



Celebrating the World IP Day 2026:

Intellectual Property and Sports

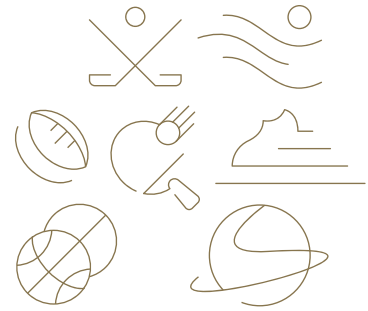
Why IP Must Sit at the Center of Sports Governance



Quote:

"In modern sport, the true contest is no longer just on the field; it is over who owns, controls, and shapes the value behind the game."

Prof. Saudin J. Mwakaje

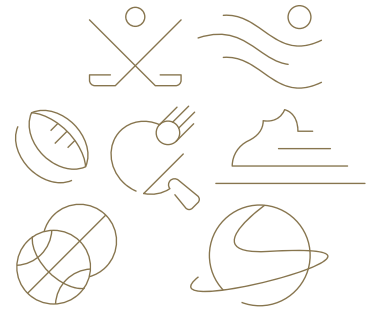


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A Contextual Setting

World Intellectual Property (IP) Day 2026 will be celebrated on April 26, 2026. This year's theme, "*IP and Sports: Ready, Set, Innovate,*" reflects the growing recognition that sport is no longer just competition on the field; it is also a marketplace of brands, data, media, technology, design, and storytelling. As shown on WIPO's website (<https://www.wipo.int/en/web/ipday/2026/index>), WIPO frames sport as an ecosystem in which patents, trademarks, designs, copyright, and related rights protect and promote the inventions, brands, broadcasts, and creative content that keep sport "thriving, dynamic, and accessible."

That framing is especially important for Africa. Across the continent, football and other sports are becoming more commercialized, digitized, and data-driven. Echoing this development, on 21st April 2026, the Tanzania Football Federation (TFF) signed a partnership agreement with BetaTQ for exclusive data rights and the digitalization of the Tanzania Premier League (Link: <https://www.tff.or.tz/betatq-mshirika-wa-tff-kwenye-data/>), marking a new chapter in proprietary sports data governance in Tanzanian football. Noticeably, many other aspects of sports, such as sponsorship, merchandising, gaming, hospitality, broadcasting, and official data rights, are now built on intellectual property assets. The Confederation of African Football (CAF)'s recent commercial engagement illustrates this emerging trajectory, as evidenced by sponsorship and commercialization deals spanning gaming, logistics, smartphone partnerships, official merchandise, match balls, hospitality, and the centralized management of media and sponsorship rights for national team competitions. Currently, CAF has a partnership with TotalEnergies covering more than 12 competitions. Other key partners for the 2025/2027 AFCONs include TECNO (mobile), Suzuki Motor Corporation (automotive), KONAMI (gaming), and Apsonic. All these deals and sponsorship components have significant IP bearing in them. Therefore, the emerging trends suggest that modern sports governance cannot remain focused solely on fixtures, discipline, and competition rules. It must also govern ownership, control, licensing, enforcement, and the monetization of IP assets.



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Centrality of IP in Sports

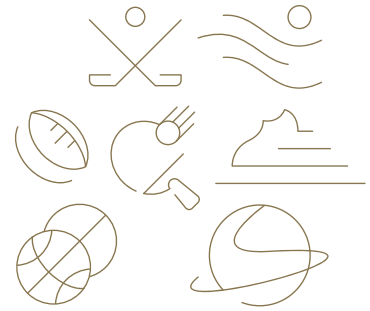
The central policy point is straightforward: *integrating IP into sports governance is no longer optional; it is essential for competitiveness, revenue protection, institutional credibility, and long-term sustainability.* When IP is poorly negotiated and governed, sports bodies suffer from piracy, counterfeit merchandise, weak sponsorship protection, uncontrolled exploitation of player images, fragmented data ownership, and poor digital commercialization. In contrast, when IP is well governed, sports organizations create bankable assets, negotiate better sponsorship and media deals, protect their reputation, expand fan engagement, and build more sustainable business models. This is true for FIFA or CAF as it is for national federations such as TFF.

The Allure of IP: Why IP integration adds value in sports governance

First, IP has the potential of turning sport from a purely event-based activity into an *asset-based industry*. A federation's crest, tournament name, match footage, player images, apps, statistics, and digital archives are not just operational tools; they are legal assets that can be licensed, defended, and monetized. WIPO expressly identifies branding, broadcast rights, sponsorships, equipment innovation, and fan-facing products as central to the IP-sport nexus.

