



## International legal challenges of cross-border digital sports media at the FIFA World Cup 2022

*Desafíos jurídicos internacionales de los medios deportivos digitales transfronterizos en la Copa Mundial de la FIFA 2022*

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** The FIFA World Cup in Qatar exposed fault lines between international intellectual property regimes for sports broadcasting and guarantees of freedom of expression and the press.

**Objective:** To assess how exclusive media rights and anti-piracy enforcement interact with journalistic freedoms in mega-events, using Qatar 2022 as a case study.

**Methods:** Doctrinal analysis of treaties and laws, such as Rome Convention-style broadcaster protections, WIPO instruments, review of sports-governance rules and host-nation measures, and case study evaluation of cross-border piracy controversies.

**Results:** Exclusive broadcasting rights remained central to event financing and were reinforced through contractual geoblocking, takedown regimes, and cross-border injunctions. Digital platforms enabled rapid, transnational redistribution of match content, complicating jurisdiction and evidence. Enforcement campaigns curbed large-scale piracy but also generated collateral restrictions, including over-broad blocking and pressure on news reporting, fan commentary, and critical coverage.

**Discussion:** The beIN dispute illustrates structural limits in cross-border IP enforcement (fragmented jurisdiction, uneven cooperation, and latency of remedies) and highlights a recurring tension: robust rights management can chill newsgathering, quotation, and transformative uses. Over-enforcement risks undermining press freedom commitments embedded in international human rights law and sport-governance principles. Balanced solutions include clearer fair-use/quotation carve-outs for news, narrowly tailored blocking orders with transparency and appeal, and event-specific media guidelines safeguarding reporting and criticism.

**Conclusion:** Effective protection of sports broadcasting and protection of expression are not mutually exclusive. A calibrated framework—stronger cross-border cooperation against commercial piracy, coupled with explicit safeguards for journalism and public-interest speech—offers a viable model for future mega-events.

### Keywords

International law, broadcasting rights, world cup, intellectual property, freedom of expression, and digital media.

### Resumen

**Introduction:** El Mundial FIFA en Catar expuso fracturas entre regímenes de propiedad intelectual para la radiodifusión deportiva y las garantías de libertad de expresión y de prensa.

**Objective:** Evaluar cómo derechos mediáticos exclusivos y la aplicación antipiratería interactúan con libertades periodísticas en megaeventos, usando Catar 2022 como estudio de caso.

**Methods:** Análisis de tratados y leyes (protecciones a radiodifusores estilo Convenio de Roma, instrumentos OMPI), revisión de gobernanza deportiva y medidas y políticas del anfitrión, y evaluación de piratería transfronteriza.

**Results:** Los derechos exclusivos de radiodifusión siguieron siendo centrales para la financiación y se reforzaron mediante geobloqueo contractual, regímenes de retirada y medidas cautelares transfronterizas. Las plataformas digitales facilitaron la redistribución de contenido, complicando jurisdicción y prueba. Las campañas de cumplimiento redujeron la piratería, pero generaron bloqueos y presiones sobre noticias, comentarios aficionados y cobertura crítica.

**Discussion:** La disputa beIN evidencia límites en la ejecución transfronteriza de PI (jurisdicción fragmentada, cooperación desigual y remedios lentos) y una tensión: la gestión de derechos puede enfriar la obtención de noticias, la cita y usos transformativos. La sobreaplicación amenaza la libertad de prensa reconocida en el derecho internacional y en la gobernanza deportiva. Soluciones: excepciones claras para noticia/cita, bloqueos con transparencia y recurso, y pautas por evento que protejan cobertura y crítica.

**Conclusion:** Proteger la radiodifusión deportiva y la expresión no es incompatible. Un marco calibrado—mayor cooperación transfronteriza contra la piratería comercial, con salvaguardas para el periodismo y el discurso de interés público—ofrece un modelo viable para futuros megaeventos.

### Palabras clave

Derecho internacional, derechos de radiodifusión, copa del mundo, propiedad intelectual, libertad de expresión y medios digitales.

## Introduction

The FIFA World Cup is not only the world's most-watched sporting spectacle but also a crucial point for legal and ethical issues in global media. The 2022 World Cup in Qatar was steeped in controversy beyond the football field, bringing into sharp relief two interrelated challenges: the piracy of sports broadcasts and restrictions on journalists' freedom to report. These issues unfolded against a backdrop of complex international legal frameworks. On one hand, intellectual property (IP) laws and treaties that grant exclusive privileges to authorized media partners protect lucrative broadcasting rights for events like the World Cup. On the other hand, states hosting such mega-events often face scrutiny over their human rights practices, including how they treat the press and handle information control. Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup exemplified this dichotomy, as its efforts to safeguard FIFA's commercial rights and its national image sometimes conflicted with principles of free expression under international law.

