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The 2022 FIFA World Cup as a Catalyst for Labor Standards of Sport Professionals? A New Institutional Theory Perspective

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**THE 2022 FIFA WORLD CUP AS A CATALYST FOR LABOR
STANDARDS OF SPORT PROFESSIONALS?
A NEW INSTITUTIONAL THEORY PERSPECTIVE**

ILIAS BANTEKAS* & MARKO BEGOVIĆ**

ABSTRACT

Following Qatar's successful bid to host the World Cup, it underwent pressure primarily as a result of concerns about the status of migrant workers and their role in developing the required infrastructure for this major international competition. Although Qatar has undertaken major legislative reforms concerning its labor regime, criticisms have not diminished, along with a general debate about the minimum set of standards for a successful mega sporting event. The specific interest of this paper lies in highlighting the status and conditions of expatriate workers employed as sport professionals, especially in the private sector (to the degree that a private sector in fact exists in the country). This paper aims to address how the organization of the World Cup impacted the working conditions of coaches as sport professionals in Qatar. The theoretical foundation of this article is based on so-called new institutionalism, merging normative institutionalism – and focusing on norms and values embodied in sport organization - with historical institutionalism, which reflects intact institutional frameworks and rational choice institutionalism. New institutionalism demonstrates a pattern of particular decision-making processes through otherwise informal practices. It is a pioneering study with a view to understanding the extent of reforms within a particular sports ecosystem. The results indicate a discrepancy between government and private-related sport organizations in terms of the predictability of labor relations and income generation. It further identifies limitations in terms of individual professional and personal development within the private sport sector.

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INTRODUCTION

Qatar’s sports ecosystem is structured around two main stakeholders. Nominally, the Ministry of Culture and Sport represents a major state institution for the development of sport, while the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) serves as an umbrella sport organization.¹ The responsibility between these two stakeholders is shared, in the sense that the ministry is in charge of sport for all and sport-related infrastructure, while the QOC in conjunction with the National Sport Federations (NSF) and Aspire Academy² is responsible for the development of high-performance sport. In addition, an ad hoc and hybrid stakeholder, the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy³ was established with the purpose of managing the preparation, organization and implementation of activities associated with the 2022 FIFA World Cup and its aftermath and legacy, following which it is in a process of transformation if not outright dissolution. The major political landmark underlying the hosting of the World Cup is based around nation building or transformation/modernization of society,⁴ a sectorial approach closely aligned with the Qatar National Vision 2030.⁵ This policy document, which is explored more fully further below, is

¹ Zachary Calo, Kim Moloney & Kamilla Swart, *Legal-Administrative Implications of International Sport for Public Administration*, ADMIN. THEORY & PRACTICE, Dec. 7, 2023, at 2-3 (discussing the legal and political framework of sport regulation in Qatar, both before and following the hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup).

² *About Aspire Academy*, ASPIRE ACADEMY, <https://www.aspire.qa/Home> [<https://perma.cc/A3DR-63B3>].

³ This entity is discussed further below. Although it had absolute control over every aspect of the 2022 FIFA World Cup and is still operational, its website seems to have disappeared. *See Sports Sector Strategy: 2011-2016 QATAR OLYMPIC COMM.* (2d ed., July 2011), https://www.aspire.qa/Document/Sports_sector_strategy_final-English.pdf.

⁴ *See Hiba Khodr, Exploring the Driving Factors Behind the Event Strategy in Qatar: A Case Study of the 15th Asian Games*, 3 INT’L J. EVENT & FESTIVAL MGMT. 81, 95 (2012).

⁵ *See Nadine Scharfenot, Urban Development and Social Change in Qatar: The Qatar National Vision 2030 and the 2022 FIFA World Cup*, 2 J. ARABIAN STUD. 209, 210 (2012) (who explore the place of sports and sports organization in the overall context of the 2030 Qatar National Vision). The FIFA World Cup was part of the Qatari 2011-16 National Development Strategy, which itself was part of the Qatar National Vision. *See Qatar National Development Strategy 2011–2016: Summary of Programmes*, QATAR GEN. SECRETARIAT FOR DEV. PLAN. (Sep. 2011), https://www.psa.gov.qa/en/nds1/Documents/NDS_ENGLISH_SUMMARY.pdf [<https://perma.cc/MZ4D-TJV7>].

overstretched between sport for development and high-performance sport.⁶ In practice, the focus ranges from hosting major international events (for example, FIFA World Cup 2022) and sponsoring sport organizations (for example, FC Barcelona)⁷ and purchasing international football clubs (for example, Paris Saint-Germain).⁸

The legal framework in the field of sport is still in development and relies mainly on the Law for Regulating Sport Clubs, adopted in 2011, which regulates the establishment of sport clubs, governance and organizational structures.⁹ The law regulates the establishment of private/commercial sport entities – clubs and academies – ultimately dictating that the ministry coordinates with the specific NSF in terms of technical requirements for a given sport.¹⁰ The legal modalities for setting up a sports or other organization in the form of a corporate entity, including shareholding requirements, is discussed below in another section. As this paper aims to address how the organization of the 2022 FIFA World Cup impacted the working position of sport professionals beyond football, the authors employed a mixed-method approach. The first phase includes a document analysis in order to determine a baseline for conducting focus groups as a second phase. The article draws on the different schools of contemporary institutionalism in order to highlight the dynamics and correlations within the sport-related private sector. This article will explain the legal framework concerning sport professionals, namely coaching professionals in Qatar, which in turn reflects a specific dimension of the domestic sport ecosystem. Next, the article will summarize major outputs of labor-related reforms associated with the organization of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Further, experiences from sport professionals will be presented focusing on labor-related contexts from a variety of focus groups.

The article is organized as follows: Section 2 undertakes a brief analysis of new institutionalism in order to situate Qatar's labor reforms and to further suggest that the labor status of sports coaches is inconsistent with formal law. Section 3 goes on to explore Qatar's legal framework from its status as a British protectorate in the early twentieth century until its successful bid for the World Cup, including the place of sport in its laws. Section 4 examines the position of sports coaches in the legal framework of Qatar, including the *kafala* sponsorship system and the creation of sports corporate entities. Section 5 discusses the legacy of the FIFA World Cup in hastening labor reform in the country, suggesting that the progression was both visible and fast. Section 6 showcases the empirical dimension of this paper, chiefly through a series of interviews with sports professionals which records their personal experiences with private sports operators.

⁶ Scott R. Jedlicka, Spencer Harris & Danyel Reiche, *State Intervention in Sport: A Comparative Analysis of Regime Types*, 12 INT'L J. SPORT POL'Y & POL. 563, 565 (2020).

⁷ *Barcelona Agree 150 Million Euros Shirt Sponsor Deal with Qatar Foundation*, THE GUARDIAN (Dec. 10, 2010), <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2010/dec/10/barcelona-shirt-sponsor-qatar-foundation> [https://perma.cc/3SNQ-S8RF].

⁸ Qatar Sports Investment (QSI), which is a subsidiary of Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) purchased in 2011 approximately 70 per cent of Paris St Germain's shares. See Mauricio Alensar, *Who Owns Paris St Germain Now? How Much did Qatar Sports Investments Pay Colony Capital in 2011?* CITY AM (Dec. 2, 2023), <https://www.cityam.com/who-owns-paris-saint-germain-now-how-much-did-qatar-sports-investments-pay-colony-capital-in-2011/> [https://perma.cc/PGJ9-U3L9].

