

[00:05.2]

Everyone wants to be at the World Cup. It's the greatest show on earth. It is humanity's collective festival. The World Cup has become a festival of over consumption. This is a once in a generation opportunity to bring people together, to accelerate action. This World Cup is going to be the most polluting sporting event in history.

[00:24.3]

It really is going to be a line in the sand, climatically, politically, economically. I feel like it's a tournament that we'll talk about the before and we'll talk about the after. It shook a lot of people up to see the Club World Cup impacted so heavily last year. And yet we haven't seen the adaptations that we would be looking for, especially with a whole year of heads up.

[00:42.5]

The massive challenge is just the sheer scale of this event. We believe that sustainability is luxury and we want to align sustainability with luxury. We want sustainability to be the next thing that everyone is really looking to move towards.

[00:57.6]

I look at these events not so much as a liability from a sustainability perspective, but maybe as an opportunity as well. If you care about football, you have to care about the climate, because football needs a healthy climate. Hi everyone, and welcome to this special edition of the Climate of Sport podcast with me, Claire Poole.

[01:16.8]

I'll be joined by some special guests today and we'll be getting into all the different environmental and climate considerations of the FIFA Men's World Cup 2026. There is something about the World Cup that pulls people across the whole world together. It pulls us into the same moment.

[01:32.4]

Billions of us tune in for football, yes, of course, but for the stories, the tension, the drama, the feeling that absolutely anything can happen. As we look ahead to 2026, the biggest Men's World Cup in history, there's an even bigger question building behind the spectacle.

[01:49.4]

What does it take to stage an event like this in a rapidly changing climate? And, what responsibilities does the tournament have and what happens when the climate itself doesn't play ball. This is a tournament with more teams, more matches and more travel than ever before, where adaptations are increasingly required to keep the game going.

[02:10.4]

And yet football has always been about adaptation. From, dusty pitches to million- or billion-dollar arenas, from local clubs to global icons, the game continues to evolve. Football's a game

of chaos, a game of mistakes, a game of uncertainties, where you are constantly having to spontaneously reconfigure yourself and your team to respond to it.

[02:36.1]

Quite right, David Goldblatt. Football imitates life in that respect, and this podcast is about football, but it's also about responsibility. Asking the question, what does it mean to keep growing a global game in a world that's changing beneath the feet of those who play and watch.

[02:52.1]

Because football has always evolved, it adapts, it expands, it finds new audiences and new scales. But evolution isn't always just about getting bigger. It's about staying fit for purpose. And that means asking harder questions about impact, about, trade-offs and about who carries the burden as the game continues to grow.

[03:11.8]

So, this special extended edition of the Climate of Sport Podcast isn't just about tournaments and trophies. It's about how the benefits of the World Cup economic, cultural and community-based sit alongside the environmental and social costs that come with it.

[03:27.5]

And ultimately, it's about whether football can keep doing what it does best, bringing people together whilst taking responsibility for the world it depends on. First, some podcast house rules for, our North American listeners. You're going to hear the word football throughout this pod and yes, we are talking about soccer.

[03:48.2]

I don't think your football, what we would call American football outside of the is going to pop up at all. So, a heads up on that. If you hear football, we mean soccer. When you hear this sound, you can go to the podcast Show Notes to see a link to the source material of what's been mentioned.

[04:05.3]

If you so desire, shout out an attribution to our friend Dave Powell on the podcast Your Brain on Climate that this shortcut was inspired by. This episode is called a deep dive for a reason. However, if there is a key theme that you're really interested in, only you can head to the Show Notes now and you'll see a timestamp and all of the key themes that we talk about pulled out.

[04:26.9]

So, you can head to that section very easily. I would note however, that the podcast has been recorded to be listened to in its entirety. And lastly, you're going to hear insights from me as well as loads of expert guests across the pod. But you'll notice that FIFA are not one of them.

[04:42.3]

FIFA of course were invited to appear on the podcast. They declined. However, they did send an email with lots of information in regards to the areas we're talking about. So, when it intersects with the discussions we're having, I'll share some of that information with you. The first insight that I can include now is that FIFA recognises that climate impact must be taken seriously and welcomes informed scrutiny.

[05:06.4]

Like any story, we need to start at the beginning. So, I want to give you a really brief potted history of FIFA's climate commitments and environmental sustainability efforts to date so you can view everything else in context FIFA's publicly available organisation Wide Climate Strategy has a forward from Mayor President Gianni Infantino that says "there is no doubt we are in the midst of a climate emergency." He goes on, quote, "climate change and its impact is undoubtedly one of the most pressing challenges of our time, if not the most critical.

[05:37.2]

And it requires each of us to take immediate and sustainable climate action." So what climate action are FIFA taking? The climate strategy cites 2006 as the start of their journey and FIFA has engaged with stakeholders and expert institutions around this time.

[05:54.6]

2009 marked the beginning of Estimating their carbon footprint on its main tournaments and activities, taking measures to reduce and offset the emissions associated with these competitions. This is a good moment for us just to give a few definitions if this is the first time you're coming to a climate and sustainability discussion.

[06:14.7]

A carbon footprint is a definition you're going to hear a number of times across the pod. That is a number that represents the total amount of carbon dioxide and other equivalent greenhouse gases that are associated with an individual, a product, a person or even a country, based on the impact they have and the carbon that they create through those activities.

[06:34.5]

Carbon emissions are the release of heat trapping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, primarily caused by burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas. These gases act like a blanket around the earth, causing global temperatures to rise, climate change and environmental disruption.

[06:51.4]

Carbon offsetting is another phrase you'll hear as well. And that's a way to compensate for these greenhouse gas emissions that are produced in one place by funding projects that reduce, remove or avoid an equivalent amount of carbon or greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere.

[07:09.4]

Back to FIFA's history. In 2016, FIFA joined the UN Climate Neutral now campaign. And participants of that campaign pledged to act through a three-step process, measuring greenhouse gas emissions, reducing them and compensating for unavoidable emissions using UN certified carbon credits.

[07:27.3]

2018, FIFA signs up to UN Sports for Climate Action framework and through that mechanism, they are committed to a 50% reduction of their carbon emissions by 2040. Again, if you're not a sustainability nerd, FIFA use a definition of net zero used by an esteemed organization called the International Panel on Climate Change, the IPCC, which states net zero is a state where there is no incremental addition of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere.

[07:55.0]

This means that once all avoidable emissions have been reduced, reduced residual emissions have to be removed from the atmosphere. FIFA Men's World Cup in Brazil in 2014 was the first year they published a sustainability strategy Ahead and then a report on sustainability after the tournament competition for one of their major tournaments.

[08:15.8]

Since then, they've published sustainability strategies for Men and Women's World Cups in 2018 in Russia, 2019 in France, 2022 in Qatar and 2023 in Australia and New Zealand. And there's a strategy ahead of 2026. So, FIFA have been doing work in this area. Over the years, FIFA's efforts and commitments have been called into question.

[08:34.7]

The big things that FIFA gets called out on in the environmental space broadly fall into two categories. One, the fact that their organization and leadership's actions at times appears opposed to the climate commitments and strategies we've just covered. And two, their heavy carbon sponsors.

[08:51.5]

Previously Gazprom, now Saudi Aramco and others. So, let's start with words versus actions. In 2022, Jamie Infantino got involved in a World Environment Day campaign called Green Card for the Planet, in which he held up a green card and said, FIFA is playing its part with our aim to make FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 carbon neutral.

[09:11.8]

So, I call on all of you to raise the FIFA card for Planet and record a short message telling us what you'll do to preserve the environment and save our world. This is a great campaign and action that people did indeed get behind. The issue was that it took place in the pre-tournament window of Qatar 2022.

