



Saudi Arabia's grip on world sport

by Play the Game

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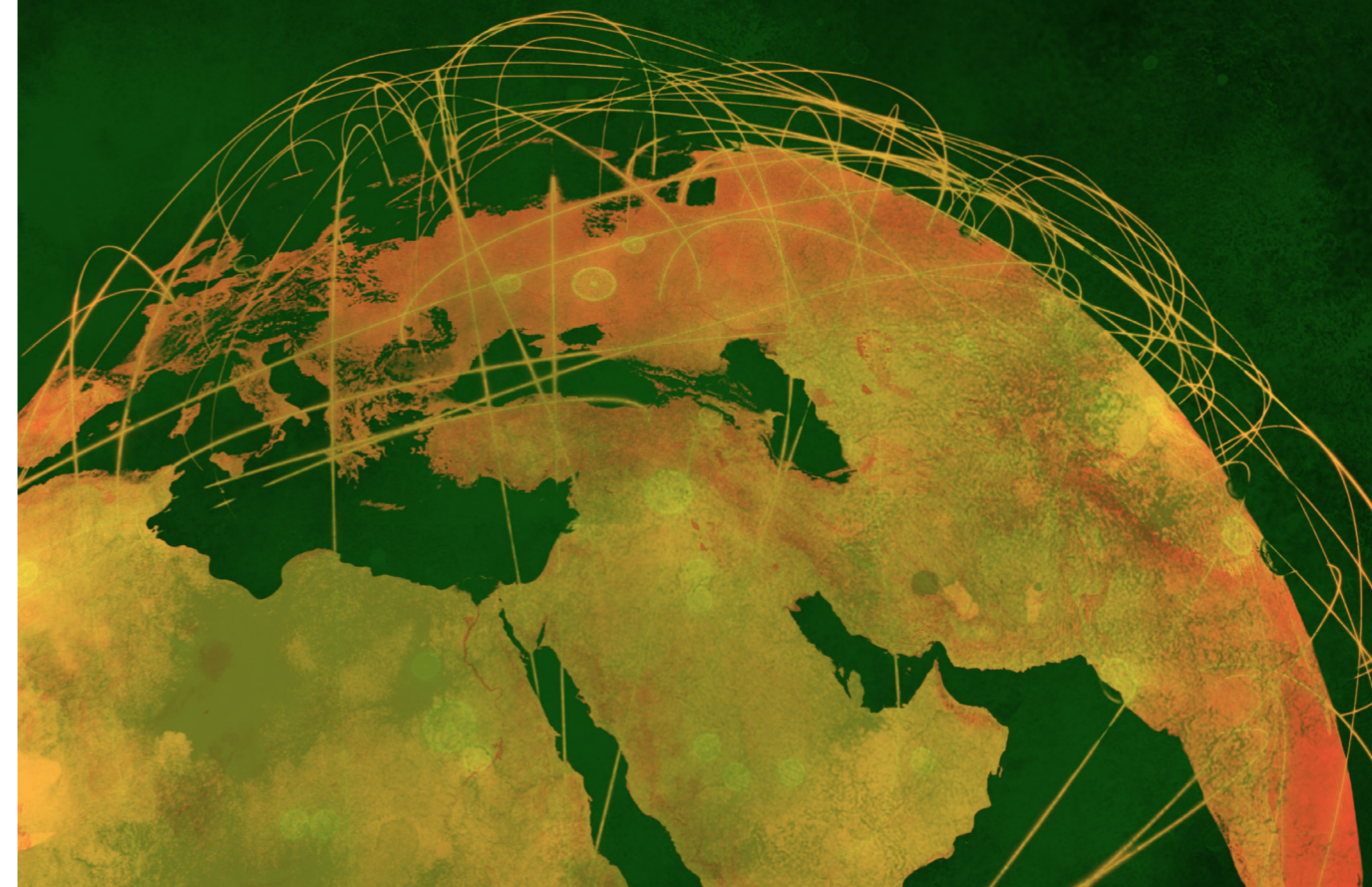


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Explore the web and labyrinth of Saudi Arabia's sports strategy

910 sponsorships and 1,412 positions mapped



Foreword

In a candid [interview](#) with Fox News in September 2023, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman declared: "If sportswashing is going to increase my GDP by 1%, then we'll continue doing sportswashing."

While it remains unclear whether this approach will truly boost the nation's economy, one thing is certain: the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's spending spree in global sports has shown no signs of slowing down since that interview.

Exclusive research by Play the Game sheds light on the key power players driving Saudi Arabia's expanding sports endeavour. Over a four-month period, our team identified 910 Saudi sponsorships in sport and 1,412 positions held across Saudi entities – focusing exclusively on activities from 2024 onward.

Why this matters

Backed by billions of dollars and a rapidly expanding network of sponsorships, partnerships, and strategic investments, the Kingdom has reshaped the sports world. This expansion, however, is not merely about elevating Saudi Arabia's presence in sport – it is part of a meticulously crafted strategy to transform the Kingdom's global image and wield sport as a powerful instrument of geopolitical influence.

The lavish sponsorships and major events may appear to elevate the spectacle of sport, but they also obscure troubling realities: conflicts of interest that undermine the integrity of global sport and challenge the very principles it claims to uphold like democracy, transparency, freedom of expression, and athletes' rights.

These issues extend beyond the realm of sport. Behind the glittering facade of major tournaments, sponsorships, and celebrity endorsements is a darker side of severe human rights atrocities, oppression, repression, and, in some cases, death.

Saudi Arabia's sports strategy seeks to divert attention from these realities, revealing the tension between the ideals of sport and the realities of power, money, and politics. Understanding this strategy is key to grasping what's truly at stake.

What you'll discover in this report

This report is more than just numbers. It unpacks the vast and intricate network behind Saudi Arabia's state-controlled sports strategy, mapping the connections between key figures, state entities, and global sports organisations. It reveals a complex web of influence that raises urgent questions about the governance of international sport and its ability to withstand political and financial pressures.

In these pages, you will find:

- Insightful stories on key figures and state entities shaping Saudi Arabia's sports ambitions, including their role in relation to the 2034 FIFA World Cup.
- Examples of sponsorships, strategic alliances, and partnerships that illustrate the Kingdom's far-reaching influence.
- Examples of conflicts of interest and governance challenges, including implications related to the 2034 FIFA World Cup.

A call to action

This report is just the beginning. To foster further investigation, Play the Game has made the dataset publicly available on [our website](#). We encourage journalists, academics, researchers, and other stakeholders to build on our findings, pursue their own stories and investigations, as many angles remain unexplored.

Many stories lie beneath the surface of the dataset waiting to be uncovered. Dive into the data, follow the connections, and help shine a light on one of the most consequential sports stories of our time!

*Stanis Elsborg, head of Play the Game
December 2024*





The network

Saudi Arabia's sports strategy is orchestrated by a select but highly influential network of individuals holding pivotal roles within both the state and in sports. Play the Game has mapped this inner circle, highlighting governance challenges, conflicts of interest, and threats to the integrity of global sports.

Heading up Saudi Arabia's sports strategy is **Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al-Saud**, whose centralised power extends across many of the state's most vital entities and organisations. As chairman of the Public Investment Fund (PIF), one of the world's largest sovereign wealth funds, he has transformed the PIF into the driving force behind the Kingdom's expansive sporting investments.