FIFA and other sports organizations finance their events largely through selling exclusive media rights, making the legal protection of those rights paramount (WIPO, 2025). For the Qatar World Cup, beIN Sports (a Qatari network) was a major regional rights holder, while other broadcasters worldwide paid massive amounts for the privilege to beam matches to billions of viewers. Yet, digital technology has made it easier than ever for unauthorized actors to steal and redistribute live signals, a practice that came to the fore in the Middle East via the beoutQ piracy operation. Simultaneously, technology enabled journalists and fans to disseminate news and clips instantaneously on social media, raising questions about where legitimate news sharing ends and IP infringement begins. Qatar, as the host nation, took steps that it argued were necessary to control media activity – such as requiring strict accreditation terms – but these measures drew criticism for impinging on press freedom and potentially violating Qatar's obligations under international human rights law (e.g., the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Qatar is a party). The convergence of these issues in one event offers a rich case study for international law.

Against this background, the central research question of this paper is: How can international law effectively balance the protection of intellectual property rights in global sports broadcasting with the safeguarding of freedom of expression, particularly in the context of mega-events such as the FIFA World Cup?

This paper proceeds as follows: It first reviews the legal framework of sports broadcasting rights, explaining how international conventions and domestic laws secure the exclusivity of sports media broadcasts and why these are economically significant. It then examines the disruption caused by electronic journalism and digital media, describing how the digital age has enabled both new forms of legitimate sports coverage and a surge in piracy. The discussion then moves to the international legal challenges of cross-border enforcement of IP rights, using the FIFA World Cup 2022 piracy disputes – notably the beoutQ case – to illustrate the difficulties of enforcement when political will is lacking. Next, the paper analyzes how the enforcement of IP rights must be balanced with freedom of expression, including the freedom of the press to cover matters of public interest, and reviews the restrictions placed on journalists during the Qatar World Cup. Finally, it offers an outlook and policy recommendations aimed at policymakers, international sporting bodies, and host nations for harmonizing the protection of intellectual property with respect for fundamental freedoms.

## Method

This paper fills a gap in existing scholarship, which often treats intellectual property enforcement and media freedom as separate silos, by analyzing them as interdependent issues that collide most visibly in high-stakes global sporting events. To address this question, the paper adopts a doctrinal legal research method, supplemented by a comparative analysis of international treaties, such as TRIPS, ICCPR, and the Rome Convention, WTO dispute rulings, and state practice during the 2022 World Cup. This method is particularly suitable because it allows for a rigorous examination of primary legal sources alongside policy documents and scholarly commentary, thereby illuminating both the normative framework and

its practical shortcomings. By situating the Qatar World Cup as a case study, the research not only interprets existing legal obligations but also evaluates their adequacy and coherence when confronted with rapidly evolving digital and political realities.

### ***The Legal Framework of Sports Broadcasting Rights***

Modern sports are deeply intertwined with intellectual property law. The spectacle and excitement of major events like the World Cup reach billions precisely because broadcasters invest heavily to bring the action to viewers worldwide (WIPO, 2025). Exclusive broadcasting rights to premier sports events are now the single largest source of revenue for many sports organizations, including FIFA (Smith, Kirtton, & Millward, 2015). These revenues fund everything from event infrastructure to grassroots sports development. In return, broadcasters expect strong legal protections for their costly investments. International law and domestic statutes thus provide a framework-granting broadcaster exclusive rights over their broadcasts, often categorized as “related rights” in intellectual property.

At the international level, sports broadcasts as such are not explicitly covered by the classic copyright conventions, which protect original literary and artistic works, but they fall under related rights protection for broadcasting organizations. The Rome Convention of 1961 was a pioneering treaty in this regard. Under the Rome Convention, broadcasting organizations enjoy exclusive rights for a minimum of 20 years over the rebroadcast, recording, reproduction, and public communication of their broadcasts (Guibault & Melzer, 2004). This prevents others from simply capturing a broadcast signal and retransmitting or selling it without permission. The Rome Convention influenced later agreements, including the WTO’s Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). Article 14 of TRIPS requires member states to provide broadcasters with the right to prohibit unauthorized rebroadcasting, fixation, and reproduction of their broadcasts for at least 20 years, either through a specific related right or via copyright in the broadcast content (TRIPS, 1994, Art. 14.3). In essence, WTO members like Qatar are obligated to have legal means to suppress signal piracy (ASIL, 2020). Failure to do so can constitute a breach of international obligations, as the WTO itself affirmed in a dispute related to World Cup broadcasting.

