



ARTICLE UAE Sports Law Federal Law No. 4/2023

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Summary

Sports Law in the United Arab Emirates ('UAE') has evolved significantly over recent years in line with a trajectory of growth within the Middle East and to accommodate the development of various sports within the UAE.

The UAE has made strides in establishing legal frameworks and introducing regulations related to sports which has helped develop sports within the UAE at both non-professional and professional levels.

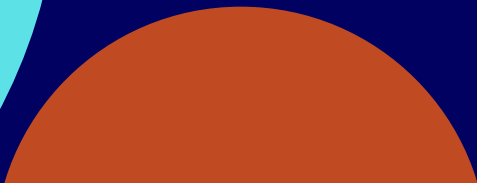
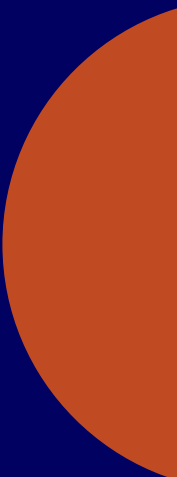
Various sports authorities have been established within the different Emirates. The UAE General Authority for Sports ('GAS') was established in 2008 and is responsible for overseeing and regulating sports activities including Football, Tennis, Fencing, Basketball, Martial Arts, and Cricket. GAS is a significant body involved in promoting and regulating sports across the Emirates.

Federal Law No. 4 of 2023 ('UAE Sports Law')

Federal Law No. 4 of 2023 ('UAE Sports Law') sets out the legal framework for regulating sports and sports-related infrastructure across the UAE.¹ It is designed to create a cohesive approach to the development of the sports sector and to ensure the alignment of objectives at both federal and local levels. The primary aim is to encourage participation in sports and empower relevant authorities to provide accessible sports and physical activities.

UAE Ministry of Youth and Sports

The UAE Ministry of Youth and Sports ('Ministry') established in 1972, was set up to handle sports and youth affairs² by formulating comprehensive plans and regulations aimed at providing guidance and care to the younger population.³ The Ministry has responsibility for establishing diverse platforms, including sports, social, and cultural clubs, along with the creation of sports facilities. It encourages active participation in sports amongst the youth. Financial support and resources are dedicated to enhancing youth-oriented initiatives across the Emirates. This Ministry is now known as GAS.



Federal Laws

Federal Law No. 29/2006 includes provisions for the Rights of People with Disabilities in various sectors including sports. It also contains provisions regarding accessibility, accommodations, and opportunities for the participation of all people with disabilities in sports activities.⁴ This highlights the UAE's commitment to inclusivity and equality. By ensuring access to sports activities and promoting participation of all in clubs and national teams, it fosters an environment that acknowledges and supports the talent and capabilities of individuals with disabilities. These provisions not only align with principles of diversity and social inclusion but also demonstrate the UAE's dedication to empowering every individual to engage in sports, promoting physical well-being, and fostering a more equitable and diverse sporting landscape.

The establishment of the **UAE Sports Arbitration Centre ('UAESAC')** was marked by **Federal Law No. 16/2016**.⁵ It provided a legal framework for sports disputes through arbitration, ensuring an effective and specialised mechanism for the resolution of sports-related disputes.

The Middle East, including the UAE, is now recognised as a fast-growing and emerging sports market, offering substantial potential for development and opportunities at all levels. This growth brings both opportunities and challenges, requiring a concurrent development in the legal infrastructure governing sports.





UAE Sports Law

General provisions and definitions are established under the UAE Sports Law, which are essential for controlling sports activities within the UAE.⁶ The objectives include improving sports bodies' operational systems and encouraging collaboration between public and private sectors for sports development.⁷

The UAE Sports Law also aims to ensure governance compliance with international and national sports laws while supporting community sports, competitive excellence, and fostering physical activity among diverse demographics.⁸

The roles of national sports organisations within the country are defined under the UAE Sports Law. It sets out the responsibilities of entities such as the National Olympic Committee; National Paralympic Committee; Special Olympics UAE; UAE Deaf Sports Committee; and the National Anti-Doping Agency.⁹ It outlines the functions, emphasising collaboration with authorities to develop sports, maintain values, and ensure fair play, especially concerning anti-doping measures aligned with global regulations.¹⁰

Guidelines are set out within the UAE Sports Law for organising sports events, ensuring that the events comply with legal standards. Regulation is provided for the process of obtaining approvals, coordinating with relevant authorities, and managing various aspects such as security, facilities, and emergency preparation during sporting events.¹¹ Registered sports bodies must meet specific criteria, including having Emirati founders and a permanent headquarters, gaining legal recognition upon registration.

The UAE Sports Law defines the scope of various resources accessible to these bodies, encompassing financial support, event revenues, donations, and other financial avenues.¹² These bodies are required to comply with statutes, ensure financial transparency, maintain athlete safety, and seek approval for international representation and event hosting.

