



**SPORT
INDUSTRY
FORUM**

@sportindustryseries

1-2

OCT, 2025

ABU DHABI, UAE

abu dhabi
Convention & Exhibition Bureau

طائرة تنمية المجتمع
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT





OFFICIALLY SUPPORTED BY



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WHERE THE RIGHT PEOPLE MEET

- The Middle East's premier business forum for sport
- 500+ senior sports business professionals
- Taking place alongside the NBA Abu Dhabi Games
- Held at the iconic Yas Marina Circuit - home of the Abu Dhabi F1 Grand Prix
- Supported by Department of Culture and Tourism, Department of Community Development and Abu Dhabi Sports Council



WHY ARE WE DIFFERENT?



- **Decision-makers in the room:** Meet senior leaders shaping sport across the GCC and beyond
- **Global voices, regional relevance:** International speakers tackling topics that matter here
- **The right mix:** From government and federations to brands and investors – network with the people you need to know
- **Impact-driven:** Sessions and debates that feed back into regional policy and industry growth
- **Help shape the industry:** Be part of the conversations that shape sport in the region



UNIQUE NETWORKING



Beyond the stage, the Forum is designed for real connections.

Padel Networking (Tuesday 30 September, 3pm)

Join 31 fellow local and international delegates for an afternoon of padel at the iconic 321 Sports venue on Al Hudayriyat Island. You'll play shorts games (1 set) with different partners on immaculate indoor courts. All abilities welcome.

Drinks Reception (Wednesday 1 October, 5.30pm)

End Conference Day One with an informal networking evening. Great conversations, great company and the perfect way to continue building relationships.





WHO



ATTENDS?

C-suite, leadership and management-level from:

- Government officials
- Brands & sponsors
- Federations & clubs
- Leagues & tournaments
- Rights holders
- Broadcasters
- Investors
- Venue owners & operators
- Event organisers
- Agencies
- Suppliers

79% local attendance vs 21% international attendance

More global than ever – with delegates from Europe, the US and Asia.

2025:

AGENDA THEMES

- 01 Government Updates and Interviews:** Sport as a Driver of National Identity and Economic Growth
- 02 National Visions for Sport, Health & Inclusion**
- 03 Investing in Purpose-Driven Sport**
- 04 Saudi Case Studies:** Transformation in Action
- 05 Modernising Federations:** A New Era of Governance & Growth
- 06 Women's Sport:** Unlocking the next wave of growth
- 07 Inside the Brand:** The Decisions Behind Investing in Sport
- 08 Beyond the Game:** The Future of Sport, Entertainment & Live Experiences
- 09 NBA Leadership:** Inside the Journey
- 10 Sports Tech and AI:** Where innovation meets opportunity
- 11 Performance and Pathways:** From grassroots to global stages
- 12 Community Activity and Wellbeing:** Embedding health through sport

SCHEDULE



**SEP
30**

Padel Networking Event

321 Sports, Al Hudayriyat Island, Abu Dhabi

**OCT
01**

Day 1: Sport Industry Forum

Yas Conference Centre, Yas Marina Circuit,
Abu Dhabi

Networking Drinks

Saadiyat Beach Club

**OCT
02**

Day 2: Sport Industry Forum

Yas Conference Centre, Yas Marina Circuit,
Abu Dhabi

NBA Abu Dhabi Games:

New York Knicks vs. Philadelphia 76ers

Etihad Arena

SPEAKERS



ALEXIS OHANIAN

CO-FOUNDER, **REDDIT**,
FOUNDER, **SEVEN SEVEN SIX** AND
FOUNDING OWNER, **ANGEL CITY FC**



MOHAMMED AWLIA

ASSISTANT DEPUTY MINISTER FOR
STRATEGIC PLANNING &
INVESTMENT, **SAUDI MINISTRY OF
SPORT**



**H.E. GHANIM MUBARAK
AL HAJERI**

UNDERSECRETARY, **UAE MINISTRY
OF SPORTS**

SPEAKERS



JOHN TERRY

FORMER PROFESSIONAL
FOOTBALLER, CAPTAIN OF
**CHELSEA FC AND ENGLAND
NATIONAL TEAM**



**H.E. AHMED ISMAIL AL
HOSANI**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR , SUPPORT
SERVICES SECTOR, **ABU DHABI
SPORTS COUNCIL**



