



Generating impact in
sports and events through
sustainable innovation

The emerging landscape

In today's global sports events landscape, value is no longer defined solely by performance in the field. Tournaments and franchises that are at the head of the game are being measured by how effectively they embed innovation, sustainability, and long-term resilience into their evolving operational models. Thus, sustainability has now shifted to strategic differentiators, giving power to life brand, stakeholder trust, and longevity, previously being a mere compliance obligation.

As environmental issues become more prominent across the Middle East and beyond, sport platforms have a great capacity to position themselves around scalable solutions to those arising issues. The Hero Dubai Desert Classic, in collaboration with Deloitte, leveraged this influence through the Green Incubator Challenge—a structured innovation platform designed to spotlight emerging technologies presented by various innovators, and to assess their scalability, measurable impact, and viability.

The industry challenge

Across sectors, sustainability has shifted from optional to strategic priority, yet meaningful progress remains uneven. Despite many organizations investing heavily in sustainable solutions, measurable impact remains a struggle.

A recent Deloitte survey shows sustainability consistently ranks among top C-suite priorities, and investments continue to rise, but this is not always translated into expanded internal capabilities at the speed required. Capability gaps persist across strategy development, data integration, governance, and execution.

Companies often struggle to define clear criteria for evaluating sustainability initiatives and lack properly structured approaches to assess scalability, risk, and long-term viability. In parallel, evolving reporting expectations and governance requirements add complexity for organizations trying to make sustainability part of everyday operations.

This gap between ambition and execution highlights the need for experienced guidance that is grounded in structured assessment and practical methodologies, to turn ideas into tangible, measurable outcomes.

In today's sports landscape, success is measured not just by performance on the field, but by how effectively organizations embed innovation and sustainability into their operations



Introducing the Green Incubator Challenge

The Green Incubator Challenge was established by the Hero Dubai Desert Classic to crowdsource innovative solutions addressing these challenges, in direct collaboration with Deloitte as a knowledge partner.

The Hero Dubai Desert Classic, the oldest golf tournament in the Middle East and the first golf event in the region to achieve GEO (Generative Engine Optimization) Certified Tournament status for four consecutive years, is a global leader in sustainable sport. This initiative marks the first time a golf event worldwide has launched an international competition dedicated to sustainable event solutions, reflecting a commitment to environmental leadership and innovation.

Sustainability is a critical priority for the sports events sector, which generates significant waste, energy consumption, and carbon emissions. In the Middle East, sustainable investment has surged by 83%, underscoring the region's commitment to climate action. Sport's unique power to unite communities and inspire action makes it an ideal platform to drive sustainability innovation.

 **83%**
surge in sustainable investment across the Middle East underscores the region's growing commitment to climate action.

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A structured approach to evaluation

As a knowledge partner to the Green Incubator Challenge initiative, we designed and applied a structured evaluation framework to ensure that proposed solutions were assessed against rigorous, transparent standards.

The evaluation process followed a phased approach. Initial screening focused on strategic alignment with sustainability priorities and relevance to large-scale sporting event operations. Shortlisted solutions were then examined through a deeper assessment of implementation feasibility, long-term value creation, and cross-market scalability.

Beyond assessment, we contributed by shaping the evaluation framework itself, ensuring that environmental ambition was balanced with operational practicality, governance considerations, and measurable impact.

By embedding structure, independence, and scalability thinking into the process, the Challenge moved beyond concept validation toward practical, deployable innovation.



The Green Incubator Challenge, hosted by the Hero Dubai Desert Classic, exemplifies how innovation and collaboration can address these challenges head-on. It has been a privilege for Deloitte to support this initiative as a knowledge partner, helping to identify and nurture solutions that will transform how events are delivered sustainably.

 **Daniel Gribbin,**
Sustainability Leader
at Deloitte Middle East

The Hero Dubai Desert Classic has always looked to collaborate with like-minded partners and leaders in their industry. Deloitte with their commitment to sustainability throughout business were the ideal partner to take us to the next level. Their knowledge and insight helped us take the Green Incubator Challenge from a concept to a relevant activation and project. Their professionalism and drive to make the challenge a success matched ours and the result from the inaugural year exceed expectations. We look forward to extending this partnership and making a real impact via these sustainable initiatives.