⁹ Law No 11 on Regulating Sports Clubs (2011), <https://www.almeezan.qa/LawPage.aspx?id=2476&language=en#>.

¹⁰ *Id.* at Art. 53.

I. THE CONTRIBUTION OF NEW INSTITUTIONALISM TO THE 'ACTUAL' NORMS UNDERPINNING THE LABOR STATUS OF SPORTS COACHES

The empirical contribution of new institutionalism will dissect institutional dynamics, particularly in locating the status of sport professionals within the private sector. The school of new institutionalism represents a theoretical framework for this paper, primarily due to its nature and scope. Within this framework, researchers are able to understand drivers and actors within institutions as they shape structures and policies.¹¹ Besides the three schools of new institutionalism, namely historical, rational choice and sociological –particular attention is given to normative institutionalism as it focuses on norms and values within institutions. In order to understand how the organization of the World Cup impacted the working status or conditions for sport professionals beyond football, norms and values represent and determine components equal to institutionalization and organizational structures. Therefore, as a process institutionalization represents a product of rules.¹² The power structure between relations and influence are key drivers for institutionalization, practiced through a normative framework with a view to developing, maintaining, or disrupting institutional arrangements.¹³ As a product, institutions are diverse and fluid both in a non-formal or a rigid form and depend on political environments.¹⁴

In the context of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, the reform undertaken presupposes significant legislative changes that affected not only institutional development and its dynamics, but also different stakeholders.¹⁵ In practice, the processes of organization, cooperation, coordination or subordination create both formal and informal rules.¹⁶ Having in mind the definition of institutions as a product of human and social interactions, new institutionalism aims to grasp informal rules and structures and their interplay with formal ones.¹⁷ The latter presupposes the development of an institutional relationship within regulatory regimes.¹⁸ That said, the interplay between institutional development and its correlation with normative beliefs, it facilitates the shaping of institutions and influence decision-making processes as part of a larger socio-political landscape.

¹¹ RICHARD PARRISH, *SPORTS LAW AND POLICY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION*, 54 (Simon Bulmer, Peter Humphreys & Mick Moran eds., 2003).

¹² Ota Weinberger, *Inštitucionalizmus. Nová Teória Konania Práva a Demokracie [INSTITUTIONALISM: A NEW THEORY OF ACTION, LAW AND DEMOCRACY]* 50 *Normative Institutionalism* 89-105 (Eva Bolfikova & Jana Frenova, eds., 1995).

¹³ Thomas B. Lawrence, Monika I. Winn & P. Devereaux Jennings, *The Temporal Dynamics of Institutionalization*, 26 *ACADEMY MGMT. REV.* 624, 628 (2001).

¹⁴ Kenneth A. Shepsle & Barry A. Weingast, *Institutionalizing Majority Rule: A Social Choice Theory with Policy Implications*, 78 *AM. ECON. REV.* 357-72 (1982).

¹⁵ Frank Schimmelfennig, *The Normative Origins of Democracy in the European Union: Toward a Transformationalist Theory of Democratization*, 2 *EUR. POL. SCI. REV.* 211, 233 (2010).

¹⁶ Eva Bolfiková, Daniela Hrehová & Jana Frenová, *Normative Institutionalism, Institutional Basis of Organizing*, 50 *SOCIOLOGIJA I PROSOR* 89,91 (2012).

¹⁷ Marko Begović, Mariann Bardocz-Bencsik, Carole A. Oglesby & Tamás Dóczy, *The Impact of Political Pressures on Sport and Athletes in Montenegro*, 24 *SPORT IN SOCIETY* 1200, 1203 (2021).

¹⁸ Paul J. DiMaggio & Walter W. Powell, *The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Institutional Fields*, 48 *AM. SOCIO. REV.* 147, 160 (1983).

The landscape is of particular importance, as it often gives rise to dispute between the law-on-the-books, clear regulatory frameworks, with law-in action influenced and interpreted among others by political actors. Of course, this discussion is not new per se, however, it is still relevant and contributes to legal realism.¹⁹ Despite the notion that legal systems are operating within tangible or formal structures, the gap between adoption and practice (implementation) in action is filled by the conceptual framework of institutionalism.²⁰ The latter is often operationalized through the interaction of formal institutions endowed with the ability to exercise beyond formal, employing informal norms and practices. This interdisciplinary view is based on the view that legislative regimes are incorporated as socially constructive frameworks within broader institutional environments. This constellation represents a potential fertile soil for exploitation and manipulation of the underlying regulatory frameworks by dominant societal actors through informal processes. Therefore, this complex inter-relationship between formal legal frameworks and informal regulatory regimes reflects the impact upon constructed and societally shaped institutional ecosystems.²¹ Here public, non-governmental, quasi-governmental, and informal actors jointly constitute, influence and direct institutional relationships that create law or quasi-judicial outcomes. Bureaucratization, as in the light Weberian model, presupposes monopoly of legal regimes so long as influential actors exist on the ground and which possess the capacity and institutions to induce isomorphic processes.

Contributing or maintaining institutional stability is enabled often through transformation of informal practices into formal legal regimes. Thus, the institutional practice often overrides and bypasses regulatory frameworks to maintain institutional stability and to facilitate potential reform processes that could lead institutional change. Therefore, institutional stability is conditioned by the relationship between organizational structure and cultural patterns and does not necessarily exclude potential institutional contradictions. It is of particular importance to highlight that the way institutional contradictions do occur, unfold, evolve and are ultimately resolved depends on socio-political or cultural settings. This is very important for Qatar as it is a country comprised of more than 90 per cent expatriate population living and working within an institutional environment with flexible boundaries between public and private sectors in the field of sports. Historical institutionalism suggests that over time, informal practices are institutionalized under the political engagement providing both legality and legitimacy of operations. This process is conditioned by organizational structures and institutional capacities through which key stakeholders exercise these transitions under the rational-choice institutionalism doctrine.²² It further suggests that informal practices often override formal capacity in rearranging or repositioning institutional relationships. Therefore, it would be premature to observe these changes from the traditional view that

¹⁹ Roscoe Pound, *Law in Books and Law in Action* 44 AM. L. REV. 12 (1910) in Jean-Louis Halperin, *Law in Books and Law in Action: The Problem of Legal Change*, 64 ME. L. REV. 45 (2011).

²⁰ Rikki Abzug, Stephen J. Mezias, *The Fragmented State and Due Process Protections in Organizations: The Case of Comparable Worth*, 4 ORG. SCI. 433, 435 (1993); see also Begović, et al., *supra* note 17, at 1208.

²¹ Rogers M. Smith, *Political Jurisprudence: The "New Institutionalism," and the Future of Public Law*, 82 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 89, 91 (1988).

²² JAN OLSSON, SUBVERSION IN INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE AND STABILITY: A NEGLECTED MECHANISM, 85 (2016).

formal legal regimes play a central role, primarily as it is enforced in very heterogeneous and contested areas and shaped by cultural patterns.²³ Moreover, questions of jurisdiction and shared/transferred competencies reflect the existence of institutional maturity and administrative capacity in both coherent and unstructured institutional environments.²⁴ Consequently, in order to analyze and understand the relevant repercussions at macro level, it is necessary to observe organizational structures, institutional relationships and their individual actions.

