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## Beyond the Scoreboard: How Sports Became a Global Business Empire

**Author Name:** Nolan Pierce

**Institution:** Mark Keppel High, Monterey, California

**Mentor:** Evan Richards

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### ABSTRACT

Sports are no longer only about athletes, matches, trophies, and fans cheering in stadiums. Today, sports have become a huge global business. Modern sports involve media companies, sponsors, team owners, athletes, brands, technology firms, governments, fans, and tourism industries. A football match, cricket tournament, basketball league, or Olympic event is not only a game. It is also an economic activity that creates money through broadcasting rights, advertisements, ticket sales, merchandise, sponsorships, tourism, and digital platforms.

This research paper explains how sports have become a competitive business ecosystem. It studies how athletes have become brands, how leagues work like companies, how player transfers create global markets, and how fans are now part of a digital economy. It also looks at major revenue sources such as media rights, sponsorships, merchandising, and sporting events. Case studies such as the Indian Premier League, the Super Bowl, and the FIFA World Cup show how sports have become powerful commercial and cultural events.

The paper also discusses problems in the sports business, such as inequality, over-commercialization, corruption, doping, match-fixing, and pressure on athletes. The main finding is that sports today are not only played on the field. They are also played in boardrooms, media contracts, sponsorship deals, technology platforms, and global markets.

**Keywords:** sports business, athletes as brands, media rights, sponsorships, IPL, Super Bowl, FIFA World Cup, sports economy, commercialization

### Introduction

For many people, sports mean excitement, passion, competition, and entertainment. A fan may remember a last-minute goal, a six in the final over, a penalty shootout, or a record-breaking sprint. Sports create emotions that few other activities can match. They bring people together, create national pride, and give fans heroes to admire.

However, modern sports are no longer just games. They have become one of the biggest business industries in the world. A match is not only a match anymore. It is a product watched by millions

of people, sold to broadcasters, advertised by companies, promoted on social media, and used by cities and countries to attract tourism and global attention.

The uploaded source explains that sports have moved beyond entertainment and now function as a complex global business ecosystem. This ecosystem includes athletes, leagues, sponsors, media corporations, technology companies, fans, governing bodies, and infrastructure developers.

In simple words, sport has become a business network. Every part of it is connected. Athletes earn through salaries and endorsements. Teams earn through sponsors, ticket sales, and merchandise. Leagues earn through broadcasting rights. Media companies earn through viewers and subscriptions. Cities earn through tourism when they host major events. Fans spend money on tickets, jerseys, streaming apps, fantasy leagues, and digital content.

This does not mean sport has lost its emotional value. People still love sports because of passion, competition, loyalty, and drama. But behind the emotion, there is a very large business system working.

The purpose of this research paper is to understand how sports became a business ecosystem. It explains the major parts of this system, such as athletes as brands, leagues as companies, media rights, sponsorship, merchandising, tourism, technology, and governance. It also discusses the challenges that come with commercialization.

## **Aim**

The aim of this paper is to explain how sports work as a business in very simple language.

This paper will study:

1. How athletes have become personal brands.
2. How sports leagues now work like large companies.
3. How media rights and broadcasting create huge revenue.
4. How sponsorships and advertising support sports financially.
5. How merchandise and fan products create loyalty and income.
6. How mega-events increase tourism and city development.
7. How technology and digital platforms have changed fan engagement.
8. What ethical problems exist in the sports business.
9. How case studies such as the IPL, Super Bowl, and FIFA World Cup show the commercial power of sports.

## **Background**

### **1. What Is a Business Ecosystem?**

A business ecosystem is a group of different people, companies, institutions, and customers who are connected to each other. They depend on each other to create value.

For example, in the sports industry, the ecosystem includes:

- Athletes
- Teams
- Leagues
- Sponsors
- Broadcasters
- Fans
- Ticketing companies
- Technology platforms
- Sports equipment brands
- Stadium owners
- Tourism companies
- Governments
- Governing bodies

Each group plays a role. Athletes play the game. Teams organize and pay players. Leagues create competitions. Broadcasters show matches. Sponsors pay for visibility. Fans watch, buy, travel, and support. Governments build stadiums and host events. Technology companies create apps, data tools, and digital experiences.