According to Play the Game's research, the fund now boasts a portfolio of 346 sponsorships in sports either directly or through its subsidiaries, including ownership of football clubs like Newcastle United.

Under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's direct control, the PIF has not only spearheaded Saudi Arabia's aggressive sports strategy but has also been linked to severe human rights abuses.

A November 2024 report by Human Rights Watch [revealed](#) that the Crown Prince has used the PIF's economic power to commit serious human rights violations, facilitate forced evictions, raze neighbourhoods, and the PIF was even implicated in the 2018 murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

The report also identified violations linked to some of the PIF's most high-profile megaprojects, including the Neom project – a futuristic megacity and a key player in the Kingdom's sports strategy. The report further noted that the regime's sports investments seek to garner uncritical foreign support for the Crown Prince's agenda, spread disinformation about the country's human rights record, neutralise scrutiny, and silence critics.

These revelations underline the urgent need for greater scrutiny of the Kingdom's use of its immense financial influence on the global stage and the pivotal role sports play in advancing its geopolitical ambitions.

Yasir Al-Rumayyan

While Mohammed bin Salman's prominent role is widely known, fewer people are familiar with the next tier of individuals driving Saudi Arabia's growing influence in international sports.

One such figure is **Yasir Al-Rumayyan**, a trusted confidant of Mohammed bin Salman. Al-Rumayyan has risen to prominence under the Crown Prince's leadership and holds influential positions which place him at the core of the Saudi state and its sports agenda.

As governor of the PIF and chairman of Aramco, the state-owned oil giant, Al-Rumayyan oversees some of the Kingdom's most significant investments in global sports.

Al-Rumayyan's vast portfolio extends far beyond these roles. For instance, he also serves as chairman of the Saudi Golf Federation and Golf Saudi, as a board member of the Saudi Olympic and Paralympic Committee, and recently he was appointed chairman of Riyadh Air – a PIF-owned airline which sponsors Atlético Madrid, the WTA Finals, and Concacaf.

These overlapping roles situate him at the nexus of entities driving Saudi Arabia's sports ambitions but also raise serious concerns about governance and conflicts of interest. For example, his leadership roles in entities like the PIF and Aramco, which sponsor overlapping events such as the Aramco Team Series, underscore the blurred lines between sports and state interests.

In football, these entanglements are even more evident. PIF-owned Newcastle United, where Al-Rumayyan is also chairman, has secured sponsorship deals with several Saudi state-owned entities, including the airline company Saudia

and three PIF-owned companies: Sela, Noon, and Savvy Games Group, where Al-Rumayyan also sits on the board.

Moreover, he is deeply involved in multi-club structures within the Saudi Pro League – where numerous clubs are state-owned – which amplifies concerns over transfer market manipulation and match integrity.

For example, Transfermarkt data indicate that in the 2023/2024 season, five out of 20 player transfers to Aramco-owned Al-Qadsiah came from other PIF-owned clubs. Similarly, Newcastle United sold Allan Saint-Maximin to Al-Ahli, another PIF-owned team. Additionally, at the time of finalising this report, nine players had moved from PIF-owned Al-Hilal to other state-owned clubs in the 2024/2025 season.

Such ownership structures also jeopardize match integrity, especially as Saudi Pro League clubs compete for spots in the AFC Champions League, which happens to be sponsored by the PIF-backed Neom initiative. State ownership of multiple clubs creates potential for the Saudi government to make choices about preferred results in matches between the state-owned clubs.

Yasir Al-Rumayyan's intricate web of influence and multi-faceted roles exemplify the deep interconnections between Saudi Arabia's state apparatus and its sports strategy.



Ahmed Al-Khateeb

Another key figure in Saudi Arabia's sports strategy is **Ahmed Al-Khateeb**, the Kingdom's minister of tourism. His influence extends far beyond tourism with leadership roles across state entities like the PIF, Neom, and Red Sea Global, all deeply intertwined with Saudi Arabia's global sports investments.

Under Al-Khateeb's leadership, Visit Saudi, a tourism bureau powered by the Saudi Tourism Authority, which he also chairs, has become a cornerstone of the Kingdom's sports strategy.

It has secured sponsorships for high-profile events including the Dakar Rally, the Formula 1 Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, major boxing bouts featuring Tyson Fury and Oleksandr Usyk, and Spain's top football league, La Liga.

Visit Saudi is also an Official Global Partner of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) until December 2024, leveraging the partnership to enhance Saudi Arabia's image through sport. The partnership extends to a range of AFC competitions including youth and women's tournaments, bolstering the Kingdom's influence across Asia.

This collaboration builds on a multi-year partnership with the AFC that began in 2021 when Neom, where Al-Khateeb sits on the board, was announced as a sponsor for the AFC – a deal which was extended in 2024 through 2029. These ventures reflect Al-Khateeb's strategic ability to align tourism with the Kingdom's broader political and sports ambitions.

Arguably, Al-Khateeb's most high-profile achievement is the partnership announced in 2022 with Argentinian superstar Lionel Messi, naming him as Saudi Arabia's tourism ambassador.

Investigative journalists Karim Zidan and Tariq Panja later revealed in The New York Times that Messi stood to receive 25 million US dollars over three years for minimal commitments of work: a few commercial appearances, social media posts, and all-expenses-paid family vacations to the Kingdom.

The contract also included a clause prohibiting Messi from making any statements that might 'tarnish' Saudi Arabia's image. This mirrors the non-disparagement clause included in the framework agreement between the PGA Tour and the PIF, which drew scrutiny during a hearing held by the U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations in July 2023.

In a nation consistently ranked among the worst for free speech, such restrictions underscore how Saudi Arabia's growing influence in sports risks limiting athletes' voices – a troubling trend as the Kingdom deepens its grip on global sports.



The prince and the princess

Two pivotal figures at the heart of Saudi Arabia's sports strategy are **Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al-Saud**, the Kingdom's minister of sports, and **Princess Reema bint Bandar Al-Saud**.

Both play critical roles in advancing Saudi Arabia's ambitions within the Olympic movement and international sports, but their overlapping governmental and sporting roles highlight significant concerns about conflicts of interest and the autonomy of sports.

Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al-Saud is a former racing driver and member of the House of Saud who has headed up the Saudi Ministry of Sports since February 2020.

His influence extends well beyond his ministerial duties, as he also holds an array of high-ranking sports positions: President of the Saudi Olympic & Paralympic Committee,

vice president of the Olympic Council of Asia, president of the Union of Arab National Olympic Committees, president of the Union of Arab Football Federation, president of the Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation, and he is also one of Asia's four representatives in the World Anti-Doping Agency. These influential roles place him at the centre of the Kingdom's multifaceted sporting pursuits, while also illustrating the blurred lines between state governance and sports leadership in Saudi Arabia.

Similarly, Princess Reema bint Bandar Al-Saud exemplifies the fusion of diplomacy, politics, and sports.

Appointed as Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the United States in 2019, she became the first female ambassador in the nation's history. Beyond her diplomatic role, she is a key figure in Saudi Arabia's sports strategy, serving as a board member of the Saudi Olympic & Paralympic Committee, the Saudi Sports for All Federation, and Mahd Sports Academy.



However, it is her position as a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) – and her roles on the IOC's commissions for gender equality, diversity and inclusion as well as sustainability and legacy – that elevate her importance to Saudi Arabia's global sports strategy.

While Princess Reema publicly advocates for women's rights and inclusion, this stance starkly contrasts with the systemic gender inequality and the severe restrictions on women's rights that persist in Saudi Arabia – a glaring disparity in a nation touting progress.

