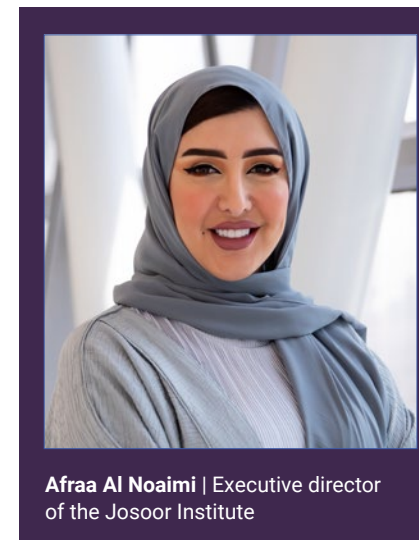
programmes are two diploma in sports and major events management, offered in collaboration with Milan's SDA Bocconi School of Management, which has been a partner of Josoor Institute since 2018, while the first three editions of the programme ran alongside Georgetown University in Qatar, Leeds Beckett University and the University of Liverpool. An average diploma cohort is made up roughly 35 per cent Qatari nationals, 35 per cent other nationalities who grew up in Qatar or are long-term residents, and 30 per cent from elsewhere. By spring 2022, the diploma will have been awarded to nearly 500 sports and events professionals.

"In the eight years of Josoor Institute's existence, more than 5,400 delegates will have passed through our diploma or other courses and events, with 100 different nationalities represented as of 2021," says Afraa Al Noaimi,

executive director of the Josoor Institute. "The delegates' engagement and satisfaction rates have been overwhelmingly positive so far, and a significant number of delegates have been women, which for a traditionally male-driven sector is remarkable."

Hands-on teaching style

Professor Dino Ruta, professor of practice at SDA Bocconi and academic director of Josoor's diploma, is one of the key figures involved in devising the nature of the curriculum and teaching methods at the institute. He tells *SportBusiness* that Bocconi was originally engaged by Josoor Institute because of its specialist Sport Knowledge Center, also associated with the FIFA Master, and deep background in the sport and events sectors. "Josoor's delegates have specific expectations and ways of learning and engaging with the instructors and their peers.



Afraa Al Noaimi | Executive director of the Josoor Institute

With that in mind we tailor-made the programme to their needs, interests, and designed the learning experience with international evidence, always linked to the local context. This is an audience to whom a unique, personalized, premium experience is important.

"With that in mind we designed the programme stressing certain components and de-emphasizing others we might focus on elsewhere. The theoretical part is presented as the background, and priority is given to hands-on experiences from the MENA Region and other relevant international organisations. The delegates want to be engaged, they want to do exercises and be practical. The model is no longer a one-way lecture where the professor shows the international best practices in sports and events industries and the audience just listens. As a matter of fact, each year we're creating a tailor-made programme – it's never off-the-shelf. But it's my philosophy that if we are able to deliver something that is tailored for the target audience, then the impact will be higher, and the relationship will be longer."

The collaboration should be an exchange between Josoor Institute and SDA Bocconi, he says, rather than a one-way transference of knowledge, and this requires a modern set of educational skills. "We want to give light to the investments that Qatar is making, and to be a facilitator of an understanding of the ecosystem around Qatar, not just show up for a

week every few months, teach and leave. We want to learn about the culture of our delegates and be part of the legacy the project will leave behind."

That willingness to embed itself into the culture is another reason Ruta feels SDA Bocconi was a good fit for Josoor Institute. He adds that there are already strong connections between Italy – particularly Milan, where Bocconi's main campus is located – and Doha. "In Milan, we are preparing to host the Winter Olympics in 2026, we are one of the main football cities in Europe, it is a very sport-oriented, event-oriented city, with a focus on design, luxury, and wealth-creation," he says. "These are all basically the same fields where Qatar wants to invest, so we like to say we are building a bridge between Milan and Doha."

Legacy a key driver

While Josoor Institute was established to provide Qatari nationals and residents with the skills necessary for organising and delivering the World Cup, Al Noaimi says that legacy has always been a primary motivator for the development of the curriculum, with an eye on establishing Qatar as a strong candidate to host future major events beyond 2022. This, Al Noaimi believes, can be a central pillar of the legacy left by the World Cup.

"We are trying to equip our people with knowledge and skills that are relevant in this domain and are widely applicable beyond 2022," she says. "When you think of these skills, we're building a base that just didn't exist here before. Now it exists. And we know that a lot of future events are going to happen here – it could be the Asian Games, maybe one day the Olympics – so it's about continuing to form a population that can sustain the industry that is emerging here. We want to make sure that people are employable for future events, on other projects for other organisations, not just with the World Cup in mind."

Ruta echoes Al Noaimi's belief that the education and training provided by Josoor Institute is one of the crucial components in

ensuring a lasting, and positive, legacy from 2022.

"Organising an event as incredible as the World Cup, in the Middle East for the first time, I think that is by definition going to leave a legacy," he says. "What we can help to control is how positive that legacy is, and I strongly believe that the more you invest in human capital, the more you increase the likelihood of a positive legacy.

"It's not 100 per cent sure, but the more people you ensure will be able to keep working in this area, ensuring the facilities keep being used and building on the reputation and image of the World Cup, the stronger that legacy is. Without the human capital, the risk is that these facilities, technologies and resources that have been invested in will easily become obsolete and not leveraged. So, I think it is very ingenious of Qatar and the SC to establish something like this in order to ensure those skills and competencies endure."

The institution of Josoor itself, as well as the learning it has imparted, can also be a part of that legacy, Al Noaimi hopes. "If you think about legacy, it's not just that you've taught 500 people about sport management, given training to 1,000 volunteers," she says. "You want to establish something which is going to last for the long-term, and what is going to last? Hopefully that can be Josoor Institute as a body that will continue to deliver and facilitate programmes, not just here in Qatar but across the Middle East and North Africa region; and



Professor Dino Ruta | Professor of practice at SDA Bocconi and academic director of Josoor's diploma,

on the longer term even beyond that.”

While the initial focus is on the legacy Josoor Institute can help Qatar achieve off the back of hosting the World Cup, there is a long-term goal to use the event to boost the sports and major events industries across the region. Al Noaimi notes that a common language and culture across the Arab world – a region of over half a billion people – gives it an advantage when it comes to trans-national collaboration. “If you go from Oman to Morocco, there are several thousand professionals who are already active in the sport industry or are keen to get active or to study in it,” she says. “That’s an incredibly powerful human and professional network we have where we have barely scratched the surface.”

The online capabilities, further enhanced due to necessity over the past 18 months when the pandemic forced much of its teaching to go remote, will help Josoor Institute expand its offering around the region and to people who otherwise may not be able to afford to study on the programme.

“We cannot expect to sell a \$10,000 programme to a Tunisian student, but we can certainly develop content, which could be primarily online, or maybe a hybrid model, for an audience of people that may not get the chance to work for PSG, Zenit or Concacaf, but who may end up successfully



managing teams from their local league, for example, or facilitate sport and event activities at city or regional level,” Al Noaimi says. “That’s very intriguing to us because it’s a mix of productive job creation and also capacity building in the industry at a local level, with a good economic impact and a good social impact. So long-term, the wider region is a very important chapter for us.”

Al Noaimi also sees the potential for Josoor Institute to evolve beyond its current role as the education and training arm of the SC and says she is excited by the idea of releasing the moorings and being subjected “to the toughness of the market, but also the discipline and opportunities of the market, especially as Qatar and the MENA region are increasingly on the

radar as a major sports and events cluster.”

“We’re a government initiative at the moment, but like everything, we’ve got to be sustainable. We could decide to consider our task completed as the cup gets lifted, but we actually aim to continue to step up the ability of Qatar as an events host, treasuring this unprecedented and truly amazing journey of 2022 and its people and content into an education and training platform that would stay relevant and sustainable. Then, rather than our focus on the World Cup, where we already have an in-built base of alumni in the SC, we have to start coming up with products and experiences that are relevant and interesting to the market at large. That’s where I think the really interesting future starts.” ○



Hassan Al Thawadi | Secretary General of the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy



The year universities went remote



Last year, *SportBusiness* spoke with Columbia University’s Scott Rosner and Brunel University London’s Vassil Girginov about how the first few months of the Covid-19 outbreak had affected campus life. This year, we checked in with them again to find out about the effects of an entire year under the pandemic, and how they assess its likely long-term impact.

Even with the pandemic a few months old by September of last year, and some parts of the world showing ultimately ill-fated signs of edging towards normality, adjusting to the new reality was an understandably difficult task at the start of the 2020-21 academic year.

In both the UK and the US, campuses were ghost towns for almost all of the year, with teaching, assessments and pastoral care all conducted remotely. “This year has been challenging in ways we could obviously never have anticipated,” Rosner, academic director of the sport management program at Columbia University, tells *SportBusiness*. “The initial adjustment period was abrupt, and we adjusted quite well early on. But then it was a year of constant adjustments and fine-tuning, constant learning about what was working and what wasn’t working in terms of how we delivered what our students were paying for.”

Girginov, reader in sport management at Brunel University London, says that those final few months of the 2019-20 academic year were a different matter and didn’t provide much in the way of preparation for the shock of a full year of managing under the pandemic. “At that time, when lockdowns first started, we were almost finished with the second semester’s teaching and students were about to start working on dissertations and examinations,” he says. “Coming back in September to a life where everything was being handled remotely for an entire year was very different.”

While there was a chance that students may have been able to return to campus at some point, Rosner says that Columbia took the decision very early to keep classrooms closed for the full year in order to maintain consistency and ensure safety for students and teachers alike, and to focus on

providing the best remote education it could.

“Once we’d got past that initial shock to the system in early 2020 and made sure we could still teach most of our courses without really skipping a beat, our thoughts very quickly became, how can we not just get through this, but how can we actually thrive during this time?”

