

Football in Qatar (and the MENA region):

**How influence was built and what other sports can learn from
its growth**

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Abstract

This case study examines the rise of Middle Eastern influence in the sport of football. In particular, it asks how a sport only introduced to Qatar in 1948 - and whose national team played their first game just 50 years ago - will host the world's premier football event – the FIFA World Cup - in 2022. It looks at what is driving the country's investment in sport and what that investment is delivering. Finally, it presents lessons to other sports, as well as potential barriers to further progress.

Keywords – Qatar, FIFA, World Cup, Influence, Hosting, Events

Introduction

While football has long been part of the sporting fabric of the Middle East and its constituent countries there are few whom, 30 years ago, could have predicted the meteoric rise in influence that the area now enjoys in the sport.

This case study sets out:

- The background to the growth of the region's influence in football and the factors driving it
- The steps policy-makers have taken to arrive at the current situation
- The key pillars in developing influence in sport
- The potential barriers for other sports to overcome in this process.

1.0 Overview and growth factors

As we will describe and evidence below, the growth in the MENA region's influence in the world's favourite – and most fought after – sport has been supported by a range of factors.

The journey begins with the creation of a bond with a sport that has captured, to some extent, almost every nation's heart. Fanship is the starting point – and, indeed, as we will see it continues to fuel the region's relationship with the sport.

From there, as this case study documents, influence has been supported through a more commercial footing, with the establishment and development of domestic leagues but also through a model of global sponsorship of some of the world's biggest sports properties.

The foundation of mutual commercial interest has also been supported by ownership of select sports properties, especially where those properties can themselves make a return to owning interests.

1.1 What drives the region's growing investment in sport?

A wide range of factors can be said to be driving forces in the region's increased investment and profile in sport. Since motives differ between countries, we look specifically here at some of the key drivers for Qatar.

- **Health** – According to Brannagan and Guilianotti, Qatar has “some of the world's worst levels of health and well-being”.¹ The country's national health strategy calculates that 71% of Qataris are overweight, with nearly a third obese or morbidly obese. The strategy's goal is to engrain sport and physical activity as part of everyday life in Qatar in a bid to address these health inequalities. The country's Aspire Zone – a large sports-centred facility, catering for mass participation as well as elite sports - is the centre-piece of the country's efforts to promote healthy living alongside elite success as a key part of the country's new, healthy identity.

Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlh4H8SSfzo>

The Aspire Zone is at the same time a community facility, a world-accredited sports science hub and a talent identification centre. As such it serves the dual purpose of addressing domestic health policy priorities, while also providing a centre of international excellence which can be used to pursue the country's foreign policy objectives.

- **Reinforcing national identity as a 'sports country'** – The Emir institutionalised the country's annual National Sports Day in 2012 with the goal of promoting a healthy lifestyle among Qatar's population. In the preceding year, Qatar introduced its first National Sports Sector Strategy (2011-2016), setting out plans for an "Active Qatar" campaign aimed at educating the public on the importance of healthy and active living. These national campaigns, in addition to the country's new association with major global events, international teams and prestigious sponsorships, are designed to build a sense of nationhood posited in sporting excellence.
- **Engaging and entertaining a growing young population** – 25% of those who live in Qatar are under 24 years old.² Brands from the Middle East are using sponsorships of key global sports to target and engage this youthful population, while programs run by facilities like Aspire seek to inspire them into activity.³
- **Economic growth and diversification** – Sport has played a major role in increasing the brand profiles of sponsors of sporting teams and competitions but its domestic development is also part of Qatar's objective of economic diversification.⁴ The country's aims are to reduce the economy's reliance on the oil and gas industry by strategically investing in a selection of key industries.

