



# Premier League Returns Covered in Polluting Sponsors

*Fossil Free Football*

*Game Changer Sponsorship Pledge*

*Badvertising*



The world is losing the fight to hold onto a climate that looks like the one we've always known. Huge reductions in fossil fuel pollution are needed in the next few years to avoid the most destabilising impacts of a hotter planet. Football is deeply vulnerable to a climate characterised by more regular extreme weather because at every level the game depends on safe playing conditions and stable communities. The sport touches the lives of billions of people, so it could play a formidable part in driving the decarbonisation that is needed to safeguard its future. Yet, football is failing to act in its own self interest by continuing to contribute hugely to fossil fuel pollution rather than pushing to reduce it. The Premier League is no different. Although some clubs do speak about improving sustainability in their own operations, their actions do not go far enough and are often undermined by other choices. Specifically, clubs allow corporations to use their 'brand' to promote the burning of fossil fuels to their global fan bases via sponsorship arrangements with polluting companies including airlines, oil corporations, cruise lines, SUV manufacturers, fossil fuel financing banks and others. This briefing outlines the extent of fossil fuel sponsorship in the Premier League. We call on clubs and the League to end the promotion of harmful activities and use their platform and resources to help preserve a climate fit for football's future.

## Instability and danger: what a changed climate means for football

Football, like the rest of society, faces increased insecurity and harm in a world impacted by climate breakdown. From junior and amateur competition, all the way up to the elite level, football is already seeing disruption from extreme weather that will only increase in frequency and severity as the climate becomes more unstable. As many as half of professional football stadiums in the UK are at risk from climate hazards including flooding, storms and heatwaves. Recent flooding in Brazil killed hundreds and displaced millions as well as inundating stadiums and forcing suspension of matches. The Premier League is dependent on the grassroots football clubs that give future professionals their start, but they face a precarious future. The FA estimates that 120,000 amateur matches are already

cancelled each year and the pathway to the top level will be put under more stress by the increased frequency of extreme rainfall.

In many other parts of the world, more regular extreme heat is already disrupting football. The intense training regimes required at the elite level will come under more pressure as the appropriate conditions are made rarer by unstable weather and rising temperatures. The issue attracted attention at Qatar 2022, which was played in winter in air-conditioned stadiums, while the tournaments in the USA, Canada and Mexico in 2026, Spain, Portugal and Morocco in 2030 and Saudi Arabia in 2034 are all highly exposed to dangerously high heat. This year's Copa America, held in the United States, saw an assistant referee collapse, players who needed to be substituted and fans seeking shelter because of high temperatures and humidity.

## Sponsorship means football sends harmful messages to huge audiences

Corporations (and states) recognise that massive investments in football sponsorship are worthwhile because they offer a unique chance to normalise and promote certain choices and activities to the more than one billion people that engage with the Premier League worldwide. Research has proven that supporters come to associate the positive feelings they hold toward their team with the brands they choose to promote. But this is problematic if the things being promoted actually cause harm, especially to those beyond the individual actually choosing the harmful product.

The ongoing promotion of high-carbon activities is out of step with international efforts to hugely reduce demand for fossil fuels in the next decade. Industries that rely on the burning of fossil fuels for their profit are concerned that their business model has no place in a decarbonised future. As such, they are eager to continue to promote their high carbon products, push back social consensus against them and maintain public image despite growing concern about the climate crisis.

There is considerable precedent for action to prevent activity deemed harmful from being promoted through advertising. Sport was saturated with marketing from tobacco companies until the weight of scientific and social consensus overwhelmed resistance from vested interests to regulate and ban it. More recently, the promotion of sports betting and gambling has become ubiquitous in football. As more and more evidence emerges of the harm that gambling inflicts in society, and pressure to react accordingly grows, the Premier League has decided to ban betting companies from appearing on the front of club shirts from 2026. The cases of both tobacco and gambling demonstrate an understanding from sport organisations and the public that promoting activity widely accepted as harmful is unacceptable. Given that it is acknowledged that global heating is extremely dangerous (to both football and wider society) and is primarily caused by fossil fuel pollution, it is necessary for a tobacco style ban on fossil fuel sponsorship to be implemented to protect people and planet as well as safeguarding the future of the sport itself. The UN Secretary-General recently endorsed this policy, calling for “every country to ban advertising from fossil fuel companies”. Such a ban in the Premier League could be legislated as part of the U.K government’s forthcoming establishment of an independent football regulator.