As societally driven institutions, sport organizations are subject to particular legislative frameworks and accept to adhere to rules that do not relate to sports, reflected.²⁵ Within the sport ecosystem that includes public, non-profit and for-profit entities, the development of institutional arrangements affects their stakeholders diversely.²⁶ Often, stakeholders are subject to varying types of pressures. The political/public/state monopoly over the use of power refers to a variety of coercive pressures; the normative refers to norms broadly accepted within society, while mimetic pressures are related to imitation in order to comply with the socio-political realm.²⁷ As the position of sport professionals outside of football constitutes the chief concern of this article, it is important to address: (i) the evolution of sport-related institutions, (ii) their normative framework, and (iii) the role of stakeholders in changing, maintaining or disrupting institutions. The interplay between these processes is reflected through institutional logic, in a sense that a sport ecosystem is (re)constructed in the context of Qatar around the 2022 FIFA World Cup, with a major focus on football in terms of allocation of resources and organizational efforts. Moreover, in order to draw upon the dynamics of institutional change or evaluation, it is important to reflect upon the concept of institutional memory – human resources, policies and procedures along with the archive – which entails an understanding of current affairs within a sport organization.²⁸ The institutional memory represents a crucial orientation in following institutional dynamics both constructive and disruptive, as both of these processes are not exclusive by their nature.²⁹ The frequent changes or rotation of employees or procedures, as well as organizational changes are key factors contributing to the loss of institutional memory.³⁰

²³ OTA WEINBERGER, *Law, Institution and Legal Politics: Fundamental Problems of Legal Theory and Social Philosophy*, 14 LAW & PHIL. LIBR. 1, 111–32 (1991) (discussing how new institutionalism operates in the context of law and politics).

²⁴ Austin Sarat, *The Maturation of Political Jurisprudence*, 36 W. POL. Q. 551, 556 (1983).

²⁵ Marko Begović, *Corruption in Sports: Lessons from Montenegro*, 58 INT'L REV. SOCIO. SPORT. 126, 127, 141–42 (2023).

²⁶ Wenkai He, *Paths Toward the Modern Fiscal State: England (1642-1752), Japan (1868-1895) and China (1850-1911)* (Sept. 6, 2007) (Ph.D. thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology) (on file with Massachusetts Institute of Technology Library).

²⁷ DiMaggio & Powell, *supra* note 18, at 160.

²⁸ See Christopher Pollitt, *New Labour's Re-organization: Hyper-modernism and the Costs of Reform – Cautionary Tale*, 9 PUB. MGMT REV. 529, 543 (2007); see also Begović et al., *supra* note 17, at 1216.

²⁹ Alfons van Marrewijk, Sierk Ybema, Karen Smits, Stewart Clegg & Tyrone Clegg, *Clash of Titans: Temporal Organizing and Collaborative Dynamics in the Panama Canal Megaproject*, 37 ORG. STUD. 1745, 1769 (2016).

³⁰ CHRISTOPHER POLLITT, *TIME, POLICY, MANAGEMENT: GOVERNING WITH THE PAST* 161 (2008).

II. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF QATAR AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL ROLE OF SPORT

Qatar has a relatively vibrant constitutional history, even if brief compared to other nations. The *Pax Britannica* in this region was established through a series of maritime defense treaties, collectively known as the Maritime Truce, which Britain signed with the rulers of the Trucial States in 1835, Bahrain in 1861, Kuwait in 1899 (de facto), and Qatar in 1916.³¹ The rulers of Gulf kingdoms were compelled to enter into these agreements with the British Crown as a means of disengaging from Ottoman oppression and with an assumption that at some future point they would be achieve viable self-governance.³² Gulf rulers signed other treaties with the British Governments of Bombay and India, the most important of which were the Exclusive Agreements, binding them into exclusive treaty relations with, and ceding control of their external affairs to, the British Crown. These were signed by the Ruler of Bahrain in 1880 and 1892, the rulers of the Trucial States in 1888 and 1892, the Ruler of Kuwait in 1899, the Saudi Ruler of Najd and Hasa in 1915 (annulled in 1927),³³ and finally the Ruler of Qatar in 1916.³⁴ In 1916, the ruler of Qatar, Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim Al Thani, signed a protection treaty with Britain that included eleven clauses. However, in order to safeguard the sovereignty of the state, Sheikh Abdullah rejected three clauses put forward by the British, namely: a) the seventh clause that allowed British nationals to compete with the local population in the pearl trade; b) the eighth clause that provided for the appointment of a British resident Commissioner in Qatar; c) and finally, the ninth clause that allowed Britain to establish a post and telegraph office in the country. Sheikh Abdulla considered these clauses to threaten the sovereignty of the country, and so only eight of the original eleven clauses remained. This agreement remained steadfast for nearly twenty years, until in 1935 it was renewed with the addition of several new clauses. By the early 1950s, the Qatari public, aided by the Arab nationalist ideals espoused by Gamal Abdel Nasser, demanded the end of colonial rule and the advent of constitutionalism in the country.³⁵ Just like other Gulf states at the

³¹ See Stephen J. Ramos, *An Historical Examination of Territory and Infrastructure in the Trucial States*, in GATEWAYS TO THE WORLD: PORT CITIES IN THE PERSIAN GULF 93 (Mehran Kamrava, ed. 2016); Robert Landen, *The Arab Gulf in the Arab World 1800–1918*, 1 ARAB AFF. 57, 59 (1986).

³² See James Onley, *The Politics of Protection in the Gulf: The Arab Rulers and the British Resident in the Nineteenth Century*, 6 NEW ARABIAN STUD. 30, 52 (2004) (referring to tribute relations and subsequent tribute payments by some sheikhdoms, particularly Bahrain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries).

³³ David Roberts, *The Consequences of the Exclusive Treaties: A British View*, THE ARAB GULF AND THE WEST (B.R. Pridham ed., 1985); Husain Al-Baharna, THE LEGAL STATUS OF THE ARABIAN GULF STATES: A STUDY OF THEIR TREATY RELATIONS AND THEIR INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS 1–36 (1968). On January 15, 1902, Ibn Saud too Riyadh from the Rashid tribe. In 1913, his forces captured the province of Al-Hasa from the Ottoman Turks. In 1922, he completed his conquest of the Nejd, and in 1925, he conquered the Hijaz. In 1932, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was proclaimed with Ibn Saud as king.

³⁴ See James Onley, *Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms 1820–1971: The Politics of Protection*, Center for International and Regional Studies (2009). Consequently, the British authorities established two parallel systems of justice. Colonial/civil courts administered English and colonial laws, whereas local courts were entrusted with the administration of Islamic law. Nizar Hamzeh, *Qatar: The Duality of the Legal System*, 30 MIDDLE E. STUD. 79 (1994).

³⁵ ADEED DAWISHA, ARAB NATIONALISM IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: FROM TRIUMPH TO DESPAIR 312 (2003); ELIE PODEH, THE QUEST FOR HEGEMONY IN THE ARAB WORLD: THE STRUGGLE OVER THE BAGHDAD PACT (1995).

time, Qataris established a variety of cultural and sports societies with the underlying aim of independence and possibly Pan-Arab unification.

