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Team Marketing prepares to fight through its existential crisis

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Welcome to the Q3 issue of SportBusiness



In the latest issue of our quarterly magazine, our cover story (page 8) explores the fortunes of Uefa's club competition sales agent outside the US, Team Marketing, and its uphill battle to retain its contract beyond the current cycle.

In spite of beginning the latest sales process with a brace of bumper media deals, sources say the governing body and its joint venture partner, the European Club Association, have plans to eschew the agency from 2027-28.

The two organisations have seen the large commissions accruing to their sales representative in each of the last four three-season cycles and are minded to keep 100 per cent of the revenues generated by the competitions for themselves in the future. Whether that is a realistic prospect or not, the immediate upshot is that Team, which until now has tended to shun the limelight, is likely to promote its exploits more aggressively while it continues to market the rights.

The All England Lawn Tennis Club (AELTC), organiser of the Wimbledon Championships, is one rights-holder that has already gone down the route of taking a selection

of commercial responsibilities in-house. Although the IMG agency continues to represent and advise the event across some media rights and sponsorship sales, the AELTC has in recent years expanded its in-house capabilities, for example seizing control of its retail, licensing and merchandising activities from the agency in 2015. On page 16 we speak to the organisation's new commercial director Gus Henderson, himself a former vice-president and head of sponsorship sales in Asia Pacific for IMG, about his plans to expand the tournament's commercial footprint in the US, India and China.

Meanwhile, the betting data division of Henderson's erstwhile employer, IMG Arena, has been on an aggressive rights push in recent months. On page 27 we report on how it has secured an eight-year deal for the official betting data and streaming rights to Major League Soccer. Although the perception in the market is that the firm paid a significant premium for the rights, the combination of the MLS betting content with the agency's recent deal to acquire the data rights to multiple league and cup competitions within the European Leagues collective will enable it to create a year-round offering for bookmakers.

Also in this issue we publish the 11th edition of our popular Postgraduate Rankings, where we list the world's best postgraduate sports management programmes. Turn to page 65 to find out which course came out on top. ♦

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Contents

7 *The View from...*

Long reads from each of our regional editorial hubs, taking an in-depth look at the dynamics shaping the business of sport in the Americas, Europe and Asia-Pacific.

London



- 8** Team Marketing prepares to fight through its existential crisis
- 16** New Wimbledon commercial team looks to US, India and China for next wave of growth

New York



- 26** MLS agrees lucrative long-term betting data and streaming deal with IMG Arena
- 32** MLB marks 20th anniversary of MLB.TV with focus on the future
- 36** ESPN+ documentary 'Fate of a Sport' highlights growing impact of Premier Lacrosse League

Singapore



- 40** PSG reaps the benefits of being fashionable in Japan in lucrative pre-season tour
- 46** "Never underestimate beIN Sports": Apac chief Kerr sets out long-term ambitions in region

54 *News Analysis*

Five of the most important news stories shaping the industry you should read.



- 54** Additional lower-tier deals help Birmingham Commonwealth Games hit sponsorship target
- 56** Forest holding out for £10m shirt sponsorship deal after rebuffing offers
- 60** Crypto.com pulled out of huge Champions League sponsorship at last moment
- 61** DAZN close to IPL rights acquisition in major cricket markets
- 64** BT set to renew EPCR pay-TV rights deal in UK

65 *PGR 2022*

SportBusiness' annual ranking of the world's best postgraduate sports management programmes.



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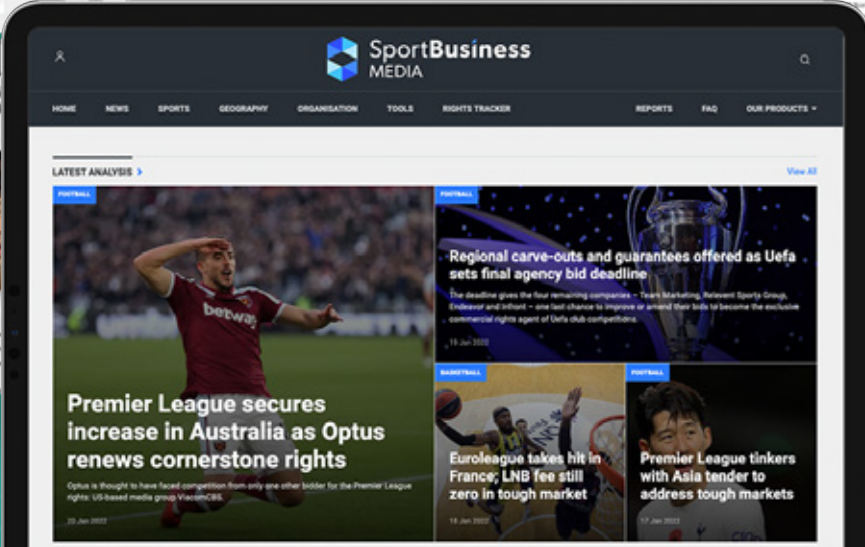
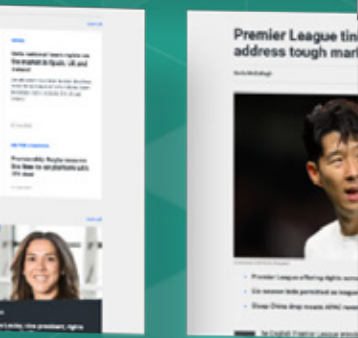


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The view from

LONDON

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*Team Marketing prepares
fight through its existenti*

- Team strikes Uefa club deals worth close to €1.05bn per season, from 2024-27
- Agency fighting for its life as Uefa and ECA tipped to bring commercial sales in-house
- Well-publicised sales projection of €5bn per season is higher than reality

By Callum McCarthy

If the 2024-27 cycle of Uefa club competition rights sales is to be Team Marketing's swansong, it's belting out one hell of a tune.

Team, Uefa's club competition sales agent outside the US, has begun the current three-season cycle with two massive media rights deals. It netted about €1.05bn (\$1.075bn) per season across deals in France with pay-television broadcaster Canal Plus and commercial broadcaster M6; and in the UK with pay-television broadcaster BT Sport, ecommerce giant Amazon and public-service broadcaster the BBC.

Cumulatively, the deals represent an increase of just under 22 per cent on the current agreements, worth a total of about €860m per season. The new deals will add about €190m per season to Uefa club competition revenues over the 2024-25 to 2026-27 cycle – a strong result by most yardsticks.

The increases are thought to be in line with Team's aggressive projections for those markets, but the agency has little cause for celebration. Everyone at Team – from the chief executive to the receptionist – knows this club competition cycle could be its last.

Team has never worked with any other client than Uefa. Since it was formed in 1992, the agency has been a special-purpose vehicle selling commercial rights to Uefa club competitions, renewing its contract every three seasons. However, during a tender process that spanned three-and-a-half intense months from October 2021 to February this year, Uefa and the European Club Association explored every possible avenue to replace its decades-long partner.

Uefa and the ECA took the process beyond three bidding rounds and into private negotiations to find a replacement, but Team hung on to retain its mandate in all markets other than the US, where Relevent Sports Group was awarded media rights in exchange for a minimum guarantee of \$250m (€244m) per season.

Most experts polled by *SportBusiness Media* believe Team's victory could be short-lived. The agency's



Chelsea fans protest the introduction of the European Super League on April 20, 2021 (Photo by Charlotte Wilson/Offside/Offside via Getty Images).

contract for the 2024–27 cycle does not contain a target-based automatic renewal clause as it has done in the past, nor does it contain any option for extension. No matter how well it performs, Team faces an uphill battle to survive.

In-house

Sources close to Uefa and the club competition sales process say the governing body, alongside the ECA, plans to bring club competition commercial rights sales in-house and eschew external agencies from 2027–28.

Some say this will extend only to sponsorship and licensing rights for the 2027–28 to 2029–30 cycle, while others expect all commercial rights – media rights included – to be brought under the direct control of UCCSA, the commercial rights-holder of Uefa club competitions.

A key reason for UCCSA's desire to bring sales in-house is to keep 100 per cent of revenue deriving from Uefa club competitions. A nine-figure euro sum has left the Uefa ecosystem in at least the past four three-season cycles, with Team earning between €120m and €180m in commission over the course of each cycle.

As a result, Team is desperate to retain its status

as a single-client agency serving Uefa and the ECA. But experts say it must find a way to make European football's stakeholders aware of the value it adds – not just the money it takes away – before the sales cycle ends in August 2024.

Some industry veterans have criticised Team for complacency during the latter part of its 30-year tenure. The agency has rarely sought to promote itself and critics say it has treated the relationship with Uefa like a marriage rather than a commercial partnership.

One source with direct experience of the Champions League rights process said Team has historically lacked strong relationships with Europe's biggest clubs, and that this played a small role in the creation of the European Super League.

The clubs driving the European Super League – Barcelona, Juventus and Real Madrid – had little to no knowledge of media rights sales, appearing to believe that an elite club competition would sell itself. At the very least, the clubs did not appreciate the extent of Team's expertise and the value of its relationships with broadcasters. This was demonstrated as they attempted to create their own competition without consulting existing Champions League broadcasters.

The ECA – which primarily comprises clubs competing in European club competitions – is now a direct stakeholder in Uefa’s club competitions, which has alerted Team to the importance of direct relationships with those receiving the revenue it generates. Sources say one of the agency’s key aims during the sales cycle for 2024–27 will be to get closer to Europe’s elite clubs to at least make them aware of Team’s importance to their bottom line.

Team’s first job will be to draw attention to its crucial role in successful commercial rights agreements. For the first time in its recent history, Team sent out a press release last month to take credit for the deals in the UK and France – something it has avoided in the past. As one expert put it: “Team always allow Uefa to take the credit.”

“They’ve been too shy,” said another expert. “They’ve always delivered these deals but never thought to tell anyone about it. They have to make their success more visible to the ultimate stakeholder: the clubs.”

Building those relationships and telling those success stories could help Team further down the road. Toward the end of the 2024–27 sales cycle, clubs will be informed about the total revenue they can expect to earn – an amount that will almost certainly be lower than what has been circulated in the mainstream press.

‘€5bn per season’

Team had to step a long way outside its comfort zone to retain its mandate, setting aggressive targets to ward off the threat of agencies IMG, Relevent or Infront taking its global commercial rights contract.

The threat of the European Super League injected urgency into Uefa and the ECA, which were desperate for a dramatic increase in global commercial rights revenue after successfully nullifying the breakaway. A magic number of €5bn per season from either 2024–27 or 2024–30 – up from just over €3.6bn per season in 2021–24 – was their consistent aim throughout the club competitions RFP that ran from October to January.

Shortly after agreeing deals with Team and Relevent, that €5bn-per-season number began trickling out into the global press as the result that had been achieved. Some outlets reported the number as a projection, others reported it as a certainty. However, months later, the reality is becoming clearer.

SportBusiness Media understands the €5bn-per-season projection was highly conditional. It was dependent on Team and Relevent receiving clearance to agree six-season deals across several major markets including the US, the Middle East and North Africa and others. It was also contingent on Uefa’s original Champions League format being approved.

Proposals for a 10-match initial league stage were announced in 2021 but were later rejected in favour of an eight-match league stage. The change was confirmed in May this year, months after Team and Relevent’s deals had been completed and the €5bn-per-season projection had been leaked.

As a result, sources say the realistic upper end of Team and Relevent’s combined sales efforts from 2024–27 – and perhaps beyond – will be between €4.6bn and

€4.8bn per season. This would represent an increase of between 27 and 32 per cent on the current 2021–24 cycle, in which global commercial rights revenue from Uefa club competitions is thought to be just over €3.6bn per season.

Had their proposed breakaway become a reality, the organisers of the European Super League (ESL) projected overall revenue of €4bn per season from global commercial rights. The vast majority of this revenue was to be shared between the 20 clubs taking part each season, though a €400m-per-season ‘solidarity fund’ would have reduced the income to €3.6bn per season.

In addition, the ESL’s founding members had agreed a credit facility with investment bank JP Morgan, which initially agreed to lend the founding clubs between €3.25bn and €3.5bn as a recovery fund after the economic turmoil caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Uefa and the ECA’s desperation to get to a €5bn-per-season revenue projection for Uefa club competitions was in large part a direct response to the Super League’s public revenue projections, as well as the clubs’ desire to plug the economic gaps left by the pandemic. Publicly exceeding the Super League’s projections by €1bn per season was statement of superiority.

The responsibility for producing that figure now largely falls on Team. Without strong bonds with key executives at Europe’s biggest clubs, the €5bn-per-season projection threatens to become a millstone around the agency’s neck in the likely event revenue falls short of that target.

A lucrative business

Sources say Team is to earn about one-per-cent commission on Uefa club competition commercial rights sales in the 2024–27 cycle, almost certainly reducing its income from the current 2021–24 cycle.

The agency’s parent company, Highlight Communications, reported that its Sports and Event Marketing department earned CHF68.7m (€70m/\$71.2m) during 2021, a year that spanned the 2018–21 and 2021–24 commercial rights cycles. The vast majority of the revenue earned by this department derives from Team’s commission on Uefa club competition sales. A small amount of revenue is driven by Highlight Event AG, which has been housed in this department since 2020.

As Team earns commission in euros and the Swiss franc has consistently strengthened against the euro over the past 18 months, it is thought that Team earned about €60m in commission over the course of 2021. In 2020, a year massively affected by Covid-19, the department earned CHF61.4m in revenue but kept its profit roughly flat due to reduced costs.

In 2019, only Team Marketing was housed within the Sports and Event Marketing department of Highlight. As such, all revenue earned under this department derives from Team. The agency earned CHF64.7m that year, turning a profit of about CHF29m. In 2018, Team earned CHF63.7m, turning a profit of CHF32m.

Team’s earnings from commission are expected to reduce to between €40m and €50m per season over the 2024–27 cycle due to the lower commission percentage and the loss of US media rights to Relevent. ♦



Long-term strategies drive LaLiga's accelerating international expansion plans

Having established solid foundations for international growth through the establishment of its Global Network over five years ago, LaLiga's expansion into new markets is gaining momentum, as international director Octavi Anoro explains.

The benefits of LaLiga's drive to broaden its horizons beyond the Iberian Peninsula in recent years are continuing to materialise as the Spanish football league operator sharpens its focus on long-term growth.

This was illustrated by a spate of business-to-business commercial and strategic partnerships announced by LaLiga, spanning countries from Korea to Mexico, in the days leading up to the start of the 2022-23 season in August.

Such deals have been made possible by LaLiga's concerted efforts to establish a worldwide development plan comprising delegates and executives who have been fuelling the operator's strategic ambitions since the opening of the league's first international office in Dubai back in 2014.

The launch of the LaLiga Global Network in early 2017 supercharged the league's growth worldwide, with specialists hired to forge connections, build contacts and establish valuable links with key stakeholders in markets across the planet.

More than five years on, the Global Network has a presence in 41 countries through 44 on-site representatives, with about a dozen more supporting the project from Madrid. In total, LaLiga's international efforts span 90 countries, including 11 offices in key locations and two joint ventures in the United States and China, which are considered to be LaLiga's top-priority markets overseas.

Accelerating plans

According to LaLiga's international director, Octavi Anoro, over the past

year, more than 50 international projects have been monetised – as many as the total across the previous four years of the Global Network.

This acceleration, he explains, underlines the financial sustainability of the international project, which now generates a comfortable bottom-line surplus, even though annual costs run into single-figure millions of euros.

However, Anoro adds, the apparent shift in gear also represents a natural evolution for a project that has been able to retain its talent with remarkable efficiency. Some five-and-a-half years on from the launch, only two of the Global Network's representatives have left LaLiga for pastures new, while more than 15 have secured internal promotions.

Anoro, who previously headed up the Japanese office for more than

two years, believes the flexibility of the project, which prioritises the wellbeing of staff, is key to ensuring a coordinated, connected and cohesive approach across such a sprawling landscape.

“We have found the right formula for coordination, and our people are very happy with us and believe in the project,” says Anoro. “LaLiga has a long-term vision, but within that, our annual business plans with each office and representative are the same across the world. For the first couple of months after July 1, it is about aligning delegates and their business plans, and then we coordinate with them via Madrid through quarterly follow-ups.

“Towards the end of the season, as long as the representative has been in place for at least a couple of years, we will ask them whether they would like to change country for a new challenge. This keeps the project fresh and flexible, and it keeps everyone motivated. For example, in the summer after Covid-19, we processed 10 rotation requests. We have young and talented people around the world and they want to grow, and we want to offer them opportunities to do that.

“It is also a good thing if they

rotate. We don’t really want someone working in the same market for 10 or 15 years. We have seen with the rotations that people have introduced new ideas into new markets, which is very healthy.”

Media rights value

LaLiga’s international strategy is built on three core aspirational pillars – to increase the value of the league’s brand and international media rights, to reach new audiences, and to generate business opportunities for the body and its clubs.

In terms of the first metric, LaLiga is on an encouraging trajectory. In the previous three-year cycle, between 2019–20 to 2021–22, the value of the league’s international rights increased by 30 per cent in comparison with 15 per cent for domestic rights.

With rights-sales processes ongoing for the current cycle from 2022–23 onwards, Anoro expects the value of international rights to surpass that of domestic rights for the first time by the middle of this decade.

This is in spite of LaLiga losing two of its most marketable stars in recent years. Between 2009 and 2017, whilst they were wearing the

colours of FC Barcelona and Real Madrid, respectively, Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo were the only winners of the Ballon d’Or – the widely recognised world player of the year award. However, Ronaldo left Real for Italy’s Juventus in 2018, and Messi exited Barcelona for Paris Saint-Germain in France last year.

According to Anoro, the departure of two superstars who attracted global followings on their own forced LaLiga to be proactive in exploring new opportunities.

“One-hundred per cent, we had to rethink, but this gave us the opportunity to evolve,” he says. “We had to mitigate the fact that these players were leaving by reaching new audiences, with the support of our Global Network. The key to this was to connect with the local media in each market and work hand-in-hand with broadcast partners, as well as digital influencers.

“It’s about leveraging the LaLiga brand – in combination with the attraction of Spain as a destination – and making the most of having relevant players for certain markets, and not necessarily just the big stars, and then creating a buzz around them.”

New portals of interest have



(Denis Doyle/Getty Images)



emerged in the absence of Messi and Ronaldo. As an example, Anoro explains that Real Mallorca was the most popular LaLiga team in South Korea and Japan last season, due to the presence of respective national team stars Lee Kang-in and Takefusa Kubo in the team.

Reaching new audiences

Worldwide, Anoro views under-40s as the key battleground for reaching and retaining new followers – and LaLiga has made significant progress in that regard. Across 17 platforms, the league has more than 155 million followers, and rising, as more digital initiatives are explored.

For instance, LaLiga was the first European sports league to join gamer-focused streaming channel Twitch two years ago. In April 2022, following a landmark agreement with the Mediapro agency and TikTok, free-to-air channel Gol broadcast live coverage of Real Sociedad's LaLiga clash with Real Betis on the social media platform.

First-mover advantage such as this has, according to Anoro, helped LaLiga to buck the ageing fan base trend

witnessed by almost every other major professional sports league worldwide. It also helps that LaLiga has adopted a realistic outlook in the context of optimising resources and efforts.

Anoro acknowledges, for example, that the dominance of Serie A clubs in the late 1980s and 1990s ensures that Italian clubs attract a healthy older following worldwide. Furthermore, the Premier League's decision to schedule games at appealing times for Southeast Asian markets in the 1990s and early 2000s – several years before LaLiga endeavoured to do the same – gave the English league a head start that is difficult to disrupt.

“It is difficult to change the mentality of a 40 or 50-year-old fan. I saw this when I was working as a LaLiga Global Network delegate in Japan,” Anoro says. “So, if we want to grow in the long term, we have to reach new, younger audiences who are 10, 15 or 20 years old. We are seeing that the average age of our fans is getting younger, but that is down to how we are changing the way the consumers can consume the product, and by facilitating the shift from pay-television to OTT (over-the-top streaming).”

In April, the new LaLiga Pass OTT platform launched in Indonesia and Thailand, offering coverage of the top two tiers of Spanish football, as well as access to the in-house television channel, LaLiga TV. In August, a separate direct-to-consumer streaming platform, LaLiga Plus, was launched in China after the league finalised a six-year agreement with Streamline Media Technology.

Business opportunities

LaLiga's confidence about its increasingly youthful audience is borne out of research carried out by commercial partner Electronic Arts, which outlined how “youngsters are interacting with our product in different ways”, Anoro adds.

Such a belief is also underpinned by the fact that the likes of EA – a brand that is synonymous with gaming – is expanding its association with LaLiga. In August, it was announced that EA Sports would be the title sponsor of all LaLiga competitions in a multi-year deal that will begin with the 2023-24 season. EA previously supported the launch of the eLaLiga Santander esports competition in the 2017-18 campaign.

“The EA partnership is a great opportunity for us to reach new target audiences and engage younger fans,” Anoro says. “We are going to work with them across lots of projects to enhance our image with new generations of fans, just like we do with other commercial partners like Microsoft in tech, Puma in merchandising, and the likes of Sorare and Dapper Labs in the Web 3.0 space.

“Our association with brands and companies like these show how far we have come in a short space of time. Eight years ago, LaLiga had eight sponsors, but now we have more than 50 sponsors spread across various territories and regions.”

Power of football

The success of LaLiga's global commercialisation strategy has coincided with the league's expanding

corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Earlier this year, for example, the LaLiga Camps project was launched within the LaLiga Grassroots initiative, to promote football within communities across the globe. The immersive experience is based on the concept of teaching values through sport in a multicultural environment, with the latest technology available to support the development of players of different ages and levels, all under the guidance of expert LaLiga coaches.

The first Spanish edition of LaLiga Camps took place in July in Madrid, with the project also hosting training camps this year in South Africa, the UK and US. Indeed, LaLiga North America opened a new academy in Texas in September, joining two existing academies in the US, after bringing 118 youngsters from North America to Spain in March through LaLiga Select, a talent spotting and development programme created in collaboration with the ISL Agency.

From major European football hotbeds to emerging markets like Angola and Tanzania, LaLiga has been nurturing various sponsorship, licensing, media and development projects. The league has also been providing consultancy and services for leagues, federations and clubs through LaLiga Tech, which was spun off into a standalone business in 2020, allowing cutting-edge technology and data provisions to be commercialised through a single entity.

The next step is for LaLiga's bold strategic vision to filter through to its clubs even more effectively.

In December, the LaLiga general assembly ratified

LaLiga Impulso (Boost LaLiga) – a strategic agreement with global investment fund CVC to promote the global growth of LaLiga and its clubs.

Clubs that endorsed the project were given access to a €2bn (£1.7bn/\$2bn) war chest to strengthen various strands of infrastructure and international development, including in digital media.

“Our support for clubs will be a strategic priority for us over the next year,” Anoro explains. “We have been doing a good job in developing our digital media capabilities over the past five years, but there is room for improvement with some of our clubs. We need to focus on helping the clubs to enter new markets.”

One international project that LaLiga is keen to resurrect is its long-held ambition to host a regular-season game in the United States.

“This is on standby right now, but we would love to play an official game in the country one day,” says Anoro, who adds that any such event, like the league's broader international development plans, would be more than just a one-off initiative.

“It is not just a cliché. Our projects are part of long-term strategies in all markets,” he says. “We have people living and working in these different countries, and they have excellent local knowledge and are able to build close relationships with stakeholders. That makes a difference.

“We want to establish roots in all of our markets, and although our business plans are year-by-year – as our industry changes rapidly – we have a long-term vision that stretches long into the future.” ♦





*New Wimbledon commercial
team looks to US, India and
China for next wave of growth*

- New commercial director Henderson has strong contacts in Asia through earlier IMG role
- AELTC focusing on brand building and fan engagement for long-term commercial returns
- Tournament still heavily reliant on UK and US broadcast markets

By Ben Cronin

The All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club (AELTC), organiser of the Wimbledon tennis Grand Slam, has identified the US, China and India as growth markets and is making a renewed effort to engage fans below the age of 25 as it stages its first event under a new commercial team.

Last January, *SportBusiness* revealed the AELTC was planning to split the responsibilities of its outgoing commercial and media director Mick Desmond when he retired at the end of the 2021 Championships and was seeking to replace him with a dedicated commercial director working alongside a marketing and communications director. The club subsequently announced the appointment of former IMG and Universal Music Group executive Gus Henderson to the commercial position and the promotion of Alexandra Willis to the communications and marketing role.

Henderson has been tasked with running media, sponsorship, retail, ticketing and hospitality for the tournament, and will be expected to work closely with Willis so that commercial partnerships also serve to increase exposure and protect the Grand Slam's brand, thereby enhancing its long-term commercial prospects.

The new commercial chief, who before taking the role served as vice-president and head of sponsorship sales, Asia Pacific, for IMG, agreed that his experience in two out of three of the target markets identified by the AELTC may have been a factor in him being awarded the role.

"The growth in the middle class out there [in Asia] in terms of people viewing new forms of media, new sponsors coming through [makes it a] hugely exciting time," he told *SportBusiness*. "As we look to grow internationally in terms of our brand and our commercial activities, I think we will be looking further east as we do that. I've still got a lot of a lot of contacts out there in those markets. We still need to tread carefully with certain things, but I think we will definitely look in that direction."

Sponsorship

Wimbledon operates a carefully controlled sponsorship policy under which on-court branding is kept to a discreet minimum and activations are based on utility (such as Rolex's sponsorship of on-court timing, or Ralph Lauren's sponsorship of tournament officials). It also places limits on the number and type of sponsors it works with and has tended to prefer building long-term media partnerships with broadcasters like the BBC in the UK and ESPN in the US.

Under Desmond, the AELTC sought to bring more commercial responsibilities in-house, although the IMG agency continues to represent and advise the tournament across some media rights and sponsorship sales while also managing the Wimbledon Archive and various broadcast and radio production services.

Henderson said any attempt to cultivate new audiences and build commercial revenues in Asia and the US would need to be faithful to the AELTC's overriding "less-is-more" philosophy. At present, Wimbledon has just one Asian sponsor in the shape of Chinese mobile communications company Oppo and he explained that the Grand Slam will continue to only work with brands that share its "values and ethos".

"We don't just want to jump in and take money," he

said. "It needs to be the right fit and the right partnership. How can we work with partners where we can grow together in those markets?"

Asked if the AELTC might adapt its sponsorship approach and begin to strike regional sponsorship deals for Wimbledon, he said: "We are exploring that type of activity, but [it's] very early days. What we are looking to do is work with truly global partners and really elevate that in terms of our brand and we feel we're in a very strong position, financially and commercially, and we just need to build on that going forward."

The new commercial chief said sponsorship sales are "100 per-cent contracted" for the 2022 event following the addition of Vodafone as the tournament's Official Connectivity Partner. The addition of the telecommunications brand made up for the loss of the tournament's long-standing sponsorship deal with Britvic-owned soft drink brand Robinsons, revealed by *SportBusiness*.

While the AELTC doesn't want to close the door on working with additional sponsors, marketing and communications director Willis stressed that any further deals would need to enhance the tournament's fan engagement activities.

"The research that we've done in terms of what's going

Novak Djokovic celebrates winning the men's single final in 2021. (Julian Finney/Getty Images).



A portrait of Alexandra Willis, a woman with long, wavy, light brown hair, wearing a dark blue blazer over a light-colored top. She is looking slightly to her right with a gentle smile. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Alexandra Willis

to trigger growth for Wimbledon – given that we’re an annual event with a limited window – is that it’s not just any type of partnership in isolation,” she said. “We’re not going to be able to make an impact in China just off the back of the Oppo sponsorship alone. We need Oppo, we need the right media partner, we need the right presence on the ground ourselves, we need the right content creation, and we need the right group of influencers. And that’s what’s really fascinating about this next period in this growth strategy – it’s working out how you bring the right component parts together.”

Of the decision to align the commercial department more closely with the marketing division she added: “We’ve got this great opportunity for growth, driven predominantly by the audience, the brand and then the commercial return, and [we talk about a] virtuous circle in terms of building the brand, building the audience and then generating the longer-term return, rather than trying to make a very quick return on investment. We’re not necessarily under the same pressures that others are.”

Wimbledon Hill in New York

In keeping with this brand building and outreach strategy, the AELTC sought to reach new US audiences by recreating its famous ‘Wimbledon Hill’ fan zone in New York’s Brooklyn Bridge Park at this year’s event.

“This isn’t a fan activation just for buzz; it’s also a brilliant activation opportunity for our partners,” said Willis. “What we wanted to try and do was create opportunities that we can activate with our partners together for mutual interest and mutual benefit, rather than them spending their activation budgets over here, and we’re doing our thing over here. How can we create things that actually were relevant to both of us?”

She described how the event has sought to create a “unifying” marketing narrative that all of its sponsors can align with, and each year creates a hero video campaign and pieces of supplementary content that the brands can use in their own marketing campaigns. This year, the focus was on the 100th anniversary of centre court.

To mark the occasion, the AELTC launched a range of digital collectibles in partnership with New Zealand-based NFT company Glorious, based on each decade of the tournament in the famous arena. In keeping with the tournament’s approach to ticket distribution, fans were able to apply for an opportunity to buy the NFTs through a ballot, while a further ten NFTs were held back and auctioned to the highest bidder.

“It’s very much about beginning to build a community and testing and learning in terms of what type of assets appeal,” said Willis. “The assets are photographic executions, it’s not clips, it’s not match action.”

She added: “What we tried to put together is a combination of things that feel very Wimbledon, that are beautifully created, that pay tribute to the heritage of Centre Court but in an innovative way and that begin to build that community whilst being accessible to as broad a demographic of people as possible...And of course, we want to make sure that any experience we deliver, we do it really well and there isn’t the suggestion that it’s just about making a quick buck.”

The AELTC’s eagerness to juxtapose its traditions with forward-looking innovation can also be seen in the activation of its long-running and heavily-publicised sponsorship deal with Official Technology Partner IBM. The two parties launched two new AI-powered fan initiatives, designed to increase understanding and engagement in the tournament. Similarly, the tournament is expected to announce its first foray into the metaverse.

The club now has a greater say in these types of deals having taken back control of its retail, licensing and merchandising activities from IMG in 2015, recruiting former IMG Fashion and apparel specialist David Hewitt to run the new in-house division. In a further example of the new closer relationship between the marketing and commercial teams, Willis said the club might also seek to leverage licensing and merchandising deals to reach new audiences.

“We’ve talked about it being a little bit like a commissioning and service model, so Gus’s team would

commission my team to develop all the branded content for the partners to help ensure that there's integration in all of the activations that we've talked about. But equally... we may approach Gus's team and say, 'we've understood that one of the things that would make the biggest difference to our reputation in India would be a high-fashion collaboration on a new sneaker line.' How can we make sure that we can open up the opportunity to do that through the partnership model, through the retail product line?"

Media deals

The focus on fan engagement, in Asia in particular, is understandable in the context of the AELTC's overreliance on a handful of broadcast markets for a large proportion of its revenues. In its most recent set of financial accounts, the club admitted that this exposed it to commercial risks and uncertainties, saying, "Income from broadcasters represents more than half of the group's turnover and a small number of key broadcast markets, notably the UK and the USA, provide the majority of that income."

The AELTC registered group turnover of £290.2m for the year ending July 31, 2021, and a net profit of £33.3m, although it should be noted last year's tournament was only able to stage matches in front of partial capacity crowds because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

As reported by *SportBusiness Media*, the BBC's current four-year deal for the exclusive domestic rights to the tournament from 2021 to 2024 is worth an average of £65m per year, while its deal with Disney, owner of pay-television channel ESPN and covering the US, Canada, the Caribbean and Latin America (excluding Brazil), rises significantly over the course of the contract and will be worth around £49.2m in 2023.

In one of Desmond's last acts as director of commercial and media, the AELTC agreed an improved renewal with the BBC for the exclusive domestic rights to the event from 2025-27 and a significant increase on the Disney deal in a long-term renewal from 2024-35. The deal includes all of the regions covered by the previous agreement, with the addition of Brazil. For the latter deal, Disney was prepared to bid very aggressively and early to lock up the content for the longest possible period (for the value of both renewals, read *SportBusiness Media*).

Henderson said: "Now we're in great shape in terms of media partnerships, but again, we're always looking at new forms of media that are coming in and having discussions with a lot of those players at the same time, so we're not just going to stand still and that's it. We're always looking at the future and how we can evolve as an organisation from a media standpoint."

Alongside the UK and US agreements, the AELTC also has a wide-ranging four-year deal with Warner Bros. Discovery encompassing 11 European markets from 2020 to 2023. The deal, announced in December 2019, included exclusive live rights in the Czech Republic and Slovakia and renewals in a further nine territories – Belgium, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Russia and Sweden. The broadcaster also has

Henderson with Vodafone director Max Taylor and former player Laura Roediger after the Vodafone sponsorship deal was announced. (Vodafone & AELTC)





Ashleigh Barty of Australia celebrates winning the 2021 women's final.
(Clive Brunskill/Getty Images)

a deal in the UK and Ireland encompassing the rights to broadcast both singles' finals live as well as a daily highlights show on Eurosport and discovery+.

However, Eurosport was one of 15 of the broadcast group's channels to recently be taken off air in Russia in the wake of the country's invasion of Ukraine. The AELTC also pulled the rights in Belarus, encompassed in a deal with Turkish agency Saran Media.

Willis said: "Discovery actually proactively withdrew their feeds from Russia, and Discovery have the Wimbledon rights in in Russia, so that was actually a proactive move on their part, which we were obviously grateful for. We've also removed our rights from Belarus, in line with the general Russia and Belarus response."

Russia ban

In a further reaction to the invasion, the AELTC also stripped hospitality boxes from Russian energy company Gazprom and took the rather more inflammatory decision to ban Russian and Belarussian players from competing in this year's event.

The decision set the tournament organiser at loggerheads with the ATP and WTA, which have subsequently stripped the championships of its ranking points, effectively turning it into an exhibition event. In a recent interview with *SportBusiness*, ATP chairman Andrea Gaudenzi said the argument reinforced the need for unified governance in tennis.

While Willis and Henderson refused to comment directly on the dispute, they acknowledged the AELTC was open-minded about Gaudenzi's plans to unify tennis governance through a T7 working group convened by the Italian, encompassing the four Grand Slams, the ATP, WTA and International Tennis Federation (ITF).

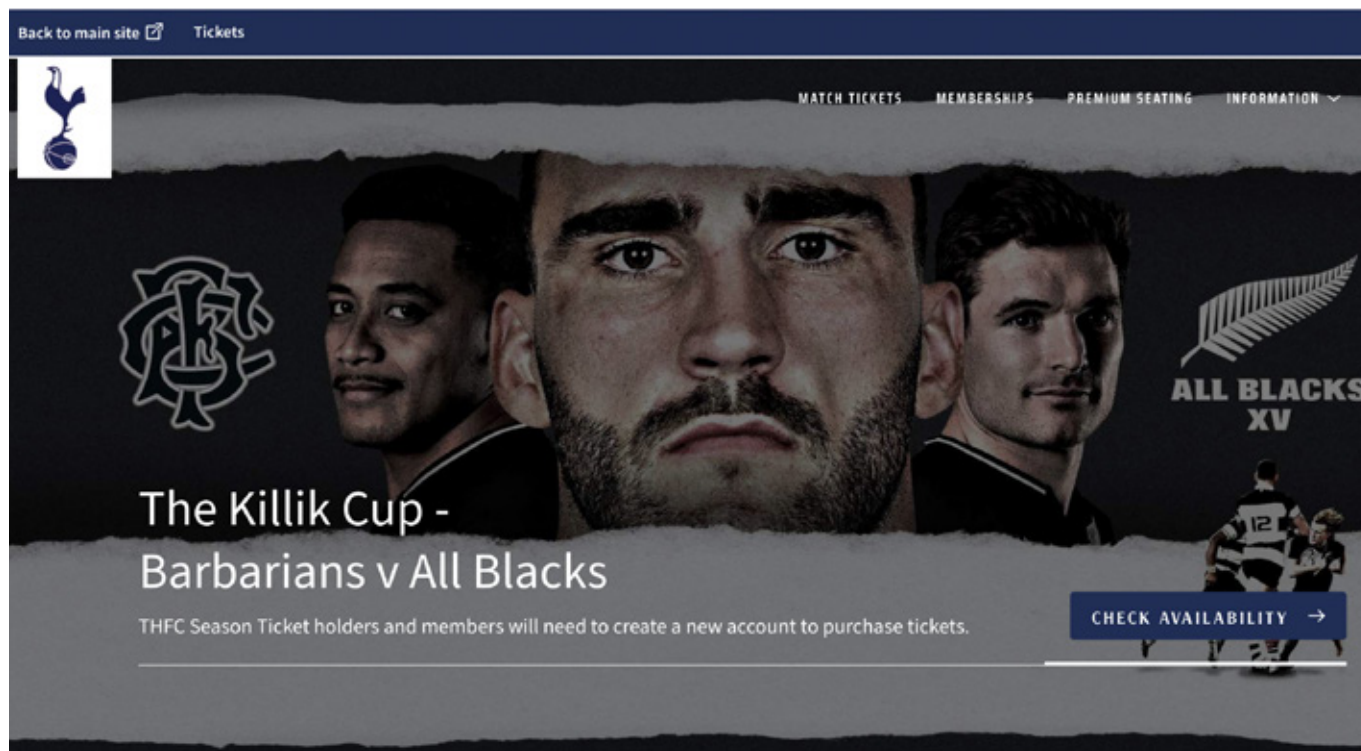
Willis said: "One of the things that has been discussed off the back of the exchange let's say between Wimbledon and the tours, off the back of our decision, has been to really look at those governance conversations. And there is absolutely willingness from us and all of the Grand Slams and the tours to do that, and those conversations continue to go on in the background. And if that is one of the outcomes of this situation, then that would be hugely positive. But obviously, it requires everyone to come to the table to do that."

But she suggested that the Italian's plans to aggregate the commercial rights across tennis might prove to be more challenging.