While the lessons themselves were relatively painless to take online, the biggest impact on the quality of the students’ experiences was created by the fact that “everything has to be far more structured now”, says Rosner. What was lost was “those informal conversations that occur before lessons start and after they end, the non-teaching-related chats where you really get to know your students”.

To that end, Columbia instigated mandatory 20-minute sessions between faculty members and students in the first few weeks of the new semester just to get to know

one another outside of the very structured, formalised Zoom lessons. This was so successful, Rosner says, that it will be maintained even into the new year when the university intends to return to traditional in-person teaching. “It was amazing, because now it’s not just the students who want to get to know you, it’s everybody, so we’re able to forge a much improved relationship with each other as faculty and students. It was universally applauded, so much so that we’re keeping it going forward, so that’s been a real positive takeaway for us.”

Attempting to replicate other

non-curricular elements of university life proved trickier, however, with faculty so keen to attempt to provide value for the students that “we ended up over-compensating”, says Rosner. “We wanted make sure that the students felt like they were getting everything they wanted out of the programme, so we scheduled a lot of stuff, we had virtual activities pretty much every week from September through to mid-November, we were meeting with them virtually with a high degree of frequency. We overwhelmed them. In November they came to us and said, ‘we really

appreciate what you’re doing, but can we dial it back a bit please? You’re not giving us enough time to do our homework!’ I think a key learning from this is that Zoom fatigue is a very real thing.”

Girginov says that while Brunel staff largely succeeded in designing and delivering “interactive, engaging sessions” and received broadly positive feedback from students to the experience they had under difficult circumstances, “there is a general agreement among students that they’re fed up of staring at their laptops as opposed to mingling with fellow students”.

Future impact

Despite that, Brunel is only taking tentative steps towards a return to pre-pandemic conditions and will adopt a ‘hybrid’ approach for 2021-22, says Girginov, with lessons taking place “more or less 50-50 in person and virtually.” The British government lifted all restrictions in July, but Girginov says Brunel is being more cautious regarding the ongoing pandemic, and has worked hard to “put in place new policies at the university to safeguard and protect students, going beyond the call of duty to ensure that students and their learning are not going to be



Columbia’s Rosner pictured teaching while wearing a mask



Students wear masks while sitting outside the Columbia campus

negatively impacted by Covid-related factors”.

This will involve being more flexible on deadlines and redesigning some elements of the campus to improve social distancing, while the most work has gone into restructuring the weekly routines by academic year. “A huge amount of work has gone into that area,” Girginov says. “To ensure social distancing, we can’t have full classrooms, and obviously we only have a limited number of rooms, so as you can imagine, we’ve had to redress the whole system of timetabling.”

He is hopeful of a swift return to fully in-person teaching, particularly for the sports management courses, because it is “a very practical activity”. While conceptual, analytical and theoretical skills can be taught remotely, “at the end of the day, learning about management comes down to whether you can actually do some hands-on management or not”, Girginov says. “You need to be able to plan, implement, deliver, control evaluate...and the context for all this is absolutely critical. The problem with online learning is that you can use as many case studies as you like, but students won’t be leaving getting a real sense of the context.”

Some positives have been drawn from the situation, however – the ability to really sharpen those analytical skills and focus on the increasingly digital, technology-led work being done at sporting organisations. The 2020-21 graduates, Girginov says, will be

better prepared than any previous class “for the challenges of a digital and social world, those specific skills that they’ll need to unpack the newer modes of delivering communications. So there have been some gains, but unfortunately sports management is a very practical activity and you really need to have a hands-on approach.”

Columbia, meanwhile, has announced that it will return to fully campus-based learning for all students who are able to. It is, Rosner believes, the sensible approach for a course whose location is a huge part of its appeal. “We’re based in New York City, and that’s one of the key strengths of our programme. We want be in-person as much as we can, we want our students in the heart of the city, and they largely want be here as well. It’s one of the big reasons why our students do very well historically on the job placement and salary piece of the *SportBusiness* rankings, and we’d be foolish not to cater to it.”

He adds, however, that one of the accommodations made for the pandemic is likely to stick around. “We’re in a fantastic location where students can take advantage of being in this marketplace, and we want to keep bringing fantastic guest speakers into the classroom and have them physically present as much as possible,” he says. “However, we also now know that we can bring in a fantastic speaker who is in Europe or on the West Coast or in New Zealand, and we’ll definitely try and keep doing that and maintain that flexibility.” ○

How Loughborough builds sport into the fabric of university life



Loughborough University has entered the SportBusiness Postgraduate Course Rankings for the first time. Dr Peter Dickenson, part of the MSc Sport Management programme, explains why the university has made sport one of its 'strategic pillars', and how its Loughborough-based programme reaps the benefits of its campus environment, where sport is all around.

Few educational institutions carve out a specialisation quite as Loughborough has with sport.

Since becoming a university in 1966, Loughborough has become the destination for sport-related education in the UK, where its name is synonymous with the subject, and it has been ranked the best institution in the world for sport-related studies five years in a row by the QS World University Rankings.

At both the 2016 Paralympics and the 2018 Commonwealth Games, Loughborough students and alumni would have finished 10th in the medal tables, had they been a country. They would have finished 17th at the 2016 Olympics.

It is a university steeped in sport, from its 440-acre site in Loughborough (which has hosted several major sport organisations and events) to its satellite campus in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London.

This year, however, marks its

first entry into the SportBusiness Postgraduate Course Rankings, where its MSc Sports Management finished 40th overall, cracked the top 20 in Europe and posted a particularly impressive score in the peer review category: a marker of its reputation in the sector among fellow academics and researchers. Having joined the process late in the day, with just a few weeks left for survey submissions, it is an impressive debut performance.

Entering the rankings this year was an important step for the university because "the world's becoming flatter, it's becoming smaller and more globalised, and we should be letting the world know about the work we do", Peter Dickenson, a lecturer on Loughborough's MSc Sport Management, tells *SportBusiness*. "The people who already know us know what we're about, and that's great. But we're increasingly aware that there are a lot of people out there who don't know us, and

sometimes can't even pronounce 'Loughborough'. We've cemented our position with those who know, and now it's about leveraging the individual facets that we've put together, particularly around the sport management side of things, which is obviously what these rankings are about, as opposed to the sport science and physical education side.

"For us, it's a great opportunity to get our name out for people, institutions, and markets who don't know us so well. At the same time, we see the institutions that are on the list, and we know that we're up there among them, so it's important for us to be seen to be among them."

Sport as a strategic pillar

The MSc Sport Management programme that features in this year's ranking sits within Loughborough's School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, but Dickenson says the culture of

sport and sporting achievement permeates the university as a whole, which has recently made sport one of its key strategic pillars.

"What this means is that even in non-sport academic subjects, there's interest in sport and they're starting to think about sport more and more," he explains. "You could imagine that in computer science, for example, there'll be some students (and academics) working on optimisation, but in the back of their mind they'll also be thinking about how this can be applied to the sport ecosystem. Sport's not all we do, but it is a fundamental part of who we are, and we see our sport management degree at Loughborough as being at the forefront of this."

The culture of sport is pervasive not only academically but also in the university's successful sports teams – which themselves present valuable volunteering opportunities for sport management students – and in Loughborough offering itself as a home, temporary or permanent, for major sporting bodies.

"Something our Loughborough-based MSc Sport Management programme is able to offer which is unique, certainly outside of North America, is that the learning takes place on our campus-based university, one of the biggest single campuses in Europe, where we're also home to partners of all kinds

from across sport," Dickenson says. Recently, the UK Anti-Doping agency moved its headquarters to the university's main campus, while the England and Wales Cricket Board has its National Cricket Performance Centre on the site. In 2018, Loughborough hosted five matches of the Uefa European Under-17 Championship. Meanwhile, the university owns four women's elite sport franchises (in cricket, cycling, netball, and rugby), which not only puts women's sport in the limelight – something of which the university is particularly proud – but also provides students with even greater opportunities to gain valuable experience interning or volunteering at sport's sharp end.

This is a significant value-add for the sport programmes and boosts the university's commitment to marrying its research-led academic side to experiential learning.

"We're starting to work more and more closely with partners in the industry," Dickenson says, "integrating a necessary blend of academia and practice, and that creates a virtuous circle whereby the practical side complements the academic side. It also means we can offer great opportunities to get involved in sport management from a volunteering perspective and a development perspective, and then bring that back into the classroom, taking the academic

learning and applying it to some of the practical management perspectives – and vice versa, of course. Our world-leading 'Loughborough Sport' function is a fantastic lever for this. Its motto is 'Where History Begins' and I couldn't agree more with that."

He adds that as well as the major sporting governing bodies and federations on the Loughborough campus, Loughborough's reputation internationally has helped it become a "launchpad" for businesses looking for an entry point into the European market. Dickenson points to work with Plae, a gym flooring specialist that used Loughborough's facilities as a "test bed" before a wider European launch, and Technogym, which collaborated with Loughborough to create a Centre of Excellence for athletes on campus, as examples of sport-related companies using the university's reputation to help position their own products.

"Ultimately, these relationships all help to create a culture where, when you're on campus, sport is all around you," he says.

International ecosystem – and alumni network

It also points to the international approach Loughborough takes toward sport – crucial, Dickenson says, in an increasingly globalised industry. "Although it was the



Loughborough men's football team vs Wolves Academy



Loughborough University hosted five matches at the Uefa European U17 Championships 2018

Loughborough-based masters that we entered into the rankings, as an institution we really have an ecosystem that stretches around the world,” he says. Securing the second campus in London in 2013 was a huge step, giving Loughborough a presence in an international hub city, on the site of the 2012 Olympics, and with it the opportunity to reach even further afield, boosting the university’s appeal to international students interested in a city university experience.

“We’re obviously not as old as Oxford or Cambridge, we weren’t founded 1000 years ago, but we’re certainly up there with them in the national rankings,” Dickenson says. “One of the biggest things for us is finding ways to get our name out there for organisations and institutions and markets that

perhaps hadn’t come across us before, especially internationally”. Rankings are one way of achieving this, as is expansion into London, but a more concrete way is the fielding of Loughborough graduates at major sport bodies around the world, helping to spread the word about its offering.