However, the current international framework has gaps. The Rome Convention has not been universally adopted (notably, Qatar and many Middle Eastern countries are not contracting parties), and TRIPS provides only baseline protections. As technology evolved – with satellite television, internet streaming, and IPTV – the inadequacy of existing protections became evident. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) has recognized that “the protection of broadcasters’ rights needs updating to accommodate the digital communications revolution” (WIPO, 2025). For years, WIPO’s member states have been negotiating a new treaty on the protection of broadcasting organizations to address challenges like unauthorized internet retransmissions. Although agreement has been elusive, the goal is an international legal framework that more efficiently combats signal piracy in the digital age (Schötz, 2019).

On the domestic front, countries implement these obligations through copyright and communications laws. Typically, either the live video feed of a sports match is protected as a copyrighted audiovisual work (in jurisdictions that recognize creative authorship in the live production – e.g., the choice of camera angles, graphics, and commentary) or via *Sui generis* broadcast rights. In either case, unauthorized streaming or rebroadcasting of the match constitutes infringement. For example, Qatar’s national laws as a WTO member obligated under TRIPS, criminalize the unauthorized distribution of broadcast content (Khwaileh, 2025). Indeed, during the 2022 World Cup, Qatari authorities warned that they would pursue anyone redistributing matches without permission (GCO Qatar, 2022). Likewise, many countries have statutes enabling courts to issue rapid injunctions against pirate streams or to prosecute commercial-scale piracy as a crime.

Beyond IP-specific laws, contracts also play a role in the legal framework. Broadcasters that obtain World Cup rights contract with FIFA for territorial exclusivity, and FIFA in turn typically provides support in enforcement, such as monitoring for illegal feeds and issuing takedown notices. The World Cup 2022 media rights agreements, for instance, empowered FIFA to act against piracy on behalf of broadcasters. FIFA’s own statutes and regulations emphasize protection of its intellectual property, and host countries often pass special legislation or establish task forces to assist in this protection during the event (Fifa, 2025).

The underlying rationale for this robust legal framework is not merely profit for broadcasters, but a symbiotic relationship between sports and media. The promise of exclusivity protects the costly investments in broadcasting global sporting events; it recognizes and rewards the efforts of broadcasters (WIPO, 2025). It also underpins the entire sports ecosystem: if piracy significantly erodes broadcasters' revenues, the value of media rights drops, and consequently sports bodies have less funding for organizing events and supporting athletes. The European Leagues and clubs have frequently cited piracy as a threat to their financial health (REUTERS, 2022) – for example, a recent analysis estimated global sports piracy costs the industry around \$28 billion in lost potential revenue annually (Stephen Battaglio, 2022). This has prompted rights holders to join anti-piracy coalitions like the Alliance for Creativity and Entertainment, which in 2022 welcomed beIN Sports as its first sports broadcaster member to bolster enforcement efforts (Stephen Battaglio, 2022).

In short, the legal framework for sports broadcasting rights is a patchwork of international treaties, national laws, and contractual arrangements, all aimed at ensuring that the party paying for the right to broadcast a sporting event reaps the benefits of that investment without unfair competition from predatory pirates. The 2022 World Cup has put this framework to the test, both through the emergence of sophisticated piracy operations and through the efforts of countries and international bodies to combat them.

### ***Electronic Journalism and Digital Media Disruption***

The digital revolution has dramatically altered how sports content is disseminated and consumed. Traditional broadcasting – once the sole domain of television networks – now shares space with streaming platforms, social media, and even individual content creators. This transformation has had a dual effect: expanding legitimate access to sports while also enabling new forms of infringement and challenging old norms of journalism. The World Cup, a global event, provides a clear microcosm of these trends. In 2022, and the previous World Cup in Moscow, fans were able to follow matches not only on television or official broadcasts, but also through real-time Twitter highlights, YouTube clips, and other digital channels that often operate outside the permitted range. Electronic journalism, in which reporters live-blog, tweet, or post video reports instantly from the scene, has become a staple of sports media coverage.

