



# STEPPING UP TO THE PLATE

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The crucial role sport must play in climate action



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Climate change proves the greatest existential threat to our collective society.

Unless enormous carbon cuts are implemented, the aims defined in the 2015 Paris Agreement will not succeed and will have devastating effects on our environment and society.

The sporting ecosystem is not immune to these consequences and is already experiencing the havoc caused by extreme weather, fires, and shifting weather patterns.

Sport is also a significant contributor to the problem through infrastructure construction, fan and athlete travel and the massive amount of waste generated at events.

There are pockets within the sports ecosystem where a concerted effort is being made to address the climate crisis, helped by global convening bodies who are trying to guide the sector towards improved sustainability practices, but this is not enough.

It is time for the global sports community to step up and collectively address the climate crisis with more urgency and impact.

The sports industry can and must play a role in three ways - transforming the sector to become carbon neutral ahead of 2040, leveraging its influence to mobilize billions of sports fans to take concrete action and utilizing partnerships to facilitate innovation and sharing to create new technologies and infrastructure to expedite the transition to a carbon neutral world.

For a comprehensive directory of what sports stakeholders are doing in the fight against climate change, please reach out to our team at 17 Sport at:

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# WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Climate change proves the greatest existential threat to our collective society with the most recent UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report underscoring the fact that climate consequences will only worsen with every bit of warming, currently slated towards an upward trajectory. The report sends an urgent message to us all, unless enormous carbon cuts are implemented, the aims defined in the 2015 Paris Agreement, to keep the global temperature rise below 2°C this century (and ideally, below 1.5°C), will not succeed. This would have devastating effects for our environment and society, many of which we are already observing (i.e. extreme weather, fires, floods, species extinctions, etc.). In fact, since 2000, we've seen how at least 13 climate events have influenced significant negative socio economic impact "measured by the extent to which it disrupted or destroyed "stocks" of capital - people, physical, and natural."<sup>2</sup>

The sporting ecosystem is not immune to these consequences and has already begun to experience

the havoc caused by extreme weather, fires, shifting weather patterns (among other phenomena). Tokyo 2020 proved the hottest Olympic Games on record with a temperature average of 32.3C, forcing several competitors to seek medical attention and even retire due to heat exhaustion despite efforts by the organizers to minimize heat impacts.<sup>3</sup>

We are seeing similar patterns across almost all major sports. In football, extreme weather and flooding is forcing the cancellation of an increasing number of fixtures across Europe;<sup>4</sup> in tennis the 2020 Australian Open had to be suspended due to extreme heat and poor air quality caused by bushfires in the area;<sup>5</sup> in cricket in the UK more days are being lost to rain than ever before and at the other extreme, in Australia, the sport is suffering due to excessively high temperatures resulting in players having to be hospitalised for dehydration and exhaustion;<sup>6</sup> and in golf, not only is the survival of many links courses under threat from coastal erosion caused by rising sea levels, but the vast amount of

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC\\_AR6\\_WGI\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_Full_Report.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Business%20Functions/Sustainability/Our%20Insights/McKinsey%20on%20Climate%20Change/McKinsey-on-Climate%20Change-Report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/aug/05/olympic-athletes-and-volunteers-in-tokyo-tortured-by-heat>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/aug/21/climate-crisis-football-global-game-carbon-neutral>

<sup>5</sup> [https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/auscon/pages/16968/attachments/original/1579232498/Love\\_40\\_degrees\\_climate\\_report\\_Jan2020.pdf?1579232498](https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/auscon/pages/16968/attachments/original/1579232498/Love_40_degrees_climate_report_Jan2020.pdf?1579232498)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/why-climate-change-is-causing-rising-problems-for-cricket-2nw3hztv6>

water required to irrigate an 18-hole golf course is unsustainable.<sup>7</sup> If nothing is done, the future for sport looks even more bleak. According to a report by the Rapid Transition Alliance, it is estimated that by 2050, of the 21 past host cities of the Winter Olympics, only half of them will be cold enough to host the Games again, and one in four English football grounds can expect flooding every season.<sup>8</sup>

Not only is sport suffering as a result of climate change, but it is also a significant contributor to the problem. Major sports events demand infrastructure construction which contributes to huge carbon emissions, they attract fans from across the

world whose travel is responsible for further carbon emissions, and these events generate a massive amount of unrecycled waste.