BRIAN LOTT

CHIEF COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER,
MUBADALA

SPEAKERS



IAN RUSH

EX LIVERPOOL F.C. AND WALES
NATIONAL TEAM FOOTBALLER



KELLY FLATOW

EVP GLOBAL EVENTS, NBA



ANDREW THOMPSON

MANAGING DIRECTOR, SAILGP

SPEAKERS



SAIF RASHID AL NOAIMI

CEO, ETHARA, CEO, ABU DHABI
GRAND PRIX



ROBBIE FOWLER

EX LIVERPOOL F.C. AND ENGLAND
NATIONAL TEAM FOOTBALLER



LARA PRICE

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER,
PHILADELPHIA 76ERS

DAY ONE:

WEDNESDAY, 1 OCTOBER 2025



08.15

REGISTRATION & NETWORKING

Reconnect with industry peers and strengthen relationships that matter.

09.00

WELCOMES

OPENING ADDRESS: SALLY CORANDER, FOUNDER, **INTERACT**, AND FOUNDER, **SPORT INDUSTRY FORUM**

WELCOME FROM THE HOST VENUE: AHMED AL KAABI, CHIEF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS OFFICER, **ETHARA**

MODERATOR'S OPENING REMARKS: CHRISTOPHER MCHARDY, HEAD OF SPORT, **ARABIAN RADIO NETWORK (ARN)**

09.20

OPENING SPEECH

OPENING SPEECH ON BEHALF OF ABU DHABI SPORTS COUNCIL

*H.E. AHMED ISMAIL AL HOSANI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SUPPORT SERVICES SECTOR, **ABU DHABI SPORTS COUNCIL***

His Excellency Ahmed Al Hosani, of Abu Dhabi Sports Council, opens the Sport Industry Forum 2025 with a vision for the future of sport in Abu Dhabi.

- World-class events and milestones achieved in 2025
- Abu Dhabi's sporting direction - where the emirate is headed and its long-term sports vision
- Upcoming 2026 highlights, including the Open Masters Games Abu Dhabi 2026
- Opportunities for partnership - new solutions and technologies which the Sports Council and partners are exploring to support its vision



09.30

KEYNOTE INTERVIEW

FROM VISION TO REALITY: DEVELOPING THE SPORTS ECOSYSTEM IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

*H.E. GHANIM MUBARAK AL HAJERI, UNDERSECRETARY, **UAE MINISTRY OF SPORTS***

- Reimagining sports services: How the Ministry is elevating access, quality and impact
- Driving the digital revolution: Technology & transformation shaping the future of UAE sport
- Building stronger communities: Advancing community sports and governance across the national sports sector

09.50

SAUDI VISION

SHAPING TOMORROW: SAUDI ARABIA'S VISION FOR SPORT

*MOHAMMED AWLIA, ASSISTANT DEPUTY MINISTER FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING & INVESTMENT, **SAUDI MINISTRY OF SPORT***

A look at how Saudi Arabia is turning its Vision 2030 ambitions into action – positioning sport as a driver of economic growth, global influence, and community transformation.

- Rapid growth in international events and investment creating jobs and tourism impact
- Infrastructure boom with new world-class stadiums and the Riyadh Sports Boulevard
- Talent development through nationwide academies and grassroots expansion
- The road to the 2034 FIFA World Cup – building legacy and global partnerships



10.10

ETHARA IN HIGH GEAR: DRIVING INDUSTRY GROWTH

*SAIF RASHID AL NOAIMI, CEO, **ETHARA**, CEO, **ABU DHABI GRAND PRIX***

From Formula 1's iconic season finale to high-profile live events, Abu Dhabi has become a global case study in how sport and entertainment can fuel tourism, brand value and commercial growth. Ethara's CEO shares lessons from their journey—and where the next opportunities exist for partners across the sports industry.