**Polluting sponsors in the Premier League**

<b>Premier League</b>	<b>Barclays</b>
<b>Arsenal</b>	Emirates, Visit Rwanda, MG Motor
<b>Bournemouth</b>	Visit Las Vegas
<b>Brentford</b>	Visit Tampa Bay
<b>Brighton</b>	Visit Kissimmee, British Airlines, Group 1 BMW

<b>Chelsea</b>	MSC Cruises, Oman Air
<b>Fulham</b>	Go Mongolia, Royal Caribbean
<b>Ipswich</b>	MSC shipping
<b>Liverpool</b>	Standard Chartered, Japan Airlines, Coca-Cola
<b>Man City</b>	Etihad Airways, Experience Abu Dhabi, Nissan
<b>Man Utd</b>	Malaysia Airlines, Visit Malta
<b>Newcastle</b>	Saudia
<b>Southampton</b>	P&O Cruises, Blue Islands
<b>Spurs</b>	Ineos Grenadier, HSBC, Castrol, BP Pulse, Coca-Cola
<b>West Ham</b>	Eva Air

\*Listed sponsorships remain live on club websites and / or SportBusiness database as of publication. Sponsorships related to cryptocurrency are not included. Their high pollution impact will be detailed in a forthcoming briefing.

## Polluting travel partners

Air travel is the dirtiest form of transport and reducing demand for flying is an important step in reducing pollution. Unfortunately, airline advertising that promotes long distance flying is widespread in football. Overall, airline emissions are surging and are on track to eat up 10% of the global 'carbon budget' by 2050 (meaning 10% of all the pollution that can be released while still keeping heating to 1.5°C). Flying is an elite activity with an outsized pollution impact that

benefits a small group of the global population but harms everyone by heating the planet. Yet football is widely used to drive demand for air travel despite its need to reduce the impacts of climate change. Premier League clubs that promote flying include Arsenal (Emirates), Brighton (British Airways), Chelsea (Oman Air), Liverpool (Japan Airlines), Manchester City (Etihad Airways), Manchester United (Malaysia Airlines), Newcastle (Saudia), Southampton (Blue Islands) and West Ham (Eva Air).

Various clubs have also chosen to promote polluting forms of tourism. Advertising far-off destinations to match-going fans in the U.K as well as global audiences is inherently polluting because they depend on long-haul air travel. Arsenal (Visit Rwanda), Bournemouth (Las Vegas Tourism), Brentford (Visit Tampa Bay), Brighton (Visit Kissimmee) and Fulham (GoMongolia) are involved in these types of arrangements. Chelsea (MSC Cruises), Fulham (Royal Caribbean) and Southampton (P&O Cruises) are also encouraging fans to choose cruise holidays that are inherently high in fossil fuel pollution.

## Barclays: profiting from harm

Barclays have sponsored the Premier League for more than 20 years and their brand has become so synonymous with the top level of English football that it is used by fans to refer to the league in general. But this positive association belies the damage that Barclays inflicts given it has provided more financing to the fossil fuel industry than any other European bank since 2016. It has poured \$235bn into projects including new coal mines on indigenous land in Australia and oil drilling in fragile and biodiverse Arctic ecosystems. The bank's sponsorship of the Wimbledon tennis championships has attracted significant backlash from prominent campaigners who accuse it of "profiting from climate chaos". The partnership has also been criticised because Barclays has financial ties to manufacturers arming Israel with weapons used to commit genocide in Gaza according to UN experts. Barclays was also recently forced to drop its sponsorship of several UK music festivals in another sign that organisations do not wish to be associated with an organisation that profits from pollution and harm.