Then there are the players, whose travel on the global sports calendar of their chosen field, adds more carbon emissions. To illustrate the significance of sport's contribution to the crisis, one only needs to look at football where the global football industry is reported to be responsible for about 30 million tonnes of carbon emissions annually, which is about the same as a country such as Denmark, and the sport's top 20 players, who are believed to be responsible for over 500 tonnes of carbon emissions.<sup>9</sup>

# Sport's carbon footprint is massive.

**30M**  
TONNES

OF CARBON EMISSIONS  
ARE PRODUCED ANNUALLY BY  
THE GLOBAL FOOTBALL INDUSTRY



THIS IS ALMOST THE SAME  
AMOUNT OF CARBON  
PRODUCED BY COUNTRIES  
SUCH AS **DENMARK**

**500**  
TONNES

OF CARBON IS EMITTED  
BY FOOTBALL'S TOP 20  
PLAYERS ALONE.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/sport/56972370>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.rapidtransition.org/resources/playing-against-the-clock/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.euractiv.com/section/health-consumers/news/study-top-20-world-footballers-responsible-for-over-500-tonnes-of-co2-emissions/>

# WHAT IS CURRENTLY BEING DONE BY THE SPORTS SECTOR?

There are pockets within the sports ecosystem where a concerted effort is being made to address the climate crisis, helped by global convening bodies who are trying to guide the sector towards improved sustainability strategies and practices.

In 2018, the UN created the Sports for Climate Action Framework (UNFCCC) which seeks to hold the sports industry accountable by uniting sports organizations and their communities behind a set of principles whereby they commit to a more climate friendly future and to tap into the popularity and passion for sport to engage millions of fans in these efforts. There are currently 270 signatories with particular efforts of notice ranging from the NHL adopting a more sustainable product for its hockey rinks, to fan-focused efforts by a number of sports venues to achieve zero-waste, and the four Grand Slam tennis events making great strides in reducing carbon emissions and energy consumption. While all of this is admirable, it does not appear to be enough to stimulate an upswell of support across the entire sports sector or to see sufficient improvement by its signatories, and others, in addressing the issue. For example, at present, we understand that only 25% of UNFCCC signatories are

actively taking steps to meet their commitments and that there appears to be a general malaise amongst the bulk of signatories. With this in mind, it is pleasing to note that UNFCCC plans to introduce accountability standards that signatories will be expected to meet if they are to remain signatories to the pledge, hopefully inciting needed action by ALL signatories.

Along with the International Sailing Federation, World Surf League, Forest Green Rovers Football Club and the French Tennis Federation, the IOC was one of the founding signatories of the UNFCCC and plays a leading role in driving a sustainability agenda in sport. The IOC is already carbon neutral, having offset its 2017-2020 emissions thanks to its partnership with Dow, and has committed to being climate positive by 2024. In addition, all Olympic Games from 2030 onwards are contractually obliged to minimize and compensate for carbon emissions and to implement lasting zero-carbon solutions. However, even the IOC comes under fire for its efforts, with some people of the view that its reliance on carbon offsetting to achieve its goals fails to address the underlying behaviour that brings about such high levels of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.sportbusiness.com/2021/09/seth-i-kirby-the-olympic-games-sustainability-crisis/>





There is further criticism that the IOC's sustainability standards do not filter down to the national federations that fall within its sphere of influence and so diminishes the far-reaching influence that the organization could have. Until the IOC, and global sports organizations like it, maximise their persuasive power and take concerted steps to bring about more widespread and radical behaviour change, their efforts towards a more sustainable future will not be enough.

Amongst sports rights holders, Formula E has also proven a pioneer with its expressed mission:

**“To accelerate change towards an electric future, one race and one city at a time.”**

The ABB FIA Formula E World Championship Series serves as a way to promote electric mobility and renewable energy solutions in order to combat climate change and contribute to reducing air pollution. The competition also fuels needed innovation and new technological solutions towards a low-carbon future. In addition, Formula E is the only global sport to be certified with a net zero carbon footprint from inception.<sup>11</sup>

Corporates who are aligned with sport, as sponsors of a team, league, event or athlete are also increasingly using their investment in sport as a visible means of highlighting their sustainability strategy. The likes of Dow, who manage an innovative carbon mitigation programme for the IOC<sup>12</sup> and P&G, who initiated a programme whereby 24.5 tons of donated household plastic waste and advanced 3D printing technology was used to create the Tokyo 2020 podiums, are just two examples of this.

Sports venues around the world are some of the most forward thinking stakeholders in the sports ecosystem when it comes to leading the sustainability charge. There is the Mercedes Benz Arena in Atlanta, which received the highest LEED score ever for a sports facility, and runs a highly successful recycling program, to achieve its zero waste objective together with renewable energy and water conservation efforts. However, even more impressive, is the Climate Pledge Arena in Seattle to which Amazon bought the naming rights in June 2020 and dedicated the arena name to serve as a long-lasting reminder of the urgent need for climate action. The stadium aims to be the most progressive, responsible, and sustainable arena in the world - it will use no fossil fuels in its daily operations, be powered

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.fiaformulae.com/en/discover/sustainability/our-approach>

<sup>12</sup> <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/dow-s-olympic-carbon-programmes-continue-to-deliver-climate-benefits-and-a-positive-legacy>

entirely by renewable energy, have an expansive water-conservation program including a rainwater-to-ice system, offer no single-use plastics by 2024 and will generate functionally zero waste. The best practices from these and other sustainably managed sports venues must be shared more widely so that this becomes the norm.