Qatar became independent from British rule in 1971 and quickly set out to draft its own constitution, which was issued in 1972. It is instructive that this instrument sets out important guiding principles that echo the ideals of the Arab nationalist movement. The desire for a unified Arab nation-state is outlined in Part 2, article 5 (b), which states that:

The State believes that the union of Arab countries in the region is a fateful need dictated by the common higher Arab interests in the region in special, and in the grand Arab homeland in general. The State shall devote all possible efforts to support such union and work to achieve it in the most appropriate image gathering between it and those sister countries which has strongest ties, most powerful and most originality with them.³⁶

A similar clear expression of support for the Arab nationalist cause is in the following paragraph, which asserts that:

The State believes in the brotherhood of all Arabs and works on strengthening solidarity with its sister Arab countries. The State seeks to strengthen the unity of the Arab nation and supports the joint effort to serve and support the Arab issues and interests. The State fully supports the Arab League and the higher goals which its charter aims to achieve them.³⁷

From 1972 onwards, Qatar sought to find its place in the Gulf region, the Arab sphere, and the world at large. This process coincided with its newly found wealth in natural gas.³⁸ Since the early to mid-1990s, Qatar set itself on an ambitious path to establish world class institutions with a view to diversifying its dependence on natural resources and as a means of becoming a knowledge-based society. Despite its short history, Qatar boasts is among the top investors globally in education,³⁹ with entities such as Qatar Foundation,⁴⁰ one of the largest media networks comparable to those in Europe and the USA, namely the Al Jazeera Media Corporation,⁴¹ and a series of state-owned companies with

³⁶ Qatari Amended Provisional Constitution of 1972, Preamble.

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Looking Back to How Exploration Started in Qatar*, GULF TIMES, (Dec. 28, 2016), <https://www.gulf-times.com/story/526227/looking-back-to-how-oil-exploration-started-in-qatar> [<https://perma.cc/8R52-KPZM>] (Oil was first discovered in 1939).

³⁹ In 2021, Qatar allocated an estimated \$4.89 billion to education and continues to invest in the ever-expanding education sector, currently estimated at \$2.5 billion and projected to grow to \$2.8 billion in the next two years. It is significant to note in order to put the numbers into perspective that the Qatari indigenous population is roughly 300,000. *See* US International Trade Administration, 'Qatar, Education and Training Equipment' (Nov. 23, 2022), <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/qatar-education-training-and-equipment#:~:text=In%202021%2C%20Qatar%20allocated%20an.in%20the%20next%20two%20years> [<https://perma.cc/LC7C-MMK2>].

⁴⁰ Qatar Foundation, <https://www.qf.org.qa> (last visited Apr. 16, 2024).

⁴¹ Al Jazeera Media Network, <https://network.aljazeera.net/en> [<https://perma.cc/H3XH-SZQB>] (last visited Apr. 16, 2024).

operations and investments throughout the globe.⁴² Qatar has established a special economic zone, namely the Qatar Financial Centre (QFC)⁴³ and is the key mediator not only in the Gulf but across the globe.⁴⁴ It mediated the US-Taliban agreement of 2020,⁴⁵ and more recently the Hamas-Israel ceasefire agreement of November 2023.⁴⁶ Just like its Gulf neighbors, Qatar's regional and global ambitions are reflected in a policy instrument known as 'Vision'. Visions set out mega-targets spanning a ten- or fifteen-year period. Although Visions seem to reflect mere policy objectives, they are treated by Gulf nations as constitutional frameworks, and it is clearly understood that all branches of government must work towards fulfilling them. This naturally has an impact on institutional bylaws as well as how laws in general are construed and implemented.⁴⁷ One of the key building blocks of Qatar's 2030 Vision is the hosting of mega-sporting events and general investment of sports among its three key priorities.⁴⁸ Besides the FIFA 2022 World Cup, Qatar hosts an event in the Association Tennis Professionals (ATP) tournament,⁴⁹ Formula 1,⁵⁰ and was recently awarded the 2027 FIBA World Cup in basketball.⁵¹

It is important to understand the role of Qatar's Vision in domestic law reform. It is generally thought that countries lacking Western democratic credentials shy away from the spotlight for fear of being constantly branded as

⁴² For Qatar its investment vehicle is the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA). Although financial data is missing from its website, its estimated assets are 300 billion USD, which ranks it 11th among all sovereign wealth funds according to the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), *QIA: Sovereign Wealth Fund in Qatar, Middle East*, <https://www.swfinstitute.org/profile/598cdaa60124e9fd2d05bc5a> [<https://perma.cc/RJQ4-L6NC>](last visited Apr. 16, 2024).

⁴³ QFC, <https://www.qfc.qa/en> [<https://perma.cc/H7DU-GHGX>]. See Zain Al Abdin Sharar & M Al Khulaifi, *The Courts in Qatar Financial Center and Dubai International Financial Center: A Comparative Analysis*, 46 H.K. L.J. 529, 529 (2016).

⁴⁴ In fact "[m]ediating disputes between conflicting parties to achieve peaceful resolutions" is a stated priority in Qatar's official foreign policy, State of Qatar Government Communications Office, Foreign Policy, <https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/focus/foreign-policy-en/>; See also *Trump Praises Qatar's Efforts on Terrorist Financing*, BBC, (Apr. 11, 2018), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-43724576> [<https://perma.cc/KM3T-DM8W>] (this is an important state because Gulf states were routinely accused in the West for filtering financial resources to terror groups).

⁴⁵ Agreement For Bringing Peace to Afghanistan, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Agreement-For-Bringing-Peace-to-Afghanistan-02.29.20.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/9BP2-3XUR>].

⁴⁶ *Palestinian Joy as Israel Agrees Gaza Truce*, AL JAZEERA, (Aug. 27, 2014), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2014/8/27/palestinian-joy-as-israel-agrees-gaza-truce> [<https://perma.cc/R33Q-HJNK>]; *Statement by President Biden on the Ceasefire in Gaza*, WHITE HOUSE (Aug. 7, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/08/07/statement-by-president-biden-on-the-ceasefire-in-gaza/> [<https://perma.cc/9YH3-QCQS>].

⁴⁷ It is fair to include alongside Qatar's National Vision of 2030, also its the Bid Book, the Qatar National Development Strategy, the Qatar 2022 Strategic Plan, and the Legacy Framework of the Supreme Committee for the Delivery of Legacy. See Ilias Bantekas, *Legislating through Policy Statements: The Authority of National Visions in the Arabian Gulf* 44 STATUTE L. REV. 1, 3 (2023).

⁴⁸ Paul Michael Brannagan & Richard Giulianotti, *Soft Power and Soft Disempowerment: Qatar, Global Sport and Football's 2022 World Cup Finals* 34 LEISURE STUD. 703, 705 (2014).

⁴⁹ Qatar Exxon Mobil ATP Tour, <https://www.atptour.com/en/tournaments/doha/451/overview> [<https://perma.cc/9XGV-QW2F>]; See *Deutscher Tennis Bund v. ATP Tour Inc.*, 610 F.3d 820, 824 (3d Cir. 2010), *cert. denied*, 562 U.S. 1064, 131, (confirming that the ATP can re-organize professional tournaments and relegate one or another to a lower tier without breaching anti-trust rules (in this case the Hamburg and Qatar tournaments)).

⁵⁰ Formula 1 World Championship Limited, *Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix 2023*, <https://www.formula1.com/en/racing/2023/Qatar/Circuit.html> [<https://perma.cc/F4YB-PSC8>] (last visited Apr. 17, 2024).