The roles held by both Prince Abdulaziz and Princess Reema challenge the autonomy of sports organisations, a principle enshrined in Rule 27 of the Olympic Charter which mandates that National Olympic Committees (NOC) resist external political pressures. Their simultaneous positions as government representatives and sports leaders raise critical questions about conflicts of interest, questions of allegiance, and the so-called autonomy of sport that the Olympic movement so ardently promotes.

Will both Prince Abdulaziz and Princess Reema be willing and able to effectively uphold the autonomy of the NOC as a government representative if a situation arises where the interests of the Saudi government and those of the Olympic movement diverge politically?

Turki Al-Sheikh

The last person to be highlighted here is **Turki Al-Sheikh** who has risen to become a linchpin figure in the Kingdom's entertainment and sporting ambitions, particularly in 2024.

As chairman of the General Entertainment Authority, Al-Sheikh oversees some of Saudi Arabia's most prominent sporting and cultural events, including the Riyadh Season which is a six-month festival of sports, culture, and entertainment.

His influence extends across multiple domains, most notably in boxing, making him a central player in Saudi Arabia's strategic use of sport for political and cultural leverage.



No match for traditional sports leaders: Saudi Arabia blends state and sports power

An element of Saudi Arabia's sports strategy that is often overlooked is the defining feature of its key figures: the extraordinary decision-making power they wield.

Unlike many of their counterparts in global sports, Saudi sports leaders hold multiple roles that combine leadership in the sports sector with high-ranking positions within the state apparatus, granting them unparalleled political and financial authority.

This duality – bridging state governance and sports leadership – gives them a distinct advantage in influencing negotiations, securing agreements, and steering the Kingdom's strategic agenda.

By holding senior roles in sports, key ministries, the sovereign wealth fund, and major state-owned enterprises, their influence transcends traditional sports administration and enables them to leverage immense state resources and extensive political networks to achieve their objectives.

Backed by state power and vast financial resources, these figures are uniquely positioned to speak for the Kingdom. For instance, Al-Rumayyan's roles as governor of the Public Investment Fund and chairman of Aramco – alongside his involvement in Saudi sports – allow him to seamlessly transition between acting as a sports leader, a financial heavyweight, or a state representative, depending on the context.

This adaptability enables Saudi leaders to exert influence in ways which are unattainable for conventional sports leaders whose authority is typically confined to federations or organisations. For them it is virtually impossible to compete with such a well-sourced and state-backed approach.

The Kingdom's integration of sports and state governance raises pressing questions about power dynamics and the future of global sports governance. The Kingdom's rapid and calculated blending of political clout with sports influence poses a significant threat to the integrity of international sport.

Power, control, and oppression: A Kingdom's human rights atrocities

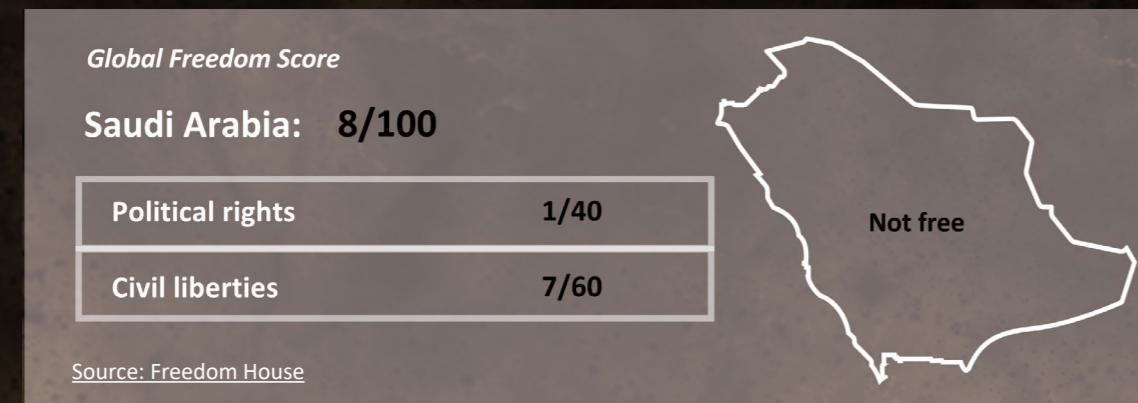
The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest country in the Middle East region and operates under an absolute monarchy where power is concentrated in the hands of key members of the royal family. Despite some superficial reforms, the broader human rights landscape remains deeply concerning.

Currently, the Kingdom faces scrutiny for various abuses, including the suppression of dissent, a lack of civil liberties and political rights, its role in regional conflicts and mass executions following what Amnesty International calls "grossly unfair trials".

One of the most visible areas of abuse is the criminalisation of freedom of expression and political dissent. Activists, journalists, and critics frequently face arbitrary arrests, torture, and even assassinations, as was the case with the brutal killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018.

Surveillance of journalists is also pervasive, and according to Reporters without Borders the number of imprisoned journalists and bloggers has tripled since 2017. That places Saudi Arabia as number 166 out of 180 countries on the 2024 Press Freedom Index.

The restriction of women's rights remains a significant issue in Saudi Arabia, although so-called reforms have allowed women to drive and participate in public life to a greater degree. Women still face legal and social barriers, especially regarding inheritance and child custody, while the male guardianship system, which restricts women's autonomy, also remains in place.



The Kingdom has also cracked down on Saudi women who speak out against the oppressive laws and several women's rights activists have received decades-long jail sentences.

Among them is activist Loujain Alhathloul, who was convicted for advocating women's right to drive and opposing the male guardianship system. According to Amnesty International, she has been subjected to torture, sexual abuse, and other forms of mistreatment, all while being denied access to her family and legal counsel. Although a court-imposed travel ban on Loujain Alhathloul expired in November 2023, she remains under an indefinite and arbitrary travel ban with no expiry date.

Saudi Arabia's use of the death penalty has also drawn widespread condemnation. The country ranks among the highest in the world for executions, often carried out by beheading. In the first nine months of 2024 alone, the Saudi regime executed at least 200 many of which were for drug-related offenses.

Migrant workers, who account for a significant portion of Saudi Arabia's overall workforce, face widespread and systemic abuse including exploitative labour practices, harsh working environments, and living conditions unfit for humans.

Meanwhile, refugees fleeing to Saudi Arabia face even greater threats, and in September 2023 a report by Human Rights Watch exposed how Saudi border guards have killed hundreds of unarmed Ethiopian migrants attempting to cross the Yemen-Saudi border.



Loujain Alhathloul

A Saudi human rights activists who was convicted for advocating women's right to drive and opposing the male guardianship system.

A Kingdom's football ambition: The road to 2034

From billion-dollar investments to strategic partnerships, Saudi Arabia's influence in global football has expanded significantly in 2024. Play the Game outlines the Kingdom's deepening engagement and power plays in the world of football.



On October 4, 2023, the Saudi Arabian Football Federation put an end to speculations about a joint bid by declaring its intent to bid for the 2034 FIFA World Cup. In July 2024, the Kingdom officially submitted its bid in Paris, emerging as the sole candidate for the tournament.

While the race for the 2034 FIFA World Cup might seem settled, the journey to this pivotal moment in global football tells a much larger story.