[09:30.1]

Stadiums were also being built at the time to serve that World Cup and a lot of the media coverage pointed to high carbon emissions that were expected. Critics flagged that this action was symbolic, not actually in line with a refereeing sanction, like a red or yellow card at all.

[09:45.9]

As mentioned, FIFA claimed Qatar 2022 would be the first fully carbon neutral World Cup, a term that means its net impact on the climate is zero or negligible. In 2023, a Swiss regulator upheld complaints from five European nations that, quote, FIFA was not able to provide proof that the claims were accurate in its decision, which is not legally binding.

[10:10.5]

The regulator added that they have, quote, advised FIFA to refrain from making unsubstantiated claims in the future, particularly the claim that 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar was climate or carbon neutral. Close quote FIFA Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand was heavily promoted by FIFA as a sustainable major tournament, largely because it used existing stadiums rather than extensive new construction.

[10:37.1]

And for the first time, all 10 stadiums had green building certifications. However, critics pointed out that the tournament still involved significant emissions, especially due to the long-distance air travel required between host cities across two countries. And, for international teams and fans around the same period, FIFA President Gianni Infantino made high profile visits across Oceania and Pacific Island nations as development and engagement work, but were criticized for adding further private jet trips that seemed at odds with FIFA's sustainability messaging.

[11:10.9]

He also undertook these trips during the 2023 tournament, missing a whole week of games, in contrast to him spending nearly every match day at, games during the Men's World Cup in Qatar the year before. Then, in 2024, FIFA announced a major global sponsorship deal with Saudi Aramco.

[11:28.8]

This reinforced criticism that FIFA's climate and sustainability messaging sat uneasily alongside the partnership with one of the world's largest oil and gas producers. In parallel, a group of 100 professional players from 24 countries issued an open letter urging FIFA to terminate that sponsorship deal, citing human rights, LGBTQ rights, and climate concerns.

[11:51.5]

Looking at all of this in context, critics cite a broader pattern across recent tournaments. Sustainability is emphasized at major events, while the underlying structure of competitions in terms of growth and the fossil fuel linked sponsorship deals continue largely unchanged, creating a perceived gap between messaging and practice.

[12:11.9]

So, is FIFA taking climate action seriously? Let's start hearing from some of our guests. My name's David Goldblatt. I'm a writer, a journalist and an academic, and I write about football and politics and the environment. So, go on. Do you think FIFA are taking climate action seriously?

[12:29.3]

I think it depends which bit of FIFA you're looking at. FIFA is not actually a unity. So, I think if you spoke to the people in the sustainability department, they're all taking it very seriously. They really are. You know, they really think they're doing the right job in the right place. Good for them.

[12:46.2]

But as we know, sustainability departments within NGOs and corporations are at the beck and call of everybody else, because you're always asking everybody else to change what they do as well as to actually have some impact on the very highest levels of strategic management.

[13:02.2]

We are seeing good environmental actions across some of the FIFA men's World Cup 2026 host cities, and we'll hear more about that later on. I find it very hard to think that FIFA is in any way serious when you're taking Saudi Aramco as your main sponsor.

[13:18.8]

I just really struggle to see how any climate action claims that you might make can be taken seriously. And that's really what, in the end, you know, FIFA's carbon footprint is not very much. I mean, in the scheme of things, it's all about symbolic action.

[13:36.1]

And when you've got Saudi Aramco all over your tournament what weight can your symbolic action have? Important questions from David, and ones surely to reflect on. What is emerging here is the tension of a growing credibility gap.

[13:52.4]

While FIFA has climate commitments and does roll out plans, strategies, reports, and in some cases, campaigns, actions around sponsorship, tournament expansion and travel can overshadow or undermine them. Outside of environmental groups and NGOs, how much conversation is actually going on in the mainstream media about any of this relating especially to this year's World Cup?

[14:14.7]

There has been some coverage, but from where I stand, it's been pretty sparse. So, I asked David what he thinks. I think what is interesting about this World Cup so far is that no one's talking about climate change. I mean, you know, you and I are right, and, you know, our mates, but basically nobody's talking about it.

[14:33.9]

Even those who are writing about the social and political side of the World Cup, they're focusing on ice and Iran and visas and expensive tickets and very expensive parking and the madness that is the Trump White House.

[14:50.6]

Both 2018 and 2022, there was a lot of conversation about climate in 2018. It was beginning, and certainly, you know, FIFA had done kind of quite good carbon audits and showed that they were getting bigger.

[15:07.4]

And this was a concern. So, despite the fact, from what I can see, that this will probably have certainly as much carbon emitted as Qatar, if not more, nothing is happening about it at the moment. And it's a shame because some really great work has been done on climate threats at the, World Cup.

[15:28.0]

I'm just getting silence, Claire. We have seen a marked reduction in major news outlets focusing on this angle of the Men's World Cup compared to the last two Men's World Tournaments. I guess we can understand why, as another guest, Freddie Daley, shared the geopolitics of the tournament, A, war, where teams that are playing at the tournament are quite literally fighting each other.

[15:49.7]

Climate and sustainability might not be front and center of the media coverage. And given world politics, that's understandable. Thanks, Freddie. Remind us who you are again. My name is Freddie Daley. I am a researcher and campaigner with the Cooldown Sport for Climate Action Network, and I'm also an academic at the University of Sussex. Super.

[16:10.3]

So, yes, David and Freddie have highlighted reasons why there is a lot for the media to cover and focus on, outside and off the pitch. There isn't climate in the environment. And, of course, we still have several months to go ahead of the World Cup.

[16:25.5]

So, it's not to say that that coverage isn't coming, but of course, we're explaining in this special episode of the Climate of Sport podcast all the reasons why it should be a focus and an area we all need to. So, let's get into the environmental impacts of World Cup 26 specifically and hear from more of our guests.

[16:44.1]

First up, Dr. Stuart Parkinson. I'm Stuart Parkinson, I'm, executive Director of Scientists for Global Responsibility, which is a UK based research and campaign organization and I have a

background in climate science. Stuart and his colleagues at SGR have written a really pertinent report.

[17:02.2]

That report is FIFA's climate blind spot. The Men's World Cup up in a Warming World. And we looked at various aspects of the climate issue in relation to the World Cup this year and in future years. The big-ticket item, from the report to kick us off was their calculation of the carbon footprint of the tournament.

[17:24.5]

We estimated that the basic carbon footprint for the FIFA World Cup in 2026 will be at least 9 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent. That's similar to about six and a half million average British cars driven for a year.

[17:41.4]

And that doesn't include the qualification rounds. That's just the hundred or so matches played in North America this summer. Okay, I'm going to throw some numbers at you now. So, for those who are interested in detail, this is for you. If you're not, tune out for 60 seconds.

[17:58.1]

Make yourself a Cup of tea, but make sure you lock back in. In FIFA's own greenhouse gas emission report, it states its carbon emissions relating to World Cup 2022 in Qatar totaled 3.8 million tons of CO2 equivalent, up from 2.17 million tons in 2018.

[18:16.8]

In Russia, independent experts like Carbon Market Watch and other researchers say they estimate the actual footprint of Qatar to be between 5.2 to over 10 million tons, driven by what they call underestimated construction impacts and high frequency shuttle FL liked by fans.

[18:33.6]

In the interest of comparison, FIFA, the French Football Federation and the local organizing committee puts its Women's World Cup carbon emissions in 2019 in France at 341,600 tons for just under 90% smaller in terms of emissions between what FIFA disclosed as its emissions from Qatar 2022.

[18:54.2]

For Women's World Cup 2023 it stated the total controlled emissions amounted to 70,692 tonnes. This is a surprising finding given the fact that the 2019 World Cup took place in one country, France, and had 24 teams taking part.