⁵¹ FIBA, *Qatar Announced as Host of the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027*, <https://www.fiba.basketball/news/qatar-announced-as-host-of-the-fiba-basketball-world-cup-2027> [<https://perma.cc/NSN7-4V9Q>].

authoritarian or have their human rights record paraded throughout the globe by governments and NGOs. Hence, where a country adopts a constitutional instrument that effectively imposes on itself global exposure through bidding for events such as the FIFA World Cup, or an international mediator role, it is inevitable that its human rights record will become a cause for greater global concern. As a result, it is clear to the Qatari leadership that in order to avoid criticism it will have to undertake extensive civil liberties and labor rights reforms.⁵² It should not be thought, however, that the assimilation of labor norms into a new state is an automatic process, even if its laws reflect international standards. This is very much a gradual process that cannot be achieved solely by legal transplants.⁵³

III. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF ALIEN SPORTS COACHES

In this context, the profession of coaching cannot easily be lumped together with the other professions in the Qatari and GCC labor market.⁵⁴ Throughout the GCC there is high demand for coaches by teams and clubs, as well as by individuals in the form of personal fitness or specialized training. Indeed, the latter represents a significant part of the overall fitness market in the West and is typically served by a combination of self-employed instructors, as well as part-time instructors that are employed full time elsewhere. The peculiarities of the GCC and Qatari market are explored further in the ensuing discussion of this section.

In Qatar, the growth of the private sports market has been mostly unregulated. There are several reasons for this, all of which affect the labor rights of professional coaches. The first reason is that associations other than corporate entities are prohibited, as already explained.⁵⁵ Secondly, there is no specific qualification framework or mandatory licensing regulations for coaches and sport professionals. This is particularly evident in respect of individual sports and other organized physical activities, such as fitness instruction.⁵⁶ Although there does not exist a physical education department in any Qatari university (at the time of writing), there are several courses on sports management run by state

⁵² For an analysis of the human rights potential of National Visions, see Eleni Polymenopoulou, *Human Rights in the Six States of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): from Vision to Reality* 3 CARDOZO INT'L COMP., POL'Y & ETHICAL L. REV. 929, 969 (2020).

⁵³ The literature on legal transplants is significant and rather consistent. While wholesale legal transplants without contextualization and serious nurturing have failed, structured transplants that are fed into the host system with a dedicated machinery have fared extremely well. See Ilias Bantekas, *Transplanting English Law in Asian Special Economic Zones: Law as Commodity*, 17 ASIAN J. COMPAR. L. 305, 306 (2022).

⁵⁴ The literature does not generally distinguish between the general labor force and sports professionals, let alone coaches. See Dantam Le, *Leveraging the ILO for Human Rights and Workers' Rights in International Sporting Events*, 42 HASTINGS COMM'N & ENT L.J. 171, 174 (2020).

⁵⁵ Self-employment is not regulated as such because only sponsored employment is permitted for expatriate workers, in accordance with Arts 18ff of Law No 4 of 2009. See Ryszard Cholewinski, *Understanding the Kafala Migrant Labor System in Qatar and the Middle East at Large*, GEO. J. INT'L AFF. (ONLINE) (Feb. 1, 2023), <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2023/02/01/the-kafala-system-a-conversation-with-ryszard-cholewinski/> [<https://perma.cc/RPA3-DD8A>].

⁵⁶ Qatar Skills is the official authority for professional certifications. There are no sports-related coaching or other programs on its roster. *Training Plan*, QATAR SKILLS, <https://qatarskills.com.qa/training-plan/> [<https://perma.cc/LU39-8N4S>].

entities,⁵⁷ thus demonstrating that sport managers are valued far higher than professional sports educators and coaches. Thus, non-profit organizations, whether for sport, culture, or other purposes, do not exist and if a sports academy or club were to be set up, it would have to assume a for-profit corporate form, in which case the non-profit aim would be lost (save if set up by the State itself).⁵⁸ An alien can only work in Qatar after accepting an offer of employment and where the employer has agreed to sponsor the alien with the consent of the Ministry of Labor.⁵⁹ It is highly unlikely in practice for a sports professional to be made a partner to a sports company. It would be expected that this would only occur where the alien makes a large financial contribution to the investment company. Nonetheless, even if this were to occur, such a business entity would be subject to several requirements under Qatari corporate law, chiefly that a Qatari partner hold 51 per cent of shares and be identified from the outset.⁶⁰ Exceptionally, these stringent capital requirements are missing in the Qatar Financial Center (a special economic zone),⁶¹ and in some other exceptional circumstances,⁶² but the authors are not aware that sports organizations can be set up there.

Secondly, Qatari labor law sets strict criteria even in the private sector concerning the salary ranges of employees from different countries. As a rule, and in order to avoid fraud and abuse of the labor system, only nationals from a select number of developing countries are eligible for manual labor work.⁶³ Europeans and workers from North and South America are typically employed

⁵⁷ Courses are run by the Qatar Olympic Academy, <https://www.qatarolympicacademy.org/diploma-courses/48>; Josoor Institute, *Diploma Programme in Sports Management*, <https://www.josoorinstitute.qa/education-development/courses/professional-diploma-programme/diploma-programme-sports-management> [<https://perma.cc/8UEC-BKN2>] (last visited Apr. 16, 2024); Hamad bin Khalifa University College of Science & Engineering, *Master of Science in Sport and Entertainment Management*, <https://www.hbku.edu.qa/en/cse/ms-sport-entertainment-management> [<https://perma.cc/78B2-2CBB>] (last visited Apr. 16, 2024).

⁵⁸ Fitness First, *Ongoing Educational Courses*, <https://qatar.fitnessfirstme.com/education/ongoing-education> [<https://perma.cc/76C4-29BY>] (last visited Apr. 16, 2024); IFPA, *Elevate Your Fitness Journey: Empowerment Through Education*, <https://www.ifpa-fitness.com> [<https://perma.cc/K7W9-HTTN>] (last visited Apr. 16, 2024). One of the few entities offering certified courses for sports professionals in a private capacity is Fitness First. This is a commercial enterprise, as is also the IFPA.

⁵⁹ Law no. 4 of 2009 Regarding Regulation of the Expatriates Entry, Departure, Residence and Sponsorship, Art. 18, https://www4.aucegypt.edu/CMRS/Files/Law_4_2009_2611.pdf [<https://perma.cc/VME5-EDJF>].

⁶⁰ This is a public policy requirement, as per the Qatari Court of Cassation Judgment 11/2015. This means that the parties cannot validly choose to waive it in favor of non-Qatari partners. Equally, By virtue of a Ministerial Decision no. 396 of 2017, foreign entities are permitted to set up wholly foreign owned representative trade offices (RTOs) in Qatar.

⁶¹ *Companies Regulation 2005*, QATAR FINANCIAL CENTRE 8 (Aug. 7, 2023) (article 2 makes it clear that shareholding requirements applicable elsewhere in the country do not apply there), <https://qfcr.en.thomsonreuters.com/rulebook/companies-regulations-2005> [<https://perma.cc/FXJ2-KZ76>].

⁶² Qatar Foreign Investment Law, Law No. 1/2019 allows for up to 100% foreign ownership in certain business sectors which are considered to be a priority for the Qatari Government.