Second, IP governance improves *commercial bargaining power*. Sponsors and broadcasters pay more when rights are clearly owned, contractually ring-fenced, and enforceable. CAF's move to commercialize media, broadcast, and sponsorship rights through a dedicated commercial structure for national team competitions illustrates how organized rights management can increase visibility and revenue.

Third, IP governance is vital for *digital transformation*. Modern sports are driven by streaming, gaming, betting integrations, live data feeds, analytics, and social media content. CAF's official partnership with KONAMI and its official retail and hospitality structures demonstrate that the value of sports now lies not only in the live event but also in the surrounding digital, data, and commercial ecosystem.



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Fourth, IP governance strengthens *integrity and sustainability*. Illegal streaming, unauthorized capture of sports data, counterfeit kits, and unlicensed use of logos and match content all erode value and undermine confidence. Strong IP governance helps federations protect official partners, preserve exclusivity, and prevent leakage of value.

How each type of IP relates to sports

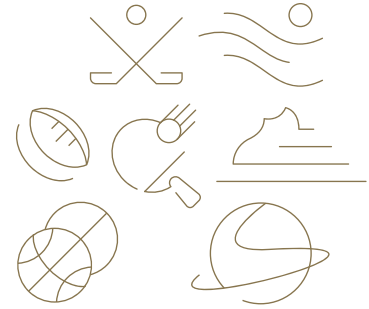
Trademarks protect team names, federation logos, competition names, mascots, slogans, official partner designations, and merchandising identifiers. In sport, trademarks are often the most visible and commercially powerful IP assets because they anchor sponsorship, licensing, and fan loyalty. A tournament brand or national team identity can be diluted quickly if it is not registered, monitored, and enforced.

Copyright and related rights protect match broadcasts, highlight packages, promotional videos, photographs, graphics, website content, social media content, documentaries, music, and other creative outputs. Related rights are especially important in broadcasting and signal protection. Without strong copyright governance, sports bodies struggle to control the exploitation of live transmissions, clips, and rebroadcasts.

Patents matter in performance technology, sports medicine, wearables, turf systems, fan engagement tools, referee technologies, broadcast technologies, and data-capture systems. Although patents are less visible than logos or broadcasts, they underpin competitive and commercial advantages in elite sport.

Industrial designs protect the visual appearance of sports equipment, footwear, apparel, medals, packaging, trophies, branded digital interfaces, and official products. In a merchandising-heavy environment, design rights can be critical against imitation.

Trade secrets and confidential information cover scouting systems, performance analytics, training methodologies, sponsorship negotiation strategies, proprietary databases, and internal commercial models. In modern sports, some of the most valuable assets are not public-facing marks but confidential know-how.



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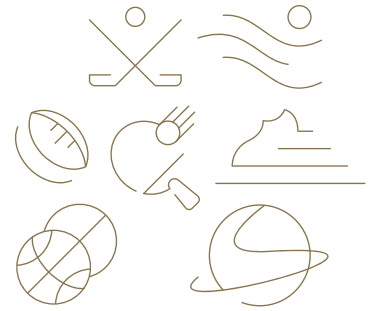
Personality and image rights, while treated differently across legal systems, are indispensable in sport. Athletes' likenesses, signatures, voices, celebrations, and personal brands drive endorsements, gaming products, campaigns, and digital content. Poorly governed image rights frameworks often lead to conflict among players, clubs, federations, and sponsors. As recently alluded to by Stephen Duval and Jason Traub, co-founders of 23 Capital, in a WIPO IP Advantage on IPR in sports:

"Players and athletes are far more IP savvy today and are increasingly breaking down what was one macro bundle of IP rights into multiple strands where the sum of the parts is greater than the whole."

A fitting example of a changing sports landscape in Tanzania is illustrated by the High Court ruling in *John Raphael Boko vs Princess Leisure (T) Ltd (Civil Case No. 118 of 2022) [2023] TZHC 20770 (31 August 2023)*, which addressed a number of legal issues, including privacy and image rights, unauthorized commercial use of a public figure's likeness, and misrepresentation as an endorsement, in a case involving the image rights of a famous footballer (John Boko) in Tanzania.

Data rights and database interests are now central. Match statistics, player performance metrics, tracking data, biometric data, and historical archives are commercially valuable inputs for broadcasters, betting and gaming firms, analysts, and sponsors. In practice, the critical governance issue is often not whether "sports data" is a classic standalone IP right in every jurisdiction, but who controls access, collection, licensing, and downstream use of that data.

Therefore, for Tanzania, considering the tremendous commercial opportunities that come with hosting AfCON 2027, TFF and other regulatory authorities should recognize the importance of adopting a clear strategy for negotiating and transacting IP issues with CAF and other commercial partners.