- Evolving the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix into a flagship event that drives economic impact and global destination appeal
- Diversifying beyond F1 with major properties including the NBA Abu Dhabi Games, UFC Fight Nights, UFC Qatar and Games of the Future
- How to maximise value through world-class venue management, hospitality and partnerships that elevate fan experience and brand ROI
- Growth opportunities and cross-border collaboration - including involvement in Saudi Arabia's mega-projects through OVG Middle East

10.40

NETWORKING & REFRESHMENTS

Exchange ideas with decision-makers in a relaxed, informal setting.

11.25

EXCLUSIVE LEGENDS PANEL

ANFIELD LEGEND: LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP AND LEGACY

PART 1: IAN RUSH, EX **LIVERPOOL F.C. AND **WALES NATIONAL TEAM FOOTBALLER****

PART 2: ROBBIE FOWLER, EX **LIVERPOOL F.C. AND **ENGLAND NATIONAL TEAM FOOTBALLER****

Two of Liverpool's most celebrated strikers take the stage to share stories from their iconic playing careers and the lessons they've carried into leadership, business, and life beyond football. From unforgettable goals at Anfield to building new ventures around the world, Ian Rush and Robbie Fowler open up about resilience, culture, and inspiring the next generation.



12.10

SPEED, STORYTELLING & SCALE: HOW SAILGP IS REWRITING THE PLAYBOOK FOR GLOBAL SPORTS PROPERTIES

*ANDREW THOMPSON, MANAGING DIRECTOR, **SAILGP***

What do Ryan Reynolds, Hugh Jackman, Kylian Mbappé, Anne Hathaway and Gary Vaynerchuk all have in common? They invested in SailGP teams!

SailGP has gone from a bold concept to one of the fastest-growing, most technologically advanced sports properties on the planet. But what does it take to build a premium sports product from scratch and win over fans, host cities and brand partners along the way?

- Start-up to global: How SailGP built a commercially viable, fan-first league with innovation and engagement at its core
- Why partners invest in SailGP: And what today's top sponsors are looking for in sport, from reach to relevance to purpose
- Growth in the UAE: Working together to expand youth sailing, grassroots development and community engagement
- Entertaining at 50 Knots: What it takes to deliver high-stakes entertainment for a global, next-gen audience - on and off the water



12.40

PANEL DISCUSSION **AI IN ACTION: FROM THE TRACK TO THE EVERYDAY GAME**

PANELISTS:

*FRED BAKER, SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT LEADER, **IBM***

*ALEX BRUNORI, VP BRAND & BRAND EXPERIENCE, **G42***

MODERATOR: *KATIE OVERY, PRESENTER*

AI breakthroughs at the top of sport are no longer confined to pit walls or pelotons. From real-time race decisions to creative fan engagement, the same principles can now be applied across leagues, brands and grassroots programmes.

- How AI and data streams are transforming split-second performance decisions and fan engagement
- Insights from IBM's global sports survey and G42's annual report on AI and sport
- Case studies in using generative AI for breakthrough design and fan engagement
- Practical takeaways for rights holders, brands and federations looking to make data and AI part of their everyday toolkit

13.10

NETWORKING LUNCH

Expand your network strategically while enjoying a relaxed dining setting.

14.20

SPORT INDUSTRY FORUM - THE QUIZ

A mainstay in our forum agenda every year - your chance to win some Knicks and 76ers merch!!