[19:11.9]

Comparatively, 2023 was across Australia and New Zealand, much larger territories and had 32 teams involved. From the disparity in numbers and the fact that in 2023, the wording mentions

controlled emissions, we can presume that this doesn't include fan travel, which was included in the footprint for 2019.

[19:32.3]

For those who tuned out for the detail, we're back. I basically just shared that previously disclosed Men's and Women's World Cup carbon emissions by FIFA are smaller than the predictions for this year. So why is Stuart Parkinson and his colleagues putting the estimate for this Men's World Cup so much higher?

[19:49.2]

There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, this is the first year that a much larger number of national teams are taking part. The tournament is going from 32 national sides taking part, which has been the case since 1998, when it changed from the previous 24 team format that was in place since 1982, and it's now moving up to 48 teams.

[20:10.8]

The second reason is the large geographic area that the tournament is taking place over. Unlike previous Men's World Cup tournaments that have been largely held in one country. Qatar, Russia, Brazil, South Africa, Germany, this year it's taking place across Canada, the US and Mexico. So, let's tackle team growth first.

[20:28.1]

In 2017, FIFA announced the decision to increase the number of teams competing in this year's Men's World Cup. When Gianni Infantino, FIFA's president, announced the growth in 2017, he cited it was for the development of the game globally, saying, quote, football is more than just Europe and South America.

[20:45.1]

Football is Global. In 2026, he reiterated this, saying, quote, we had to open it to the world. And I think it's the minimum we could do to open it to more African, but Asian countries, because we want football to be strong everywhere.

[21:00.4]

Close quote. Let's get some views on that from our guests. You already know Stuart, so let's hear what he had to say about this. Inclusion doesn't really wash when you're creating a tournament that most people in the world can't afford to get to. It would be extremely environmentally damaging if they did get to it.

[21:18.5]

It's a very perverse way to encourage inclusion is to say let's put on a really polluting sporting event for inclusion purposes when we know the reason why they expanded the tournament is because they can make a lot more money out of it. But does this growth go beyond just people who are just physically attending these events?

[21:39.0]

It can also be about senior country on a world stage, too. And David Goldblatt had thoughts on this. There's some truth in it. You know, it would be easy to write it off entirely as a kind of cynical economic growth and sort of build your patronage network inside FIFA by having more Football association presidents happy with you because they got to the World Cup.

[22:01.4]

So that's all true. I kind of think, you know, everyone wants to be at the World Cup. It's the greatest show on earth. It's the collective, you know, it is humanity's collective festival, bizarre as that may be. When Morocco 1 games at the 2022 World Cup, literally hundreds of thousands of people across the wider Middle east and the Moroccan diaspora go on the streets celebrate. He's not wrong.

[22:27.7]

In April we saw fans filling the streets when Bosnia and Herzegovina knocked Italy out in the qualifiers. Social media was absolutely flooded with videos of people taking to the street, flags aloft. But of course, multiple things can be true at once. The ability to get more teams to qualify who we don't usually see competing at this level is exciting, but it is going to have a larger impact on the environment which doesn't seem to align with the climate commitments we've heard about.

[22:55.0]

And the aim for FIFA to reduce their environmental impact by 50% by 2030. David Goldblatt summed it up. On balance, I think it's probably a mistake. I think less is more. On the other hand, you know, this time around I shall be pleased to see us back in Pakistan and Curacao and Cape Verde, and Jordan and all of these people who never normally get a look in.

[23:24.4]

David mentioned economic growth and Stuart has previously mentioned money. So now is probably a good moment to say that this year's World Cup is estimated to make FIFA upwards of US\$10 billion. So, 16 additional national teams are going to qualify this year.

[23:40.0]

Can that really have such a huge impact on the environmental footprint of this World Cup? My guess is that, expanding the number of teams by off again flying players and squads and everybody around, it's probably no more than a couple of percentage points if that of the overall carbon footprint.

[23:58.0]

And he's not wrong. But of course, the difference this does make where having 16 more teams involved has impact is the number of games that need to be hosted for them to compete and their fans going to watch them. An increase of 50% more teams means a jump from 64 matches to 104 matches.

[24:17.3]

The second point is the large environmental footprint of FIFA men's World Cup 2026 being the large geographic area the tournament's taking place in a unified bid by US, Canada and Mexico to host 2026 Men's World Cup won over Morocco, with reasons cited by FIFA members being because of its existing infrastructure and stadium capacity, meaning a lower risk.

[24:39.1]

The construction of new stadiums for mega sports events does create huge environmental impacts and can leave white elephants behind. Some of the information that FIFA sent over to us by email connect with this theme and they said, quote the FIFA World Cup 2026 is being staged across host cities with existing stadium infrastructure, which reduces the need for new construction and the emissions that come with it.

[25:03.1]

Close quote this is sound reasoning, but we know football is nothing without the fans. And unfortunately, fans traveling to watch games is usually the largest impact on the environment created by sports generally and definitely for mega sports events.

[25:18.3]

But this is a seriously large area for fans to go between. The host cities that are the furthest apart are Vancouver and Mexico City. They're about 4, 800 kilometers apart. That's about the same as flying from London to Dubai, or nearly as far as flying from New York to London.

[25:36.1]

Even inside the USA, the distance between, say, Seattle or Los Angeles and, the New York, New Jersey stadium or Miami are between four and four and a half thousand kilometers. Some trips between venues could be taken by train, but not all.

[25:51.7]

And of course, organizers don't control how fans travel. We've seen examples at mega sports events in the past of more sustainable mobility options being encouraged and incentivized. Good examples of this were the UEFA men's Euro in 2024 in Germany and UEFA Women's Euro in 2025 in Switzerland, where match day train travel was included in tickets.

[26:12.0]

But is this likely or feasible depending on where you're going from? And two, I spoke to Gabrielle Maguire about this. Gabrielle leads sustainability for the FIFA World Cup 2026 project. For on location. On Location is responsible for delivering all of the premium hospitality across all 16 venues at the World Cup.

[26:30.6]

So quite a big lift. 104 matches, as we all know, 39 days. And we are responsible for delivering everything from the outside pavilions to inside the venue suites, lounges. My role in terms of

leading sustainability for the World Cup is to really focus on how we are going to integrate our sustainability into what we deliver.

[26:50.6]

We're going to hear more from Gabrielle a little later, but what were her thoughts on fan travel? We don't manage the travel for our guests. The guests are making their own travel decisions. We will be pointing them to public transit options and encouraging them, but that's sort of something out of our hands at this moment.

[27:07.9]

Where does that leave us? I think it is undoubtedly going to have a huge contribution to the climate crisis, the scale of the tournament, the sheer quantity of flights that are going to be required, massive, massive contribution to emissions. That was Freddie. So, are there solutions to this fan travel conundrum? Dr.

[27:25.0]

Madeleine Orr has an idea on this and we haven't met Maddie yet, so let's hear from her. My name is Maddie Orr. I'm an assistant professor of Sport ecology at the University of Toronto. Great. So, what's your idea, Maddy, on fan travel? If you can find a way to limit tickets to locals or have a substantive number of tickets reserved for locals in each place, we reduce that international fan travel across the Atlantic and that goes a really long way to driving down emissions overall.

[27:50.2]

Freddie Daley had thoughts on this as well. I think the future tournaments then, they definitely need to look at the sort of geographic concentration. So, we know for a fact that the, the largest contribution to emissions, and climate change from a World Cup is air travel, primarily the fan travel.

[28:05.5]

So, by having, you know, a more concentrated host, you can lay on public transport or alternative transport that can drive those emissions down. So, we did see this concentration, concentration at Qatar 2022. But having as many stadiums as you need, with the capacity you need really close together for a tournament of this size meant a lot of construction as the infrastructure didn't already exist.