"At a general level, there is huge enthusiasm and appetite for the sport to work together to drive greater outcomes for the sport. And that's something that really began to be discussed in the Covid response, right at the beginning of 2020, when the sport came together to support players, tournaments and communities around the world," she said.

"But I think it would be too simple to say that that's the answer for the whole of the sport because different aspects of the sport today drive different types of value, and so it just needs to be considered in the round." ♦

Since this article was published, Alexandra Willis left the AELTC to join the English Premier League.



Ticketmaster's 3D Virtual Venue offers a view of the future

Steve Korian, executive vice-president of Ticketmaster's partner IOMEDIA, the digital agency that created 3D Virtual Venue, outlines why he believes the solution can take the fan experience and stadium revenues to the next level.

Tottenham Hotspur Stadium's state-of-the-art design and cutting-edge amenities have already enshrined its reputation as one of the sporting world's most celebrated venues since it opened its doors in April 2019.

Earlier this year, though, the facility broke new ground when it became the first English Premier League football stadium to integrate Ticketmaster's 3D Virtual Venue technology, giving fans a unique life-like view of their seats when considering buying a ticket.

With a large number of first-time attendees having visited the venue over the past three-and-a-half years from across the UK, Europe and beyond to watch various sport and entertainment spectacles, the North London venue was an ideal launchpad for the solution in a

highly competitive market.

However, it arrived in the Premier League on the back of an impressive track record.

Indeed, whilst Tottenham marked a debut offering for 3D Virtual Venue in English football's top tier, more than 300 teams and venues worldwide have integrated the solution since it launched some 13 years ago at Yankee Stadium, the home of Major League Baseball's New York Yankees.

"3D Virtual Venue was designed to allow fans to 'try before you buy'," says Steve Korian, executive vice president at Ticketmaster's partner IOMEDIA, the digital agency that created the solution. "The 3D views from every seat enable the ticket buyer to make a more informed purchase decision as they've had a chance to experience

the seat views.

"The Yankees' goal was to use technology to help their long-time fans envision what their new stadium was going to look like. Virtual Venue offered the team a unique way of introducing the new stadium to sponsors, corporate partners and fans before construction was complete."

Track record

Whilst different seat-view technologies have sprouted up across sports and entertainment in recent years, Ticketmaster believes Virtual Venue offers the best seat in the house due to its ticket system integration, pre-eminent technology and proven returns for its clients.

"The service has been met with tremendous enthusiasm from both the clubs and teams that use the

technology and their fans,” Korian says. “Use of Virtual Venue has helped to significantly increase consumer confidence for ticket buyers when purchasing tickets, leading some teams to increase to increase their active userbase by nearly 40 per cent.”

The service is equally valuable across all venue events, with a busy arena like Tottenham’s a case in point. The stadium hosts 19 Premier League games and extra cup matches each season and will welcome two NFL games in October, as well as two top-level rugby union matches in the coming months. Having hosted Guns N’ Roses as its first major concert over the summer, Virtual Venue will also be helping to attract music fans to Tottenham Hotspur Stadium for years to come.

“Virtual Venue works well across all categories and segments and is integrated across the purchase flow, so it does not slow down the system or the buyer. In fact, it builds ticket buyer confidence since the consumer knows exactly what they are going to get with their purchase,” Korian adds.

Virtual experience

Fans at Tottenham, Yankee Stadium and elsewhere are able to digitally preview 360-degree views and sightlines, compare sections and check time-of-day viewpoints in real time when selecting their seats.

With 3D-quality visuals and

pinpoint accuracy, fans have the opportunity to explore various parts of the stadium via their mobile or desktop, including premium areas, to choose the seat that is right for them.

“Virtual Venue is the industry’s only architecturally accurate 3D seat map tied to ticketing and offers the most realistic 360-degree seat views available,” Korian says. “Every level of detail – from the cupholders to leather back seats – are captured with precision. We work in tandem with architects and designers to ensure every seat view is recreated with flawless design.”

While the service allows potential general admission visitors to make a more informed purchase, the service is particularly useful for sales teams looking to secure those all-important VIPs and corporate clients.

“Virtual Venue is a fantastic tool for showcasing a venue’s premium seating product and hospitality areas,” Korian adds. “The 360-degree views help potential buyers envision their premium experience, including dining and entertaining, and enable sales teams to showcase and tour these spaces without requiring the client to travel. Additionally, teams that use Virtual Venue now run their annual re-seating events and upgrades online.”

Ticketmaster’s clients are enthused by the benefits the service brings, with Ian Murphy,

Tottenham’s head of ticketing and membership, having described it as an innovation that can “take our fan experience to the next level.”

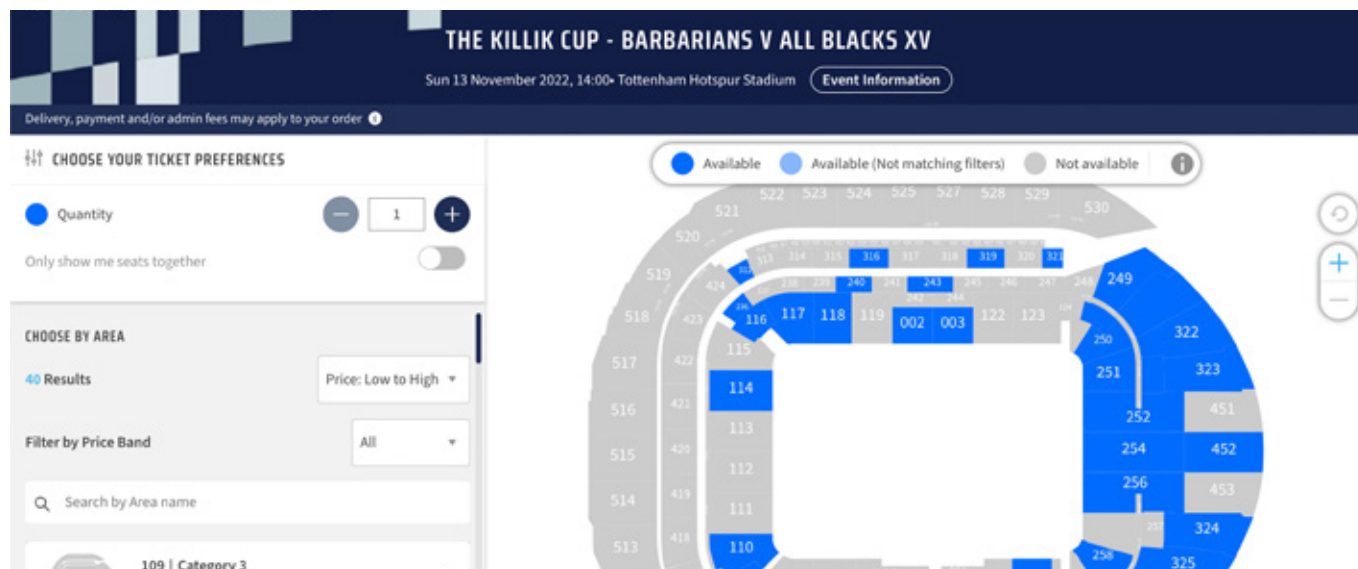
Marking its launch earlier this year, he added: “With such a wide range of seating options on offer at our stadium, including licensed safe standing and premium areas, this cutting-edge technology will give fans the best possible insight into what their matchday experience will be like before making their selection.”

Integration

Ticketmaster has been keen to ensure its solution can be integrated easily and efficiently, offering new opportunities for its venues and clubs that are having to work harder than ever before to lure back spectators in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

With this in mind, any Ticketmaster client can upgrade their service to include Virtual Venue, meaning they can tap into a tried-and-tested service that provides a fresh perspective.

“The feature is part of our suite of premium products and may be customised for each client’s needs,” Korian says. “We continue to see widespread adoption of Virtual Venue around the globe. We expect to welcome further Virtual Venue releases and hope fans will continue to enjoy the views from venues across the world of sport and music.” ♦



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IMGARENA

*MLS agrees lucrative long
betting data and streaming
with IMG Arena*

- Agreement includes betting data and streaming rights to the Leagues Cup
- IMG Arena seeking to 'leverage' 2026 Fifa Men's World Cup games in USA
- US Soccer data no longer included in package of rights

By Ben Cronin

Major League Soccer has concluded its second major piece of business in the space of a month, agreeing an eight-year betting data and streaming rights agreement with IMG Arena, the betting division of the IMG agency.

SportBusiness understands the deal, which also includes the rights to the MLS' new feeder league, MLS Next Pro, is worth \$270m (€264.5m) over its duration, with the annual value rising as new team franchises are added to both leagues.

The agreement also includes the betting data and streaming rights to the Leagues Cup, the annual competition that pits MLS clubs against teams from Mexico's top domestic league, Liga MX. The two leagues announced plans last year to revamp the tournament from an eight-team event to one featuring all 47 teams from both leagues.

IMG Arena said the company would seek to leverage the USA's co-hosting of the 2026 Fifa World Cup and that the long duration of the deal would allow the two parties to develop an "all-encompassing" strategy to develop data, content, fan engagement and marketing tools for the US league's betting and media clients.

Freddie Longe, president of IMG Arena told *SportBusiness*: "We've got global streaming rights, including a small proportion of domestic streams as well. There are going to be initially three data feeds being: reduced fast path; event; and then tracking data. All three sets of data will be produced across both the MLS and then the MLS Next Pro."

In agreeing the deal, IMG Arena has effectively consolidated the betting data and streaming rights for the MLS.

In the previous cycle, IMG held the betting streaming rights to the US league and US Soccer as part of a wider eight-season deal which also encompassed the league's international media rights from 2015-22. However the agency will no longer have the MLS' international media rights in the next cycle following the league's 10-year global media rights deal with tech giant Apple.

Stats Perform currently holds the exclusive rights to collect and analyse MLS betting data in a three-season deal from 2020 to 2022 that also encompasses the US Soccer Federation's data rights. Under that agreement, the company also provides integrity services and data coverage of over 3,000 US Soccer development academy matches through its Opta player data service, enabling match analysis and helping the national association to identify and develop talent.

However, US Soccer's data rights were not included in MLS' latest request for proposals after US Soccer ended its long-running relationship with the MLS-controlled Soccer United Marketing and brought its commercial rights in-house.

Volume

Chris Schlosser, Major League Soccer's senior vice-president of Emerging Ventures, suggested the addition of the MLS Next Pro League and Leagues Cup betting and streaming rights had helped to compensate for the absence of the US Soccer rights. The number of games included in the package of rights rises up to 1,156 a season with the inclusion of the two other competitions.

He said: "We think, with MLS and MLS Next Pro, that's a tremendous package with significant volume of games and matches that happen in a great time zone for sportsbooks, and in a great schedule, given that we run the summer schedule versus many of the leagues around the world, so we think that's a super-compelling offer.

"I think tonnage is important. As MLS Next Pro continues to grow, [the whole package is] over 1,000 matches, potentially, a year. That's a pretty hefty package of matches, and premium matches, we think, and then at an appropriate time zone and schedule."

Asked about the absence of the US Soccer rights, Longe said: "From an IMG Arena perspective that doesn't really have any impact on the size of the opportunity as we see it, because I think what's coming in is infinitely more exciting than perhaps not having a few US Soccer matches which frankly is probably more valuable from the broadcast perspective anyway."

Similar to a number of other US leagues, the MLS has a pre-existing Approved Gaming Operator (AGO) programme that pre-dates the IMG deal and will protect the exclusivity of the betting distributor's rights.

Schlosser said: "The way our AGO programme works is if you spend in our television broadcasts, or if you sponsor the league or a club, you have to have an AGO. The AGO basically provides IP rights to the sportsbook and then the sportsbook agrees to certain integrity provisions, including the use of official data."

Another recent trend in the US is for betting distributors to provide stock options to incentivise sports right-holders to license them their rights, as was the case when the NFL earned 22.5 million shares in Genius Sports as part its global data rights agreement with the London-based firm. Asked if the MLS had earned any stock in the publicly-listed Endeavor as part of the long-term deal, Schlosser said: "We're not going to get into the specifics of the deal terms, other than that this is a strategic long-term partnership between

us."

IMG Arena appears to be intent on expanding its data and streaming offering in football as well as renew existing deals in the sport, agreeing a deal in June for the international betting streaming and data rights to the DFB-Pokal, Germany's top-tier cup competition. As reported by *SportBusiness*, the agency was prepared to double the value of the cup competition's rights to see off strong competition from all of the major betting distributors and a new interest in the space from the Infront agency.

In February, IMG Arena was also awarded the combined fastpath data rights to league and cup competitions organised by a total of 19 different football league bodies and national associations across Europe.

The award of the rights came after European Leagues, the collective body of European football leagues, went to market with the centralised rights in July last year.

Although sources suggested IMG has paid a significant premium for the MLS rights, the feeling is the timing and volume of matches included in the deal will complement the European Leagues deal, enabling the betting distribution firm to create a year-round football offering for bookmakers.

With many of the data rights to major European football leagues locked up for some time, and betting streaming rights to these leagues invariably excluded, the feeling was that an exclusive and combined betting and streaming opportunity with a US league would provide the agency with a strong tentpole product. Given IMG was the league's incumbent distributor of betting streaming rights, it would also have had a realistic sense of the margin it could make on the rights in the downstream market.

Competitive

Speaking about interest in the MLS' own RFP, Schlosser said "all the major players" were involved and the tender might have proved even more competitive had it been timed later.

He said: "Frankly, had we held the tender after the Apple deal was announced, we might have even gotten some more excitement and interest because there's now so many people chomping at the bit to be part of this."

He added that IMG Arena's track record in providing "new experiences" for fans and betting clients in tennis and golf had played an important role in the deal. The company has betting data and streaming deals with the PGA Tour and European Tour in golf, as well the ATP men's tennis tour.

"Obviously, we are very happy with the commercial terms in this agreement, but we also spent a lot of time with all of the participating companies on their capabilities and technologies and vision for how this would all come to life," said Schlosser. "And I think IMG has a really compelling vision for how to use data to really create tremendous fan experiences, and further they have the track record in what they've done in the other sports."

Longe said the betting distribution company would draw on its recent acquisitions of data collection, audio-

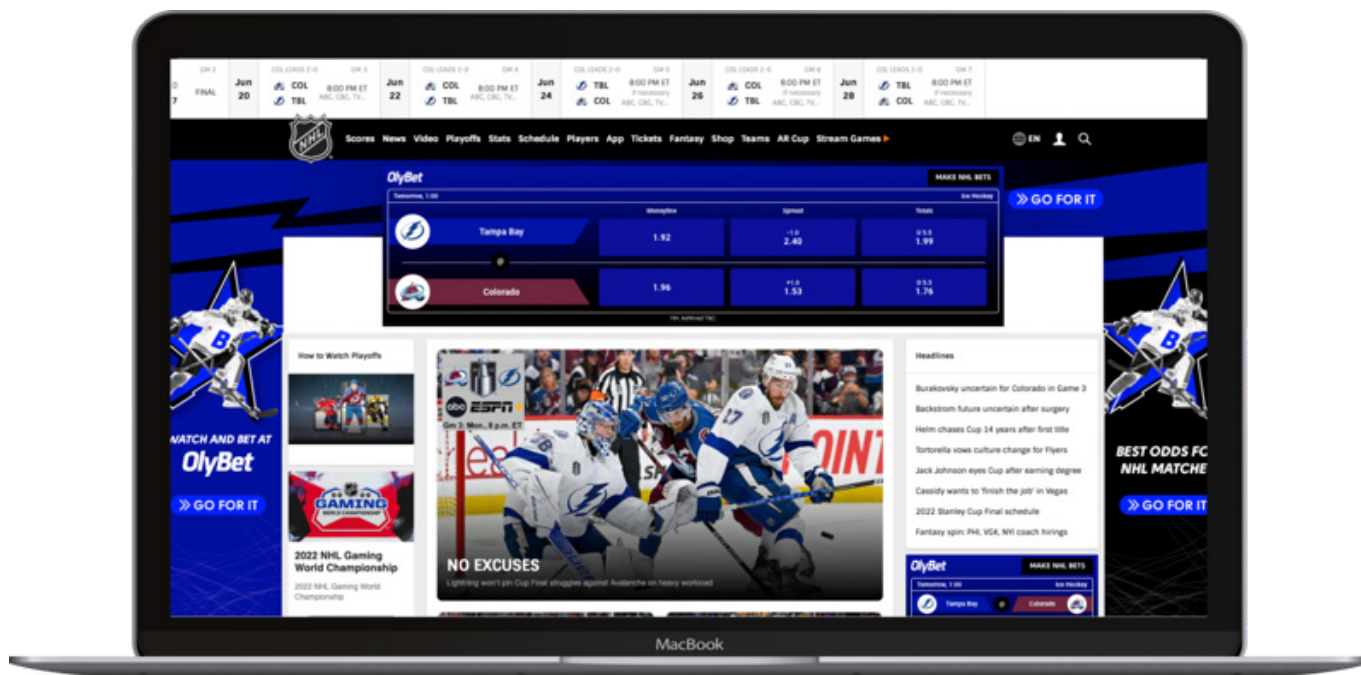
visual production and tracking technology specialist FlightScope, as well as its deal to buy a controlling interest in computer vision and camera technology firm Signality, to “reimagine data-driven storytelling for soccer and the downstream consumer”. He suggested that the MLS Next Pro league could act as a testing ground for new betting and fan engagement products that would ultimately find their way into MLS.

“I don’t think we see what you would describe as scouted data as something that can be looked at in isolation – we also supply live video streaming. I’ve talked about the investments in FlightScope and Signality and the richer datasets that those two technologies can yield. I think that, as you look at the

United States in particular, where the profile of the consumer is arguably the most sophisticated in the world, that the expectation is that these assets will all start to converge in a variety of different experiences.”

He added: “It’s a superb time to be partnering with the MLS in this space, a combination of everything that’s going on in the US from a sports betting perspective, combined with the fact that we’re moving towards the 2026 World Cup taking place in North America. [The deal is] certainly beyond that time horizon and a perfect opportunity for us to help grow the MLS, and grow the MLS against the backdrop of soccer becoming even more pre-eminent in North America over the next several years.” ♦





A tech-driven approach to activating sports betting sponsorships

Sports betting partnerships are being activated in increasingly sophisticated ways to provide multiple benefits for the rights-holder and sponsor, ultimately enhancing the experience for the fan. Hampus Lofkvist, Sportradar’s Director of Global Sponsorship Sales, outlines the opportunity in an evolving digital landscape.

Sport’s most ambitious clubs, franchises, and organisations are increasingly aware that betting sponsorships can provide much more than merely a financial boost to their commercial portfolios.

Indeed, in the engagement stakes, research shows that the combination of betting on and watching sport is a powerful and mutually beneficial proposition for both sectors.

For instance, 70% of Americans are more likely to watch a game if they have bet on it, while someone who watches sport in the US is 72% more likely than an average adult to be interested in betting, according to the most recent studies.

This unique relationship creates an opportunity for rights-holders to work with their betting partners to

create engagement opportunities. In a primarily digital-first space, the driving force behind such growth is technology. Enter Sportradar ad:s.

Sports data and tech DNA

At the core of its ad:s marketing services, Sportradar has built a multi-channel marketing platform focused on supporting clients to more effectively engage, acquire and retain customers.

With a bespoke iGaming demand-side platform (DSP) and industry-leading personalisation and customisation technology, Sportradar ad:s has already established itself as a trusted partner of leading sportsbooks worldwide.

Combining this ad tech with its global sponsorship expertise has allowed Sportradar to also support

the digital activation of global sports betting partnerships – a growing need.

Addressing the challenge

As standard, rights-holder digital inventory is built into most betting sponsorships. However, leaving a positive impression on the end user, the fan – let alone acquiring them as a customer – is not always guaranteed.

Traditionally, creative assets are often static, devoid of live data or odds, lacking contextual relevance, and are supported by inefficient or infrequent updates. To compound this, insufficient data feedback can make it difficult for both the rights-holder and their betting partner to understand the performance of a particular product or campaign.

This potential missed opportunity

can and should be addressed.

Providing Solutions

Addressing this need, tech-driven solutions like Sportradar's ad:s Publisher Products have become increasingly important, boosting ad conversion by matching website content with dynamic advertisements featuring contextually relevant insights powered by live data.

Featuring real-time and engaging content is also ensuring a better experience on a rights-holder's digital platform.

This has already had a tangible impact in cases like the National Hockey League's collaboration with betting operator OlyBet, for example. The partnership, which was facilitated by Sportradar and announced last year, has enabled both parties to grow their respective businesses and followings in the Baltic states.

During the 2022 Stanley Cup finals, NHL integrated ad:s Publisher Products to serve contextually relevant and dynamic advertisements across NHL.com, targeted to OlyBet's core markets, with click-through rates exceeding the previous benchmark more than twofold.

An advanced reporting suite also helped all parties to understand the optimisation strategies more effectively and make recommendations for further improvements for the upcoming NHL season.

Status-quo

Applying technology to solve such a need is increasingly important in today's consumer habit world and market economy.

Everyone will be well aware of the shift in audience and customer expectations, with sports enthusiasts now demanding more from rights-holders and operators than ever before. Quite simply, fans want the most relevant content, tailored to their interests, and delivered on their favourite platforms at the right time – or they will look elsewhere.

In an economic landscape that



also demands ever-greater scrutiny on marketing spend, sports betting companies are putting greater pressure on the performance of their brand partnerships. Building awareness and affinity is no longer enough. Operators want to see the ROI.

Carefully curated digital activation can therefore be used to better extract the true value of a sponsorship – helping ensure such partnerships remain a key part of a varied and effective sports marketing strategy.

Sponsorship is still a key part of any marketing mix as there is nothing quite like it. To be able to tap into the passion points of a highly engaged and relevant target audience is unique. The challenge today is to ensure there is less wastage of rights and ensure a more efficient use of the rights acquired. This is what we are working to support our clients achieve.

Shifting set-ups?

Incentivising the rights-holder to deliver on digital activation performance has made its way into

the set-up of partnerships across the industry.

Whilst most rights-holders continue to, understandably, demand an up-front guarantee for the use of their IP, a performance-oriented model with variables linked to the sponsor ROI, such as the number of converted customers, is becoming increasingly prevalent across certain markets.

This sort of arrangement is facilitated due to the unique nature of betting sponsorships compared to other sponsor categories. The opportunity to trigger such incentives has led forward-thinking rights-holders to take a proactive approach by investing in technology in order to better leverage their fan data and digital activation capabilities across their platforms – from websites, apps and social to OTT.

Natural extension

As a business that operates on the intersection of sports data and technology, applying its solutions to the global sponsorship marketplace represents a natural extension of Sportradar's overall and ever-evolving service portfolio.

We want to continue to create unique partnerships between ambitious companies and rights-holders worldwide.

Arguably even more important, however, is to ensure the partnership delivers. If we can play a role in that through applying our technology, we will. ♦









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Details Games Broadcast Options


Live TOP 4

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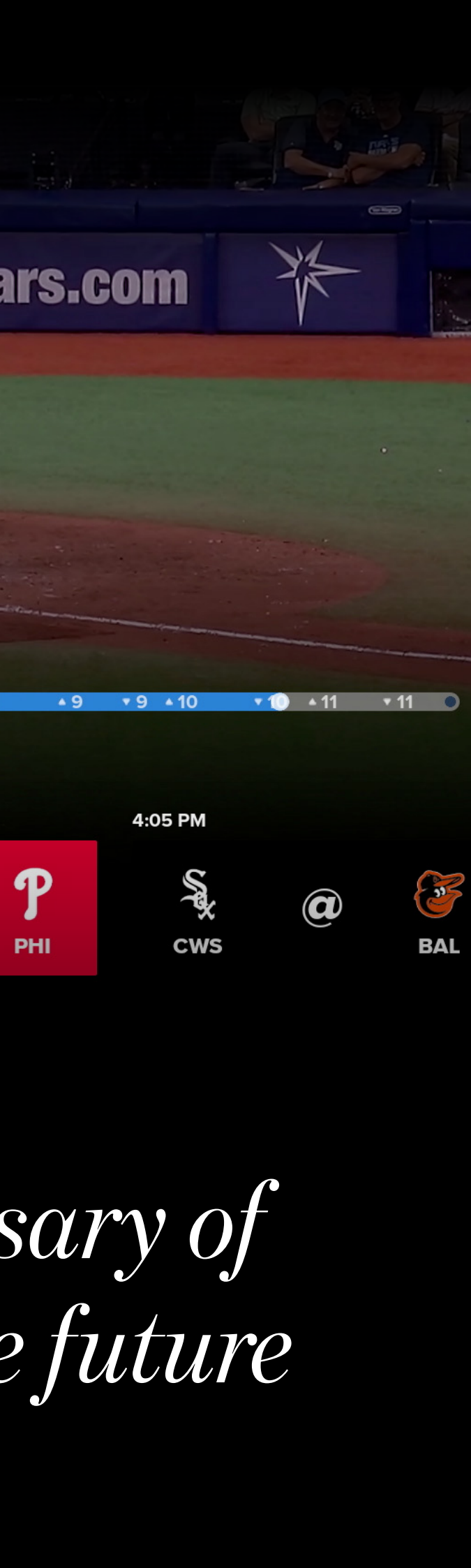
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*MLB marks 20th anniversary
MLB.TV with focus on the*



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- League's flagship, out-of-market streaming service is now one of the longest running and most successful sports streaming products anywhere in the world
- Service is on pace to attract more than 11 billion minutes of consumption this year
- Blackouts that have frustrated fans for years again a focus of league executives

By Eric Fisher

Much of the media and industry conversation surrounding the business of video streaming is framed in the context of streaming itself being something new, emerging, and not yet fully defined in its either its value proposition to consumers or its own economics.

There is certainly plenty of truth in that framing, as the business of streaming is indeed going through its own upheaval and fundamental redefinition in the face of widespread cord-cutting of linear television services, the continued addition of top-tier live sports to more streaming platforms, and still-answered questions regarding the consumer tolerance of additional price increases to some services.

But streaming as something new? Not so much, as Major League Baseball on August 26 celebrated the 20th anniversary of the first live stream of a full game, marking the start of what became the MLB.TV flagship, out-of-market streaming service that is now one of the longest running and most successful sports streaming products anywhere in the world.

On August 26, 2002, MLB became the first North American pro sports league to live-stream a full, regular season game. On that day, a tiny, choppy stream of a New York Yankees-Texas Rangers game went out to about 30,000 people. That predated the early 2007 beginning of streaming by Netflix, an entity now often seen as a relative graybeard in the business, by more than four years.

There were quickly howls of complaints from MLB's incumbent television rights holders, worried their rights were being cannibalized. The debut MLB.TV stream itself was not of particularly high quality, and there was certainly not yet anything resembling a meaningful business surrounding those live streams.

From those humble origins, as many industry observers now know, grew an industry colossus. In the ensuing years, the streaming service in a dizzying succession made its way to a wide range of major platforms, including Apple Inc.'s iPhone and iPad, the Sony PlayStation gaming service, social media destinations such as Facebook and Twitter,

and connected TVs, among others, each expanding the reach of live MLB content and allowing fans to experience the game in new ways.

The success of streaming MLB.TV, in turn, allowed the then-MLB Advanced Media to also build a robust business managing the streaming operations of a wide range of prominent third parties, including ESPN, CBS Sports, and World Wrestling Entertainment, among many others.

That business, ultimately becoming the BAMTech subsidiary, later yielded a massive windfall for the 30 MLB club owners when MLB in 2016-17 sold its equity in the company to the Walt Disney Co. in two separate transactions for a total of \$2.58bn (€2.58bn).

A generation after its start, MLB.TV now produces

more than a quarter of a billion dollars per year in direct subscription revenue from its nearly three million subscribers, and millions of dollars more from advertising, merchandise sales, ticketing, and other revenue directly or indirectly spinning off the product.

The service is also on track to attract an unprecedented total of more than 11 billion minutes of consumption in 2022, reaching more than 230 countries and building off of record levels of activity generated both at the start of this season and the 2021 campaign.

“Sometimes I have to pinch myself to realize what this become,” says Noah Garden, MLB chief revenue officer. “We didn’t know what we didn’t know back then at the start. But it’s become one of the great internet startup



stories.”

Entering the third decade of MLB.TV, the league is now trying to keep alive the original spirit of innovation that allowed the service to become what it is, while at the same time fundamentally retooling the business surrounding it, as well as the league’s entire media footprint, to reflect the current industry realities.

“We have a [media] disruption obviously happening now, and we have to continue to innovate the product,” Garden said. “We are very focused on reach, and the question we’re always trying to answer is, ‘How can we make sure fans can get the product they want on the device they want?’”

A new structure

The birth of MLB.TV and much of its history existed in a very different operating and organizational structure than what MLB now uses, a situation that allowed the product and baseball’s broader ambitions digitally to flourish, but one that also created no shortage of issues, both internally and externally.

The streaming service was a product of MLBAM, a separate unit within MLB that had its own board of directors, its own financial structure, and notably, its own physical headquarters and own corporate culture. Housed in New York’s Chelsea Market, away from the league’s Park Avenue headquarters in Manhattan, MLBAM indeed looked and felt like the aggressive technology startup it was.

But MLB ultimately became something of a victim of its own success. As its own digital operations, including MLB.TV, continued to grow to unprecedented heights, aided by the separate structure, those endeavors became increasingly blurred with more traditional business operations such as sponsorship and linear TV, activities MLB ran out of Park Avenue.

That, in turn, created a series of internal power struggles, and for licensees and corporate partners, increased hassles and more difficult dealmaking as some companies needed to reach two separate league-level agreements in order to have an official relationship with MLB.

Under current MLB commissioner Rob Manfred, those physical and operational divisions have been eliminated, in turn helping engineer a new wave of growth for MLB.TV. The league’s business activities under Manfred were initially led by Bob Bowman, former MLBAM president and chief executive. That plan saw the late 2014 departure of MLB executive vice president of business Tim Brosnan, who earlier that year unsuccessfully sought the commissioner post won by Manfred.

Nearly three years later, Bowman also departed, as then did deputy commissioner Tony Petitti in 2020. Manfred now has a senior business leadership team led in part by Garden and chief operations and strategy officer Chris Marinak, but also involving several other key figures in areas such as legal, finance, and communications.

And as Manfred has promoted a strategy of “One Baseball,” in which multiple levels and components of the sport are all aligned under MLB, the league in early 2020 also physically manifested that plan by opening

a new headquarters in New York housing both the former Park Avenue office and MLBAM’s Chelsea Market operations.

The Covid-19 pandemic, arriving just weeks after the opening of the new offices, delayed the realization of the full benefits of those new headquarters. But league executives now point to a very different working environment.

“The current senior leadership team here is as close of an operating group as I’ve seen,” says Kenny Gersh, MLB executive vice president of business development, and a former senior MLBAM executive. “We’re all [physically] here, everyone gets along, and we’re all rowing in the same direction.”

Innovating the business

Following the league’s labor deal with the MLB Players Association, the league introduced a series of new elements for MLB.TV, including new playback features offering greater personalization and enhanced controls such as inning milestones, in-game details, and customized scoreboards.

The league also plans to more actively embed alternate broadcast presentations, betting content, and other supplemental programming within MLB.TV.

But there are far bigger ambitions within the league for MLB.TV, and the sport’s overall media profile.

Among those ambitions is at last providing a meaningful solve for the regional blackouts that have served as by far the top complaint of MLB.TV over its 20-year lifespan to date. Subscribers to the service have historically been unable to receive access to games shown in their local markets, serving as a protection to regional rightsholders that have been and remain a critical economic underpinning of the entire sport.

Newly developed in-market streaming services such as the Bally Sports+ and NESN 360 provide a local complement to MLB.TV. But even those offerings still have not addressed long-running and thorny issues where fans in certain United States markets such as Las Vegas, Nevada, and Des Moines, Iowa, can find themselves blacked out from as many as six clubs on MLB.TV, and unable to get a full view of the sport, no matter how much money they pay for streaming services.

“We’re now focused on innovating the business,” Gersh says. “We’re really focused on evolving the overall business model.”

That evolution involves what Manfred has described as a reconstruction of the broadcast control rights within the sport. And ultimately, the league is contemplating a broad revision of its territorial map so that fans can more easily see the games they want, wherever they are.

That multiyear project, if successful, could represent some of the most profound changes to baseball broadcasting since the advent of cable television roughly a half-century ago. And MLB.TV will be a key element of the effort.

“The world is clearly changing and the [cable] bundle, and what we think of as the bundle, is going to reinvent itself,” Garden says. “We have made it our business to listen to fans, and we’re listening here, too.” ♦



EXCLUSIVE

FAT SPORT

START STRONG

ESPN
FILMS

ESPN+ documentary 'Fat Sport' highlights growing of Premier Lacrosse League

LIVELY ON **ESPN+**

E OF A PORT

STREAMING AUGUST 29



*Fate of a
Sport
The impact
of the*

- ESPN picks up independently-financed film amid competition from streaming services
- Documentary, which covers first three seasons of startup, to air on ABC on September 18
- It is hoped that rare lacrosse documentary will help bring new fans into the sport

By Bob Williams

The new ESPN+ lacrosse documentary *Fate of a Sport*, which also aired on ESPN on September 15 and the ABC broadcast network on September 18, highlights the transformative impact that the Premier Lacrosse League has had on the sport in the United States since debuting in late 2018.

The documentary chronicles the first three seasons of the startup touring league and the efforts of co-founders Paul and Mike Rabil to get the league off the ground, navigate the Covid-19 pandemic and then secure a merger with Major League Lacrosse to cement its status in the North American sports landscape.

Among the commercial details revealed are that NBC Sports did not pay a rights fee to the PLL initially, that MLL made an offer to buy the PLL for \$35m (€35m) towards the end of its inaugural season in 2019, and then a year later the PLL acquired MLL for just \$1m.

After premiering earlier this year at the Tribeca Film Festival, the documentary was immediately picked up by ESPN amid competition from a series of streaming services. It features original interviews with industry heavyweights such as National Basketball Association commissioner Adam Silver, New England Patriots head coach Bill Belichick, and Brooklyn Nets owner (and PLL founding investor) Joe Tsai.

Fate of a Sport is a perfect fit for both parties, with the PLL having signed a four-year media rights agreement with ESPN later this month worth an eight-figure total dollar value. Indeed, the ABC broadcast of the documentary later this month will lead directly into the PLL championship game on the network.

The deal also further establishes ESPN as the principal home of lacrosse in the United States, also having the rights across the sport via deals with World Lacrosse, the National Lacrosse League, Athletes Unlimited, and across the college athletics landscape.

ESPN has aired a documentary on lacrosse before, the 2016 film *Fantastic Lies* which focused on three players from the Duke University men's lacrosse team being wrongly accused of committing sexual assault at a party.

The film, part of the acclaimed 30 for 30 series, is more about class, race, and underlying faults in the judicial system, police force and media industry than the sport of lacrosse itself.

Fate of a Sport is, rather, the first major documentary about the professional lacrosse ranks and has the added gravitas of being executive-produced by ESPN Films and Uninterrupted, the media company run by Los Angeles Lakers superstar LeBron James and his business partner Maverick Carter.

It is hoped that the documentary, which provides a rare behind-the-scenes glimpse into the creation of a new sports league from scratch, will serve as a means to engage diehard fans and bring new fans into the PLL and sport as a whole.

“I think *Fate of a Sport* can be momentous to the PLL,” Paul Rabil, the league’s co-founder and president, tells *SportBusiness*. “The level of scale that you get with a documentary film is much different from what you can get with a live broadcast or through social media or digital. We’re definitely excited about growing our total reach with the documentary.”

It is also hoped that *Fate of a Sport* will change some preconceptions around lacrosse and its participants.

“Still to this day, I would argue that the biggest moment in national and global press for lacrosse has been the Duke rape case,” Rabil says in the documentary. “We still, as a sport, haven’t recovered from that. We need it not to represent elitism and exclusivity and we need it to represent its roots in indigenous culture in North America.”

Move to ESPN has been ‘highly positive’

Despite the natural synergies between ESPN and the PLL, it was not a given that the league would align with its domestic rights partner for *Fate of a Sport*, especially as there were numerous suitors for the film.

There are various templates for rightsholders working with different media companies in this space, namely Formula 1 being aired on both Netflix in the US through the highly successful docuseries *Drive to Survive* and on ESPN, which airs its live races.

But the film’s director Michael Doneger and the PLL felt that ESPN would be the best partner to air the documentary due to the reach of the company’s portfolio and marketing prowess.

“From the filmmaking side and league-operating side, when we work on a project we try to devote a strategy that is best suited for that specific project,” Rabil says. “When it came to *Fate of a Sport* it was about the best distribution partner that presented top-to-bottom-scale promotion, audience aggregation, and a number of other items.

“There were a few bidders for it and ESPN was the best fit for us. When stars align and in this case our live playoffs this September, with the launch of *Fate of a Sport* as an interest aggregator and a piece of content which we hope our fans will enjoy and will potentially attract new fans, it really made for a perfect match,” he said.

For Rabil, the league’s move from NBC Sports to ESPN has been an overwhelming success across a series of metrics, with domestic ratings up 34 per cent year-on-

year through the All-Star Break in July.

“Our ratings are up. The broader interest around the clock in lacrosse is higher by impressions and total video views,” Rabil says. “We’ve been the beneficiary of regularly featured SportsCenter Top 10 and broader conversation around the shows from talent who watch the PLL to talent that is invested in the growth of lacrosse. It’s been hugely positive for us and we’re really excited about our four-year term with them.”

The league has grown further recently with the reintroduction of its Championship Series in February 2023 in the new short-form Sixes format, and a Series D funding round, which includes new investment from World Wrestling Entertainment and Thirty Five Ventures, the investment company led by NBA superstar Kevin Durant and his business manager Rick Kleiman.

For Doneger, a former teammate and roommate of Rabil at Johns Hopkins University, the prospect of creating an independently-financed documentary on the PLL when it formed in 2018 was both a challenge and an opportunity.