This means sport is not only one activity. It is a network of many businesses working together.

### **2. Sports as Entertainment and Industry**

In the past, sport was mainly seen as recreation or physical competition. People played for pride, fitness, community, or national identity. While money was always involved in some form, the modern scale is completely different.

Today, sports are connected to entertainment, media, fashion, tourism, technology, politics, and global branding. A popular athlete is not only a player. They may also be a brand ambassador, social media influencer, investor, business owner, or celebrity.

The uploaded source states that the global sports industry was estimated to be worth more than USD 512 billion in 2023 and may grow further by 2030. This shows that sport is now a major part of the world economy.

### **3. Why Sports Make So Much Money**

Sports make money because they attract attention. Attention is valuable. If millions of people watch a match, companies want to advertise during it. If fans love a team, they buy jerseys. If a country hosts a mega-event, tourists may visit. If a player has millions of followers, brands want that player to promote products.

This is why sports are powerful. They combine emotion and business.

A normal advertisement may be ignored. But a brand logo on a team jersey is seen again and again by loyal fans. A Super Bowl advertisement becomes an event by itself. An IPL sponsorship reaches millions of viewers across India and abroad. A football club's shirt can be worn by fans in different countries.

Sports sell more than products. They sell identity, loyalty, pride, and belonging.

### **Approach**

This paper uses a secondary research method. This means it is based on already available information, reports, examples, and case studies rather than a new survey or experiment.

The main source used is the uploaded research content on sports as a competitive business ecosystem. This content discusses the growth of sports as a global industry, athletes as brands, leagues as enterprises, revenue streams, media rights, sponsorships, merchandising, tourism, franchise ownership, governance, ethical problems, and case studies such as the IPL, Super Bowl, and FIFA World Cup.

The paper rewrites and explains these ideas in simple language for a high school student.

The approach includes four steps.

First, the paper explains what a sports business ecosystem means.

Second, it studies the main sources of money in sports, such as broadcasting, sponsorship, merchandise, events, and tourism.

Third, it examines how athletes, leagues, and franchises work as business units.

Fourth, it uses case studies to understand how sports business works in the real world.

This method is useful because sports business is a large topic. Studying selected examples helps make the concept easier to understand.

## Data Analysis

### 1. Media Rights: Selling the Right to Show the Game

One of the biggest sources of money in sports is media rights. Media rights mean the money paid by television channels, streaming platforms, or digital companies to show sports events.

For example, if a league sells its broadcasting rights, the broadcaster gets permission to show the matches. The broadcaster then earns money through advertisements, subscriptions, and viewership.

The uploaded source mentions that global sports media rights were valued at around USD 56 billion in 2022. It also mentions that the IPL's 2023–2027 media rights deal was worth about USD 6.2 billion.

This shows how valuable live sports content is.

Unlike movies or shows, live sports are unpredictable. People want to watch them in real time. This makes sports very attractive for broadcasters.

### 2. Simple Media Rights Example

Imagine a cricket league signs a media deal worth USD 600 million for 5 years.

To find the yearly value:

**USD 600 million ÷ 5 = USD 120 million per year**

If the league has 60 matches per year:

**USD 120 million ÷ 60 = USD 2 million per match**

This means each match has huge business value even before tickets, sponsors, or merchandise are counted.

This is why leagues care about match schedules, prime-time slots, and audience numbers.

### 3. Sponsorships: Brands Paying for Visibility

Sponsorship is another major revenue source. Companies pay money to associate their brand with a team, athlete, league, or event.

Examples include:

- Logos on jerseys
- Stadium naming rights
- Official drink sponsor
- Official banking partner

- Official fantasy gaming partner
- Player endorsements
- Digital campaign partnerships

The uploaded source explains that sponsorship and advertising are major parts of sports income, generating billions globally. It also mentions that in India, cricket dominates the sports sponsorship market.