Saudi Arabia has invested massively in world sport and meticulously positioned itself within the 'football family'. Over the past few years, the Kingdom has woven an extensive web of influence across football's global landscape with sponsorships, partnerships, and investments connecting them with the sport's most powerful and decision-making figures.

The awarding of the 2034 World Cup to Saudi Arabia is merely the culmination of years of strategic investments and behind-the-scenes manoeuvring.

Building influence in Asia

The ink had barely dried on Saudi Arabia's declaration of interest to host the 2034 FIFA World Cup when the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa issued a swift, enthusiastic endorsement. Within hours, more backing came in from across the footballing world.

This synchronised show of support underscores the deep ties Saudi Arabia has built with the AFC over the years. In February 2023, the Saudi Arabian Football Federation president Yasser Al-Misehal was elected as one out seven AFC representatives to the powerful FIFA Council. The election

happened on the very same day Saudi Arabia was granted the rights to host the 2027 AFC Asian Cup.

The groundwork had been laid years earlier, when Neom, Saudi Arabia's ambitious megacity project, became the AFC's Global Partner from 2021 to 2024 – a partnership that was renewed in July 2024 for another five years. Between these deals, the Kingdom further solidified its foothold when Visit Saudi, a tourism bureau powered by the Kingdom's Saudi Tourism Authority, in 2023 became the official Global Partner of the AFC until December 2024.

Ambitions played out on Saudi stadiums

Saudi Arabia's influence in world football has reached unprecedented heights in the year the country is set to secure hosting rights for the 2034 World Cup.

Domestically, the Kingdom has poured immense resources into its own league, providing both entertainment for Saudi citizens and a showcase for its football ambitions.



[Explore the full dataset](#)

These investments serve as a diversion in a country lacking political rights and civil liberties, while signalling to FIFA and the global sports community that Saudi Arabia is committed to advancing football in the Middle East.

In 2024 alone, Saudi Arabia hosted a series of high-profile foreign cup finals: the Spanish Super Cup, Italian Super Cup, CAF Super Cup, and Egypt Cup Final – all played out in Saudi stadiums.

Saudi investments in international football

The Kingdom's sponsorship reach in European leagues has also expanded, with [Visit Saudi](#) and the General Entertainment Authority's (GEA) [Riyadh Season](#) as prominent sponsors of Spain's La Liga.

Riyadh Air, the new flag carrier, sponsors Spanish club Atlético Madrid, and Riyadh Season sponsors AS Roma in Serie A. Meanwhile Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, the Public Investment Fund (PIF) owns Premier League club Newcastle United, and GEA Chairman and Royal Court advisor Turki Al-Sheikh bought the Spanish club Almería in 2020.

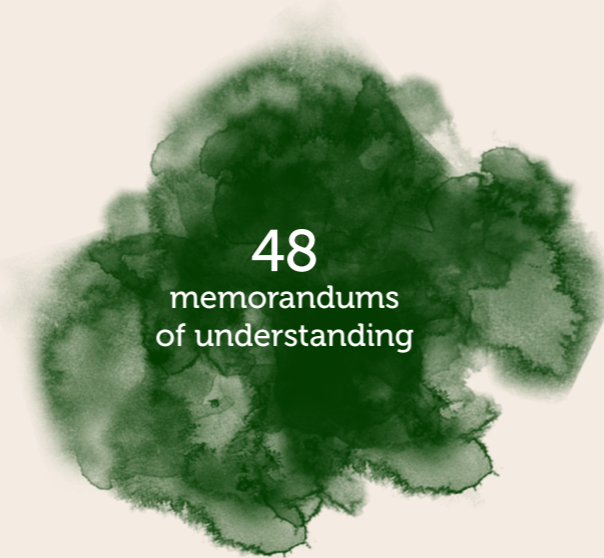
Abdullah bin Musaid Al Saud, a royal family member and former general president of the General Sports Authority (now known as the Saudi Ministry of Sport), has also invested in the football industry. He is the owner of multiple football clubs including Beerschot VA (Belgium), Al-Hilal United (United Arab Emirates), LB Châteauroux (France), Kerala United FC (India), and Sheffield United (England).

The Kingdom's ambitions and influence extend even further, where three key players entered sponsorship deals with the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (Concacaf) in 2024: [Aramco](#) in February, followed by the [PIF](#) and [Riyadh Air](#) in August.

Another tool in Saudi Arabia's strategic arsenal is the use of memorandums of understanding (MOU). As of 2024, Play the Game has identified 48 MOUs between the Saudi Arabian Football Federation and various football federations.

While these agreements may appear symbolic at first glance, they highlight the Kingdom's extensive network of partnerships and diplomatic ties in global football and can be powerful strategic instruments.

Beyond fostering goodwill, MOUs pave the way for increased collaboration, development initiatives, and direct access to key decision-makers within federations. Ultimately, these decision-makers play a critical role in voting on significant agendas within FIFA, including host selection and governance issues.



[Explore the full dataset](#)

The FIFA deal

A pivotal milestone in Saudi Arabia's journey in world football was the 2024 landmark [partnership](#) between FIFA and Aramco, the Saudi state-owned oil and gas giant.

FIFA's President, Gianni Infantino, spoke highly of the partnership and highlighted Aramco's track record of supporting global sports events and developing grassroots sports initiatives. The agreement came just one month after Saudi Arabia was [announced](#) as host for the FIFA Series 2024, featuring eight teams from four confederations.

However, the Aramco deal has not been without controversy. In October 2024, more than 100 female footballers signed an [open letter](#) urging FIFA to end the partnership with Aramco, criticising Saudi Arabia's record of human rights violations, systemic restrictions on women's rights, and Aramco's contribution to the climate crisis. The letter stated that such a corporation "has no place sponsoring our beautiful game."

As the Kingdom's ambitions rise with the 2034 World Cup in sight, so does its indelible mark on world football – a development that raises critical questions about the intersection of sport, governance, and human rights.



How FIFA helped pave the way for Saudi 2034

In October 2023, FIFA made a surprising move that effectively set the stage for Saudi Arabia's bid to host a future FIFA World Cup when it announced that the FIFA Council had unanimously agreed that the sole candidacy for the World Cup in 2030 would be "the combined bid of Morocco, Portugal, and Spain."

In the same announcement, the FIFA Council detailed the bidding process for the 2034 World Cup and specified that it would follow "the principle of confederation rotation and of securing the best possible hosting conditions for the tournaments."

As a result, only countries from the Asian Football Confederation and the Oceania Football Confederation were eligible to bid for 2034. FIFA subsequently set a tight 25-day window for countries to formally express interest.

Just 81 minutes after FIFA's announcement, the Saudi Arabian Football Federation declared its intent to bid for the 2034 World Cup.

As the deadline neared, Australia, Saudi Arabia's only potential competitor announced its decision not to compete for the bid and instead focus on securing hosting rights for the 2026 AFC Women's Asian Cup and possibly the 2029 FIFA Club World Cup.

On 15 May 2024, Australia was announced as host for the 2026 AFC Women's Asian Cup while the decision on the 2029 FIFA Club World Cup is still pending.

In another historic development, on 3 October 2024, FIFA detailed the voting procedure for the 2030 and 2034 World Cups, which had been approved unanimously by the FIFA Council.

The voting procedure and the decision on the hosts will be taken en bloc. This means that since FIFA operates with a one-nation-one-vote system, you either vote yes or no for both tournaments at the same time.