“It’s certainly a challenge when the broader public doesn’t really consider lacrosse one of the bigger major team sports in North America. It’s not the NBA, NFL, NHL, it’s not MLS,” he tells *SportBusiness*. “So we’re definitely starting from a bit of a deficit in terms of awareness of the sport.

“But I also saw that as an opportunity to really be the first documentary to cover the professional ranks of lacrosse. If we did our jobs right and the film is able to gather interest we think at the end of the day that will be an asset,” Doneger said.

Initially the documentary was due to just cover the league’s inaugural season in 2019 but it expanded to 2020 and then 2021 in part as Rabil did not perform well on the field as a player in the league’s second campaign and also due to encouragement from Uninterrupted to make a more extensive piece of content.

“[During 2020] Paul was not playing well. In fact he was having his worst professional season. And we didn’t want to end the movie like that, on a bit of a downer for Paul personally,” Doneger says. “After that season, we decided to shoot one more season which would be our third act. Paul ended up playing great that year and the league was prospering. It was pretty much a storybook ending.”

Doneger adds that Uninterrupted has proven invaluable in terms of ideas with storytelling, providing staff where needed and helping with the marketing.

“Their mantra is ‘More than an Athlete’ and that is very much in line with who and what Paul Rabil is and that’s best expressed in the fact that he has created a new professional league for the next generation of professional lacrosse players,” he says.

So can *Fate of a Sport* become the PLL’s *Drive to Survive*?

“I don’t know if a single hour and 40 minute documentary is going to invite millions of people to start watching the league but I think it’s a step in the right direction,” Doneger says. “It also opens the door for future stories to be told within the PLL. Hopefully this is just the beginning.” ♦

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*PSG reaps the benefits of being fashionable in Japan
lucrative pre-season tour*



n in

- Football club has leveraged Japan’s fascination with French style and culture
- Fashion collaborations have been a major focus for PSG’s marketing efforts
- Japanese fans respond enthusiastically, become biggest Asian e-commerce market

By Kevin McCullagh

Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) owners Qatar Sports Investments (QSI) have targeted Japan as a growth market for the club since taking over in 2011. This summer, a decade of nurturing the club’s business in Japan is bore fruit in a lucrative, three-match pre-season tour.

As it has courted Japanese fans, PSG has sought to leverage connections between Paris and Tokyo as cosmopolitan cities on the bleeding edge of global culture. Fashion and merchandise — key touchpoints for Asian fans with sports properties in Europe and the US — have been used to develop the PSG brand and drive revenues.

Sebastian Wasels, PSG’s managing director for Asia-Pacific, told *SportBusiness* recently that the tour satisfies two broad aims: preparing the team for the season ahead with fixtures against Japanese J.League sides that are mid-season and, therefore, match-fit; and bolstering PSG’s marketing and promotional work in the market.

PSG is also getting a match fee which Wasels claims is among the biggest ever paid out for a pre-season football tour: “It’s one of the most lucrative deals that has been done in the industry... it’s very significant for the club.”

Wasels declined to comment on the value of the fee but it is understood to be in excess of \$10m (€9.8m). To put this in context, one of the biggest fees previously reported for a pre-season tour by a European football team was \$14m for Barcelona for three matches in the US in 2017.

PSG’s fee is being paid by tour promoter Circus, a Japanese advertising and marketing agency that has previously worked with PSG stars including Neymar Jr and Kylian Mbappé on ad campaigns in Japan. In return for the fee, Circus gets to exploit the commercial opportunities around the event, including ticketing, media rights, sponsorship and merchandising.

Circus has put a comprehensive commercial structure around the tour, with an array of sponsors and a powerful media partner in free-to-air broadcaster Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS). The top-level presenting sponsor is online travel firm AirTrip. Other commercial partners include online real estate firm Renosy, sports



NFT company Meta All-Stars, metaverse game Dagen, and champagne brand Collet. A line of tour-specific merchandise was offered in partnership with merchandise specialist Fanatics.

The tour had its own Twitter account (8,900 followers at the time of writing), Facebook account (only 159 followers), Instagram account (1,900 followers), and YouTube channel (327 subscribers, top-viewed video with 7,800 views).

TBS showed live coverage of the three matches, against Kawasaki Frontale on July 20, Urawa Red Diamonds on July 23 and Gamba Osaka on July 25. PSG players also appeared on around 10 other TBS programmes during the tour.

This exposure on TBS was a big attraction for PSG. Wasels says: “There was a guarantee for us to have amazing exposure... on some of the most popular and followed shows on TV.”

French fascination

PSG has built upon existing foundations as it has developed its brand in Japan. Paris and France have long fascinated the Japanese. More than a million tourists per year from Japan visited France pre-pandemic. The Japanese are big consumers of exports such as French cuisine and fashion.

PSG has sought to capitalise on this interest in all things French. Wasels says: “Paris Saint-Germain is the representative of the city of Paris in football. I think that’s one of the reasons we had so many passionate fans that started to cheer for the club and why we developed so many projects in Japan.”

He continues: “There are a lot of common points between France, Paris and Tokyo... A love for gastronomy, for culture, for fashion... way they sense new trends in Tokyo, just like we do in Paris.”

This echoes the words of club president Al-Khelaifi around the time of the QSI takeover in 2011: “Paris is... the city of fashion, gastronomy, arts and great museums. And yet Paris has only one club, while most major capitals like Madrid or London have at least two. We see this as an

opportunity to create a great club of international stature in France.”

Fashion has been central in QSI’s work to turn Paris Saint-Germain into a globally recognised ‘lifestyle brand’ — that is, a brand that is more than just a football club, extending into other areas of culture and fashion. By developing ranges of desirable clothing and merchandise the club has built a stylish image, appealed to young fans globally and driven revenues.

It has pursued collaborations with famous fashion brands in France and abroad, most notably its tie-up with Jordan, the US sports brand established by Nike and NBA legend Michael Jordan.

Speaking to industry publication *Luxury Tribune* in 2020, PSG’s director of merchandising and diversification Fabien Allègre explained how PSG had positioned itself. “Fashion, style, design and elegance are the hallmarks of Paris,” he said. “We have capitalized on the DNA of Paris, its roots, its identity, its originality. That’s what sets us apart from other cities, what makes us different, unique; it’s this that gives us the capacity to be a lifestyle brand, with a strong creative content.

“[We] then take it one step further and imagine different things, to stretch the brand into territories previously unexplored by the big football clubs: like fashion, music, art. These new and original collaborations have brought PSG to new, different audiences time and again.”

Combining universes

In Japan, PSG has run collaborations with local fashion brands including Bape, Baycrew and BearBrick. The latter is a producer of popular collectible toy figurines.

Wasels says PSG is continuing a trend seen elsewhere in the fashion world, of crossovers between designers and other intellectual property owners:

“[We have] dedicated lines that mix the universe of Paris St Germain with the universe of the artists, in special collections. It’s a very successful trend in the fashion

world today – mixing two ‘universes’ to create something spectacular.”

Japanese fans have responded enthusiastically to PSG’s fashion-focused marketing and it is now the biggest market in Asia for the club’s ecommerce business.

The Jordan crossover proved particularly popular. “The partnership with Jordan has been crucial,” Wasels says. “The Jordan brand here in Japan is very, very popular. When we announced the partnership, it was a huge success here — that’s also one of the reasons we decided to intensify our fashion collaborations in the market.”

PSG has two merchandise stores in Japan, one in Tokyo and one in Nagoya. It also has a café in Tokyo, bringing (PSG-branded) Parisien café culture to the city. This week, it opened a pop-up store in Shinjuku in central Tokyo. The pop-up will be the location for the launch of its ‘Away Jordan’ line for the upcoming season — Jordan-branded sportswear using the club’s away kit colours. It will also host launches of collaborations with Japanese designers NIGO, VERDY and Makoto Yamaki.

PSG has also tapped into gaming and esports culture in Japan, creating a professional team to compete in the local Rainbow Six Japan League.

“Japan is such a symbol of video games and esports that it felt very natural for us to also create this team,” Wasels says.

The French club was one of the earliest and most emphatic movers among traditional sports rights-holders within esports. It has a stable of teams competing in major competitions in several of the biggest esports titles globally, including: PSG LGD, a Chinese team competing in Dota 2; PSG Talon in Hong Kong, competing in League of Legends; and of course a team competing in the Fifa game.

Special moments

Top European football clubs have returned to Asia-Pacific in force this pre-season, after a hiatus due to the pandemic. Manchester United, Liverpool, Tottenham

Hotspur, Leeds United, Aston Villa, Everton and Sevilla were among the other clubs recently engaged in pre-season tours in the region.

While preparing for the coming season is the ostensible rationale for the tours, nurturing local fanbases and business is just as, if not more, important. Significant match fees can be earned, as the PSG tour shows. But the ancillary promotional work supports much bigger sponsorship and media rights revenues.

Most top European clubs have several sponsorship deals with Asia-Pacific brands. Pre-season tours are important activation points for these deals. Liverpool shirt sponsor Standard Chartered was busy activating around the club’s recent match in Singapore against Premier League rivals Crystal Palace, including title-sponsoring the match trophy.

Pre-season tours are also opportunities to court new sponsors. Wasels says one of the aims of the PSG tour is “to showcase to Japanese brands how efficient Paris Saint-Germain can be as a platform to promote their services and products.”

Arguably the most important work on the tours is engaging with the local fanbases that underpin the sponsorship and media rights revenues. In an age of proliferating alternative entertainment options, rights-holders with international ambitions such as European football clubs have to work harder than ever to retain the interest of their overseas fans.

PSG claims six million fans in Japan. Wasels says one of the central objectives of the tour was “to spend a lot of time with our fans and create very special moments”.

At the time of going to press, the PSG tour had got underway. Around 13,000 fans had turned out to watch an open training session with the team and the declared attendance at the first match, against J.League champions Kawasaki Frontale at the National Stadium in Tokyo, was 65,000. The French club appears to remain very much in vogue in Japan. ♦





How the FIFA Master has stayed at the top of its game

CIES director Denis Oswald explains how the FIFA Master's offering has evolved over the past two decades to remain a vital launchpad for aspirational sports industry executives.

The global business of sport has transformed beyond recognition since the International Centre for Sports Studies (CIES) launched its FIFA Master back in 2000.

However, for more than two decades, the reputation of the CIES's flagship course has remained outstanding, with the course delivering an evolving offering in changing times.

"To remain successful for more than 20 years has simultaneously required a clear focus on our course identity and the openness to change," CIES director Denis Oswald says.

"Since we operate as a bridge between higher education and the sport industry, we must have an up-to-date understanding of both worlds. This means observing how each sector operates and evolves,

taking note of both good and bad practice, and trying to apply that in how and what we teach."

Collaboration

The course is spearheaded by the CIES in partnership with De Montfort University in Leicester, SDA Bocconi School of Management in Milan and the University of Neuchâtel in Switzerland.

Such a comprehensive collaboration featuring highly regarded institutions in Switzerland, the UK and Italy respectively ensures a holistic outlook covering the most timely and relevant sports industry trends and issues, as well as first-in-class teaching methods.

"Having three universities is an advantage, because it regularly forces us internally to rethink how we teach from the constant mixing of three distinct international and

academic perspectives," Oswald adds.

"Our staff across all three universities review the programme after each edition, introducing new topics and approaches in line with the evolution of the world of sport. Thanks to our many guest speakers, we also maintain a dialogue with the industry to understand the key problems and new directions in which sport is moving."

Furthermore, the course undergoes an "intensive audit" by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education that examines all aspects of the programme, from curriculum and methods to student services and career support.

Alumni network

FIFA Master leaders also recognise the importance of tapping into a powerful alumni network,

which spans top positions in administration and business across the global industry.

“Student feedback is central, and we listen – not just to current students, but also to our alumni who look back on their experience in the context of their developing careers,” Oswald adds.

“While the FIFA Master Alumni (FMA) association is an independent body, we have always sought to have them at the table since it formed in 2003. The continuity of this partnership for nearly 20 years has allowed the course staff and alumni to walk hand in hand with a shared goal of innovating the programme.”

The aim, according to Oswald, is to build a “true community” – not just within each intake of students, but through a “multiplier effect” spanning the 22 groups of sports industry leaders so far. As an example of the FIFA Master fraternity, a number of former students have continued to return for each annual graduation ceremony for nearly 15 years.

FIFA Master alumni also hold annual general assemblies and regional reunions and conferences on the sidelines of sports events, with WhatsApp groups helping to facilitate connections across the years. The joint CIES–FMA webinar series has also encouraged fruitful conversations between alumni worldwide.

“Because so many alumni consider the FIFA Master as a life-changing experience, this creates a dedication and feeling of belonging which generates a willingness to give back,” he adds. “This takes many forms whether returning as a guest speaker, circulating job openings or engaging with new students as mentors.”

New approach

Whilst it is difficult to describe a so-called typical FIFA Master student, given the diversity in terms of cultural, academic and professional backgrounds, most are between the ages of 25 and 35, with more than two-thirds already working in sport and having lived abroad before joining the CIES.

With usually between 20 and 25 different nationalities in a class of 30, and a plethora of experiences in areas as diverse as sponsorship, litigation, politics, and engineering, variety lies at the heart of the FIFA Master experience.

This contributes towards the development of an outward-looking network of individuals with expertise that spans a range of areas, bringing fresh ideas into the industry.

“It is a common complaint that the sports world is too insular,” Oswald says. “However, one of the specificities of our programme is the diversity of our students’ backgrounds. Of course, they all have an interest in sport, but some have not really worked professionally in this field and, by following our course, they wish to change their professional orientation, which means that they will arrive in the market without preconceived ideas and with a new approach.”

The strength of the renowned FMA network was particularly important in maintaining relationships at the height of Covid-19, with the pandemic also having an understandably significant impact on the structure of the course.

“The forced experience of 100% e-learning for a few months was ultimately a beneficial one,” Oswald says. “It allowed us to strengthen our virtual learning environment, rethink our tendency to rely on lecturers, speakers and organisations who could be in-person.”

Blended learning

Oswald adds that some lecturers actually found they were able to spend more time engaging with students via digital channels.

Informal online sessions with alumni who work for the Asian Football Confederation and Confederation of African Football were arranged. Such initiatives are still possible as part of a “blended learning” approach for students who are now able to gather again on the rotating campus in the UK, Italy and Switzerland.

“The ability to have lecturers

or guest speakers who would not have the possibility to travel to our classroom is something that we have definitely kept and, as a result, has expanded the diversity of speakers we could normally have,” he says.

However, Oswald adds: “Fundamentally, Covid has reinforced the importance of in-person learning. We have realised that this is really our core strength and that the virtual cannot replace the face-to-face experience of learning together in a classroom as diverse as ours.

“There is definitely a risk that courses operating principally through virtual environments will be unable to foster the same kind of relationships and community that are a consequence of our learning model. So, while we remain committed to in-person learning, we try to retain the positive achievements of the virtual and apply a proper balance when it can really enhance our course.” ♦

Denis Oswald





“Never underestimate beIN Sports”: Apac chief Kerr sets long-term ambitions in region

- BeIN Sports Apac's Mike Kerr says business has broken even and is set for growth
- Qatari ownership has meant perennial speculation over beIN's ambitions in the region
- BeIN is expanding its content portfolio and battling SPOTV for regional leadership

By Kevin McCullagh

BeIN Sports' ambitions in Asia-Pacific are a perennial subject of speculation in the regional sports media business.

The prevailing thinking, which also applies to beIN's operations in other parts of the world, is that the broadcaster is a soft power project by the Qatari state with a limited lifespan. Many have pegged this year's Fifa World Cup, the pinnacle of Qatar's decades-long investment in sport, as a likely watershed. Qatar will be firmly established on the world map and the state will no longer have need for an expensive international sports broadcasting operation, the thinking goes.

BeIN Sports Asia-Pacific's managing director Mike Kerr has a different story to tell. Speaking to *SportBusiness* in recent weeks, he said his operation is profitable, has headroom for growth, and is in the region for the long term.

Kerr says: "We've been around since 2012 and from some commentators it's been, 'Will it be one year? Will it be two years? Three years?' And we've consistently said: 'We're long term and never underestimate beIN'..."

"In Apac, it's been six years [the Apac business was run for its first three years as a joint-venture with the MP & Silva agency]. We've turned the corner from a financial perspective... We've got a very solid strategy. We've got the best team in the region. We continue to acquire content on a rational, reasonable and profitable basis. There would be no rational reason why we wouldn't continue with the business in Apac."

He adds: "Ultimately, what beIN Apac wants is to be the leading regional sports media company, plugged into one of the most significant players globally, beIN Media Group."

This may not be as big an ambition as it initially sounds. The competition to be the leading regional Apac sports broadcaster – in terms of operating in multiple markets – is a two-horse race with Eclat Media Group's SPOTV. But it underlines Kerr's contention that beIN is not a business that is winding down or even merely cruising. Rather, he says it is one that has found its groove and has its sights set on future growth.



Regional platform

BeIN Sports Asia-Pacific runs pay-television channels in 12 markets: Australia, New Zealand, Brunei, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Singapore. It has 14 channel feeds across these markets, including Thai, Bahasa (Indonesia) and Cantonese language feeds, alongside English-language feeds.

The vast majority of the business's revenue comes from distribution agreements with pay-television platforms (referred to as 'affiliates'), such as PCCW/Now TV in Hong Kong, Astro in Malaysia, AIS and TrueVisions in Thailand, Singtel and StarHub in Singapore, Foxtel in Australia and Sky in New Zealand.

BeIN has a direct-to-consumer streaming platform, beIN Sports Connect, in the region, but this plays second fiddle to the affiliate business. Access to beIN Sports Connect is provided at no extra cost to subscribers to affiliates' sports packages.

BeIN's content varies somewhat by market but is mainly focused on European football, tennis and a small portfolio of motorsport properties.

Some of the scepticism about beIN's staying power in Asia-Pacific stems from the fact it did not hold on

to premium rights it acquired when it first entered the market, notably the English Premier League in territories including Indonesia and Thailand.

Kerr says there was an early focus on premium content to establish the brand, but that rising content costs and the nature of the business led to change: "We will always be 'premium', but perhaps not 'ultra premium', which tends to be a loss leader. That's a very difficult proposition for a sports channel and content provider to third party partners...It's a lot easier for a triple-play or a quad-play player [i.e. a telco providing internet and/or mobile network services] to bring that ultra premium sports content into their business and use it as a loss leader across different verticals. We have one vertical: sports content."

The 'ultra premium' tier of content essentially means the Premier League in most of beIN's Asian markets. The English league has managed to maintain strong valuations in Asia-Pacific as pay-television broadcasters, under pressure from streaming services, have put increasing weight on 'must-have' content that makes a real difference in driving subscriptions. The Premier League underscored its 'must have' status in its latest round of rights sales in the region, for the 2022-23 to



2024-25 cycle, increasing its overall revenue from Asia-Pacific outside of China.

Some key pieces of beIN's Apac rights portfolio are multi-region deals agreed by beIN Media Group, also covering markets such as France and the Middle East. Examples include deals for French Open tennis, French Ligue 1, Uefa club competitions, the Italian Serie A, and the English Football League.

Expansion opportunity

Disney's shutdown last year of Fox Sports Asia, formerly beIN's main rival in the pan-regional business, presented the latter with an opportunity to expand its content offering. beIN snapped up rights for two tennis Grand Slams, the Australian Open and the French Open. Added to existing deals for the ATP and WTA tours, the broadcaster now has a strong position in tennis.

BeIN is understood to be on the verge of another big expansion of its portfolio, with a deal for Formula 1 rights in its Asian markets expected imminently. This is another property that was previously one of Fox's crown jewels. Kerr declined to confirm the acquisition although said a major new deal was on the horizon.

BeIN has faced competition for the rights previously

held by Fox from new player SPOTV, which was launched last year by Korean company Eclat Media Group and specifically aimed at the gap left by Fox. SPOTV and beIN are not pursuing exactly the same markets or strategies but there is plenty of crossover and competition between them. SPOTV operates in some Asian markets that beIN does not, such as Taiwan and Mongolia, but does not operate in Australia or New Zealand. It also has sister services in Korea and Japan. SPOTV has shown little interest to date in football content, but did compete strongly with beIN for the tennis Grand Slams, coming away with rights for Wimbledon and the US Open.

The presence of beIN and SPOTV is good news for rights-holders selling into the region. But underlying soft market conditions mean the competition has generally led to sellers maintaining previous rights valuations or avoiding large drops, rather than getting significant increases in values.

Echoing beIN Media Group chief executive Yousef Al-Obaidly in recent interviews marking 10 years since the launch of the beIN Sports France, Kerr says the Asia-Pacific operation is focused on "proportionate and rational" spending:

"We now have a strategy of proportionate, premium, rational acquisitions... We have become profitable, and we intend to maintain that rational business focus into the future."

Affiliate model

BeIN and SPOTV are betting on a business model that this time last year one would have been forgiven for questioning. Both businesses are banking on the continued strength of the traditional pay-television companies – their 'affiliates' – that have been threatened by the rise of direct-to-consumer streaming services.

Disney's closure of Fox Sports Asia was a dramatic repudiation of that model. The American entertainment giant signalled it saw no future in supplying sports content to traditional pay-television platforms and was ruthlessly focusing on its Disney+ direct-to-consumer service, which it has been rolling out in Asia-Pacific. Disney+ in Asia-Pacific does not carry significant sports content.

A year later, things look a little different. Stuttering growth at Netflix has raised questions over the direct-to-consumer model and hit share prices for streaming businesses. And 're-aggregation' of D2C streaming services by traditional pay-television platforms has continued apace – more and more traditional platforms allow subscribers to easily add the likes of Netflix and Disney+ to their bundles and pay for everything in a single bill. Although they are smaller businesses than a few years ago, the traditional pay-television platforms in Asia-Pacific are far from being eclipsed by D2C and look set to continue to play a central role in the video entertainment business.

Both beIN and SPOTV have one foot in the D2C space – they both have D2C products, but these play a supporting role to the affiliate business. Kerr expects beIN's business to be increasingly about providing streamed and on-demand content to affiliates.

He says many Southeast Asian markets are not yet ready for a wholly D2C approach in sport and the linear viewing experience remains critical for beIN and its affiliates: “Going only direct-to-consumer in this part of the world is still not the right thing to do...”

“The linear service ... still offers you the best experience from a large-screen perspective. It still has absolute stability in terms of the network. It’s the ease of accessing the content, the familiarity with the EPG and how content is scheduled.”

To underline the continued importance of linear, Kerr points to the 2018 Fifa World Cup final, for which 80 per cent of the 1.1bn global audience was watching on linear.

Sport sidelined

Sport has been side-lined in the D2C streaming boom story, with movies and television series taking the starring roles. Netflix, of course, does not even carry live sport.

Kerr sees this changing, noting Apple’s acquisition of global MLS rights and Amazon’s increased spend on sports content. For a total believer in the power of sports content, this is only natural: “They’re looking for content that is premium, that is unique, that is fresh...sport has everything they’re looking for.”

Kerr, who previously worked with Fox Sports Asia, when it was known as ESPN Star Sports, thinks Disney may have been hasty in its exit from sport in Asia-Pacific and tips it for a return.

“I was surprised they really didn’t grasp the value of sport and the unique position of sport within the market,” he says. “Maybe it was a little bit too soon...”

“Can you imagine a day when ESPN becomes a vertical within Disney+ in Apac? Personally, I think the answer is yes.”

One potential D2C threat that Kerr is not losing much sleep over is rights-holder-owned services. beIN was surprised last season when Spain’s LaLiga, one of its most important rights-holder partners in Asia-Pacific, launched its D2C service LaLiga+ in Thailand and Indonesia. There was a provision for this in beIN’s rights deal with LaLiga but the broadcaster did not expect the league to act on it. Kerr thinks D2C services are a bridge too far for most, if not all, rights-holders:

“I think rights-holders are going to learn that it’s actually not viable. Such a narrow proposition, with no opportunity to cross-promote, no opportunity to aggregate audience...The cost of [customer] acquisition, the cost of marketing, even to those people who are already fans, is just way too high.”

This is perhaps even more the case in Southeast Asia as opposed to bigger Asia-Pacific or Western markets, he says:

“I think in Asia, it’s still too early [for sports rights-holder direct-to-consumer services]. You still need the traditional linear proposition, you still need the aggregation with all the other genres...It sometimes seems like it’s a dirty word, but you still need the bundle.”

Faith in sport

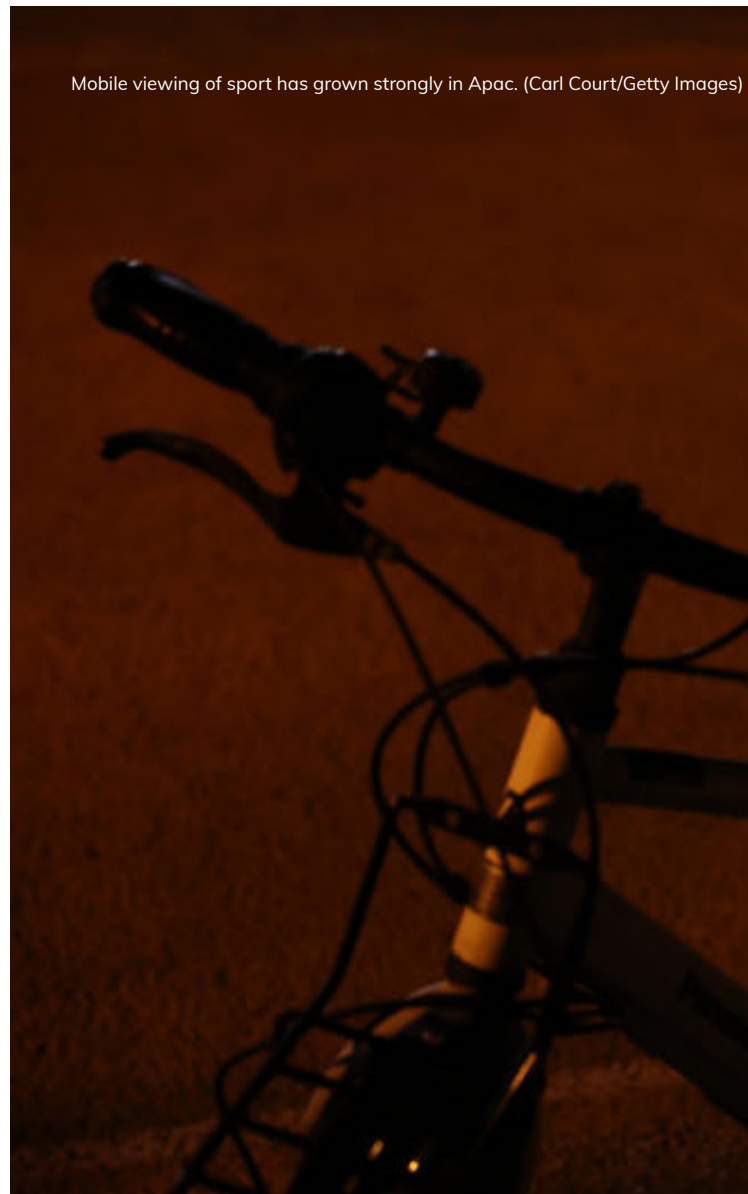
It’s fair to say that, globally, the sports broadcasting business is in something of a downturn after a couple of boom decades that were driven by the rise of pay-television. Subscriber numbers for sports pay-television platforms are declining, rights values for most properties outside the premium tier are declining or plateauing, and sport has not yet really benefited from the D2C streaming boom.

Despite all this, Kerr is confident that the business has a rosy future: “One only has to look at Disney’s annual report and see how profitable ESPN is. I think that, in putting sport in front of the consumer in the right way and being rational about the decisions you make in terms of acquisitions, there’s still a real opportunity to make a long-term profitable and sustainable business from sport.”

He acknowledges there are challenges in changing viewing habits, and in particular getting younger generations as engaged with sport as previous generations. But he says beIN’s Asia-Pacific viewership suggests continuing strong demand for its core product – live sport. And he sees opportunity for growth in the region’s developing economies and deepening penetration of smartphones and high-speed mobile internet.

“We see changes in consumption. But 90, 95 per cent

Mobile viewing of sport has grown strongly in Apac. (Carl Court/Getty Images)



of what is drawing viewers in is still the live content...

“I absolutely get the point of the new generation coming through being bombarded by all sorts of different options for their time... but we don’t see that translate into viewership. We still see the same viewership patterns as we always have. And we still feel that there’s immense opportunity for growth, particularly across Asia.

“There’s a challenge in ensuring that the next generation are as passionate in the way the generations above were...But I think there’s also a real opportunity as the levels of disposable income continue to increase in this part of the world...Technology will give us the opportunity to reach many, many more people. Legacy media distribution wasn’t able to do that – it was too expensive, there were huge infrastructure barriers. Now, smartphones are almost ubiquitous.”

The future

Kerr says the next few years will see beIN remain focused on its current strategy, built on three pillars: (i) securing high quality content; (ii) execution, meaning producing, distributing and marketing sports content in multiple markets at a level of quality that the affiliates would be unable to match on their own; (iii) and partnerships, meaning maintaining and extending deals with affiliates.

There are no short-term plans to expand to new markets in Asia-Pacific, but the business will remain in all its existing markets. “We’re only going to get bigger,” he says.

BeIN’s unique ownership means there will always be speculation about the extent of its ambitions. Kerr makes the case it will a major part of the sports broadcasting landscape, in Asia-Pacific and beyond, for the foreseeable future. He points to the company’s recent investments at a group level:

“When you look at the investments that beIN as a group has made, we’ve got not just this World Cup in the Middle East but the next two editions up until 2030. So that’s another eight years of World Cup broadcasting in that market. We’ve just launched a game-changing new OTT platform in Mena, called TOD. Our entertainment business at group level, including Miramax, is going great guns. And our entire group across more than 40 markets is globally integrated thanks to our group leadership.”

Zooming in on Asia-Pacific, he says: “When you look at the investments that we’ve made here, the ATP investment that we made in Asia is for four years; the two tennis majors are for five years; we’ve just done a renewal of EFL and Carabao Cup on a multi-year basis...We’re absolutely committed to the long term.” ♦





How sport can address strategic errors in the NFT space to maximise engagement potential

Capital Sports Media chief executive Tim Mangnall offers his perspective on the key lessons learned during a rollercoaster first three-quarters of 2022, and how sports clubs and rights-holders can maximise the engagement opportunities presented by digital assets.

Even in the midst of the unprecedented non-fungible tokens (NFTs) boom of late 2021, advocates of the concept, like Capital Sports Media chief executive Tim Mangnall, were insisting that the growth of such digital assets in sport was unlikely to be linear.

So far, 2022 has proved that to be the case. Whilst there have been notably successful NFT projects in sport, several underwhelming release ‘drops’ have flopped, leaving rights-holders to be pilloried by a skeptical press.

Furthermore, a cryptocurrency crash, which has wiped off two-thirds of the value of the top 500 crypto assets since November 2021, has had a significant impact on NFTs. Additionally, broader volatility in the financial markets, including surging



inflation, has not helped.

In the closing months of 2021, Mangnall was keen to stress how it would take at least two or three years – possibly longer – before the full scale of the opportunity in NFTs is realised in sport. He urged rights-holders to adopt a sustainable long-term vision in collaboration with carefully selected partners, and to avoid chasing short-term revenue from the outset.

Lessons

Unfortunately, many did not heed the warning. Even so, nearly a year

on, he believes there is no reason to alter his optimistic long-term outlook.

“Clubs still have a huge amount to learn about NFTs and there remain lots of misconceptions in the industry,” Mangnall says. “Fundamentally, clubs still do not understand the opportunity around NFTs. The majority of NFT ‘drops’, particularly in football, have been focused on a moment in history or an artwork, but after they are released, everyone moves on quickly and forgets about them.”

The challenges in this market can be best summed up by Liverpool FC’s contentious foray into NFTs in early April. Critics of the release cited an apparent lack of utility and interaction with buyers, with the artworks themselves also dividing opinion.

Less than a week after the launch, it emerged that Liverpool had raised some £1.125m through the initial drop, with nearly 10,000 tokens sold. However, that accounted for only 5.7% of the NFTs available, raising questions about whether the balance of short-term gains versus sustainable growth had been achieved.

Strategic errors

Capital Block, a division of Capital Sports Media that advises sports clubs and other entities worldwide on their NFT strategies, is ideally placed to evaluate the success or failure of NFT strategies so far in a tumultuous year for the sector. On this point, Mangnall is frustrated to see projects fail to maximise their potential due to basic strategic errors at the outset.

“We have seen far too many drops that appear to be standalone. If that is the case, then the strategy is wrong,” Mangnall adds.

“Particularly in football, we have not seen much longevity in NFT strategies. Clubs may generate income from the first drop, but fans are unlikely to come back, whereas they should be creating an ecosystem for their digital assets and encouraging people to return again and again.

“We have also seen some NFT platforms try to push their own agenda too much through partnerships with clubs and rights-holders. Above all, it is important to focus on engagement through a narrative and utility if you want it to be something that resonates with the audience.”

Utility importance

Mangnall points out that the utility of NFTs – essentially the tangible benefits that are bundled into the buyer’s package – can and should be updated regularly. A number of the more savvy rights-holders in the space have worked with partners to provide unique benefits and experiences as part of an NFT purchase.

For the 2022 Australian Open tennis grand slam, for example, fans were offered NFTs that automatically updated with ball and match metadata in real time. The NBA All-Star VIP Pass NFT Auction, supported by Dapper Labs, included VIP passes and various other unique perks, including shooting hoops on future All-Star game courts and exclusive merchandise.

“I do still take my hat off to the brands that are pushing NFTs and exploring this space. As an industry, there is still so much to learn in this space, and we are at a very early stage,” Mangnall says.

“A sports NFT project should not be all about revenue, as that will immediately alienate the fan base. I can’t stress this more: if the NFT project is just sell, sell, sell, then it will become unsustainable.”

Rebrand

Focusing on short-term revenue can also cause reputational damage, not only for the club, but also for the broader NFT space, Mangnall adds.

“What’s a concern for me is how negative experiences can damage a fan’s perspective of NFTs,” he says.

With that in mind, Mangnall

believes ‘NFTs’ need a rebrand.

“Fans do not like the word ‘NFT’ as they think it’s a money grab or a scam,” he explained. “When we talk about NFTs, they really represent the technology behind the digital product, so we should really be treating them as products.

“I guarantee that the organic interest would be tenfold for a ‘digital ticket’ in comparison with an ‘NFT ticket’ at the same event. Ultimately, people are going to start buying digital products and collectibles, and they don’t actually need to know they are NFTs. At Capital Block, we are working hard on educating partners and changing the narrative.”

Despite the growing pains of a sector that was barely recognised just over a year ago, Mangnall remains confident that the embryonic development of such digital assets will ultimately lead to the creation of one of the most effective fan engagement tools in sport.

What sports entities do in the meantime remains to be seen. However, Mangnall believes that, sooner or later, they will face a crossroads.

“There are going to be two types of sports organisations,” he concludes. “There will be those who accept that digital assets are here to stay, but they will believe they have other priorities, and then there will be others who will work with agencies like Capital Block to develop a stronger connection with their fans. One thing is for certain though: digital products aren’t going anywhere.” ♦



(Naomi Baker/Getty Images)

Additional lower-tier deals help Birmingham Commonwealth Games hit sponsorship target

By Martin Ross

Published online 26 August, 2022

The recent Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games exceeded their sponsorship target after additional tier two and tier three agreements more than offset any shortfall from revenues generated in the tier one category.

Speaking exclusively to *SportBusiness*, Stephen Marsden, the experienced Sportfive executive who sits on the board of the CGF Partnerships joint venture, revealed that the target had been met, albeit as a result of a different split than originally targeted.

Watchmaker Longines, energy company Eon, the University of Birmingham, digital bank Chase and health and hygiene products manufacturer Reckitt were all top-tier partners of Birmingham 2022. Water utility company Severn Trent was also upgraded from an initial second-tier sponsorship to a top-tier sponsor.

Marsden said: “We’ve averaged seven [tier-one partners] over previous Games. We had six for these Games but the revenue that the tier-one partners generated against our original plan was very close to what we’d required to exceed our revenue target, even though we had six rather than seven.”

The onset of Covid-19 made the Games “more challenging” than any before in terms of bringing companies on board, according to Marsden, who praised the organising committee for designing, building, managing and executing the event despite the “unprecedented”

circumstances.

“As a consequence, the deals came later to some degree than we originally would have anticipated”, said Marsden, Sportfive’s president of global sales and Olympic partnerships. “But despite all those challenges, we exceeded the sponsorship revenue target.”

CGF Partnerships, an entity established with Sportfive in 2017 and in which the Commonwealth Games Federation retains a 60-per-cent shareholding, was responsible for the sale of sponsorships across all tiers. This was done in close co-ordination with the finance, legal and procurement teams within the Birmingham 2022 organising committee.

A total of eight second-tier ‘Supporters’ were brought on board, including Aggreko, Canon, GL Events and PwC. There were 39 third-tier ‘Providers’ in total. By turning to lower tiers to offset the narrow shortfall from the top bracket, the revenue generally flowed into the organising committee later than usual.

Car giant Ford had been a top-tier sponsor at Glasgow 2014 but the automotive industry – like the airline sector – was hit hard by the pandemic and CGF Partnerships was left to look to alternative industries.

Sponsorship revenue traditionally represents the largest portion of the revenues generated by a Commonwealth Games, driven by seven-figure deals with top sponsors. Ticketing and broadcast rights have then typically brought in

a similar sum with merchandising and licensing bringing in a low seven figure-sum.

The Glasgow 2014 Games raised £43.6m (\$51.6m/€51.6m) in sponsorship income, while Gold Coast 2018 brought in A\$79.2m – or £46.7m at current conversion rates – from that revenue source.

Both Glasgow 2014 and Gold Coast 2018 each comfortably exceeded £100m in total commercial revenues and Birmingham 2022 was expecting to do the same. Speaking during the opening press conference at the Games, Ian Reid, the organising committee chief executive, said that stakeholders were in a “good place” to hit their commercial targets.