“It’d be highly surprising if you spoke to a major sport organisation, not just in the UK but around the world, and didn’t find that Loughborough alumni were working there, had worked there, or have some direct connection there,” Dickenson says. “If you just look at the 2018 cohort who filled out the surveys for these rankings: we’ve got people in the US at the New Jersey Devils, in the UK with WMP Creative and CSM Sport and Entertainment, people working on the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics,

people who’ve been involved in women’s cricket in Pakistan, people in India working in sports media organisations and the pro kabaddi league, people working at the International Paralympics Committee at the Tokyo Games... Even just from the 2018 class, we’ve got so many people in fantastic positions across the globe.

“We’re proud of our academic offering, we’re proud to be a leader in the sector and in terms of the academic knowledge we produce and disseminate, the most important thing is that we hope we pass that pride on to our students such that when they do go around the world and start to get into high positions, they remember what they learned from Loughborough and that starts to spread our reputation even further.” ○



The kitting out of the ParalympicsGB team ahead of this year’s Tokyo Games

Ten editions and counting...



To mark the milestone of the 10th annual edition of this publication, SportBusiness casts an eye back over the evolution of the sector in the time since we launched, and speaks to programme directors of the three courses to have topped the list about the impact and importance of the rankings.

This edition of the *SportBusiness Postgraduate Course Rankings* marks the 10th since we launched the initiative in 2012, and while both the industry and the education sector have witnessed dramatic changes in that decade, the thinking behind and need for this project has remained largely the same.

The rankings were initially undertaken at a time when the number of sports management courses offered by universities had been proliferating, and we intended it as a guide to help students and graduates thinking about a career in sports management to pick their way through the increasingly crowded landscape. The industry itself was rapidly expanding, and with that, the requirement for ever more specialised and tailored knowledge and skillsets was growing, too. More and more traditional universities and colleges were recognising the

need to offer education in this area, while specialist institutions devoted exclusively to the teaching of sports management, often with the backing of major organisations such as Fifa and the IOC or clubs like Real Madrid and Valencia, had also begun to spring up.

While the sports management departments at our top two courses this year, at Ohio University and the University of Massachusetts Amherst, are both now half-century old, having been founded in the mid 1960s and early 1970s respectively, a significant proportion of the courses we list in 2021 were not even in operation at the turn of the century. The number one and two courses in Europe – the Fifa Master at CIES and AISTS’s Master of Advanced Studies – both launched in 2000, while the University of Florida’s Vinik Sport & Entertainment Management Program, third in the table, did not

take its first students until 2012, the same year we started the rankings.

Even over the 10 instalments of this list, the sector has seen considerable growth. In 2017, we expanded the rankings from a top 25 to a top 40, a reflection of both the increased number of entries we were receiving each year, as well as a marker of the growth in the all-round quality of the courses, with those ranked between 30 and 40 still representing some of the best sport business education on offer and making it impossible to leave them unmentioned. We are not ruling out further expansion to a top 50 in the near future, such is now the range of quality courses on offer around the world – particularly with an eye on the Asian market, where the sports and leisure industry is growing and universities are beginning to respond.

The SportBusiness Postgraduate Course Rankings remain the only



Former Olympian Colin Jackson presents CIES director Denis Oswald with the award in 2014

dedicated, global list of its kind, the only international rankings to focus exclusively on postgraduate sports management courses and to have a criteria and methodology grounded in the practices particular to sports management. While the first 10 years so far have been dominated by a handful of courses – Ohio has been named the global leader in all but two years; CIES the best in Europe nine times out of 10 – the 2021 edition shows signs that the landscape is changing. USF’s rise to its highest placement to date, after first crashing the top five in 2018, demonstrates that the Vinik Program is here to stay, while the 18 European courses in this year’s top 40 represents a record high, and shows the continued improvements that have been made on this side of the Atlantic.

To celebrate our landmark, *SportBusiness* spoke with major figures at the three schools to have topped our list in the first ten years – UMass Amherst’s Steve McKelvey; Ohio University’s Jim Strode; and

Denis Oswald of CIES – about the gap in the market the rankings have filled; the impact they have had since their inception; and what it means to finish in first.

Devil in the detail

“The rankings probably came along at the right time,” says McKelvey. “We were seeing a very quick evolution of the sector and a spike in the number of programmes, and the industry needed something to be able to sort through all these programmes claiming to have ‘the best faculty’, ‘the best alumni network’, ‘the best career support’, just as part of their marketing. It was important to have something that could really put a legitimate stamp of quality on some of these programmes.”

That legitimacy was only possible thanks to the unique methodology we devised and have been fine-tuning ever since with the help of input from our advisory board each year, which in 2021 included both McKelvey and Strode.

“As someone who has now had that input into the direction of the rankings and has been able to take a look at the measures and the levers that go into coming up with the final metric, I think what is unique is the level of detail that goes into these rankings,” says Strode. “It’s not just focused on outcome data or on one particular measure of success. We’re looking at a variety of different metrics, including the academic research that’s going on at our institutions as well as the application-based, practitioner-focused instruction. What’s unique about the rankings is that, when you look underneath the hood and at how things are measured, it’s tremendously detailed and statistically sound.”

Oswald, a veteran of the sector who has been in his role as director of CIES since 2000 and has been involved in every edition of the Fifa Master to date, says that there was a gap in the market for a rankings in 2012, “and *SportBusiness* filled it by setting up well-thought-out criteria, which is not always the case in this type of exercise. That’s why the rankings remain a point of reference after 10 years”.

SportBusiness has always “been very receptive to input throughout the years in terms of fine-tuning the rankings instrument to be as accurate and as sound as it can be”, McKelvey adds. “Particularly when it comes to teasing out the nuances between different types of programmes. While there is an overall winner, the criteria rewards courses that do different things well and recognises that there is more than one way to be a top-quality course.”

Point of pride

Course leaders and faculty are, of course, always aware of the quality that is on offer. But Oswald admits that there is validation in having the hard work done on campuses “confirmed and recognised independently, based on robust criteria”.

He adds: “It helps us to increase the visibility of the Fifa Master among students, the sport industry and other course leaders. When we attend major sports conventions

now, the Fifa Master brand is better known.” Oswald also believes that the existence of the rankings themselves has helped to confer a broader legitimacy onto the sports education sector, “helping to open up what we do to the academic world and show them the rise of sports management”.

McKelvey agrees that being named number one in the world in 2019 was “a nice point of validation for our faculty and staff who worked so hard to deliver a quality programme. To get that recognition from an arbiter of grad programmes was important internally and externally”, but adds that the most important marker is the pride with which graduates and alumni of the course view its success. “Anecdotally, I know that it’s such a source of pride for our students and our alums, and that’s critically important for us because it extends their willingness to give back to the programme. I know from conversations that our success in these rankings, our students’ sense of pride at having graduated from such a successful course, really helps their willingness to give back.”

Strode says the rankings have helped the wider Ohio University to attract students and strengthen its overall reputation, not simply that of its Master of Sports Administration. “Out of the whole of our college of business, we have the most undergraduates coming here to major in sports management. That’s because of what they know about OU, and the rankings definitely come into play there and have helped us to build up a reputation as the destination for anyone who wants a career in sports.”

Being able to point to the course’s success in the rankings is not only meaningful as an external show of strength, but internally within the Ohio University ecosystem, says Strode. “It’s pretty common for our university leaders to point to these rankings, they take tremendous pride in our sports administration department as a result of our performances in the rankings,” he says. “We’re really excited at the moment because

Hugh Sherman, the former dean of the college of business, has just assumed a two-year contract as president of Ohio University. He really understands sport and he’s already been extolling the pride he and the university has in having an internationally-recognised sports administration programme in its ranks.”

Widening appeal

For *SportBusiness* and the course leaders alike, the greatest validation is to hear students have turned to the rankings to help them decide which courses to apply for – that, after all, is why we started doing this in 2012. “We have heard feedback from students who were encouraged to take the Fifa Master because of the rankings,” says Oswald. “We are happy to hear this, because it means that the rankings are not only taken seriously by the sport industry and by academics, but by the people who are interested in the industry and want to enter it. Being consistently placed in the top positions has helped us to attract the best students and reinforce our leading position.”

Strode concurs, and says that the rankings have been a particular benefit to boosting

Ohio University’s international appeal. “We’ve always had global reach, we’ve always reached internationally,” he says, “but we know for a fact that our placement on the rankings has driven awareness in the UK and Europe in particular, and that’s paid dividends, because we’ve been able to bolster our reach with tremendously talented intentional students who may otherwise not have been aware that we offered this, or certainly of the quality of our offering in sports management.”

McKelvey concedes that the rankings alone are unlikely to convince someone to move across the USA or even move countries just to study. “But it does help us to stand out that little bit more,” he says. “It serves as a useful tool for people who are applying, just to give them another metric in their equation about the quality of programmes. There are strong programmes in all different regions of this country and increasingly internationally, but the rankings offer a way to delineate the top 10 per cent of programmes from those in the next 10 or 20 per cent. It really represents the cream of the academic crop.”



A decade of success, but only the start



The end of 2021 marks a decade of unparalleled success for the ESA Diploma, sports marketing's premier training qualification based in the UK. Founded in 2012 with 36 candidates signing up for its inaugural course, the Diploma has just rounded off its tenth edition with its largest-ever intake of over 100 students from 14 different countries. It will mark its first decade having qualified nearly 600 industry professionals, all of whom are able to practise in the industry with a sense of considerable accomplishment and with, perhaps more importantly, their knowledge and confidence greatly enhanced and enriched by the experience.

The infographic on the right, based on its first nine years, shows just how effective and far-reaching the Diploma has been in reaching all areas of the industry, initially in the UK, but increasingly internationally.