Companies sponsor sports because fans are emotionally connected. If a fan loves a team, they may also notice the brands connected to that team. This makes sports sponsorship different from normal advertising.

#### **4. Athletes as Brands**

In modern sports, athletes are not only players. They are brands.

A brand is an identity that people recognize and trust. Athletes build their brands through performance, personality, lifestyle, social media, endorsements, and public image.

The source gives examples such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, Virat Kohli, LeBron James, and Serena Williams. These athletes earn not only from playing but also from brand deals, businesses, investments, and digital influence.

For example, a famous player may earn from:

- Salary
- Prize money
- Sponsorships
- Social media promotions
- Personal businesses
- Clothing lines
- Fitness brands
- Advertisements

This shows that athlete income is no longer limited to the field.

#### **5. Simple Athlete Brand Example**

Imagine a player earns:

- USD 10 million from salary

- USD 5 million from brand endorsements
- USD 2 million from social media campaigns
- USD 3 million from personal business

Total income:

**10 + 5 + 2 + 3 = USD 20 million**

This means only half the money may come from playing. The rest may come from business activities around the athlete's image.

This is why athletes carefully manage their public image.

## **6. Merchandising: Selling Fan Identity**

Merchandising means selling products connected to teams, players, or events.

Examples include:

- Jerseys
- Caps
- Shoes
- Scarves
- Posters
- Signed bats or balls
- Video game items
- Collectibles
- Digital fan tokens

Fans buy merchandise because they feel emotionally connected. A jersey is not just cloth. It shows loyalty. It tells others, "This is my team."

The uploaded source discusses how sports apparel and equipment sales form a major part of the global sports economy. It also mentions that merchandise keeps fans engaged between matches and seasons.

## **7. Ticket Sales and Tourism**

Sports events also make money through ticket sales and tourism. When a city hosts a major event, people travel there. They spend money on hotels, flights, food, taxis, shopping, and entertainment.

The FIFA World Cup, Olympic Games, Super Bowl, and major cricket tournaments can all create large economic activity for host cities and countries.

The source states that mega sporting events can support tourism, hospitality, infrastructure, and local employment.

This means sports can affect much more than the stadium. A match can benefit an entire city.

## **8. Franchise Value**

Many modern sports teams are franchises. A franchise is a team that is owned and operated like a business. The team has a brand name, players, sponsors, fans, merchandise, and media value.

For example, IPL teams such as Mumbai Indians and Chennai Super Kings are not only cricket teams. They are business brands.

A franchise's value may depend on:

- Team performance
- Star players
- Fan base
- Social media following
- Sponsorship deals
- Merchandise sales
- Stadium revenue
- League popularity

The uploaded source explains that franchises in leagues such as the IPL, NBA, and NFL operate like business entities and can become extremely valuable assets.

## **The Business of Competition**

### **1. Athletes as Entrepreneurs**

Earlier, athletes were mostly seen as players who performed for teams or countries. Today, many athletes are also entrepreneurs. They start companies, invest in brands, create media houses, launch clothing lines, and own sports teams.

This change is important because it gives athletes more control over their careers. Instead of only earning while playing, they can build long-term income sources.

For example, an athlete can use fame from sport to enter:

- Fitness industry
- Fashion industry
- Film and media
- Sports academies
- Technology startups
- Health products
- Charity foundations

This changes the athlete's role from performer to business owner.

## **2. Leagues as Companies**

Sports leagues today often function like large companies. They sell media rights, negotiate sponsorship deals, manage teams, create rules, protect brand value, and expand into new markets.

Examples include:

- Indian Premier League
- National Basketball Association
- English Premier League
- National Football League
- FIFA World Cup
- UEFA Champions League

These leagues are carefully managed. They do not only organize matches. They create entertainment products.

A league must think about:

- Scheduling
- Broadcasting
- Team balance
- Player rules
- Stadium experience
- Fan engagement

- Digital platforms
- Sponsors
- Global markets

The source explains that modern leagues are corporate structures with revenue-sharing models, media contracts, merchandise, and international expansion plans.