Top-tier Commonwealth Games sponsors have typically been “ready to buy” between 12 months and 18 months out, according to Marsden. Deals with “key delivery partners” in recruitment or legal and professional advisory services are struck earlier given the operational needs over a longer lead-in time.

Marsden is well versed in selling sponsorships to the multi-sports Games, having done so since Manchester 2002 and initially through SMAM. The Australian sports marketing agency was taken over by the Lagardère conglomerate, Sportfive’s erstwhile owner, a decade ago. Following the creation of CGF Partnerships, the sponsorship sales remit shifted from SMAM to the joint venture project.

The entity was set up to put in place a leaner delivery model for Commonwealth Games host cities

and is headed by David Leather, previously deputy chief executive at Manchester 2002, chief operating officer at Glasgow 2014 and executive vice-president of Event Knowledge Services, another Sportfive company.

Multi-edition deals 'driven by operational delivery needs'

Upon the creation of CGF Partnerships, one of the commercial practices put in place was to look to deals covering two or three editions.

In March 2020, Longines was unveiled as the first-ever sponsor across multiple Commonwealth Games in a deal covering the Birmingham 2022 Games along with the 2026 and 2030 editions. UK-based production company Sunset+Vine was also appointed as host broadcaster of Birmingham 2022 in a deal that can be extended to include Victoria 2026 and the 2030 edition, and potentially worth £78m over the three Games, *SportBusiness* understands.

The rationale behind the multi-edition agreements has chiefly been to put in place a "long-term technology ecosystem and applications" in specialist operational areas.

Marsden said: "The strategy around multi-games deals has really at this stage focused on working in categories where we know there are absolutely world-class leaders that can deliver outstanding solutions and understanding – from an operationally delivery viewpoint – the needs of a Commonwealth Games. They are the sorts of companies we're focused on.

"The overall ambition is to deliver better outcomes but to save considerable money in the delivery of future Games by being able to leverage those relationships. At the same time, we're nurturing relationships where, from a marketing perspective, companies like Longines have a long-term strategic commitment where they can build equity in the partnership over time."

While he ceded that it's "in everyone's preference to offer certainty" as to where future Games will be hosted, Marsden flagged



Sponsors logos on view beside Birmingham 2022 netball court at NEC Arena (Sue McKay/Getty Images)

that Longines committed without knowing where the 2026 or 2030 editions would be.

He observed: "It's a shared ambition from a delivery viewpoint but ultimately what it points to is that these companies are demonstrating in a very tangible way their long-term commitment but also their long-term belief in the future and the movement of Commonwealth Sport and the Commonwealth Games."

Victoria 2026 regional Games

Attention will now fall on CGF Partnerships' commercial plan for Victoria 2026 as the Games return to Marsden's native Australia and as a new multi-city model is rolled out across four regional hubs in the state.

A Games held across Geelong, Bendigo, Ballarat and Gippsland will "unlock new and distinct opportunities", Marsden said.

Given the acute need to deliver legacy benefits post Games, "purpose-led" sponsorships are likely to be particularly prevalent, continuing the trend set in Birmingham. These included Severn Trent's sustainability initiatives

to cut down on single-use plastic and E.ON's focus on diversity and inclusion.

"There are a whole host of areas that we focused on with our partners because the market has changed", he said.

"While it recognises the power of sport to unite and inspire, the companies we were talking to particularly through Covid, are looking for more.

"They're looking at where and how the Games align with their own values, but more importantly, they want to look at how they can use the Games to make an authentic and lasting difference."

While global brands such as Atos, BP, Emirates, Ford, Longines and Chase have all come on board in recent editions, the decision on companies' marketing budget spend around a Commonwealth Games typically sits locally.

Representatives from CGF Partnerships, the Birmingham 2022 organising committee and the CGF are all due to visit Victoria in the next six weeks to begin to shape the commercial programme for the next Games and also put in place the transfer of knowledge programme. ◆

Forest holding out for £10m shirt sponsorship deal after rebuffing offers

By Joseph Perry

Published online 26 July, 2022

English Premier League club Nottingham Forest is holding out for a front-of-shirt sponsorship deal in the region of £10m (\$12.1m/€11.8m) per year after rebuffing at least two multi-million-pound offers, *SportBusiness* understands.

Yesterday (Monday), boiler manufacturer BOXT announced it will not renew its front-of-shirt sponsorship deal with the club. The manufacturer became the East Midlands club's principal sponsor following the collapse of virtual stock market platform Football Index and parent company BetIndex during the 2020-21 season.

In a statement posted on Twitter, the Leeds-based company said it was "incredibly disappointed" not to be working with the club during the forthcoming season. It added: "We had submitted a multi-million-pound offer but unfortunately the club wanted to go in a different direction for their front-of-shirt sponsorship."

Well-placed sources told *SportBusiness* that Nottingham Forest has declined at least one other multi-million-pound offer. Sources say the club's owner, Greek shipping magnate Evangelos Marinakis, has instructed its commercial department to strike a front-of-shirt sponsorship deal of between £8m and £10m.

Industry insiders say the asking price is unusually high for a club of Nottingham Forest's stature – the club was promoted to the Premier League via the play-

offs after finishing fourth in the EFL Championship last season – and is more typical of a team challenging for a top-half position or qualification to continental cup competitions.

Insiders believe the asking price is likely to push the club towards betting operators and cryptocurrency companies, which can be prepared to pay above the market rate, but are sometimes considered less reputable.

The club is thought to have contacted a number of sponsorship agencies in the hope of finding a front-of-shirt sponsor before the start of the forthcoming Premier League season next Friday (August 5).

Nottingham Forest is also looking for a new sleeve sponsor and training apparel sponsor following the end of its deals with foodstuffs brand The Skinny Food Co. and online chemist UK Meds at the end of last season.

The protracted search for sponsors means the club is facing the prospect of beginning the Premier League season, its first in the top-flight of English football for more than 23 years, without any shirt sponsors

Insiders told *SportBusiness* the club may prefer to leave the shirt blank, as is the case with jerseys currently available in the club shop, or donate the inventory to a local charity if it does not receive satisfactory offers.

Greek Super League club Olympiacos, which is also owned by Marinakis, previously donated

its sponsorship inventory to humanitarian aid organisation Unicef after opting against a deal with a commercial partner.

Nottingham Forest defender Neco Williams in action against... at the Pirelli Stadium in Burton. (Robbie Jay Barratt - AMA)



While the club's demands have surprised some within the industry, it also represents a statement of intent from Nottingham Forest, which has a large fan-base and rich history. The club has already signalled its intention to challenge Premier League incumbents on the pitch by beating West Ham to the signing of former Manchester United and England midfielder Jesse Lingard. The 29-year-old is one of 12 new arrivals at the club.

Nottingham Forest could also receive long-awaited approval for the redevelopment of its stadium, the City Ground, later this week. Rushcliffe Borough Council's planning committee will meet on Thursday (July 28) to consider the

club's proposal to rebuild the Peter Taylor Stand to raise the stadium's overall capacity from 30,000 to 38,000. The council's planning application report has recommended the plans are approved.

The redevelopment was first proposed in 2019 and is expected to cost almost £100m.

Yesterday, Fulham became the latest Premier League club to announce a front-of-shirt gambling sponsorship ahead of the start of the new season. The club's deal with betting operator W88 means it joins Newcastle United (Fun88), Everton (Stake.com), West Ham United (Betway), Brentford (HollywoodBet), Southampton (Sportsbet.io), Bournemouth (Dafabet) and Leeds

United (Sbotop) in partnering with a gambling firm.

The league is in the process of developing a self-regulatory framework for gambling sponsorships to prevent a complete ban when new legislation on the betting industry is put forward by the UK government later this year.

Premier League clubs are said to favour a three-season transition period during which front-of-shirt gambling sponsorships will be phased out. The clubs are likely to make the retention of sleeve sponsorships by gambling companies one of the conditions upon which they will approve the voluntary ban on front-of-shirt deals. ♦



st Hertha Berlin
(Getty Images)



(Daniel Rasmussen)

Copenhagen celebrates cycling culture with historic Grand Départ

Copenhagen's burgeoning portfolio of sporting events was boosted by the arrival of the Tour de France's Grand Départ this summer. Lars Vallentin Christensen, senior manager of events at Wonderful Copenhagen, outlines the impact of welcoming the cycling spectacle.

The Tour de France's Grand Départ headed further north than ever before this summer when Copenhagen welcomed the cycling showpiece from July 1-3.

Widely dubbed as the world's most bike-friendly city, Copenhagen appeared to be a natural choice to stage the sport's biggest event. Thousands of fans lined the roads in and around the capital, with the spectacle boosted by the performance of home favourite and eventual Tour winner Jonas Vingegaard

Although fans witnessed just three days of racing, local organisers launched a series of activations in the days and weeks leading up to the event to drive engagement and maximise riders' exposure to spectators.

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'Cycling is for everyone'

Two days before the event, competing teams were presented on a route that encompassed a bike bridge crossing Copenhagen Harbour. Riders were then presented on a stage at the Tivoli Gardens amusement park, where they were saluted by some 10,000 fans.

"On the day of the actual Grand Départ, all of the city was buzzing with several dedicated fan zones, yellow flags and polka-dotted caps, and smiling faces filled the streets," says Lars Vallentin Christensen, senior manager of events at Wonderful Copenhagen, the official

tourism organisation of the Capital Region of Denmark.

"One main activation was the Festivélo, a family-orientated fan village organised by the city of Copenhagen with lots of cycling activities for everyone. The day after the race, the time trial route was kept open without traffic and everyone in Copenhagen was invited to test the time trial on their own bike.

"Another big activation was a month before the Grand Départ, when the Storebælt Bridge was closed for traffic and the 16,000 participants cycled 100km and crossed the majestic bridge, which was also part of the Tour de France in Denmark."

Cycling culture

The event itself provided an

opportunity to shine a spotlight on Copenhagen's cycling heritage and culture, with locals invited to cycle the route themselves and "ride like the stars".

An early start was organised for serious riders before the route took on a more leisurely pace, with children and parents taking part, while elderly people were taken around on cargo bikes.

"In Copenhagen, cycling is for everyone and so was the Grand Départ," says Vallentin. "The main focus of all the city's PR efforts was on showcasing the bike infrastructure of the city and showing how cycling is an integral part of Copenhagen's position at the top of Monocle's list of the world's most liveable cities.

"We want to share our solutions and inspire other cities to invest in bicycle infrastructure instead of more cars. And we also want to celebrate the everyday cyclists of Copenhagen as unsung heroes, who choose the healthy and sustainable way to commute instead of congesting roads and parking zones with more cars."

Fine-tuning preparations

Copenhagen first secured hosting rights for the Grand Départ back in February 2019, with the event having originally been due to take place in 2021.

Pandemic-related disruption led to an agreement being reached with Tour organiser Amaury Sport Organisation (ASO) to reschedule the event for July 1-3, 2022.

In some ways, the delay was a

blessing in disguise, as Copenhagen was already scheduled to host four matches during the postponed Uefa Euro 2020 football tournament in the summer of 2021.

The rescheduling of the Grand Départ allowed organisers to fine-tune preparations whilst the risk of the race being overshadowed by the Euro 2020 matches was averted. The delay was not without its challenges, though, as Vallentin explains.

"The postponement complicated the event, as we had to push all related activities and find budgets for prolonging the planning process," he says.

"It gave us a bit more time to perfect the execution, but as the focus of the activation was on the last 100 days before the Grand Départ, it was... a focused sprint as we got closer to the event."

Local heroes

The interest in Danish rider Vingegaard only served to drive the already huge excitement surrounding the race.

Locals turned out in support of all riders, but Vingegaard, as one of the pre-race favourites for the yellow jersey, was the man locals wanted to see.

"Danes love the Tour de France, and it was always going to be a huge success, with lots of people celebrating the riders," says Vallentin. "However, having Jonas Vingegaard going full circle and returning triumphant to be celebrated in Copenhagen really tied the event together and was a beautiful way to end a summer of

bike euphoria in Copenhagen."

It is clear that the experience has given the city a taste for more.

"There is no doubt that because the event was such a successful public spectacle and managed to create a strong shared feeling of being part of something historic, Copenhagen will be more open to once again investing in events of this scale," Vallentin adds.

"Both this year's Tour de France and last year's Euro 2020 enjoyed the boost from hugely successful local heroes, just as they showed that when it comes to bringing an event out of the arenas and having them manifested in a local celebration, few cities match Copenhagen."

Since hosting the Grand Départ, Copenhagen has staged the Tour of Scandinavia on the Women's World Tour, as well as the UCI Trials World Cup. The city has already secured hosting rights to the UCI's Track World Championships in 2024 and BMX World Championships in 2025.

"We have had an ongoing dialogue with the UCI for the last 20 years, resulting in a great number of cycling events being hosted in Copenhagen. Currently discussions are building on the hosting of the UCI Road World Championships in 2029, which is a great guiding star for us this decade," says Vallentin.

"The Grand Départ has shown us that the sky is the limit and that we should continue to have high ambitions for the future, which undoubtedly should result in a large range of major events being hosted in the city." ♦



Magnus Andersen (Grand Depart Copenhagen, Denmark 2022)

Crypto.com pulled out of huge Champions League sponsorship at last moment

By Frank Dunne

Published online 31 August, 2022

Uefa narrowly missed out on what was set to be one of its largest-ever sponsorships for the Champions League earlier this summer when a deal with the Crypto.com cryptocurrency company fell through at the last moment.

SportBusiness understands that the value of the proposed deal was in the region of €100m (\$99.9m) per season.

The crypto brand had been lined up as a replacement for Gazprom. The deal would have been for five seasons, the two seasons remaining in the 2021-22 to 2023-24 cycle and the three seasons of the 2024-25 to 2026-27 cycle and would have meant more than a doubling in annual value for Uefa.

European football's governing body cancelled its contract with the Russian state-owned gas company in March following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Gazprom had been paying about €40m per season for its Champions League rights. In May, the Team Marketing agency invited bids across two or five seasons to fill the Gazprom slot.

Informed industry sources say that the deal had been agreed in principle between Uefa and Crypto.com and the two parties were close to sign-off on the long-form contract. It is understood to have been the most advanced stage of a negotiation at which a Uefa commercial deal has ever collapsed.

The sudden ending of the negotiation is not thought to be linked to the financial crisis which has engulfed the crypto sector. Since

November 2021, the cryptocurrency market has lost \$1trn (€1trn) in value.

The issue is said to be related to legal advice the company took regarding its discussions with national regulators in some key territories, including the UK, France and Italy, about the scope of its licences to trade and operate.

Crypto.com declined to comment. Uefa had not replied to request for comment by the time *SportBusiness* went to press.

Many industry executives question whether the sector will be able to continue the massive investments made in sport over the last 12 to 18 months.

As Phil Carling, managing director of football at the Octagon agency, put it: "Even three months ago it was a hot sector, and they were offering crazy money for premium rights. But we're not seeing that at all in any in any of the processes we're involved in. I'm not saying it's gone away forever. It could bounce back. But for now, the big money deals and disruption that we were experiencing from a fee perspective have disappeared."

Crypto.com alone has invested well over \$1bn in sports sponsorship.

This includes deals with: the Staples Center in Los Angeles (\$700m for naming rights over 20 years); Formula One motor racing (\$150m over five years), the Miami



(Eric Alonso/MB Media/Getty Images)

F1 grand prix and the Aston Martin racing team; the Ultimate Fighting Championship (\$175m over 10 years); the 2022 Fifa World Cup (expected to be at least \$40m); Ligue 1 club Paris Saint-Germain (at least \$25m over three years); top Italian football league Serie A; the Australian Football League; the NBA's Philadelphia 76ers; and Conmebol, the governing body for football in South America, for the Copa Libertadores.

Uefa continues to work with other brands in blockchain-based services.

In February, the governing body agreed a wide-ranging deal with fan token operator Socios.com. The agreement made Socios.com the official provider of fan tokens for Uefa's club competitions in the current cycle, as well as a regional sponsor for the Champions League and Super Cup.

Chinese smartphone brand Oppo recently replaced Expedia as a global sponsor of the Champions League in a two-season deal. The online travel operator held a one-year contract during the 2021-22 campaign. Oppo joined Heineken, PlayStation, PepsiCo, Mastercard, FedEx and Just Eat in the roster of global sponsors. ◆

DAZN close to IPL rights acquisition in major cricket markets

By Martin Ross

Published online 30 June, 2022

Subscription sports broadcaster DAZN is nearing an agreement for exclusive broadcast rights to cricket's Indian Premier League in the UK, Australia and South Africa, *SportBusiness* understands.

The broadcaster is thought to be close to signing off on a deal for the rights in three of cricket's major markets as it makes its first move into the sport.

SportBusiness understands that the deal, if finalised, would run for five years from 2023 to 2027.

DAZN has been in negotiations with Indian conglomerate Reliance after Viacom18, its media and entertainment entity, was recently awarded various IPL international rights during the high-profile auction recently run by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

DAZN is yet to decide whether it would directly broadcast the IPL in the markets involved or sell on

to other broadcasters via its Global Rights Partnerships division. A combination of both also remains under consideration.

The recently-concluded IPL season was broadcast in the UK by pay-television broadcaster Sky. In Australia and South Africa the rights have been held by pay-television broadcasters Fox and SuperSport, respectively.

During the BCCI's tender process, a total of INR48,390.32 crore (\$6.1bn/€5.9bn) was raised in total from the sale of global linear and digital rights to the T20 competition from 2023 to 2027.

The international rights ('Package D') were sold for INR1,058 crore (\$134m/€128m), with Viacom18 securing the rights in the UK, South Africa and Australia and New Zealand, while digital group Times Internet secured the rights in the Middle East and the USA. Rights

landed by Viacom18 also included sub-Saharan Africa, Ireland, Continental Europe, Singapore and the Caribbean (see *SportBusiness Media* feature for more details).

Viacom18 was expected to sublicense the rights in at least most of its territories, although its Paramount+ streaming service was seen as a potential vehicle for the rights in Australia.

DAZN is well established in the boxing market in the UK and recently secured rights to the fights of former world heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua for the first time. Last year, the broadcaster reached a rights agreement with Matchroom Boxing to end the decades-long partnership between the promoter and pay-television broadcaster Sky. As a result, DAZN's monthly subscription tariff for its streaming service was increased to £7.99 per month. ♦



Action from the Indian Premier League match between Chennai the Super Kings and Mumbai Indians in Chennai. (Robert Cianflone/Getty Images)



Queensland's outback proves fertile breeding ground for sporting events

Many miles from the bustling metropolis of Brisbane, rural Queensland is providing a surprisingly adaptable platform for eye-catching sporting events.

As advocates of Brisbane's successful campaign to host the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games have stressed from the outset, Queensland's event-hosting capabilities sprawl way beyond the borders of its capital city.

Indeed, Queensland's coastal destinations have become a hotbed of past and future major events – from Gold Coast's 2018 Commonwealth Games in the south to Townsville's 2024 World Triathlon Multisport World Championships in the north.

However, the depth of Queensland's appetite for major events stretches further than many outside Australia, or even the state, may realise.

Birdsville Races

In a vast region that has a larger land area than France, Germany, Portugal,

Spain and the UK combined, sport is ingrained in locations that are well off the beaten track.

Deep in the outback, on the eastern tip of the Simpson Desert, lies the rural town of Birdsville. With just 110 inhabitants, according to the 2021 census, it is not a typical destination for an established and historic sporting event.

However, every September, the annual Birdsville Races are held, swelling the local population approximately 70-fold for a two-day horseracing extravaganza in aid of Australia's Royal Flying Doctor Service.

Organisers believe the "bucket list nature" of the event contributes to its ongoing appeal, with intrepid racegoers turning their attendance into a road trip.

Such is the influx of visitors, organisers have to work closely with

a multitude of freight companies to ensure sufficient supplies, products and services are delivered within the constraints of fortnightly delivery schedules, although some providers offer additional support over the crucial period.

"We're fortunate that we now have a lot of the infrastructure in place at the track to stage the event. However, event logistics continue to grow as we add new elements each year and the event also grows," the organisers say, before adding that collaborations with travel providers, local businesses, the Diamantina Shire Council and partners like Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ) are critical to the success of the spectacle.

"Working with TEQ has allowed the Birdsville Races to hugely expand their reach through their support of the Roadies, a newer

concept in delivering a club experience for all ticket-holders and their travels to Birdsville. It connects more people on the ground with smaller outback communities, other ticket-holders and travellers within the many different routes to Birdsville.

“Being a part of the TEQ Events calendar has also benefited an extended reach to those who are not typically from the region or outback. Having the support of TEQ has certainly also boosted the event’s credibility and profile.”

Mount Isa

The Birdsville Races attract a significant number of visitors from New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria, as well as eastern Queensland, plus occasional travellers from even further afield.

It is not the only show in the vast arid expanse of western Queensland, however.

Further north, the mining city of Mount Isa has hosted the southern hemisphere’s largest rodeo for more than 60 years. Meanwhile, the first annual Mount Isa Mines Indigenous Rodeo Championships took place in August, connecting visitors with the region and the local Kalkadon people.

Meanwhile, the emergence in 2019 of the TEQ-backed Outback Queensland Masters (OQM), an annual six-stop amateur golf series spanning a region of one million square kilometres, shows that new events are still sprouting up.

Approximately 85% of the series’ players and spectators come from Queensland, with the 2,000-plus attendees staying for an average of 12 nights.

This year, players from over 85 golf clubs from Queensland, New South Wales, ACT, Victoria and South Australia were in attendance, as well as two from New Zealand. In 2023, for the first time, Western Australia will also be represented.

“We’re not about attracting large event crowds, or profitless volume, but one that attracts high-value travellers, with a long length-of-stay and regional dispersal for Outback Queensland,” says Luke



Bates, State Manager – Queensland & Northern Territory, Golf Australia. “We cap numbers at each location to ensure an intimate experience for visitors, and to ensure these small communities are not inundated with visitors they may not have the resources to cater for.”

High-value impact

The impact is significant for local communities. This year, the event generated 12,298 visitor nights for Queensland and 8,482 for Outback Queensland, with overnight visitor expenditure of more than AUD\$1.7m (£1m/€1.1m/\$1.1m).

The series is marketed on a year-round basis, including a combination of traditional, digital and social media, with a particularly strong focus on email direct marketing. Bates believes, though, that word-of-mouth from the first event has been key to ensuring sold-out editions in 2021 and 2022.

“We are always evolving and innovating the event experience,” he adds. “In 2023, to further develop spend, length-of-stay and visitor satisfaction, we are developing pre-event visitor experiences at each location. These will be specially curated and immersive experiences, exclusive to OQM players and spectators visiting

Outback Queensland.”

Bates also points out that, with TEQ’s support, New Zealand is emerging as a growth market for the series.

“With our strategic partnership with TEQ, we have been able to undertake marketing interstate and into the New Zealand market,” he adds. “As part of the ‘It’s Live in Queensland’ campaign, the OQM has been featured in many publications and digital TEQ initiatives.

“The TEQ strategic partnership was also an integral factor in our partnership with the PGA, which has further assisted in credibility and profile for the OQM.”

With TEQ’s support, it is clear that opportunities will continue to arise for the OQM as part of the state’s eclectic sporting portfolio.

“We see a strong future for the event to strongly position it as an iconic destination event for Queensland,” Bates says.

“During the COVID-era more people have taken up golf in Australia, so demand domestically is growing.

“Into the future, we would like to grow the event to further develop new, high-yield markets for Outback Queensland, reaching into international markets.” ♦

BT set to renew EPCR pay-TV rights deal in UK

By Callum McCarthy

Published online 26 August, 2022

BT Sport is set to continue as the exclusive pay-television broadcaster of European Professional Club Rugby competitions in the UK and Ireland, *SportBusiness* understands.

A deal has been agreed in principle between BT and EPCR to extend the telco's pay-television rights deal from the upcoming 2022-23 season onward, but a decision is yet to be made on the duration of the contract. BT will continue to show every match from the top-tier European Rugby Champions Cup and the second-tier European Rugby Challenge Cup.

The proposed new deal means that BT will protect its portfolio of European club rugby in the UK.

The broadcaster has held exclusive EPCR rights since 2018-19 and previously shared the rights with pay-television broadcaster Sky from 2014-15 to 2017-18. BT also holds exclusive pay-TV rights to the English Premiership in three-season deal from 2021-22 to 2023-24.

As reported in a *SportBusiness Media* analysis article, sources say that BT will reduce its fee from 2022-23 onwards.

In addition, *SportBusiness* has learned that free-to-air network Channel 4 will not continue as EPCR's free-to-air broadcaster in the UK from 2022-23.

Channel 4's four-season deal, from 2018-19 to 2021-22, included rights to show nine EPCR matches each season, including the final. EPCR is expected to continue with a free-to-air broadcaster in the UK with a deal yet to be announced.

The impending BT deal comes shortly after EPCR agreed to extend agreements in France with pay-television broadcaster beIN Sports

and public-service broadcaster France Télévisions for a further four seasons, from 2022-23 to 2025-26.

beIN will retain rights to all matches across the two competitions, while France Télévisions will continue co-broadcasting two Champions Cup matches on Saturday at 3pm (CET) and Sunday at 4pm, along with the Saturday evening fixture from the second-tier Challenge Cup.

New deals are yet to be announced in Ireland, Italy and South Africa.

Commercial broadcaster Virgin Media has aired EPCR matches on Irish free-to-air television during the previous four-season cycle. It is thought that pay-television broadcaster SuperSport will show

EPCR competitions across sub-Saharan Africa.

Rights outside EPCR club territories are being sold by agencies Infront and River Media Partners from 2022-23 to 2024-25. River Media had sold international rights on a commission basis during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 seasons after the RDA agency terminated its international rights deal in June 2020.

The 2022-23 EPCR season will begin on the weekend of December 9 to 11 and will include South African teams for the first time. The Sharks, Bulls and Stormers will play in the Champions Cup, while the Lions and Cheetahs will compete in the Challenge Cup. ♦

A view of an EPCR branded ball prior to Heineken Champions Cup match between Connacht and Leicester Tigers (Oisín Keniry/Getty Images)





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**POSTGRADUATE
RANKINGS 2022**



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POSTGRADUATE RANKINGS 2022

Contents

- 4 Introduction
- 6 Top 40 Global

University profiles

- 9 #1 - UMass
- 16 #2 - Ohio
- 21 #3 - USF
- 32 #1 in Europe - The FIFA Master at CIES
- 39 #2 in Europe - MasterSport
- 44 #3 in Europe - ESBS

Features

- 27 Jim Riordan: A Tribute
- 29 Professor Ruta's Athlete Education interview series | Damjan Rudež
- 49 Engaging Esports
- 52 How improving infrastructure procurement frameworks can enhance the integrity of international sport events and reduce corruption risks
- 55 Network Connection: How universities are supporting students in developing meaningful industry and alumni relationships

Data and tables

- 58 Top of the class
- 60 Employment data
- 62 Top 15 North American courses
- 62 Top 15 European courses

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Welcome... To the 2022 SportBusiness Postgraduate Course Rankings



As another year speeds by, the time to publish the latest edition of the SportBusiness Postgraduate Rankings has once again come around. Now entering its 11th edition, the rankings remain as competitive as ever with familiar courses jostling for the top positions, as well as some newer contenders making their mark on the rankings. While aspects of how the rankings are conducted continue to evolve, the purpose remains the same – to provide students and course leaders alike with the most dependable and reliable ranking system for postgraduate sports management programmes around the world.

The 2021 edition of the Postgraduate Rankings described the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic as the dominant theme of the academic year. While the pandemic is by no means over or forgotten, it is pleasing to be able to remark that its impact is a less prominent consideration this year. Indeed, course leaders have begun to talk more about the return to normality, with a greater number of in-person classes and large-scale events being held. Moreover, there is a sense that rather than

grappling with the impact of the circumstances, universities are now able to look upon the period reflectively and translate learnings from the challenges into improving future practices.

Following on from the precedent of previous editions, the rankings are complemented by a suite of content in the pages that follow. In both North America and Europe, each of the top three courses are covered by a snapshot overview, as well as an Alumni Interview and Academic Insight article, showcasing the work and expertise of those who have graduated the programmes and those who teach on them.

There is also a poignant note to this year's edition, with a tribute article dedicated to Florida Atlantic University stalwart Jim Riordan, who sadly passed away earlier this year.

Readers will also find the first edition of Professor Dino Ruta's series of interviews with athletes on their academic endeavours. This type of article will form part of a regular content series featured on the SportBusiness University platform in the coming months.

Another regular content stream on the SportBusiness University

platform is our Academic Insight series and this year we have decided to celebrate the most viewed article that has been published within this feature over the past 12 months. The article in question comes from Loughborough University's Dr Alex Thurston, who wrote about how adhering to internationally accepted procurement integrity frameworks and standards helps sport practitioners mitigate integrity risks and, consequently, potential corruption risks inherently linked to international sport event procurement.

As in previous years, feature articles have also been written especially for the rankings for those who enjoy a longer read. This year, we focus on the topics of networking and esports education.

Methodology

Our rankings are based on two surveys, completed by course leaders and alumni who graduated three years prior to publication – meaning the 2022 edition is based on responses from the classes of 2019. 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. ○

PGR Scoring System

Number of points shown here is the maximum possible score.

STUDENT MEASURES

Quality of faculty: **5 points**

Extra-Curricular Initiatives: **5 points**

Alumni Network: **5 points**

Quality of Curriculum: **5 points**

Industry Network: **5 points**

Return on Investment: **5 points**

Professional mentorship/advocacy: **5 points**

Career Advancement: **3 points**

Skills Applicability: **3 points**

Skills Frequency: **3 points**

EMPLOYMENT

Employment status at 12 months: **11 points**

Current employment status: **12 points**

Job Support: **5 points**

OTHERS

Mentorship: **1 point**

Work placement: **1 point**

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: **5 points**

Peer Review: **5 points**

Current salary: **5 points**

Acceptance rate: **3 points**

Female:Male student ratio: **3 points**

Female:Male faculty ratio: **1 point**

International:National student ratio: **3 points**

International:National faculty ratio: **1 point**

Advisory Panel

As ever, we would like to express our gratitude to our advisory board, who are critical to the Postgraduate Rankings and the credibility at the centre of the process.

Sue Bridgewater

Professor of marketing, director of executive education, director of Centre for Sports Business, University of Liverpool.

Michelle Harrolle

Director of the Vinik Sport & Entertainment Management Programme, University of South Florida, Tampa president Women In Sports and Events.

Dan Rascher

Professor and director of academic programmes, sport management, University of San Francisco.

Daniel G Kelly II

Academic director of graduate programmes and clinical assistant professor, Preston Robert Tisch Institute for Global Sport, New York University.

Dino Ruta

Lecturer; associate professor of human resources and sport management, SDA Bocconi School of Management, Bocconi University.

T.Bettina Cornwell

Professor of marketing, head of the department of marketing at the Lundquist College of Business and Philip H. Knight chair, University of Oregon.

Peter Dickenson

Programme director, sport management (postgraduate), Loughborough University.



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Top 40 Global PGR Rankings

Rank	University	Program	Region	Class size 2018/19	2019 graduates	Class size 2021/22	Re-sponse rate	Course duration (months)	Average age (years)	Accept-ance rate	Female: Male student ratio (%)	International:National student ratio (%)	Female: Male faculty ratio (%)
1	University of Massachusetts Amherst, Isenberg School of Management	Mark H. McCormack Department of Sport Management MBA/MS Sport Management	North America	21	21	22	95%	12-21	25	17%	55:45	23:77	50:50
2	Ohio University	Dual MBA/MSA Program	North America	29	29	35	97%	22	23	27%	46:54	11:89	45:55
3	University of South Florida	Vinik Sport & Entertainment Management MBA/MS	North America	24	24	27	71%	22	24	31%	44:56	19:81	50:50
4	The International Centre for Sport Studies (CIES)	International Master (MA) in Management, Law and Humanities of Sport – The 'FIFA Master'	Europe	28	28	32	93%	10	29	17%	47:53	63:37	30:70
5	University of South Carolina	Master of Sport and Entertainment Management	North America	22	22	49	77%	15	25	45%	43:57	55:45	21:79
6	George Washington University	MS/MBA in Sport Management	North America	20	4	35	100%	18-22	25	44%	40:60	23:77	60:40
7	Columbia University	Master of Science in Sports Management	North America	77	22	84	58%	12-16	26	28%	40:60	32:68	30:70
8	University of Central Florida	DeVos Sport Business Management Program	North America	30	30	20	50%	17	25	36%	65:35	10:90	27:73
9	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	Masters of Sport Administration	North America	10	9	12	100%	22	24	19%	67:33	0:100	43:57
10	The Ohio State University	MS in Kinesiology (Sport Management)	North America	26	17	40	82%	12-21	23	33%	40:60	5:95	50:50
11	Florida Atlantic University	MBA in Sport Management	North America	120	45	37	53%	23	24	13%	49:51	11:89	46:54
12	University of Parma & University of San Marino	International Masters in Strategic Management of Sports Organisations, Events and Facilities	Europe	25	25	25	48%	12	26	43%	24:76	4:96	17:83
13	University of Oregon	Masters in Business Administration	North America	20	20	28	65%	21	27	24%	32:68	39:61	20:80
14	VCU	Center for Sport Leadership	North America	41	41	42	44%	12-16	23	31%	52:48	14:86	33:67
15	University of Windsor	Master of Human Kinetics in Sport Management	North America	9	11	9	64%	16-24	23	25%	33:67	22:78	33:67
16	University of San Francisco	Master of Science in Sport Management	North America	109	102	97	45%	23	26	40%	32:68	16:84	29:71
17	ESBS European Sport Business School - Formación Valencia CF	Master in International Sports Management	Europe	44	42	99	57%	9	27	24%	20:80	83:17	18:82
18	Georgia State University	Master of Science in Sport Administration	North America	40	28	38	54%	24	24	25%	66:34	8:92	33:67
19	University of Bayreuth	MBA Sportmanagement	Europe	18	16	30	19%	24	27	33%	30:70	7:93	19:81
20	New York University	MS in Sports Business	North America	40	53	72	28%	12-16	26	37%	28:72	61:39	29:71
21	University of Vigo (Spain)	Master in Business Administration of Sport	Europe	20	19	25	79%	9	26	78%	20:80	24:76	50:50
22	Temple University	Master of Science in Sport Business	North America	54	37	46	49%	21	24	39%	52:48	20:80	26:74
23	Ca' Foscari University - Venice	Master in Sport Business Strategies - Master SBS	Europe	36	36	34	8%	12	24	61%	15:85	0:100	59:41
24	University College Dublin	MSc in Sport Management	Europe	27	24	27	29%	12-24	30	30%	26:74	7:93	20:80
25	University of Tennessee	Sport Management	North America	21	24	29	92%	18-24	23	21%	45:55	14:86	30:70
26	AMOS Sport Business School	Master in Sport Management	Europe	115	74	142	81%	24	21	82%	40:60	33:67	42:58
27	Real Madrid Graduate School	MBA in Sports Management	Europe	40	38	40	45%	10	31	37%	33:67	87:13	24:76
28	Unisport Management School	Online - MBA Sport Management	Europe	40	40	40	23%	13	29	77%	25:75	30:70	20:80
29	Seattle University	MBA in Sport and Entertainment Management	North America	20	20	29	60%	24	24	21%	31:69	24:76	50:50
30	Johan Cruyff Institute - Online	Online - Master in Sport Management	Europe	28	28	34	50%	13	31	92%	29:71	68:32	18:82
31	The University of Liverpool Management School - football	Football Industries MBA	Europe	22	24	16	17%	12	29	17%	13:87	100:0	25:75
32	The University of Liverpool Management School	MSc Sports Business and Management	Europe	50	50	72	36%	12	24	14%	18:82	82:18	33:67
33	Loughborough University (School of Sport, Exercise, and Health Sciences)	Sport Management	Europe	78	76	80	38%	12-24	24	12%	18:82	85:15	30:70
34	Global Institute of Sport	MSc International Sports Management	Europe	10	10	12	20%	12	24	27%	17:83	33:67	42:58
35	Vrije Universiteit Brussel / University of Brussels	Postgraduate Course in Sports Management	Europe	56	56	62	25%	8	23	79%	13:87	3:97	67:33
36	AISTS - International Academy of Sport Sciences and Technology	Master of Advanced Studies in Sport Administration and Technology	Europe	35	34	24	47%	15	32	27%	38:62	96:4	20:80
37	Rutgers University	The Global Sports Business MS program	North America	26	26	24	73%	15	25	13%	42:58	33:67	33:67
38	Johan Cruyff Institute	Master in Sport Management – On campus	Europe	32	31	34	35%	10	30	43%	26:74	44:56	18:82
39	University of Cincinnati	Online - Master of Science in Sport Administration	North America	39	33	111	55%	12	28	85%	34:66	0:100	25:75
40	Deakin University	Master of Business (Sport Management)	APAC	179	172	76	15%	12-24	27	8%	30:70	78:22	23:77