[28:29.8]

Examples of using existing venues but keeping the geography a bit tighter. Again, we can go back to men's Euro 24 in Germany and women's Euro 25 in Switzerland, both countries with decent train links and inside one territory. But of course, the single country with existing stadium that meets the criteria, as well as strong transport infrastructure, needs to actually bid to be chosen.

[28:53.6]

Time to share another insight that was shared with us from FIFA. FIFA recognises that air travel is a significant contributor to the overall footprint of any major event. And it's clear that reducing emissions linked to flights is one of the biggest sustainability challenges that major event organisers face.

[29:10.4]

However, numerous environmental initiatives relating to the tournament are being implemented by FIFA and the host cities before, during and after the tournament. The regional hosting model across Canada, Mexico and the United States also enables many fans to travel domestically or within the region, reducing reliance on long haul travel for a significant proportion of attendees.

[29:32.0]

And finally, the tournament transportation fleet will include hybrid vehicles. And FIFA is also encouraging the use of public transport, walking and cycling options in close collaboration with the host cities and public authorities. Close quote. I also mentioned another reason that FIFA gets a lot of flak is because of some of their sponsors.

[29:50.9]

So, let's cover that angle off Saudi Aramco is the main focus here. Aramco is the national oil company of Saudi Arabia and the world's largest oil and gas company. It's frequently cited as one of the most profitable organizations in the world with net income often exceeding \$100 billion a year.

[30:10.8]

Billion with a B. 2022 was a standout year for the company. It posted a record net income of \$161.1 billion. The four-year global partnership deal was signed between Aramco and FIFA in 2024 and will run until 2027 to a value of an estimated \$100 million annually.

[30:31.2]

And this deal includes sponsorship of the 2026 Men's World Cup and the 2027 Women's World Cup. Up. Because these numbers are so bananas to us mere mortals, can I just underline that Aramco's sponsorship is actually just 0.1% of their 100-billion-dollar annual net income.

[30:49.8]

It is a literal rounding error. So, what is the problem with them sponsoring the World Cup? Let's hear from David Goldblatt. It is the largest carbon emitter in the corporate sector on the planet. It has absolutely no plans for decarbonization.

[31:05.9]

It alongside many other agencies of the Saudi state are active in disrupting the climate conversation either by introducing fake uncertainties, or just simply lobbying against necessary change.

[31:21.7]

Aramco has published decarbonization targets and they say they have an ambition to achieve net zero scope 1 and 2 greenhouse gas emissions across Saudi Aramco wholly owned and operated assets by 2050. Although financial think tank Carbon Tracker ranked them as last in a list of the world's 25 largest oil and gas companies' emissions reduction targets.

[31:47.4]

We've already heard from Dr. Stuart Parkinson from the Scientists for Global Responsibility and their report and he had some insights on Aramco 2 to have. The world's largest oil company, Aramco being the top sponsor at this World Cup is completely tone deaf and demonstrates a lack of understanding what is driving climate change.

[32:10.9]

Who is driving climate change and where a sport with such powerful influence like football should be associating itself with should be advertising should be encouraging. We also estimated the induced carbon emissions for the sponsorship deal between FIFA, and Aramco.

[32:32.5]

Which companies sponsor sporting events in order to increase their sales. We made an estimate of what the increased sales would lead to in, in carbon emissions. We estimated that's about 30 million tons extra. So that's about three times the basic carbon footprint is just that one sponsorship deal.

[32:55.1]

So, listen, maybe you genuinely don't care about an oil company sponsoring the World Cup. But Freddie Daley connected the dots on maybe why you should. With football in particular. I'm not like, naive about the sort of general sense that commercialization is kind of pulling the game away from fans.

[33:13.8]

Ticket prices going up, this idea that the game is no longer for them. FIFA partnering with Aramco is part of that same story. In the energy crisis that we're just about to move into. Saudi Aramco are going to be making eye watering profits out of this.

[33:30.6]

How they use that profit is not trying to build a sustainable energy system or, you know, a sustainable future for football to be played in. So, you know, they're part of that story. And it's about the game and it's about the future of the game. If FIFA's serious about protecting the game and building a future where the game can be played, then it needs to, partner with organizations that share that mission and share that message.

[33:53.6]

And Aramco definitely don't. Dr. Maddy Orr had thoughts too, when I asked her about her wish list of things she'd like to see FIFA change for. Perhaps an even more sustainable Men's World Cup in 2030. She said top of the list would be drop Aramco and Coca Cola from the sponsor list.

[34:09.6]

There's loads more we could get into here, but time's ticking so we're going to press on. A quick recap of what we've covered so far. FIFA's Climate Commitments and previous environmental sustainability work. The growth of the men's World Cup 2026, both in terms of nations involved, the geography and the environmental impact of that and FIFA and the World Cup sponsors.

[34:31.0]

If we know the World Cup is creating a large impact on the environment, could it also have a positive impact in helping to connect and encourage fans to understand more about the environment and climate and change towards lower carbon options in their own lives?

[34:47.2]

That's something I was really interested to find out more from and asked another expert in this area. My name is Dr. Jonathan Casper. I'm, the Associate department head and professor in Parks and Recreation at North Carolina State University. So, can the FIFA men's World Cup 2026 help move fan behavior towards something more environmentally positive?

[35:07.5]

Yes, but it's definitely not through awareness alone. We're trying to make fans aware of sustainability at the World Cup. That's falling short and that won't change behavior. But, when we're talking about sport fans, what changes behavior is the social norms that happen.

[35:25.8]

And there's two social norms that happen. The behaviors that the other fans have can be really important in driving sustainability behaviors, whether that's things that are simple as recycling and composting to other things such as alternative transportation. Driver number one is the other fans.

[35:43.0]

What are the other US fans doing? Right? So, there's that expectation there that comes from that. So, whether I like it or not, whether I'm totally against or not, I'm not going to be the one that sticks out from the crowd with that. The other one is the social norms that come from the organizations.

[35:58.1]

So, this is FIFA, FIFA creating a social norm where this is expected when you watch attend our events. So, there's an organizational norm that comes into play. But what other people do and what the organization thinks, especially if I align with that organization, I have that identity with there.

[36:18.0]

Those are two things that I would say, yes, we can change behavior at the World Cup now if there's the peer pressure, social pressure and the organizational expectation, things can happen. That's encouraging. And there are certain groups of fans who expect organizations to, to act on social and environmental issues more than others.

[36:39.7]

Can you guess who they are? So, the Gen Z that expect these things, like it's not an exception, it's, it's a point of parity. It means it has to be part of what's going on. And so, if you look at statistics for some of the younger fans, about 70% of them do expect organizations to act on social and environmental issues.

[37:00.5]

Another important segment that I've found within this is female fans. Females always rank higher when it comes to environmental concern. Okay, there for fans who these topics are just on, on their radar, what actually moves the needle?

[37:15.7]

Number one is making convenience matter, like making it easy. We think about things like how go to a website and you go to purchase something and all of a sudden there's this app with that pay thing for example, and, and it's so easy to pay. How can sport organizations do the same thing? How can we make it so easy that fans can actually do it?

[37:36.1]

Making it easy, making it visible, working with the teams, working with the regional facilities to make sure that there's alignment and communication. Alignment and expectation is the best way to go. One thing fans attending games in person or watching online or streaming at home will definitely notice around the matches this summer is, is the weather.

[37:58.9]

You're going to hear a lot in this section from our resident expert on this area, Dr. Madeleine Orr, the sport ecologist. But first, an insight from David Goldblatt. I cannot see how if not 2026. At some point in the next decade, a major, major global sporting event is not merely disrupted, but like really profoundly disrupted by the climate impacts.

[38:21.4]

So, what climate impacts can we expect to see this June and July in the us, In Canada and in Mexico? We're expecting a range of climate impacts across the FIFA World Cup. This is based on research that's been ongoing for 10 years. And we can pretty reliably say we're looking at wet in the east, dry in the west.