From the 2017 crackdown to a disputed report: Law firm's role in Saudi's World Cup plans

A human rights assessment made by law firm AS&H Clifford Chance for Saudi Arabia's bid for the World Cup in 2034 has been labelled flawed and far from independent by human rights organisations. The law firm also played a role in a crackdown on Saudi Arabia's most influential people in 2017.

By the time the 2034 FIFA World Cup arrives in Riyadh, FIFA's VIPs will likely stay in the luxurious Ritz-Carlton, the designated hotel for FIFA's top officials. But this pinnacle of the Kingdom's opulence and hospitality has a darker history, as it played a pivotal role in one of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's most ruthless political maneuvers.

In November 2017, the hotel was transformed overnight into a detention center for nearly 400 of Saudi Arabia's most influential figures. Princes, business magnates, ministers, and senior officials found themselves unexpectedly detained and some of them reportedly faced abuse, torture, coercion, and imprisonment.

The move, orchestrated by Mohammed bin Salman shortly after becoming Crown Prince, was framed as an anti-corruption initiative but widely seen as a calculated power grab to consolidate his authority and reshape the Kingdom's elite while pressuring some of the detainees to sign over substantial assets.

To manage and facilitate these asset transfer, the government brought in major international firms, including the British law firm Clifford Chance.

From crackdown to human rights assessment

Seven years later, Mohammed bin Salman's trusted friends in Clifford Chance, now operating as AS&H Clifford Chance, reappeared on the Saudi stage. This time as the company behind the so-called "independent context assessment" report of Saudi Arabia's human rights, a key component of the Kingdom's bid to host the 2034 FIFA World Cup.

However, when the report was released in July 2024, Play the Game highlighted significant conflicts of interest that cast serious doubt on the report's independence. Fahad Abuhimed, a partner at AS&H Clifford Chance, was particularly noteworthy as he has held numerous influential positions in Saudi government bodies and state-owned enterprises.

Abuhimed has served as a board member of the government-owned Riyadh Airports Company, Deputy Minister for Laws and Regulations, and as an advisor for various high-profile state activities like Neom and the Public Investment Fund.

A flawed report and mounting criticism

Concerns deepened three months later when eleven human rights organisations issued a joint statement which denounced AS&H Clifford Chance's report as "flawed".

The organisations alleged that AS&H Clifford Chance had agreed to a decision by FIFA and the Saudi Arabian Football Federation to "exclude analysis of Saudi Arabia's record on multiple critical human rights" – including issues related to freedom of expression, LGBTI+ rights, prohibition of trade unions, and forced evictions.

The report selectively cited UN findings while omitting others, such as documented cases of torture, women's rights violations, labour complaints, cases of death penalties connected to Neom's development, and the brutal murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Further compounding the criticism, there is no evidence that AS&H Clifford Chance consulted external experts, international human rights organisations, or individuals potentially affected by the World Cup. Even Amnesty International's report 'Playing a Dangerous Game? Human Rights Risks Linked to the 2030 and 2034 FIFA World Cups', which details potential human rights risks associated with the World Cup in Saudi Arabia, was absent from the assessment.

The Public Investment Fund's growing sports portfolio

Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund has become one of the world's most powerful sports investors, influencing everything from football and combat sports to e-sports and tennis.



In November 2024, Saudi Arabia hosted its most prestigious tennis event to date – the WTA Finals, the flagship event for the Women's Tennis Association.

The tournament took place in Riyadh and featured eight of the world's top singles and doubles players vying for the year-end championship.

Beyond the significance of the event itself, the tournament also underscored the growing influence in sport of the Public Investment Fund (PIF), the Kingdom's state-owned sovereign wealth fund which is responsible for the lion's share of Saudi's sports investments.

According to Play the Game's research, the PIF including its subsidiaries has secured at least 346 sponsorships across global sports, including the WTA Finals, where the PIF's logo was present throughout the tournament, both on the grounds and on the advertising boards during the matches.

Serving up influence

Throughout 2024, Saudi Arabia has made its ambitions in the tennis world clear. The Kingdom brought in Spanish legend Rafael Nadal as an ambassador to the Saudi Tennis Federation, the PIF entered strategic partnerships with both the WTA and the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP), and the Kingdom hosted the Six Kings Slam exhibition tournament as part of the Riyadh Season festival in October 2024.

However, the most significant tennis event held in Saudi to date was the 2024 WTA finals, where the Kingdom used the appeal of tennis as a popular women's sport to support its claims that it has reformed women's rights.

When the American tennis player Coco Gauff won the event, she claimed the tournament would inspire young Saudi girls to believe "their dreams are possible."

Despite this narrative, women in Saudi Arabia continue to face oppression as male guardianship laws are still in place while women's rights activists like Manahel al-Otaibi are currently imprisoned for advocating for rights that the Kingdom asserts it has already granted women.

"I feel terrible to see my sister is in a prison, and the other women from outside came to play [tennis]," al-Otaibi's sister told ABC Australia.

The power of football

Football is a pivotal component of Saudi Arabia's sports strategy as the sport is a beloved national pastime across generations. Much of Saudi's football investments are generated through the PIF.

One of the PIF's first investments in football was its acquisition of English Premier League club Newcastle United in October 2021. At the time, the Premier League justified the Saudi-led takeover after receiving "legally binding assurances" that the Kingdom would not control the club, even though the PIF happens to be the primary investment arm of the Saudi state and chaired by the Kingdom's de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Since the takeover of Newcastle United, the Kingdom has made several new sponsorship deals between the club and state-owned entities like Sela, Noon, Saudia, and Saudi Telecom Company.

In June 2023, the PIF took ownership of four Saudi Pro League clubs: Al-Ahli, Al-Ittihad, Al-Hilal, and Al-Nassr. Simultaneously, four other clubs transitioned into the hands of state-owned entities like the Royal Commission for Al-Ula, Diriyah Gate Development Authority, Neom, and Aramco.

Between them these clubs have signed some of the biggest names in the sport, including Karim Benzema, Cristiano Ronaldo, and Neymar with extraordinary deals that could be worth more than 1 billion US dollars in wages for 20 foreign players.

Saudi's use of football for soft power was further on display in August 2024, when the PIF announced a multi-year partnership with the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (Concacaf). The deal, which according to the press release builds on a "shared ambition to grow football at every level of the game", includes sponsorships of the men's and women's Concacaf Champions Cups and the 2025 Concacaf Gold Cup.

Millions for prizes in golf

While the PIF is chaired by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, it is governed by Yasir Al-Rumayyan, one of the most powerful figures in the Saudi regime. Al-Rumayyan, who also chairs the oil giant Aramco, leads the Saudi Golf Federation, Golf Saudi, and LIV Golf – each a crucial part of Saudi Arabia's growing influence in the global golf industry.

Both the PIF and Aramco overlap as sponsors of many of the same golf events: Saudi Open presented by PIF, PIF Saudi International, the Aramco Team Series, and the Aramco Saudi Ladies International.

The latter two events are both sanctioned by the Ladies European Tour and each boasts a prize fund of 5 million US dollars, which underscores the financial weight behind Saudi Arabia's presence in golf.

Subsidiaries also sponsor sports

Saudi Arabia also utilises its PIF subsidiaries, such as the Saudi Telecom Company, which has invested in combat sports, e-sports, and the Six Kings Slam tennis exhibition.

Another example is the Saudi National Bank that sponsors a wide range of events and institutions, including the Saudi Arabian football federation, the PIF Saudi International golf tournament, and the FIFA Series 2024 held in Saudi Arabia.