Course director Peter Raymond is definitive about what he considers the proudest achievement of the Diploma to date. "My biggest thrill is knowing that a large proportion of our students each year come to the Diploma having had it enthusiastically recommended by colleagues, contacts or friends," he says. "Each year we refine the course in line with comments from the students and I'm confident we've now got the perfect mix of elements to ensure a rich learning experience. The fact that so many of



our students tell their businesses and colleagues how much they enjoyed and benefitted from their time with us is undoubtedly what I'm proudest about."

The European Sponsorship Association has the onerous responsibility of representing all businesses that operate in the commercial sector of sports marketing across Europe and has, as one of its primary objectives, an ambition to inspire and educate its stakeholders. A decade ago, it faced up to the fact that the sponsorship industry had no training qualification by choosing a challenging and immersive distance learning qualification to plug this yawning gap.

Chairman Andy Westlake takes up the story: "We wanted to put in place a learning experience that educated its students about all aspects of our ever-evolving industry and which was challenging enough for them to feel proud about achieving. We think we've got a course that suits all levels of experience, is equally valid irrespective of which part of the industry you're from, and that guarantees to improve the

performance level of whoever takes it. We're confident we've created something unique, something unavailable anywhere else in the world."

The Diploma comprises a mixture of learning stimuli from comprehensive study notes, an assessment protocol based on written assignments, a course project and live learning seminars involving industry-leading experts who willingly give up their time to help educate the next generation. There are several other elements to encourage networking, knowledge-sharing and social interaction. "We've also got several course sponsors who greatly add to the whole Diploma experience," Raymond explains. "Our great friends at *SportBusiness* and *Activative* share our passion for education and generously give access to their online content throughout the course which is a tremendous bonus for the students. We have partnered with *SportBusiness* since the first edition of the Diploma, and being able to give our students access to the depth and breadth of their resources on sponsorship and the wider industry is invaluable.

"We think we offer our students a multi-layered experience to set them up for a successful and fulfilling career, whether that is based on academic achievement or a fulfilling grounding that prepares them for improved workplace contribution. Either way,

what we offer is incredibly valuable to their overall personal development."

Like several other online learning initiatives, the pandemic brought some unexpected enhancements to the Diploma programme. "It made us concentrate on our digital assets and, as a result, our seminar programme for this year's course has greatly benefitted," says Raymond. "For example, we've had seminar presenters from across the world – three from the US, one each from New Zealand, Denmark and Ireland – embracing an unprecedented level of global industry knowledge, which has been incredibly inspiring for this year's students. It's also enabled us to have face-to-face tutorials with students wherever they happen to be, which has been extremely rewarding for their learning experience."

Certainly, Diploma alumni speak glowingly about their experiences. David Adams, head of commercial partnerships at the Professional Golfers Association, who took the Diploma in its first year in 2012 when he was working in the commercial team at Arsenal FC, says: "I believe the ESA Diploma is a mark of excellence and one that has helped me navigate my career in sports marketing & sponsorship."

Stuart Milne, who gained a Distinction in the Diploma in 2015, when he was commercial partnerships manager at the British Universities

& Colleges Sport (he has since risen to Head of Partner Services at the Aston Martin Cognizant Formula One Team), adds: "The ESA Diploma was the trampoline for my career in the sports marketing industry, providing me with an educational foundation fused with incredible networking opportunities that have opened many doors since. Six years on I still find myself reverting back to the course material and have wholeheartedly recommended the diploma to many colleagues over the years."

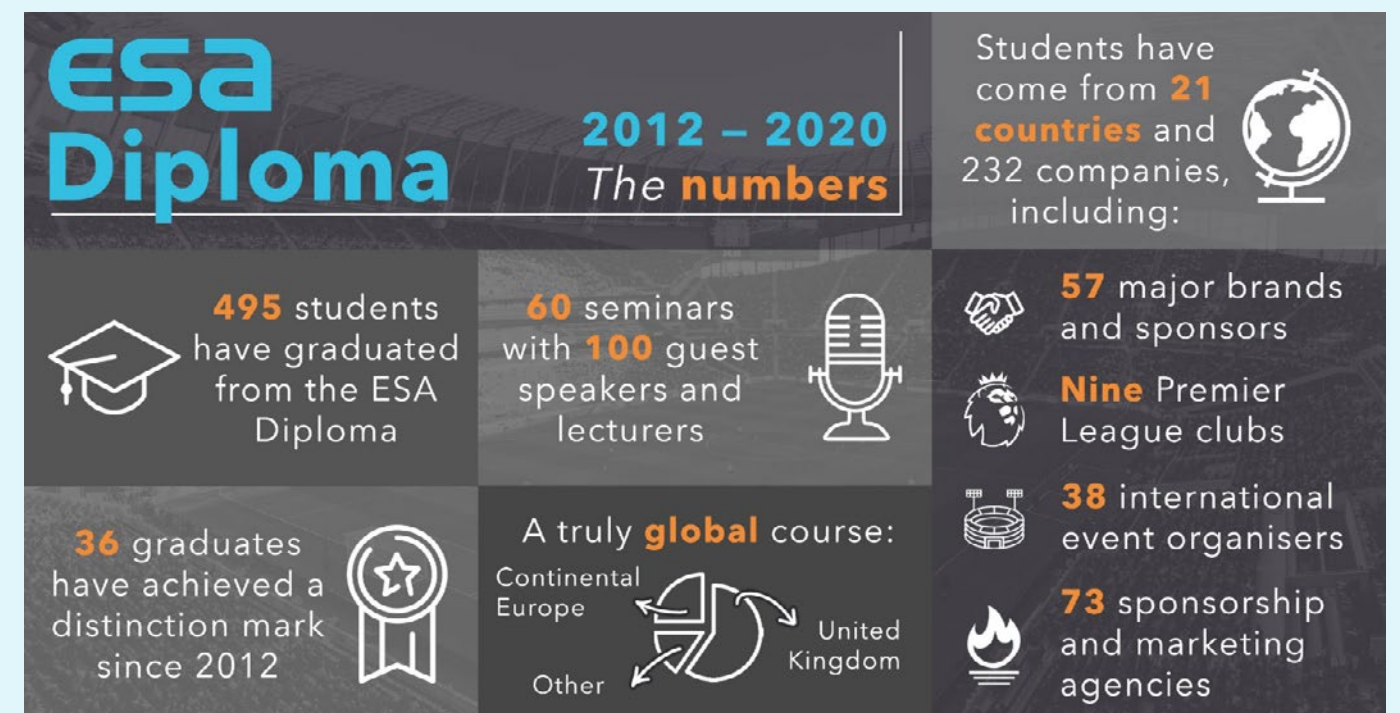
Kevin Smit, one of the Diploma's international students who gained a Distinction in 2018 and is currently Sponsorship Manager (Regions) for ASB Bank in New Zealand (where among a varied portfolio he manages the bank's sponsorship of the All Blacks), also speaks enthusiastically of the course: "The coursework provides a large breadth of knowledge relevant to today's competitive landscape and exposed me to a diverse array of subject matter experts who brought with them a high level of experience and commercial acumen," he says. "I really enjoyed the opportunity to meet peers from across the globe and hear how their experiences translated to our course lessons. Ultimately the experience contributed to accelerating my career development and my progression into a senior role within my organisation."

Finally, Michelle Gouly, head

of partnerships at the City Football Group, adds: "I completed the ESA Diploma in 2013 and found it an incredibly insightful and rewarding experience, not only improving my knowledge and opening my eyes to the breadth of the sponsorship industry but giving me a significant confidence boost as I took the next steps in my career."

"In addition, the course piqued my interest in cause and purpose partnerships, an interest I've since pursued and have the privilege of working on day-to-day as part of my current role as Head of Foundation Partnerships at City Football Group. It's been exciting to see the diploma go from strength to strength over the last decade and I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to anyone seeking to start or further their career in sponsorship."

After a decade of continual growth and evolution complacency is not something that occurs to Raymond. "We're approaching our second decade with even more vigour and are preparing to re-launch the whole Diploma package. We've already started preparing to completely update the course notes to reflect the many ongoing changes in the sports marketing environment and look forward to welcoming anyone from around the world who is keen to advance their career by taking the transformative Diploma challenge."



Top of the Class

Average Salary

Rank	Provider	Salary (\$)
1	Columbia University	100,778
2	University of Oregon, Lundquist College of Business, Warsaw Sports Marketing Center	96,789
3	Real Madrid Graduate School	95,233
4	University of Bayreuth	90,598
5	The International Centre for Sport Studies (CIES)	90,583
6	AISTS	86,034
7	University of Liverpool Management School - Football Industries MBA	83,300
8	New York University Tisch Institute for Global Sport	68,048
9	University of Massachusetts Amherst, Mark H. McCormack Department of Sport Management	67,546
10	George Washington University	67,021

Graduates' Choice Based on student satisfaction score*

Rank	Provider	Score
1	University of Parma - University of Republic of San Marino	98.46
2	Ohio University	98.29
3	University of Massachusetts Amherst, Mark H. McCormack Department of Sport Management	97.32
4=	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	97.22
4=	George Washington University	97.22
6	University of South Florida, Muma College of Business	97.01
7	University of San Francisco	94.67
8	University of Central Florida	94.37
9	Virginia Commonwealth University Center for Sport Leadership	93.79
10	University of Vigo	93.58

* The student satisfaction score is the aggregated total of the following six measures: Quality of teaching, support in finding a job in the industry, quality of extra-curricular support, opportunities to connect with the alumni network, ability to network with industry executives and value for money provided by the masters program.