Since 2011, the country has reduced its reliance on petro-chemicals from 60% to 48% and part of that reduction is thanks to the increase in the tourism industry.⁵

Since the region's first major sports sponsorship deal. Qatar's tourism industry has increased in value from \$498m in 2004 to \$15,239m.⁶

- **National brand-building** – Hosting events and tournaments represents an effective way to project a country's brand on a global platform, to promote tourism and to showcase the economic benefits of investing in a country. As the ruler of a neighbouring emirate, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum remarked, sport is a multi-billion 'charm offensive' and football is a pivotal part of this. Facilities like Aspire's Anti-Doping Laboratory Qatar (ADLQ) play a role, for example. It is the only accredited lab in the MENA region. At the time of accreditation Mohammed Al Sayrafi, general manager of ADLQ acknowledged, "This is part of the larger vision of the state to develop Qatar as the preeminent sporting hub in the region."

As Ahmed Kellil Abbassi, Executive Director of Competitions and Football Development at the country's elite football competition, the Qatar Stars League (QSL) put it neatly in an interview for this case study:

"We all align on our objectives to deliver the country's vision – and when I say 'all' I mean the whole country. We believe that hosting the World Cup can be a catalyst to achieving that vision and aligning all the stakeholders on a milestone that excites everybody.

“Wellbeing, health and sustainability are all part of that and the World Cup, for example, will be the first to be carbon neutral. The Qatar Stars League has announced its commitment to be the first professional sports league in the world to be carbon neutral too. These kind of things show that football is much more than just about kicking a ball. That it has a wider purpose for our country.”

2.0 The pathway to influence

As we describe above, a number of parallel steps have been taken on the path to influence. This section lists the most significant and tangible.

2.1 Fanship

Soccer was introduced to the Middle East in the latter part of the nineteenth century and has since become an important part of sporting society.⁷ It has taken root at various speeds across the diversity of cultures and nation states in the region.

In Qatar, the game was introduced to locals as recently as the 1940s.⁸ Football was brought by visitors – in this case by foreign (possibly British) oil workers in 1948. Two years later, the country’s first club, Al-Najar, was formed and in 1951, the Qatar Oil Company organised the nation’s first official competition – the Ezz Eddin Tournament.⁹ The national side played its first game – against Bahrain – in 1970.

Today, football is the country’s most popular sport and a quarter of all Qatar’s sports facilities are devoted to football (105 stadia in all).¹⁰ As QSL’s Ahmed Kellil Abbassi, put it:

“Historically football has been the number one sport in the region. *Everyone* is very passionate about playing football, watching football, supporting football, following football and this is part of our culture.

“Football brings people together. It’s a language that everyone in the world speaks and it’s no different in this region. Kids play and watch, and when they can no longer play, older generations support.”

2.2 Growing commercial relationships

The nature of the region’s growing commercial relationships can be broadly characterised as centring on sponsorship and ownership. Abbessi believes that, as well as having strategic importance, these relationships also deliver in a practical sense for the country.

“Commercial deals have contributed to domestic development in many ways. One of them is to enhance the passion for football by making connections between the people in Qatar and top clubs in the world. We all support those clubs who are owned or sponsored by Qatari entities.

“The opportunity to have those clubs visiting Qatar gives good visibility to the country and helps to spread the experience of watching the world’s top teams. They give us benchmarks that we can follow and also provide us with opportunities for transfer of knowledge and experience too.”

2.2.1 Sponsorship

Middle Eastern involvement in football outside of the region first manifested itself openly in commercial deals on behalf of brands based in the Arabian Gulf.

Arguably the first high-profile sponsorship began in 2001, when the UAE's Emirates airline became the main shirt sponsor of English Premier League team, Chelsea. Although Chelsea had yet to win the Premier League at this point (they would go on to do so in 2004/05), the deal - the second biggest in the league - was still seen as major coup for both parties.¹¹

By the 2013/14 season, five of the top eight revenue-generating clubs in the world had shirt sponsors based in the Middle East. And although that number has now reduced (today it's only two of the top six), shirt sponsorship was the first step towards a much closer integration.