 **Simon Corkill,**
Executive Tournament
Director for the Hero
Dubai Desert Classic



The finalists highlights:
innovative solutions driving sustainability

Takeback | Reusable cup system (India)



Takeback replaces single use cups at large events with a reusable hydration system based on deposit return models and tracked reuse cycles. Cups can be washed and reused more than 50 times.



Impact



Reduces large volumes of event waste while enabling circular beverage systems.

GreenFair AI | Sustainability monitoring platform



GreenFair AI provides a digital platform that tracks waste, vendor activity, and environmental performance during events through real time dashboards.



Impact



Helps organizers monitor waste streams and improve sustainability during live events.

P3Global | AI cooling optimization



P3Global uses AI and digital twin modelling to optimize cooling systems in large venues by predicting demand and adjusting cooling schedules.



Impact



Achieved energy savings equivalent to 737,500 AED annually at Coca Cola Arena.

Green Rock Group | Compostable food packaging



Green Rock Group develops PFAS free packaging that can be recycled as paper or composted with food waste, replacing plastic-based materials.



Impact



Reduces plastic waste in food service and event operations.

Untap! | Atmospheric water generation



Untap produces drinking water by capturing condensation from air conditioning systems using modular solar powered units.



Impact



Reduces plastic bottle use while providing a sustainable water source.



The winner: Notpla

Notpla develops packaging materials derived from seaweed that naturally biodegrade without leaving microplastics. Their products replace single-use plastics with materials that are home compostable and PFAS-free. Already used at major venues including The O2 Arena and Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, the solution delivers significantly lower emissions than conventional plastics.



Impact

79↓% CO₂e

compared with traditional plastic packaging.

Industry perspectives: Hassan Malik
on sport's next growth phase

Hassan Malik, Sports Sector Leader, speaks on how sport is becoming a strategic investment priority across the Middle East, serving broader economic and social objectives. Beyond attracting fans, major sporting events are helping create diverse entertainment experiences for residents, families and international visitors alike.

He notes that mega-events are evolving into digitally enabled, fan-centric experiences designed to deepen engagement and unlock new revenue streams. Personalization, immersive technology and seamless customer journeys are increasingly central to event success. Malik also highlights how stadiums are being reimaged as year-round entertainment destinations. Through enhanced food and beverage offerings, AR/VR experiences and smarter crowd-flow management, venues are extending their value beyond matchdays to host concerts, cultural programming and other large-scale events.

Technology, he adds, is transforming how sport is consumed, both inside the venue and at home. Data-driven insights are enabling more personalized experiences, stronger audience understanding and new forms of engagement. Broader participation categories is on the rise, particularly women's sport, which continues to attract growing investment and attention.

As the sector evolves, Malik emphasizes that sustainability and social impact are becoming increasingly important considerations for fans, investors, and organizers, presenting a significant opportunity for the region.

Toward a new standard for
sustainability:

The Green Incubator Challenge demonstrates that sustainable transformation in the sports events sector is not achieved through isolated initiatives, but through structured collaboration, measurable frameworks, and an openness to reimagine how events are designed and delivered. As environmental expectations continue to evolve, leading tournaments and event organizers have an opportunity, a responsibility, to embed innovation at the core of their operational and commercial strategies.

By convening entrepreneurs, sponsors, regulators, and industry leaders within a disciplined evaluation model, sport platforms can accelerate scalable solutions that extend far beyond a single event. The integration of innovations such as circular materials, resource-efficient systems, and carbon-reduction technologies signals a broader shift toward infrastructure-level sustainability rather than mere symbolic action.

Deloitte remains committed to supporting this transition, working alongside global tournament platforms, partners, and innovators to design governance frameworks, assess measurable impact, and scale solutions across markets and sectors. As the expectations and pressures placed on global sporting institutions continue to rise, the path forward will belong to those who treat sustainability not as a feature of the event, but as a defining pillar of its foundation.

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