Alongside the stakeholders in sport, there are also a number of organizations, like the Green Sports Alliance, Sport & Sustainability International and Sport4Climate, who play the role of convenor bringing together teams, leagues, athletes, venues, corporate partners and fans to create sustainable progress and behaviour change by sharing resources, experience and expertise of what can be achieved by the sports sector.

**CORPORATES WHO ARE ALIGNED WITH SPORT, AS SPONSORS OF A TEAM, LEAGUE, EVENT OR ATHLETE ARE ALSO INCREASINGLY USING THEIR INVESTMENT IN SPORT AS A VISIBLE MEANS OF HIGHLIGHTING THEIR SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY.**



# WHAT CAN SPORT DO ABOUT IT NOW?

While a minority of the sports sector can be credited for the steps that have been taken so far, it is time for the global sports community to step up and collectively address the climate crisis with more urgency and impact. The sporting ecosystem has done too little thus far to make a meaningful impact in combating climate change and now is the moment for us to take our place as leaders in this plight. We have the collective power, influence, resources, and perhaps most importantly, the ability to inspire HOPE in mounting a climate come-back. Through leading by example (after getting our own house in order), the sports industry can serve our global society and the planet by educating and mobilizing billions of sports fans to take tangible action in fighting climate change.

## MORE CONCRETELY, THE SPORTS INDUSTRY CAN AND MUST PLAY A MEANINGFUL ROLE IN THE FOLLOWING THREE WAYS:

- 1 Transforming our sector to become carbon neutral ahead of 2040.
- 2 Leveraging our influence to mobilize billions of sports fans to take concrete action.
- 3 Utilizing partnerships, which are so fundamental to sport, to facilitate innovation and sharing to create new technologies and infrastructure to expedite the transition to a carbon neutral world.

Enacting this game plan will not be easy. However, if we seize this opportunity and rise to the occasion, the collective action of the sports industry and fans will go down in history as a defining moment in expediting the transition to a carbon neutral world, ultimately keeping global heating to below 1.5 degree levels and

**“living in a regenerative world where humans and nature thrive.”**<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.globaloptimism.com/the-future-we-choose>



ACTION 1

# CLEANING UP OUR OWN HOUSE

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Transforming our sector to be  
carbon neutral ahead of 2040.



## OUR TRACK RECORD

Historically, the sports industry has a dismal record concerning our carbon emissions with major world sporting events proving the “heavy hitting” polluters across this ecosystem. During the 2010 South African FIFA World Cup, 1.6M tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> were produced, the 2014 Brazilian FIFA World Cup generated 2.75M tonnes (331,000 of which were offset by FIFA) and an additional 3.6M tonnes were emitted during the Rio 2016 Olympic Games (with all emissions pledged to be offset by both DOW chemicals and the Brazilian Government).<sup>14 15 16</sup>

To put these numbers into perspective, the entirety of Iceland’s CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for 2019 amounted to just 3.32M tonnes.<sup>17</sup>

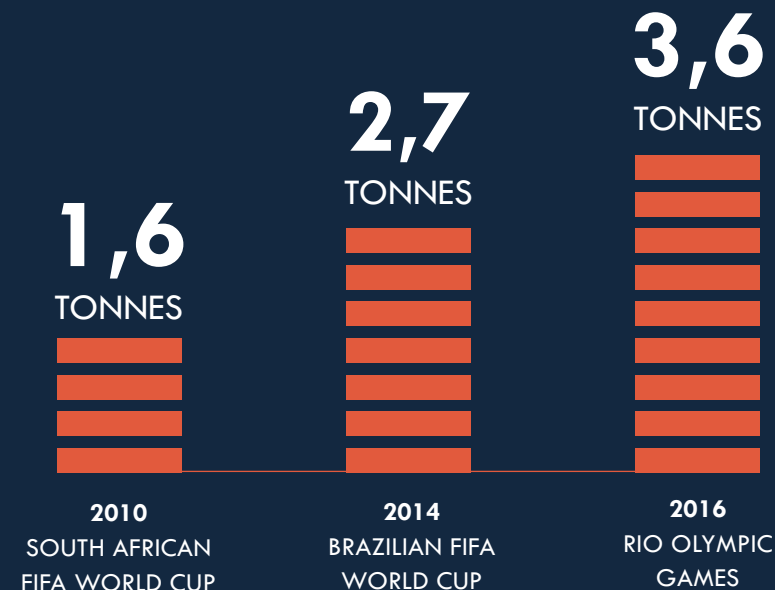
The biggest culprit of major sporting events are the greenhouse gas emissions<sup>18</sup> related to travel and accommodation which account for 85% of total emissions. Currently, many of the largest sporting events have implemented carbon offsetting programs (essentially, “paying” for carbon emissions through activities like planting trees, etc.), to address emission. While this strategy might continue to be a feature of future sports events, this band-aid approach will prove problematic in the long run as it does not address the core problem of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Of similar concern is the fact that rights holders, teams, and leagues have been slow to implement robust strategies to go carbon neutral with many of these properties having severely under-resourced