⁶³ As part of its commitment to FIFA and worker demands, the government introduced in March of 2021 a non-discriminatory minimum monthly wage of 1,000 QAR, which amounts to around 275 USD, which also includes an obligation by the employer to provide free accommodation and food (or a minimum of 500 QAR for accommodation and 300 QAR for food). These regulations are reinforced with the appointment of a Minimum Wage Committee which is tasked with period assessment of wages based on inflation and living standards. Moreover, Law No 17 of 2018 set up the Workers' Support and Insurance Fund with the aim of raising sufficient funds in the event that a contractor was unable to pay wages, or where the business became insolvent. This adds another layer of protection to wage safety that was not available in the past. *Qatar's New Minimum Wage Enters into Force*, INT'L LABOUR ORG., (Mar. 19, 2021), https://www.ilo.org/beirut/countries/qatar/WCMS_775981/lang--en/index.htm [<https://perma.cc/G6BN-7CF5>].

based on tertiary-level qualifications and their salaries are significantly higher. Depending on one's salary, the person may be eligible to bring its dependents to Qatar⁶⁴ and one's salary range further determines more trivial issues, such as the permissible quota of alcoholic purchases.⁶⁵ Official Qatari sports clubs participating in local leagues, as well as public sector sports entities (that is, federations) typically employ coaches and attendant health professionals (for example, physiotherapists) with tertiary level education and their salary ranges reflect their status. On the other hand, private clubs tend to hire coaches lacking tertiary level education who nonetheless possess basic coaching (diploma level) qualifications attained in their country of origin and although their salaries are higher than the minimum wage, it is still significantly lower as compared to white collar workers. The vast majority of professional coaches hired at this level do not as a general rule earn enough to support their families in Qatar,⁶⁶ save if their employer is willing to alter the salary range in the contract, on paper at least, in order to allow a coach to bring their family. This is rare, however, and employers are very cautious about false statements.

Despite the existence of excellent sporting facilities in Qatar, these are all in the possession of government entities or owned by large hotel chains (for example, tennis courts). In turn, they are made available for the needs of national sporting federations, which generally tend to exclude non-Qataris, although it is becoming more common for such local clubs to attract expatriate talent. Private sports clubs as a rule do not have the resources to purchase land to construct their own facilities and hence lease training spaces from public entities that own them at a fee. This general un-availability of sporting facilities not only raises the cost of training in private clubs, but further reduces the prospect of high-performance sports for the non-Qatari expatriate population. This is a serious concern, because the expatriate population of Qatar represents a staggering 85 percent of the overall population,⁶⁷ but high demand is not matched with serious provision and availability of high-performance sportsmanship. Qatar and GCC countries more generally have failed to appreciate the growth and size of the expatriate sports market, nor the prospect of high-level sports training by foreign athletes during Qatar's winter and spring season.

In line with the aforementioned discussion, there is no (official) private coaching in Qatar other than through registered sports companies. A sports coach can only be present in Qatar if sponsored (*kafala*) by an employer or its spouse.⁶⁸ Low-paid coaches sponsored by an employer effectively supplement their income by coaching privately after working hours, at risk of violating their

⁶⁴ Currently, the minimum salary (official requirement) for a Family Residence Visa in Qatar is QAR 10,000 per month for private-sector employees. This is far above the average laborer monthly wage. Applications are available on the government portal, Hukoomi, <https://hukoomi.gov.qa/en/service/family-applications-service> [<https://perma.cc/8J27-BMVS>].

⁶⁵ Qatar Foreign Investment Law, *supra* note 62.

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ An accurate source, according to this author, offers significant statistics, that are crucial from a policy perspective. It justifies a desire to decrease dependency on expatriate workers and so-called 'Qatarisation' of the public sector. See "Qatar Population 2021," *World Population Review*, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/qatar-population> [<https://perma.cc/U8RH-VE6R>] (last visited 15 Jan. 2024).

⁶⁸ See Ray Jureidini & Said F Hassan, *The Islamic Principle of Kafala as Applied to Migrant Workers: Traditional Continuity and Reform*, 2 *MIGRATION & ISLAMIC ETHICS* 92, 92 (2020).

employment contracts and Qatari law more generally.⁶⁹ Even so, the practice is rife, and expatriates rely on this informal coaching in order to support their high-performance dependents who are unable to find sufficient training and playing time in registered clubs. A big part of this private coaching takes place in public spaces (for example, public parks), as well as in residential compounds, many of which have some excellent sports facilities that are only available to residents. This underground and unregulated coaching pattern is problematic but is clearly the result of very high demand.

It is not easy to counter this trend of unofficial private coaching as well as the un-availability of high-performance training for expatriates. One solution might be to set up a register of qualified coaches under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Sports and Culture and who may work as independent coaches⁷⁰ under condition that they report a particular and verified amount of coaching hours per month and subject to tax liability. In equal measure, private sports entities may be granted access to both facilities and credit through which to construct new training grounds.⁷¹ In turn this would generate the hiring of more foreign coaches and eliminate the need for extensive unofficial coaching. Such a state of affairs would strengthen Qatar's 2030 Vision, of which sports is a key component.⁷²

IV. THE LABOR REFORM LEGACY OF THE 2022 FIFA WORLD CUP

One cannot divorce sports coaching from general labor reforms in Qatar, because as already stated no coach is an independent contractor and all are susceptible to contracts with clubs or other corporate entities or the public sector. Hence, despite the fact that the Western perception of Qatari labor rights concerns construction workers, in fact the same legal regime applies to all employee's *mutatis mutandis*. One must thus understand the labor status of sports coaches within this particular framework and not through a separate lens. It is instructive to briefly set out this labor framework. The plight of labor rights in Qatar received international attention chiefly through two private initiatives. The first was an investigative report by the Guardian newspaper in 2013 which signaled and condemned the large number of labor-related deaths in construction projects,⁷³ whereas the second was a 2014 report by the US-based NGO

⁶⁹ Advertisements are rife in local sites, as "Qatar Living," but in the opinion of the authors word-to-mouth, especially from existing corporate clients is more common. <https://www.qatarliving.com> [<https://perma.cc/Q344-7XER>], but in the opinion of the authors word-to-mouth, especially from existing corporate clients, is more common.

⁷⁰ See 'Qatar Olympic Academy, Ministry of Culture and Sports Sign MoU' (Dec. 11, 2019), <https://www.olympic.qa/media-center/qatar-olympic-academy-ministry-culture-and-sports-sign-mou> [<https://perma.cc/M3VW-L7F7>]. The MoU apparently was meant to "enhance the concept of training, qualification and professional development of national cadres in sports clubs and organizations." It is not clear to the authors that this encompasses actual sports coaching.

⁷¹ It is instructive that on the basis of Law No 13 of 2008 "On the Contribution by Certain Companies towards Social and Sports Activities," all listed companies in the Qatari stock exchange are obliged to offer 2.5 per cent of their profits (so-called sports levy) to sporting and cultural activities. A special fund has been established to distribute and manage these assets.

⁷² *Qatar National Vision 2030*, STATE OF QATAR GOV'T COMM'N OFFICE, <https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/about-qatar/national-vision2030/>.

⁷³ Pete Pattison, *Revealed: Qatar's World Cup Slaves*, GUARDIAN (Sept. 25, 2013), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/25/revealed-qatars-world-cup-slaves>.

Amnesty International, which while equally focusing on appalling living conditions and the then growing death toll, noted that Qatar's labor system facilitated practices akin to trafficking and forced labor and that laborers' were forced to pay exorbitant recruitment fees and employers often confiscated their passport. It also stressed that Qatar's sponsorship system (the *kafala*) unnecessarily tied workers to a single employer, thus requiring them to get exit visas from their sponsor to leave the country or work elsewhere. This system represents deregulation of responsibility and labor control to individual's workers by their sponsors. This, it was rightly held, breeds a culture of exploitation.⁷⁴ Sport is not exempted from this practice, as demonstrated by the Belounis case. After his contract was abruptly terminated, Belounis was prevented from leaving Qatar without his employer's consent, in line with the *kafala* system. When Belounis engaged in legal proceedings to protect his rights against unpaid salaries, he was refused an exit permit, thus confirming the dominant position of employers/sponsors. Contracts for sport professionals are often obscure and their key provisions unclear, which in turn enables sponsors to terminate employment at any time, whereas employees are placed in an exploitative circle that favors compliance beyond the ordinary terms of a sports contract.