One aspect of digital disruption is the rise of direct-to-consumer streaming. Major tech companies and streaming services have entered the sports broadcasting arena, leading to a fragmentation of sports media rights across platforms (Pwc, 2019). Consumers in some countries now need multiple subscriptions to follow all matches, which can inadvertently drive some towards pirate streams out of frustration or cost considerations. FIFA itself offered an online streaming option in certain regions for the 2022 World Cup, reflecting the shift from conventional TV to internet delivery. However, the more platforms and streams exist, the harder it becomes to police unauthorized access. Illegal streaming sites have proliferated; sometimes offering aggregated “one-stop” access to sports that mirrors the convenience users seek. For instance, during the World Cup, an illegal streaming service called Stream east reportedly attracted enormous traffic (over 100 million visits) by streaming matches for free, until law enforcement actions shut it down (Yahoo Sports, 2025).

Social media has arguably been the biggest game-changer in sports journalism and a headache for rights controllers. In real time, spectators or journalists can post goal clips or key moments on Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram, reaching millions within minutes. During the 2018 World Cup, for example, users uploaded so many highlight clips that rights holders had to file waves of takedown requests with platforms. Twitter, lacking a proactive filter, became a hotspot for these quick posts (Kurt Wagner, 2018). By 2022, platforms like Facebook and YouTube had improved automated content recognition systems (such as Facebook's “Rights Manager” and Google's “Content ID”) to detect and remove infringing World Cup clips on the fly (Google, n.d.; Meta, n.d.). These tools allow rights holders to upload reference video of matches so that any user-uploaded video that matches the content can be flagged or blocked almost immediately (Google, n.d.; Meta, n.d.). In theory, this should significantly curtail the spread of unauthorized clips. In practice, perceptive users may crop, mirror, or otherwise alter videos to evade detection, and as noted, some platforms like Twitter did not universally deploy such filtering, relying instead on manual reports (Bridy, 2019).

Electronic journalism is not limited to video. Live text commentary, blogging, and data feeds have also raised questions. While reporting about a match in text form (e.g., live-tweeting the score or key events)





does not infringe copyright, some leagues have tried in the past to claim exclusive rights even over real-time data or updates from games, sparking legal debates on where IP protection ends and freedom of information begins. The consensus in law is that facts (such as the occurrence of a goal at a certain time) are not copyrightable, so journalists can report them freely. However, the “hot news” doctrine or *sui generis* database rights in some jurisdictions add nuance, occasionally giving event organizers a short-term quasi-property right over event information – though this is not uniformly recognized and was not a major factor in the Qatar World Cup context (Gervais, 2008).

The digital age also expanded who counts as a “journalist.” Citizen journalists and influencers often report from events via smartphones. For instance, a spectator in Doha could film a slice of stadium atmosphere or an intriguing incident and upload it to YouTube, essentially performing a journalistic function. FIFA’s media regulations historically draw a line: only accredited media can bring professional equipment and film inside venues, and even they are restricted in what they can broadcast (usually only short news clips outside of live rights). Digital disruption makes enforcement of these rules tricky – with high-definition, cameras in every phone, any fan might generate content that competes with official broadcasts. During the 2022 tournament, short videos taken by fans in the stands (showing, for example, a goal celebration from the crowd’s perspective) often went viral on TikTok or Twitter. While such clips technically breach the ticket terms, which prohibit unauthorized filming of matches and possibly copyright, since they capture the live event action, policing them is practically impossible without severe measures that would themselves be controversial, like searching spectators’ phones.

Another disruptive element is the agility and scale of organized piracy networks. Unlike the grainy peer-to-peer streams of the early 2000s, modern sports piracy can be a sophisticated operation with high-quality feeds. Illegal IPTV services often mimic legitimate cable packages, offering hundreds of channels (including beIN Sports and other World Cup broadcasters) for a cheap subscription. They advertise on social media and are accessible through common devices (e.g., “jailbroken” Amazon Fire sticks or Roku devices configured with pirate apps). The World Cup is a prime target for such services given the global demand (Synamedia, 2022). In 2022, data showed an uptick in usage of IPTV and streaming links during the tournament, especially in markets where the official broadcasts were expensive or required pay-tv. For example, industry analysts noted that in some Asian and African countries, World Cup piracy “exploded” due to limited affordable viewing options (Kevin McCullagh, 2022). A study by the Live Content Coalition found that an overwhelming 81% of illegal sports streams remain active through the live event, and only 2.7% are shut down within the first 30 minutes – the critical window during a live match (Agile TV, 2024). This indicates that pirates largely succeeded in delivering live World Cup content to their users faster than enforcement could catch them, reflecting fragmented enforcement systems and the agility of pirate streams (Agile TV, 2024). Such statistics underscore how digital technology has tilted the playing field, often in favor of infringers who can spin up new streams or mirror sites as soon as one is taken down.

