

The background of the entire page is a dark, atmospheric image. In the center is a globe of the Earth, appearing scorched and covered in thick, billowing white and grey smoke that rises from the continents. At the bottom of the frame, several industrial smokestacks are visible, some with red and white stripes, emitting smoke that contributes to the overall hazy, polluted atmosphere. The top right corner features decorative, flowing orange lines. The main title is centered in the lower half of the image.

SHOULD SPORT CUT TIES WITH FOSSIL FUEL SPONSORSHIP?

SPORT POSITIVE DEBATE REPORT

OCTOBER 2023

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SETTING THE SCENE

The Sport Positive Summit 2023 Annual Debate took place on 4 October 2023.

Co-hosted by:



- **Claire Poole, CEO & Founder, Sport Positive**
- **David Garrido, Presenter, Sky Sports**

With debate speakers:



- **Fiona Morgan, Chief Purpose Officer, SailGP**
- **Martin Offiah MBE, Former Pro-Rugby Player**
- **David Goldblatt, Sports Writer, Broadcaster, Author, Journalist**

Hundreds of attendees of Sport Positive Summit shared their views, this report is an overview of the industry's current views on this topic.

DEBATE TOPIC

Should sport now entirely be disengaging from sponsorship money that comes from fossil fuel/heavy carbon emitters?

AUDIENCE POLL RESULTS BEFORE DEBATE

Yes – 72%

No – 21%

Don't know – 7%

AUDIENCE POLL RESULTS AFTER DEBATE

Yes – 82%

No – 13%

Don't know – 4%

≡ POLL

SPEAKER INSIGHTS

“Where I would begin the process is to say let us separate core fossil fuel companies, who hold the majority of their assets and take the majority of their profits from producing and distributing hydrocarbons.

“This is just where you start. It’s about a symbolic action. It’s about saying when it comes to hydrocarbons who are the most culpable? Both of producing this stuff but also of undermining and muddying the climate debate over the past 40 years.

“If we start there, I think it would make decisions for sporting organisations much easier.

“We can have a think about the other guys further down the line.

“We’re always looking for a single superhero but we’re much more powerful collectively....collective strength is what is going to make this happen.”

David Goldblatt

Sports Writer, Broadcaster, Author, Journalist



SPEAKER INSIGHTS

“This is the most challenging thing of jobs like mine....the tension between commercial, purpose, sustainability. But it is also a great opportunity.

“You have to lean into it, be at the decision making table, help them (the commercial team) make a better decision...and try to make our commercial teams see the value of doing better deals.

“Do due diligence...we do a score against sustainability - social and environmental - and use that in discussions.

“With sponsors, asking how are they helping with solutions in your net zero journey? That’s the framing of it, and actually helping the commercial team find that optimism.

“There is a role for both of you (rights holder and sponsor) of a problem in the middle that you’re both trying to solve. And I think sponsors want that too.”

Fiona Morgan, Chief Purpose Officer, SailGP



AUDIENCE INSIGHTS

At the start of the debate, 72% of the audience believed that sport should disengage completely from sponsorship money coming from fossil fuel or heavy carbon emitters. By the end of the debate, that number had risen to 82%, with only 13% believing that we should continue accepting such funds.

The themes that came through from the insights provided by the audience in answer to the question were:

1. **YES: Stop accepting the money altogether**
2. **NO: Utilise the money for good**
3. **NO: Implement a criteria around the acceptance or use of the money**

Then some wider themes came through too:

1. **Understand the risks**
2. **Use this dialogue to drive bigger change needed**
3. **Alternative solutions**
4. **Innovations**

The direct responses from our audience can be read in the following pages.

Audience breakdown

Sports organisations (leagues, governing bodies, federations, clubs, teams, stadia, associations), athletes, broadcasters, brands, NGOs, UN bodies, consultants, solution providers

STOP ACCEPTING THE MONEY.