# Petrostate owners use sponsorship to double down on their fossil fuels

The Premier League is intimately connected to the rulers of a few autocratic petrostates that see football as a vehicle for building their own power and deepening their vast profits from fossil fuel resources. Manchester City and Newcastle United are owned by leading members of the ruling families of the U.A.E and Saudi Arabia, respectively. These owners then leverage sponsorship to further their own interests, including by driving demand for long-haul tourism (and therefore the fossil fuels they produce) through partnerships with state owned enterprises such as Etihad, Experience Abu Dhabi and Saudia. While discussion of petrostate investment in sport has often focused on regressive human rights abuses, it is important to include the harm inflicted by ongoing commitment to fossil fuels in the debate around 'sportswashing'. The Chairman of Newcastle United also Chairs Saudi state oil corporation Aramco, whose Chief Executive has said that "we should abandon the fantasy of phasing out oil and gas, and instead invest in them adequately". The Saudi leaders linked to Newcastle are also closely tied to broader efforts to slow international climate action and "hook poor countries on oil", including by driving demand for flying.

## Spotlight on 'sustainable' Spurs

Tottenham like to claim credit for their sustainability credentials. The club was recognised as the Premier League's greenest for the last four years, has taken positive steps to reduce its direct impact and has joined the UN Sports for Climate Action framework, committing to halve carbon emissions by 2030 and reach 'net-zero' carbon by 2040.

However, the club's choice of sponsors indicate that it is happy to be paid to promote fossil fuels to its fans (recent off-season flying also indicates serious blind spots in its pollution reduction efforts). It is a

partner of HSBC, one the world's largest funders of fossil fuel developments. HSBC has provided at least \$192bn of financing for projects including coal mining, gas fracking and Arctic oil drilling between 2016 and 2023. Tottenham are also promoting Castrol, a leading manufacturer of oil products as well as Coca-Cola, the world's biggest plastic polluter, responsible for more than half of plastic pollution globally. Additionally, Tottenham advertise the INEOS Grenadier, an "ultra-polluting" SUV from the car manufacturing arm of the broader petrochemicals conglomerate long accused of using sport to clean up its dirty image.

Both Castrol and another Tottenham sponsor, BP Pulse, are arms of BP. Over many decades, BP has been a significant contributor to the pollution that has caused the climate crisis. A 2019 report found that BP had contributed 34bn tonnes of CO2 since 1965, the sixth most of any corporation. It has also been a leading polluter in the years since the international community committed to limit climate change. It is also responsible for many specific harms, including undeclared gas pollution in Iraq linked to local child cancer cases and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, that killed and continues to sicken workers and ruined a huge area of coastline. BP has also worked to undermine efforts to address climate change; for example in coining the term "carbon footprint", designed to shift responsibility for pollution away from the corporation onto the individual. It has no serious decarbonisation plan; last year softening its already weak climate targets despite making huge profits.

Given this history, in recent years, many institutions have decided that BP is no longer an appropriate partner. The National Portrait Gallery, Royal Shakespeare Company and Royal Opera House as well as a Paralympics broadcaster, have dropped BP and other corporations that are out of step with decarbonisation goals, following campaigning from prominent actors, authors, musicians and academics.

Now, BP and other similar corporations are changing their approach by drawing up new partnerships that centre more sustainable arms of their operations while still pushing the traditional, main brand.



Tottenham is therefore promoting BP this season, by way of its electric vehicle charging operation, BP Pulse. This sponsorship allows BP to associate itself with a popular football club and build its brand in a way that will also benefit BP's non-renewable business, which makes up the vast majority of what it does. This partnership also washes over BP's deep history of pollution and obfuscation and may deceive some fans into thinking that BP is somehow playing a positive role in the energy transition.