In conclusion, the era of electronic journalism and digital media has democratized sports reporting but also introduced significant challenges in protecting IP. The World Cup 2022 exemplified these dynamics: it was the first World Cup where anti-piracy technology and pirate technology were in a real race against each other online, and it was a tournament covered as much by tweets and YouTube vlogs as by traditional newspaper columns. The legal system is still catching up to this reality, trying to draw boundaries around what constitutes permissible sharing (such as short “fair use” excerpts or purely personal, non-commercial posts) versus what is outright piracy or a breach of contractual limits. The next sections delve into how international law grappled with these issues, and how the balance was struck – or not struck – in Qatar between controlling content and allowing free expression.

### ***International Legal Challenges of Cross-Border Enforcement***

Enforcing broadcasting rights for a global event like the World Cup presents inherent international difficulties. Signals and pirate operations cross borders, requiring coordination across multiple jurisdictions to address infringements effectively. The 2018 World Cup illustrated these challenges vividly through the beoutQ piracy dispute, which became entangled with broader geopolitical tensions in the Gulf region. This case, centered on allegations that a regional channel systematically retransmitted beIN Sports content without authorization, escalated to international adjudication and tested the limits of enforcement across borders.



The beIN vs. beoutQ Dispute: beIN Media Group, a Qatari-affiliated broadcaster, held exclusive rights to broadcast the World Cup as well as numerous other major sports events. Shortly after restrictions on beIN were introduced in a neighboring market, a new channel known as beoutQ emerged and began retransmitting beIN's sports content, including World Cup matches, via satellite boxes and online streams. The signal was carried on Arabsat, a regional satellite operator. This was not typical small-scale piracy; it operated with open access. A WTO panel later examined the case and concluded that state authorities in the concerned jurisdiction had failed to provide adequate remedies and enforcement mechanisms against piracy, as required under TRIPS (ASIL, 2020; WTO, 2020). The panel's findings highlighted the serious implications of systemic piracy and the legal challenges of addressing it when domestic enforcement is unavailable or ineffective (AlJazeera, 2020).

From an international law standpoint, the dispute raised the question: what happens when a country fails to enforce its IP obligations? Qatar pursued two major avenues: a WTO dispute and an investment arbitration. In the WTO complaint (Measures Concerning the Protection of Intellectual Property Rights, WT/DS567), Qatar argued that the jurisdiction in question had not provided civil or criminal enforcement against the piracy channel and that this constituted a breach of TRIPS. In 2020, a WTO panel found in Qatar's favor, holding that the state had failed to ensure legal procedures against the piracy operation despite "an abundance of evidence" of infringement (WTO, 2020). While national security concerns were raised as a justification, the panel clarified that such exceptions could not excuse complete inaction in addressing piracy that harmed both Qatari interests and third-party rights holders, including European leagues (ASIL, 2020; WTO, 2020).

The ruling was notable as the first time a WTO panel applied the TRIPS national security clause and explicitly linked state responsibility to large-scale piracy. However, enforcement of the ruling proved complex. By 2021, regional reconciliation efforts were underway, and political agreements led to the suspension of legal actions, including WTO proceedings (REUTERS, 2022). The piracy channel had gone off air by late 2019, reportedly due to technical and legal pressure (AlJazeera, 2020). This sequence of events demonstrated that while international tribunals can declare breaches, actual compliance often depends on political will and negotiation rather than purely legal rulings.

Beyond this high-profile case, the Qatar World Cup also saw conventional enforcement methods. In December 2022, U.S. authorities announced the seizure of 55 domain names illegally streaming World Cup matches, redirecting visitors to seizure notices (ICE, 2022). The operation targeted heavily trafficked domains such as score808.com and yalla-shoots.com that had attracted millions of global visits (Andy Maxwell, 2022). Because many domains like .com and .net are U.S.-controlled, U.S. agencies leveraged jurisdiction to protect FIFA's rights even where piracy was based abroad. However, pirate operators quickly migrated to mirror sites, prompting a second round of seizures (Torrent Freak, 2022; Andy Maxwell, 2022).