- Partnering with sustainable organizations only lends polluters false credibility. It's wrong.
- If you change fossil companies in this poll to the weapons industry or even tobacco companies nobody would hesitate.
- Sport and carbon intensive industries are entirely incompatible... even if you don't know or care about the environment the impacts on health are obvious.
- We need to reduce fossil fuels to mitigate climate change effects. So why should sport support fossil fuel companies by giving them a platform?
- Ban fossil fuel/ high carbon emitters from front of shirt sponsorship like football is doing with gambling sponsors
- No fossil fuel company deserves to have the legitimisation the sponsoring sport provides. having demonstrated their power - disinformation, delaying, denying
- Fossil fuel companies have consistently shown they aren't serious about transitioning to renewable. It is tokenism and greenwashing.
- It's like putting betting + tobacco brands on shirts. Sport is about health. Why are we allowing promotion of companies causing the planet's health demise?
- Promoting shameless polluters in exchange for money is the definition of selling out.
- High carbon organisations are only interested in decarbonisation as far as it allows them to continue business as usual.
- It's akin to tobacco advertising of yesteryear.

STOP ACCEPTING THE MONEY.

It's hypocrisy

- **Being bold and making a positive statement on responsible sponsorship is needed. We can't say we support sustainability while taking at same time.**
- **Doesn't it ultimately come down to that sport clubs/ leagues won't challenge sponsors on sustainability as it's biting the hand that feeds them!**
- **What about links with banks who fund/invest in fossil fuel companies?**

STOP ACCEPTING THE MONEY.

Build the future you want

- **We should be partnering with those who will be a key part of the future we want.**
- **Sponsors should reflect your culture and what's important. We need to help take supporters with us on that journey.**

UTILISE THE MONEY FOR GOOD

- Why are we not celebrating the good that is created from meaningful relationships from fossil fuel partners?
- Is disengaging with these companies stunting potential innovation and growth in sustainability with companies that have a lot of money to invest?
- Why not take the fossil fuel money and use it on sustainability agendas to accelerate them? Have a plan and timeline, then drop them if they don't change.
- What about using their money in a positive way and be transparent on how you used that money?

UTILISE THE MONEY FOR GOOD As a necessity

- Why are we not considering the 'costs' of running the sporting organisation when thinking about sponsorship?
- What sponsors are left over after we weed out the ones with any corruption, ethical or climate concerns? They don't exist!
- If it were as easy as replacing fossil fuel \$ with a handful of new meaningful partners, don't you think we'd already have those sponsors?
- Until sports are fully independent from fossil fuels for transport, it seems hypocritical to turn down meaningful sponsorship \$ if they are used for sustain.

IMPLEMENT A CRITERIA AROUND THE ACCEPTANCE OR USE OF THE MONEY

- You only accept sponsors around them hitting certain criteria determined by the sport - and these should get harder over time
- What about setting requirements for the sponsors - they have to have science based targets including scope 3?
- Shall we include in our sponsorship deal a carbon tax? Our a % of money dedicated to sustainability initiatives?
- Perhaps a promotion/relegation system for sponsors, who move up/down for eligibility based on their progress and commitment to climate action?

UNDERSTAND THE RISKS

- I suspect sports that continue to be sponsored by high carbon organisation will increasingly be targeted for activism and protest.
- If sport disengages from the fossil fuel sponsorship, is it ready for the de-growth scenario?
- We'd have to fully embrace de-growth and reimagine the commercial model to cushion the economic fallout of losing carbon-heavy sponsorship.

USE THIS DIALOGUE TO DRIVE WIDER NECESSARY CHANGE

- Can we flip the narrative and think about reducing costs to reduce the need for these heavy emitters that are likely to pay more?
- Ultimately, the change has to come from the biggest emitters. Sponsorship can be used to discuss and promote a legitimate and authentic decarbonisation journey
- Even Shell employees made a stance on Shell's rollback plan. Saying it was unacceptable. Sports are not the only ones but governments are not doing their job
- Why are we not thinking about costs when considering sponsorship? Can we reduce costs to reduce the 'need' of these high emitters - who pay more traditionally!
- Should all sports organisations with funds invested in stocks and shares, divest fossil fuels from the funds held by them?
- If all sporting organisation gets away from these sponsors we're not putting each other's under pressure to accept high monetary values that comes from it
- Ultimately, the change has to come from the biggest emitters. Sponsorship can be used to discuss and promote a legitimate and authentic decarbonisation journey

ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

- We need a fund from philanthropies, companies, governments to replace the \$\$ from fossil fuels & use that \$\$ to advertise for low carbon behaviors.
- Heavy carbon emitters should be able to sponsor events, but their logos and any media connecting them to the should not be allowed.
- There is an absence of institutional authority to kick out fossil fuel sponsorship from sport
- How do we collectively pull carbon out of the air? Isn't that the solution needed for all of this?
- Fossil fuel companies are investing in carbon removals & biofuels due to sport partnerships. Isn't it positive to maintain these relationships until other solutions appear?

COMPLEXITY OF QUESTION

- Binary question that doesn't distinguish whether the company in consideration is on a high pace to transition, a slow pace or actually expanding drilling

UNDECIDED

- On the one hand, fossil fuel companies have lied to us long enough - expel them. On the other, do we need to engage with them for solutions - include them?

SUMMARY

The question we posed within the debate was should sports organizations cut ties from sponsorship money that comes from fossil fuel/heavy carbon emitters?

Looking at the poll numbers, there seems to be no debate around the fact the audience agreed sport should cut ties from sponsorship money that originates from fossil fuel organisations. However, this report provide a taste of the complexities that sport is grappling with when it comes to the how.

Some suggest the business of sport needs to be overhauled; the need for high emitters' cash is predicated on the need for high levels of revenue. If we are to protect our future, sport should partner with organisations that align with it's culture and values.

Others argue that we should take the money but use it for positive impacts, include criteria or a carbon tax in sponsorship deals, or only accept sponsors that meet certain sustainability criteria and use this revenue for legitimate and authentic decarbonisation. Some even posit that engaging with high emitters for solutions is necessary.

There are concerns over the economic fallout of losing carbon-heavy sponsorship. Alternatives suggested by audience members include seeking funding from philanthropies, companies, governments to advertise for low carbon behaviours, or the idea of taking the revenue but not giving fossil fuel sponsors any visibility...although we're not sure that idea would be well received by sponsors!

There is a lot of information in this document to consider. However, to ensure healthy ecosystems to play sport, as well as secure the long-term brand reputation of your organisation in the face of climate-breakdown, not playing an active role in bolstering fossil fuels is clearly the safest bet. If you currently have a fossil fuel sponsor, or are considering aligning with one - ask yourself; are there REALLY no other options or models to access the revenue you need?

THANKS

To our panellists; Fiona Morgan, David Goldblatt and Martin Offiah MBE.

To our co-hosts; David Garrido and Claire Poole.

To our audience; for your input, honesty and commitment to driving progress forward for sustainability within sport.

To our team; Lauren, Russell, Louisa, Claire, Nancy, Jenny, Mila, Phil and volunteers.

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of Sport Positive Ltd.

All references to individual organisations have been removed for anonymity.

If you have any questions about this report, contact info@sportpositivesummit.com

If you wish to reference the information contained in this report, please attribute quotes to Sport Positive Summit 2023.

OTHER RESOURCES

If this topic is of interest to you, make sure you check out:

Badvertising

- **Sweat Not Oil - Why sports should drop advertising and sponsorship from high-carbon polluters:**
<https://www.badverts.org/reports-and-toolkits>
- **How to screen-out polluting sponsors - A low-carbon toolkit for sports organisations to navigate the issue of polluting sponsorship -** <https://www.badverts.org/reports-and-toolkits>

Climate Council

- **CALLING TIME - How to remove fossil fuel sponsorships from sport, arts and events:**
<https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/call-time-fossil-fuel-sponsorship/>

Sport for Change, by ChangeNOW

- **Sport Sponsors Climate Pledge - An active commitment to contribute to the decarbonization of the sports industry and embrace science-based targets:**
<https://form.fillout.com/t/g1xD9MmXtBus>