Peer review

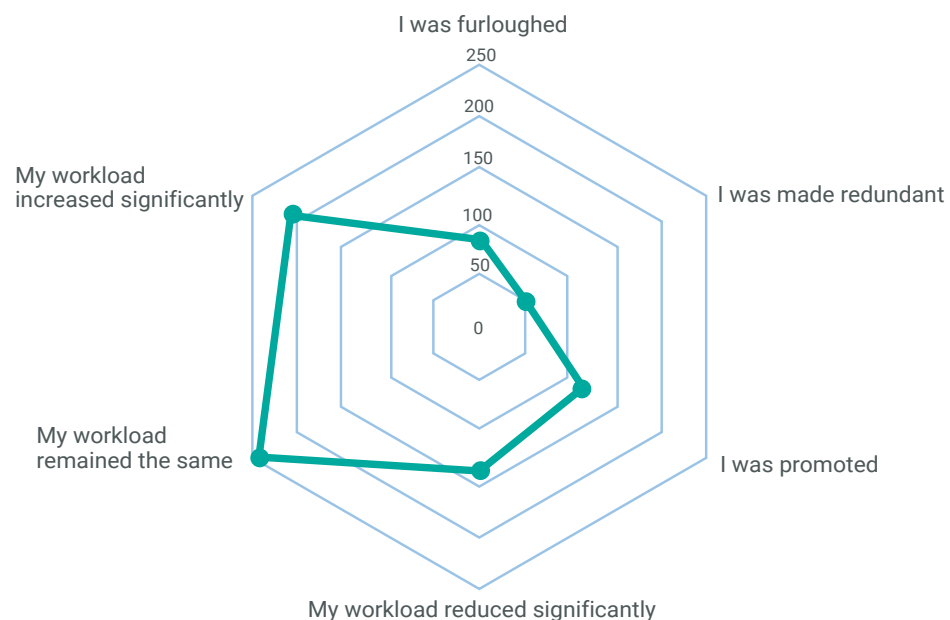
Rank	Provider
1	University of Massachusetts Amherst, Mark H. McCormack Department of Sport Management
2	Ohio University
3	The International Centre for Sport Studies (CIES)
4	University of Oregon, Lundquist College of Business, Warsaw Sports Marketing Center
5	Columbia University
6	University of South Florida, Muma College of Business
7	AISTS
8	Real Madrid Graduate School
9	University of South Carolina
10	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Most valuable in furthering career Based on career value score

Rank	Provider	Score
1	University of Parma - University of Republic of San Marino	97.50
2	Ohio University	95.65
3	University of Vigo	94.67
4	Russian International Olympic University	89.41
5-	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	88.89
5-	George Washington University	88.89
7	University of Massachusetts Amherst, Mark H. McCormack Department of Sport Management	87.78
8	University of South Florida, Muma College of Business	86.67
9	University of Stirling	85.00
10	Virginia Commonwealth University Center for Sport Leadership	83.75

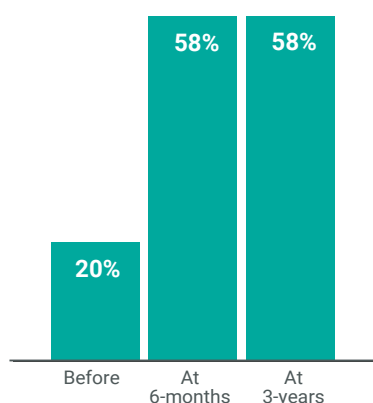
Employment data

Covid impact

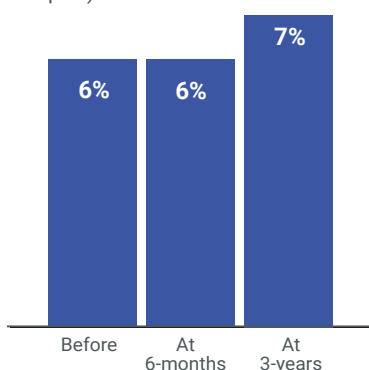


Employment status

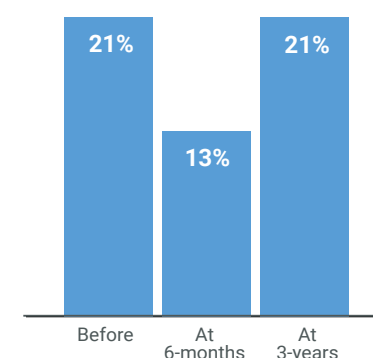
Full-time employment in the sports industry



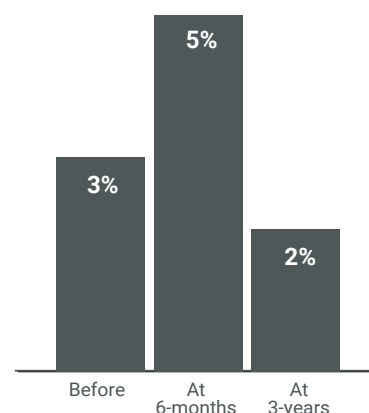
Full-time employment in a non sports industry company but your work is connected to sport (e.g. the marketing department of a major sponsor, working in a legal firm but specializing in sport)



Full-time or self employed outside the sports industry



Unemployed

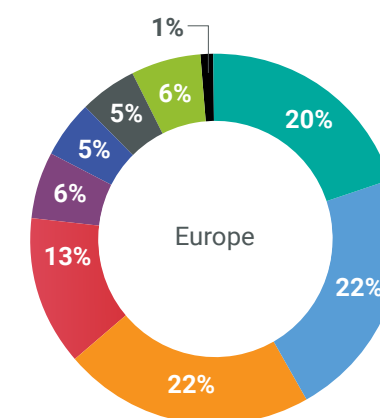
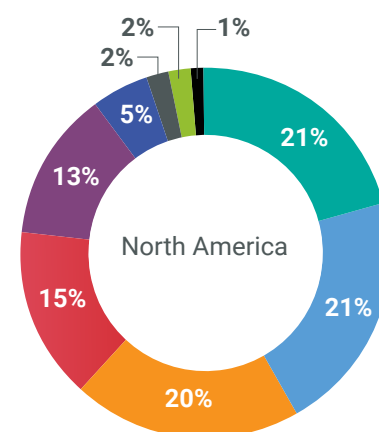


Ideal employer

Ideal employer	Count
NCAA and/or NCAA University	80
NBA and/or NBA Team	65
EPL and/or EPL Club	51
NFL and/or NFL Team	44
IOC	26
LaLiga and/or LaLiga Club	26
Nike	23
Self-employed	21
Agency	20
Fifa	20

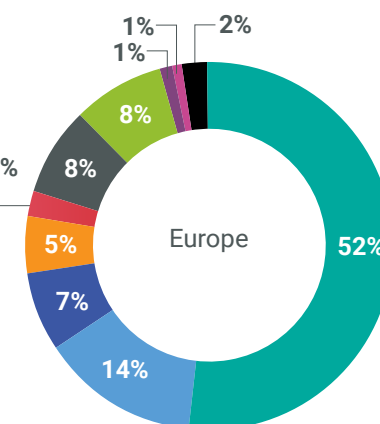
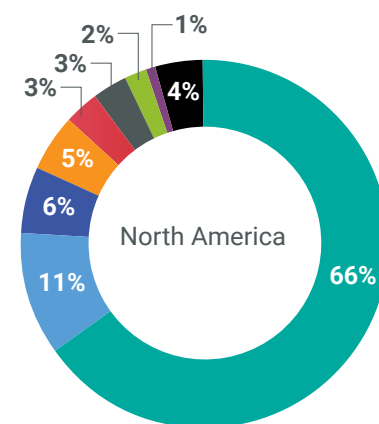
Career Prospects | Sports Masters Graduates

Employment status before beginning course



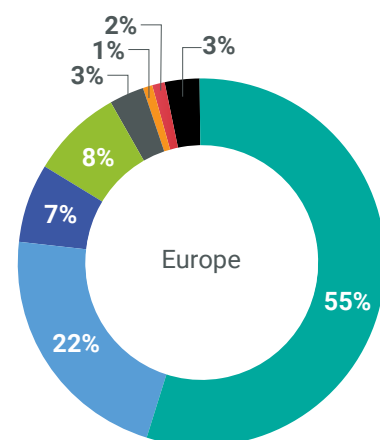
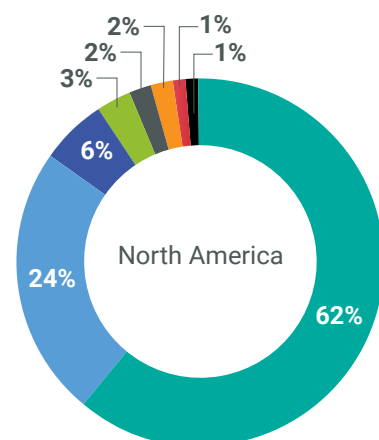
- Full-time employment in the sports industry
- Full-time or self employed outside the sports industry
- Student - other course
- Student - undergraduate sports course
- Part time employment
- Full-time employment in a non sports industry company but connected to sport (e.g. the marketing department of a major sponsor, working in a legal firm but specializing in sport)
- Unemployed
- Self employment within the sports industry
- Other

Employment status six months after graduation



- Full-time employment in the sports industry
- Full-time or self employed outside the sports industry
- Full-time employment in a non sports industry company but your work connected to sport (e.g. the marketing department of a major sponsor, working in a legal firm but specializing in sport)
- Internship within the sports industry that did not lead to a full-time position in the same company
- Internship within the sports industry that led to a full-time position with the same company
- Unemployed
- Self employment within the sports industry
- Enrolled on a full-time sports-related PhD program
- Enrolled on a full-time non-sports academic program
- Other

Current employment status



- Full-time employment in the sports industry
- Full or self employed outside the sports industry
- Full-time employment in a non sports industry company but connected to sport (e.g. the marketing department of a major sponsor, working in a legal firm but specializing in sport)
- Self employment within the sports industry
- Unemployed
- Part-time employment outside the sports industry
- Enrolled on a full-time sports-related PhD program
- Other