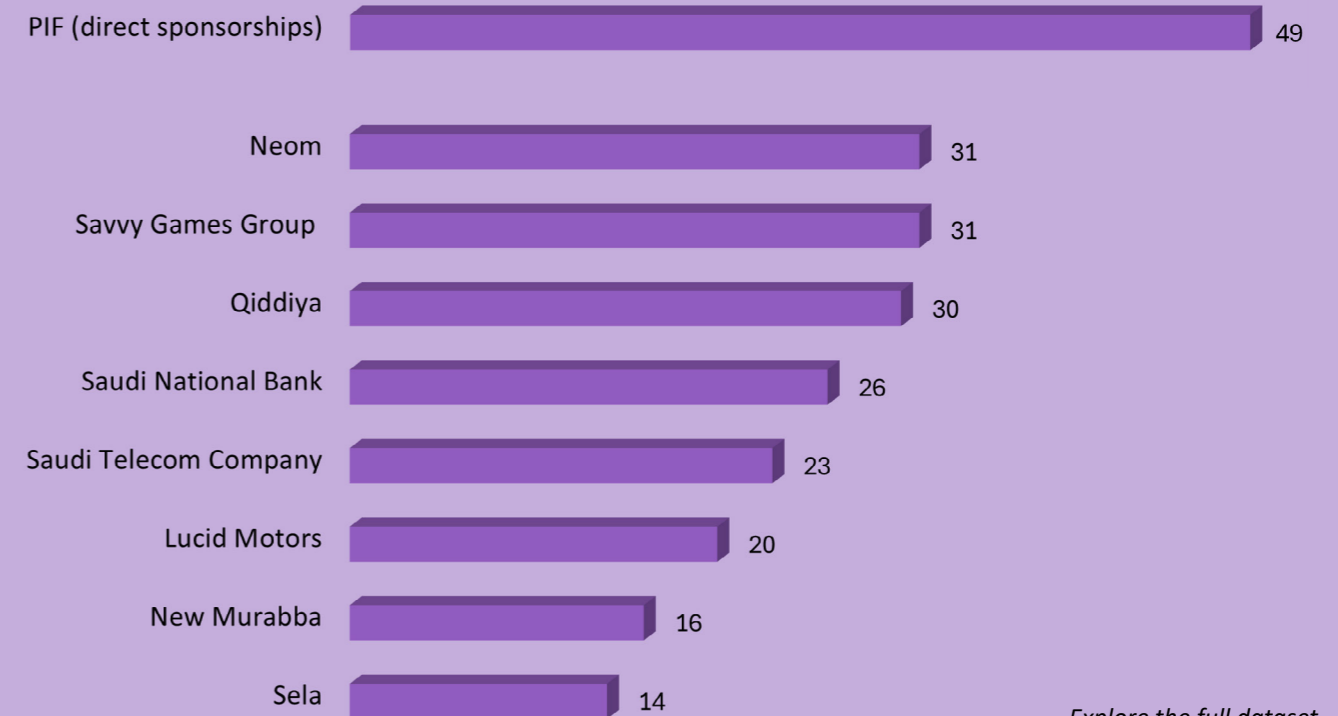
According to a 2024 Human Rights Watch report on the PIF, much of the fund's influence is wielded directly by Mohammed bin Salman. The crown prince has overhauled the PIF's governance framework in a way that enables him to unilaterally direct state wealth to the megaprojects he personally favours, rather than investments which benefit the Saudi people.

The report also revealed the extent of the PIF's investments in sports, referring to them as a "cornerstone of Saudi Arabia's influence operations abroad."

The sheer scale of the PIF's investments signals that there appears to be no limit to its ambition to become a global sports powerhouse.

The Public Investment Fund's total number of sponsorships: 346

The PIF serves as the driving force behind Saudi Arabia's sports strategy. While the PIF itself sponsors a wide range of sports, it has also leveraged its many subsidiaries to amplify its influence. Below is an overview of some of the PIF's most significant subsidiaries and the number of sponsorships they hold in the world of sports.



[Explore the full dataset](#)

Neom: A futuristic vision for sport on feet of clay

Saudi Arabia's futuristic city Neom is being built to host major international sports events, including the 2034 FIFA World Cup, and is already sponsoring a vast number of sports events. Yet, behind the ambitious facade lies a troubling story of human rights abuses and controversies.



Imagine a World Cup where fans travel from ultra-luxurious hotels to a massive 45,000-seat stadium towering 350 meters above sea level. This is the vision Saudi Arabia wants the world to see as it promotes Neom as a host city in its [bid](#) for the 2034 FIFA World Cup.

[Neom](#), Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's ambitious 1.5 trillion US dollar mega-project, is a centerpiece of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 – a plan that aims to reduce the Kingdom's dependence on oil, diversify its economy, and rebrand it as a global sports hub.

Neom's role in the Kingdom's sports strategy is evident. In 2024, Neom's name has been visible at multiple international [sports events](#), including the World Aquatics Open Water Swimming World Cup, the FIBA 3x3 World Tour, and Neom's own multi-sport Beach Games which attracted teams from over 25 countries to compete in disciplines ranging from beach soccer to volleyball.

In addition, Neom owns the Saudi football club Neom SC.

Looking ahead, Neom has [secured](#) the rights to host the 2029 Asian Winter Games at its Trojena mountain destination, making it the first Olympic event awarded to a city that doesn't yet exist on the map.

Expanding influence in Asian and European football

Since 2021, Neom has been the Official Global Partner for the Asian Football Confederation's (AFC) national team and club competition. The partnership was [renewed](#) in 2024 for another five years.

Neom's reach stretches to Europe as well, with its partnership as a presenting sponsor for Spain's Spanish Super Cup,

2024 Neom Beach Games events

- 2024 World Aquatics Open Water Swimming World Cup Neom (Swimming)
- 2024 FIBA 3x3 World Tour Neom (Basketball)
- 2024 Neom Beach Soccer Cup (Football)
- 2024 Supertri Neom (Triathlon)
- 2024 Neom IFSC Masters (Climbing)
- 2024 Neom Titan Desert (Cycling)

[Explore the full dataset](#)

which positions Neom's brand alongside some of football's most iconic clubs.

From Formula E to Extreme E

Neom has also become an active part of Saudi Arabia's extensive investments in motorsports.

While Aramco has high-profile sponsorships of Formula 1 and the Dakar Rally, Neom has formed a [partnership](#) with McLaren Racing to create Neom McLaren Electric Racing which competes in the electric car series Formula E and Extreme E.

Enowa, Neom's energy, water and hydrogen subsidiary, has also signed [partnership](#) deals with Extreme E including a sponsorship of the 2024 Extreme E – Desert X race hosted in Jeddah. The deal intertwines Neom's futuristic brand with high-technological motorsport.

The dark reality of Neom's shining vision

The Saudi regime describes Neom as “[the future of sport](#)” and “[humanity's next chapter](#)”, but beneath the allure lies a history of displacement, oppression, and, for some, death. In 2020, The Guardian reported that the development of Neom was accompanied by “[threats, forced eviction and bloodshed](#).”

In October 2022, Saudi Arabia's Specialised Criminal Court [sentenced](#) three members of the Huwaitat tribe to death for opposing the eviction from their ancestral land to make way for the Neom project.

In May 2023, UN experts [voiced](#) grave concern over the imminent risk of these executions and urged the Kingdom's authorities to halt the process and investigate allegations of torture and ill-treatment.