14.30

NBA TEAMS – BUSINESS LEADERS PANEL GAME PLANS FOR GROWTH: LEADERSHIP JOURNEYS IN SPORT

PANELISTS:

*JAMAAL LESANE, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, **MADISON SQUARE GARDEN SPORTS (NEW YORK KNICKS)**
LARA PRICE, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, **PHILADELPHIA 76ERS***

Hear from two of the NBA's most influential leaders as they reflect on their careers and share insights from the front office of globally recognised franchises:

- Personal leadership journeys and lessons from the NBA's biggest stages
- Building culture and scaling growth within major sports organisations
- Operating within a multi-faceted sports and entertainment business – teams, venues, global partnerships
- Innovation, adaptability, and resilience in steering organisations through high-pressure moments

15.10

RUNNING THE BUSINESS OF ATHLETICS: INNOVATION, INVESTMENT AND GLOBAL AMBITION

*HUGH BRASHER, CEO, **LONDON MARATHON EVENTS**, AND CO-FOUNDER, **ATHLETIC VENTURES***

INTERVIEWER: *KATIE OVERY, PRESENTER*

As CEO of London Marathon Events and co-founder of Athletics Ventures, Hugh Brasher shares how a new model is transforming the future of athletics – from innovative financing of major championships to fresh partnerships and global event delivery.

- Why Athletics Ventures is a game-changer for the sport
- Inside the UK's bid for the 2029 World Athletics Championships
- New commercial models driving fan engagement and growth
- Exporting London Marathon expertise to mass-participation events worldwide



15.40

DESTINATION MARKETING IN THE AGE OF ADVENTURE

*ALISTAIR GOSLING, FOUNDER & CEO, **EXTREME INTERNATIONAL***

INTERVIEWER: *KATIE OVERY, PRESENTER*

Adventure, lifestyle, and tourism are converging to reshape how destinations are marketed – with social media and the creator economy driving global visibility and economic growth. This session explores how sport and adventure experiences are powering one of the fastest-growing segments in tourism.

- The intersection of adventure, lifestyle, and tourism as a destination driver
- The role of creators and social media in building authentic global reach
- Adventure sport as a high-growth engine for tourism economies
- Lessons for destinations on turning experiences into sustainable marketing assets

16.10

NETWORKING & REFRESHMENTS

Visit exhibitor stands and discover solutions that can transform your business.

16.40

CLOSE OF DAY ONE

17.00

NETWORKING DRINKS

Saadiyat Beach Club

Delegates board a bus to Saadiyat Beach Club.

Unwind after a packed first day at our networking drinks reception. Share highlights from the Forum, continue conversations in a relaxed setting, and build new connections with fellow delegates, speakers, and partners.

Drinks from 17.30 at Saadiyat Beach Club.



DAY TWO:

THURSDAY, 2 OCTOBER 2025

08.20

REGISTRATION & NETWORKING

Spot new opportunities by meeting partners outside your usual network.

09.00

WELCOME TO DAY TWO

MARK GILDEA, MANAGING DIRECTOR – UAE, INTERACT

09.05

MODERATOR'S OPENING REMARKS

CHRISTOPHER MCHARDY, HEAD OF SPORT, ARABIAN RADIO NETWORK (ARN)

09.10

FIRESIDE CHAT FROM TECH ENTREPRENEUR TO WOMEN'S SPORTS INVESTOR

*ALEXIS OHANIAN, TECH FOUNDER AND VENTURE CAPITALIST, CO FOUNDER OF **REDDIT**, FOUNDER OF **SEVEN SEVEN SIX***

Alexis Ohanian, co-founder of Reddit and founder of Seven Seven Six, built a career spotting untapped upside in tech, media and community. He's now applying that same vision to women's sport – backing Angel City FC from its 2020 launch through to its record-breaking \$250 million sale just four years later.