These were serious criticisms that would have to be addressed not only for the smooth operation of the FIFA World Cup, but also in order for Qatar to successfully bid for any future mega-sporting event. In 2017 the Qatari government adopted legislation whereby any fees paid by blue collar workers to agents or manpower companies would have to be immediately reimbursed under pain of severe sanctions.⁷⁵ The government further ensured that this practice does not become entrenched by monitoring manpower companies by issuing fines or dissolving companies found to have demanded fees.⁷⁶ Following the successful Qatari bid for the FIFA World Cup, the government invited the International Labor Organization (ILO) to set up a regional headquarter in Doha and effectively consult Qatar in its deep labor reforms. Despite the ILO's initial reluctance, this experiment seems to have worked well for both sides.⁷⁷ Qatar's Supreme Committee for the Delivery of Legacy,⁷⁸ which was not only the organizer of the FIFA World Cup, but the entity in charge of its legacy (both tangible and intangible) addressed early on the deficiencies of the Qatari labor

⁷⁴ *Qatar*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH: WORLD REPORT 2014 596–600 (2014), https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2023/01/HRW%20World%20Report%202014.pdf [https://perma.cc/G5FL-CYQT].

⁷⁵ In 2017, the Supreme Committee introduced the Universal Reimbursement Scheme, requiring a contractor either to prove that workers did not pay any fees or to reimburse the worker. See *Qatar/FIFA: Reimburse Migrant Workers' Recruitment Fees*, HUM. RTS. WATCH (Oct. 20, 2022), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/20/qatar/fifa-reimburse-migrant-workers-recruitment-fees> [https://perma.cc/4X57-6U47].

⁷⁶ See *Ministry of Labor Closes and Revokes Licenses of 23 Labor Recruitment Offices*, PENINSULA, (March 1, 2023), <https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/01/03/2023/ministry-of-labour-closes-and-revokes-licenses-of-23-labour-recruitment-offices> [https://perma.cc/BUH7-LJLT]; See *Qatar/FIFA: Reimburse Migrant Workers' Recruitment Fees*, HUM. RTS. WATCH, (Oct. 20, 2022), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/20/qatar/fifa-reimburse-migrant-workers-recruitment-fees> [https://perma.cc/8FAJ-JFE5].

⁷⁷ Its current presence in Qatar is a springboard for strengthening labor rights in the GCC and the Arab world more broadly. See *The ILO in Qatar*, INT'L LABOUR ORG., <https://www.ilo.org/beirut/countries/qatar/lang--en/index.htm> [https://perma.cc/WCQ6-6MMA].

⁷⁸ See Moza Al-Thani, *Channeling Soft Power: The Qatar 2022 World Cup, Migrant Workers, and International Image*, 38 INT'L J. HIST. SPORT 1729, 1737 (2021).

system. This was an arduous task because the *kafala* system had worked well and the complication was that the bulk of the country's blue-collar workforce was employed by private contractors. As a result, it was clear that the government needed to set up a massive labor monitoring mechanism with a view to preventing and avoiding labor abuses in the private sector.

As a first step, the Supreme Committee set out a Workers' Welfare Charter in 2013, supplementing it in 2014 with a much more comprehensive Worker's Welfare Standards (WWS).⁷⁹ It also set out a comprehensive law on domestic servants,⁸⁰ which is broad enough to encompass personal trainers, but the authors are not aware if this status has been requested, or indeed rejected, by a household in Qatar. The WWS is now mandatory on all companies and makes serious inroads on recruitment, employment and living conditions and in theory it also applies to sports academies and their coaches. Bulletin 1 to the 2016 version of the WWS set up the institution of Workers' Welfare Officers (WVO) and Project Workers' Welfare Officers (PWVO). These entities are meant to ensure that the living and working standards of blue-collar workers are in line with ILO standards and those mandated by the government of Qatar. This has given rise to a compliance audit,⁸¹ but it is not abundantly clear to the authors if this applies in practice across all industries not under the supervision of the Supreme Committee. This is particularly relevant to the discussion at hand because the audit system requires of quarterly self-audits, as well as independent audits commissioned by the Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Labor.⁸² A clarification by the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Culture and Sport on the applicability of these audits to publicly and privately funded sports clubs would be useful.

An average compliance score of 78.3 per cent across the entire construction sector was recorded in 2021.⁸³ By the end of 2021, almost 86 per cent of the workforce employed for the benefit of works commissioned by the Supreme Committee had moved to far improved accommodation with better amenities and medical facilities.⁸⁴ There is no available data for sports professionals in the country, particularly since the effort of the government was to protect the most vulnerable among its workforce.⁸⁵ It is clear that the aforementioned labor reforms eyed construction and other manual labor work and makes no neat distinctions. Sports professionals, however, constitute a distinct labor community with its own labor demands and characteristics and

⁷⁹ Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, *FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022: Amazing Delivered*, 'Workers' Welfare Standards' (2d ed.), 80 (2022), www.sc.qa/workerswelfare [https://perma.cc/XKN7-6FW9].

⁸⁰ Law No. (15) of 2017 on Domestic Workers (United Arab Emirates), Aug. 22, 2017, [https://www.mol.gov.qa/admin/LawsDocuments/Law%20No.%20\(15\)%20of%202017%20on%20Domestic%20Workers.pdf](https://www.mol.gov.qa/admin/LawsDocuments/Law%20No.%20(15)%20of%202017%20on%20Domestic%20Workers.pdf) [https://perma.cc/XW39-242J].

⁸¹ Workers' Welfare Standards, Bulletin 1 to Edition 2 (2018), section 19.1, <https://www.qatar2022.qa/sites/default/files/docs/Workers-Welfare-Standards-Qatar-2022-v2.pdf>.

⁸² *Id.* § 19.2.

⁸³ Qatar Supreme Committee on Legacy, 'Seventh Annual Workers' Welfare Report: Progress Report 2021', at 19, https://www.workerswelfare.qa/sites/default/files/documents/WW_Progress_Report_2021_EN.pdf [https://perma.cc/29KX-GRT8].

⁸⁴ *Id.* § 19.

⁸⁵ The ILO, an otherwise harsh critic, has praised Qatar for deep reforms and significant progress it has made in its labor reforms. See ILO, *Labor Reforms in Qatar: Coming Together around a Shared Vision* (2022), https://www.ilo.org/beirut/countries/qatar/WCMS_859843/lang--en/index.htm [https://perma.cc/GEM8-AP3M].

there is a need to adopt specialized legislation to deal with these. The *Belounis* case certainly highlights why such specialized legislation is needed, despite the best efforts of the Qatari government and its Ministry of Sports and Culture to embed and enforce labor laws and reforms in the sport sector.