Postgraduate Report 2020 the complete data

Rank	Programme provider	Programme	Class Size 2017/18	No of Graduates 2018	Class size 2020/21	Re-sponse rate	Course duration (months)	Work placement	Average age (years)	Over-sub-scription	Female stu-dents	Interna-tional students	Female teaching staff	Interna-tional teaching staff	Employ-ment at 6 months score	Current employ-ment score	Quality of teaching score	Job support score	Extra-curricular support score	Alumni network score	Industry net-working score	Value for money score	Career value score	Useful-ness score	Fre-quency score	Peer review score	Total score
1	Ohio University	MBA/MSA and Master of Sports Administration	27	27	24	85%	11-22	Yes	23	229%	49.0%	4.2%	44.4%	5.6%	93.48	100.00	96.44	95.07	100.00	100.00	100.00	99.49	95.65	90.58	95.03	90.00	91.89
2	University of Massachusetts Amherst, Mark H. McCormack Department of Sport Management	MBA/MS Sport Management and MS Sport Management	22	21	23	86%	12-21	Yes	26	317%	44.0%	13.0%	46.2%	0.0%	88.89	77.78	97.40	94.90	96.85	99.35	98.70	96.57	87.78	86.11	92.06	100.00	89.58
3	University of South Florida, Muma College of Business	MBA/MS - Vinik Sport & Entertainment Management Program	28	28	30	64%	22	Yes	24	243%	50.0%	3.3%	50.0%	25.0%	97.22	86.11	94.25	97.50	94.72	99.35	99.35	97.40	86.67	81.48	91.27	50.00	88.01
4	The International Centre for Sport Studies (CIES)	The FIFA Master	32	32	25	75%	10	Yes	29	512%	52.0%	86.0%	25.0%	33.3%	87.50	87.50	90.42	74.45	82.50	97.08	91.04	88.05	80.00	68.75	67.86	80.00	86.03
5	Columbia University	MS in Sports Management	74	76	69	32%	12-16	Yes	26	206%	26.1%	20.3%	0.0%	0.0%	97.92	100.00	91.59	79.37	80.13	90.07	93.19	82.08	79.13	75.00	78.57	60.00	84.33
6	George Washington University	Masters in Sports Management	20	16	35	56%	16-21	Yes	25	209%	45.7%	8.6%	66.7%	0.0%	88.89	83.33	97.40	93.70	97.40	100.00	100.00	94.80	88.89	85.19	85.71	20.00	84.11
7	University of Oregon	Warsaw Sports Marketing Center, MBA in Sports Business	22	22	25	77%	21	Yes	28	188%	32.0%	12.0%	37.5%	16.7%	88.24	85.29	89.31	88.72	85.78	99.31	99.31	86.47	80.00	74.51	80.67	70.00	83.79
8	AISTS - International Academy of Sport Science and Technology	Master of Advanced Studies in Sport Administration and Technology	40	40	27	35%	15	Yes	29	244%	44.4%	96.3%	50.0%	87.5%	89.29	92.86	87.97	90.00	84.40	91.54	86.67	84.16	80.00	73.81	65.31	40.00	83.75
9	The Ohio State University	Master of Science in Sport Management	24	24	31	58%	12-24	Yes	23	152%	54.8%	9.7%	50.0%	0.0%	92.86	96.43	96.66	86.79	90.59	94.99	95.11	92.74	80.00	83.33	82.65	10.00	83.46
10	University of San Francisco	Master of Sport Management	104	100	108	37%	23	Yes	25	132%	37.0%	16.7%	20.0%	40.0%	86.49	81.08	96.52	93.55	90.99	97.52	96.89	90.69	75.14	74.54	80.56	20.00	83.06
11	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	Masters of Sport Administration	10	10	13	90%	22	Yes	23	262%	53.8%	0.0%	40.0%	0.0%	83.33	72.22	98.70	92.40	100.00	95.00	97.40	100.00	88.89	88.89	85.71	30.00	81.93
12	University of Parma & University of San Marino	International Masters in Strategic Management of Sports Organisations, Events and Facilities	25	25	25	64%	12	Yes	26	276%	28.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	96.88	87.50	97.92	97.81	100.00	100.00	100.00	95.73	97.50	96.88	99.11	20.00	81.32
13	University of Vigo	Master in Business Administration of Sport	18	18	25	83%	9	Yes	25	52%	28.0%	28.0%	44.4%	2.2%	86.67	93.33	99.22	79.89	89.44	97.66	93.88	97.78	94.67	88.89	88.78	0.00	81.30
14	Virginia Commonwealth University Center for Sport Leadership	Master of Sport Leadership	31	28	36	57%	12	Yes	22	314%	55.6%	8.3%	25.0%	25.0%	93.75	93.75	97.81	93.64	95.61	93.85	93.12	87.49	83.75	85.42	86.61	0.00	80.66
15	Coventry University	MSc Sport Management	45	40	29	50%	12-24	Yes	25	1093%	13.8%	82.8%	33.3%	50.0%	75.00	90.00	94.83	76.99	88.41	86.00	87.92	90.66	81.00	78.33	82.86	20.00	80.31
16	University of Central Florida	DeVos Sport Business Management Program	30	30	21	73%	21	Yes	24	143%	42.9%	4.8%	20.0%	10.0%	79.55	84.09	94.62	92.42	93.33	93.78	95.83	95.83	79.09	74.24	87.01	10.00	79.74
17	University of Ottawa	Masters in Human Kinetics - MHK in Sport Management	16	16	18	56%	12	Yes	23	289%	61.1%	0.0%	50.0%	25.0%	94.44	94.44	95.61	70.85	69.39	94.15	98.54	80.61	80.00	77.08	92.86	10.00	78.97
18	Georgia State University	Masters of Science in Sport Administration	71	47	45	51%	24	Yes	25	233%	44.4%	13.3%	66.7%	33.3%	95.83	93.75	91.04	76.67	84.65	86.52	86.03	82.92	80.00	75.69	82.14	10.00	78.61
19	Florida Atlantic University	MBA Sport Management	82	24	55	67%	23	Yes	24	489%	27.3%	0.0%	31.6%	35.1%	81.25	71.88	96.34	89.48	86.78	85.52	88.03	85.00	82.50	82.29	82.14	0.00	77.82
20	University of South Carolina	Master of Science in Sport and Entertainment Management	38	35	39	77%	15	Yes	24	174%	41.0%	41.0%	20.8%	16.7%	77.78	74.07	91.41	79.26	83.51	80.19	85.55	84.75	75.56	70.37	74.60	40.00	77.74
21=	University of Windsor	Master of Human Kinetics (MHK) in Sport Management	11	9	11	89%	16-24	Yes	24	236%	36.4%	0.0%	42.9%	0.0%	81.25	75.00	98.54	82.50	92.91	84.78	91.45	95.84	80.00	81.25	85.71	10.00	77.14
21=	Real Madrid Graduate School	MBA in Sports Management	44	44	58	39%	9	Yes	27	0%	n/a	13.8%	n/a	n/a	94.12	97.06	89.41	76.26	77.05	84.31	84.21	81.95	83.53	82.35	88.24	40.00	77.14
23	University of Liverpool Management School	MSc Sport Business and Management	30	25	81	64%	12	No	24	617%	18.5%	76.5%	33.3%	33.3%	62.50	81.25	97.92	81.35	86.13	87.59	93.53	89.48	82.50	79.17	87.50	0.00	76.55
24	NYU Tisch Institute for Global Sport	MS in Sports Business	52	49	56	24%	12-16	Yes	27	284%	25.0%	35.7%	33.3%	0.0%	83.33	70.83	96.10	73.47	81.39	87.78	90.13	78.89	68.33	63.89	61.90	10.00	76.07
25	University of Liverpool Management School	MBA Football Industries	20	17	22	35%	12	No	35	509%	40.9%	54.5%	20.0%	40.0%	66.67	75.00	86.95	57.22	74.45	86.65	92.20	80.27	60.00	69.44	66.67	30.00	76.05
26=	Russian International Olympic University	Master of Sports Administration	51	43	53	40%	10	Yes	31	183%	41.5%	30.2%	22.2%	0.0%	78.13	84.38	95.98	71.19	86.66	91.76	78.32	87.93	89.41	85.29	84.87	20.00	75.60
26=	Bayreuth University	MBA Sport Management	36	40	32	35%	24	No	29	475%	18.8%	6.3%	12.5%	0.0%	85.71	85.71	96.66	73.94	78.81	96.66	94.28	89.04	61.43	67.86	74.49	0.00	75.60
28	University of Stirling	MSc in Sport Management	55	52	83	23%	12	Yes	26	435%	18.1%	54.2%	37.5%	50.0%	79.17	75.00	94.30	71.26	82.63	77.64	81.24	86.94	85.00	72.22	73.81	10.00	74.63
29	University of Tennessee	Master in Sports Management	27	29	22	83%	20	Yes	22	255%	40.9%	0.0%	25.0%	25.0%	79.17	77.08	92.91	78.18	82.98	92.35	87.63	89.65	75.00	70.83	77.98	0.00	73.69
30	Temple University / School of Sport, Tourism, and Hospitality Management	Master of Science in Sport Business	40	55	55	49%	21	Yes	25	131%	29.1%	18.2%	36.4%	9.1%	87.04	83.33	88.32	76.23	77.28	82.34	82.77	77.59	69.63	64.20	70.37	10.00	73.66
31	Seattle University	MBA Sport and Entertainment Management	15	15	14	40%	24	Yes	23	171%	35.7%	14.3%	100.0%	0.0%	83.33	75.00	92.50	86.95	86.65	88.60	90.55	82.22	80.00	72.22	85.71	0.00	72.81
32	Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey	MS Global Sports Business	27	23	29	48%	16	Yes	25	55%	34.5%	3.4%	16.7%	0.0%	77.27	81.82	83.47	73.34	75.30	84.69	96.81	79.70	74.55	68.18	80.00	0.00	71.84
33	Washington State University	M.A. in Sport Management	13	16	7	44%	21	No	26	243%	57.1%	14.3%	20.0%	40.0%	92.86	78.57	90.55	56.95	77.22	56.95	65.55	75.27	76.67	66.67	78.57	0.00	71.78
34	University College Dublin	MSc Sport Management	25	24	27	42%	12	No	31	163%	25.9%	18.5%	25.0%	25.0%	75.00	75.00	92.98	72.83	71.50	88.16	86.99	82.49	76.00	65.00	70.00	10.00	71.61
35	Sheffield Hallam University	MSc Sport Business Management	37	36	56	33%	12	Yes	27	120%	25.0%	44.6%	50.0%	0.0%	79.17	66.67	93.33	70.98	73.63	79.03	78.33	85.56	68.33	61.11	64.29	10.00	71.10
36	AMOS Sport Business School	Master in Sport Management	152	138	448	44%	24	Yes	21	7%	48.2%	5.4%	35.4%	12.5%	86.89	90.98	86.31	72.38	75.00	70.00	79.62	76.58	73.11	71.39	79.76	10.00	70.97
37	Venice Ca' Foscari University	Master SBS - Sports Business Strategies	38	38	34	32%	12	Yes	24	24%	29.4%	0.0%	n/a	n/a	79.17	87.50	88.60	88.03	85.98	84.30	94.15	81.66	81.67	68.06	73.81	0.00	70.84
38	Centro Formación Fundación Valencia CF - ESBS	Master in International Sports Management	16	16	99	94%	9	Yes	27	167%	19.2%	70.7%	15.0%	17.5%	76.67	83.33	90.88	62.23	82.23	82.77	81.89	83.88	82.67	70.00	77.14	10.00	70.83
39	Vrije Universiteit Brussel	Postgraduate Sports Management Course (PG SPORT)	56	56	62	20%	8	Yes	23	32%	24.2%	4.8%	20.0%	7.5%	85.00	81.82	80.75	82.87	78.33	89.99	86.80	76.95	70.91	65.15	62.34	0.00	69.58
40	Loughborough University	MSc Sports Management	72	67	91	34%	12	No	24	607%	33.0%	80.9%	22.2%	38.9%	80.43	82.61	86.87	53.19	72.10	70.37	62.90	72.17	66.96	60.14	63.35	30.00	69.30