Following the archetypal model for sports sponsorship, corporate partners boost their profile through branding club assets, with the most effective partnerships driving a transfer of brand equity between the sport or team and the sponsor (and sometimes in the other direction too).

So successful has this model been for MENA brands that in the last two years, both Emirates and Etihad Airways have also entered the US soccer market with shirt-front sponsorships with New York Cosmos and New York City FC, respectively.^{12 13} This is in addition to Etihad's league-wide partnership with Major League Soccer.

For its part, Qatar Airways is involved across the world with footballing properties, and enjoys current deals with Boca Juniors in Brazil as well as Bayern Munich and AS Roma in Europe.

And while the face of sponsorship is constantly changing, a study last year calculated that MENA is responsible for more major sports sponsorships than any other region (8 deals, valued at Euro250m).¹⁴

These deals across football achieve enormous reach for MENA brands. 2.2bn people across the world are interested in sport today, with 1.6bn of them interested in football specifically.¹⁵ These figures illustrate why the region's influence in football began to take root from the front of shirts.

Shirt Sponsor Timeline:

Europe

- Chelsea 2001-05 (Emirates)
- Arsenal 2006-Present (Emirates)
- Man City 2009-Present (Etihad)
- Barcelona 2012-13 (Qatar Foundation)
- Barcelona 2013-18 (Qatar Airways)
- Real Madrid 2013-Present (Emirates)
- PSG 2006-19 (Emirates)
- Lyon 2020 (Emirates - just brokered)

- Hamburger SV 2006-Present (Emirates)
- Benfica 2015-Present (Emirates)
- AC Milan 2010-Present (Emirates)
- AS Roma 2018-Present (Qatar Airways)
- Bayern Munich 2018 – Present (Qatar Airways)
- K.A.S Eupen 2019-Present (Qatar Airways)

Significant non-European deals

- Boca Juniors (Qatar Airways)
- New York Cosmos (Emirates - up until 2018)
- New York City FC (Etihad)
- Melbourne City (Etihad)

2.2.2 Club Ownership

The second phase of increasing MENA influence in football has involved investors in the country moving from being a partner of footballing brands to owning (in part or whole) those brands. This transition, aided by the foundations set by commercial sponsorship deals, has taken place quickly and with little resistance from major clubs and leagues, who have looked to new investors to allow them to continue to compete.

Although the picture is regularly changing, below you can find a list of some of the clubs owned by interests based in the MENA region.

Mena Club Owners

- Manchester City: UAE
- Sheffield United: Saudi Arabia
- Aston Villa: Egypt
- Hull City: Egypt
- Everton: Iran
- Arsenal: Iran
- Nottingham Forest: Kuwait
- Charlton Athletic: Abu Dhabi
- Bristol Rovers: Jordan
- 1860 Munchen: Jordan
- Malaga: Qatar
- Paris Saint Germain: Qatar
- K.A.S Eupen: Qatar
- CS Sedan Ardennes: Saudi Arabia
- Almeria: Saudi Arabia
- Girona FC: UAE
- New York City FC: UAE
- Melbourne City: UAE
- Yokohama F. Marinos FC: UAE

By and large, acquisitions of clubs by MENA interests have passed with the support of football authorities, which often welcome the extra financial resource and attention which high-profile owners can bring. But a notable recent exception to this has been the attempted purchase of Newcastle United by a group backed by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund. It ran into trouble in 2020 as regulators scrutinised links between the

country and illegally streamed football content. It is possible that the rejection of the takeover by footballing authorities could set a new benchmark for future acquisitions, complicating the process for other interested parties.

Typically, taking control of a club confers a range of different types of influence on its new owners and it is worth exploring their role in the region's rising influence.

First of all, depending on the level of the club, ownership provides opportunities to create networks and common cause with other owners, something especially worthwhile when these owners are themselves figures of influence.

Second, ownership provides a place at the top-table of, at the very least, domestic football. It often gives owners a stake in the formal decision-making processes of leagues and divisions – on everything from football finance to ownership policies.