[38:40.5]

So, wildfires and smoke coming out of the west, storms in the east, rain delays and then heat all the way north from Toronto south down to Mexico. So, this is going to be a challenge everywhere. Potential challenges. But major sports tournaments just play on, don't they?

[38:57.1]

Not exactly, no. In last year's Club World Cup 2025, we saw six of the 63 matches. So nearly 10 of games experiencing delays ranging from slightly inconvenient to, to be honest, rage inducing from around 50 minutes to just under two hours of delays happened across these matches due to heavy rain, lightning strikes and thunderstorms, all threats thereof.

[39:23.2]

The rage inducing match in particular I'm thinking about was between Benfica and Chelsea where the match was suspended in the 85th minute for nearly two hours. The match eventually resumed and Chelsea went on to win 4:1 in extra time. But that delay had an impact.

[39:39.7]

Of the 16 stadiums used for this year's World Cup across Canada, US and Mexico, three have roofs. That's Dallas, Houston and Atlanta. An additional two have some cover. Los Angeles has a canopy roof with side ventilation and Vancouver has a retractable roof. So, I asked Maddy if the stadia with roofs mean lower impacts for fans and staff experiencing the impact of say, extreme heat.

[40:02.1]

The venues that are going to be the most adversely affected are the ones that have the most people coming and going. It actually has less to do with whether they're covered or not. It has more to do with how many people are exposed. I'm worried about the whole day, the transit system around that, the downtown core that's going to have fan areas.

[40:18.1]

We're talking about millions of people potentially impacted. And you have to consider heat and air pollution a potentially mass debilitating event. This is not like a concussion that happens to one person at a time. We're talking about hundreds of thousands of people exposed at any given time.

[40:34.6]

That sounds extreme, doesn't it? But actually no, it's not made or is not actually prone to over exaggeration at all. And we don't even have to look that far back to find an example of this. In June and July 2021, as a reminder, the exact time of the year that the World Cup is going to take place, a heat dome over the Pacific Northwest caused temperature to hit nearly 50 degrees Celsius, or 121 Fahrenheit.

[41:01.4]

In Canada, that event led to the deaths of 800 people. In Washington State, the daily number of heat related illness emergency department visits was 69 times higher than that same period in

2019. FIFA has convened a dedicated heat illness mitigation and management task force comprising medical and operational experts.

[41:22.8]

The task force is finalizing a number of measures and let me get this right. They include standardized guidance, including scalable heat risk alert systems, operational triggers for cooling and hydration measures, harmonised stadium medical action plans, and adaptable public messaging toolkits to ensure consistent information across all host sites.

[41:44.3]

They will continue to monitor conditions in real time and integrate wet bulb global temperatures and heat index surveillance and will apply established contingency protocols should extreme weather events occur. There are also recent cases of indoor sports being impacted by wildfire smoke in entirely different countries.

[42:03.9]

In June 2023, a reminder exactly the same time of year that the World Cup 26 is taking place, Wildfire smoke from Canada, drifted thousands of kilometers down the eastern seaboard of the U.S. to New York to Philadelphia and even to Washington, D.C.

[42:19.5]

postponed indoor matches across baseball, basketball and soccer. The inference here that even when you have an indoor facility for hosting your sports matches, people have to travel to your event. And if the air quality is so low that it could be an issue to your health, sports organizations have a duty of care not to encourage people to go out in that kind of air quality to attend a sports match.

[42:43.9]

So even if you're an indoor property going to a sports match, you are not separate to the environment that exists outside of it. With the crew of Artemis 2 being to the far side of the moon recently and sending those amazing images of Earth, from so far away, we have had a really recent reminder of how connected and, fragile our planet really is.

[43:04.8]

Events in other places can impact us in ways that we may not even have envisaged. So, is wildfire smoke an issue we need to worry about for this summer's championship? You could see smoke kind of roll in and impact a lot of people. There is no policy, hard and fast rule around what level of air pollution is acceptable and is not.

[43:23.8]

So that's something to keep an eye on. We don't know how they'll handle that. They haven't been faced with it before. Are any plans in place to deal with it? I asked Maddie. There are plans in place to develop a policy. Now that's something that can take three weeks, it's something that can take seven years. And the consultation process will not be complete by the summer.

[43:41.3]

And so, we are looking at potentially a games time policy around heat, around how much water we'll accept. So what plans are being put in place to deal with extreme weather? So, in terms of adaptations, we're looking at a range of solutions and some of them are great and some of them I would say not so much.

[43:58.3]

In the stadium there are regulations that are designed to protect players. And this looks like cooling breaks, hydration breaks that are put in place once we reach about that 31-degree threshold. For the first time. FIFA have actually put in place a mandatory 3-minute cooling break for every single World Cup match, regardless of the actual temperature or if the game is taking place in indoor stadiums.

[44:20.1]

These cooling breaks are going to take place halfway through the first half at the 22-minute mark and halfway through the second half at the 67th minute. Cooling breaks came in in 2014 for the Brazil Men's World Cup due to extreme heat and humidity. And since then, a mandated when the wet bulb globe temperature reaches or exceeds 32 degrees Celsius or 89.6 degrees Fahrenheit, the wet bulb globe temperature isn't just about outdoor temperature on off thermometers.

[44:48.2]

It's a measure of heat stress in direct sunlight that combines air temperature, humidity, wind speed and solar radiation, which is sun angle and cloud cover to better estimate how heat affects the human body. Cooling breaks have been conditional on this ever since. But for FIFA men's Club World Cup in the US last year, they were used much more Frequently now in 2026, FIFA have standardized them and they will happen come what may, twice during the matches this summer.

[45:16.0]

Matches are now effectively split into four quarters regardless of temperature. This player safety measure was announced at the world broadcaster meeting in December 2025. Okay, so cooling breaks are one thing, but are they enough for everyone? That's great for the players. That does nothing for the fans in the stands, who are stuck sitting in their seats because you're not going anywhere on three minutes and it doesn't do anything for anyone outside.

[45:38.9]

Now there are no protections in place and none of the cities actually have a comprehensive heat plan yet, although they are in development around the events that would happen kind of around the stadium to and from end fan zones separate from a Comprehensive heat plan that are mentioned there.

[45:55.4]

Host cities are looking at support for those attending and host city Dallas sustainability lead Meghna Tare told me the city of Dallas is going to release a heat intervention guidebook for all the citizens. What are some of the signs that you need to keep an eye out for when you are in 100-degree temperatures outside for an extended period of time?

[46:17.9]

So, heat is likely to be a massive problem this summer. And we've covered air quality from wildfire, smoke, thunderstorms and heavy rain that has to be hit for extreme weather concerns, doesn't it? No, I'm quite worried we could be facing hurricane season head on, especially in the Southeast.

[46:35.1]

And given what the warm weather looks like over the oceans now in April, we are looking at a dangerous storm season. The official hurricane season for the Atlantic basin is from 1 June to 30 November and World Cup host cities that are in this area that this is a threat to are Miami, Houston and, and Dallas.

[46:54.6]

The big thing I wanted to hear from Maddie was whether she thinks adequate prep has happened, especially given the disruption of the Club World Cup last year. An example of extreme weather impacting sport at exactly the same time as year in locations where the World Cup is going to happen this year.

[47:10.7]

I think it shook a lot of people up to see the Club World Cup impacted so heavily last year. And yet, no, we haven't seen the adaptations that we would be looking for, especially with a whole year ahead. Ups. Let's sidebar here for a second. Many of these concerns we've heard about storms, hurricanes, thunder and lightning, heavy rain could cause matches to be severely delayed or suspended again like we saw at the FIFA Club World Cup in 2025.