Global University Performance Index (GUPI) - 2022																			
University	Academic Excellence					Research & Innovation					Student Experience					Sustainability & Impact			
	Graduation Rate	Faculty Quality	Research Output	Patent Filings	Industry Partnerships	Publications	Grants	Startups	Alumni Success	Retention Rate	Satisfaction	Diversity	Employability	Carbon Footprint	Community Engagement	ESG Score	Global Reach	Alumni Network	Peer Review
International/National faculty ratio (%)	Work placement	Mentorship	Avg. salary (int\$)	Employment at 12 months	Current employment	Quality of faculty	Quality of curriculum	Job support	Extracurricular initiatives	Alumni network	Industry network	Return on investment (ROI)	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	Professional mentorship/advocacy	Career advancement	Skills applicability	Skills frequency	Peer review	Total score
0:100	YES	YES	72,898	93.68	90.53	98.95	94.74	92.63	93.68	98.95	97.89	88.42	93.68	97.89	90.35	90.35	80.70	90.00	89.35
18:82	YES	YES	58,191	96.43	98.57	92.14	90.00	91.43	99.29	99.29	98.57	92.14	80.00	95.71	88.10	76.79	89.88	100.00	88.51
25:75	YES	YES	66,882	97.65	80.00	92.94	92.94	92.94	98.82	92.94	98.82	88.24	95.29	95.29	83.33	81.37	80.39	70.00	86.11
40:60	YES	YES	94,181	87.69	90.00	86.92	80.00	73.85	83.08	93.85	93.85	82.31	87.69	81.54	80.13	69.87	73.08	80.00	84.79
17:83	YES	YES	49,206	95.29	90.59	98.82	89.41	91.76	83.53	88.24	95.29	82.35	83.53	94.12	72.55	81.37	81.37	50.00	82.76
0:100	YES	YES	57,500	80.00	90.00	95.00	95.00	90.00	95.00	90.00	95.00	95.00	90.00	95.00	91.67	100.00	100.00	20.00	82.35
3:97	YES	YES	135,132	90.22	91.56	89.78	82.22	71.11	74.09	81.33	88.44	72.00	74.67	78.22	80.74	74.44	82.96	40.00	80.15
13:87	YES	YES	67,925	98.67	90.67	86.67	78.67	78.67	84.00	82.67	92.00	82.67	98.67	84.00	87.78	73.33	74.44	30.00	79.20
0:100	YES	YES	50,733	82.22	93.33	95.56	91.11	82.22	88.89	80.00	97.78	95.56	84.44	77.78	77.78	94.44	96.30	30.00	78.97
0:100	YES	YES	56,308	92.86	82.86	97.14	88.57	85.71	94.29	88.57	88.57	82.86	85.71	90.00	72.62	82.14	80.95	20.00	78.80
22:78	YES	YES	73,982	87.50	81.67	94.17	89.17	85.83	85.00	88.33	90.00	78.33	83.33	86.67	76.39	77.78	84.03	-	78.61
10:90	YES	YES	42,111	91.67	88.33	93.33	93.33	90.00	95.00	95.00	98.33	93.33	90.00	90.00	93.06	77.78	90.28	20.00	77.93
30:70	YES	YES	82,690	89.23	86.15	72.31	72.31	73.85	80.00	90.77	93.85	73.85	63.08	75.38	79.49	70.51	76.92	60.00	77.73
33:67	YES	YES	56,117	83.33	82.22	87.78	90.00	90.00	84.44	88.89	91.11	83.33	83.33	83.33	84.26	76.85	70.37	20.00	77.59
0:100	YES	YES	53,670	82.86	91.43	97.14	91.43	82.86	91.43	85.71	97.14	91.43	65.71	74.29	73.81	73.81	76.19	10.00	76.66
13:87	YES	YES	74,565	80.00	88.26	89.57	87.39	87.11	78.70	87.83	89.78	81.74	78.70	83.91	81.52	79.35	77.17	10.00	76.27
26:74	YES	YES	55,183	83.33	95.83	86.67	86.67	79.17	86.67	80.83	85.83	85.83	85.83	84.17	83.33	87.50	84.03	-	75.90
33:67	YES	YES	64,667	84.00	90.67	88.00	89.33	81.33	80.00	78.67	89.33	78.67	86.67	84.00	68.89	73.33	71.11	20.00	75.82
9:91	YES	NO	83,447	93.33	100.00	93.33	86.67	80.00	66.67	100.00	86.67	93.33	66.67	73.33	83.33	83.33	100.00	-	75.60
0:100	YES	YES	69,417	77.33	81.33	89.33	82.67	78.67	81.33	84.00	89.33	74.67	80.00	82.67	80.00	73.33	68.89	20.00	74.57
5:95	YES	YES	38,843	90.67	86.67	81.33	90.67	85.33	80.00	74.67	84.00	89.33	89.33	85.33	90.00	86.67	76.67	10.00	73.47
11:89	YES	YES	57,161	86.67	88.89	83.33	80.00	70.00	75.56	74.44	78.89	66.67	68.89	72.22	72.22	81.48	70.37	30.00	72.92
8:92	YES	YES	56,592	80.00	100.00	86.67	80.00	80.00	86.67	86.67	93.33	80.00	86.67	86.67	72.22	61.11	83.33	10.00	72.63
40:60	YES	YES	77,859	85.71	82.86	88.57	80.00	80.00	77.14	71.43	80.00	77.14	80.00	82.86	76.19	80.95	64.29	-	72.37
30:70	YES	YES	54,139	83.64	80.91	87.27	80.00	70.00	80.91	78.18	75.24	71.82	75.45	77.27	71.21	71.97	75.00	-	72.26
25:75	YES	YES	46,870	85.67	85.33	76.67	79.66	75.67	75.67	73.33	80.67	73.33	70.33	78.67	76.11	73.89	75.28	10.00	72.12
35:65	YES	YES	79,516	80.00	83.53	81.18	80.00	67.06	71.76	68.24	77.65	64.71	70.59	67.06	74.51	71.57	58.82	70.00	71.88
0:100	YES	NO	48,755	88.89	93.33	86.67	82.22	68.89	85.00	82.22	66.67	82.22	82.22	80.00	74.07	75.93	87.04	-	71.39
0:100	YES	YES	64,221	83.33	76.67	86.67	86.67	76.67	70.00	71.67	70.00	71.67	73.33	76.67	72.22	84.72	81.94	-	71.20
51:49	YES	YES	85,657	80.00	88.57	83.08	81.43	74.29	71.43	75.71	61.43	74.29	80.00	81.43	76.19	75.00	64.29	-	71.05
33:67	YES	YES	210,271	90.00	90.00	85.00	85.00	50.00	75.00	75.00	90.00	60.00	80.00	60.00	62.50	79.17	50.00	-	69.95
33:67	YES	YES	49,497	88.89	81.11	84.44	82.22	56.67	74.44	67.78	74.44	70.00	78.89	74.44	77.78	63.89	64.81	30.00	69.87
33:67	YES	YES	50,632	87.59	89.66	82.07	73.79	60.00	78.62	68.28	62.76	63.45	71.72	72.41	68.97	75.86	60.34	30.00	69.70
33:67	YES	NO	73,421	100.00	100.00	70.00	60.00	60.00	80.00	60.00	80.00	60.00	60.00	60.00	66.67	66.67	50.00	-	69.00
33:67	YES	YES	50,166	92.86	88.57	78.57	78.57	77.14	81.43	82.86	81.43	68.57	68.57	78.57	67.86	63.10	61.90	-	68.41
70:23	YES	YES	77,547	77.50	83.75	78.75	75.00	70.00	78.75	70.00	72.50	66.25	73.75	67.50	72.92	67.71	56.25	30.00	68.11
8:92	YES	YES	81,540	82.11	85.26	69.47	57.89	57.89	62.11	70.53	81.05	56.84	66.32	54.74	66.67	74.56	49.07	-	67.81
51:49	YES	YES	46,157	81.82	81.82	80.00	67.27	54.55	74.55	61.82	69.09	65.45	69.09	67.27	78.79	63.64	56.06	20.00	67.73
0:100	YES	YES	59,888	83.33	75.56	88.89	77.78	60.00	73.33	64.44	73.33	60.00	74.44	72.22	64.81	75.00	61.11	-	63.98
31:69	YES	YES	63,146	76.00	75.20	72.80	75.20	54.40	52.00	58.40	52.00	52.00	59.17	55.00	72.22	65.97	56.94	20.00	62.29
Postgraduate Rankings 2022																		7	



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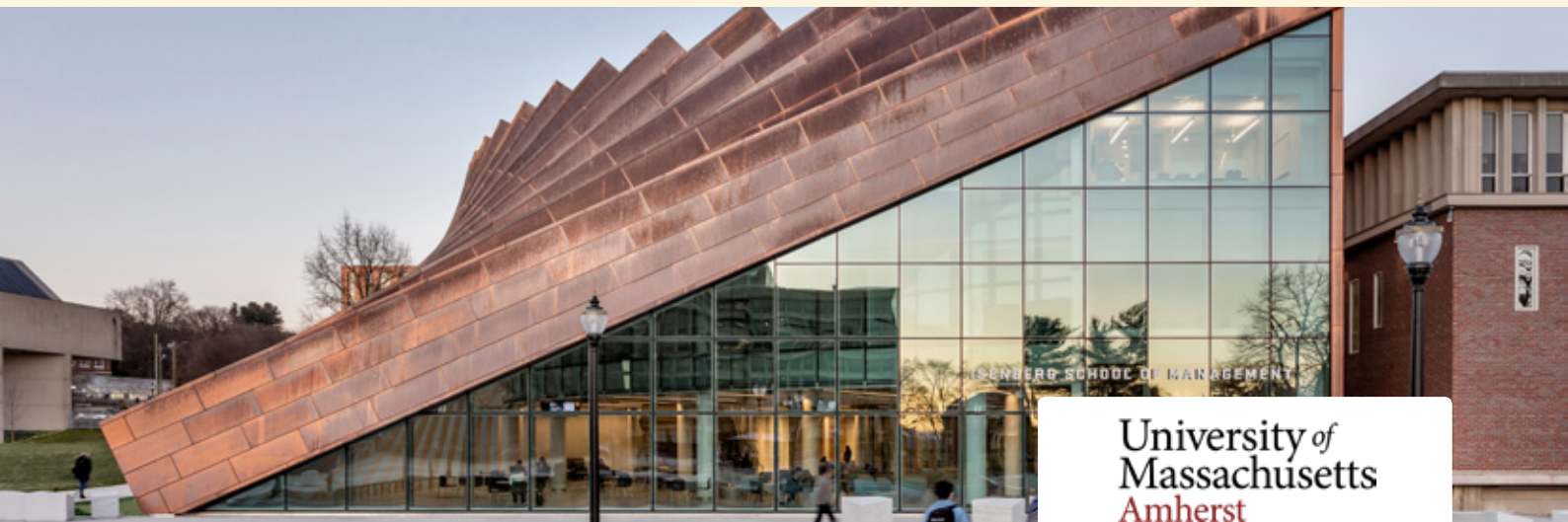
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University of Massachusetts Amherst's MBA/MS Sport Management and MS Sport Management



University of
Massachusetts
Amherst

The University of Massachusetts Amherst's MBA/MS Sport Management and MS Sport Management moves into its 51st year in 2021-22 and marks it by placing top of the 2022 Postgraduate Rankings. Having achieved the same feat in 2019, the programme dropped one place in 2020 and finished second again in 2021 but returns to first position this time round.

Celebrations of the Mark H. McCormack Department of Sport Management reaching its half-century mark in the last year were slightly delayed due to the pandemic but the recently concluded summer saw the University hold three days of events in June to mark the anniversary. This included the welcoming back to campus of over 125 alumni and dignitaries of the programme.

As well as representing the 50th anniversary of the course's inception, 2021-22 saw Will Norton move into the role of graduate programme director, taking the reins from Steve McKelvey, who held the role for the previous 13 years. McKelvey retains an influence on the programme as head of the Mark H. McCormack Department of Sport Management at UMass. Dr. Nicole Melton is also instrumental to the programme as Associate Department

Chair.

The overall number of full-time faculty working on the programme rises to 13 for the upcoming academic year, with Katie Sveinson joining as assistant professor of sport management. Sveinson's research has focused on the areas of marketing and consumer behaviour, specifically as it pertains to women sport fans and culture/cultural production of sport fandom. Yiran Su also joins as assistant professor of sport management and provides a research background in digital marketing and applied technology, with interests in identity-based digital consumption, the relationships between technology, sports, and wellbeing, and brand-consumer interaction in the digital and virtual space, such as Web 3.0.

The typical size of cohort on the dual MBA/MS programme ranges from 22 to 30, with applicant rates typically at about 125. On average, the university fully funds at least 50 per cent of each student's tuition cost and almost all students are members of a union via their graduate assistantships, which provides income and health insurance during their time on the course.

Integrated within the University's Isenberg School of Management, the course is centred on experiential

learning, with the aim of providing students with a holistic view of the sports industry.

The inter-departmental research labs, based within the McCormack Department and focused on areas such as sport rivalry and diversity and inclusion within sport, are seen as a provider of competitive advantages to graduates of the programme by its leadership. Graduate students work directly with the research labs to contribute to work with external organisations including the Wasserman agency and Japan's Pacific League.

The data from the 2022 Postgraduate Rankings survey indicates the programme to be particularly strong across metrics such as employability and quality of faculty. This year, the programme was also the only example of an institution which had graduates progress into positions within the Research & Analysis category. Part of the reason for this may be that students on the programme are provided support with industry placement in sports agency consulting, market research analyst, and business intelligence positions, while classes such as Sport Market Research and Sports Analytics teach students to apply proper research methodologies to a given business problem. ○

What do women (sport fans) want? Fan clothing that doesn't suck

Katie Sveinson joined the UMass Amherst faculty ahead of the 2022-23 academic year, having previously been part of the staff at Temple University and the University of Regina, where she earned a PHD in Sport Management/ Sociology of Sport.

It's game day, so what's the first thing sport fans do? Throw on some team gear. Studies have found that sport fan clothing is an essential product to show identification with and attachment to favourite teams and players. But what if they don't like the style, design, or fit of the clothing? My research has shown this is often the case for women fans. Using qualitative approaches, including in-depth interviews, text analysis, and open-ended surveys, I found that sport fan clothing is underwhelming for women consumers. This is a crucial issue as not only are the number of women sport fans growing, but they also carry significant purchasing power.

There are two major issues with team apparel for women: availability and design.

In a previous study (with Dr. Larena Hoerber and Dr. Kim Toffoletti), I conducted in-depth interviews with women who were fans of men's major league teams. A reoccurring theme was dissatisfaction with the clothing. The women expressed a dislike for items that were pink, bedazzled, sequined, low-cut, or too fitted. Though women wanted to demonstrate their authentic fandom, they often felt that feminising clothing made their gender identity (women) seem more important than their fan identity. Specifically, when items were not the same colour as the team's colors, they felt disconnected. Since these women were unhappy with the few options available, it often drove them to reluctantly purchase limited items in the "men" or "youth" categories.

In another study, my collaborator Dr. Rachel Allison and I explored language choices of consumers in their responses to a now-deleted



tweet from U.S. Soccer promoting girls' apparel. The tweet included clothing that was pink, sparkly, and included the term "cutie." Out of 307 tweets analysed, 99% were negative in tone. Through text analysis, we found consumers argued the items suggested women and girls lacked athletic skills and emphasised physical appearance as the most valuable, and therefore, the organisation engaged in sexist marketing practices. These findings show clothing are not just items fans wear but are products that have symbolic meanings beyond identification. Since the clothing did not align with consumers' values in relation to gender equity and equality, the negative reaction transferred onto the organisation itself. For a summary of this study, [watch this video](#).

Along with poor design, the lack of availability of fan clothing is a more significant issue for women's sports. Specifically, consider women's soccer which has taken off on a global scale. Not only did the historic Lionesses win at the UEFA Women's EURO 2022 final reach record-breaking attendance, but the recently announced October 2022 match between the Lionesses and the United States women's national team (USWNT) sold out within 24 hours. What does this tell us? The demand for women's sport is constantly growing. Yet, the supply of fan clothing is lacking. The Canadian women's national soccer team won gold in the 2020 Olympics and came second in the 2022 CONCACAF W Championship, however fans have struggled to get their hands on any type of clothing to represent their team. While it was said that supply chain issues are to blame, my research suggests it is not that simple.

In my current international collaborative research project (with Dr. Beth Clarkson, Dr. Keith Parry, and Dr. Jessica Richards), we created an open-ended survey for fans of women's national soccer teams and professional soccer leagues in three locations: England, Australia, and the United States. Women fans who responded said the worst aspect about their soccer team's apparel is the lack of options and availability. These fans were often frustrated as they wanted to show their identity in supporting women's sport, and even encourage others to become fans, but frequently found many items out of stock. One participant even said: "I'm trying to spend money and not being able to because items go out of stock very rapidly." They were also looking for a broader range of sizes, designs, cuts, and fit in their apparel.

Overall, these issues can be related back to supply and demand. When it comes to fan clothing for women's sport, there is more demand than supply. This is a major issue that can impact the growth of women's sport, as these items create visibility, exposure, support, and investment in the players and teams. In other cases, there is no demand for what is being supplied. Meaning, the clothing items that are available are not what women sport fans want to wear to show their fandom. Recently, these issues have been addressed through strategies, such as that from the USWNT players association creating their own online store, independent of U.S. Soccer. The new site provides items with a range of designs and sizes, and showcases a support for

women's sport (a good strategy as suggested by these research findings).

To meet the needs of women consumers, organisations must realise that women fans are not "one-size-fits-all" and have varying needs and wants. This starts with recognising that sport fan clothing goes beyond the functional aspect (i.e., wearing clothing to show identification with a team or player), and should be considered a valuable item that communicates meanings about the organisation, and consumers identities and values. Organisations should provide gender neutral items simply designed with the team color and logo. Items should also come in a wide variety of sizes and fits, as well as embrace a variety of body

types in marketing strategies. This presents opportunities to include real fans modelling the clothing items, building a deeper connection and loyalty to the team. Lastly, conduct market research to ask women what they want in their fan clothing and ensure manufacturers can supply desirable items while meeting demand. Organisations must speak with a variety of women that represent the diversity within their fanbase.

So, what do women sport fans want? To feel and look good as fans by their own standards, not a limited, predefined appearance created by the organisations. They want to feel empowered as consumers to show their fandom without having to put their gender first. ○



Dominic Macklin, football operations manager, City Football Group

Having grown up and studied in the UK through undergraduate level, **Dominic Macklin** was part of UMass' MBA/MS Sport Management graduating class of 2015. He then returned to UK and joined City Football Group, where he has worked in a number of roles and currently holds the position of Football Operations Manager.

Why did you choose to take the path of a postgraduate degree in sports management?

I had completed my undergraduate degree in the UK at Cambridge and when I graduated, I wasn't really sure exactly what I wanted to do. None of the main career paths my friends were following particularly appealed to me at the time, so I took some time out whilst I decided what to do before ultimately realising it was a career in sports which I was passionate about.

I'd always been keen on doing something in sport and was interested beyond the typical fandom that my friends had. I had spent a lot of time in the States growing up and was fascinated by the US sports culture and the size of the economy around it, so it felt like a logical move to try to begin my career over there. Going via the academic route, getting a postgraduate degree felt like the best step to gain an understanding of the industry, build a network and start to develop a plan for my career.

In terms of picking which institution to go with what was decisive about selecting UMass?

I was aware from my research of just how competitive the world of sports was in terms of securing a job. That's why I wanted to begin my path on the academic side, to earn a qualification as a means to help differentiate and establish myself in a crowded market, but also a way to make connections in the industry. When I was researching programme, the UMass name came up time and time again as being the best, pretty much wherever you look. The more I read, the clearer it became just how strong the programme's alumni network was and how focused it was on helping students secure a great job in the world of sports. The



UMass programme was not only well respected academically, but it had a huge focus on the career side of things, so it just immediately became clear to me that it was the best option.

How did the course set up your career path and open doors for you within the industry?

It was brilliant in this sense. The network is just so vast and so strong that there were a lot of doors that they could open. Regardless of what field you're looking to go into, there were people that they could connect you with. I was able to connect directly with senior figures from the

worlds of college athletics, corporate partnerships, consulting, and a whole range of areas of the sports industry through the programme's alumni network and the mentorship programme.

As I mentioned, I think the programme prioritises the alumni network and therefore provides the opportunity to build strong relationships with them. As a result, the alumni are then very helpful, and they reach back out. Even now, I'm not that long out the programme – I graduated seven years ago – and I've had numerous calls and conversations with current and past students of the programme who have wanted to pick my brain and connect to understand my career path and how I might be able to advise or help them. As it's something I benefited from so greatly, I'm more than happy to pay it back and I know this is the case with UMass alums all over the world. Even outside of the direct alumni network, the respect that the programme has in the industry means that a lot of people in the world of sports tend to be happy to speak to you because the programme is so well regarded. The UMass name tends to help open some doors.

Are there any experiences from your time on the course which stand out as being either memorable or influential that you carry with you today?

We visited New York City to meet with a range of different companies in the sports industry as part of the career development programme. Those introductions, those meetings and networking sessions, were all set up through the programme's network. We went to visit the New York Mets, Madison Square Garden, a couple of consultancy agencies, the NHL. As students at the time,

it was great to see in real life that these weren't just names on a piece of paper. These were real people working in the real NHL office in Manhattan or the real New York Mets office. It brought to life how strong the network was in getting the chance to meet people at these great institutions in the world of sport.

As part of the programme, I spent the summer between my 2 years of study interning at USA Rugby in Colorado. I was a full-time employee of the organisation for three or four months which was an incredible experience and gave me the chance to see and be involved first hand with a lot of the ideas we'd talked about back in the classroom in Amherst. I was lucky enough in that I was asked to carry on working for USA Rugby until Christmas, whilst back in Amherst. UMass supported me and allowed me to keep doing this whilst studying, including this experience as part of my course credit. The programme was so geared towards career development and helping you find a job that they realised something like that was extremely beneficial and so they were incredibly supportive in it.

What would you say to someone in a similar scenario today considering following a similar move from abroad to study in the US to help build their career in the sports industry?

From my own personal experience, I couldn't recommend it highly enough as a way to learn the industry and to take the first steps in your own path in sports. When I was considering the move, part of what helped me make the decision was the knowledge that on the academic side, sports management as a discipline was far more established and well regarded than in most countries.

In addition, the US sport industry was more diverse, larger and also probably a bit better established than over here; when you consider all of the professional sports in the U.S., collegiate athletics, the wider sports marketing industry over there – it just felt like there was more opportunity. All of this added together just made it seem a great place for me to start. Hopefully myself and a lot of others who've done the same are proof that you can bring that knowledge and the skills from the U.S. to help build a good

career for yourself in the U.K. or elsewhere.

Following on that point, do you think that the Masters at UMass is a differential for you in the UK sports market?

I've been working in the UK for six and a half years, and even being based here I've come across multiple people in my day-to-day work who are either fellow alumni, know or work with alumni or who just know of the reputation the programme has, which is fantastic. There's a huge amount of respect that people across the industry have for the programme, even here in the U.K., which of course is only a positive for your career, particularly in the early stages. With the programme offering a dual degree of both an MBA and M.S., a lot of the business management concepts I learned have proved increasingly helpful as my career has progressed. Very few sports management programmes include an MBA, which has certainly been a differentiator and will hopefully help me have a successful career in sports for a few more years to come! ○



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Mead Al Emadi, Project Director at the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, Qatar 2022 World Cup, and FIFA Master 2016 graduate

In July 2016, Mead Al Emadi became the first female Qatari to ever graduate from the prestigious FIFA Master in Management, Law and Humanities of Sport – an accomplishment that made her very proud and, according to her, was what opened the doors for her to join the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, the State-led organisation responsible for the delivery of the required infrastructure and host country planning and operations for Qatar to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Mead studied computer science at university and had a promising job in the banking industry, but it was only when she joined the sports broadcaster beIN Sports that she felt she was in a place where she could do exceptionally well. "I grew up watching sports with my father, and having three sisters and two brothers, our household was very competitive in sports too", she recalls. "But it was only when I started working for beIN Sports that I realised how much I loved being in that environment". However, Mead felt that she needed more than her passion for sport, so when she found out about the FIFA Master through an alumnus of the course, she didn't hesitate to apply, and couldn't have been happier than when she was accepted to enrol onto the award-winning programme.

Here is more of the interview with Mead Al Emadi:

What is your job like at the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy?

My main role is working as a Fan Festival Director. This is no easy task as you are responsible for making sure that people will have a good time! There are various key elements to my job, but the three most important would be research, planning and marketing. We focus on understanding fan expectations then reaching out to different stakeholders who can help us to achieve these expectations. An even bigger element involves making sure that our visitors know of the wide range of events which are occurring around them.

What is the main career goal you'd like to achieve?

I consider myself lucky to have been able to find my passion very early in life. Working in the sports industry for fifteen years has provided me with exceptional experiences from being part of international events hosted by

my country. I would say my main career goal now is to continue growing within the sports industry and representing Qatar on the world stage.

What's the plan for after the World Cup?

I definitely see myself as part of an organising committee that oversees and hosts sports events in Qatar. Our country is passionate about raising awareness of the importance of having an active lifestyle. The FIFA World Cup is the biggest event we are going to host so far, but we have successfully hosted other important tournaments like the Asian Cup and Asian Games. This is only the beginning for our country and we aspire to host and promote various sporting events in the near future.



What are the particular challenges of being a woman working in sport?

Working in the sports industry in the Middle East was an even bigger challenge from the start because it was so rare to see females participating or working in this particular industry sector. Nonetheless, Qatar has taken a huge leap in improving the role of women through several different initiatives. We have women in executive roles and I believe that we are more empowered now than ever before to voice our opinions and take responsibility. Because our country has promoted this sense of passion towards sport, now almost everyone is interested, capable and driven to be a part of the industry.

What are your fondest memories of the FIFA Master?

The fondest memories I have were formed with my classmates. I am grateful for being able to learn about different cultures and have made lifelong friends who have taught me confidence, strength and resilience. Furthermore, I am happy to have left a positive influence and changed their perspective on the capabilities of a small Arab country in hosting the World Cup. As a Muslim Qatari woman, many were astonished how I had made it this far in the sports industry. However, after spending time with them and showing them what we are capable of, they were able to see Qatar in another light.

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Ohio University's Master of Sports Administration



OHIO
UNIVERSITY

The University of Ohio's Master of Sports Administration degree takes second place in both North America and globally in the 2022 Postgraduate Rankings. While the position represents a slight drop from top spot in last year's edition, the programme retains its record of featuring in the global top two in each of the 11 years since *SportBusiness* launched the rankings.

The programme, which was launched back in 1966, is offered as a MBA/MSA dual-award and is based out of Ohio University's College of Business in Athens, Ohio. Up to the end of the 2021-22 academic year, Jim Strode was chair of sports administration but he has recently been promoted within the College of Business and so has vacated the role. Strode's work now focuses on overseeing

all undergraduate programmes in the College of Business. The search for a new department chair is set to get underway imminently, while Matt Cacciato remains in post as executive director of the university's AECOM Center for Sports Administration and oversees the Master's resident programme, as he has done for the past five years. Mick Andzulis is also key to the running of the programme, especially from an administrative process perspective.

The course leaders view the amount of real-world projects and wider experiential learning opportunities afforded to students as a distinguishing feature of the course. As well as this, the wide-ranging alumni network of the programme is leveraged to provide an extensive schedule of guest speakers throughout each academic

year.

In terms of faculty, there are 10 full-time staff working on the MBA/MSA programme. Its cohort for the upcoming academic year is 35, refined from a typical total of 150 to 160 applicants. This represents an increase of one from the previous year, with the feeling among staff that 35 is the maximum number the course can go to, particularly to ensure efficiency in group-project based learning.

The curriculum will be under review this coming academic year, as scheduled on the programme's cycle. It is understood to be most likely that the current programme will be augmented by the integration of additional certificate options for students, leveraging the capabilities of the College of Business as a whole. ○

International influence on sports gambling in the US Market

Matt Cacciato, Executive Director AECOM Center for Sports Administration and Director, MSA Program writes with Dean McKenzie, MSA Graduate '00 and Director, McKenzie Sport International and Scott Pincombe, MBA Graduate '22 and current MSA student, on the influence of foreign companies on the evolution of sports gambling in the USA.

The expression 'time flies' is an appropriate framing to understanding the explosive growth in legalised sports gambling across the United States since the repeal of the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act (PASPA) in May of 2018. Various industry tracking agencies estimate that Americans have wagered more than \$125 billion since the decision, with two-thirds of states having legalised some form of sports gambling. While many a news outlet has reported this incredible momentum, what has been less discussed is the presence of foreign companies driving the American evolution of sports gambling.

What dawned on us recently through a class assignment with our graduate students from our Ohio University's College of Business dual MBA/MSA programme was the amount of learning and market developments abroad that could inform our country's management and oversight for the betterment of intended audiences and future sports gambling consumers. Specifically, various regulatory efforts abroad aimed at the marketing and promotion of sports gambling in the hope of lessening a wave of new and younger problem gamblers. With that backdrop I turned to one of our current graduate students from Canada, as well as an alumnus from New Zealand with extensive executive experience in the Australasian sports gambling markets.

To begin, on June 23, 2021, the Canadian government passed the Safe and Regulated Sports Betting Act (C-218) that legalised single-game and online wagering for the first time in the country's history. After this initial announcement, bill C-218 went live on August 27, 2021, when provincial governments could



then decide if their province would adopt this new bill or stay the course of previous years. Seven of the 13 provinces and territories initially jumped on board, legalising single-game wagering, with Ontario leading the charge. Ontario is Canada's most populous province, and upon implementing bill C-218, was the first to launch mobile wagering in April of 2022, with theScore's mobile platform leading the way. As a result, MGM, FanDuel, Bet365, and other large players are now operating across Ontario, in the hope that additional provinces will join soon.

Ultimately, the goal of passing this bill was to allow the government to be able to regulate sports betting. Illegal books, run both through the US and Europe, were extremely prevalent across Canada, as it was estimated that Canadians were spending north of \$10 billion per

year through unregulated sites. This new legislation not only helps to ensure the safety of individuals partaking, but also enables that money to come back into the Canadian economy. As mentioned, Canada is a large market for sports gambling, a market that had been taken advantage of by 'organised crime' through illegal wagering methods throughout history. To quote Brian Egger of Bloomberg Intelligence, "Canada is playing catchup, today's legislature is just smart, so that the Canadian marketplace can be governed by Canadians." Generally, it will be quite interesting to see how provincial governments navigate this new space as the law matures, and what additional measures will be enacted to provide both success and safety across the country in the sports gambling space.

To continue with the international discussion, sports betting has been legal in New Zealand since 1996, and former TAB NZ Executive Chair/CE Dean McKenzie, who is now based in Southern California, has some interesting insights quoted below.

"In my view, there are really three key influencing factors to consider when examining the issue. Firstly, the regulatory framework operating in that jurisdiction; secondly, the cultural or social acceptance of sports gambling there (or gambling in general really); and thirdly, the commercial realities the sports book operator faces in optimising the returns for its shareholders.

"As a result, when considering the marketing and promotion of its products, the operator will obviously want to operate within the boundaries of that regulatory framework but just as important will be the social licence aspects of that. In my experience, these will differ from one territory to

another. Whatever the regulatory framework, which will also likely differ from state to state, what may be socially acceptable in one state may not be acceptable in another. Don't underestimate the importance of having a strong social licence, it's critical in my view. Finding the 'Goldilocks' spot where regulatory compliance is achieved, harm is minimised, and returns are optimised is clearly the goal. However, at times this can be difficult to achieve and of course not every operator will have the same view on where that spot is.

"When it comes to my personal thoughts, I believe any legitimate, responsible sports book operator, with a long-term vision for the industry and their business, wants to minimise the harm that may come from its products. Harm

minimization will sit at the very centre of what they will do every day. In my view, without a strong social licence, they just won't be able to optimise their organisations value and long-term performance.

"Furthermore, you will find these best-in-class operators will have strong messaging in all marketing and promotions they undertake, regardless of regulatory requirements. They will also have robust harm minimisation tools available for their customers, together with well-resourced back of house infrastructure to support these. This is obviously one of the great advantages of sports betting being legalised here in the US; these tools and resources become part of the social licence to operate at a minimum and are available to all customers, something which is

not always true in the alternative unregulated model.

"Finally, the regulatory framework in Australia in particular has certainly evolved over the years with regards to the marketing and promotion of sports betting. For example, specific restrictions in and around live sporting events are now in place, something which was not the case in the early days, and I would suspect the same sort of general evolution to occur, at varying degrees, throughout the US as the market matures more."

The sports betting industry is facing large expectations, and as more states and countries come on board, the different processes set in place to help with its regulation will continue to be a point of emphasis. We are all eager to see its development in the near future. ○



Sports gambling platform FanDuel displays its presence at a US sports venue

Dr. Mónica Lebrón, deputy athletics director of championship resources, University of Tennessee

Dr. Mónica Lebrón was part of Ohio University's graduating class of 2003, earning a MS/MBA in Sports Administration. Dr. Lebrón has since built an extensive career in college athletics, currently holding the position of deputy athletics director of championship resources, as part of the executive leadership team at University of Tennessee.

Why did you choose to take up a postgraduate degree in sports management?

My love for sports began at birth, but my love for athletics administration began with my work study job at Yale University. I was on financial aid at Yale, so in addition to going to school and playing softball I also had to work an on-campus job. My head coach asked me if I wanted to work for the administrative assistant of the AD. I said, "Sure, I don't know what an AD does, but sign me up." Three months later, I sat Mr. Beckett, our Director of Athletics (AD), down and asked, "How do I become you?" As I continued to work throughout my four-year playing career at Yale, I was encouraged to pursue a Sport Administration degree upon graduation. The more I explored it, the more I realised it was a perfect next step for me.

What was decisive in selecting the programme at Ohio University as your chosen course?

To determine which graduate school was the next best step for me, I asked anyone and everyone which Sport Administration graduate programmes were the best. The Ohio University Sport Administration programme was ranked #1, at the time, but it was also anecdotally one of the programmes that continued to be mentioned due in large part to the strong alumni. I knew I not only wanted to learn from those alums, but I also wanted to be one. In addition, I appreciated the dual degree aspect of the programme requiring students to earn an MBA prior to earning the Sport Administration degree which I knew would open more doors. Lastly, I was



excited to explore a different region of the country, having grown up in San Jose, CA, and attending college in the northeast.

How has your time on the course influenced your career path in college sports?

There is no question that the most valuable asset to earning a degree from the Ohio University Sport Administration programme is the opportunity to forge meaningful and lasting relationships, not only with the classmates that attend with you, but the hundreds and thousands of alumni that earn the same degree. I have been calling on those classmates and other alumni since I graduated 20 years ago for any number of reasons from sharing industry best practices to recruiting top talent. I was even hired at the University of Tennessee by a friend I made 20 years ago, through the programme, in Danny White SAFM '05. My experiences through the Ohio University Sport Administration programme have helped me almost every day of my career.

Are there any experiences from your time on the course that stand out as being particularly memorable/influential?

Experiential learning is such an invaluable tool and I continue to be most proud of the partnerships forged by the Ohio University Sport Administration programme for the purpose of providing hands-on learning for past, present, and future OU Sport Administration students. My classmates and I had those opportunities to travel the roads and work various sporting events and the opportunities for the students of today continue to grow exponentially.

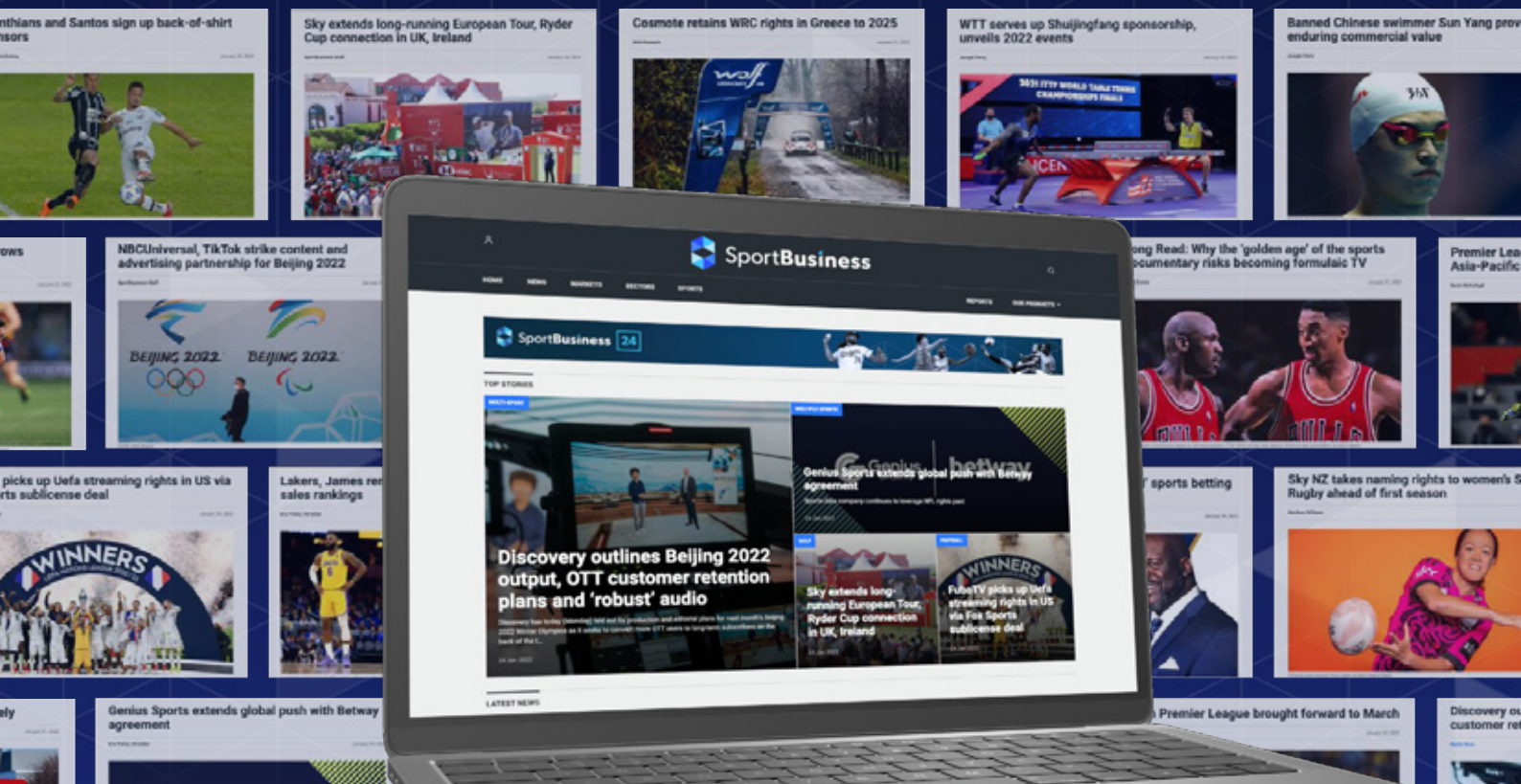
How often do you utilise what you learned on the course within your current role? Can you provide some examples?

