

The need for specialised advice on Sports Law

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The sports industry is booming. It has been estimated that up to US\$620 billion is spent every year in the global sports industry.

This includes infrastructure construction, sporting goods, licensed products and live sports events. That is a large market by anyone's standards, and the Middle East is at the very heart of the industry's development.

The EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa) market is currently ranked as the second largest sports market in the world, with a growth rate expected to hit an impressive 4.6%. Sponsorship is one of the fastest growing segments. The region is considered to be the prime emerging sports market, and its continued growth is creating significant commercial opportunities for both domestic and international companies, whether they are directly involved in sports or the broader framework of associated services.

This dynamic regional growth – underscored by successful headline events including annual Formula One races in Abu Dhabi and Bahrain, as well as world class golf, tennis, swimming, horseracing and rugby tournaments held throughout the year – has combined with Qatar being awarded the biggest prize of them all, the FIFA 2022 World Cup. The result has been a revolution in the GCC's sports industry and it is generating an even greater appetite for more sporting events.

The growth potential across the Middle East brings vast opportunities and challenges, but it will certainly act as a catalyst for sustainable development as regional governments seek to further diversify their economies. Public sector investment in the industry is a major driver of growth, while sports tourism, as well as numerous other ancillary markets, is also on the increase.

While all this is hugely positive for both governments and private enterprise, clients are increasingly recognising that the industry's growth must come hand in hand with the development of regulatory structures and services that adhere to international standards of best practice. Rapid development and a proven platform for global aspirations have led to increasingly complex sports related projects being undertaken in the region. From inspirational purpose-built facilities infrastructure efforts to sponsorship investments and all transaction points in between, the passion for sports has made its way to the corporate deal table and it is here to stay.

With so much at stake, both commercially and reputationally, especially when it comes to major sporting events and initiatives which represent the region around the world, it is clear that the industry requires dedicated professional services to support it. This is particularly true when it comes to legal services, and in fact, many clients are now demanding specialism from their external legal counsel.

Al Tamimi & Company has responded quickly to this need by launching a dedicated and specialised Sports Law practice, which aims to play a leading role in developing the standards of legal services being provided to the sports industry across the region. The practice will be able to tap into international knowledge and experience and apply this locally in a manner that remains strongly rooted in Arabic culture and language.

Higher standards will in turn increase the region's chances of attracting further investment by

boosting confidence, as well as improving the opportunity to win more global sporting events or initiatives in the future – including the Olympics.

Whether it is a question of maximising the opportunity for year-round use of facilities, or simply negotiating a better sponsorship package from a commercial standpoint, clients will receive more value – with an increased ability to optimise strategic input at an early stage and an improved return on investment through the use of focused and experienced legal counsel adept at handling sports-related matters.

In essence, providing more specialised legal services to this fast-growing market is a no-brainer from an economic, commercial and reputational perspective. It is an exciting time in the sports industry and Al Tamimi & Company is committed to leading from the front – because getting this transition right will help ensure that the Middle East sports industry maintains the momentum we are currently witnessing.