SPORT INDUSTRY FORUM

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@sportindustryseries



24 - 25

NOV 2026

W ABU DHABI - YAS ISLAND, ABU DHABI, UAE

SPORT INDUSTRY FORUM

OFFICIALLY SUPPORTED BY

دائـــرة تـنـمـيـة المجتمع
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

abu dhabi
Convention & Exhibition Bureau

Abu Dhabi Sports Council
مجلس أبوظبي الرياضي



WHERE THE RIGHT PEOPLE MEET

- The Middle East's premier business forum for sport
- 300+ senior professionals from sport, health, education, community and related sectors
- Taking place in the week leading up to the SailGP Grand Final in Abu Dhabi
- Hosted at W Abu Dhabi - Yas Island in the centre of Yas Marina Circuit
- Supported by the Department of Culture and Tourism, Abu Dhabi Sports Council and Department of Community Development

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 (Monday 23 November, 3pm)
Join 31 fellow delegates for an afternoon of padel at the iconic 321 Sports venue on Al Hudayriyat Island. You'll play in a relaxed, friendly tournament amongst some great networking opportunities.

Drinks Reception (Tuesday 24 November, 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

2026:
AGENDA THEMES

01 Public Policy, Sports Strategy & Health Outcomes

02 Destinations, Global Properties & Brand Partnerships

03 Live Sport, Clubs & Building the UAE Sports Calendar

04 AI & Technology

05 Regional Growth inc. Saudi: Federations, Venues & Markets

06 Brands, Sponsorship & Retail

07 Participation, Women’s Sport & Integrity

08 Media & Fans

SCHEDULE

NOV 23

Padel Networking Event
321 Sports
Al Hudayriyat Island, Abu Dhabi

NOV 24

Day 1: Sport Industry Forum
W Hotel Yas Island, Abu Dhabi

Evening Networking Drinks

NOV 25

Day 2: Sport Industry Forum
W Hotel Yas Island, Abu Dhabi

PADEL NETWORKING EVENT

We’re delighted to be hosting our padel networking event once again, the evening before the Sport Industry Forum.

Join the who’s who of the forum a day early for some friendly competition and relaxed conversation. It’s an informal way to build connections with the people who matter, before the forum begins.