I believe the most valuable skill you can acquire from any level of education is the ability to think critically. Whether it be K-12, when you are establishing the notion of critical thinking, college, when you are sharpening those skills, or graduate school, when you are mastering them, critical thinking is the tool used most in one's career and in life. I feel blessed to have crossed paths with some of the smartest sports minds an institution can attract through the Ohio University Sport Administration programme as they challenged me, and therefore pushed me as a critical thinker, to my utmost potential.

What would be your advice to new students starting out on the same course at Ohio this year?

My advice to current and future students is to nurture all relationships, both with peers and alumni. It is through those relationships that we continue to learn, grow, and lean on as we advance throughout our careers. ○

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University of South Florida, Muma College of Business MBA/MS



The University of South Florida's Vinik Sport & Entertainment Management programme finishes in third place in the Postgraduate Rankings for the second consecutive year. The programme moves into its 11th year in 2022-23, although 10th anniversary celebrations will take place in the Spring of 2023, around the 10th anniversary of the course's first graduation.

Michelle Harrolle is the program's director and has held the role since 2019. Dr. Harrolle is one of four full-time faculty members, alongside four adjuncts. Its typical class size is close to 30 and graduates earn a dual-award MBA/MS and study a curriculum designed around providing rounded personal and professional development around the business of sports, placing the industry in its wider global and cultural context.

The course is named after the Vinik family, owners of the NHL's Tampa Bay Lightning and was

launched via a partnership with the franchise. The partnership with the Lightning and the wider Tampa Bay sports communing, including organisations such as Fanatics, Valspar, USF Athletics, Women's Tennis Association, and Hard Rock Casino, is leveraged as part of the program's focus on experiential learning, with a significant emphasis placed on relationship building throughout the program. Part of this is achieved through trips and events, with students visiting Las Vegas in 2021-22 and presenting student created partnership proposals to MGM Resorts executives as part of the trip.

This was part of a busy schedule in Spring which would see the course leaders plan several in-person events, including the annual USF Esports Summit and USF Sports and Entertainment Analytics Conference, after the opportunity to do so was lessened over 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic. These type of trips and events can be

linked to the high score the Vinik program achieved in the extra-curricular and industry network metrics among respondents to the 2022 Postgraduate Rankings survey. The program ranked top globally on the industry network measure, with a score just under 99 out of 100 and achieved the same score in the extra-curricular category, placing it second worldwide here.

The program's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion is also reflected in the data, topping the global rankings in this measure with a score of 95. Dr. Harrolle discussed the approach of the program in this area in last year's edition of the rankings, detailing one example of recruitment being conducted virtually to help engage students from underprivileged backgrounds, while Kristine Propokec, class of 2015, details experiences of the commitment to gender equality within the Vinik program in the Alumni Interview below. ○

Beyond the Classroom. The Ecosystem of Personal and Professional Development

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.

While we can all agree that curriculum and classroom work is important, most career development occurs outside of the classroom. When hiring managers and recruiters are looking at two equally qualified applicants, who are they going to hire? The applicant who sent the handwritten thank you note? The one who had a personal referral from a mentor in the industry? Or the applicant with the impactful online brand with 1,000 followers on TikTok? Or the one who had the most inspiring online presence during the video interview? Or the one who...

At the University of South Florida in the Vinik Sport and Entertainment Management Programme, we have developed an eco-system of personal and professional development encompassing seven main areas.

1. Social and emotional essential skills

While often called “soft” skills, the social and emotional essential skills for a successful career in the sport and entertainment industry are grounded in building relationships and developing interpersonal skills. Our faculty, especially Dr Janelle Wells, leads our Power Placement initiative. Within this programme, our students meet four times throughout the year outside of the classroom to build these essential skills. We focus on communication, such as how to conduct an informational interview, meeting someone for the first time, understanding body language, and thank you cards. A perfect example would be our hand-shake discussion. We spend over 20 minutes discussing handshakes, practising handshakes, and giving feedback on handshakes, because first impressions have such a strong impact on success



in the job market. Moreover, our students learn about the importance of gratitude and growth mindsets, and read books (e.g., *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* by Dweck) outside of the classroom for their professional development. Our faculty dedicate their time assisting students to become more self-aware (e.g., DiSC assessments) while encouraging them to have courageous conversations, work on their priority management, and learn the power of their voice.

2. Mentorship

We have all succeeded through the help of others, thus mentorship is embedded within three main areas of our community. First, our seasoned, second-year students are paired with our incoming, first-year students the first week of classes. These mentors provide a sounding board, an “expert” of our programme for

our incoming students to ask non-school related questions and develop lifelong friendships. As with many other universities, our second type of mentor is our faculty advisors who really assist with skill development. Faculty meet with students at least once a semester, and then students must “drive the bus” and learn to be an exceptional mentee. Lastly, we pair up all of our first-year students with industry professionals, many who are our alums. These mentors guide our students through the career process, are a sounding board for interviews, and assist our students with job placement and personal development.

3. Relationship building

Our industry is all about relationships! From day one of the programme, we stress the importance of relationships and teach specifically about cultivating and stewarding relationships. Students are taught how to connect with someone they do not know, how to respond to emails using BCC, and then are personally connected with industry experts via faculty connections/relationships within the industry. During orientation, students are encouraged to check LinkedIn, look at the faculty connections, and ask to be connected with an industry professional within our network. Afterwards, faculty personally connect students and the beginning of a beautiful relationship begins. Students follow up throughout the year and work to maintain these relationships to build their own professional communities. Additionally, as a part of the Power Placement programme, the faculty facilitate 80+ virtual interviews with 35+ executives from around the world to provide practice and additional connections for students headed out to the market.

4. Personal brand

With our constant connection to the digital world, students must focus on their personal brand, especially their online presence. During orientation, our programme provides professional headshots for each student. After an extensive digital footprint review, students update their resumes and LinkedIn profiles consistently within intentional sequential courses and assignments throughout the year. Within our marketing course, students are required to create meaningful content to push out on numerous social media channels and tag our programme. Our motto is “you are selling yourself every day!” and we prepare our students for this accordingly.

5. Community engagement

Within our university, college, and programme, each student is expected to increase their cultural and global awareness. While all of our courses have a focus on DEIB (Diversity,

Equity, Inclusion and Belonging) teachings, our students take a social issues course, dedicated to 20 hours of community service projects in our local community. For example, our students have worked with the YMCA, Special Olympics, Junior Achievement, and Metropolitan Ministries, within the course.

6. Global and cultural awareness

Our vision is for every student to travel internationally and present a major business strategy project to a corporate partner. In years past, we travelled to London and our students presented partnership campaigns to Harlequins FC while learning about the cultural experiences in all parts of London and Spain. These experiential opportunities are the most impactful for a student’s development and the memories built are the most meaningful to our students.

7. Wellness

While we recognize that we are

not mental health and physical wellness experts, our faculty and fellow students encourage students to be aware of their overall health and encourage them to seek help as needed. As a part of our students’ semester discussions on their personal and professional development plans, students reflect on their health goals. Due to our open dialogue and open-door policy, many students feel comfortable sharing very personal information. Faculty are there to listen, provide direction to resources on campus, and assist in any way that we can.

This eco-system is built on relationships, among all of our stakeholders – students, faculty, alumni, and partners. Our network is strong because our community is built on trust and care for one another. Together, we all have a relentless commitment to developing the next generation of talent and helping students reach their dreams. ○



A view of the USF campus

Kristine Prokopec, senior manager, brand strategy & operations, EA Sports

Kristine Prokopec is an alumna of the University of South Florida's Vinik Sport & Entertainment Management Programme, which she graduated in 2015. Following completion of the programme, Kristine joined CSM Sport & Entertainment, before joining the NBA's marketing strategy and operations team in 2019. As of August 2021, Kristine is a senior manager, brand strategy & operations at EA Sports.

Why did you choose to take up a postgraduate degree in sports management?

In undergrad I tended to gravitate towards internships in sports. One with the Outback Bowl and the other as the Student Athletic Director for admissions. I loved how sports bring such a diverse global population together unlike anything else. I was passionate about marketing and I wanted to explore ways that I could combine this passion with sports. Pursuing a graduate degree in sports management seemed like the most natural next step for me in my professional career.

What was decisive in selecting the Sports Management programme at USF as your chosen course?

When I found out that the USF sport management programme offered two master's degrees in two years, I was sold. The residency experience during the second year was also a selling point because I knew that the combination of education and industry experience was going to be the right mix that would propel my professional career into sport management.

When I went into the programme I knew I wanted to work in sports, but I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do. That was just because I wasn't familiar with all the roles sports entailed. Taking the agency route during my residency gave me the opportunity to work across various roles and be open to these roles. Having that residency allowed me to identify that the agency route would be the next step with me – my first full-time job outside of graduate school was at a sports and entertainment agency in New York City and that residency led me to understanding the agency route is where I wanted to develop a breadth



of knowledge across various strands to be able to identify the direction I wanted to go in with my career.

How has your time on the course influenced your career path?

The coursework throughout the two years at USF provided me with a diverse set of understanding of all components it takes to be an impactful contributor to the business of sports. It's the macro understanding of how the industry and organisations within operate that really helps sets you apart from others.

Are there any experiences from your time on the course that stand out as being particularly memorable/influential?

I have so many! Everything from the 29 other students that I spent two years learning from and developing

relationships with, to the many mentors that guided me through coursework and professional development, to the FoxSportsU and business case projects that allowed me to become deeply entrenched into real-life problem solving.

My FoxSportsU project was around how do we get more fans into the stadium for Tampa Bay Rays Major League Baseball games. It was a problem they were facing in terms of needing to increase ticket revenue. When you're tasked with that problem with a team that isn't performing very well, it's a little challenging. You have to think of other ways to engage fans beyond riding the coattails of the team's performance. So it led the team I was part of to think of alternative fan engagement tactics that would bring fans to the stadium and also to identify that not all fans are the same in terms of interest level. There are more casual fans that would consider going to game for the social aspect, so we had to figure out engagement tactics for that.

How often do you utilise what you learnt on the course within your current role at EA Sports?

All the time! There are so many learnings and experiences from my time at USF that have contributed to my career path. My current day-to-day consists of brand building and operationalising marketing and brand teams. I would say the research, data, and application skills I learned in grad school have remained very valuable throughout all of my roles. Professional and persuasive writing along with effective communication are also skills that I use on a daily basis. Additionally, understanding the industry through assigned and optional readings will always be

something I prioritise so that I can stay on top of identifying opportunities that drive impact.

What would be your advice to new students starting at on the same course at USF on the Vinik Sport and Entertainment Management programme this year?

Take on every opportunity that comes your way. If it's selling raffle tickets at a game, coordinating speakers for an event, attending a conference, or taking on an incremental research project, do it! Through every opportunity comes unique experience and networking.

As someone who combines a prominent role in the sports/entertainment industry with motherhood, what are your thoughts about the level of gender equality within the industry and the support given to people in a similar position? Did your time at USF shape your perspective on this subject at all?

I won't lie. I was nervous when I found out I was going to be a mom because of the career path that I chose in sports. Am I going to fall behind in my career development? Will I be treated differently because I may not be able to stay late at games or at work? Will this hold me back from getting a promotion? Real thoughts that that would keep me up

at night because this industry is still more male dominated. And they kept me up because gender inequality still exists. But just like anything else, it's not a standard related to only the sports industry. Inequality exists throughout many industries.

I have made a conscious effort to join organisations that are accepting of diversity of thought, gender, and race, and acknowledge that there is a large growth opportunity to be better.

Being a working mother in the sports & entertainment industry has not only created an opportunity for me to show others that it's possible, but to also show how rewarding it can be to overcome any stigmas around being a mother and holding a prominent role within sports and entertainment! If I can be an example and contribute to the growth of women in sports, that's a win! I am proud that I went to a university that championed women in sports.

Whenever I was looking at programmes, not once did I speak to a female director, they were all male. When I looked at USF I noticed the difference with Dr. Michelle Harrolle on the staff and during my time there Dr. Wells also joined. There was a conscious effort to ensure that women were respected and championed within the programme.

It builds on aspects like Women

in Sport and Entertainment (WISE), a national non-profit organisation which brings women in sports together around aspects like networking opportunities, mentoring, leadership and coaching. Dr. Harrolle sat on the board of WISE and it was something that all of us were involved in. It allowed us to draw inspiration from the paths of other successful women within the sports industry and benefit from their mentorship. It created an avenue for us to see past what the typical view in a male-dominated industry.

I was also a graduate assistant to a director in my first year so was one of two individuals on the programme who worked in the admissions office and everything we did, from the speaker series, to adjunct professors, to opportunities for students, we ensured there was equal opportunity and a diversified group of individuals partaking in them.

I have taken that conscious effort I experienced at USF with me, so in my roles that I have had I also make sure that on interview panels, for example, there's diversity. When we think about opportunities, the stigmas and bias go out the window, it's really around the diversity of thought and diversity of perspectives and that's something that was ingrained in me from grad school. ○



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Jim Riordan: A Tribute

Jim Riordan, the founder of Florida Atlantic University's (FAU) MBA Sport Management Programme, leaves a substantial legacy at FAU and across the wider sports industry after sadly passing away in March of this year.

Highlighting Riordan's importance and standing at FAU, the university held a celebration of his life on April 28 at the FAU Stadium with attendees including former and current students of the MBA Sport programme, colleagues, and friends.

Prior to launching FAU's MBA Sport programme in July 2000, Riordan had established his academic credentials by earning both his bachelors and MBA degrees from St. John's University, New York, and then pursuing doctoral studies at Temple University, Philadelphia, before going on to earn his Ph.D. in Higher Educational Leadership-Higher Education from FAU.

Throughout Riordan's professional career, he specialised in event operations and crowd management, was appointed as director of security and event services for the Spectrum Centre in Philadelphia, and served in several key roles: Manager of Event Services at Long Island's Nassau Coliseum; Director of Operations for the Richmond (VA) Coliseum and Mosque Theatre; and as Director of Operations for the Philadelphia Civic Center during his time working for Spectacor Management Group (SMG) between 1989 and 1994. He also applied his event management skills to the 1996 Olympic Games and both Super Bowl XXXIII in Miami and XXXIV in Atlanta.

Riordan's first foray into working in higher education was the five years he spent as the Director of the Master of Science in Sport Administration at Canisius College in Buffalo, New York.

After moving to South Florida, Riordan went on to make a highly significant impact in sport education when he initiated the

MBA Sport Management Programme at FAU.

FAU has never placed outside of the global top 30 since *SportBusiness* began its Postgraduate Rankings

FAU has again achieved a strong result in this year's rankings, placing 11th worldwide.

The high career placement rate of the MBA in Sport Management students was one of the distinguishing features and biggest achievements of the course.



Personal Tributes

At the event to celebrate Riordan's life, several of those who knew him paid personal tributes.

John Kelly, FAU president: "He wasn't going to let you fail unless you chose to fail and that's a really great attribute of an educator. He didn't like anyone to beat him at what he was doing and that's a great competitor and a person you really want on your team. When I arrived here and looked at what FAU did, the person who had the

highest ranking of anything we did was Jim Riordan with the Sports Management programme; so I said to him, Jim, 'How much better can you get?' And he said, 'How much better do you want?' "

Vegar Wiik, assistant dean, FAU Business, executive director, FAU executive education: "Describing him was describing passion for his work, passion for FAU Sports, passionate about the sports industry but most passionate about his students."

Marc Savain, assistant coordinator, FAU Sport Management MBA: "He used to always say it was never about him; it was all the students' hard work, 'I had nothing to do with it,' he'd say."

George Linley, FAU Sport Management, MBA Class of 2003; executive director, Palm Beach County Sports Commission: "He has been one of the most influential leaders in my life. A person I respect immensely and love dearly, who represents a university that I also love very dearly. Together this university and Dr. Riordan are responsible for my success and triumphs, both from a professional and personal perspective. This is true for so many other students. He was first my teacher, then he became one of the greatest mentors that I had; he also became a great friend and will always be part of my family."

Legacy

Riordan's legacy is surely best illustrated by the students that have come through the MBA Sport Management Programme at FAU and gone on to great success in the sports industry and by those that doubtlessly will follow the same path in the future.

Some of the organisations that have hired FAU sport management students include: the Miami Dolphins, Miami Heat, the Boston Bruins, the University of Miami Hurricanes, the LPGA and the Atlantic Coast Conference.

His legacy will be further cemented by the establishment

of the Dr. Jim Riordan Student Support Endowment by the FAU College of Business. The fund will support students in the MBA Sport Management programme.

Dan Cornely, Assistant Director of FAU's MBA in Sport Management Program will succeed Dr. Riordan and he had this to say about the program: "We are so fortunate to have a world-class foundation set

by Jim for our Sport Management Program here at FAU. We will continue his legacy of excellence daily by recruiting the right students, ensuring they have high-profile jobs in the sports industry, and developing an elite and innovative curriculum that prepares students for success in their careers."

We'll leave the last word to

Daniel Gropper, dean of FAU College of Business, who said at Riordan's celebration of life event: "Jim Riordan was one of those guys who was a pillar of the community, a pillar of the college. Jim is a legend not only here with our students, but he carried that reputation outside. He made a positive impact on so many people and his memory will not be forgotten." ○

Dr. Jim Riordan

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#ForeverAnOwl

Professor Ruta's Athlete Education interview series | Damjan Rudež

Welcome to the first of a new series of interviews carried out by Professor Dino Ruta, Sport Knowledge Center Leader at SDA Bocconi, on Athlete Education. Professor Ruta has worked with numerous high-profile sportspeople from around the world, helping to provide them with education and skills necessary to take forward into their second careers and prepare them for a life after sport.

In a series of exclusive interviews, Professor Ruta will speak to elite former athletes and coaches in order to explore how athletes approach their post-playing careers and look at how those lessons can be applied across the worlds of sport and education.

For this first edition, Professor Ruta spoke with former NBA and European basketball star Damjan Rudež. From 2004 to 2006, Rudež played for Oostende, winning the Belgian championship in his final year before returning to his home country of Croatia, where he played two seasons for Split. In 2014 he reached the NBA, signing a contract with the Indiana Pacers, where he led all rookies in three-point field goal percentage in his first season. In 2015 he moved to Minnesota Timberwolves, and in 2016 played his last season in the NBA with the Orlando Magic. Lastly, in 2017, he came back to Europe, where he played for Valencia, Monaco, Murcia and Donar Groningen until his retirement in 2021.

Professor Ruta: Damjan, when did you first realize you could become a professional athlete?

Damjan Rudež: The first realization came when I was 15 years old, during the Eurocamp organized in Treviso and other camps that gathered all the best young European basketball players. I had the chance to match up with other peers and realized I was really good. I didn't feel uncomfortable and I realized that in a couple of years I could have

become a professional.

The following year, I actually became a professional. I moved to the senior team of my local team and, even if I was 16 I played with grown athletes playing the first division in Croatia.

Who have been your role models during your professional career?

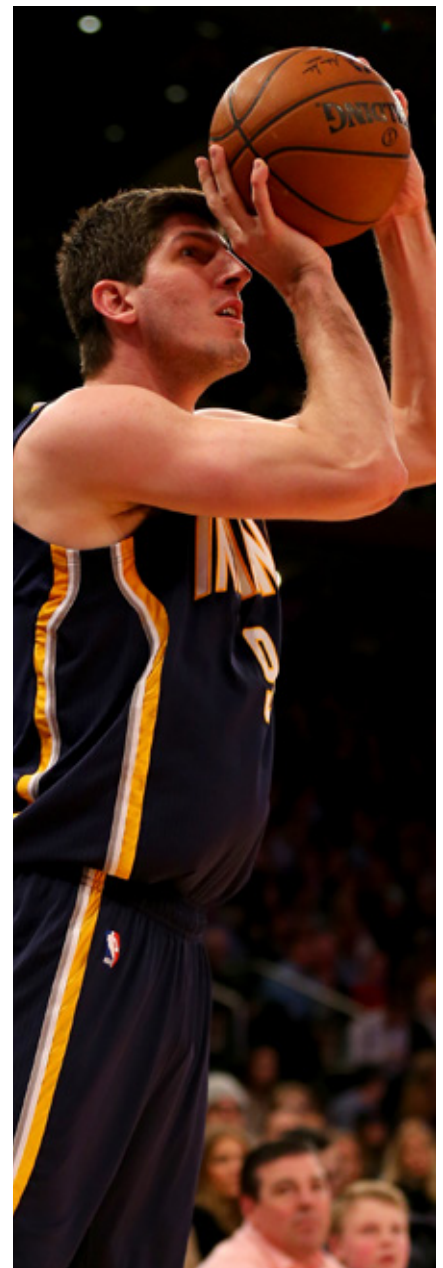
During the first part of my childhood my role models were Michael Jordan together with Toni Kukoč and Dražen Petrović, who both played for our national team. However, my first real idol was Dejan Bodiroga. Seeing a guy of my size with such an amazing skill set made me dream that one day I could play like him at professional level.

When I became professional, Kobe Bryant was for my generation what Jordan was for the previous one. Little by little, LeBron came to the scene, but he was always viewed as an extra-terrestrial. However, if I really had to pick one I was really connected to, I would say Bodiroga.

What was the most difficult moment in your career to date and how did you get over it?

The most difficult moment in my career was when I was traded from the Indiana Pacers to the Minnesota Timberwolves. It was a crushing moment because I had a good fit with the organization and I felt I found my place. All of a sudden, the team decided to trade me and it was the first time for me experiencing something like that. I felt unwanted and it took me a long time to recover and realize that even if I got traded, I still had my value.

To get over it I let time take its course and focused on what I could do. There is a saying in the NBA: control what you can control and what you can't control you have to make peace with it. That is the way I looked at it. I focused on the fact that I was still in the NBA, I still had the chance of being productive and part of the NBA ecosystem.



Damjan Rudež during his playing days in the NBA

When did you start planning for your post-athlete career, and thinking about what additional education or training you would need?

I started thinking about my post career during the last 4 years. I left the NBA at 32 and I started realizing it was time to start thinking about the next steps. Even if I had time, I didn't have the focus, the concentration, and the willingness to dive into an educational program.

I planned to play the last years to my maximum and enjoy every second of my basketball.

Maybe it was the wrong thing to do because I lost a little bit of time. I could have accomplished a little more on the educational side if I started earlier but I just didn't feel like I should start anything without being 100 per cent focused. Literally, the moment I decided to retire, I started actively planning my next educational steps and post career.

What professional activities have you nurtured during your career?

I never did any vocational training during my career but playing at the highest levels, in 14 different teams and seven different countries, helped me develop a cultural agility which represents a valuable asset.

Professional sport teaches you a lot about what you need to succeed both in business life and in sports. I think I developed a strong discipline, a feeling of responsibility towards my job, team-mates, group and organization. I learned a lot about patience, short-term and long-term planning when it comes to personal development. My sporting career taught me a lot about working with people for a common cause.

Tell us about the training you are undertaking or have already completed to move into the next phase of your career.

I just finished vocational training for being a professional FIBA basketball coach, because I want to be able to go down that path if I decide to. I am also enrolled in the kinesiology undergraduate program at the university of Zagreb and at the 1-to-1 Academy in Management and Entrepreneurship at SDA Bocconi.

I wanted to explore different playing fields, not just staying connected to one road, whether it is in coaching or on the business side. While I am waiting for the image of my future to crystalize, I want to give myself different options.

How do you think education for athletes needs to be different? Does it need to be more similar

to training and reflect the way athletes are used to preparing?

Absolutely, yes. Because there are certain patterns of how days are organized that athletes are more used to. Athletes are used to staying in the gym and having free time, so loose schedules might be useful. They are used to having one practice a day and that might be the only thing they have to do, so it would be helpful to go along with that schedule and be more flexible instead of doing highly condensed programs, putting them in uncomfortable positions where they wouldn't be able to learn. It all depends on personal learning capabilities. Some guys are used to gathering more information than others, but organizing the schedule would be wise.

What are your motivations and ambitions in this second part of your career?

My motivations and ambitions are to find something I am equally passionate about and to see if the qualities and traits that brought me to success in the first phase of my career can also be translated and copied in another playing field.

Do you have any role models who have made a similar transition from professional sport to working in business?

I would definitely say Luis Scola, who was one of my teammates at the Pacers. He is now doing a fantastic transition with the project he is doing in Varese [the Italian Lega Basket Serie A team where Scola became chief executive after retirement last year]. He is a guy I always liked playing with and a very good guy to talk to.

What were the strengths that distinguished you from the others during your athletic career, and how do they apply to the next stage?

When you reach a high level, everybody is there for a reason. So it is hard to mention what separates you from the others when everybody has their own strengths and weaknesses. However, I was very proud of how resilient I was and how

I managed to jump over obstacles. Also, my adjustability was very high and I think it really helped me to navigate through my basketball career. Looking at how athletes who climbed the ranks managed to take the next step, they based their success not on talent but on their hard work and resilient mindset.

Talking to a lot of people from the business world, I think resiliency and the ability to adjust are good qualities to have throughout all the career.

What advice would you give current professional athletes to build a long-term successful and sustainable career?

I would stress that without hard and extra work it is hard to succeed. It is the extra work that makes the difference. What is good for me is not necessarily good for everybody. Follow your instincts and listen to your heart because playing basketball at professional level requires 100 per cent dedication. If your focus is shifting to other things in terms of education it could be good because you are prepared in time and you could reach the end line being ready to cross over but it might also take away some concentration.

How important do you think it is that athletes go into administrative roles in sport, and that people in those positions have experience of playing the sport?

It is crucial, but we need a good balance of people with different perspectives. I don't think sport would be in a good place if it was only run by former athletes. More former athletes should hold important positions but there is a reason why businesspeople, especially experienced business people, have success. They know how to run things from a different perspective and two pairs of eyes are always better than one.

We should find the right balance between businesspeople and people who come from the centre of the ecosystem, bringing different skills and perspectives. ○

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The FIFA Master at the International Center for Sport Studies



FIFA Master class of 2020 visit FIFA HQ in Zurich



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The FIFA Master retains its position as the top course in Europe and the fourth placed in the world in this year's Postgraduate Rankings.

Operated by the International Center for Sport Studies (CIES) in Switzerland, the FIFA Master launched in 2000. During the year-long programme, a maximum cohort size of 32 candidates study across Europe at partner institutions De Montfort University in Leicester, SDA Bocconi School of Management in Milan and the University of Neuchatel in Switzerland.

The course's leaders place high value on interdisciplinary learning, centered on the fields of humanities, management and law. It aims to allow students to understand sport as an international phenomenon. The fact the course is spread across three separate universities is seen as key to achieving this.

During the course students must conduct original research and

write a dissertation which bridges the three disciplines of the course – humanities, management and law. As a group exercise, it also aims to replicate the complexity of working in a team of international individuals from different backgrounds. The below Academic Insight article by Heather O'Keeffe illustrates some of the work that underpins these dissertation projects.

Across the three institutions, the number of full-time faculty working on the course amounts to 24, with many guest lecturers and industry speakers invited to contribute to learning across the curriculum. This past year, the course's longest-serving member of staff, Professor Pierre Lanfranchi, retired after 22 years of service as a Scientific Committee member.

2022 was also significant in that those who completed the final months of the course virtually in 2020 were finally welcomed back

to Switzerland for a week of special events and a belated graduation after this had been delayed due to the pandemic.

The last year also saw the course's alumni association ratify a new Code of Conduct for its membership after a year-long project led by the FMA Good Governance and Ethics Task Force. The results from the survey shows the programme already scores close to 94 out of 100 for its Alumni Network.

Another area of strength suggested by this year's data is the average salary earned by graduates from the 2019 class, with the course placing third globally for this metric at \$94,181.

Moving forward, as per the UK government Quality Assurance Agency, the programme is entering its five-year external collaborative review, out of which a new phase of developments for the FIFA Master will evolve. ○

Thinking beyond the pitch to develop women's football



Heather O'Keeffe is a FIFA Master Alumna 2021 and current revenue strategy and planning trainee at FIFA. The following article shines a light on one of the group projects undertaken by O'Keeffe and some of her classmates from the 2021 FIFA Master edition.

After years of hard work, hustle, and pioneering spirit, women's football has broken into mainstream sports media. Seemingly every week a new spectatorship record is broken at a women's football match. However, this success comes with a big caveat: records are being broken and women's football is making headlines in Europe, North America and Australia. For being widely understood as the world's game, women's football is hardly close to being accepted, much less respected or celebrated, in many parts of the world.

One glaring indicator of this disparity in the acceptance of women's football around the globe is the number of matches played by senior women's national teams. During the last FIFA Women's World Cup cycle (2016–2019), the USA

played 85 matches, Germany played 56 matches, and Nigeria competed in 35 matches, while the Egyptian women's national team played just 12 matches, Honduras played two matches and Armenia did not play a single match. (*chart 1*)

How do we ensure women's football grows around the world? And young girls in Egypt, Honduras and Armenia can cheer on their women's national teams just like young girls in the USA, Germany and Nigeria?

This is exactly what my colleagues (Thomas Grimm, Lorenzo Mazzone, Diana Yonah) and I set out to understand through our thesis during our FIFA Masters studies. We wanted to understand the key reasons for the existing gap between national team strength in women's football through a holistic methodology. We tested four hypotheses against 44 key

performance indicators (KPIs) across five categories: economic, geographic, socio-cultural, political and sporting. By taking a broad, holistic approach, we analysed the implications of broader societal context on the scheduling of women's senior national matches. This research was conducted on a sample of 16 out of 211 FIFA member associations.

The results of the research paint a very clear picture of the state of women's football and the obstacles it faces in becoming mainstream in various cultures and countries around the world.

First, we found a close relationship between economic indicators (e.g. GDP/capita) and the number of matches scheduled for a women's national team. This can be intuitively understood: nations with disposable income can afford to direct public and private funding

to support elite athletes, whereas in financially insecure nations that funding is more urgently needed to provide basic services.

Geographic isolation also proved to be a statistical obstacle to the scheduling of women’s football matches. Countries with a lower International Air Connectivity score have limited access to global air transport, and thus it is more difficult and more expensive to organise travel for senior women’s football matches. For example, there are fewer flight options for the Bhutanese women’s national team to travel for tournaments and friendlies than the Italian women’s national team. **(chart 2)**

In an analysis of socio-cultural obstacles, two clear indicators emerged. Power Distance, a social indicator which quantifies the role and acceptance of hierarchy in a society, had a statistically significant relationship with the scheduling of women’s football matches. Our analysis found that in countries where vertical hierarchies are prevalent, such as Egypt, Honduras, Bhutan and Armenia, fewer matches were played than in countries that have a flatter social hierarchy such

as Australia or South Africa. **(chart 3)**

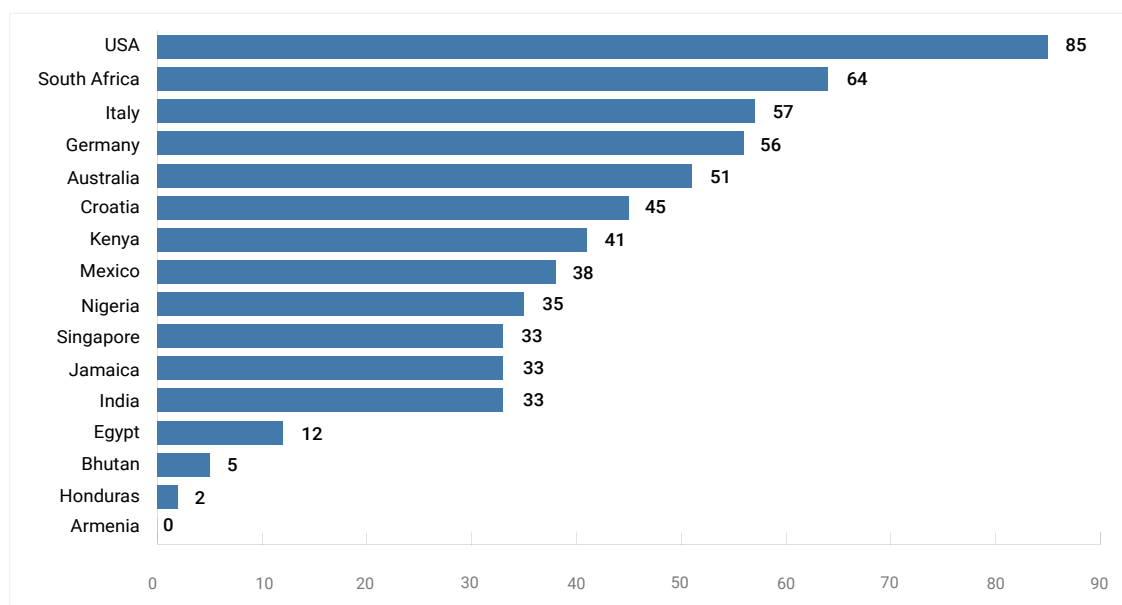
Another noteworthy socio-cultural indicator was the level of LGBT acceptance in a society. Countries and societies which had a higher overall level of LGBT acceptance had more active women’s national teams. This finding was supplemented through interviews with women’s football administrators who described interacting with parents who didn’t want their daughters to play football as they were fearful football would “turn their daughter gay”. This harmful stereotype can position football as a non-desirable activity for girls and young women. **(chart 4)**

This research clearly showed that a variety of factors impact the acceptance and promotion of women’s football. The most startling finding was that the indicators that were statistically significant obstacles for scheduling women’s football matches were not statistically significant for the scheduling of men’s national team matches in the same country. A low GDP/capita, limited ability to travel internationally, or a rigid hierarchy were all surmountable obstacles in the face of men’s national team

programmes. This finding suggests that a lack of willingness to invest in women’s football is perhaps the most significant hurdle to the scheduling of senior women’s national team matches (although a much harder obstacle to quantify). In the end, of the 16 countries analysed, women’s national teams played, on average, 30 per cent less than their male counterparts.

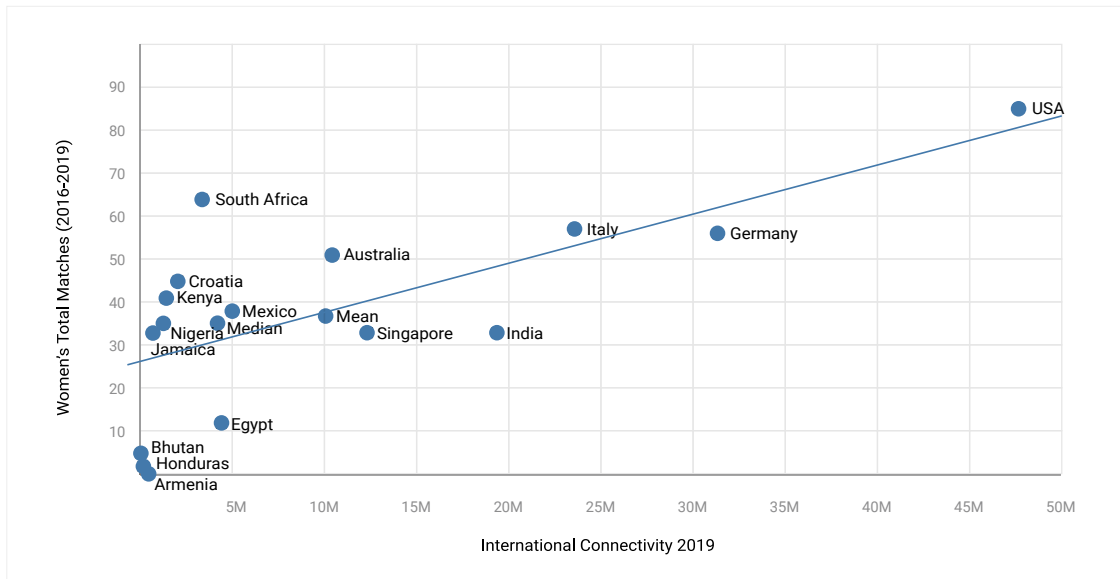
As women’s football continues to grow and develop, special attention must be paid to the broader societal and cultural contexts in which women’s national teams operate. Landmark solutions in one nation are not plug and play solutions in countries with their own unique cultural and financial contexts. Organisations and administrators driving the exceptional growth of women’s football should carry out similar holistic analysis of the societal context to properly identify solutions which will allow women’s football to truly prosper around the world. If we want girls and women to succeed on the pitch, it is imperative to consider the extenuating circumstances impacting women’s football development that extend far beyond the touchline. ○

(chart 1)

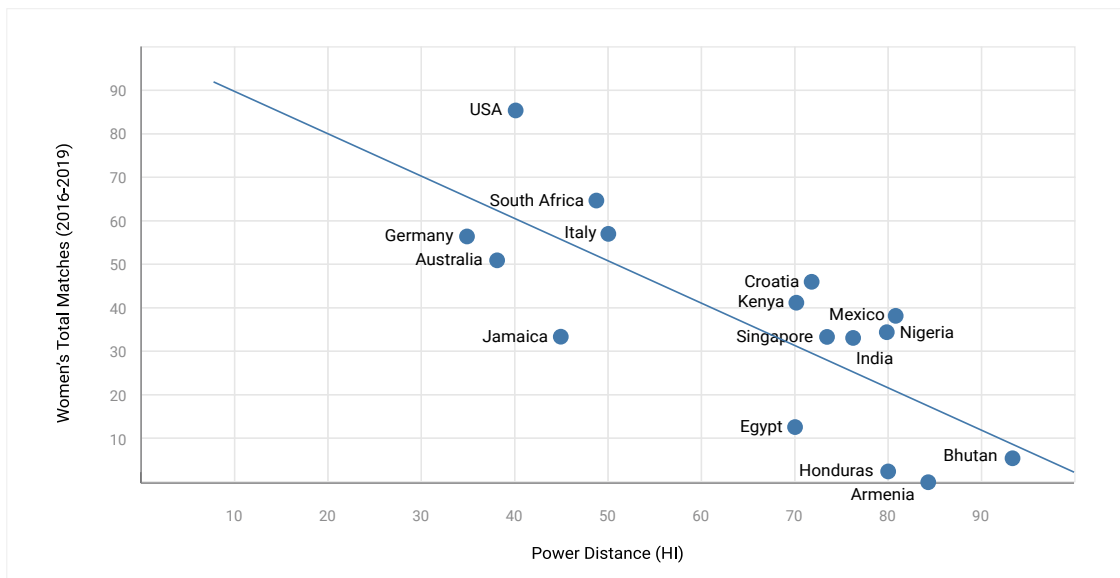


Total number of women’s football matches (2016 - 2019)

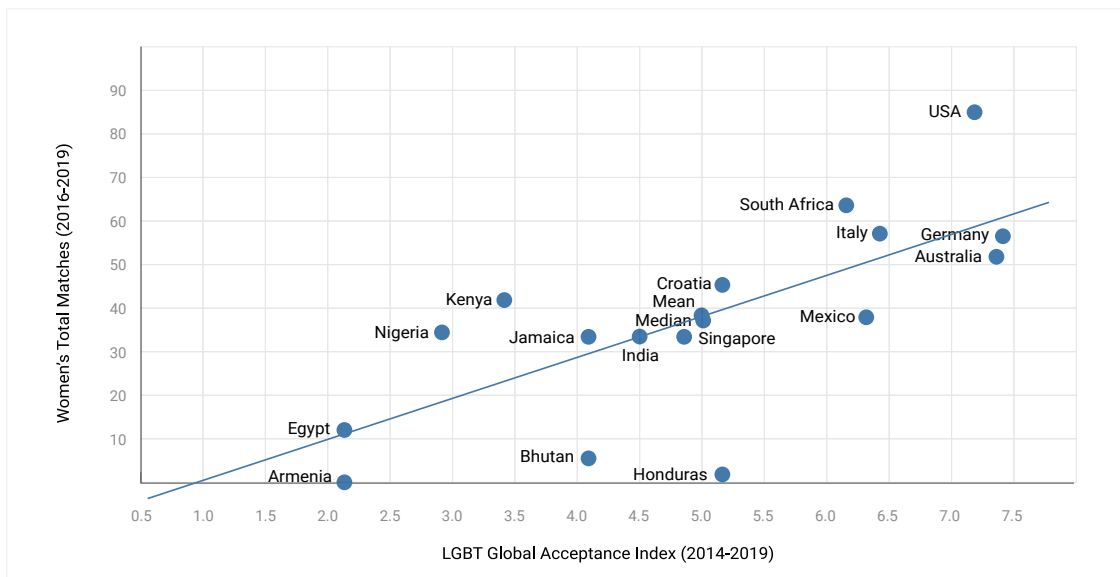
(chart 2)



(chart 3)



(chart 4)



Rhali Amrani, strategy and analysis director, Qatar 2022

Rhali Amrani completed the FIFA Master in 2012 and took up a role as part of the organising committee behind the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar in the first half of the following year. His current position within the tournament's organisational structure is strategy and analysis director, reporting directly to the CEO.