sustainability teams, if any at all. In addition, many sports properties do not track their carbon emissions (only 16% of the stadiums in the Sustainable Sport Index 2021 Benchmarking Report track their emissions<sup>19</sup>), leading to a lack of transparency around their operations and making it more difficult for stakeholders to hold them accountable. That being said, we have seen the “Greening” movement operating in sport for over a decade now, and sports organizations

and event organizers are certainly becoming more aware of the negative impact their operations have on the environment and the benefits that a robust sustainability strategy can deliver.

This “greening” movement is encouraging, but the fact remains that current efforts are not sufficient. Sport loves a good comeback story and becoming climate neutral is one challenge we must step up to.



<sup>14</sup> <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/unep-evaluation-2010-world-cups-green-performance-shows-south-africa>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.environmentalleader.com/2013/09/fifa-to-offset-2014-world-cups-2-7m-metric-tons-of-carbon-emissions/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://nachhaltigersport.files.wordpress.com/2016/04/carbon-footprint-management-report-rio-2016.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <https://ourworldindata.org/co2-and-other-greenhouse-gas-emissions/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.cleaneenergywire.org/news/sustainability-concept-bolsters-germanys-football-euro-2024-bid>

<sup>19</sup> [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5fd3bb510b78c966e04791e8/t/6160a89489deb50a2395ce\[...\]6895/Sustainable+Sport+Index+Benchmark+Report+2021.v2.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5fd3bb510b78c966e04791e8/t/6160a89489deb50a2395ce[...]6895/Sustainable+Sport+Index+Benchmark+Report+2021.v2.pdf)

# FIFA WORLD CUP QATAR 2022™

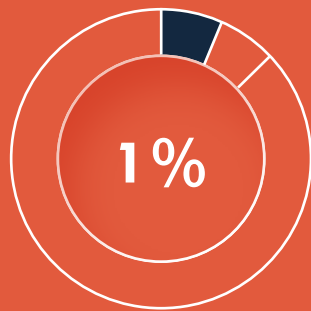
The next FIFA World Cup will take place in Qatar from 21 November to 18 December 2022. Among many other activities, staging the tournament entails the construction and renovation of infrastructure, transporting thousands of people to the matches and Fan Fests, the provision of accommodation, managing waste in the stadiums, and broadcasting fixtures in over 200 countries. This scale inevitably has an impact on the climate. According to the FIFA World Cup 2022™ Greenhouse Gas Accounting Report, the total GHG emissions for the event is estimated to be 3,631,034 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO<sub>2</sub>e).

The majority (95%) are indirect emissions, mainly from travel (51.7%) and accommodation (20.1%) for match attendees in Qatar, including the general public, officials and staff. The third-largest source of estimated emissions is from infrastructure construction and operation, including the construction of stadiums, training sites and temporary facilities.

If this tournament does produce the expected quantity of CO<sub>2</sub>, this would be more than some nations produce in a year. According to the International Energy Agency, Montenegro, Iceland, and the Democratic Republic of

the Congo all produced fewer than 3 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> in the year 2018.<sup>20</sup>

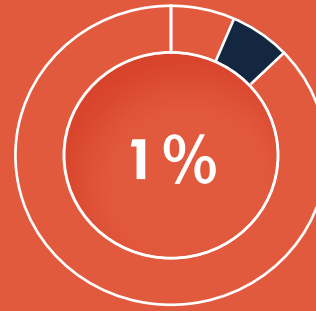
While the above mentioned efforts by Qatar are pioneering when compared with efforts of their counterparts in previous years, carbon offsetting still features too prominently as a solution to achieving carbon neutrality. In the same respect, Qatar has come under criticism for other governance issues, namely human rights, which undermines the legitimacy of the commitment to implementing the SDGs.



### SCOPE 1

35,103 tCO<sub>2</sub>e

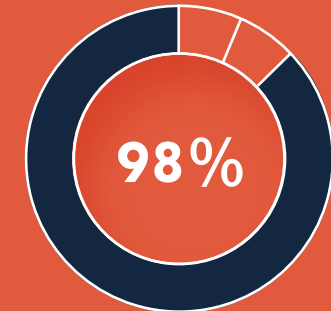
**STATIONARY COMBUSTION (0.9%):** ..... 33,245 tCO<sub>2</sub>e  
**OTHER (0.1%):** ..... 1,858 tCO<sub>2</sub>e