321 Sports
Al Hudayriyat Island, Abu Dhabi
23 November
3pm



SPEAKERS



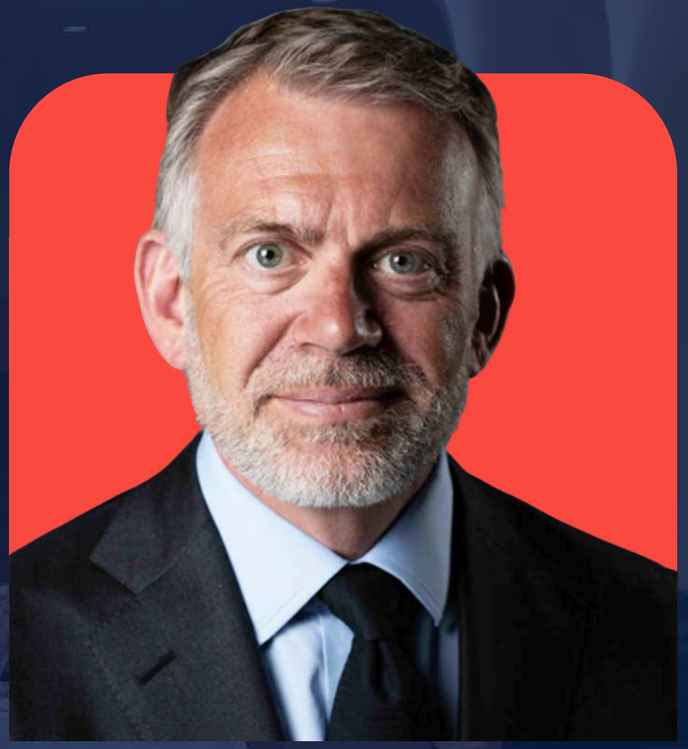
H.E. AREF AL AWANI

GENERAL SECRETARY, **ABU DHABI SPORTS COUNCIL**



H.E. DR. RASHED AL SUWAIDI

DIRECTOR GENERAL, **ABU DHABI PUBLIC HEALTH CENTRE**



JONATHAN EMERY

CEO, **ALDAR DEVELOPMENT**

SPEAKERS



SANJOG GUPTA

CEO, **INTERNATIONAL CRICKET COUNCIL (ICC)**



CHLOE TARGETT ADAMS

CHIEF COMMERCIALIZATION OFFICER, **SURJ SPORTS INVESTMENT, SAUDI**



RUSSELL COUTTS

CEO, **SAILGP**

SPEAKERS



BRIAN LOTT

GROUP CHIEF COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER, **MUBADALA**



H.E. TALAL AL HASHEMI

BOARD MEMBER, **UAE WRESTLING FEDERATION**



SAFA TARYAM

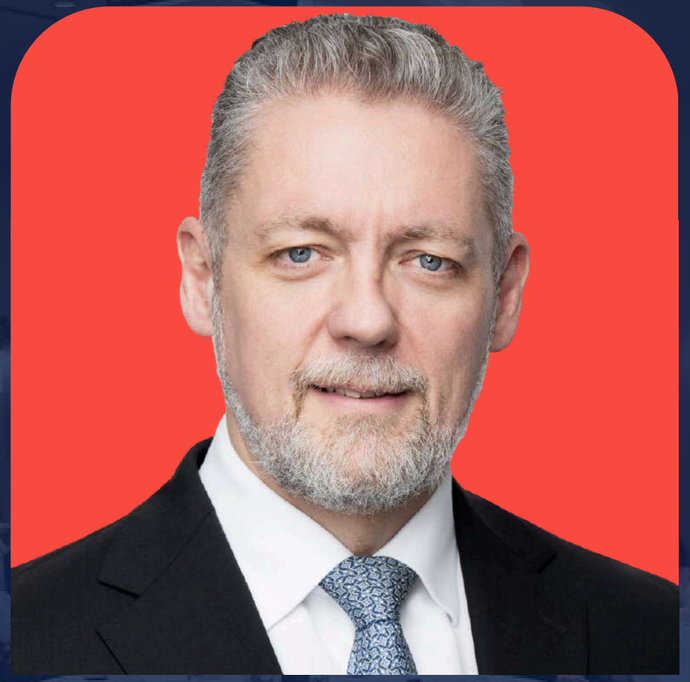
CEO, **ELITE SPORTS UAE**

SPEAKERS



H.E. ALI AL ALI

CEO AND BOARD MEMBER, **DUBAI RACING CLUB**



CIARÁN CARRUTHERS

CEO, **GENERAL COMMERCIAL GAMING REGULATORY AUTHORITY (GCGRA)**



RALPH STRAUS

CHIEF COMMERCIAL & MARKETING OFFICER, **AL KHAIL SQUARE (ABU DHABI EQUESTRIAN/TURF CLUBS)**

SPEAKERS



BUDREYA FAISAL AL AFEEFI

PRESIDENT & FOUNDER, **BANAAT F.C.**



FRIEDRICH SCHMEISSER

MANAGING DIRECTOR, TOURNAMENT & OPERATIONS – MIDDLE EAST, **DP WORLD TOUR**



XAVIER CAMPBELL

CEO, **RADIA, SAUDI**

DAY ONE:
TUESDAY, 24 NOVEMBER 2026

08.30

REGISTRATION & MORNING REFRESHMENTS

Beat the morning rush, grab an early coffee and maximise your networking time with fellow leaders working in the business of sport, health and other related sectors.