### **3. Globalization of Talent**

Sports talent now moves across the world. A football player from Brazil may play in Spain. A basketball player from Europe may play in the NBA. A cricketer from Australia may play in the IPL. A coach from one country may manage a team in another.

This movement of players creates a global talent market.

The uploaded source states that football's international transfer market reached record values and involved thousands of transfers across many countries. It also explains how leagues such as the IPL use international players to increase quality and audience interest.

This shows that talent has become a global asset.

A player's value depends on:

- Skill
- Age
- Fitness
- Marketability
- Nationality
- Fan following
- Past performance
- Future potential

Sports teams now scout players like businesses searching for valuable investments.

## **Technology and Digital Fan Engagement**

Technology has changed how people watch and enjoy sports.

Earlier, fans mainly watched matches in stadiums or on television. Today, fans can follow sports through phones, apps, fantasy leagues, social media, short videos, streaming services, podcasts, and online communities.

This has changed the fan experience.

Fans can now:

- Watch highlights instantly
- Follow players on Instagram
- Play fantasy sports
- Buy jerseys online
- Watch behind-the-scenes videos
- Join fan communities
- Vote in polls
- Track live statistics
- Watch matches on streaming platforms

The uploaded source explains that digital technology, data analytics, and sports technology have changed the relationship between fans and the game.

This means fans are no longer passive viewers. They are active participants.

### **1. Data Analytics in Sports**

Teams also use data to make better decisions. Data can help teams decide:

- Which player to buy
- Which bowler to use
- Which football formation to play
- When to substitute a player
- How to prevent injuries
- Which fan groups to target
- What content fans like

Data analytics has become a major part of sports business. Teams that use data well may gain an advantage both on and off the field.

### **2. Fantasy Sports and Digital Money**

Fantasy sports have also become part of the business ecosystem. Fans create virtual teams and earn points based on real players' performances. This makes fans more involved because they follow not only their favorite team but also individual players across teams.

However, fantasy sports can also create concerns. They may blur the line between entertainment, gaming, and gambling-like behavior. This is why regulation and responsible use are important.

## **Case Study 1: Indian Premier League**

The Indian Premier League, or IPL, is one of the best examples of sports as a business ecosystem. It began in 2008 as a T20 cricket league but quickly became much more than a cricket tournament.

The IPL combines cricket, entertainment, media, sponsors, player auctions, celebrity ownership, digital streaming, and fan culture.

The uploaded source states that the IPL's business valuation reached about USD 10.9 billion and that its media rights deal for 2023–2027 was worth about USD 6.2 billion.

The IPL earns money from:

- Broadcasting rights
- Digital streaming
- Sponsorships
- Ticket sales
- Team merchandise
- Player auctions
- Advertisements
- Franchise fees

Each team operates like a separate business. Teams build their own brand identity, fan base, social media strategy, sponsorships, and merchandise.

The IPL also creates employment. It supports not only cricketers but also coaches, ground staff, camera crews, broadcasters, security workers, hotel staff, advertisers, designers, content creators, and event managers.

This shows how one sports league can affect many industries.

The IPL is successful because it combines sport with entertainment. It is fast, dramatic, colorful, and easy to watch. It also includes international players, which gives it global appeal.

In simple words, the IPL is not only cricket. It is a business festival built around cricket.

## **Case Study 2: The Super Bowl**

The Super Bowl is the final championship game of the National Football League in the United States. It is one of the biggest sports events in the world.

The Super Bowl is important because it is not only a match. It is also a media and advertising event. Millions of people watch it, including people who may not follow American football closely. Many viewers watch for the halftime show, advertisements, and cultural experience.

The uploaded source mentions that Super Bowl advertisements cost millions of dollars for a 30-second slot and that the event generates major economic impact for host cities.

Why do companies pay so much for a short advertisement?

Because the Super Bowl gives access to a huge audience at one time. It is one of the rare events where people actually pay attention to advertisements. Some Super Bowl ads become famous by themselves.