### SCOPE 2

37,216 tCO<sub>2</sub>e

**ELECTRICITY (0.9%):** ..... 34,925 tCO<sub>2</sub>e  
**OTHER (0.1%):** ..... 2,291 tCO<sub>2</sub>e



### SCOPE 3

3,558,715 tCO<sub>2</sub>e

**TRAVEL (51.7%):** ..... 1,878,106 tCO<sub>2</sub>e  
**INFRASTRUCTURE CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION (24.2%):** ..... 893,337 tCO<sub>2</sub>e  
**ACCOMODATION (20.1%):** ..... 728,403 tCO<sub>2</sub>e  
**OTHER (4%):** ..... 58,868 tCO<sub>2</sub>e

**TOTAL (100%): 3,631,034 tCO<sub>2</sub>e**

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.iea.org/countries>

# THE IMPORTANCE FOR CHANGE

Across society, there are expectations for individuals and institutions to take a more conscious approach to climate action and wider sustainability. The world has changed and incorporating sustainability within corporate strategy is more important than ever.

As sustainability initiatives become more extensively adopted, some innovative sport organizations, teams and leagues are following suit and pursuing strategies that will allow them to adjust their business model and deliver truly sustainable results and improved business performance.

Inserting sustainability within corporate strategy should become an increasing requirement and should be embedded in the curriculum planning and budgeting of sports organizations and governing bodies in order for sport organizations to protect their business results and sporting performance as it offers an opportunity to drive top line growth and long-term competitive advantage through:



- 1 New sources of revenue growth and innovation.
- 2 Brand differentiation and loyalty (consumer values are shifting).
- 3 Enhanced brand reputation.
- 4 Enhancing the fan experience.
- 5 Cost efficiencies from reduced waste and resource consumption.
- 6 Talent attraction and retention.
- 7 Superior long-term financial performance, organizational resilience and mitigation of regional land degradation.
- 8 Basic legal compliance.
- 9 Ability to anticipate and respond effectively to health and safety risks.

The benefits of implementing sustainability strategies are considerable, which is why sports organizations, teams and leagues need to respond to social, environmental, and economic problems or else they may struggle to remain competitive, or worse, to survive.

It is clear that many organizations are facing many difficult decisions during the COVID-19 crisis and even though achieving true sustainability may seem overwhelming, now is the opportune time for organizational transformation that places sustainability at the forefront, and those that take the leap will lead the shift to a more regenerative future and allow sport to stake a legitimate claim to being a leader in the fight against climate change. However, until sport gets its own house in order, it cannot authentically make such a claim.

# FOREST GREEN ROVERS LEADS THE WAY.<sup>21</sup>

An often touted case of a sports team leading by example in the fight against climate change is Forest Green Rovers (FGR), the EFL League two football team. Already in a league of its own when it comes to sustainability in sport, FGR has gained global attention due to its progressive approach to the environment and is showing that what few thought could be possible is not only a reasonable, but a desirable future for the sports industry.<sup>22</sup>

According to FGR's Environmental policy, the Club focuses on three sectors; energy, transport and food - which between them account for most of the club's carbon footprint.

<sup>21</sup> [https://assets.ctfassets.net/f42pa1j7pq2p/2wYKknRfr8xNBxykzYRG2e/a53f17f1de6ac0d06c85e6e5d7963466/FGR\\_Climate\\_Case\\_Study\\_-\\_Sport\\_as\\_a\\_force\\_for\\_good.pdf](https://assets.ctfassets.net/f42pa1j7pq2p/2wYKknRfr8xNBxykzYRG2e/a53f17f1de6ac0d06c85e6e5d7963466/FGR_Climate_Case_Study_-_Sport_as_a_force_for_good.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> <https://unfccc.int/news/world-s-greenest-soccer-club-kicks-off-in-professional-league>





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**There is no doubt that FGR is a pioneer when it comes to working to mitigate its impact on the environment, which is demonstrated by its extensive sustainability initiatives, some of which are as follows:**

The grass is cut with a GPS-directed electric lawn mower powered by solar energy.

An online ticketing system and a paperless membership scheme.

FGR is 100% vegan, offering only freshly made vegan food to all players, staff, and fans.

Team kit manufactured from bamboo and soap manufactured using grass from the FGR pitch.

A grass management plan for the pitch, encouraging pollinators by seed sowing, bat and floral survey, bug hotels, bee feeders and beehives.

Community sessions to educate fans on energy, waste and healthy lifestyles, as well as eco information on the FGR website, notice boards around the stadium, and in the match-day program.

Rainwater is captured for pitch irrigation instead of mains water.

FGR has a low energy LED scoreboard, energy efficient fryers in its catering outlets and timers for heating of buildings.

Pitch side, corporate boxes and office recycling facilities; reduced packing waste from kit suppliers; recyclable pitch side sponsorship boards; snacks with compostable packaging, and composting.

The entire club is powered by 100% green energy from Ecotricity, some of which is generated by the solar panels on the stadium roof and the solar tracker at the ground entrance.