Third, it can provide a platform to stand for election to international football's federations and confederations, something which can help coalesce formal power.

Fourth, it can create or reinforce economic power, particularly in leagues and clubs with strong revenue streams.

Fifth, taking ownership of a football club instantly creates profile and 'brand awareness' for new proprietors (whether they like it or not), which in itself can open opportunities and build influence. Related to this are the soft power benefits derived from the hospitality/hosting opportunities which ownership delivers.

2.3 Event hosting

The rise of MENA's influence is crystallised by Qatar's successful bid to host football's blue-riband event, the FIFA World Cup, in 2022.

Although the path to successful hosting of the event was paved by the region's hosting of a number of other high-profile football events – like the Club World Cup (UAE 2017 and 2018, Qatar 2019), the Under-17 World Cup (UAE 2013) and the 2011 AFC Asian Cup – the award of the premier tournament in world football to Qatar (which predates many of these events) came as a huge surprise to many outside the region. As Sujit Jasani, CEO of Vero, the world's leading bid communications agency and advisor to the Qatar committee told us for this case study, “We were rank outsiders in the race. No one, particularly in the international media, gave us a hope.”

For those involved in the bid, however, the route to success was much clearer.

First of all, interests in the country were united behind the effort, making a united front possible. Qatar put sport at the centre of its 2030 National Vision where it sits as part of one of four connected pillars of development. ¹⁶

As a result, the country put hosting the World Cup at or near the top of its foreign policy objectives – as Griffin argues, to ‘normalise Qatar's status in the global community’ and to challenge the ‘orientalist’ stereotype of the Arab World. ¹⁷

But this factor should not be over-stated. As someone integral to the strategy, Vero's Sujit Jasani believes that while it was an important part of the bid's success, it didn't necessarily set it apart from its competitors:

"The voters want to see that there is domestic buy-in and that a bid will be well-supported domestically. Voters want to see that but ultimately what does well for FIFA and the sport of football is what they are truly concerned about it and that's something which Qatar did well on too."

Second of all, as Jasani suggests:

"A more important selling point than simply being able to practically deliver the World Cup was the belief that Qatar gave FIFA a credible chance to deliver a great World Cup in this region for the first time - a first Arab-hosted World Cup."

Hopes had been high that under the organisation's rotation policy, an Arab country would be awarded the right to host a World Cup but when that policy was abandoned in 2007, it seemed the opportunity may have passed. However, it was replaced with a statute that banned from bidding countries in confederations whose members had won the right to host one of the last two tournaments – something which allowed Qatar back into the running. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bu971RsEPqA>

An Arab World Cup wasn't just appealing for its novelty either, argues Jasani.

“It also appealed because of the compact nature of the World Cup – how fans could see three matches in a day if they wished. In addition, as a location it works really well for the rightsholder and its stakeholders in terms of geographical accessibility – there are so many football fans within a relatively small distance. The location also helps for time zones for broadcasters too. The technical part was always right but the Middle East narrative began to build too.”

Third, the country’s track record of successfully bidding for and hosting second-tier events has established its credentials as a capable and hospitable host. Golf, tennis, cycling, motorsports and athletics events had all been successfully held in the run-up to the World Cup bid, bolstering the country’s reputation for competence in this area. QSL’s Abbessi told us:

“Previously, Qatar has won a reputation for being a very good host of sports events. And that’s partially because hospitality is embedded in our culture and heritage.”