In 2023, the human rights organisation ALQST released the report ‘[The Dark Side of Neom](#)’ which details the extent of expropriation, expulsion and prosecution of the region's original inhabitants.

In June 2024, the Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI) [filed](#) formal complaints with the International Labour Organization (ILO) which accused Saudi construction companies involved in Neom's development of severe human rights abuses and wage theft affecting at least 21,000 workers.

In October 2024, ITV's documentary ‘Kingdom Uncovered: Inside Saudi Arabia’ [exposed](#) further exploitation including grueling 16-hour workdays, denial of leave, and inadequate living conditions.



Aramco: Rich on oil, rich on sport

Aramco is Saudi Arabia's second-largest sports sponsor, with 71 sponsorships across football, golf and cricket, among others. Yet, despite its expanding presence in sports, the state-run oil giant is facing criticism from athletes and environmental activists over its continued abuses.



In 1988, the Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Saudi Aramco) was officially established and has grown into one of the world's largest companies and oil producers, fueling decades of prosperity in Saudi Arabia.

However, Aramco is more than an economic engine for Saudi Arabia. It is also a key component of the Kingdom's rebranding efforts and today serves as an important vehicle for projecting soft power through international sports such as football, golf, and cricket.

Aramco's football venture

In April 2024, FIFA and Aramco announced that the Saudi Arabian oil giant had become FIFA's "Major Worldwide Partner" in a deal that is reportedly valued at more than 100 million US dollars per year.

The lucrative partnership, which will run through to the end of 2027, gives Aramco sponsorship rights for the football governing body's most prestigious upcoming events, including the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2027 FIFA Women's World Cup.

The FIFA-Aramco partnership, which comes on the heels of a similar partnership between Aramco and the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (Concacaf), marked a significant advancement in the Kingdom's global sports takeover and underscores the growing influence of the world's largest oil and gas producer, which also happens to be the main source of funding for the Saudi regime.

Female footballers condemn FIFA partnership

Saudi Arabia's investments in football and its deal with FIFA faced backlash in October 2024 when more than 100 professional female football players wrote an open letter condemning FIFA's partnership with Aramco.

The letter called on FIFA to reconsider the deal, which it referred to as a "middle finger to women's soccer."

It criticised the oil company's contribution to the climate crisis, as well as Saudi Arabia's human rights violations, particularly against women and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

"The Saudi authorities trample not only on the rights of women, but on the freedom of all other citizens too," read the letter.

"Imagine LGBTQ+ players, many of whom are heroes of our sport, being expected to promote Saudi Aramco during the 2027 World Cup, the national oil company of a regime that criminalises the relationships that they are in and the values they stand for?"



Aramco's role in golf

Much of the oil giant's growing involvement in sports is being driven by Yasir Al-Rumayyan, who serves as chairman of Aramco and governor of the Public Investment Fund (PIF), one of the world's wealthiest sovereign wealth funds.

Notably, he is also chairman of the Saudi Golf Federation, Golf Saudi, and LIV Golf, all key players in Saudi Arabia's strategic influence in the golf world.

Golf has become a significant tool in Saudi Arabia's diplomatic efforts, highlighted by Al-Rumayyan's golf outings with Donald Trump at a side event of the LIV Golf tournament – a breakaway series financed by the PIF.

Cricket: Aramco's gateway to India

In 2022, Aramco expanded its reach in the Indian subcontinent when it joined forces with the Indian Premier League (IPL) in cricket. At the time, the IPL registered more than 405 million viewers – a figure that rose by 32% the following year.

However, the deal was short-lived. After running into “legal complexities” that complicated Saudi's efforts to invest further in the IPL, the Kingdom decided to discontinue the partnership, and focus instead on its partnership with the International Cricket Council (ICC). The Aramco-ICC partnership includes sponsorship of all the ICC's major events and allows Aramco to connect with an audience of millions of fans.

Following a successful initial term, which ran from October 2022 until early 2024, Aramco and the ICC have agreed to a four-year extension to the partnership, which further cements Aramco's role as a major commercial partner in the cricket world.

Saudi-backed golf tournaments

- Aramco Saudi Ladies International
- Aramco Team Series (5 events across the world)
- PIF Saudi International
- Saudi Open presented by PIF
- LIV Golf (14 events across the world)

[Find more details in the dataset](#)

Saudi Arabia is also set to host the IPL player auction in 2025, which is one of the most watched events in cricket.

The world's biggest polluter

Aramco's expanding presence in sports has faced criticism, particularly from climate reporters and activists highlighting the company's poor environmental record.

Since 1965, Aramco is estimated to be the largest corporate contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions, and its failure to meet sustainability targets led the UN to warn the company it was non-compliant with the Paris Agreement. FIFA requires its partners to live up to a number of sustainability requirements but refuses to discuss whether Aramco fulfil these requirements. In reply to questions from Play the Game about its partnership with Aramco, FIFA offered the following statement:

“FIFA's partnership with Aramco was established on the shared values of innovation, development and social enterprise. As is the case with all FIFA's commercial partnerships, revenues generated are invested back into global football development via the FIFA Forward fund – and make a tangible, visible and meaningful impact on the lives of millions around the world.”



Turki Al-Sheikh's season

Turki Al-Sheikh is a driving force behind Saudi Arabia's emergence as a global hub for sports and entertainment. He has brought combat sports and major boxing matches to the Kingdom and taken the Riyadh Season abroad.



On 12 October 2024, Saudi Arabia launched the 5th edition of Riyadh Season – the Kingdom's six-month festival of sports, culture, and entertainment – with a highly anticipated boxing showdown between Artur Beterbiev and Dmitry Bivol dubbed IV Crown Showdown.

The event drew celebrities from football superstar Neymar to rap legend Busta Rhymes and was staged with all the glitz and glamour one can expect from a country keen to present itself as a destination for combat sports to rival Las Vegas.

Seated ringside among the celebrities was Turki Al-Sheikh, the chairman of the General Entertainment Authority and a driving force behind Saudi's rise as a global hub for sports and entertainment.

Al-Sheikh, a close confidant of Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, is not only the face of Riyadh Season but also an advisor to the Royal Court and the owner of the Spanish football club Almería.

The man behind Saudi Arabia's boxing revolution

Al-Sheikh has played a pivotal role in bringing high-stakes combat sports to Saudi soil. Over recent years, he has struck deals with World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), and even secured the rights to stage the Italian and Spanish Super Cups in Saudi Arabia.

However, his crowning achievements have arguably been in the world of boxing.

In 2024, Al-Sheikh secured landmark partnerships with some of boxing's most influential organisations, including the World Boxing Council and the World Boxing Association, as well as leading promoters such as Matchroom, Queensberry, Golden Boy Promotions, Toprank, and Boxxer.

Al-Sheikh has revitalised boxing in ways once thought impossible. He bankrolled high-profile fights and broke through negotiation stalemates between the various boxing promoters who control the sport by offering unprecedented sums of money thanks to the deep pockets of the Saudi state. He was even able to secure a heavyweight showdown between Tyson Fury and Oleksandr Usyk – the first undisputed heavyweight title bout of this century.



Riyadh has now been the site of several major boxing events that have reshaped the sport. The British newspaper 'The Telegraph' crowned Al-Sheikh as "the most influential man in boxing," and fans and media have affectionately dubbed him "His Excellency."