No pesticides or herbicides are used on the turfgrass.

Fans are encouraged to travel to all games (home and away) by sustainable means and, at the ground, the club has installed electric vehicle charging points.

FGR's efforts to mitigate its environmental impact have been recognized and acknowledged across the board and, worldwide, it is considered a success story to be replicated.

## HERE ARE SOME OF THESE ACHIEVEMENTS:

# 2017

FIFA declared FGR as the 'greenest football club in the world'.

# 2018

FGR was certified by the United Nations as carbon neutral, under the Carbon Neutral Now scheme.

FGR became a founding member of UNFCCC Sports for Climate Action Framework





# 2019

FGR chairman Dale Vince became a Climate Champion for the Framework.

It's worth highlighting that these efforts have in no way hampered the club commercially. In the past year, even with the Covid-19 pandemic, FGR has managed to double its sponsorship revenue, largely thanks to its distinctive positioning around sustainability, thus proving that it is indeed possible to do good and do well in sport.



# BRINGING ACTION 1 TO LIFE

 <b>SPORTS PROPERTIES</b>	 <b>ATHLETES</b>	 <b>SPONSORS</b>	 <b>FANS</b>
<p>Implement a comprehensive sustainability strategy in undertaking systemic transformation towards Carbon Neutrality/Positivity by or before 2040 including KPIs to be attained on a time-bound basis (i.e. 50% reduction in emissions by 2030, etc.) and involving and incentivizing employees to participate. When sustainability is seen as everyone's job, it is more successful.</p>	<p>Demand key activities of the team/ clubs operations move towards carbon neutrality, beginning with advocating for forms of low-carbon emitting transport to events where possible (i.e. trains, etc) and advocating for a reduction in cross-continental travel.</p>	<p>Hold sports properties and Athletes accountable by evaluating ESG factors and commitment to carbon neutrality before or by 2050 as key criteria in deciding which sports properties to invest in.</p>	<p>Adopt carbon reducing actions around attendance of sporting events including: taking sustainable forms of transport, bringing reusable water bottles to games, etc.</p>
<p>Commit to sharing best practices and learnings around how to become carbon neutral and the successful implementation of sustainable solutions with vendors and others in the supply chain network as well as with other sports organizations.</p>	<p>Offset any unavoidable carbon emissions and share both carbon emissions and chosen offsetting partner organization with fans.</p>	<p>Activate partnerships in a sustainable way.</p>	<p>Hold sports organizations accountable for their impact on the environment and demand that they do something to address climate change (for example, set objectives and targets to be carbon neutral).</p>



## ACTION 2

# MOBILIZING FANS

Leveraging our influence to mobilize billions of sports fans to take concrete action.



# MOBILIZING FANS

2020 has certainly reiterated the power that athletes and fans hold to shape social movements and influence society. In fact, 95% of athletes with more than 5 million followers on Instagram advocated for social causes in 2020 according to Nielsen Sports.<sup>23</sup> We witnessed hundreds of athletes across all global sports events kneeling in solidarity with the racial equality movement. Protest efforts fueled by some of today's biggest sports stars including the likes of LeBron James and Megan Rapino have shaped the social discourse around racial equality and gender equality, educating fans and creating new initiatives in their wake (i.e. NBA Social Justice Coalition, etc.).

That being said, we have yet to see robust advocacy from high-profile stars and widespread fan mobilization as it concerns climate change. An exciting opportunity and urgent responsibility exists for us to now double down our efforts at the service of the globe by leveraging the influence of the athletes and fans within the sports ecosystem to bring the climate change discussion to the forefront and, more importantly, give fans and society concrete ways in which to act.

At the moment, only 67% of individuals surveyed amongst respondents from 26 countries by Pew Research Center see climate change as a major threat to their societies, although this is up from 56% in 2013.<sup>24</sup> In addition, over half of American adults report that they rarely or never discuss climate change with their family members or friends.<sup>25</sup> Using high-profile athletes, sports properties and sponsors to educate and increase dialogue about climate change can serve as an important first step in helping individuals make the needed lifestyle adjustments towards a carbon free future. Awareness building will fuel the healthy and needed debate within the public sphere around how to go about addressing these issues, including how to hold governments and businesses accountable.

In the same respect, the sports industry has a compelling opportunity to mobilize fans by providing them with concrete ways to get involved and take action. In fact, according to SD Europe's recent survey, sports fans want to participate in helping tackle the climate crisis, both in their communities and on an international level, but have expressed a lack of opportunities to get involved, something

<sup>23</sup> <https://niensports.com/sports-fans-are-looking-to-sports-leagues-and-athletes-to-support-social-causes/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/18/a-look-at-how-people-around-the-world-view-climate-change/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.kff.org/report-section/the-kaiser-family-foundation-washington-post-climate-change-survey-main-findings/>





which sports properties and their supporting stakeholders should look to provide.<sup>26</sup> Key to the success of any fan engagement around sustainability is to support the program with clear and compelling communication via in-venue messaging, website, social media and regular reporting against key metrics as this provides an opportunity for education and will drive awareness and buy-in.