The event also boosts tourism. Fans travel to the host city, stay in hotels, eat at restaurants, buy merchandise, attend parties, and spend money locally.

The Super Bowl shows how sport can become culture. It includes music, celebrity appearances, brand campaigns, food traditions, and family gatherings.

In simple words, the Super Bowl is not just a game. It is a national business event.

## **Case Study 3: FIFA World Cup**

The FIFA World Cup is one of the biggest sporting events in the world. It brings together countries, fans, players, sponsors, broadcasters, and governments.

The uploaded source explains that the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar generated billions in revenue for FIFA and had major economic, political, and tourism effects. It also mentions that the event was linked to soft power, nation branding, infrastructure, and global attention.

The World Cup is important because it is more than football. It allows a host nation to show itself to the world. Countries use the World Cup to improve image, attract tourism, build infrastructure, and gain international recognition.

However, mega-events also create challenges. They can be very expensive. They may involve human rights concerns, environmental questions, and debates about whether the money could be better spent elsewhere.

The World Cup shows both the power and problems of sports business.

It can bring people together and create unforgettable memories. But it can also raise difficult questions about money, politics, labor, and fairness.

## **Challenges in the Sports Business Ecosystem**

### **1. Inequality Between Sports**

One major problem is inequality. Not all sports receive the same money, attention, or support.

In India, cricket receives most of the money and media attention. Other sports such as athletics, swimming, hockey, wrestling, and many women's sports often receive less funding.

The uploaded source explains that cricket dominates sports revenue in India, while many other sports receive much less corporate and media support.

This creates a cycle.

Popular sports get more money.

More money creates better facilities.

Better facilities create better players.

Better players attract more fans.

More fans attract more sponsors.

Meanwhile, smaller sports struggle to grow.

### **2. Inequality Between Countries**

Rich countries often have better stadiums, coaches, training centres, nutrition, sports science, and sponsorships. Athletes from poorer regions may have talent but fewer resources.

This means global sports competition is not always equal. Some athletes start with major advantages because of their country, family income, or access to training.

If sports are meant to be fair, then access to opportunity matters.

### **3. Ethics and Corruption**

Sports business also faces ethical problems. These include:

- Doping
- Match-fixing
- Bribery
- Illegal betting
- Corruption in governing bodies
- Exploitation of young athletes

- Poor player welfare
- Lack of transparency

The source discusses doping, match-fixing, athlete exploitation, and governance challenges as major issues in modern sports.

These problems damage trust. Fans watch sports because they believe the competition is real. If matches are fixed or players cheat, the emotional value of sport is harmed.

#### **4. Commercial Overreach**

Commercial overreach happens when money becomes more important than the sport itself.

This can happen when:

- Ticket prices become too high
- Too many advertisements are added
- Players are overworked
- Tournaments become too frequent
- Fans feel ignored
- Tradition is replaced by profit

The source explains that many fans worry sports are becoming too commercial and losing emotional connection.

This is an important warning. Sports need money to grow, but they also need authenticity. If fans feel that everything is only about profit, they may become disconnected.

## **Results**

### **1. Sports Are Now Major Businesses**

The first finding is that sports have become a major global industry. They are connected to media, tourism, advertising, technology, fashion, and entertainment.

### **2. Athletes Are Now Brands**

Modern athletes earn money not only by playing but also through endorsements, social media, businesses, and personal branding. Famous athletes influence consumer behavior.

### **3. Leagues Work Like Corporations**

Leagues such as the IPL, NBA, NFL, and Premier League operate like large companies. They manage teams, sponsors, media rights, and global expansion.

#### **4. Media Rights Are Extremely Important**

Broadcasting and streaming rights are one of the biggest revenue sources in sports. Live sports are valuable because people want to watch them in real time.

#### **5. Fans Are Also Consumers**

Fans do not only watch matches. They buy merchandise, pay for streaming, join fantasy leagues, travel for events, and follow teams online.

#### **6. Technology Has Changed Sports Business**

Digital platforms, data analytics, fantasy sports, wearable devices, and streaming have changed both performance and fan engagement.