In this fireside chat, Alexis will share lessons and opportunities for sport stakeholders and investors in the Middle East, including:

- How lessons from scaling tech and other ventures translate into building women's sports brands and communities
- Why he invested in Angel City FC and Chelsea FC Women – seeing each as undervalued opportunities
- The launch of Athlos – the women's-only track and field event offering record prize money and global visibility
- How to define and measure success in women's sport investments – balancing performance, commercial upside, community impact and growth
- Creating new fan markets, leveraging technology and media, structuring investments and building commercial value in women's sport

09.50

SAUDI FOCUS INVESTING IN THE FUTURE OF SPORT

*DANNY TOWNSEND, CEO, **SURJ SPORTS INVESTMENT, SAUDI ARABIA***

As CEO of SURJ Sports Investment, Danny Townsend shares how Saudi Arabia's government-backed platform is reshaping global sport through long-term equity investment – creating sustainable pathways to host world-class events and build lasting legacy.

- Why equity investment in sports and leagues secures long-term growth
- Bringing global sports to Saudi Arabia in a sustainable, repeatable way
- Building legacy through events that extend beyond the competition itself
- Positioning Saudi Arabia as a committed, long-term partner in global sport



10.10

PANEL DISCUSSION PUTTING ON THE GREATEST SHOW: THE FUTURE OF SPORTING SPECTACLES

PANELISTS:

*KELLY FLATOW, EVP – GLOBAL EVENTS, **NBA***

*KASH SHAIKH, FOUNDER & CEO, **BASEBALL UNITED***

*DAVID POWELL, MANAGING DIRECTOR, **OVG MIDDLE EAST**, CHIEF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, **ETHARA***

*STACEY KNIGHT, GLOBAL COMMERCIAL & MARKETING DIRECTOR, **WASSERMAN LIVE***

MODERATOR: *KATIE OVERY, PRESENTER*

From the NBA's global event portfolio – spanning the U.S., Middle East, and beyond – to Baseball United's pioneering efforts in exporting and building an entire sports ecosystem, this session dives into how leading sports brands and venues craft unforgettable moments for fans, partners and host cities alike.

- How to design events and venues that keep fans coming back
- The "must haves" when entering new markets
- The role of technology, hospitality and entertainment in elevating live sport
- Lessons for governments, brands and organisers on using sport to engage audiences and grow destinations

10.50

NETWORKING & REFRESHMENTS

Meet your next client over coffee during our dedicated networking break.

11.30

ATHLETE EXCLUSIVE FROM CAPTAIN TO COACH: LEADERSHIP LESSONS

*JOHN TERRY, FORMER **CHELSEA F.C.** AND **ENGLAND NATIONAL TEAM** CAPTAIN*

Chelsea's legendary captain shares stories and insights that go beyond the pitch, offering practical lessons in leadership and adaptability for today's business world.

- Winning titles and the Champions League: building teams that thrive under pressure
- Leading strong personalities and creating unity in high-stakes environments
- Lessons from world-class managers on adaptability and change management
- Translating elite sport leadership into business and organisational success



12.05

ATHLETE PANEL **ATHLETES' VOICES: BREAKING BARRIERS AND BUILDING PATHWAYS**

PANELISTS:

MARYAM AL FARSI, **UAE SPRINTER**

HAYA BARGHOUT, HEAD OF CREATORS & PUBLIC FIGURES – MENA, **TIKTOK**

DAWN BARNABLE, FOUNDER, **THE METTLESET**

VERA PAUW, HEAD COACH, **UAE NATIONAL WOMEN'S FOOTBALL TEAM**

MODERATOR: KATIE OVERY, PRESENTER

Behind every headline performance is an athlete navigating unique challenges — from access to resources and infrastructure, to balancing life on and off the field.

- The everyday realities and pressures athletes encounter
- The role of media, sponsorship and storytelling in shaping opportunities
- How TikTok and the creator economy are giving athletes new tools to grow their visibility, voice, and support systems
- What federations, brands and industry stakeholders can do to better support athlete development and wellbeing

12.45

PANEL DISCUSSION – SPONSORED BY NIELSEN SPORTS **INSIDE THE BRAND: THE BUSINESS OF SPORTS PARTNERSHIPS**

PANELISTS:

BRIAN LOTT, CHIEF COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER, **MUBADALA**

DALE NOBLE, HEAD OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, MENAPI, **NIELSEN SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT**

Leading brand executives lift the lid on how and why they invest in sport – from global sponsorships to grassroots partnerships – and what they really look for when choosing where to spend.