09.30

WELCOME & OPENING

*SALLY CORANDER, FOUNDER, **SPORT INDUSTRY FORUM**, & FOUNDER, **INTERACT***
*CHRISTOPHER MCHARDY, PRESENTER & HEAD OF SPORT, **ARABIAN RADIO NETWORK (ARN)***

SPORTS STRATEGY, HEALTH OUTCOMES & PURPOSE-DRIVEN SPORT

09.40

SPORT FOR EVERY AGE AND WHAT'S NEXT FOR 2027

A conversation with the General Secretary of Abu Dhabi Sports Council (ADSC) on what comes next. Abu Dhabi Sports Council's priorities for 2027 will focus on expanding community participation in sports, encouraging the adoption of healthy and active lifestyles, and ensuring greater accessibility to sporting opportunities for all segments of society.

What's in it for you: Learn what ADSC is prioritising for 2027, from events to community participation.

*H.E. AREF AL AWANI, GENERAL SECRETARY, **ABU DHABI SPORTS COUNCIL***

AGENDA

10.10

DESTINATION BUILDING & PURPOSE-DRIVEN SPORT: FROM TOUR LEVEL SPONSORSHIP TO COMMUNITY IMPACT

- Using flagship properties, including title partnership of the Abu Dhabi Aldar Championship, to put destinations on the global stage
- Linking mega-event sponsorship to grassroots facilities, active urban design, and cycling tracks across Aldar's developments
- Integrating high-growth community sports, including the padel and social racquet boom, into master-planned communities
- Purpose-driven leadership: lessons from the 3,333km Cycle Against Cancer for Al Jalila Foundation

What's in it for you: See how a master developer turns headline sponsorship into footfall, property value and long-term community participation.

JONATHAN EMERY, CEO, ***ALDAR DEVELOPMENT***

10.40

NETWORKING BREAK & REFRESHMENTS

Grab a coffee and compare notes with peers across government, federations, and the private sector following the morning policy run.

11.20

SPORT INDUSTRY AWARDS MIDDLE EAST LAUNCH & SPORT INDUSTRY FORUM QUIZ

An official announcement on next year's Sport Industry Awards Middle East, followed by some friendly competition and a prize or two.

BASSAM AL NAWFAL, MANAGING DIRECTOR, ***SPORT360X***

11.30

PREVENTION STARTS WITH MOVEMENT: PUBLIC HEALTH, SPORT AND THE FIGHT AGAINST CHRONIC DISEASE

- Why physical activity is the front line against chronic disease, and what a prevention-first approach means in practice for Abu Dhabi
- Making movement easy and part of daily life - lessons from ADPHC initiatives in the community
- Working across government and with the sport industry - how health, community, education and sport entities pull in the same direction, and what the private sector can contribute

What's in it for you: Understand how Abu Dhabi is putting prevention first, and where sport businesses, operators and brands can support public health goals.

H.E. RASHED AL SUWAIDI, DIRECTOR GENERAL, ***ABU DHABI PUBLIC HEALTH CENTER***

DESTINATIONS, GLOBAL PROPERTIES & BRAND PARTNERSHIPS

12.00

CRICKET'S NEXT CHAPTER: THE OLYMPIC RETURN, NEW MARKETS AND GROWING THE GLOBAL GAME

- What a place at Los Angeles 2028 means for cricket, and the plan to make it a regular Olympic sport
- Where the ICC is investing next: China, the US and new formats
- Growth of the women's game after the 2025 World Cup, and what comes next

What's in it for you: Get a view from the top of a global federation on where a sport is investing, and what that opens up for different types of partner.

SANJOG GUPTA, CEO, ***INTERNATIONAL CRICKET COUNCIL (ICC)***

12.20

BEYOND THE MEDALS: BUILDING THE FUTURE OF ELITE SPORT IN THE UAE

When a UAE athlete wins a medal, the whole country sees the moment. Few see the years of preparation behind it. In this exclusive keynote presentation, Safa Taryam introduces Elite Sport UAE, which works alongside the Ministry of Sport, the National Olympic Committee and the national federations to build the UAE's high-performance system. Its philosophy is athlete-focused, coach-led, ESUAE-enabled. Drawing on a record-breaking Asian Games and a new generation of Emirati talent, she explains why talent alone is not enough and what it takes to turn potential into consistent international success. Looking ahead to Brisbane 2032, she sets out what the next one, five and ten years must deliver.