When sports properties have initiated opportunities for fan engagement around purpose and climate action, the response and results have been powerful. For example, in 2014, Brazilian Football Club Recife launched their “Immortal Fans” campaign, encouraging fans to become organ donors. Recife fans fully embraced this effort, leading over 66,000 fans to sign up, reducing waiting lists for organs in the area to almost zero, and saving thousands of lives.<sup>27</sup> Another initiative, the “Play Your Part” campaign centered around Super Bowl 50 in 2016, gave fans an opportunity to personally contribute to making the event “Net Positive”. Fans were rewarded with “goodcoins” (which helped them earn prizes) by participating in or pledging to participate in sustainable actions including taking public transportation, using reusable water bottles, and recycling among others. Ultimately, over 24,000

“Net Positive” pledges were made and \$200,000 in grants were given to four local environmental causes (with winners determined by the fans through the platform).<sup>28</sup>

These aforementioned fan engagement campaigns provide examples of how we can and must educate and engage sports’s huge and diverse fanbase. The challenge now is to “level up” and take these efforts to new heights by engaging our high-profile athletes, clubs, and sponsors in large scale efforts that cut across sports codes and continents to mobilize fans on an even greater scale.

<sup>26</sup> <https://sdeurope.eu/fans-want-to-be-part-of-solution-to-climate-change/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-27632527>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.playyourpart.org>

# BRINGING ACTION 2 TO LIFE

 <b>SPORTS PROPERTIES</b>	 <b>ATHLETES</b>	 <b>SPONSORS</b>	 <b>FANS</b>
<p>Leverage reach and communications and media assets (i.e. social media, dedicated webpage, onsite signage, broadcasting assets, etc.) to advocate for climate action.<sup>29</sup></p>	<p>Use the platform to educate fans around individual actions they can take to combat climate change (i.e. switching to EVs) and how to vote at the service of the environment.</p>	<p>Leverage sponsorship activations to facilitate discussion and education around climate change and partner with fans and athletes/sports properties in enacting concrete climate actions.</p>	<p>Talk about climate change and the need for climate action with other fans, sporting communities; keep conversations open and honest and appeal to shared values found through the love of sport to speak toward solutions and appeal to our collective humanity in the plight against climate change.</p>
<p>Provide pathways for fans to be directly involved and actively engage in taking climate action (i.e. through initiatives like Planet Super League, Play Your Part, and Immortal Fan among others).<sup>30</sup></p>	<p>Lend a voice and partner with to stakeholders already implementing meaningful solutions to combating climate change (i.e. NGOs, environmentally progressive brands, etc.).</p>	<p>Use sports sponsorship to promote, amplify, and demonstrate innovative solutions to addressing climate change (i.e. Toyota EV fleet during Tokyo 2020).</p>	<p>Request sports organizations to post content and educational resources on climate change, helping facilitate the mainstreaming of climate action/solutions.</p>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.sustainablesportindex.com>

<sup>30</sup> <https://sustainability.sport/the-lives-of-fans-should-come-first-when-sport-takes-climate-action/>

## ACTION 3

# PARTNERSHIPS FOR CHANGE

Sport is inherently about partnerships and it is only through partnerships that climate change will be effectively addressed.



# PARTNERSHIPS FOR CHANGE

The sports industry needs to start by using its sponsorship partnerships more strategically to achieve its climate goals. A recent Badvertising report into sports sponsorships reveals that more than 258 sponsorship deals across 13 global sports are with brands that promote high carbon products, services and lifestyles with football leading the charge with 57 partnerships with brands in the oil and gas, automotive and airline industries.<sup>31</sup> For an industry that is vulnerable to climate change and also claims to be committed to combating the climate crisis, this does not reflect well. The promotion of high carbon products and services through sport flies in the face of other efforts being made by the sector to mitigate against the harmful effects of climate and undermines sport's credibility and commitment to playing its part.