[47:35.5]

The impact of this disruption is manifold. Firstly, for spectators, nothing disrupts the spectacle either in the stadium or at home that a match being suspended for an unknown amount of time. In the event of this happening. Pubs and bars take note, have some ideas up your sleeves to keep your patrons happy if you to keep them there for players, they'll cool down, they'll have to warm up again.

[47:57.5]

A team that has momentum will be stopped and a team that was lagging behind will have time to regroup. We could see big performance shifts and outcomes because of these delays. For broadcasters, there'll be heaps of advertising contracts sold that are predicated on prime-time slots.

[48:13.6]

And prime time may slip very easily for organizers in stadiums. Their ushers, stewards, security and concession staff are going to need to be paid for long, longer hours in the instance that this happens and delays are incurred themes might incur costs too if rentals of hotels, buses or travel windows are missed.

[48:32.4]

One piece of advice we can definitely offer everyone involved in organizing or watching the FIFA men's World Cup 2026 is to build flexibility into your plans. Okay, back to what Maddie said about adaptations. What have FIFA done already? We spoke about cooling breaks.

[48:47.5]

FIFA have also reported that the match schedule for competition was designed to minimise travel, maximise rest, and enable the widest global audience to follow their theme. But they did also consider average temperatures, cooling, infrastructure, public transport and security.

[49:04.1]

So, what else would it have been good to see from FIFA? In a perfect world, I would have liked to see a comprehensive climate response policy out of the FIFA World Cup that would be uniform across cities. Now that's tricky across three federal jurisdictions. And when you get into wildfire and hurricanes in particular, those would be considered a national emergency.

[49:23.5]

And therefore, we're talking about federal government involvement, state level involvement, and city level involvement across several jurisdictions. So complicated, really hard to navigate. And it would have had to have happened a year ago to have any chance of working. No shortage of complexity there.

[49:40.2]

But with the 2026 FIFA World Cup expected to be the most lucrative major sports events in history, and AFP reporting that 7 million tickets will be offered for the competition, taking into account the capacity of the 16 stadiums where matches are taking place. If it wasn't going to happen for this, I guess the question is, what would make a policy like this happen?

[50:01.9]

So, we haven't had a master plan out of FIFA, but host cities are working to be prepared. And we're lucky to have input from two of the host cities that have the most substantive public facing efforts around sustainability as guests, Houston and Daniel Dallas. More on what they're doing and other host cities later.

[50:18.2]

But right now, Elizabeth Carlson told me what they've got planned in Houston in case of these extreme weather impacts. First off, who is Elizabeth? My name is Elizabeth Carlson. My official day job is Chief Sustainability officer@ Tricon.

[50:33.9]

We're a chemical distribution and trading company. But a lot of my time these days is going to my volunteer hat, which is as the chair of the Environmental Sustainability Committee for the FIFA World Cup 2026 Houston Host City Committee. So, what are they planning for in Houston?

[50:51.4]

Our biggest risks from a, major environmental event standpoint would be, you know, heat, flooding and associated hurricanes. I mean, certainly there's other potential contingencies, but those are key risks that were part of our planning from the beginning.

[51:07.5]

And one thing we've done is integrate environmental risks into our sustainable event management system right from the start. But also work very closely with our Office of Emergency Management here in Houston. And so, they have done a phenomenal job just putting together a very thorough risk management plan.

[51:26.1]

That includes all of the typical things that you would cover like natural disasters in a Major event plan. But they've also added in additional environmental risks that we brought forward, which is again something we hope will be legacy because it just brings more integration. So, something like besides the obvious heat and hurricane type risks, we also put air quality as a risk.

[51:46.5]

Of course, you can never fully anticipate every risk that will come up or what might happen with a hurricane. It's a very real possibility unfortunately in Houston that there could be a hurricane at some point or a major weather event just given the time frame and that it's happened before in the past.

[52:02.0]

Earlier we heard from Maddie about the concerns for those traveling to and from games during the World Cup, experiencing things like extreme heat. So, I asked Elizabeth what they're doing and what they're planning to do to help on that front. Our number one strategy is using the existing infrastructure so that people can access air conditioning and be on, on the light rail and other, in the buses and so on to, to keep cool.

[52:25.4]

I asked the same question to the lead of sustainability in Dallas. My name is Meghna Tare and I work as the chief sustainability officer for the North Texas FIFA World Cup organizing committee for the World Cup 2026 for the host city, Dallas in Texas.

[52:42.0]

People don't realize that it's part of sustainability because people think it's just related to health and safety and security. But at the fan zone we are making sure that there's access to hydration

stations, water covered canopy, there's access and availability of healthcare, ambulances, and support system.

[53:01.4]

And then the city of Dallas is going to release a heat, intervention guidebook for all the citizens. You know, what are some of the signs that you need to keep an eye out for when you're in 100 degrees temperatures outside for an extended period of time.

[53:16.8]

But the guidebook kind of provides every visitor or folks who live in Dallas right now on what some of the measures that they can take to protect themselves against the extreme heat. Hydration being one, they're thinking longer term. Two, we've really focused on integrating nature-based solutions into our planning.

[53:35.9]

So, we are planting a lot of trees. Some of those trees will be mature trees that can offer the shade immediately. But a lot of those are smaller trees that won't offer a lot of shade come this summer. But the idea is to create that legacy of heat resilience.

[53:52.4]

Other elements that have been discussed less around the tournament over such a large area are the very varying climatic conditions taking place in Mexico City is at a high altitude of approximately 2,240 meters above sea level. That's nearly seven and a half thousand feet.

[54:08.9]

FIFA has designed the tournament in regional clusters to reduce travel and climate swings. But based on the planned fixtures, an example of these shifts are one team will play a Round of 16 on 5 July in Mexico City at high altitude. The winner of that will then go on to play their quarter final in Miami on the 11th of July where they can expect very high humidity and extreme heat.

[54:33.3]

The winner of that match then goes on to play a semi-final in a climate controlled indoor stadium in Atlanta on the 15th of July. Three completely different physiological challenges in 10 days with each location stressing the body in a different way. So, we're likely to see squad depth, rotation and recovery becoming a really key performance.

[54:55.6]

So, these are some ways in which host cities react to situations at the World Cup, but what are they doing proactively to reduce the impact of the tournament on the environment? FIFA has a men's World Cup 2026 Sustainability and Human rights strategy and it has an environmental pillar with six objectives.

[55:12.2]

They are fostering more sustainable infrastructure and operations. That's your venues, that's your stadiums. Measure and mitigate the tournament's climate impact. That's about understanding the impact on the environment and trying to reduce it. Reduce local air pollution, reduce waste and implement circular resource management.

[55:31.8]

So obviously reduce waste as far as possible and try and ensure you're not using single use items. That circular resource management is about using items that continue to be reused in some other way rather than a one and done situation. Promote water efficiency and conservation and protect and promote biodiversity.

[55:51.5]

So, we're talking about nature of there. The host cities and local organizers are going to be responsible for leading most of this. And this is the first edition of the tournament organized following the integration of sustainability and human rights requirements from the very beginning from the bidding regulations through to the hosting agreements.

[56:07.7]

The information that FIFA shared with me via email said, quote FIFA World Cup stadiums are required to achieve sustainable building certifications for operations and maintenance, thereby by promoting energy efficiency and water conservation in the lead up to and during the tournament.

[56:24.7]

They went on with regard to temporary infrastructure. FIFA aims to reduce diesel generators by increasing the use of available utility grid connections and temporary power solutions that incorporate battery energy storage systems. Work is also ongoing to promote recycling and reduced food waste at key tournament sites.