What's in it for you: Learn how the UAE Ministry of Sports, federations and Elite Sport UAE are working together to nuture sporting talent into successful performance on the international stage.

SAFA TARYAM, CEO, ***ELITE SPORT UAE***

12.40

NETWORKING LUNCH

Decompress over a relaxed lunch, build valuable connections with decision-makers from across the region, and discuss the morning's sessions.

LIVE SPORT, CLUBS & BUILDING THE UAE SPORTS CALENDAR

13.45

PANEL - THE BUSINESS OF LIVE SPORT: EXPERIENCE, INVESTMENT AND COMMERCIAL RETURN

- Developing a calendar of events in Abu Dhabi to secure the best athletes and horses
- Commercial strategy for a home grown calendar of international events vs an international tour
- Creating great live experiences and best practice in event delivery
- How it all comes together to improve the commercial success of major sporting events

What's in it for you: Find out what makes an event land in Abu Dhabi and how rights holders, delivery partners, brands, promoters and venues extract commercial value from the calendar.

PANELLISTS:
RALPH STRAUS, CHIEF COMMERCIAL & MARKETING OFFICER, ***AL KHAIL SQUARE***
FRIEDRICH SCHMEISSER, MANAGING DIRECTOR, TOURNAMENT & OPERATIONS MIDDLE EAST, ***DP WORLD TOUR***
KATIE CUTHBERT, VP COMMERCIAL, ***LIVE TEAM MIDDLE EAST***

14.25

PANEL - BRAND PARTNERSHIPS ON THE WORLD'S LEADING SPORTS PROPERTIES: CHOOSING, ACTIVATING, MEASURING

Russell and Brian share how they evaluate, structure, and evolve marquee sports partnerships, using Mubadala and SailGP as the case study. Ahead of the Mubadala Abu Dhabi SailGP Grand Final, this session explores moving beyond traditional sponsorship into team equity, using data and technology to grow commercial value, and proving B2B, brand and community ROI.

What's in it for you: Learn how major institutional brands decide where to invest, what elevates a partnership from sponsorship to ownership, and how rights holders can pitch and report value in their terms.

PANELLISTS:
RUSSELL COUTTS, CO-FOUNDER & CEO, ***SAILGP***
BRIAN LOTT, GROUP CHIEF COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER, ***MUBADALA***

15.00

AFTERNOON NETWORKING BREAK & REFRESHMENTS

Refuel before the afternoon disruption in football and tech sessions, swap ideas with fellow operators and line up your next commercial partnership.

15.40

PANEL - DISRUPTING UAE FOOTBALL: PRIVATE CLUBS, ACADEMIES AND MODERN PYRAMIDS

- How new, privately-owned clubs are climbing the UAE football pyramid
- Operating models, academy fee structures, facility management and building commercial revenues
- Developing fanbases and talent in a multinational market

What's in it for you: See what a sustainable club business looks like outside the top flight, and where investors, brands and suppliers can get involved.

PANELLISTS:
MO JARAD, CO-FOUNDER & DIRECTOR OF FOOTBALL, ***GULF UNITED F.C.***
BUDREYA FAISAL AL AFEEFI, PRESIDENT & FOUNDER, ***BANAAT F.C.***

MODERATOR:
MINA RZOUKI, SPORTS REPORTER, **THE NATIONAL**

AI & TECHNOLOGY

16.10

AI IN PRACTICE: WHAT WORKS IN SPORT BUSINESSES

One practitioner on what AI is doing inside sport businesses today: running front offices, finding commercial inventory, and speeding up content and matchday marketing. Practical examples only, cutting through the hype to focus on agentic tools and immediate efficiency gains for your business.

What's in it for you: Leave with specific uses of AI, including prompts to get you started, which you can test in your own organisation.

*CRAIG HEPBURN, CEO & CO-FOUNDER, **1706 STUDIO**, FORMER CHIEF DIGITAL OFFICER, **ART BASEL** & **UEFA***

16.30

END OF DAY ONE & NETWORKING DRINKS RECEPTION

Trade business cards, debrief on Day One insights, and continue informal conversations over drinks at our dedicated evening reception.