Top 20 North American Courses

Rank	Programme provider	Programme	Class Size 2017/18	No of Graduates 2018	Class size 2020/21	Re-sponse rate	Course duration (months)	Work placement	Average age (years)	Over-sub-scription	Female stu-dents	Interna-tional students	Female teaching staff	Interna-tional teaching staff	Employ-ment at 6 months score	Current employ-ment score	Quality of teaching score	Job support score	Extra-curricular support score	Alumni network score	Industry net-working score	Value for money score	Career value score	Useful-ness score	Fre-quency score	Peer review score	Total score
1	Ohio University	MBA/MSA and Master of Sports Administration	27	27	24	85%	11-22	Yes	23	229%	49.0%	4.2%	44.4%	5.6%	93.48	100.00	96.44	95.07	100.00	100.00	100.00	99.49	95.65	90.58	95.03	90.00	91.89
2	University of Massachusetts Amherst, Mark H. McCormack Department of Sport Management	MBA/MS Sport Management and MS Sport Management	22	21	23	86%	12-21	Yes	26	317%	44.0%	13.0%	46.2%	0.0%	88.89	77.78	97.40	94.90	96.85	99.35	98.70	96.57	87.78	86.11	92.06	100.00	89.58
3	University of South Florida, Muma College of Business	MBA/MS - Vinik Sport & Entertainment Management Program	28	28	30	64%	22	Yes	24	243%	50.0%	3.3%	50.0%	25.0%	97.22	86.11	94.25	97.50	94.72	99.35	99.35	97.40	86.67	81.48	91.27	50.00	88.01
4	Columbia University	MS in Sports Management	74	76	69	32%	12-16	Yes	26	206%	26.1%	20.3%	0.0%	0.0%	97.92	100.00	91.59	79.37	80.13	90.07	93.19	82.08	79.13	75.00	78.57	60.00	84.33
5	George Washington University	Masters in Sports Management	20	16	35	56%	16-21	Yes	25	209%	45.7%	8.6%	66.7%	0.0%	88.89	83.33	97.40	93.70	97.40	100.00	100.00	94.80	88.89	85.19	85.71	20.00	84.11
6	University of Oregon	Warsaw Sports Marketing Center, MBA in Sports Business	22	22	25	77%	21	Yes	28	188%	32.0%	12.0%	37.5%	16.7%	88.24	85.29	89.31	88.72	85.78	99.31	99.31	86.47	80.00	74.51	80.67	70.00	83.79
7	The Ohio State University	Master of Science in Sport Management	24	24	31	58%	12-24	Yes	23	152%	54.8%	9.7%	50.0%	0.0%	92.86	96.43	96.66	86.79	90.59	94.99	95.11	92.74	80.00	83.33	82.65	10.00	83.46
8	University of San Francisco	Master of Sport Management	104	100	108	37%	23	Yes	25	132%	37.0%	16.7%	20.0%	40.0%	86.49	81.08	96.52	93.55	90.99	97.52	96.89	90.69	75.14	74.54	80.56	20.00	83.06
9	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	Masters of Sport Administration	10	10	13	90%	22	Yes	23	262%	53.8%	0.0%	40.0%	0.0%	83.33	72.22	98.70	92.40	100.00	95.00	97.40	100.00	88.89	88.89	85.71	30.00	81.93
10	Virginia Commonwealth University Center for Sport Leadership	Master of Sport Leadership	31	28	36	57%	12	Yes	22	314%	55.6%	8.3%	25.0%	25.0%	93.75	93.75	97.81	93.64	95.61	93.85	93.12	87.49	83.75	85.42	86.61	0.00	80.66
11	University of Central Florida	DeVos Sport Business Management Program	30	30	21	73%	21	Yes	24	143%	42.9%	4.8%	20.0%	10.0%	79.55	84.09	94.62	92.42	93.33	93.78	95.83	95.83	79.09	74.24	87.01	10.00	79.74
12	University of Ottawa	Masters in Human Kinetics - MHK in Sport Management	16	16	18	56%	12	Yes	23	289%	61.1%	0.0%	50.0%	25.0%	94.44	94.44	95.61	70.85	69.39	94.15	98.54	80.61	80.00	77.08	92.86	10.00	78.97
13	Georgia State University	Masters of Science in Sport Administration	71	47	45	51%	24	Yes	25	233%	44.4%	13.3%	66.7%	33.3%	95.83	93.75	91.04	76.67	84.65	86.52	86.03	82.92	80.00	75.69	82.14	10.00	78.61
14	Florida Atlantic University	MBA Sport Management	82	24	55	67%	23	Yes	24	489%	27.3%	0.0%	31.6%	35.1%	81.25	71.88	96.34	89.48	86.78	85.52	88.03	85.00	82.50	82.29	82.14	0.00	77.82
15	University of South Carolina	Master of Science in Sport and Entertainment Management	38	35	39	77%	15	Yes	24	174%	41.0%	41.0%	20.8%	16.7%	77.78	74.07	91.41	79.26	83.51	80.19	85.55	84.75	75.56	70.37	74.60	40.00	77.74
16	University of Windsor	Master of Human Kinetics (MHK) in Sport Management	11	9	11	89%	16-24	Yes	24	236%	36.4%	0.0%	42.9%	0.0%	81.25	75.00	98.54	82.50	92.91	84.78	91.45	95.84	80.00	81.25	85.71	10.00	77.14
17	NYU Tisch Institute for Global Sport	MS in Sports Business	52	49	56	24%	12-16	Yes	27	284%	25.0%	35.7%	33.3%	0.0%	83.33	70.83	96.10	73.47	81.39	87.78	90.13	78.89	68.33	63.89	61.90	10.00	76.07
18	University of Tennessee	Master in Sports Management	27	29	22	83%	20	Yes	22	255%	40.9%	0.0%	25.0%	25.0%	79.17	77.08	92.91	78.18	82.98	92.35	87.63	89.65	75.00	70.83	77.98	0.00	73.69
19	Temple University, School of Sport, Tourism, and Hospitality Management	Master of Science in Sport Business	40	55	55	49%	21	Yes	25	131%	29.1%	18.2%	36.4%	9.1%	87.04	83.33	88.32	76.23	77.28	82.34	82.77	77.59	69.63	64.20	70.37	10.00	73.66
20	Seattle University	MBA Sport and Entertainment Management	15	15	14	40%	24	Yes	23	171%	35.7%	14.3%	100.0%	0.0%	83.33	75.00	92.50	86.95	86.65	88.60	90.55	82.22	80.00	72.22	85.71	0.00	72.81