In parallel, rights holders pursued site-blocking injunctions in domestic courts. In India, for instance, Viacom18 obtained an order from the High Court in Chennai to block dozens of rogue streaming websites for the duration of the tournament (Hindu Bureau, 2022). Such measures are also used in Europe for the Premier League and UEFA matches. Yet they depend on courts and ISPs' cooperation and are limited by how quickly new sites appear.

The beoutQ affair illustrates a key principle: when systemic piracy is tolerated, conventional IP enforcement fails. Qatar could not litigate directly in the relevant jurisdiction, and private rights holders like FIFA and UEFA reportedly faced resistance in seeking representation. This left trade disputes and arbitration as the only recourse. The beIN initiated a \$1 billion investment arbitration under the bilateral investment treaty framework, arguing that the blocking of its operations and the piracy constituted treaty violations (AlJazeera, 2020). Though suspended after regional reconciliation, this arbitration showed how IP disputes could escalate into matters of state responsibility under international law.

In summary, cross-border enforcement during the Qatar World Cup combined WTO litigation, arbitration, domain seizures, and injunctions. Persistent challenges included jurisdictional hurdles, rapid adaptation by pirates, and political factors that limited legal remedies. The case underscored that international cooperation—through joint enforcement campaigns and harmonized tools—is essential to tackling piracy, which by nature is transient and borderless. The Qatar 2022 experience demonstrated that while

legal frameworks exist, their effectiveness ultimately depends on the interplay of law, politics, and enforcement agility (Aljazeera, 2020).

### ***Balancing IP Rights and Freedom of Expression***

The 2022 World Cup raised questions not only about protecting intellectual property but also about safeguarding freedom of expression and media independence. Achieving balance between these two values is delicate. On one side, event organizers demand robust measures to prevent unauthorized use of content. On the other, journalists and the public have legitimate interests in news reporting and open commentary, even when this involves material protected by IP or issues considered sensitive in the host state. International law acknowledges both dimensions: intellectual property is protected (for example, Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes authors' rights), while freedom of expression, including press freedom, is guaranteed by instruments such as Article 19 of the ICCPR. Restrictions on expression to protect others' rights, including IP, are permissible only when necessary and proportionate (ICCPR, art. 19(3)). The World Cup in Qatar provided a real-time test of these principles, as regulatory measures on media activity intersected with FIFA's IP enforcement practices.

In preparation for the tournament, Qatar introduced an accreditation system for visiting media, which drew criticism from organizations such as Reporters without Borders (RSF). RSF argued that the terms "impose many restrictions on the media" and might discourage reporting outside stadiums (RSF, 2022c). The conditions required journalists to capture images only in permitted locations, respect privacy, and comply with national laws (RSF, 2022c). Certain sites were broadly excluded, including residential areas, private businesses, industrial zones, government buildings, universities, places of worship, and hospitals (RSF, 2022c; IFG, 2022). Observers noted that these provisions, by their breadth, could lead to self-censorship (RSF, 2022c).

Officials from the Supreme Committee emphasized that the rules were intended to protect privacy and safety, noting that requiring consent for filming on private property reflects practices in many countries. At the same time, international commentators observed that the absence of explicit exceptions for public-interest reporting and the broad framing of excluded areas could limit journalistic scope (Shanti Das, 2022). Past incidents, such as the detention of BBC and Norwegian journalists prior to the tournament, reinforced concerns that restrictive interpretations of law might discourage investigative coverage (RSF, 2022c). From the perspective of international law, these measures sit uneasily with Qatar's commitments under the ICCPR and the Arab Charter on Human Rights, which safeguard press freedom. While protecting privacy and security is a legitimate aim, applying blanket prohibitions risks raising questions about proportionality (Khwaileh, 2025).

Intellectual property enforcement also posed challenges for freedom of expression. FIFA's takedown notices during the 2018 World Cup, echoed in 2022, affected not only large-scale infringers but also ordinary users. For example, a seven-year-old boy's celebratory video, where the match was barely visible, was removed from Twitter for alleged copyright infringement (Francis Whittaker, 2018). Similarly, a UK professor's brief recording of a standby screen in a pub was taken down by automated filters, despite no commercial harm to FIFA (Francis Whittaker, 2018). These cases, reported by NBC and Euro news, illustrate how automated recognition systems sometimes overreach, treating benign or incidental use as infringement. As Jim Killock of the Open Rights Group commented, removing such content risks suppressing legitimate expression of enthusiasm and commentary (Francis Whittaker, 2018).