DAY TWO:
WEDNESDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 2026

08.30

REGISTRATION & MORNING REFRESHMENTS

Reconnect with key delegates over breakfast refreshments and set your networking agenda for our final day.

09.30

WELCOME TO DAY TWO

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

REGIONAL GROWTH: FEDERATIONS, VENUES & MARKETS

09.35

BUILDING A NATIONAL FEDERATION: WRESTLING AND PARTICIPATION IN THE UAE

- The Federation's vision, strategic priorities and long-term ambitions for developing wrestling in the UAE
- Growing participation, competitions, talent development, and strategic partnerships
- Expanding access and inclusion while strengthening community engagement
- Building on key achievements and advancing national and international ambitions

What's in it for you: Understand how the UAE Wrestling Federation is building a sustainable wrestling ecosystem through competitions, talent development, community participation and strategic partnerships, with ambitions for international success.

H.E. TALAL AL HASHEMI, BOARD MEMBER, ***UAE WRESTLING FEDERATION***

AGENDA

09.55

RACING AT MEYDAN: BUILDING A GLOBAL SPORTING AND SOCIAL BRAND

- Running a global racing property, from the Dubai Racing Carnival to the Dubai World Cup meeting
- Balancing the heritage of racing with modern fan experience, media and technology
- Opening racing up to new audiences, owners and participants

What's in it for you: Hear how one of the region's best-known sporting properties approaches fan engagement, partnerships and long-term growth.

H.E. ALI AL ALI, CEO & BOARD MEMBER, ***DUBAI RACING CLUB***

10.15

PANEL - BUILDING SAUDI ARABIA'S SPORTS ECONOMY: STRATEGY, VENUES, OPERATORS AND COMMERCIAL VALUE

Saudi Arabia’s sports expansion has entered an operational phase focused on commercial discipline, domestic IP generation, and long-term asset operation. This panel explores how entities like SURJ, Qiddiya, and Radia are developing world-class venues, building scalable operational capacity, and structuring commercial partnerships that transfer knowledge and create lasting value.

What's in it for you: Find out how Saudi Arabia builds, finances and operates sport, and where international brands, rights holders and operators can plug in.

PANELLISTS:
CHLOE TARGETT-ADAMS, CHIEF COMMERCIALIZATION OFFICER, ***SURJ SPORTS INVESTMENT (SAUDI ARABIA)***
XAVIER CAMPBELL, CEO, ***RADIA (SAUDI ARABIA)***
MARC ARCHER, SENIOR DIRECTOR - SPORTS STRATEGY, ***QIDDIYA (SAUDI ARABIA)***

10.55

NETWORKING BREAK & REFRESHMENTS

Step out of the auditorium to meet sovereign investors, venue operators and retail pioneers.

AGENDA

BRANDS, SPONSORSHIP & RETAIL

11.35

PANEL - THE HIGH-PERFORMANCE ORGANISATION: CULTURE, CUSTOMERS AND EXECUTION IN SPORT RETAIL

- Operational excellence: team culture, high standards, and digital integration across stores, online, and partners
- Consumer focus: keeping the shopper and athlete at the centre, including high-growth sectors such as women's running and padel apparel
- Athlete mindset: building teams that perform in peak trading periods, product launches, and regional expansions

What's in it for you: Take practical ideas on culture, customer focus and operational execution that apply to any consumer-facing sports business.

PANELLISTS:
*IMAD EL GHAZAL, PRESIDENT - **SPORTS, GMG***
*ROBIN TREBBE, GENERAL MANAGER - GO SPORT FRANCHISE, **AL MANA FASHION GROUP***
*NIKOLA DJORDJEVIC, DEPUTY GM MARKETING, **ASICS ARABIA***

INTEGRITY & COMPLIANCE

12.15

REGULATED SPORTS WAGERING IN THE UAE: WHAT IT MEANS FOR SPORT

- How the UAE regulates commercial gaming, and GCGRA's role in setting standards, licensing operators and supervising them
- How sports wagering fits within the regulated market, and how player protection and sporting integrity are built into the framework
- How GCGRA works with government entities, industry bodies and licensed operators to enhance consumer protection and market integrity

What's in it for you: Understand the compliance obligations, commercial data opportunities and governance safeguards that apply as the regional regulatory landscape evolves.