[56:45.0]

The last element of what they sent is an extensive tree planting initiative has also been launched across North America, including in many FIFA World Cup 2026 host cities. The project will help increase local green spaces, boost biodiversity, support wildlife, strengthen local ecosystems, improve water quality and help replenish groundwater.

[57:07.4]

We've already heard from Elizabeth Carlson from Houston and Meghna Tare from Dallas already and we're going to hear more now. What is the actual role of these people? So, Elizabeth shared. I basically translate FIFA's requirements for sustainability into more practical action plans for Houston and for our stakeholders while, making sure that legacy is set, integrated into what we do and for Meghna.

[57:32.5]

So, my focus is social, environmental and economical. Those three are important key pillars of sustainability. But when it comes to the individual specific bucket of environment, my focus is infrastructure. Infrastructure, climate change, you know, making sure that the air quality and air pollution is monitored and tracked, reducing our waste, reducing water consumption, making sure that we are preserving our biodiversity.

[57:58.4]

But also, a little bit of focus on education and awareness for the community and the folks who are going to be part of this amazing event. We've also got insights from Gabrielle Maguire, who we heard from earlier, who's leading sustainability within hospitality across all 16 FIFA Men's World Cup 2026 venues.

[58:16.9]

As a reminder, my role in terms of leading sustainability for the World Cup is to really focus on how we are going to integrate our sustainability into bring all of the premium hospitality across all 16 venues at the World Cup. I approached Magna and Elizabeth about joining this episode as they represent the host cities that are publicly doing the most around sustainability and the environment. Environment.

[58:38.9]

As of 13 April 2026, the only other host cities that have sustainability pages on their website are Miami and Vancouver. And information is very light or there is just holding text on those pages currently. We really hope to see more information appear over the next couple of months ahead of the tournament.

[58:56.5]

Kicking off through our work at Sport Positive, we know heaps of these stadiums and cities are doing really authentic and credible work on sustainability. So, it'd be a real shame for fans and fans and new fans to miss out on knowing about that. The big buzzwords of sustainability at mega sports events like Men's World Cup are community and legacy.

[59:16.2]

You're going to hear that a lot around the World Cup. Community is about benefits to the local population and legacy essentially means this is Going to cause a huge amount of excitement but also disruption for local citizens. So, what will they be left with when everyone goes home?

[59:31.3]

Elizabeth Carlson said, you can do a lot of cool things, things for the World Cup, but because we want everything to have legacy, we have to make sure that it's connected into an existing institution. Meghna told me a little bit about what people can expect in Dallas. We want the community to be part of this.

[59:47.9]

And so, some of the programs and initiatives that we have been organizing for the past one year actually are focused on bringing the community together for various events like tree planting. So, the idea is that you kind of reduce your environmental impact through these programs and initiatives, but also let the community be part of something fun but engaging and something that serves and impacts our community in the long run.

[60:11.6]

We are launching a massive North Texas community cleanup challenge for the cities in the North Texas region. And this is done in partnership with the North Central Texas Council of government, where 16 plus cities have signed on a pledge or their commitment to host cleanup events in their cities, in their parks to reduce the waste and the litter and to have clean community.

[60:36.2]

We have been establishing mini soccer pitches across local schools. In the Texas region we are hosting educational programs like a Green Ambassador certification program, two-day program, where anybody can come and learn about, you know, sustainability.

[60:53.1]

Then we are hosting some nature challenge in partnership with Trinity River Audubon center where visitors or residents can go to seven or eight different hotspots that we have picked in the region and identify species, of plants and birds.

[61:08.1]

You know the Inaturalist app and the Ebird app where you can document your findings. So that helps preserve our biodiversity but it also helps towards the global data collection and sometimes emission reduction. During the tournament and legacy afterwards come together trying to make sure adoption of low carbon vehicles.

[61:28.4]

We are working on charging infrastructure for EV charging across the region, making sure that people have access to rideshare at fan festival, providing free shuttles for people to transport into the stadium from say Dallas.

[61:43.9]

Those cities lead on their own individual strategies because these are massive sporting events and so the impact that it has on a community are very different because everybody has their own regional challenges. So, what happens in LA is not the same as Dallas or Boston or New York.

[62:00.7]

So, what can the good people attending matches in Houston expect? Elizabeth Carlson shared more. Our sustainability program is really built around this idea that sports rally people

together, that this is a once in a generation opportunity to bring people together to accelerate action.

[62:17.0]

So, we don't really say that we're creating new things. We're really trying to accelerate what's out there in our community. And I think what makes it, it unique from a action standpoint is the deadline of 20, 26. So it kind of pushes you to take action, it pushes that acceleration. We're doing a lot of these cleanups really to engage the community, not just for the actual act of cleaning up, but also to get people engaged.

[62:39.5]

And then we have a sustainable soccer fields program. How do you make that neighborhood park a demonstration of resilience and bring sustainability into how kids play every day in the city? And then one of our biggest projects is the Green Corridor. This, this is 35+ organizations working together to tell Houston's story of existing sustainable transit.

[62:59.1]

So, we have 14-mile loop between fan festival and the stadium where on one side we have light rail, on the other side we have a hike and bike trail. And we said it'd be cool to kind of think about this as sustainable transit, but also to look at along that trail and along the light rail we have parks, we have the bayou, we have green spaces, native planting and pollinator gardens.

[63:23.1]

And so, we've done a lot of our demonstration level projects like innovation hubs, youth art, air quality monitoring, pollinator gardens, more trees along that green corridor so that people can actually visit and experience sustainability. And working with our metro partners to make sure that we have additional bus, infrastructure and things that might be needed.

[63:43.6]

For example, they added a direct, direct bus route from the airport to downtown just to help make sure that people have access to these existing infrastructure. And so, we're going to be promoting that a lot. And then the other piece I would say is we also tried to think outside of just the direct fan transport between the venues and really engage hospitality groups as well.

[64:04.1]

And so, part of our hospitality toolkit is the option to promote public transit at your hotel or at your restaurant, to add bike rides, racks or include EV charging so that we're trying to just engage more broadly on how to make sustainable transit part of the community as a whole.

[64:22.8]

These local efforts will hopefully support travel around the city during the tournament, but also stay in place for the local community long after the World Cup fans have gone home. We're about to publish a playbook that, you know, will basically make public all the documents, policies, everything that we've put together to serve future, events and serve the city for sure.

[64:44.1]

We'll publish our own sustainability report so that people have access to that from a knowledge sharing standpoint. One of the biggest issues with keeping good ideas going after an event like the World Cup is ensuring that people and information stay in circulation for others to learn from. So, playbooks are a great idea, but what about ensuring projects don't disappear?

[65:03.0]

Because at the end of the day, the host committee or FIFA or these like event specific institutions, they fade away after the event. I think the real benefit benefits are the knowledge sharing, education and awareness. And I'll give a very practical example. We talked about native planting, and how important native grasses are to our ecosystem and absorbing floodwaters and purifying water in the air and drawing down heat.

[65:26.3]

But most people in Houston don't know those benefits. And so, if we could just achieve the education, engagement, using the World Cup to get people to see those benefits, that would be a huge win for us. We can do a lot of cool things, things for the World Cup, but because we want everything to have legacy, we have to make sure that it's connected into an existing institution.

[65:47.5]

We have matched each of our interventions with a legacy plan. It's a lot easier to find a home for a piece of infrastructure or a set of trees because we can put a maintenance agreement in place. Now we're working with all these different partners to say, okay, how do we transition this or to transform this into something that lasts, into a way that we can continue to collaborate.

[66:10.2]

Gabrielle Maguire on location are thinking about Legacy 2. What I am quite excited about is the massive amount of work that we're doing to gather our data so that we can perform a baseline for the future. We plan to take that data and hand over a clean data set to FIFA.