Top 20 European Courses

Rank	Programme provider	Programme	Class Size 2017/18	No of Graduates 2018	Class size 2020/21	Re-sponse rate	Course duration (months)	Work placement	Average age (years)	Over-subscription	Female students	International students	Female teaching staff	International teaching staff	Employment at 6 months score	Current employment score	Quality of teaching score	Job support score	Extra-curricular support score	Alumni network score	Industry networking score	Value for money score	Career value score	Usefulness score	Frequency score	Peer review score	Total score
1	The International Centre for Sport Studies (CIES)	The FIFA Master	32	32	25	75%	10	Yes	29	512%	52.0%	86.0%	25.0%	33.3%	87.50	87.50	90.42	74.45	82.50	97.08	91.04	88.05	80.00	68.75	67.86	80.00	86.03
2	AISTS - International Academy of Sport Science and Technology	Master of Advanced Studies in Sport Administration and Technology	40	40	27	35%	15	Yes	29	244%	44.4%	96.3%	50.0%	87.5%	89.29	92.86	87.97	90.00	84.40	91.54	86.67	84.16	80.00	73.81	65.31	40.00	83.75
3	University of Parma & University of San Marino	MasterSport – International Masters in Strategic Management of Sports Organisations, Events and Facilities	25	25	25	64%	12	Yes	26	276%	28.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	96.88	87.50	97.92	97.81	100.00	100.00	100.00	95.73	97.50	96.88	99.11	20.00	81.32
4	University of Vigo	Master in Business Administration of Sport	18	18	25	83%	9	Yes	25	52%	28.0%	28.0%	44.4%	2.2%	86.67	93.33	99.22	79.89	89.44	97.66	93.88	97.78	94.67	88.89	88.78	0.00	81.30
5	Coventry University	MSc Sport Management	45	40	29	50%	12-24	Yes	25	1093%	13.8%	82.8%	33.3%	50.0%	75.00	90.00	94.83	76.99	88.41	86.00	87.92	90.66	81.00	78.33	82.86	20.00	80.31
6	Real Madrid Graduate School	MBA in Sports Management	44	44	58	39%	9	Yes	27	0%	n/a	13.8%	n/a	n/a	94.12	97.06	89.41	76.26	77.05	84.31	84.21	81.95	83.53	82.35	88.24	40.00	77.14
7	University of Liverpool Management School	MSc Sport Business and Management	30	25	81	64%	12	No	24	617%	18.5%	76.5%	33.3%	33.3%	62.50	81.25	97.92	81.35	86.13	87.59	93.53	89.48	82.50	79.17	87.50	0.00	76.55
8	University of Liverpool Management School	MBA Football Industries	20	17	22	35%	12	No	35	509%	40.9%	54.5%	20.0%	40.0%	66.67	75.00	86.95	57.22	74.45	86.65	92.20	80.27	60.00	69.44	66.67	30.00	76.05
9=	Russian International Olympic University	Master of Sports Administration	51	43	53	40%	10	Yes	31	183%	41.5%	30.2%	22.2%	0.0%	78.13	84.38	95.98	71.19	86.66	91.76	78.32	87.93	89.41	85.29	84.87	20.00	75.60
9=	Bayreuth University	MBA Sport Management	36	40	32	35%	24	No	29	475%	18.8%	6.3%	12.5%	0.0%	85.71	85.71	96.66	73.94	78.81	96.66	94.28	89.04	61.43	67.86	74.49	0.00	75.60
11	University of Stirling	MSc in Sport Management	55	52	83	23%	12	Yes	26	435%	18.1%	54.2%	37.5%	50.0%	79.17	75.00	94.30	71.26	82.63	77.64	81.24	86.94	85.00	72.22	73.81	10.00	74.63
12	University College Dublin	MSc Sport Management	25	24	27	42%	12	No	31	163%	25.9%	18.5%	25.0%	25.0%	75.00	75.00	92.98	72.83	71.50	88.16	86.99	82.49	76.00	65.00	70.00	10.00	71.61
13	Sheffield Hallam University	MSc Sport Business Management	37	36	56	33%	12	Yes	27	120%	25.0%	44.6%	50.0%	0.0%	79.17	66.67	93.33	70.98	73.63	79.03	78.33	85.56	68.33	61.11	64.29	10.00	71.10
14	AMOS Sport Business School	Master in Sport Management	152	138	448	44%	24	Yes	21	7%	48.2%	5.4%	35.4%	12.5%	86.89	90.98	86.31	72.38	75.00	70.00	79.62	76.58	73.11	71.39	79.76	10.00	70.97
15	Venice Ca' Foscari University	Master SBS - Sports Business Strategies	38	38	34	32%	12	Yes	24	24%	29.4%	0.0%	n/a	n/a	79.17	87.50	88.60	88.03	85.98	84.30	94.15	81.66	81.67	68.06	73.81	0.00	70.84
16	Centro Formación Fundación Valencia CF - ESBS	Master in International Sports Management	16	16	99	94%	9	Yes	27	167%	19.2%	70.7%	15.0%	17.5%	76.67	83.33	90.88	62.23	82.23	82.77	81.89	83.88	82.67	70.00	77.14	10.00	70.83
17	Vrije Universiteit Brussel	Postgraduate Sports Management Course (PG SPORT)	56	56	62	20%	8	Yes	23	32%	24.2%	4.8%	20.0%	7.5%	85.00	81.82	80.75	82.87	78.33	89.99	86.80	76.95	70.91	65.15	62.34	0.00	69.58
18	Loughborough University	MSc Sports Management	72	67	91	34%	12	No	24	607%	33.0%	80.9%	22.2%	38.9%	80.43	82.61	86.87	53.19	72.10	70.37	62.90	72.17	66.96	60.14	63.35	30.00	69.30
19	Northumbria University	MSc International Sport Management	24	23	31	26%	12	No	22	265%	35.5%	38.7%	38.5%	30.8%	70.00	58.33	98.05	60.00	81.38	77.48	78.62	94.15	76.67	66.67	61.90	0.00	68.42
20	Johan Cruyff Institute	Master in Sport Management	150	129	151	19%	10-13	Yes	30	25%	19.9%	74.2%	16.3%	22.4%	72.92	76.09	84.64	63.54	72.57	81.18	80.69	73.95	63.33	63.89	63.10	20.00	67.02

Online Programmes

1	Ohio University	Professional Master of Sports Administration	26	26	26	23%	21	No	32	n/a	30.8%	3.8%	42.9%	0.0%	100.00	91.67	98.05	86.12	87.66	94.45	98.05	89.72	76.67	69.44	73.81	0.00	79.23
2	Unisport Management School	MBA Sports Management	38	38	40	45%	13	Yes	28	25%	31.0%	42.0%	0.0%	0.0%	79.41	85.29	90.83	83.43	84.21	85.93	78.54	89.06	75.00	72.92	78.57	0.00	75.13

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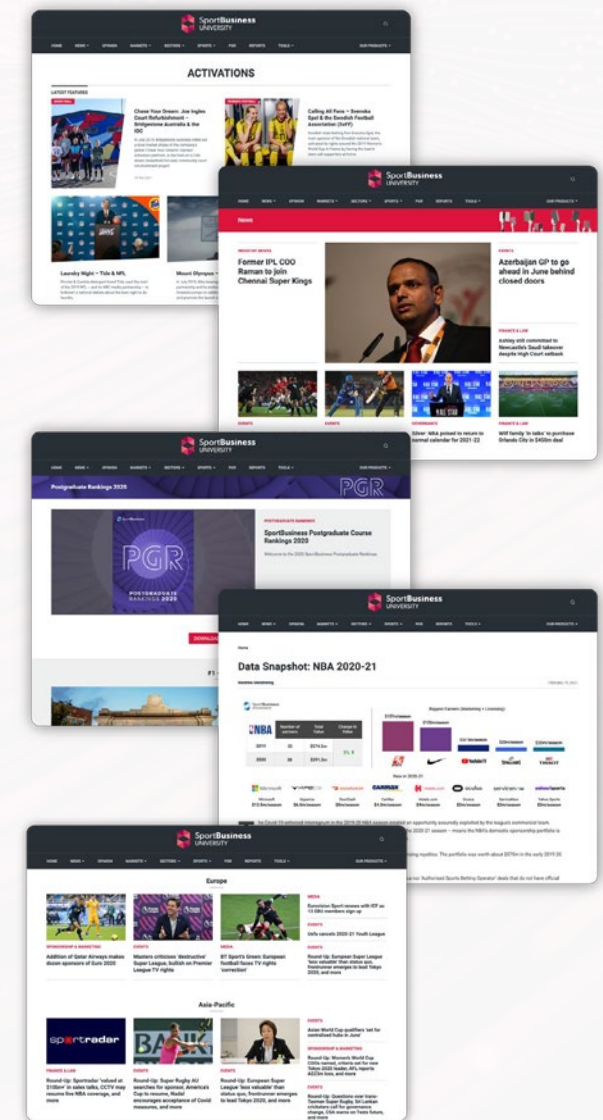
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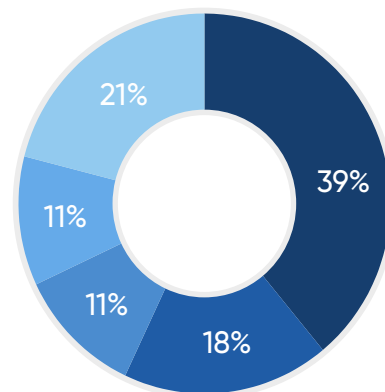
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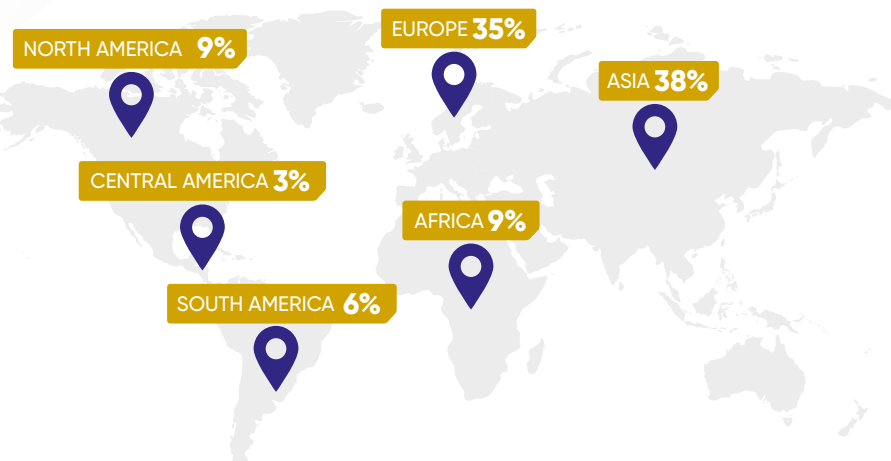
This is how the alumni from the 18th edition of the FIFA Master - International Master in Management, Law and Humanities of Sport - are distributed around the world in 2021.



- International Sports Organisations
- National Sports Organisations
- Sports Clubs & Teams
- Agencies
- Other Sports Related Businesses

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