#### **7. Commercialization Creates Problems**

While sports business creates money and growth, it also creates problems such as inequality, corruption, doping, over-scheduling, high ticket prices, and athlete pressure.

### **Discussion**

The business of sports is powerful because it is built on emotion. People do not follow sports only because they want entertainment. They follow sports because they feel connected. They support teams, admire players, remember matches, and pass loyalty from one generation to another.

This emotional connection is what makes sports valuable as a business. A fan who loves a team may watch every match, buy the jersey, follow players online, and travel to see games. This creates money for many parts of the ecosystem.

However, this also creates responsibility. If sports organizations use fans only as customers, they may damage the relationship. Fans want excitement, but they also want fairness, tradition, and respect.

The rise of athlete branding is one of the biggest changes in modern sport. Athletes now have direct access to fans through social media. Earlier, fans mostly saw athletes through television, newspapers, or magazines. Today, athletes can post directly, promote brands, share personal stories, and build their own image.

This gives athletes power. But it also creates pressure. They must perform on the field and manage their public image off the field. One mistake online can damage a brand. One injury can reduce market value. One controversy can affect sponsorships.

Leagues also face pressure. They must grow financially but keep competition fair. If only rich teams win, fans may lose interest. This is why some leagues use salary caps, drafts, revenue sharing, and financial rules.

Mega-events also show the mixed nature of sports business. Events like the World Cup and Olympics can bring tourism, jobs, and global attention. But they can also be extremely expensive. Stadiums may become unused after the event. Local people may be displaced. Workers may face poor conditions. Governments may spend huge amounts of money for prestige.

Therefore, sports business must be studied carefully. It is not automatically good or bad. It creates opportunities, but it also creates risks.

The future of sports will likely depend on four major ideas: digital engagement, sustainability, inclusivity, and ethical governance.

Digital engagement means fans will continue to interact through apps, streaming, data, fantasy leagues, and virtual experiences.

Sustainability means sports organizations will need to reduce waste, use greener stadiums, and manage travel and event pollution.

Inclusivity means women's sports, disability sports, smaller sports, and athletes from developing regions must receive more support.

Ethical governance means sports bodies must be transparent, fair, and responsible.

In simple words, sports must grow, but they must not lose their soul.

## **Conclusion**

Sports have changed from simple games into a global business ecosystem. Modern sports include athletes, teams, leagues, sponsors, broadcasters, fans, technology companies, cities, and governments. Money flows through media rights, sponsorships, ticket sales, merchandise, tourism, and digital platforms.

This paper found that athletes now act like brands, leagues operate like companies, and fans behave as both supporters and consumers. Case studies such as the IPL, Super Bowl, and FIFA World Cup show how sports can create huge economic and cultural impact.

At the same time, commercialization brings serious challenges. Inequality between sports, corruption, doping, match-fixing, high ticket prices, and athlete exploitation can damage the meaning of sport. If money becomes more important than fairness and emotion, sport may lose what made people love it in the first place.

The future of sports business should therefore focus on balance. Sports must continue to grow, but they must also protect fairness, inclusion, athlete welfare, and fan trust.

In the end, sports are no longer only about the scoreboard. They are about business, culture, technology, identity, and global connection.

Sports may begin on the field, but today, the real game continues far beyond it.

## **Limitations**

This paper has some limitations.

First, it explains the sports business ecosystem in simple language, so it does not include advanced economic models.

Second, it mainly uses secondary information and does not include a student survey or interviews with sports professionals.

Third, the paper focuses on major sports and big leagues, so it does not deeply study smaller local sports systems.

Fourth, some financial figures in sports change quickly because media rights, sponsorships, and franchise values are updated regularly.

Fifth, the paper studies selected case examples such as the IPL, Super Bowl, and FIFA World Cup. Many other examples, such as the Olympics, NBA, English Premier League, and Formula 1, could also be studied in more detail.

Even with these limitations, the paper shows clearly how sports have become a major business ecosystem.

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