[66:27.2]

But we will also be, calculating our emissions internally. That we will have, have 16 different venues that we can look at the data and we'll be able to compare those venues and look at emissions, maybe per guest or emissions per product level.

[66:42.3]

When you hear about hospitality, sustainability might not be the first thing that springs to mind. Honestly, hospitality is about food, drink, gifts. So how are they approaching that? So, we believe that sustainability is luxury and we want to align sustainability with.

[66:59.0]

So, as I always say with the team, let's make it sexy. We want sustainability to be the next thing that everyone is really looking to move towards. Sort of a very innovative space for guests in the hospitality areas. What are they going to see and hear? So, we really look towards local chefs and local foods and we're trying to purchase as much as we can locally.

[67:20.2]

We will be measuring that and reporting on that after the event. We're also thinking about seasonal ingredients, not just in the, the meals that we prepare and the foods that we serve, but also in the cocktails that we're serving. And in terms of our menus, we will be looking at what percent of our menus were locally sourced and how much of our menus were plant forward.

[67:38.9]

So, the communication piece is a really important piece of what we're doing and one of the elements of our strategy is, sustainable storytelling. And then what about behind the scenes? Like the stuff that people don't see when they just attend matches. Minimizing the impact of our supply chain is a really big piece of what we're doing.

[67:55.7]

As you can imagine, across 16 venues. Venues, we are bringing a lot of stuff into the venues that they do not normally have in those venues. And so, this is a huge lift. We are renting everywhere that we can. While we do have food donation programs in place for the venues, our goal is not food donation.

[68:15.1]

Our goal is to make sure that we haven't over served on the food. And in terms of what we purchase, we will have to buy some things at the end of the event. We are putting into place a demobilization plan and an asset tracking system so that we can make sure that we know where every single, single item goes after the event.

[68:32.2]

Everything from big pieces like furniture, which we hope to donate, all the way to small pieces like the excess lanyards that we might have or excess wristbands. Even challenging items like carpeting will have to be donated. So, the goal is to divert as much as we can.

[68:50.4]

Either donate it so it's reused or recycle it if we have to. It's an absolutely incredible, incredible to get the inside track from those front and center of actually delivering the FIFA Men's World Cup this June, in July, from getting the community involved to working to ensure community and legacy.

[69:07.9]

Data collection, cleanup challenges, charging infrastructure, a green corridor, air quality, monitoring what they're doing with carpets. For goodness sake. I hope this has given you a good

sense of what it means to be leading on sustainability, sustainability and legacy at a major sports event like the FIFA men's World Cup 2026.

[69:27.5]

I know we've given you heaps of information over the past 70 minutes or so, but what I really want to get across to you is that climate is one of the very few factors that could impact absolutely everything at this tournament. From delivery, from fan experience, from squad performance, staffing, impacts, broadcast timings, and of course the underlying risk to the commercials that sit around all of that for mega sports event Delivery where planning and schedules are the absolute center of everything and from which everything stems.

[69:59.6]

The risk of uncertainty that climate impacts bring are real and they're inescapable. There's so much more depth that we could have brought to all of these areas but we were conscious of your time and we'll bring you more content in the run up to the tournament and over June and July as well as well.

[70:16.3]

And we know many others are planning the similar and same content with much more depth in different areas. So, we look forward to hearing that. For now, let's head for some final thoughts from our absolute powerhouse lineup. Elizabeth Carlson from Houston host city. Everything we do, we have the choice to make the world better or worse.

[70:34.7]

Every decision, every action we choose, make the world better, make the world worse. If you're looking at the World Cup, if you're looking at what you're doing tomorrow, is it going to make the world better or is it going to make it worse? And that's how I approach sustainability. So, I think that's the takeaway, like don't think about the complexity and is it climate action?

[70:50.5]

Is it resilience? What words do I need to use? It's how do I make something better with this? Gabrielle Maguire from On Location. Sustainability isn't about limitation. Sustainability is about innovation. Meghna Tare from the Dallas host city. So, I'm hoping that the headline will be Sustainability and seamless mobility.

[71:10.0]

Dr. Stuart Parkinson from the Scientists for Global Responsibility. My concern is it's just going to be remembered for all the wrong reasons. It's a huge bloated tournament sponsored by a huge oil company and all sorts of climate impacts cause all sorts of hazards for fans and players alike.

[71:28.7]

Jonathan Casper from NC State University. We need to go from sport to saying it's a platform for sustainability. To us, not only what they promised but what they said, what did they deliver on

now more, more than anything it's what did the fans experience, what was the experiences that happened?

[71:49.0]

When sustainability becomes part of what is expected at these events, not just what it promotes and says that's when the behavior change actually starts to happen. Dr. Maddy Orr from the University of Toronto. I think for me the takeaway always, always when it comes to climate conversations is considered how this impacts you.

[72:08.5]

We are going to watch players play in conditions that our 7- to 10-year-old kids should not be playing in. The provision of support is so extraordinary that they're able to do things that our kids when they go outside are not able to do. In the same conditions. So do not take what you see on the screen when you're watching at home to be what is okay.

[72:26.2]

What works for the professional level is not what works, works at lower levels. And we need to make that distinction. Freddie Daley from the Cool Down Network and University of Sussex Sport, football included, needs a habitable planet. It needs breathable air. It needs temperatures that, don't boil your organs.

[72:41.8]

So, we need to do everything we can to ensure that that future and those habitual conditions remain in place. And that has to extend from driving down emissions of tournaments, pushing our governments to build more sustainable economies so that tournaments and of sort sport can be hosted within infrastructures that are low carbon.

[72:59.7]

And it also means calling out polluting sponsors that are actively rolling back measures and that are trying to ensure that that future never comes to pass. If you care about football, you have to care about the climate, because football needs a healthy climate. Author David Goldblatt Football generally is played outdoors under, the sky.

[73:17.0]

I think it's best there. And that means it's affected by the weather. The weather is achieved, changing on this planet. Every single institution of every kind, every social practice on this whole planet, every person is enmeshed within this web. If football is something that is precious to you in any way whatsoever, check in.

[73:38.6]

Because if you want your kids and your grandchildren to enjoy what you enjoy right now, we need to make some changes because climate change, climate change is going to make the playing, the watching of football, aside from anything else, much harder, much more expensive, much more difficult than it has been in the past.

[73:59.2]

So, we've heard loads from our guests today and so much about the FIFA Menswear Cup this summer that hopefully you found really, really useful. The big takeaway, I guess from me is no matter the environmental, social, political context, the world is going to tune in this summer.

[74:15.0]

The 2026 FIFA Men's World Cup will ultimately deliver what it always does. Moments of brilliance, moments of heartbreak, and a sense of global connection that very, very few events can match. Football has an unmatched ability to bring people together across borders, culture and generations.

[74:33.3]

And in an increasingly divided world, that power matters now more than ever. But this tournament also arrives at a different moment. The moment the game is growing. Bigger tournaments, bigger audiences, bigger revenues. At the same time as the world around it is facing very real environmental limits.

[74:52.8]

From extreme heat to long distance travel, from commercial pressures to climate commitments, the World Cup now sits squarely at, the intersection of these competing forces. So maybe the question is whether the direction of travel is clear and whether the choices being made about, that match the reality of our world today and the positive, inclusive future that sport is talking about.

[75:16.1]

So, enjoy it. Enjoy the goals, enjoy the drama, enjoy the spectacle, but maybe try and hold two things at once. That enjoyment, but also the reality it lives in. Please don't look away from what the reality is telling us, because the future of the game is being written now.

[75:35.9]

That is a wrap on this episode of the Climate of Sport. If this got you thinking, send it to the group chat, send it to your team or someone who cares about the future of the game. Follow, subscribe and join us next time. Because the biggest wins aren't just on the scoreboard. They're out there for the planet, too.

[75:52.3]

See you on the next one.