It also enforces ethical conduct and fair play by administering penalties including imprisonment and fines for match fixing and sets out details on violations and corresponding penalties to uphold integrity and ensure compliance.¹³

A robust framework is introduced for integrating and promoting physical education and sports across multiple sectors in the UAE.¹⁴ It mandates government and private educational institutions, care centres for individuals with disabilities, and rehabilitation centres for juvenile offenders to provide opportunities for physical and sports activities while ensuring access to necessary facilities and equipment within their financial means.¹⁵

Emphasis is placed on the role of schools and universities in talent discovery, sportsmanship principles, and specialised sports centres for exceptional student-athletes.¹⁶

The UAE Sports Law prioritises inclusivity by enabling individuals with disabilities to engage in sports activities and encouraging their participation in clubs and national teams. There is a requirement to provide resources, facilities and support needed to pursue sports activities for people of determination. It also outlines regulations for military and police sports, traditional sports, sports media, and the provision of sports facilities for public use, highlighting talent discovery, elite sports, and support for referees and non-professional athletes.¹⁷



GAS is committed to fostering female talent by collaborating with sports federations to elevate women's championships, increasing their participation in global competitions.

Emirati women have made significant strides in the field of sports, showcasing remarkable ability and achieving notable accomplishments at high levels. Several sports federations are led by Emirati women, which include The Emirates Women Sports Federation, Badminton Federation, and Pentathlon Federation.

The UAE hosts an array of major sporting events, including Formula 1 races, international golf tournaments, tennis championships, NBA, taekwondo, and marathons. The country boasts state-of-the-art sports facilities and stadiums, attracting athletes and enthusiasts worldwide.¹⁸ These institutions focus on developing local talent across various sports, providing professional training, and fostering participation from a young age.¹⁹

The UAE's efforts to diversify its sports offerings, such as promoting traditional sports, e-sports, and hosting world-class events and niche sporting activities, have widened the market's appeal, amongst both residents and visitors.



Implications of the UAE Sports Law

The UAE Sports Law represents a shift in the nation's sports landscape by instituting a comprehensive regulatory framework that aims to transform sports development across federal and local levels. Its primary focus lies in enhancing sports participation and accessibility. This strategic framework sets its sights on three fundamental areas:

- Firstly, fostering broader social engagement in physical activities with an ambitious goal of achieving a 71% participation rate in various sports by 2031.²⁰
- Secondly, it strives to bolster sports entities, enabling them to attain excellence both locally and on a global scale.
- Thirdly, the law is dedicated to promoting inclusivity by facilitating the involvement of individuals with disabilities in sporting events, providing avenues for their participation in national teams for major competitions.

The National Sports Strategy 2031 ('Strategy') is based on three goals:

- Increasing sports participation and encouragement in leading an active lifestyle.
- Developing sports talent.
- Excelling in professional sports.

The Strategy presents several advantages and creates a structured and unified approach to sports development across the nation, encouraging broader participation in sports activities while fostering a competitive environment. There may be potential challenges that naturally arise in the effective implementation of the Strategy, including the need for substantial infrastructure development, financial investments, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation to ensure the delivery of outlined objectives within the required timeframe.



Conclusion

The UAE Sports Law is an important step in regulating and developing the country's sports sector. With its comprehensive provisions, the Law aims to promote inclusivity, excellence, and integrity in sports, fostering greater participation across diverse segments of society while aligning with a national strategy for sporting advancement. The overarching goal of the provisions is to strengthen the UAE's presence and performance in various international tournaments, including the Olympic Games.

It signifies the UAE's commitment to nurturing talent, encouraging diversity, and advancing the realm of sports by aligning with international standards while emphasising equal opportunities for all participants. These are unprecedented times of change in the UAE sports space which can be said of the Middle East generally with established athletes performing within and moving to the region to take advantage of all that is on offer. It will be interesting to see how the landscape continues to evolve and change rapidly in the coming years as an area that has one of the fastest paces of growth at the moment.



References

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- 4.Federal Law No. 29/2006
- 5.Federal Law No. 16/2016
- 6.Article 1-2, Federal Law No. 4/2023
- 7.Article 3, Federal Law No. 4/2023
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Sarah Malik

Sarah Malik is an award-winning lawyer who founded SOL International Ltd, a boutique legal consultancy registered at the ADGM in 2018. Sarah achieved 'Litigator of the Year' (2022) at the first GCC Women in Law Awards and received an honourable mention as 'Law Firm Leader of the Year' category at the same awards. In March 2022, SOL was named by Legal 500 EMEA as 'A Firm to Watch in Dispute Resolution: Arbitration and International Litigation'.

In the UK, Sarah was instructed on behalf of a Premiership football club in a six-week medico-legal investigation involving allegations of doping and presented the findings to the Board. Sarah was also instructed in relation to the relegation of a football club and the consequent dismissal of various staff members. Sarah was instructed as a GCC partner in relation to the Mike Tyson gym in Saudi Arabia and contracts for the Trainer and General Manager.

In September 2023, Sarah attended the IBA The Law of Sports Conference in Qatar.

Sarah has been published in respect to HR issues in the sports world and has co-authored an article on 'Reform in Gaming and Gambling Laws in the UAE and the GCC'.



Iqra Islam

Iqra is a paralegal at SOL International Ltd. She graduated with an LLB Hons with Criminology from Middlesex University, Dubai. She plans to pursue training and qualification as a Barrister.

Iqra deals with the core areas of practice and also has a keen interest in sports law. She regularly keeps updated with legal developments in the sports world, especially with cricket and will be attending upcoming legal sports events.

At SOL, Iqra supports senior lawyers by assisting with their caseloads and research.

