

Winning the Attention Economy

How sports organizations convert scrollers into lifelong fans.

For decades, sports organizations could rely on the live event as the primary gateway to fandom. Today that journey looks very different.

For younger audiences, fandom is increasingly being shaped before they ever tune into a live broadcast.

The challenge is distribution.

THE FAN JOURNEY HAS CHANGED

Traditional fan journey

Watch live match via traditional media channels.



Become a Fan

One step, passive conversion

VS

New Fan Journey

- Social Discovery
- Short-Form Engagement
- Fan Conversion
- Long-Term Fandom



62% of sports fans say they enjoy watching sport on social media more than traditional TV, and **50%** prefer short-form content.
(Mediapost)

THE FOUR LEVERS OF THE NEW FAN JOURNEY

SOCIAL DISCOVERY

The algorithm surfaces a 45-second clip.

A viewer in São Paulo sees it on their 'For You' page, without ever searching for it.



FAN CONVERSION

A month later they're seeking out full highlights and subscribing to club channels.

Interest converts to loyalty.

 **SUBSCRIBE**

SHORT-FORM ENGAGEMENT

They follow the account.

Watch three more clips.

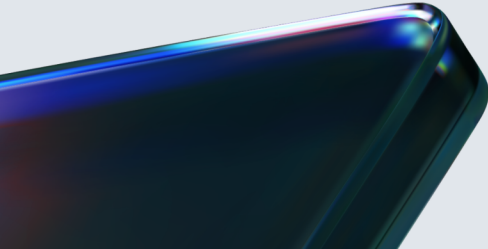
Engagement grows through content, not through broadcast exposure.

FOLLOW

LONG-TERM FANDOM

Six months later, they're watching live.

The live event is the destination, it is no longer the starting point.





NBA, MLB, and NHL are already scaling creator and social-first strategies to reach younger audiences – recognising that the **journey to live viewership now begins on social platforms**, not in front a broadcast.

Source: AP NEWS

The Attention Gap

Most organizations are optimizing for the wrong end of the funnel.

Being absent from where audiences spend time isn't a neutral choice. It's a competitive loss.

Every moment a younger audience spends with a creator or entertainment platform is a moment of potential fandom that sport didn't claim.

WHERE INVESTMENT GOES.

End-of-funnel focus

Most rights holders naturally gravitate towards what they can see and measure.

- Match day experience investment
- Broadcast production quality
- Premium OTT platforms
- Traditional media partnerships



WHERE FUTURE FANS ARE.

Start-of-funnel reality

Younger audiences are forming new fandoms, often on platforms sports organisations have previously underinvested in.

- TikTok FYP and Reels
- Athlete-led social channels
- Creator and influencer content
- Short form video content



Distribution is now as strategic as production quality.

A beautifully produced documentary behind a paywall no one knows about is worth less than a rough-and-ready clip shared a million times.

The New Playbook

Four levers to win attention

Attention, once captured at the top of the funnel, compounds.

A **follower today**, is a **subscriber tomorrow** and a **ticket buyer next year**.

Short-Form Content at Scale

This is about treating social as a primary distribution channel from the start.



The question isn't "how do we cut this down for Instagram?"



It's "what is the most shareable moment, and how quickly can it reach the right people?"

Athlete storytelling

The creator economy figured this out before sport did: people follow people before they follow things.



It gives new audiences something human to latch onto before they've developed loyalty to a club or competition.

Speed is the competitive edge.



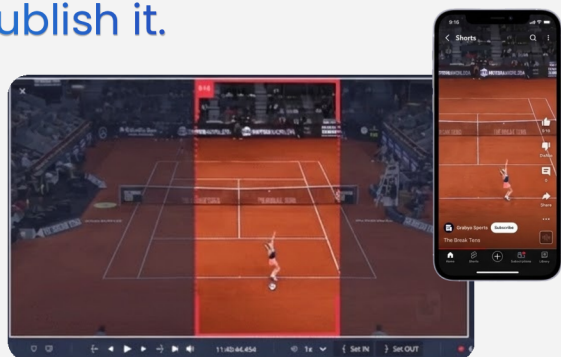
The organisation that clips a decisive moment and publishes within minutes wins the cultural moment.

80%

of Gen Z sports fans follow athletes online, with athlete content influencing what they watch & buy. (*Deloitte*)

Live Clipping

The biggest barrier to short-form content at scale has always been resource. Every clip traditionally requires someone to identify the moment, edit it, format it and publish it.



AI and metadata change the economics.

By identifying key moments in real time and packaging them with human editorial oversight, authentic storytelling can scale without scaling headcount.

Personalized by platform

Not every platform rewards the same content. Each has its own grammar, audience expectations and algorithm logic.



Those that build workflows to produce platform-native variants, same story, different execution, will consistently outperform.

Personalisation at the distribution layer is a real competitive advantage.

Platform Intelligence

Each platform has its own story.



TikTok favours raw, reactive, first-person content. The 'For You' page surfaces moments to audiences who've never searched for you, your biggest discovery opportunity. The starting point of the fan journey.



Instagram rewards visual quality and personal identity. Audiences engage with content that reflects lifestyle, personality and aspiration. Strong for athlete lifestyle content and behind-the-scenes moments.



Moves at the speed of commentary and reaction. Audiences come to the platform for live moments, hot takes and real-time cultural conversation. The brands that join the conversation outperform those that simply broadcast.



YouTube rewards retention and repeat viewing, enabling creators to build ongoing narratives rather than isolated moments. Strong for athlete storytelling, match breakdowns and recurring content series.

The cost of one-size-fits-all distribution:

TikTok | Discovery & personality

Miss younger audiences and new fans

Instagram | Narrative & identity

Lower engagement and weaker affinity

X | Real time reaction & conversation

Miss cultural moments and relevance

YouTube | Depth & storytelling

Reduced watch time and subscriber growth



**Meet fans at the
start of the journey.**

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