Brands sponsor sport to engage with their consumers, build brand loyalty and positively influence purchase behaviour. With brands such as Ineos, Gazprom and the like aligning with the world's biggest sports brands, the message to fans is that commercially driven considerations win out over efforts to protect the future of the planet and that is damaging to

sport's reputation and credibility. Sports events, teams and leagues need to screen corporate sponsors before signing partnership agreements and decline partnerships with sponsors who go against their climate change commitments. Alternatively, sports organisations should look to work with these brands to tell the story of their efforts to transition to more environmentally-friendly business practices and offerings. The move to a climate positive world is, after all, a journey and if organisations can demonstrate a credible commitment to being part of this journey, then a partnership with a less than perfect brand, could still work in an organisation's favour. A good example of this is Toyota's partnership with the IOC. Although the Badvertising report identified Toyota as the biggest high carbon sponsor in sport with 31 partnerships across most sports categories, its role as the IOC's Official Mobility Partner helped Tokyo to achieve the lowest emissions ever from any official vehicle fleet used at the Olympics. Toyota provided more than 3,700 mobility products for the Tokyo Games, 90% of which were electric, and helped to reduce carbon emissions by half.<sup>32</sup> More importantly though, Toyota helped the IOC

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.rapidtransition.org/resources/sweat-not-oil-why-sports-should-drop-advertising-and-sponsorship-from-high-carbon-polluters/>

<sup>32</sup> <https://global.toyota/en/newsroom/corporate/29232815.html>





to leave a positive legacy of improved city mobility in Tokyo and surrounds. For sport to succeed in leading the climate change movement, there also needs to be greater collaboration between the various stakeholders in sports to scale up the efforts being made. There need to be minimum sustainability requirements to be eligible as an event's host city or host stadium. Staging a net zero carbon event must become mandatory across all sports events and failure to do so must result in consequences for the offending host. There also needs to be cooperation between opposing clubs and teams within and across sports codes so that best practices are shared across the entire sports network and supply chain and so that an increasing number of fans can be mobilized to be part of the desired change.





The recently launched CUP26 football tournament is a good example of this. This is the biggest ever football campaign to address the climate crisis and incorporates a partnership model that sees 49 Premier League and EFT clubs, Planet Super League and Count Us In join forces to raise awareness of the role football and its fans can play in becoming more sustainable. For the duration of the 8-week tournament, fans will score goals for every planet-saving activity completed which is then allocated to

their team (there are more than 100 activities listed on the website<sup>33</sup>). Whichever team scores the most 'goals' wins the match and advances up the league table. It is too soon to comment on the success of this campaign but more initiatives like this will certainly help to achieve the scale and impact needed for sport to play a meaningful role in combating the climate crisis.

**STAGING A NET ZERO CARBON EVENT MUST BECOME MANDATORY ACROSS ALL SPORTS EVENTS AND FAILURE TO DO SO MUST RESULT IN CONSEQUENCES**

<sup>33</sup> <https://planetsuperleague.com/>

# BRINGING ACTION 3 TO LIFE

 <b>SPORTS PROPERTIES</b>	 <b>ATHLETES</b>	 <b>SPONSORS</b>	 <b>FANS</b>
<p>Cease sponsorship agreements with Fossil Fuel organizations with a phased approach to removing other high-carbon lifestyle sponsors or insist that these organizations are actively transforming to more sustainable operations.</p>	<p>Seek sponsorship agreements with brands authentically committed to climate action.</p>	<p>Provide technical support and resources to help facilitate the transition to carbon neutrality including: building sustainable transport options, introducing new technological solutions for sustainable stadiums/cities, etc.</p>	<p>Participate in and support any climate change initiatives organized by your favourite team or league.</p>
<p>Seek to partner with sponsors and fans in taking concrete climate action, whether that be through finding sponsors who can find concrete solutions to infrastructure or transportation needs of the property or engaging fans in interactive ways to engage in climate action (i.e. online platform to encourage them to take concrete climate actions).</p>	<p>Join organisations advocating for Climate Action (i.e. EcoAthletes) in order to become part of something bigger where athletes can collaborate with one another and greater impact can be achieved at scale.</p>	<p>Include specific wording within contracts with sponsored properties and athletes which links their environmental performance (i.e. environmental Social Return On Investment) to sponsorship fees or as a means for properties/athletes to earn performance bonuses.</p>	<p>Voice support for teams, sponsors/ brands and athletes who are engaged in climate action.</p>



## CONCLUSION

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Climate change is a real threat to the future of sport as we know it, but also to society and the planet. Urgent collective action is needed to turn the tide, significantly reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and bring global temperature increases to below 2°C.

Sport can and must play a leading role in the race towards a more sustainable world. With its global reach, influence, resources and its ability to inspire hope, sport must lead the charge. The industry must ramp up its efforts, move away from delivering quick wins and, instead, commit to a long term sustainability strategy across all sectors of the sports ecosystem. Its message and actions must be a clear and authentic example to other industries of what can be achieved through a concerted effort.

Fans are calling for the sports they follow and the athletes they love to show them the way. If the sports industry can collectively prioritize sustainability and change the way it operates at the scale necessary to make a noticeable impact, not only will we safeguard the future of the sports we love, but others will surely follow.



# 17 SPORT

The author of this report is 17 Sport, as are the expressed views outlined in this document. 17 Sport is an impact company operating at the intersection of sports, business and purpose. We provide strategy, partnership, implementation, and social return on investment measurement services to transformational leaders in sport and business who are committed to accelerating the transformation of sport into a force for good.

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