Beyond his growing personality cult, Al-Sheikh has also positioned himself as Saudi's entertainment czar, utilizing the Kingdom's vast resources to establish Riyadh Season – now one of the largest multi-week festivals in the world – and leverage that platform to further expand Saudi's soft power.

Since the launch of the 2024 edition of Riyadh Season, the festival has hosted events such as the Six Kings Slam tennis exhibition, the CAF Super Cup Final, the WWE Crown Jewel event, and a Professional Fighters League (PFL) event dubbed 'Battle of the Giants'. Riyadh Season 2024 also includes a rematch between Oleksandr Usyk and Tyson Fury as well as the Italian Super Cup.

Riyadh Season goes global: Controlling the narrative

Al-Sheikh has also taken the brand international. In August 2024, he brought a Riyadh Season fight card to Los Angeles, where boxing legend Terence Crawford headlined an event at BMO Stadium.

The following month, London's Wembley Arena hosted a clash between British heavyweight Anthony Joshua and

Daniel Dubois, also under the Riyadh Season banner. In a striking display of Saudi influence, the Kingdom's national anthem was performed ahead of the main event – the first time Saudi Arabia's anthem was played at a boxing event on British soil.

This was also the event where a journalist from 'The Telegraph' – the same paper that dubbed Al-Sheikh the most influential figure in boxing – had his credentials revoked for criticising the Saudi regime. It was a clear signal of the Kingdom's growing influence over both boxing and the wider sporting scene.

It also draws similarities to a New York Times investigation into Lionel Messi's contractual agreement with the Saudi tourism authority. The agreement included a non-disparagement clause that barred Messi from stating anything that would "tarnish" Saudi's reputation.

Despite the assault on press freedom in the UK, the incident barely made a ripple among boxing fans. Al-Sheikh's growing influence has effectively silenced much of the criticism within the sport.

It is yet another reminder of how Saudi Arabia leverages sports not only to reshape its global image but also to tightly control the narrative surrounding the Kingdom.

Turki Al-Sheikh is central to that strategy.



Riyadh Air & Saudia: Dominating sport from the skies

As Saudi Arabia intensifies its global sports strategy, two state-owned airlines – Saudia and the newly launched Riyadh Air – are competing for prominence in the sports sponsorship world.



As Saudi Arabia intensifies its global sports strategy, two state-owned airlines – Saudia and the newly launched Riyadh Air – are competing for prominence in the sports sponsorship world.

For years, the sports world has become accustomed to see prominent airline carriers like [Etihad Airways](#), [Emirates](#) and [Qatar Airways](#) sponsor high-profile sporting events and teams across the globe.

Now, Saudi Arabia is applying the same strategy and is also leveraging its airlines as ambassadors carrying celebrated sports stars to promote both the airline and a vision of Saudi Arabia as a luxury travel destination.

Saudia's role in the Kingdom's strategy

Founded in 1945, Saudia, the state-owned airline, has long been a significant player in Saudi Arabia's sports business. Over the years, it has sponsored numerous high-profile events in the Kingdom, including the 2022 boxing match between Anthony Joshua vs Oleksandr Usyk and the 2023 clash between Tyson Fury and Francis Ngannou.

As of 2024, Saudia continues to be at the forefront of promoting Saudi Arabia through sponsorships of a wide array of sporting events.

Some of Saudia's many sponsorships

- Tyson Fury vs Oleksandr Usyk 1 & 2
- Anthony Joshua vs Daniel Dubois
- Anthony Joshua vs Francis Ngannou
- 2024 Saudi Cup
- 2024 Fursan Cup
- 2024 Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Endurance Cup
- 2024 Diriyah E-Prix
- Formula E
- 2024 PFL Champs vs Bellator Champs
- Newcastle United's Official Airline Partner
- 2024 Riyadh Season Cup
- 2024 Riyadh Season World Masters of Snooker
- Six Kings Slam
- 2024 Richard Mille AIUla Desert Polo

For a full list of Saudia's sports sponsorships, explore [the complete dataset](#).

Riyadh Air: The new contender

In March 2023, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, prime minister of Saudi Arabia and chairman of the Public Investment Fund (PIF), announced the launch of the nation's new flagship carrier, Riyadh Air.

The airline, wholly owned by the PIF, is chaired by Yasir Al-Rumayyan, governor of the PIF, who also holds an extensive portfolio of other leadership roles within the Kingdom. Years before the planned maiden flight in 2025, Riyadh Air has made significant sponsorship deals with actors in sport.

In August 2023, just five months after its launch, Riyadh Air made waves by becoming the new main sponsor of the renowned Spanish football club Atlético de Madrid. Then, in August 2024, the airline expanded its footprint in global sports by signing a multi-year partnership with the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (Concacaf).

In October 2024, Riyadh Air captured the attention of nostalgic football fans by securing a historic nine-year agreement with Atlético de Madrid for the naming rights to the club's iconic stadium, Metropolitano.

Going forward, the stadium will be known as the Riyadh Air Metropolitano – a strategic move by the Saudi state to elevate Riyadh Air's brand while generating goodwill within the community.

This landmark deal was celebrated in an official statement as the club's most important sponsor to date.

As the latest addition to Riyadh Air's sponsorship portfolio, the airline signed an agreement with the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) as the official airline partner for the 2024 WTA Finals in Riyadh.



How we did it

The dataset provides a comprehensive look into the scale and network of Saudi Arabia's sports strategy by mapping the key individuals and entities driving its sports initiatives. It captures 1,412 positions across 207 Saudi entities and includes 910 Saudi sponsorships in sports worldwide.

The data collection took place between August and November 2024 and focused on current Saudi Arabian sports sponsorships and leadership positions for the year 2024 onwards.

The data collection was conducted by Play the Game researchers Nathalie Zahle, Lasse Kjær Nielsen, and Stanis Elsborg.

Positions

Our approach to data collection has been exploratory and investigative in nature. We have thoroughly researched the positions of Saudi Arabian ministers as well as the positions of key decision-makers in the Saudi Arabian Olympic federations, Saudi Pro League football clubs, and what we deemed to be central state-owned or state-run companies and initiatives.

We have focused on positions in the organisations' decision-making bodies giving priority to roles at the presidential, board, and executive management levels whenever possible. We also compiled a complete list of board positions within international Olympic sports federations and the Olympic Council of Asia held by Saudi Arabian nationals. Additionally, we cross-referenced our findings with a list of Saudi Arabian ambassadors, including only those diplomatic positions relevant to our project.

Sponsors and partnerships

In order to create a comprehensive overview of Saudi Arabian sponsors in the world of sports, we reviewed the official websites that belong to the Saudi Arabian entities we identified while mapping the positions of individuals.

In addition, we have identified 48 memorandums of understanding between the Saudi Arabian Football Federation (SAFF) and various football federations, as well as six partnerships with foreign football clubs. We found them by reviewing SAFF's website.

We used Google searches, social media, and news articles to supplement our findings.

Reflections

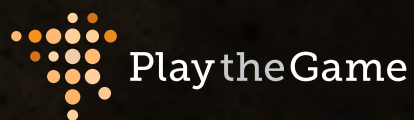
While the dataset is extensive, it may not cover all significant positions and sponsorships, and there might be some that we have overlooked.

Moreover, the dataset is limited to relational networks between individuals within Saudi entities, whilst other roles they may hold in international organisations were outside our scope. However, in project articles based on the dataset, we have included such details when pertinent.

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