From a legal standpoint, exceptions such as "fair dealing" in the UK or "fair use" in the U.S. might protect such uses. However, the reliance on global automated systems means that content is often removed preemptively, without the opportunity for context-based review. This raises concerns about prior restraint by private actors, a theme debated in the EU during the adoption of its 2019 Copyright Directive (Article 17) (Francis Whittaker, 2018).

Efforts to reconcile IP protection with freedom of expression can be seen in measures like the European Union's Audiovisual Media Services Directive, which guarantees a "right to short news reporting" (ihrb, n.d.). This ensures that events of major public interest remain accessible for journalistic purposes, even under exclusive broadcasting contracts. However, such frameworks are regional and did not directly apply in Qatar.

Within Qatar itself, accredited journalists were able to cover matches and file reports freely inside stadiums, though only rights holders could film live action. There was no indication that sports reporting or commentary was restricted; rather, the limitations concerned coverage of broader social issues and unauthorized filming. In this sense, restrictions were more evident in relation to news reporting on sensitive social topics than in relation to FIFA's intellectual property.

Human rights organizations emphasized FIFA's role in ensuring press freedom at host events. Ahead of the tournament, RSF and the International Federation of Journalists urged FIFA to ensure protections were not undermined (RSF, 2022a). FIFA's statutes include human rights commitments (FIFA, n.d., art. 3), and its bidding process for future tournaments, starting with 2026, explicitly requires guarantees for press freedom (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Critics, however, argued that FIFA's monitoring of these obligations in Qatar was limited (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

The Qatar World Cup demonstrated the ongoing tension between IP protection and freedom of expression. Measures to secure broadcasters' rights and control media activity, while legitimate in part, sometimes raised concerns about proportionality and transparency. Similarly, automated IP enforcement risked capturing lawful expression. The broader lesson is that international law requires a balance: robust protection of IP must not come at the expense of fundamental rights. Proportionality and necessity remain the guiding principles for ensuring that both interests can coexist in future global sporting events.

### ***Future Outlook & Policy Recommendations***

As global sporting events continue to grow in economic and cultural influence, the legal challenges observed during the 2022 World Cup are likely to persist unless addressed through proactive measures. The intersection of intellectual property enforcement and human rights, particularly freedom of expression, calls for solutions that balance both values. This section presents a forward-looking perspective with recommendations in three key areas: strengthening international anti-piracy frameworks, embedding media freedom standards into event governance, and refining technology and business practices to address piracy while upholding public interest.

### ***Enhancing International Anti-Piracy Cooperation***

The 2022 World Cup illustrated both the strengths and weaknesses of existing international mechanisms. While the WTO dispute process offered a formal avenue and produced a clear ruling affirming IP obligations, it operated slowly and was ultimately overshadowed by political negotiations. This has prompted calls for more agile frameworks to handle urgent piracy issues, especially those involving live broadcasts. Proposals include an international protocol specifically targeting live sports piracy, with commitments to expedited cross-border injunctions and enforcement during global events. The European Union's recent recommendations for swift blocking of illegal sports streams—ideally within 30 minutes—reflect this trend (European Commission, 2023; Pinsent Masons, 2022). A similar approach could be developed internationally through WIPO or a coalition of states, with mechanisms for real-time cooperation between enforcement agencies. The U.S. domain seizures in 2022 demonstrate how effective coordinated action can be (ICE, 2022). Extending such practices to a broader international network would improve enforcement during events of global significance.

### ***Completing and Modernizing the WIPO Broadcast Treaty***

Negotiations on the WIPO Broadcasting Treaty have been ongoing for years, reflecting the need to update protections in light of digital-era challenges. A finalized treaty could extend broadcasters' rights explicitly to online streaming, not only traditional rebroadcast, and allow for more effective cross-border legal remedies. This would help align obligations across jurisdictions and provide clarity that national security or policy exceptions should not serve as blanket justifications for non-enforcement in cases of commercial piracy.

### ***Embedding Human Rights in Mega-Sporting Event Contracts***

Recent years have seen increased attention to embedding human rights commitments into hosting agreements for major sporting events. FIFA's bid requirements for the 2026 World Cup included provisions related to press freedom and media access. Going forward, these safeguards should be systematically implemented and monitored. Independent mechanisms, possibly in cooperation with international bodies such as UNESCO or the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, could also help



ensure that journalists are able to report without undue restriction. Host nations retain sovereignty, but by agreeing to host, they accept obligations to meet international standards. Binding human rights safeguards in contracts, with clear consequences for non-compliance, would provide greater assurance that press freedom and access be respected.