Fourth, the country has continually invested in its sporting infrastructure to the point where, despite its size, it can be compared to some of the world’s leading sporting nations. In the build-up to the FIFA World Cup, it is anticipated that the government will spend \$60bn on World Cup-related and legacy projects. This will be supplemented by \$140bn in upgrades to transport infrastructure.¹⁸ In fact, Qatar already boasts the world’s largest indoor sports complex.¹⁹ The country’s Aspire facility claims to assess the skills of 400,000 boys each year from across Asia, Africa, Central and South America, providing it with invaluable soft power across its network.²⁰

As Jasani says in his interview for this case study:

“Trust in delivery was there. The main part of that was the wealth of region – to speed up the delivery of the infrastructure that was required – not just in stadia but in transportation, international and domestic, hotels and all the other elements required by an event of this size. It was also 12 years out – not the usual seven or eight before a World Cup. The economic story of a country that could afford this was important in the context of the global economic crisis of 2008. The appetite for hosting major events on this scale was probably limited so being able to meet the bill became an important part of the bid and Qatar was well-placed on that front.”

Ahmed Abbessi of QSL persuasively argues that the Aspire Zone is a foundation for some of Qatar’s success both domestically and internationally:

“We’re very lucky to have a state-of-the-art sports facility like Aspire Zone, which includes the Academy, sports facilities and also the sports medicine facilities. It gives us the opportunity at the top level to deliver matches in amazing stadiums, to train future players for the national league and team. We can already see the fruits of it in our league and in the national team. This is in line with our ambition to be an example around the world – and we now support athletes and teams around the world too and it’s our responsibility to help others.”

A number of other factors also aligned to make a successful bid possible – for example, the large, split field of competition during the voting and Qatar’s well-

organised lobbying campaign. So despite initial surprise, and later accusations of bribery in the voting process, it is worth pointing out that Qatar's bid was both well-organised and timely.

3.0 Pillars of growth – Guiding principles for growing and building legitimacy in sport

A number of lessons can be learned from the region's in-roads into the football world, some of which may be usefully applied by other sports seeking to mirror that success.

- **Coordinated, tripartite national policy** – Growing the footprint of football has been helped by a coordinated policy driven by the centre of politics in Qatar. The Qatar Olympic Committee, the Ministry of Culture and Sports and the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy continue to execute that strategy in the public sphere, complemented by activities in the global sports market by some of the country's biggest brands.

- **Multi-purpose policy-making** – As an instrument of policy, sport offers more than one outcome and, as such, is a powerful and favoured tool by policy-makers. As well as delivering improved health, it can support the country's cultural identity, and its brand overseas. Sports who can harness this argument can make a powerful case for support.

- **Feeding into tourism** – Linked to this is sport's ability to attract tourists – especially those who might not otherwise visit a country. In Qatar's case, tourism is one of the priority sectors for economic development.

- **Using thought-leadership platforms** - Qatar stages several major international sports conferences, such as the annual Doha Gathering Of All Leaders in Sport (Doha GOALS), and the 'Securing Sport' symposium that is convened by the Qatar-based International Centre for Sport Security (ICSS). These provide excellent opportunities for cementing the country's sports leadership credentials.

- **Hosting** – Qatar's event-hosting strategy has built confidence in the country's ability to hold an event like the FIFA World Cup.

- **Building a national participation base** – Having a strong participation base in a sport is arguably the first step towards being taken seriously by international partners. The Ministry of Culture and Sports (MCS) has developed a sporting culture by encouraging school athletics, organising activities, and regulating sports and youth associations. It currently administers more than 15 sports clubs across Qatar's municipalities and forms a strong base for the necessary step of building participation credentials.

- **Acquisition of international sports properties** – Built from the region's sponsorship relationships, Qatar has taken the next step into the purchase or control of brands in the sports sector. Qatar Sports Investment (QSI) plays a central role in foreign investment. The state-funded private investment group focuses on sports-related projects around the world, with the ultimate goal of raising revenue that can be reinvested in Qatar. Investments in overseas sporting properties can create a valuable launchpad for those seeking to build influence.

- **Media** – Qatar has cemented its reputation in sport with the growth of BeIN Sports. Its rights are now available in multiple markets around the world and burnish perceptions of the country as a serious player in sport.

QSL's Ahmed Abbessi also provides some practical insight on how football can provide a benchmark for other sports:

“When it comes to talent development, Aspire gives us a very good example of how to build a sustainable future in a sport and to reach the elite level.