Why did you choose to take up a postgraduate degree in sports management?

Back in 2010 when I decided to take up the course, I was a corporate banker in Montreal. My life and career in Montreal was good but I really wanted to get into sport. I've always been a football fan, living and breathing football and I wanted to see how I could live my passion. My brother (also an Alumnus of the FIFA Master since 2004) was a senior administrator of the Confederation of African Football at the time, and I went with him to the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa and was privileged to attend a few matches and meet lots of people, so that experience was incredible and influenced my thinking at the time. I was also very lucky to have full support from my father and eldest brother, which was also a decisive factor.

What was decisive in selecting the FIFA Master programme as your chosen course?

When I took the decision to take the course it was 2010 and you didn't have many courses offering sports management as a Master's or even MBAs specialised in sport. It was always about getting into football rather than wider sport and the idea of the network the FIFA Master could provide influenced my choice. At any football association in the world there'd be someone you could be connected with and that network has helped me significantly within my career. It was also about giving myself credibility and differentiation within the industry and the FIFA Master was really the quality stamp I needed.

It's been one of the best professional decisions I have ever made. The year you do the Master is incredible. The course was so



diverse in terms of nationalities, it broadened my horizons from a cultural perspective and was an incredible experience. The international angle was always very attractive to me, it was valuable to interact with such a highly diverse class in terms of both culture and mindset.

How has your time on the course set up and influenced your career path?

The course was one of the main factors that allowed me to be where I am today because it provided me with the tools to hit the ground running in an environment driven by passion rather than profit. The humanities-focused element of the course allowed me to track back to the origin of sports and understand the humanity angle to it. The management module was an easier transition as I had the

banking experience, but the financial metrics don't take into account passion which plays such a huge role in sport. The law element really provided me and helped me build a systematic approach.

After the course, I worked on various small events then I had the opportunity to join the World Cup in early 2013. The reason I waited for months after finishing the course was that I wanted to take time for the right opportunity to be presented to me after such a drastic change in career. When I got the offer from Qatar, I also had a few offers from marketing agencies and other organisations but the Qatar 2022 opportunity stood out for various reasons. I did not know much of Qatar growing up, but their innovative bid prompted a lot of comments about the country and their ability to deliver the tournament. This increased even more my curiosity and attractiveness about the event, apart from the obvious fact that the tournament will be hosted in an Arab country for the first time. I had already the chance to attend the 2010 FIFA World Cup in Africa, I am convinced this tournament will also leave a long-lasting legacy. The opportunity to contribute to this historic event made it something more attractive to me. I also wanted to form my own opinion of Qatar and ten years later, I feel we're about to deliver the greatest ever FIFA World Cup.

Are there any experiences from your time on the course that stand out as being particularly memorable/influential?

There were many but what really blew my mind was to be able to wake up every morning and meet football club representatives to talk about their experience and collect

their advice. For instance, we went to Bolton Wanderers' stadium and visited the hotel connected to their stadium and the next day we spoke to both Man United and Man City. From a marketing standpoint, both teams were unbelievably strong and amongst the best teams in the world at the time. Another memorable moment was going to Italy and seeing the passion of people with low financial means going to the stadium to support their team every single week no matter the result on the pitch. For instance, I saw a game between AC Milan and Napoli in -2 degrees at the San Siro and everyone was chanting to the last minute despite a quite boring goalless draw.

Once more, what really stuck with me was that passion. I was making a very good living in banking but there was something missing. The FIFA Master and those experiences helped me see that it was that passion factor which was the missing ingredient, with football being so much more

than just kicking a ball around – it involves teamwork, discipline and respect. All those things stuck out for me, especially coming from the corporate financial world. I saw the power of sport in practice here in Qatar – sport is really used as a vehicle to improve and develop society.

Can you describe how what you learned on the course has been applied to your current role working as part of the organising team for Qatar 2022?

I attended the Monaco GP and Champions League final in 2012. This really stuck in my head because they were two massive events, with such large amounts of people attending, but there were so many opportunities to improve the fan experience and make the events more enjoyable as a whole. I have taken this with me into the current role because this is something we are really focusing on. We want every fan who comes to the 2022 World

Cup to have a positive experience and I was mindful of that time at the Grand Prix and Champions League final when approaching the fan experience challenge.

What would be your advice to new students starting at on the same course on the FIFA Master this year?

Enjoy every single second because you are about to have the best year of your life in terms of learning, experience, interacting with new cultures and new people and joining the FIFA Master family, which professionally is one of the best things that has happened to me. It taught me many things, including to treat everyone with respect and to not focus on outperforming others because there's enough space for everyone to succeed. Always have an open mind, taking into account differing opinions. Ultimately, when I think back about the Master I always have a smile on my face. ◯



Lusail National Stadium, a host venue for the Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup and the final.

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MasterSport International Masters in Strategic Management of Sports Organisations, Events and Facilities



L launched in 1996, the masterSport programme once again takes a place among the top three courses in Europe in the Postgraduate Rankings, rising one place to second after finishing third in 2021.

The course, which is jointly based at the University of San Marino and University of Parma, has featured in the European top 10 in every year since the launch of the rankings in 2011.

Its initial foundation was based on the desire of a group of senior Italian sports executives to establish a sports education platform that gave students an opportunity to learn directly from senior figures in the industry. The programme has since stayed true to its Italian roots, continuing to be taught in Italian

with the vast majority of its cohort coming from the country.

The head of masterSport is Marco Brunelli, who is also secretary general of the Italian Football Federation. Brunelli has held the role since the course's inception. There is a permanent faculty of around 10 professionals each year underpinning the course, made up of academics who have run regular courses in other universities and teach individual modules on the masterSport programme.

This is augmented by what the course's organisers see as its central characteristic, its ability to bring the real-world experience of the sports industry to its curriculum via guest speakers. The course hosts 80 to 90 professionals from the industry each year. The interaction with industry is

further solidified by a project which centres on a placement within an organisation, which concludes the course.

In terms of performance on the metrics that comprise this year's Postgraduate Rankings survey, the masterSport scores particularly well on Quality of Curriculum, scoring third globally with a total of 93.33. Moreover, it is placed first globally on the Career Advancement metric with a score of 93.06. The programme also excels on the Industry Network measure, with a score of 98.33.

Next year, 2023, a new chapter of masterSport's history will begin, with the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia joining as a partner university, with the University of San Marino also retaining its role within the course. ○

From glory to tears in eight months: so what can we say about Italian football?

Niccolò Donna, head of FIGC Research & Development and chief of the Italian Football Module (MasterSport - University of Parma & University of San Marino) discusses the profile of Italian Football and the strategic assets to focus on, in order to enhance the growth of calcio.

When Roberto Mancini's Italy won the European Championships at Wembley, overcoming England to claim their second continental title, it seemed as if Italian football had restated itself as a force in the world game. However, ecstasy was to turn to sadness only 256 days later. On 24 March 2022 in Palermo the Azzurri were defeated by North Macedonia in the 2022 World Cup playoffs, meaning that Italy would be missing out on the world's most prestigious football tournament for a second successive occasion.

In light of this rollercoaster of emotions, what conclusions can we draw from the current state of Italian football?

A strategic asset for the Italian economy

The FIGC-run module as part of the postgraduate MasterSport programme has presented a snapshot of Italian football, revealing it in numerical terms to be an important industrial sector and a strategic asset: there are 30 million fans (all of the top 50 most viewed programmes in the history of Italian television are football matches), 4.6 million participants, 1 million FIGC members (which if it were a municipality would be the third biggest in Italy by population, after Rome and Milan), a turnover of €5bn (12 per cent of world football's GDP) and 12 product sectors involved in the value activation chain, with an impact on GDP of €10.2bn and 112,000 jobs created. In the last 14 years, football's tax and social security contributions amounted to €15.5bn; for every euro invested by the Italian government in football, the country's economy has received a return of €18.3 in terms of tax and social security contributions.



While these numbers testify to the relevance of football, it is evident that the sport is still yet to fully realise its potential.

Loss of competitiveness

The sport's decline is nothing recent: the 1990s saw Italian teams reach seven consecutive Champions League finals (winning two of them) and the following decade (2001-10) saw five final appearances and three victories. However, between 2011 and 2022, there have only been two finals and three semi-finals, with no trophies, in comparison to Spain (19 semi-final appearances, seven victories), England (11 semi-final appearances, three victories) and Germany (10 semi-final appearances, two victories). The last time an Italian club won a European competition was back in 2010, when Inter won their fabled triple (Champions League, Serie A and Coppa Italia).

This is a reflection of the gradual weakening of Italian clubs' financial dimension, with Serie A sides less able to compete with their La Liga, Bundesliga and Premier League counterparts in the transfer market to sign top players. The change in fortunes is most greatly exemplified by the widening gap with the English

game: in the 1992-93 season, the Premier League's inaugural campaign, the competition had a turnover amounting to half of Serie A's (€390m compared with over €700m), while in 2020-21 Premier League clubs had a turnover of more than double the Italian top flight: €5.1bn compared with €2bn. Considering the media rights, the main source of revenues in both leagues by far, in 2021-22 Norwich City FC, last-placed team in Premier League, had more turnover than Inter, the champions in Italy; €116m for the English club, €84 million the Italian one.

Stadiums: a crucial issue

The difficulties which have caused this scenario are no secret. They stem from a short-term oriented managerial vision which penalises investment in "virtuous" assets, starting from sporting infrastructures: 187 stadiums were built across Europe between 2007 and 2021, totalling an investment of €21.7bn; however this only includes five in Italy (Juventus, Udinese, Frosinone, Albinoleffe and Südtirol). This equates to just 1 per cent of the total investments in Europe, meaning that the current scenario is far from ideal: the average age of a stadium is 60 years and only 7 per cent are privately owned.

However, the growth potential is notable, with 13 new stadium projects in the planning stage, including at important clubs such as AC Milan-Inter and Roma, with a total investment of €2.5bn. Should Italy be named as the host nation for Uefa Euro 2032 then such renovation would be furthered.

Starting again with young Italian talent

A crucial aspect concerns the exploitation of youth talent. Italian

youth national teams have shown their quality in recent years, reaching four U19 and U17 European Championships finals, finishing third and fourth in U20 World Cups and achieving their best historical ranking. On the other hand, the glass ceiling between youth and senior teams persists: in Serie A Italian U21 players account for just 1.5 per cent of the total playing time, compared to 35.9 per cent of Italian over-21s, 59.5 per cent of foreign over-21s and 3.1 per cent of foreign U21s. This unsustainable talent dispersion prompted the Italian football federation (FIGC) to implement some projects, such as the training path for footballers of national interest, with many others in the offing: a system of federal academies, the reorganisation of the youth sectors, the introduction of a rating system for youth teams and the improvement of FIGC scouting.

Financial sustainability

There are extremely worrying signs for the financial sustainability of professional football. In the 12 pre-Covid years, the sector was consistently in the red, amassing €4.1bn losses. It's a structural crisis connected to unsustainable player

wages, accelerated by the pandemic: in the two seasons which have been impacted by Covid-19 the aggregate loss was equal to €2.2bn (€878m in 2019-20 and over €1.3bn in 2020-21), while debts rose from €4.8bn in 2018-19 to almost €5.4bn in 2020-21. These figures were influenced by the stadium closures (23.1 million lost spectators and €513.3m less revenues from unsold tickets), costs associated with health protocols, but also the continuous increase in salaries and amortisations.

However, Italian football remains attractive to foreign investors, with 23 overseas owners, including the recent American acquisitions of Atalanta, Milan, Roma and Fiorentina. But the alarm bells are still ringing and must not go unheeded; the objective of the path to reform that the FIGC is developing attempts to bring stability to the sector, with the introduction of progressively more stringent indicators and controls, inspired by the new principles introduced internationally by UEFA.

The value of investing in human capital for the future of Italian football

This data testifies the value of

Italian football and its untapped potential. It underscores the need to take a new direction, including at a managerial level. There are numerous case studies which testify the added value of investing in Human Capital within sports organisations, and one of these concerns the FIGC itself and its business area. Since 2019, the FIGC has internalised the commercial functions previously delegated to an external advisor, investing in young, well-trained staff members with an international profile, coming in part from the masterSport. The roster has grown from seven to 25 people in the last four years, with extraordinary results: the revenues deriving from sponsorships in the four-year period 2019-22 grew by 22.9 per cent compared to 2015-18, up by €36 million.

The FIGC case testifies how investing in a new generation of young sports management figures trained through specific courses of excellence is a fundamental step and a new starting point for the future and the aim of building a footballing model which is able to increasingly combine on-the-pitch results, financial sustainability and social impact. ○



Niccolò Donna, head of research and development, FIGC

After graduating in Economics at the SAA in Turin, **Niccolò Donna** earned the International Master of Sport Management. He has worked at Juventus FC and Lega Serie A, before joining the Italian Football Association (FIGC) in 2011. He had a role of Bid Dossier Coordinator for the FIGC's bidding for UEFA EURO 2020 for the 2019 UEFA European Championship Under 21. As well as teaching on the MasterSport course, he currently holds the role of Head of Research and Development for the FIGC, and he is the author of the main publications aimed at representing the figures of Italian football, the main trends in progress and the strategic profile of FIGC, such as ReportCalcio, the Italian FA's Integrated Report and The Income Statement of Italian Football.

Why did you choose to take up a postgraduate qualification in sports management?

After my first professional experience at Juventus, I realised that I wanted to work in sport but I also thought I needed some specific training in top-level sports management before I could seriously start out on such a career path. The sports sector is rather peculiar: it works very differently to nearly all the other traditional economic and industrial sectors. I thought I needed to learn more about this fascinating but complicated world before I could potentially become a part of it.

What was decisive in selecting the programme in question as your chosen course?

MasterSport offered the best teaching programme and I was particularly interested in the lecturers, some of whom were also involved in the FIFA Master – another course I would have liked to attend. I was impressed by the overall organisation, which was clear from the initial application and selection process for the course, and most of all the high percentage of placements with leading Italian and international sports organisations. From the very first interview I had in San Marino, I knew it was the right choice. I found a common language with the other candidates and the professors of the selection committee, and this feeling of being in sync remained throughout the Master. I thoroughly enjoyed it from a professional and personal point of view.

Are there any experiences from your time on the course that

stand out as being particularly important to your development?

I think where MasterSport most aided my development was helping me work out which specific areas I was most interested in within the world of sport. Nowadays sports organisations have a vast range of strategic objectives and activities and the Master was key in helping me understand that I should go down the path of researching and studying economic, financial and strategic profiles within the sector. I loved the topics in the lessons on sport's industrial profile. That is what has enabled me to combine one of my great passions with my work – a privilege many people do not enjoy. That was the greatest gift the MasterSport gave me.

How often do you use what you learnt on the course in your work at the Italian Football Association? Can you provide some examples?

The knowledge and skills I learnt during the lessons on the football industry, on business models and balance-sheet analysis enabled me to later take up a position at the FIGC Study Centre and produce official FIGC publications like ReportCalcio (which for the last 12 years has analysed the state of Italian football, partially through comparisons on the international stage). More generally, MasterSport was crucial for my personal and professional development. It helped me build up a network of contacts with companies and people working in the sector which is still very useful to this day.

What made you decide to become

a junior professor on the course and contribute to its teaching?

I began teaching almost immediately after I finished my MasterSport, giving lessons on the business models of Europe's top five football leagues, based on my end-of-course dissertation. In the years that followed, my work at the FIGC Study Centre enabled me to expand the topics I covered in lessons. More recently I've had the honour of setting up a "Calcio" Module as part of the MasterSport curriculum which is the result of a strategic partnership with FIGC. It means there's more in-depth analysis of the different areas within FIGC and students get to see the bigger picture: analysis of the international landscape in the value creation processes of football organisations, and a specific case history of the biggest Italian Sports Federation.

What would be your advice to new students starting on the same course this year?

Make the most of this opportunity to take part in a fantastic learning experience, both in terms of the lessons themselves and the quality of life in the cities hosting the courses. Above all, make sure you use the experience to lay the foundations for your own career in the world of sport. My personal advice would be to try to interact with the professors as much as possible during lessons. It's often the case that when a student asks a question or makes an observation and shows an aptitude for critical analysis, the professor bears it in mind in their assessment of the student, which can help in planning the placement process. ○

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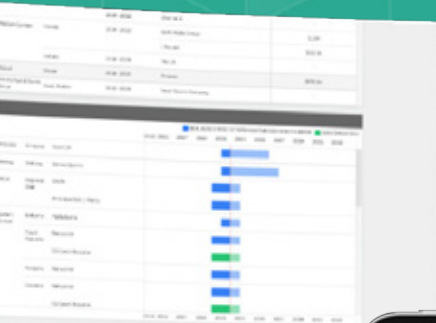
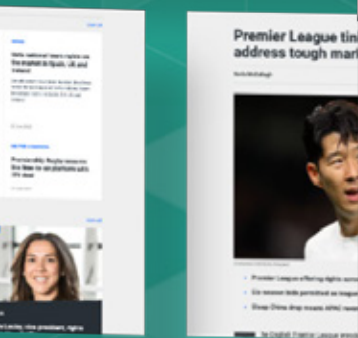


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European Sport Business School–Master in International Sports Management



The European Sport Business School (ESBS) Master in International Sports Management, run in partnership with Spanish football club Valencia CF, enters the European top three for the first time since 2019.

Since 2021, ESBS has partnered with and become part of the ecosystem of Amos Sport Business School, one of the largest sport management training groups in Europe.

The Master in International Sports Management was initially launched in 2009, with Valencia CF involved from its inception. The link to the

LaLiga club is leveraged within the course, with classes taking place at the Mestalla stadium and the club's sporting complex.

As well as in-person teaching, the course is offered both online and in hybrid format, while it is also available to be studied in both English and Spanish.

The lecturers who teach on the course are sports industry professionals with a minimum of 10 years' experience. Employability is a significant focus of the structure of the programme. This emphasis is reflected in the results of the Postgraduate Rankings survey, with

the course among the top scorers on the current employment metric, achieving 95.83.

There is also an emphasis placed on adapting the curriculum to recent trends in the sports industry, with topics such as blockchains in sport recently introduced to the programme. This is perhaps influential in the course placing fourth worldwide on the skills applicability metric, with a score of 87.5.

In 2022, ESBS announced it will take its total of campuses in Spain to two by opening an additional hub in Madrid. ○

The role of women in the sports industry

Carmen Ruano is the academic director of the ESBS Master in International Sports Management, as well as being a lecturer on the course for a module entitled 'The Role of Women in the Sports Industry'. Ruano has a PHD in Sports Science and was previously a lecturer at Universidad Miguel Hernández and Universidad de Alicante.

According to the World Bank, 49.6 per cent of the world's population are women.

If we used a mathematical or statistical vision, we could think that the proportion of women who practise sports, or who are dedicated to the world of sport business, could move in similar numbers.

But that is too far away from reality.

Participation of Women in Sport 1967. It was the year in which the first woman participated in a marathon. And not because women were able to do it, but because an individual woman managed to sneak around the ban that the race management of the Boston Marathon imposed.

Fortunately, the vision of women's participation in sport, especially in the Western market, and increasingly around the world, is changing. Sports practice is a growing trend, with average growth rates in sports practice of between six and 10 per cent in the last five years. Now, it's totally normal to see women participating in sports competitions or practising physical activities in their leisure time.

Despite that, there are big differences still. According to Eurostat, the rate of sports activity (at least 150 minutes a week) is 35.7 per cent among men and 26.2 per cent among women. However, there are large differences between countries: only five EU countries have a higher percentage of active women than men in their population. We can find one "exception": the world of esports, where this gap seems to be reduced. According to Statista, in 2021, 46 per cent of the players in the USA were women. In Asia, similar numbers are shown.



How could we explain that? Maybe because it's a newer market, that is not affected by a historical stigma? Maybe.

Women and Sports Science

Another trending question is related to sports science: Do women perform the same as men? Should women and men train in the same way? Maybe not, or at least not in all cases. Despite the increase in the number of sportswomen at all levels, scientific research is mostly carried out with a male sample and has not yet considered the influence of female biological features (such as the menstrual cycle) and their possible influence on performance. Fortunately, more articles are emerging around this topic and there is a growing interest in this trend.

Women and Sports: Trending

Topic Nowadays?

"Women in sports" is a leading topic in today's society. Here are some facts:

In 2021, according to Forbes, the 10 best paid women athletes earned a total of \$166.6 million, an increase of 20 per cent on the previous year.

According to a Nielsen Report in 2022, 61 per cent of US sport fans name "gender equality" among the causes that make them passionate about sports. That can be linked to the fight of the US women's national soccer team players to close the salary gap, a story that was covered by media all around the world.

The media coverage of events also holds a key role. A new TV deal in the UK in 2021 made it easier to watch the women's football Super League and led to a 542 per cent increase in TV viewers. In the US, an increase in the coverage of the NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament doubled the audience in 2021 compared to 2019.

Women in Sport Business

These numbers were just a small sample of the growth and potential that women's sport has within the sport business. Despite this, how many women do you know in "positions of responsibility" in the sports industry?

Maybe the first answer that comes to our mind has been something like: only a few.

Cynthia Marshall, Kim Ng, Nicole Lynn, Laura Martínez or Elaia Gangoiti. If we read those names, maybe, they don't sound very familiar. However, they are, respectively: CEO of Dallas Mavericks, General Manager of Miami Marlins, the first female to represent an NFL Agency and the presidents of Athletic de Bilbao CF in Spain.

Women hold positions of responsibility in between 10 and 20

per cent of the total positions in the sports industry field, depending on the country. Although in the last 10 years, the figure has tripled.

Why can't we find more women in those top positions in sport business?

There is no single answer to this question and it is surely the result of a combination of different factors: social stigma, lack of motivation, lack of support, lack of references, and many other "lacks".

Now comes the most important question, how can we change that?

Again, the answer is not simple, but one of the most powerful means can be education. Through education, we have the power to change the world, and thus the role of women in the sports society.

Only 13 per cent of the students in sports business postgraduate programmes are female. However, their employability rate is the same or even higher than males.

This could be explained with the change of mindset of

some organisations, who are now prioritising competences, technological skills and attitude of people above gender. Moreover, they're giving priority in hiring more women, in order to close the gender gap in their employees.

We can find business schools such as ESBS and AMOS, where we work to encourage women to fight to reach their goals in the sports business. Roland Garros, Major League Soccer, Redbull, Valencia CF, JC Ferrero Equelite Sport Academy or FIBA, among others, are some of the organisations where our female graduates are currently working, occupying positions of responsibility.

In addition, we lead by example, with a staff of 64 per cent women in the Spanish Campuses. Every year the proportion of women on our list of lecturers increases. They contribute with their knowledge to the teaching of undergraduate and master's students, thus fighting for gender equity in the sector.

The Future of Women in the Sports Industry

It's a fact that women have still a lot to say within the sports world. The rise in involvement is huge, but so is the gap that we can find in comparison to men. There are lots of things to do yet, and education is the key.

Concerned professionals in sports organisations, clubs and media, are essential to lead the change and close the gender gap, but we shouldn't forget where we come from. It's really important to raise children with a mindset where careers are not associated with gender, but with the passion that moves people.

Now, it's time for some personal reflection. What role do you think women play in sport business? Do you think it should change? And the most important one: what are you going to do, from your own position, to realise that change? Once you have some answers to those questions, it's time to act. ○



Graduates of the ESBS Master in International Sports Management celebrate at Valencia's Mestalla stadium

Simon Hernandez Oramas, commercial analyst, Kosmos Tennis

Simon Hernandez Oramas completed his Master's Degree in International Sports Management at the European Sport Business School in 2019. He has since worked at Club de Tennis Valencia, Goiko Games and took up a position as commercial analyst at Kosmos Tennis in May 2022.

Why did you choose to take up a postgraduate qualification in sports management?

Well, I took this decision because sports always has been a fundamental pillar for my journey. Since day one, my parents wanted sports to play an important role in my life, and that happened. In 2012 I had the opportunity to move to the US because of a soccer scholarship and earn my undergrad degree. After I finished my last university soccer season, I didn't really know what to do with my life. I was asking myself, should I focus my career in marketing? Finance? What industry should I focus on? Should I stay in NYC? Should I go back to Venezuela? Many questions came to my mind, and the reality was that I didn't really know what to do with my professional career.

One day, a college friend invited me to watch Real Madrid's training at the Red Bull Arena in Harrison, NJ. The first moment I got the chance to see the stadium, I knew I wanted to work there. A few months later, I graduated and started looking for jobs in sports or anything related to marketing – I sent hundreds of emails with no replies. One day, I checked on [teamworkonline.com](https://www.teamworkonline.com), an opening for the New York Red Bulls position; I applied and got my first real job in the sports industry and since day one at the job I knew I wanted to do a postgraduate in sports management.

What was decisive in selecting the ESBS programme as the best option for you?

I considered many things, for example, professors, programme, city/country, job opportunities, alumni, ranking, etc. ESBS was the perfect fit for what I was looking for, and I believe this decision depends



a lot on each individual situation. However, in my personal experience, I also thought that ESBS partnering with Fundación Valencia CF was going to give me an important insight into how a top LaLiga club was operating.

Are there any experiences from your time on the course that were particularly influential in your development?

My internship with Club de Tennis Valencia was an experience from my time at ESBS that stood out. This internship specifically introduced me to the world of tennis. In this case, I was able to

organise a professional women's ITF tournament, which is now a WTA. Having the experience on my CV is key to working for Kosmos Tennis now.

How often do you utilise what you learnt on the course within your work at Kosmos tennis? Can you provide some examples?

Every day, we are constantly looking for new partners for the Davis Cup and new innovative ideas/assets we could offer them, and this is just a small part of many KPIs (key performance indicators) we have.

What would be your advice to new students starting on the same course this year?

Many people have a passion for this industry, and sometimes we forget to be humble and open-minded because we are so focused on finding a specific job in an organisation, and that mistake closes our possibilities in our personal and professional life. Be ready to learn from everyone, especially your professors and future classmates, and don't miss any opportunity you get. ○



Action from the 2022 Davis Cup match between Spain and Korea Republic in Valencia.



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Engaging Esports



SportBusiness speaks to **Jason Chung**, the man helping to craft New York University's approach to esports education, and **Rick Burton**, David B. Falk Professor of Sport Management at Syracuse University, about the challenges universities and academics face in teaching esports – and some of the practices they recommend to deal with them. We also hear from **Matteo Masini** of masterSport to hear about how the institute responded to industry interest to create an esports-focused masters.

There's no truly comprehensive and up-to-date textbook and even if there was it's going to be obsolete in five minutes." These are the words of Jason Chung, who set up the Business of Esports course, offered as part of New York University's (NYU) MS in Sports Business, before creating the world's first fully online esports business Masters degree programme at the University of New Haven. He has now returned to NYU and taken on his current position as director of the university's Esports and Gaming Initiative.

His thoughts speak to one of the several challenges and questions educational institutions are facing when it comes to teaching esports management – aligning teaching to trends in a highly dynamic and burgeoning space.

There's no denying the eye-catching potential of esports. The latest research by SkyQuest Technology indicates that the global esports market was valued at \$1.08bn (€1.08bn) in 2021 and is



Jason Chung, director, Esports and Gaming Initiative, New York University.

expected to reach a value of \$2.8bn USD by 2028, at a compound annual growth rate of 14.5 per cent over the forecast period (2022–2028).

Around the globe, educational institutions are grappling with how to harness this potential juggernaut and provide meaningful options for students wishing to focus their studies on this space. Research published in September 2021 in the International Journal of Esports showed there to be 10 bespoke esports/esports management

masters in operation at the time. Many more institutions offer modules or classes focused on the subject.

Chung is one of those involved in shaping the future of the approach at NYU. His view on how to ensure teaching is aligned to the most relevant trends in esports is centred on people and industry engagement.

Chung says: "Ensuring relevancy comes down to the people you have in the programme and the relationships you have. I've focused a lot of capital and time on bringing the right people in to teach and to bringing in real-world examples and consulting projects.

"It's also about understanding the importance of not fetishising the subject matter, if an esports course has that business element then students still need to understand business principles, be able to present, work with clients and so on. So it's about understanding and sourcing the right people who can focus on the most relevant topic areas and then having the confidence to execute on that

education by leveraging existing resources and knowledge bases as well.”

When crafting the Online Masters at the University of New Haven, Chung struck multiple partnerships with industry organisations to bolster the curriculum with real-world examples. He says: “I think any time you’re teaching applied business, having real-world and project-based learning is critical. Don’t just think that of this as an esports and gaming thing, it is a general higher education thing.

“In esports and gaming, experiential learning is even more critical, because what else will we teach? We are just starting to get publicly traded esports organisations, we are just starting to get financials, so if I’m going to create an esports finance class, what am I relying on? Where are the materials? So ultimately you do need that industry engagement, just to get the content that you need to teach in a meaningful way.”

Rick Burton, David B. Falk Professor of Sport Management at Syracuse University and the former Commissioner of Australia’s National Basketball League, arrives at the subject of esports education from a slightly different angle, as someone who has been involved in the traditional sports industry for decades. However, referring to the esports module he currently teaches, he agrees with Chung’s sentiments.

Burton says: “The biggest part is incorporating practitioners and organisations into the class and having them provide assignments that relate to their organisation’s current initiatives. I’ve worked with the likes of ESL and Copa90 for this purpose and therefore we rely less on me being a sole lecturer and look to involve industry professionals to ensure the class is at the cutting edge of the space.”

People supply presents challenge

While a strong industry network can be crucial for the success of esports education, there is a challenge in terms of the supply of academics suited to teach the subject at the higher education level. The demographics of the teaching base dictate that most

experienced academics in the sports management space haven’t grown up with esports and gaming at the forefront of their experience and have instead more often been entrenched in the traditional sports industry via their education and professional experience.

There is also an issue around attracting people to teaching positions in the space. Chung says: “There are not a lot of people in general qualified to teach it and certainly not a lot of professionals who are willing to take a pay cut to teach it depending on where a programme sits within an institution’s organisational structure. The question around attracting the right people to teach often comes secondary for a lot of places to the economic potential of establishing a programme. My advice would be that attracting the right people is the entire economic element. You can have great initial demographics and enrolment but if you don’t have the personnel and resources to exploit that or expand on that you’re barking up the wrong tree.”

With supply perhaps not meeting demand in terms of esports-focused academics, there is the question of how those more versed in traditional sports can excel in teaching the subject. For Burton, part of the answer to achieving this is found in increasing the involvement of students in the actual teaching process. He says: “Teaching esports has to be more Socratic than with traditional sports. I’ve found students that already had expertise in the area and were more informed than I was, so I’ve asked them to help teach and it’s exciting.”

“For a lot of faculty, that might be a scary concept. To give up the power and authority, but there’s an empowerment to it. If I have a student with prior knowledge teaching about League of Legends I can then put something about the subject on a test. All of sudden, the information imparted by the students’ peer was something I could test on and it helps my students pay that much more attention, whereas if I tried to talk about it off the cuff I just wouldn’t have that latent knowledge and

therefore true authority on the subject.”

On the subject of traditional sport management professors teaching esports, Chung adds: “I think the key here is authenticity and honesty. That’s a tentpole of just all interaction with Gen Z audiences.

“Authenticity really matters here. If you go in saying, ‘I’m the cock of the walk and I know everything about esports after reading a textbook,’ they’re going to figure you out right away but if you go in and you say, ‘I don’t really watch esports for fun, but I understand and am researching the business fundamentals of the industry, how it interacts with other stakeholders, and I can teach you on that front,’ that is fine. If you also say, ‘I am exploring the space and I am doing it with you,’ that is also valuable.”

The second-highest ranked institution in Europe in the 2022 Postgraduate Rankings, masterSport is one of the organisations that has taken the step of launching a degree in eSports management at the Postgraduate level.

In response to interest from its industry partners, including some of Italy’s biggest football clubs, the Italian Football Federation and the Italian Olympic Committee, the masterSport staff began studying the esports space and launched its masterSport, the first master’s degree in the esports market within Italy, in 2018. Like the original masterSport course, the degree was designed and built with the input of professionals and experts from the industry.

Mateo Masini, masterSport coordinator, said: “At the moment, specializing in a sector like esports management is a great opportunity because the esports sector is booming, especially in Italy, having started late compared to the UK and northern Europe, and has a continuous search for new professional figures. Studying the sector, getting to know the dynamics that animate it, getting to know the universe that revolves around the global phenomenon, getting into the details of the Italian system and being able to do it with constant confrontation with professionals makes the master Esports a unique

experience on the national scene and offers the opportunity for enthusiasts to approach the job market with knowledge and tools.

“The response from the students was, and still is, incredible. Since its creation in 2018 we have already produced 5 editions and all have sold out thanks to partnerships with industry players who have given us their support in the implementation of the initiative and in the story of the project.”

Bespoke approach to gain popularity?

Although there are notable exceptions such as masterSport, it is noteworthy that despite the esports market already accelerating past the \$1bn mark, there are still a limited number of degrees currently available for students at the postgraduate level.

Is this because more traditional sports management degrees that offer an esports module are satisfying student interest? And is this model sufficient in terms of preparing the next generation of esports commercial leaders to cope with the market’s predicted growth?

Chung said: “There’s no problem with sports management degrees offering components on esports and obviously no problem with the

bespoke model; it really comes down to how the subject matter is treated. I think there are some places that will take a sport management degree, slap an e in front of it and recycle 90 per cent of the same courses to claim a new degree programme. That is not something I ascribe to, but there is a lot of overlap where it makes sense to have economies of scale, where it makes sense for students to learn about the wider sports industry. At the same time you must understand it is a different industry as well.

“You have to understand the culture, the market dynamics, the stakeholders within it and achieving that within the programme properly is the most important thing.”

Looking to the future, Burton and Chung agree that a greater volume of bespoke esports degrees is inevitable, with several institutions featured in the 2022 Postgraduate Rankings actively building a greater presence with regards to esports. NYU’s re-hiring of Chung is evidence of its interest in developing its offerings to the market, with this remit primarily focused on helping cultivate and develop the university’s strategy in regards to its offering in the esports space.

Meanwhile, global third-placed Vinik Sport and Entertainment

Management programme has hosted an annual esports summit for the last three years at USF, with programme director Michelle Harrolle writing about the approach of the programme to esports education in the 2021 Postgraduate Rankings.

Chung summarised: “It’s inevitable we’ll see more and more bespoke esports degrees at the postgraduate level. Colleagues and friends within the industry have been charting this in North America, but also in the UK and globally. As responsible organisations, institutions will go where enrolment is and tuition dollars are.