- Decision-making: Why brands choose certain sports, teams, and athletes
- ROI and measurement: Proving the value of sponsorship and partnerships
- Building audiences and customers through sport
- Fan engagement: Connecting with communities in authentic and innovative ways



13.15

NETWORKING LUNCH

Build deeper connections over lunch with industry leaders and peers.

14.20

EXCLUSIVE PANEL

OPEN MASTERS GAMES ABU DHABI 2026

PANELISTS:

*H.E. TALAL MUSTAFA AL HASHEMI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE EVENTS SECTOR, **ABU DHABI SPORTS COUNCIL**
SALEM AL AKBARI, CHIEF DIRECTOR, **OPEN MASTERS GAMES ABU DHABI 2026***

Abu Dhabi will welcome the world in February 2026 for the Open Masters Games, the largest and most inclusive multi-sport event ever staged in the Middle East. Bringing together thousands of athletes of all ages and abilities, the Games will showcase global competition, community participation and Emirati heritage on an unprecedented scale.

- 30+ sports and 20+ venues across Abu Dhabi – from world-class arenas to heritage locations
- 25,000+ participants from 100+ nations – open to athletes aged 30+ and people of determination
- Designed to leave a lasting legacy of health, active living and community engagement in the UAE
- How everyone – businesses, individuals, athletes – can get involved!

14.50

PANEL DISCUSSION

ABU DHABI'S THREE YEAR PLAN FOR SCHOOL SPORTS

PANELISTS:

*JONATHAN SILMAN, SPORT PROGRAM MANAGER – TEAM LEAD, **DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE – ABU DHABI (ADEK)***

*MOHAMMED HUSSAIN AL SHATERI, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY EVENTS, **ABU DHABI SPORTS COUNCIL***

MODERATOR: KATIE OVERY, PRESENTER

Explore Abu Dhabi's strategic vision to transform school sport – from new competitions and talent pathways to embedding physical activity into everyday student life.

- Delivering on ADEK's three-year plan for school sport
- Expanding school competitions to nurture talent and participation
- Encouraging daily physical activity to build healthier, more active children
- Linking education, health and community outcomes through sport





15.20

PANEL DISCUSSION

FROM START-UP TO SCALE: HOW SPORTS APPAREL BRANDS COMPETE AND GROW IN A CHANGING MARKET

PANELISTS:

*STUART HENWOOD, SENIOR DIRECTOR, MIDDLE EAST, AFRICA, INDIA, **NEW BALANCE***

*IMAD EL GHAZAL, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT – SPORTS, **GMG***

*WAJDAN GUL, CO-FOUNDER & CEO, **SQUATWOLF***

*RORY MACFADYEN, FOUNDER, **REFLO***

- The Challenger Brands: Reflo's and SQUATWOLF's journeys from concept to market traction, with investor backing from Harry Kane
- The Regional Powerhouse: GMG's perspective on growing a sports business across the Middle East and Asia – all while addressing the challenges of meeting diverse consumer needs
- The Global Brand: How New Balance sustains growth and relevance in a crowded field, balancing heritage with innovation and adapting to consumer expectations
- The Future of Sports Apparel: What's next for brands at every stage – from sustainability to e-commerce to athlete influence

16.00

FINAL NETWORKING SESSION

Uncover cross-industry opportunities during the final networking break.

16.30

CLOSE OF SPORT INDUSTRY FORUM



**“THE BEST SPORTS FORUM IN
THE MENA REGION!
SESSIONS WERE ENGAGING
AND PROVIDED VALUABLE
INSIGHTS YOU CAN’T GET
ANYWHERE ELSE”**

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interact

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SPORTS UNFOLDED
THE METTLESET

Arabian
Business