“Another aspect is organisation and professionalism. The league [QSL] gives a very good example of a professional framework that we believe is the best in Asia, and which other sports can follow.

“On hosting of mega-events, we have shown and proven that we are the best in Asia and also among the best around the world. That is an example which other sports can – and do – follow.”

4.0 Emulating football's rise - Barriers to overcome by the wider sports sector

Although the Middle East's rise in footballing influence may have been relatively meteoric, there are a number of barriers which sports administrators should consider how to tackle, where they are relevant.

- **Creating a participation base** – In a country of 2.8m, there will be barriers to some sports seeking to create a strong participation base.

- **Supporting elite success** – Likewise, the relatively small population is likely to make it difficult for administrators to build successful domestic and national teams, as well as develop athletes, without leaning heavily on imported talent.

- **Socio-cultural constraints** – Cultural or religious challenges, such as the way traditions have a particular impact on the manner in which sports for certain groups (e.g. women) are organised, may affect the growth of some disciplines.

- **Environmental constraints** – According to Benjamin and Donnelly, the most commonly-cited barriers to participation at the environmental level are the weather and lack of facilities.²¹

- **Potential** – Sports do not all offer the same level of profile as football, possibly making them less attractive to policy-makers who are keen to use sport's instrumental value to achieve other policy goals. Not all sports offer access to the number of markets which football provides.

- **History** – Football is now an established part of the Middle East's history. More newly-established sports are unlikely to enjoy the same level of cultural weight domestically.

Sujit Jasani, the CEO of the world's leading bid communications agency, Vero has the last words on what other sports can learn:

“Of course, other sports can learn from football's experience. But the thing to remember is that football is unique. Not many events outside of soccer pull in partisan fans from around the world in such numbers. Football also has a unique profile in respect of the number of stars it can put together from those different countries in one place for a World Cup.

Now that they have won the right to host the FIFA's World Cup, he argues that Qatar can afford to be selective about what they take on.

"The optics of hosting something that doesn't appeal to a mass domestic audience can devalue the brand of an event or sport – but also its host. So the advice for other sports is to think very carefully about the events you do try to attract. The conversation between the rightsholder, the venue and host needs to be realistic if they're all to benefit from it.

"It's clear from hosting events like the Asian Games and the Club World Cup that Qatar can build and create audiences for sports events. And with the cumulatively better infrastructure that the country has as a legacy from other events – like transport links and hospitality - organisers can reach the point of building spectator audiences much more quickly. There's some solid thinking going around on sports strategy in the country and long-term planning will mean that organisers in other sports can build on that."

NOTES

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Teaching Asset

Introduction

While football has long been part of the sporting fabric of the Middle East and its constituent countries, there are few whom, 30 years ago, could have predicted the meteoric rise in influence that the area now enjoys in the sport.

Qatar's investment in sport has been driven by a wide range of factors, including health, national identity, brand building and economic diversification. And its influence has been achieved by taking a number of steps – building fanship, entering into commercial deals, acquiring sports assets and event hosting.

The whole process presents a number of lessons for other sports administrators, both in terms of the principles to follow and the constraints which must be overcome.

Teaching:

Exercise 1 – List as many clubs as you can with MENA ownership. For each club, give a reason why it may have been a) attractive to MENA investors and b) available for purchase.

Answer

Mena Club Owners

- Manchester City: UAE
- Sheffield United: Saudi Arabia
- Aston Villa: Egypt
- Hull City: Egypt

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- Everton: Iran
 - Arsenal: Iran
 - Nottingham Forest: Kuwait
 - Charlton Athletic: Abu Dhabi
 - Bristol Rovers: Jordan
 - 1860 Munchen: Jordan
 - Malaga: Qatar
 - Paris Saint Germain: Qatar
 - K.A.S Eupen: Qatar
 - CS Sedan Ardennes: Saudi Arabia
 - Almeria: Saudi Arabia
 - Girona FC: UAE
 - New York City FC: UAE
 - Melbourne City: UAE
 - Yokohama F. Marinos FC: UAE

Reasons for purchase may be manifold and it is up to students to evaluate each proposition and decide why they believe a club is attractive to investors. It is likely they will arrive at different answers depending on their subjective viewpoint but the purpose of this exercise is to activate students' thinking about the different way clubs can be viewed.