### ***Fair Use and News Exception Policies***

Broadcasters and platforms can refine their enforcement mechanisms to distinguish between large-scale piracy and limited, non-commercial uses. More nuanced filtering systems that recognize fair use or fair dealing could help avoid unnecessary takedowns of newsworthy or incidental content. For instance, very short clips or incidental background footage might be exempted or reviewed manually before removal (Makhadmeh, 2014). Similarly, trusted news organizations could be whitelisted to ensure their reporting is not disrupted. This approach would align with frameworks such as the EU's right to short news reporting and help reconcile IP enforcement with freedom of expression.

### ***Addressing Root Causes of Piracy***

Enforcement measures alone are insufficient if access barriers persist. Many fans resort to unauthorized streams due to affordability or limited availability of official broadcasts (Agile TV, 2024). Expanding legitimate access—such as by providing affordable streaming options or free-to-air broadcasts for key matches—can reduce reliance on piracy. Studies show that a significant portion of users of unauthorized streams would pay for accessible legal alternatives (Stephen Battaglio, 2022). Policy frameworks could encourage such models, ensuring both rights protection and audience access.

### ***Capacity Building and Awareness***

Not all countries have the infrastructure to enforce IP rights effectively during global events. International organizations such as WIPO and INTERPOL could expand training and technical assistance programs for national enforcement bodies. Parallel efforts should include training for host country officials on international standards regarding press freedoms, ensuring that both IP enforcement and respect for journalistic activity are balanced during events.

### ***Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue***

Given the complexity of these issues, a sustained platform for dialogue among stakeholders—including sports bodies, broadcasters, governments, platforms, and press freedom advocates—would be beneficial. Initiatives such as the Sports and Rights Alliance and the Centre for Sport and Human Rights are promising examples (Sport & Rights Alliance, 2025). Supporting and institutionalizing such dialogue could help develop best practices and strengthen accountability (Makhadmeh & Khwaileh, 2025).

The experiences of the 2022 World Cup underline the continuing challenges of reconciling intellectual property protection with media freedoms. Looking forward, effective solutions will require international cooperation, updated treaties, accessible distribution models, and firm commitments to human rights (Makhadmeh & Khwaileh, 2025). With thoughtful planning and implementation of the recommendations outlined here, future global sporting events can better ensure both the safeguarding of IP and the protection of open expression.

## **Conclusion**

This paper examines an open case study at the intersection of international IP law and human rights law. It concluded that the most important role of effective IP enforcement is to preserve the economic viability of international sporting events, which are increasingly beset by on-large piracy. The development of such channels as beoutQ and widespread use of illegal online streaming indicated shortcomings in the current system of enforcement and underscored the need for more effective international cooperation and novel regulatory measures. Legal measures, ranging from WTO litigation to US domain name seizures, have demonstrated that even as international law exposes avenues for fighting piracy, responses prove slow and sporadic compared to digital infringement velocity.

At the same time, the tournament accentuated the importance of freedom of expression and underlined the risks when media freedoms are brought under harsh restriction. Accreditation rules, limits in covering by journalists, and excessive enforcement of copyright cases illustrated how the balance between rights protection and protection of open expression tends to topple onto one side easily and instill fear towards openness and public discourse.

Collectively, the World Cup demonstrated that freedom of expression and intellectual property cannot be addressed in isolation at the mega-event level. Both need to be calibrated with great accuracy through policy and law, using the principles of necessity and proportionality. International legal frameworks—TRIPS and ancillary treaties on the one hand, and the ICCPR and comparable standards on the other—codify protections for both, but the experience of 2022 illustrated that harmonizing the application of the same is still unfinished work. The Qatar lessons instill in us the process of moving towards a world where sporting bodies, governments, and international bodies cooperate more: a world where piracy is challenged not merely with sanctions, but with models of distribution that are accessible and fair, and where host nations are measured not merely on stadium and infrastructure construction, but on their adherence to human rights. In brief, the World Cup was not just a sporting competition; it was a spur for contemplation and experimentation with pressing concerns of worldwide law. The scandals involving piracy pushed the limits of extraterritorial enforcement, while restrictions on journalists pushed the limits of worldwide commitments to freedom of expression. In the future, the task will be to build on these lessons when it comes to reinforcing anti-piracy regimes, integrating human rights obligations into hosting agreements, and employing technology in a manner that protects both rights and liberties. If that is the case, future World Cups and similar events can be a cause for celebration not only sporting triumph, but also an occasion when international law confronts the realities of a global public.

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