*CIARÁN CARRUTHERS, CEO, **GENERAL COMMERCIAL GAMING REGULATORY AUTHORITY (GCGRA)***

PARTICIPATION & WOMEN'S SPORT

12.35

FROM PARTICIPATION TO IMPACT: ABU DHABI'S NEXT PHASE FOR COMMUNITY SPORT

- What DCD's four-year Strategy for Sport delivered: Adult activity up from 37% to 60%, 100 new community facilities and school sport across 380 schools
- DCD's changed role: Focusing public services on identified beneficiary groups and districts so more people can access sport
- Measuring impact, planning facilities and using sport for social change and cohesion - in a financially sustainable way

What's in it for you: See where providers and partners can align with DCD's next phase.

ROSS BAXTER, SPORTS DIVISION MANAGER, ***DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT***

12.50

NETWORKING LUNCH

Make the most of our final shared lunch to cement new relationships and commercial deals.

14.00

PANEL - COMMERCIALISING WOMEN'S SPORT: WHERE THE VALUE IS AND HOW TO UNLOCK IT

- Moving beyond CSR-led and bundled sponsorship: establishing standalone commercial valuations for women's sports properties
- Who the regional audience is, and what commercial partners need to understand to reach them effectively
- Building sustainable competitions: practical lessons from professional tournaments, visibility and athlete-led storytelling

What's in it for you: Get a realistic view of what makes women's sport commercially viable, and how to build partnerships that stand on business metrics rather than goodwill.

PANELLISTS:
BHAVNA VOHRA, CO-OWNER & DIRECTOR, ***YEOVIL TOWN F.C.***
HEATHER HENYON, FOUNDING PARTNER, ***MINDSHIFT CAPITAL*** *& CO-OWNER,* ***VERMONT WILD F.C.***
HANA ALNABULSI, ***EMIRATI ELITE TRIATHLETE***
DAWN BARNABLE, FOUNDER, ***THE METTLESET***

AGENDA

14.35

PANEL - GROWING THE GAME: PARTICIPATION PATHWAYS AND MASS ENGAGEMENT

Converting marquee sporting spectacles into sustained physical activity requires deliberate community infrastructure and accessible pathways. This session examines lessons from major mass-participation events, including the Open Masters Games Abu Dhabi 2026, and looks at how federations and community partners keep people playing by tackling dropout rates, upgrading coaching standards, and widening access for females, seniors and People of Determination.

What's in it for you: Learn what actually works to build regular community participation, and how national sports targets influence commercial sponsorship and grassroots funding.

Panellists:
SALEM ALAKBARI, ***OFFICE OF DEVELOPMENT AFFAIRS****, CHIEF DIRECTOR,* ***OPEN MASTERS GAMES ABU DHABI 2026***
MOHAMMED AL SHATARI, ADVISOR, ***ABU DHABI SPORTS COUNCIL***

MEDIA & FANS

15.05

PANEL - MEDIA RIGHTS, STREAMING AND DIGITAL FAN ENGAGEMENT

- How rightsholders, brands, production houses and social platforms turn sport into multi-platform entertainment across MENA
- Producing Arabic, digital-first and creator-led storytelling that resonates with younger audiences
- Packaging shoulder programming, behind-the-scenes access and vertical video to build audience and commercial value around main rights deals

What's in it for you: Understand where audiences are moving and how to shape content to reach them.

PANELLISTS:
MOHAMED HARB, HEAD OF PARTNERSHIPS, ***TIKTOK***
JOHN CURTIS, GENERAL MANAGER, ***WHISPER MIDDLE EAST***

MODERATOR: *MINA RZOUKI, SPORTS REPORTER,* ***THE NATIONAL***

15.35

CLOSE OF CONFERENCE

AGENDA



“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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THE METTLESET