Reasons to buy may include power, economic potential, location, strategic influence opportunities, fan footprint, on-field success, potential for growth or success, vanity, creating a brand, building a reputation, enjoyment etc.

Reasons for availability may include cost of running, potential purchase price, failing leadership, financial situations, regulatory environment, liquidity, the difficulty of running a club, fan revolt, profit motive etc.

Exercise 2 – Provide an assessment of how and why the global sport of football was so open towards greater influence by Middle Eastern interests. What can other sports learn from that situation as they seek to emulate MENA’s success in football?

Answer

Students may name a number of factors:

- Openness of leagues and teams to external investment
- Competition between leagues, leading to that openness
- The absence of rules around investment into clubs (eg Financial Fair Play)
- Increase in broadcast cash flowing into football, making clubs attractive long-term economic propositions
- The soft power that football club ownership can provide
- The wealth of MENA interests made them attractive investors
- The novelty of MENA interest in clubs/leagues
- The lack of baggage of MENA interests, compared to more established rivals
- The cache that MENA investment brought with it
- The debt which many clubs had exposed themselves too
- The difficulty of running clubs profitably during the ‘arms race’ to succeed on the pitch
- The growing cost of recruiting the best players

Exercise 3 – While football provides one exemplar for growing influence within a sport, what other ways can a sport (TBD) increase and exert influence on the world stage? Consider the

many constituent parts a sport requires to be successful, including participation, coaching, regulation, officiating, sports science, integrity, governance, international competition etc, and how those areas can be mobilised to grow influence.

Answer

Answers here may be wide-ranging. They would typically involve building capacity, expertise, facilities or experience in one or more specific areas, to the extent that a nation became known for its offer in this sphere. Areas could include:

- Nutrition
- Rehab
- Coaching
- Groundskeeping
- Finance
- Governance
- Law
- School sport
- Youth sport
- Elite sport
- Women's sport
- Disability sport
- Specific types of sport (for example athletics)
- Hosting events or conferences
- Sports marketing
- Fan engagement or experience
- Broadcasting
- Innovation
- Sport for good/development

Exercise 4 – What factors are likely to affect or constrain the growth of other sports seeking to emulate the growth in influence which MENA interests have enjoyed in football?

Answer

- Creating a participation base – There is only room for so many sports in a country, typically
- Supporting elite success – Having a ‘shop window’ to encourage followership is often an important dimension of growing a sport
- Socio-cultural constraints – Some sports or activities will find it easier to grow in some countries than others
- Environmental constraints – Some countries are more suited to some sports than others. Qatar’s weather, for example, mitigates against the possibility of snowsport emerging as a popular pastime.
- Potential for growth and reasons to invest
- History – The background or hinterland that a country has in a particular sport can play an important part in its ability to create a relevance in it.

Further reading

The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer – James Dorsey (2016)

Soccer in the Middle East – Khalidi and Raab (2015)

Brannagan, P.M. and Giulianotti, R. (2014) Soft Power and Soft Disempowerment: Qatar, Global Sport and football's 2022 World Cup finals, *Leisure Studies* [online]. DOI: 10.1080/02614367.2014.964291.

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Salma Thani & Tom Heenan (2017) The ball may be round but football is becoming increasingly Arabic: oil money and the rise of the new football order, *Soccer & Society*, 18:7, 1012-1026, DOI: 10

Benjamin, Kathleen, and Tam Donnelly. "Barriers and Facilitators Influencing the Physical Activity of Arabic Adults: A Literature Review." *Avicenna*, no. 2013 (2013): 8.

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