“It’s key, though, to understand that it’s not a field of dreams situation, where if you build it they will come. You need to put money and weight behind it and a lot of unis are finding that out the hard way. The interest is there, we’re still early in the progression but we do anticipate massive growth, just as sport and entertainment programmes have been growing over the past years. But organisations have to understand where they are in the geographic market, mindset market and whether you are able to place students in industry and make connections. If you can’t do that, it’s hard to justify a programme.” ○



Speakers at the 2019 USF Esports Summit

How improving infrastructure procurement frameworks can enhance the integrity of international sport events and reduce corruption risks

Loughborough University's **Dr Alex Thurston**, part of an international team of researchers (led by Sue Arrowsmith QC (Hon), Prof Emerita, University of Nottingham and recent expert advisor to the International Partnership against Corruption in Sport (IPACS)) who worked on a mapping project in conjunction with the OECD, writes about how adhering to internationally accepted procurement integrity frameworks and standards helps sport practitioners mitigate integrity risks and, consequently, potential corruption risks inherently linked to international sport event procurement (ISEP).

Full research team

[University of Nottingham School of Law](#)

Sue Arrowsmith (lead)
Joshua Idoko
Steve Kay
Jorge Faria Lopes
Carlos Sebastian Barreto Cifuentes
Ke Ren
Ashraf-Ul-Bari Nobel
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Gábor Soós

[Loughborough University School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences](#)

Dr Alex Thurston

The first thing to say when it comes to international sport event procurement," Thurston explains, "is that, surprisingly, there is little research on it. Yet, understanding international sport event procurement (ISEP) is useful for many reasons."

Notably, while the procurement activities and objectives largely align with public sector procurement in broad terms, the 'one off' nature of international sport events often means host governments have little-to-no organizational memory to optimally manage them. It is therefore important to facilitate this memory wherever possible. Similarly, the 'once in a lifetime' context can deter potential event bidders that deem the risks involved in meeting unmovable deadlines and/or the pressures that come from international visibility, too high. This can lead to smaller pools of procurement bids submitted and not necessarily from the best suitors. Subsequently, bids with the lowest projected costs are invariably chosen over bids that offer the best value for



public finances.

Yet, in the end, costs often spiral and event budgets are blown. As such, a general understanding of how potential ISEP bidders balance risks and rewards, and how 'value' is considered in bids has practical worth for many sport organizations. In addition, complex institutional relationships involving local organizing event committees, international federations, and national and regional governments (among others), can negatively

impact procurement procedures.

Therefore, knowing where the sources of procurement inefficiencies lie can help deliver international sport events on time and on budget.

However, as Thurston reveals, "when the multi-faceted and nuanced factors involved in ISEP are considered together, the integrity of internationally accepted procurement practices can be compromised. Indeed, political involvement itself can result in entrenched corruption, making it difficult to address ISEP

integrity issues through standard transparency mechanisms used across the world.”

To this end, an infrastructure procurement mapping study (e.g., of stadiums and swimming pools, athlete accommodation, event-related transport facilities) of 14 international sport events+ over a 10-year period highlights where possible integrity procurement issues lie, and how these risks could be mitigated.

The researchers’ methodology utilized both regulatory frameworks and existing internationally accepted models and standards around procurement integrity, such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD’s) [“Recommendation of the Council on Public Procurement”](#), all of which are widely accepted as playing major roles in limiting procurement integrity risks.

Understandably, the 14 international sport event studies also relied on publicly available (and generally online) documentation, but the availability of such documentation varied greatly across procurements. Thurston explains, “there was substantial information on procurement award procedures. This may have been because supplier audiences needed greater visibility of procurement decisions or simply that more attention is generically given to award procedures.

Conversely, information linked to risk management, and internal controls and audits, was sparse or non-existent. However, it’s important to emphasize that while availability of information can be seen as a way to mitigate integrity risks, this doesn’t mean such ISEP practices were necessarily corrupt. Instead, it may have been that these documents were deemed unnecessary for public access, that they were not stored electronically, or that they no longer exist, which is especially likely if bespoke agencies are wound up after international sport events are concluded. However, the lack of documentation does limit our ability to interrogate potential issues at a future point in time.”

That said, there were plenty

of examples of non-standard procurement practices found across events and, pertinently, the specific nuances characterizing international sport events were often used to legitimize actors’ circumventions of accepted procurement protocols. For instance, New Delhi’s ISEP involved many ‘urgent’ non-competitive procurement awards justified by the immovable event deadline, yet the origins of this ‘urgency’ most likely arose from poor event planning in the first instance. The Fina World Aquatics Championships (Budapest) also claimed ‘urgency’ for circumventing procurement rules, and even created a special law exempting much ISEP from its usual procurement laws. Indeed, six major sport-specific infrastructure contracts were awarded through a ‘restricted invitation’ approach for the Fina World Championships, which the researchers suggest presents a clear red flag for integrity risks.

International Partnership against Corruption in Sport (IPACS) Recommendations

The research team’s work facilitated the [International Partnership against Corruption in Sport \(IPACS\)](#) in making numerous recommendations for mitigating risks around international sport event procurement, including:

- International federations, governments, implementing agencies, and oversight bodies, agreeing on strategies for ensuring procurement information is publicly available. This includes ensuring procurement data – from pre-tender to post-event – is available in a standard, consistent, error-free manner and in a searchable and otherwise usable form;
- Having clear internal and external reporting lines, including clear and communicated procedures for reporting integrity suspicions, and training to help stakeholders identify potential bid rigging;

- A more strategic, proactive approach to collecting information on international sport event procurement (ISEP) by all stakeholders, including before, during, and after sport events are held;
- Fostering, and systematically applying, “open public tender” competition (e.g., public solicitation of offers and under which all interested suppliers have a right to be considered in accordance with objective criteria) in the procurement process, and as early as possible;
- Ensuring procurement bids are also valued on non-price/cost criteria (as well as a cost basis) to advance a better price/quality mix in procurement decisions;
- Ensuring adequate oversight when procurement contracts are executed so that the benefits of tendering are not undermined. This includes having internationally-accepted governance mechanisms for contract amendments, and clear processes for submitting and assessing amendment claims.

While not an exhaustive list, IPACS’ recommendations are expected to go a long way to help identify red flags for international sport event procurement integrity risks, and ultimately reduce the likelihood of ISEP corruption.

Even so, lead researcher, Sue Arrowsmith, also believes [open contracting](#), where all data and documents are disclosed at all stages of the contracting process, is a missed, forward-looking, opportunity, which would further mitigate procurement integrity risks. Thurston concludes, “Sue’s thoughts just go to show we’re at the beginning of this journey so while we hope this *SportBusiness* piece provides food for thought for international sport event procurement stakeholders, we also know there is still so much work to do in this space.” ○

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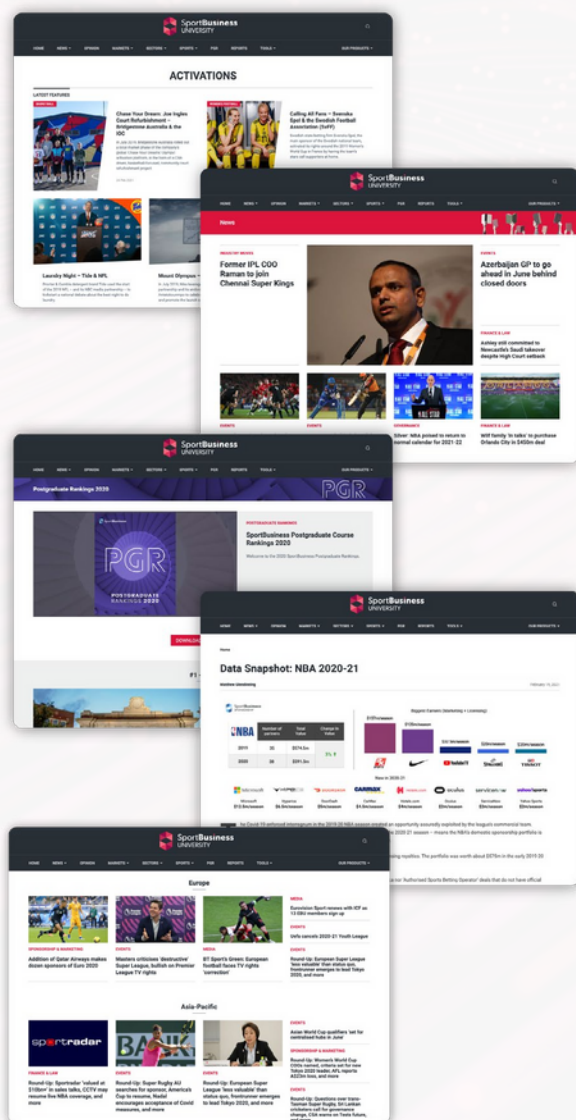
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Network Connection: How universities are supporting students in developing meaningful industry and alumni relationships



For students, the importance of networking and relationship building while studying for a postgraduate degree can be critical to their prospects beyond graduation. To paraphrase one course leader's recent summation, in an industry such as sport which is relatively small and highly inter-connected, connections can be key to success and those who haven't actively built a network can struggle as a result.

The benefits of networking may seem obvious, but it is more complex than just a case of sending out a few requests on LinkedIn accompanied by generic introductory greetings. Guiding students towards meaningful network building is an aspect that many institutions have invested significant time and resource in, and this is reflected in the scores some have achieved in the networking-related metrics within the Postgraduate Rankings survey. It is perhaps reflective of the importance of these measures that the top courses globally have generally excelled in these areas.

Programmes were scored on aspects such as Industry Network, Alumni Network and related measures such as Professional Mentorship/Advocacy. *SportBusiness* spoke to some of the organisations

that scored best on these metrics to understand how they met students' needs in these areas.

The highest overall scorer on the Industry Network measure was the University of South Florida's Vinik Sport & Entertainment Management Programme. In terms of networking, the importance of this is instilled in students from the start of the programme, with guidance on the subject beginning with orientation. Course professor Dr Janelle Wells, told *SportBusiness*: "Networking is relationship building and the key is to invest in relationships. Relationships are an investment, so yes, it takes work, it takes intentionality, and it takes authenticity.

"Understand that networking is an ongoing process, not an isolated event, so let's help our students build foundational skills.

Our students' success comes from consistently leveraging faculty and programme contacts, making new intentional contacts, and following up to stay in touch deepens the relationship."

In order to provide students with the opportunities to develop their skills in this area, events such as networking dinners are held, while class trips are centred on relationship building. An example of this was the 2022 trip to Las Vegas, during which the students visited organisations such as Encore Beach Club, Caesars, UFC, Dolby, Allegiant Stadium, HyperX and the programme partnered with Women in Sports and Events (WISE), to coordinate a networking event.

Dr Wells added: "We create the opportunities to sharpen their skills, and most importantly, practise their networking skills

in a supportive and collaborative environment. We recognise not everyone is comfortable meeting new people or taking the initiative to introduce themselves, or know how to add value to a relationship, so we help students gain the confidence through our PowerPlacement curriculum.

“Partners from across the world constantly applaud our students’ appreciation and ability to do the simple yet meaningful things such as initiate conversation, send a personal thank you note, or have an agenda for an informational interview.”

Emphasis is also placed on creating opportunities for students to interact directly with industry leaders and put networking skills into practice at Columbia University. The flagship event in this sense is ‘Elevator Pitch Perfect’, which sees students provided with the chance to present their scenario-based ‘Elevator Pitch’.

Columbia University’s Laurajean Holmgren, deputy programme director, sports management, indicates that the industry figures involved in the event see real value in it and welcome the opportunity to network with students, stating: “There are some industry leaders that have been really keen to come back the following year, loving the opportunity to help students in a creative way, because they feel like they’re truly giving back. For students, the purpose is to learn different styles of interacting and networking. What I say to you, I might need to tailor it differently to someone else, because we have different shared connections. That event is one that from the industry leader standpoint, it’d be viewed as something that is really valuable.”

Alumni Networks can be central to mentorship

The Vinik Sport and Entertainment Management Programme also scores highly on the Professional Mentorship/Advocacy measure, an aspect the course leaders place a high level of focus on, particularly leveraging its alumni network for this purpose.

Both peer and professional mentors are provided to students

throughout the course. The professional mentors are comprised of the alumni network and aligned to students based on the suitability of factors such as profession, career experience and lived experience. This is even taken further with students assigned an alumni mentor for specific projects within classes.

For the organisers of the MBA/MSA Sports Administration degree at Ohio University, there is a lot of emphasis placed on its ‘Ohio Family’ moniker, referring to its community and alumni network. This is given additional substance by the results of this year’s survey, which sees the programme top the Alumni Network metric with a near-perfect score of 99.29.

An aspect of the course which leverages the alumni network particularly strongly is the ‘Executive Mentor Programme’. This sees incoming students offered the opportunity to peruse the course’s alumni directory and select five names that they would like to approach to be their executive mentor for their next two years of study. The course leaders also look to enhance this opportunity for its students by inviting a number of the current executive mentors to campus in the autumn to interact with the current candidates, also awarding one of the group with an ‘Executive Mentor of the Year’ prize. Executive director of Ohio University’s Center for Sports Administration, Matt Cacciato said: “We see the executive mentor programme as something that is incredibly unique, it allows people upon entering the programme to align with those that are in the field, in roles that are matched to their interests. It has proved to be incredibly valuable. Students and their mentors develop relationships over their two years in the programme, communicating on a regular basis and meeting in person.”

The weight carried by the ‘Ohio Family’ moniker is perhaps best exemplified by the fact the current executive chair of its 19-strong Alumni Advisory board went through the programme and met his wife in the process. The couple now have two children who both graduated from the programme and are now

working within the sports industry.

On how the strength and depth of the alumni network developed, Cacciato said: “As the programme and the size of the classes grew, and the prominence of our earlier alumni and their careers developed, they naturally look back to their experience and they stay in touch with their classmates. We aid that with the publishing of alumni data and also hold alumni events in cities across the country, at various conferences and larger sporting events.

“For instance, around our men’s and women’s collegiate basketball tournaments, with the support of our sponsor, we organise structured alumni receptions that gather our graduates from multiple years. In Minneapolis last year, for our women’s Final Four event, we had a gentleman who graduated in 1971, who’s been present in the Minneapolis market for a long time, meeting graduates from just the previous year, so it literally was a 50-year span of graduates that were represented there.”

Overall global leaders UMass also flourished in the Alumni Network, Industry Network and Professional Mentorship/Advocacy metrics, topping the last of the three listed worldwide.

Will Norton, graduate program director and senior lecturer, Mark H. McCormack Department of Sport Management, UMass, detailed the course leaders’ approach to networking and how interaction with industry is woven into its curriculum: “Who you know is important, but it’s equally important who knows you. This two-sided exchange is promoted via experiential learning coursework that gives students the ability to create industry-level deliverables to our more than 3,000 alums working in sports today.

“We run three-month long consulting practicums for our second-year MBA/MS students, which allows for tremendous growth and on-the-job training. We take real-world industry challenges and create independent studies from them. Our graduate mentor programme is a tried-and-true networking platform, from which career-long connections are made.”

Alumni steps up in response to pandemic

Across the institutions mentioned above, in-person visits and events seem to be central to the support provided to students in regards to networking. This raises the question, how have course leaders mitigated the impact of the pandemic in recent years and retained the same level of opportunity for its students when it comes to networking and mentorship?

Norton says: “While live events and physical get togethers were certainly put on hold for a time, we activated our alumni network during the pandemic, first putting an “All Call” out on LinkedIn, asking alums to step up for students in need. We were able to match students with a variety of mentors during the remote semester and bring them closer to sports industry stakeholders to ask questions about an uncertain future hiring period. Many alums stepped up and offered remote projects, internships, and shadowing opportunities to create networking as a practice.”

The theme of alumni stepping up and recognising the need to redouble efforts to support current students in the circumstances was also present at Ohio University, not just in regards to the pandemic, but in relation to wider societal issues.

Cacciato added: “Our alumni

knew that our inability to get out and travel could hamper the programme and stepped up proactively in a lot of areas. Even away from the classroom and looking at some of the challenges that we saw in the summer of 2020 with racial and social injustice, our black alumni stepped up proactively. They collected and organised themselves and came to us as a group and said, ‘How can we help? How can we better assist you in helping students understand some of the some of the challenges, how can we reach across racial lines, gender lines, and make this a more meaningful and ultimately rewarding conversation for the Ohio family?’

The aforementioned Elevator Pitch Perfect event held by Columbia University has been held digitally three times since the onset of the pandemic and the course’s leaders actually saw benefit in some of the scenarios and features prompted by the event taking place in a virtual context. Holmgren explains: “On virtual meeting software, the use of breakout rooms and the chat feature was really interesting. It allowed us and students to think about the different mediums that exist to communicate and how we could leverage them. Many of our faculty remarked that our students had great conversations through the chat feature, so we promoted that

as a way of building a brief personal branding statement for students to introduce themselves in that context.

“We definitely used the breakout rooms. When we brought in people from the industry, we put them in breakout rooms with students for 10 minutes. They loved that interaction. You’re seeing the faces, you’re seeing the names and they become really ingrained in the mind.”

Ultimately, the array of perspectives presented above underlines the importance some of the most prominent institutions in sports management education at the postgraduate level place on supporting students with developing industry relationships, leveraging alumni networks and on providing meaningful mentorship opportunities to candidates. As Norton summarised: “The dynamic pace of sport management forms an incredibly close-knit community, and accessing that family unit is one of the primary selling points we talk to prospective students about.

“Postgraduate study is a chance to lean in to the sports family, and build your own inner circle that will support the rest of your career. The world of sports is small, and networking with prominent industry leaders can often help secure a distinct leg up in entry-level and mid-level management roles.” ○



Students during the Vinik Sport & Entertainment Management trip to Las Vegas in 2022

Top of the Class

Average Salary

Rank	University	Salary (\$)
1	The University of Liverpool Management School - football	210,271
2	Columbia University	135,132
3	The International Centre for Sport Studies (CIES)	94,181
4	Johan Cruyff Institute - Online	85,657
5	University of Bayreuth	83,447
6	University of Oregon	82,690
7	Rutgers University	81,540
8	Real Madrid Graduate School	79,516
9	University College Dublin	77,859
10	AISTS - International Academy of Sport Sciences and Technology	77,547

Graduates' Choice

Rank	University	Score
1	University of Massachusetts Amherst, Isenberg School of Management	95.20
2	University of South Florida	94.25
3	George Washington University	93.33
4	Ohio University	93.17
5	University of Parma & University of San Marino	93.15
6	University of South Carolina	89.67
7	The Ohio State University	89.05
8	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	88.15
9	VCU	86.91
10	Florida Atlantic University	86.76

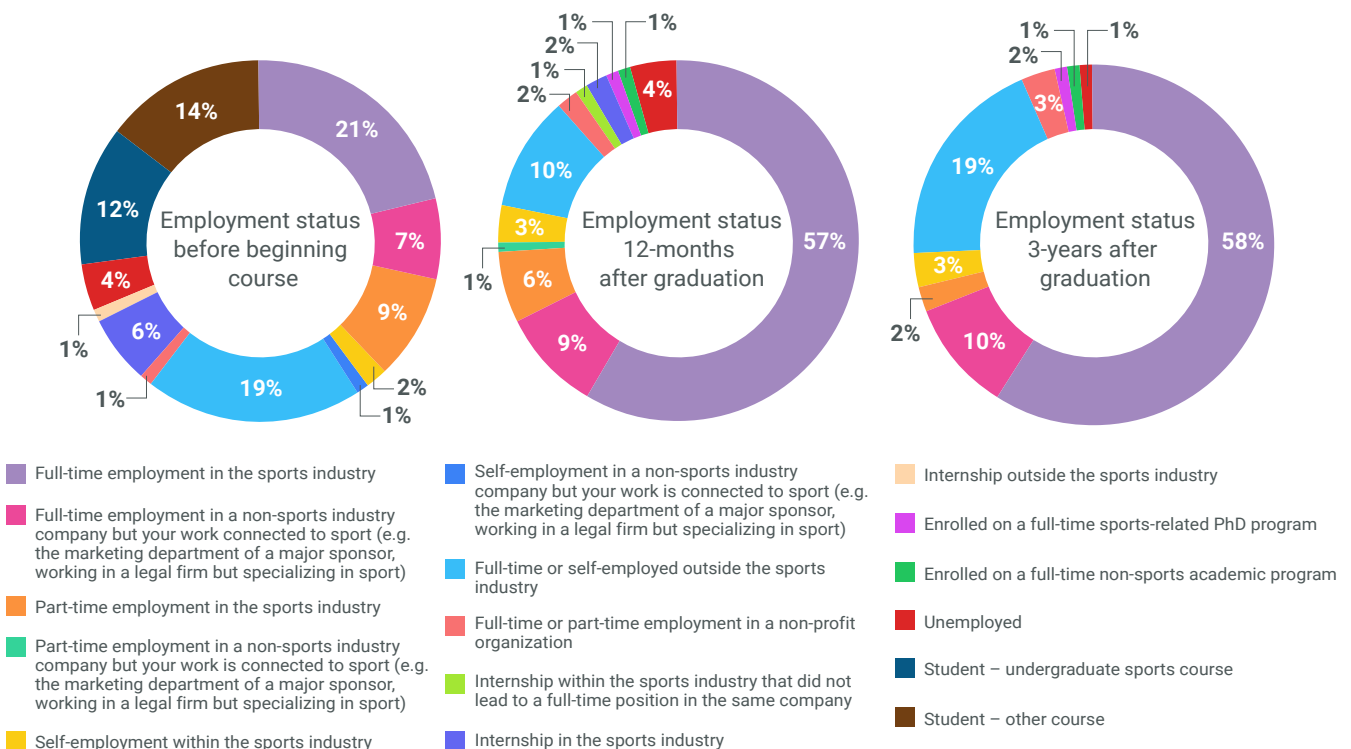
**The student satisfaction score is the aggregated total of the following six measures: quality of faculty, quality of curriculum, job support, extracurricular initiatives, alumni network, industry network, return on investment (ROI), diversity, equity, and inclusion score and professional mentorship/advocacy provided by the masters program.*

Peer review *Based on 'peer review' score

Rank	University
1	Ohio University
2	University of Massachusetts Amherst, Isenberg School of Management
3	The International Centre for Sport Studies (CIES)
4	University of South Florida
5	Real Madrid Graduate School
6	University of Oregon
7	University of South Carolina
8	Columbia University
9	University of Central Florida
10	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Career Growth

Employment status



Employment data

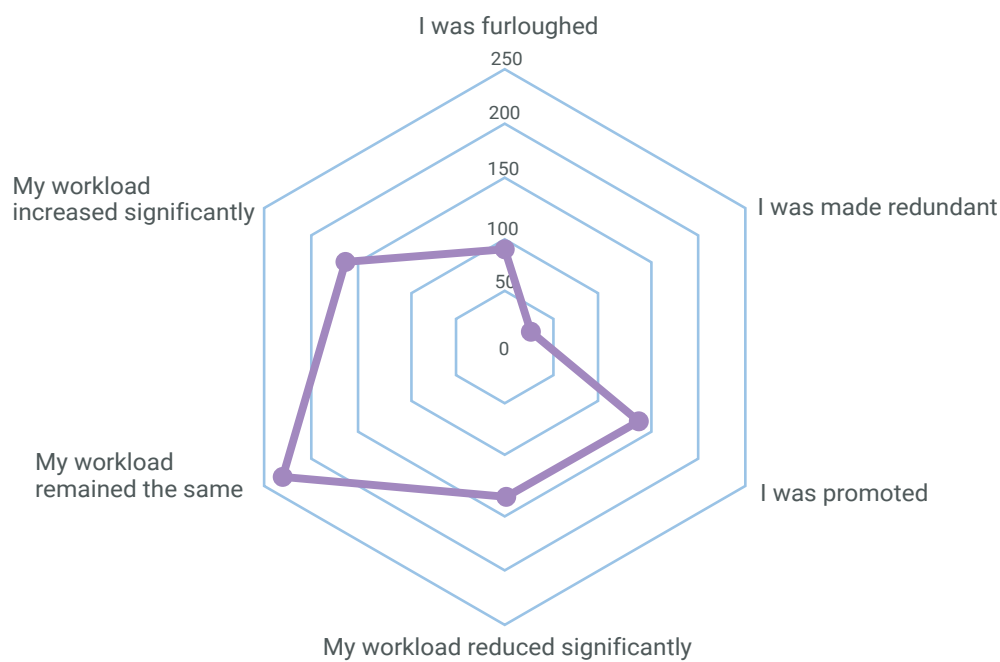
Ideal Employer

Rank	Employer	Count
1	NBA and/or NBA Team	67
2	NCCA and/or NCAA University	64
3	NFL and/or NFL Team	50
4	English Premier League and/or English Premier League club	32
5	Spanish LaLiga and/or Spanish LaLiga club	22
6	FIFA	20
7	MLB and/or MLB Team	19
8	Self-employed	18
9	Nike	13
10	Formula One and/or Formula One team	12
11	IOC	10
11	NHL and/or NHL Team	10
12	Italian Serie A and/or Italian Serie A club	8
12	National Olympic Committee	8
13	French Ligue 1 and/or French Ligue 1 club	7
13	PGA Tour	7
14	MLS and/or MLS club	6
14	ATP	6
15	Red Bull	5
15	UCI and/or UCI team	5

Career Advancement *Based on 'career advancement' score

Rank	University	Score
1	University of Parma & University of San Marino	93.06
2	George Washington University	91.67
3	University of Massachusetts Amherst, Isenberg School of Management	90.35
4	University of Vigo (Spain)	90.00
5	Ohio University	88.10
6	University of Central Florida	87.78
7	VCU	84.26
8	University of South Florida	83.33
9	ESBS European Sport Business School - Formación Valencia CF	83.33
10	University of Bayreuth	83.33

Covid impact



Top 15 North American Courses

Rank	University	Program	Region	Class size 2018/19	2019 graduates	Class size 2021/22	Re-sponse rate	Course duration (months)	Average age (years)	Acceptance rate	Female: Male student ratio (%)	International:National student ratio (%)	Female: Male faculty ratio (%)
1	University of Massachusetts Amherst, Isenberg School of Management	Mark H. McCormack Department of Sport Management MBA/MS Sport Management	North America	21	21	22	95%	12-21	25	17%	55:45	23:77	50:50
2	Ohio University	Dual MBA/MSA Program	North America	29	29	35	97%	22	23	27%	46:54	11:89	45:55
3	University of South Florida	Vinik Sport & Entertainment Management MBA/MS	North America	24	24	27	71%	22	24	31%	44:56	19:81	50:50
4	University of South Carolina	Master of Sport and Entertainment Management	North America	22	22	49	77%	15	25	45%	43:57	55:45	21:79
5	George Washington University	MS/MBA in Sport Management	North America	20	4	35	100%	18-22	25	44%	40:60	23:77	60:40
6	Columbia University	Master of Science in Sports Management	North America	77	22	84	58%	12-16	26	28%	40:60	32:68	30:70
7	University of Central Florida	DeVos Sport Business Management Program	North America	30	30	20	50%	17	25	36%	65:35	10:90	27:73
8	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	Masters of Sport Administration	North America	10	9	12	100%	22	24	19%	67:33	0:100	43:57
9	The Ohio State University	MS in Kinesiology (Sport Management)	North America	26	17	40	82%	12-21	23	33%	40:60	5:95	50:50
10	Florida Atlantic University	MBA in Sport Management	North America	120	45	37	53%	23	24	13%	49:51	11:89	46:54
11	University of Oregon	Masters in Business Administration	North America	20	20	28	65%	21	27	24%	32:68	39:61	20:80
12	VCU	Center for Sport Leadership	North America	41	41	42	44%	12-16	23	31%	52:48	14:86	33:67
13	University of Windsor	Master of Human Kinetics in Sport Management	North America	9	11	9	64%	16-24	23	25%	33:67	22:78	33:67
14	University of San Francisco	Master of Science in Sport Management	North America	109	102	97	45%	23	26	40%	32:68	16:84	29:71
15	Georgia State University	Master of Science in Sport Administration	North America	40	28	38	54%	24	24	25%	66:34	8:92	33:67

Top 15 European Courses

1	The International Centre for Sport Studies (CIES)	International Master (MA) in Management, Law and Humanities of Sport – The 'FIFA Master'	Europe	28	28	32	93%	10	29	17%	47:53	63:37	30:70
2	University of Parma & University of San Marino	International Masters in Strategic Management of Sports Organisations, Events and Facilities	Europe	25	25	25	48%	12	26	43%	24:76	4:96	17:83
3	ESBS European Sport Business School - Formación Valencia CF	Master in International Sports Management	Europe	44	42	99	57%	9	27	24%	20:80	83:17	18:82
4	University of Bayreuth	MBA Sportmanagement	Europe	18	16	30	19%	24	27	33%	30:70	7:93	19:81
5	University of Vigo (Spain)	Master in Business Administration of Sport	Europe	20	19	25	79%	9	26	78%	20:80	24:76	50:50
6	Ca' Foscari University - Venice	Master in Sport Business Strategies - Master SBS	Europe	36	36	34	8%	12	24	61%	15:85	0:100	59:41
7	University College Dublin	MSc in Sport Management	Europe	27	24	27	29%	12-24	30	30%	26:74	7:93	20:80
8	AMOS Sport Business School	Master in Sport Management	Europe	115	74	142	81%	24	21	82%	40:60	33:67	42:58
9	Real Madrid Graduate School	MBA in Sports Management	Europe	40	38	40	45%	10	31	37%	33:67	87:13	24:76
10	The University of Liverpool Management School - football	Football Industries MBA	Europe	22	24	16	17%	12	29	17%	13:87	100:0	25:75
11	The University of Liverpool Management School	MSc Sports Business and Management	Europe	50	50	72	36%	12	24	14%	18:82	82:18	33:67
12	Loughborough University (School of Sport, Exercise, and Health Sciences)	Sport Management	Europe	78	76	80	38%	12-24	24	12%	18:82	85:15	30:70
13	Global Institute of Sport	MSc International Sports Management	Europe	10	10	12	20%	12	24	27%	17:83	33:67	42:58
14	Vrije Universiteit Brussel / University of Brussels	Postgraduate Course in Sports Management	Europe	56	56	62	25%	8	23	79%	13:87	3:97	67:33
15	AISTS - International Academy of Sport Sciences and Technology	Master of Advanced Studies in Sport Administration and Technology	Europe	35	34	24	47%	15	32	27%	38:62	96:4	20:80

Online Programmes

1	Unisport Management School	Online - MBA Sport Management	Europe	40	40	40	23%	13	29	77%	25:75	30:70	20:80
2	Johan Cruyff Institute - Online	Online - Master in Sport Management	Europe	28	28	34	50%	13	31	92%	29:71	68:32	18:82
3	University of Cincinnati	Online - Master of Science in Sport Administration	North America	39	33	111	55%	12	28	85%	34:66	0:100	25:75
4	Indiana State University	Online - Sport Management M.S.	North America	21	5	20	100%	12-20	24	57%	20:80	0:100	40:60

Global University Performance Metrics: A Comprehensive Analysis of Academic, Financial, and Operational Indicators																			
Institution	Operational & Financial Data			Academic Performance					Student Engagement & Support				Research & Innovation						
	Work placement	Mentorship	Avg. salary (int\$)	Employment at 12 months	Current employment	Quality of faculty	Quality of curriculum	Job support	Extracurricular initiatives	Alumni network	Industry network	Return on investment (ROI)	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	Professional mentorship/advocacy	Career advancement	Skills applicability	Skills frequency	Peer review	Total score
0:100	YES	YES	72,898	93.68	90.53	98.95	94.74	92.63	93.68	98.95	97.89	88.42	93.68	97.89	90.35	90.35	80.70	90.00	89.35
18:82	YES	YES	58,191	96.43	98.57	92.14	90.00	91.43	99.29	99.29	98.57	92.14	80.00	95.71	88.10	76.79	89.88	100.00	88.51
25:75	YES	YES	66,882	97.65	80.00	92.94	92.94	92.94	98.82	92.94	98.82	88.24	95.29	95.29	83.33	81.37	80.39	70.00	86.11
17:83	YES	YES	49,206	95.29	90.59	98.82	89.41	91.76	83.53	88.24	95.29	82.35	83.53	94.12	72.55	81.37	81.37	50.00	82.76
0:100	YES	YES	57,500	80.00	90.00	95.00	95.00	90.00	95.00	90.00	95.00	95.00	90.00	95.00	91.67	100.00	100.00	20.00	82.35
3:97	YES	YES	135,132	90.22	91.56	89.78	82.22	71.11	74.09	81.33	88.44	72.00	74.67	78.22	80.74	74.44	82.96	40.00	80.15
13:87	YES	YES	67,925	98.67	90.67	86.67	78.67	78.67	84.00	82.67	92.00	82.67	98.67	84.00	87.78	73.33	74.44	30.00	79.20
0:100	YES	YES	50,733	82.22	93.33	95.56	91.11	82.22	88.89	80.00	97.78	95.56	84.44	77.78	77.78	94.44	96.30	30.00	78.97
0:100	YES	YES	56,308	92.86	82.86	97.14	88.57	85.71	94.29	88.57	88.57	82.86	85.71	90.00	72.62	82.14	80.95	20.00	78.80
22:78	YES	YES	73,982	87.50	81.67	94.17	89.17	85.83	85.00	88.33	90.00	78.33	83.33	86.67	76.39	77.78	84.03	-	78.61
30:70	YES	YES	82,690	89.23	86.15	72.31	72.31	73.85	80.00	90.77	93.85	73.85	63.08	75.38	79.49	70.51	76.92	60.00	77.73
33:67	YES	YES	56,117	83.33	82.22	87.78	90.00	90.00	84.44	88.89	91.11	83.33	83.33	83.33	84.26	76.85	70.37	20.00	77.59
0:100	YES	YES	53,670	82.86	91.43	97.14	91.43	82.86	91.43	85.71	97.14	91.43	65.71	74.29	73.81	73.81	76.19	10.00	76.66
13:87	YES	YES	74,565	80.00	88.26	89.57	87.39	87.11	78.70	87.83	89.78	81.74	78.70	83.91	81.52	79.35	77.17	10.00	76.27
33:67	YES	YES	64,667	84.00	90.67	88.00	89.33	81.33	80.00	78.67	89.33	78.67	86.67	84.00	68.89	73.33	71.11	20.00	75.82
Detailed Analysis of Institutional Performance: A Deep Dive into Key Metrics and Trends																			
40:60	YES	YES	94,181	87.69	90.00	86.92	80.00	73.85	83.08	93.85	93.85	82.31	87.69	81.54	80.13	69.87	73.08	80.00	84.79
10:90	YES	YES	42,111	91.67	88.33	93.33	93.33	90.00	95.00	95.00	98.33	93.33	90.00	90.00	93.06	77.78	90.28	20.00	77.93
26:74	YES	YES	55,183	83.33	95.83	86.67	86.67	79.17	86.67	80.83	85.83	85.83	85.83	84.17	83.33	87.50	84.03	-	75.90
9:91	YES	NO	83,447	93.33	100.00	93.33	86.67	80.00	66.67	100.00	86.67	93.33	66.67	73.33	83.33	83.33	100.00	-	75.60
5:95	YES	YES	38,843	90.67	86.67	81.33	90.67	85.33	80.00	74.67	84.00	89.33	89.33	85.33	90.00	86.67	76.67	10.00	73.47
8:92	YES	YES	56,592	80.00	100.00	86.67	80.00	80.00	86.67	86.67	93.33	80.00	86.67	86.67	72.22	61.11	83.33	10.00	72.63
40:60	YES	YES	77,859	85.71	82.86	88.57	80.00	80.00	77.14	71.43	80.00	77.14	80.00	82.86	76.19	80.95	64.29	-	72.37
25:75	YES	YES	46,870	85.67	85.33	76.67	79.66	75.67	75.67	73.33	80.67	73.33	70.33	78.67	76.11	73.89	75.28	10.00	72.12
35:65	YES	YES	79,516	80.00	83.53	81.18	80.00	67.06	71.76	68.24	77.65	64.71	70.59	67.06	74.51	71.57	58.82	70.00	71.88
33:67	YES	YES	210,271	90.00	90.00	85.00	85.00	50.00	75.00	75.00	90.00	60.00	80.00	60.00	62.50	79.17	50.00	-	69.95
33:67	YES	YES	49,497	88.89	81.11	84.44	82.22	56.67	74.44	67.78	74.44	70.00	78.89	74.44	77.78	63.89	64.81	30.00	69.87
33:67	YES	YES	50,632	87.59	89.66	82.07	73.79	60.00	78.62	68.28	62.76	63.45	71.72	72.41	68.97	75.86	60.34	30.00	69.70
33:67	YES	NO	73,421	100.00	100.00	70.00	60.00	60.00	80.00	60.00	80.00	60.00	60.00	60.00	66.67	66.67	50.00	-	69.00
33:67	YES	YES	50,166	92.86	88.57	78.57	78.57	77.14	81.43	82.86	81.43	68.57	68.57	78.57	67.86	63.10	61.90	-	68.41
70:23	YES	YES	77,547	77.50	83.75	78.75	75.00	70.00	78.75	70.00	72.50	66.25	73.75	67.50	72.92	67.71	56.25	30.00	68.11
Summary of Key Findings: Overall Performance Trends and Institutional Strengths																			
0:100	YES	NO	48,755	88.89	93.33	86.67	82.22	68.89	85.00	82.22	66.67	82.22	82.22	80.00	74.07	75.93	87.04	-	71.39
51:49	YES	YES	85,657	80.00	88.57	83.08	81.43	74.29	71.43	75.71	61.43	74.29	80.00	81.43	76.19	75.00	64.29	-	71.05
0:100	YES	YES	59,888	83.33	75.56	88.89	77.78	60.00	73.33	64.44	73.33	60.00	74.44	72.22	64.81	75.00	61.11	-	63.98
0:100	YES	NO	56,200	60.00	68.00	68.00	72.00	56.00	64.00	44.00	40.00	56.00	52.00	60.00	66.67	73.33	56.67	10.00	53.76
Postgraduate Rankings 2022																		63	



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