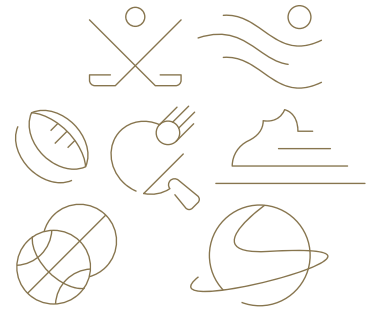
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The African sports context: CAF, sponsorship value, and data governance

African sport is entering a phase in which centralized rights management is becoming more important. As noted above, CAF's recent sponsorship architecture reflects this trend: gaming, logistics, official balls, official merchandise, hospitality, and smartphone partnerships are all being built around exclusivity and commercial packaging. These deals are not only sponsorship transactions; they are *IP-intensive and dependent structures*. They rely on controlled use of tournament marks, media rights, official designations, digital assets, and competition data. Thus, it creates a major governance lesson for African federations: *rights that are not clearly documented, allocated, and protected cannot be priced properly*. If official data collectors, betting companies, or content distributors operate without a clear legal and contractual framework, the federation loses both revenue and control. If sponsors cannot trust exclusivity, sponsorship values would likely decline. If counterfeit merchandise floods the market, official retail loses traction. CAF's launch of an official store for AFCON 2025 is a practical reminder that brand control and anti-counterfeit strategy are integral to sports commercialization.

The TFF context: sponsorship complexity, data control, and governance

The TFF context shows why this issue is urgent. The AfCON 2027 is on the horizon, TFF is already managing growing commercial streams, including sponsorships, broadcasting rights, ticketing, competitions, and digital systems, and its 2025 budget identified sponsorships and broadcasting rights as material revenue sources. TFF has also introduced digital systems for club registration, which signals a move toward more structured digital governance. As alluded to above, TFF has just signed a contract with BetaTQ for exclusive access to Tanzania Premier League data. While the terms of the contracts are not yet public, we assume they contain sufficient IP safeguards in TFF's interest.



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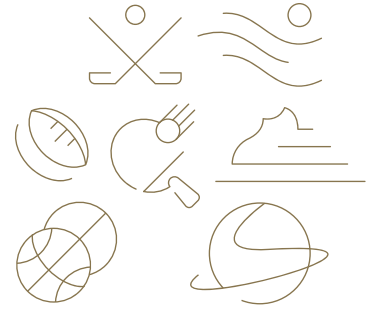
Intriguingly, TFF is operating in a space where sponsorship deals are becoming more layered, often combining naming rights, category exclusivity, broadcast visibility, social media exposure, player appearances, and digital activations. Without a structured and coherent IP governance framework, such deals become legally fragile and commercially under-optimized. Likewise, sports data control is becoming a frontline issue: if match data is captured, redistributed, or monetized without a clear governance model, TFF risks losing a major future revenue stream.

What should be done: Strategic actions

Given its urgency, it is vital that strategic actions be adopted to integrate IP precepts into sports governance. While this brief primarily focuses on football, the proposed strategic actions also apply to other sports. The interventions are layered in short-, medium-, and long-term perspectives.

Short-term: TFF and similar federations should begin with a comprehensive audit of IP assets like trademarks, logos, footage, archives, player image rights, websites, apps, stats, and sponsorship assets. They should establish interim rights-clearance protocols for sponsorships, broadcasting, digital content, image rights, and data sharing, along with anti-piracy procedures, including takedowns and enforcement with regulators and online platforms. For CAF and national bodies, focus on official data governance: who can collect, access, license, and exploit match data.

Medium-term: Sports bodies should develop a formal IP and Sports Governance Policy covering trademarks, copyright, designs, image rights, sponsorships, and data governance. They need to standardize commercial documents like sponsorship templates, broadcast agreements, licenses, and player consent frameworks. TFF should create a compliance unit linked to finance, competitions, integrity, and digital teams. Regional and continental bodies must strengthen anti-piracy efforts and unify guidance on sports data issues.



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Long-term: Aim to embed IP into sports governance via federation rules, competition regulations, digital plans, and strategic initiatives. This includes investing in rights-management tech, sports data infrastructure, and stakeholder IP training. Federations like TFF should eventually manage sponsorship, media, retail, data, and athlete rights in an integrated system.

A Takeaway

As I conclude my brief, it is pertinent to highlight that the real lesson from WIPO's World IP Day 2026 theme is that sport now sits at the intersection of law, innovation, media, commerce, and data governance. In that evolving environment, IP is not a mere technical side issue. It is the legal infrastructure that determines who owns value, who controls narratives, who monetizes fan engagement, and who remains competitive. For Africa, and for institutions like CAF and TFF, the future of sports governance will depend, in significant part, on whether they can move from seeing IP as paperwork or a mere legal construct to treating it as a vital and indispensable sports strategy.

By

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