The ILO, but particularly international trade union organizations have consistently called on Qatar to recognize trade unions and collective bargaining, particularly to the country's blue-collar labor force.⁸⁶ Collective bargaining is clearly at odds with the kafala system, which is individualistic in nature, and it is difficult to reconcile the two without effectively abolishing one in favor of the other. Hence, a compromise solution was the only way to resolve this conundrum. The Supreme Committee ultimately devised a grievance system entailing that workers would not be targeted or discriminated and that they would not become the subject of reprisals.⁸⁷ This is an excellent reform compared to the previous state of affairs which lacked a grievance mechanism altogether, but still falls short of the protection offered by employment tribunals or labor arbitration. In order to allow labor complaints to be lodged, the WWS set up a three-tier grievance mechanism that include worker interviews, Workers' Welfare Forums (WWF) and a 24-hour grievance hotline.⁸⁸ Complaints need not be lodged by workers in an individual and personal capacity only, but also through the medium of an institution known as elected workers' representatives (WRs).⁸⁹ Even though WRs are provided training in order to execute their mandate, this is no substitute to access to the courts. With the introduction of Law No 236 of 2018, Qatar set up Dispute Settlement Committees, which are meant to facilitate workers' access to an effective dispute resolution mechanism. Disputes are to be resolved within three weeks from submission of the complaint,⁹⁰ but it is not clear if this mechanism has been viewed as successful among migrant workers. It is not surprising that under government pressure and effective monitoring that instructive that non-World Cup construction companies volunteered to provide the WWF scheme to their employees under the supervision and assistance (although not always) by the ILO itself.⁹¹ The introduction, even if limited, of a culture of elected workers' representatives⁹² is a significant milestone for workers' rights. A similar system was set in motion to the non-World Cup workforce through the passing of the Ministry of Labor's Decision No 21 of 2019, which sets out the conditions for the election of worker representatives in so-called Joint Committees. Companies with thirty or more employees are obliged to allow their workers to elect representatives whose role is to engage with management over work-related issues.⁹³ Smaller sports academies will be unable to benefit from this scheme,

⁸⁶ See *Qatar Must Move Forward on Labor Rights*, INT'L TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (MAR. 17, 2023), <https://www.ituc-csi.org/qatar-statement-march-2023> [<https://perma.cc/B9TB-S639>].

⁸⁷ FIFA, *Grievance and Remedy Mechanisms for Workers*, <https://publications.fifa.com/en/final-sustainability-report/human-pillar/access-to-effective-remedy/grievance-and-remedy-mechanisms-for-workers/> [<https://perma.cc/2D79-3R55>] (last visited Apr. 17, 2024).

⁸⁸ *Id.*

⁸⁹ Welfare Report 2021, *supra* note 83, at 24.

⁹⁰ Art. 2, Law No. 236 of 2018.

⁹¹ Welfare Report 2021, *supra* note 83, at 24.

⁹² *Decree Paves Way for Election of Worker Representatives in Enterprises*, INT'L LABOUR ORG. (May 1, 2019), https://www.ilo.org/beirut/countries/qatar/WCMS_696935/lang--en/index.htm [<https://perma.cc/Z6KD-JXVA>].

⁹³ *Decision No. 21 of 2019 by the Minister of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs Regulating the conditions and procedures of the election of workers' representatives to joint committees*,

but sports clubs funded by the Ministry of Culture and Sport should be encompassed therein not as distinct clubs as such, but as employees of the Ministry.

It should be noted that the Dispute Settlement Committees mandate that disputes are resolved within three weeks from submission of the complaint, but it is not clear if this mechanism has been viewed as successful among migrant workers. This system has not been made available to sports professionals, despite the fact that several sports entities satisfy the above number, especially professional clubs in the more popular sports such as football, handball, and basketball. Furthermore, there is no indication that such collective rights will be conferred upon sports professionals as an extension of the same right offered to other 'workers.' Moreover, these reforms are rather general, and do not provide sufficient standards to protect sport professionals from the existing disadvantageous position within the sponsorship system, despite Qatar's ratification of the relevant ILO Conventions.⁹⁴ This is especially evident in the process of changing employer, whereby sponsors may use their dominant power and refuse to provide a non-objection certificate (NOC) that is required by law in order to work for a new employee. Moreover, missed or late payment of wages in the private sector is not uncommon, while access to justice may be not only slow but also ineffective.⁹⁵

V. EXPERIENCES OF SPORTS PROFESSIONALS

The data we have gathered shows no significant differences in the experience of sport professionals in individual sports on the one hand and team sports on the other. The interdependence of Qatar's sport ecosystem direct stakeholders, along with royal family members engaged as decision-makers in prominent roles helped to shift significant human and financial resources towards the 2022 FIFA World Cup. That said, the commercial sector or service providers continued to operate in a largely unregulated or inconsistent legal environment. The organization of focus groups was aimed at understanding the practical implications of the wider labor reforms on the sport ecosystem. For this purpose, there were two focus groups comprised of sport professionals, namely coaches. Initially, invitations were addressed to forty sport professionals, from which fourteen responded positively and ultimately participated in the study. Prior to their participation, sport professionals signed consent forms and the moderator explained the procedures. The significance of this approach and the underlying rationale was to uncover unheard stories and learn from the participants' experiences. The participants were identified by pseudonyms. Focus groups were conducted between June and September 2022, lasting on average 120 minutes each.

INT'L LABOUR ORG. (Apr. 21, 2019), https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=&p_isn=108501 [<https://perma.cc/G7BG-L6V6>].

⁹⁴ Qatar has not ratified the ILO's Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention of 1948, nor the ILO's Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention of 1949. See ITUC, *Qatar Must Move Forward on Labor Rights*, *supra* note 86.

⁹⁵ See Tirana Hassan, *Qatar: Events of 2022*, HUM. RTS. WATCH, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/qatar> [<https://perma.cc/6C2J-S86V>].

In structuring the interviews, data has been clustered as per the prevalent themes:

- Participation in policymaking
- Involvement in governing structures and decision-making processes
- Economic status
- Health insurance

Salah stressed that after five months working for a company, and just before the end of his six-month probation period he was given the choice, to either sign a new contract excluding a yearly return ticket and paid leave or agree to terminate his current contract. Most of the participants in both focus groups claimed that their contracts had been changed with similar amendments, with a view to weakening their status within their corporate structure. “These constellations forced many to seek alternative solutions, including resigning, changing sponsorship, and leaving the country,” according to Joel. Salah said, “[t]he fact that some members of NSFs are at the same time owners of sport-related companies, discourages us from challenging this practice primarily due to the nature of the relationship among stakeholders.” This practice of having closed groups of royal family members and connected persons as decision-makers within sport-related organizations quintessentially reflects a deeply entrenched patrimonial system. Consequently, it has led to the establishment of informal and clientelist networks aimed at bridging public and private interests, while shaping and directing institutional dynamics within the sport ecosystem. This does not necessarily mean that such practices are endorsed or promoted by the government or the Emir. According to John, public funds are often distributed without clear criteria to and within sport-related organization, particularly since internal regulations and procedures for fund allocation are either non-specific or not in place. As in some other countries, the homogeneous forces evident in these arbitrary processes have gone on to produce resilient structures with a firm grip over sport-related dynamics and relations that are very much unchallenged.⁹⁶ These entrenched power dynamics contribute to a patrimonial system, where processes are influenced, shaped, and directed by undisputed political power politics. The commercial dimension of sport in Qatar, a is subjected to influence from individuals associated with the dominant structure, as indicated by Tiba.

The structural challenges for expatriate sports professionals continue to persist in the aftermath of 2022. Sponsorship remains an exclusive power bestowed on employers in their relationship with employees and is not limited to manual and construction workers. Several commentators point to the case of Zahir Belounis in order to illustrate that the labor system does not favor sport professionals. The footballer’s contract was apparently terminated without payment for two years and he was unable to leave Qatar without his club’s consent.⁹⁷ The dispute with Belounis’ football club, Al-Jaish occurred in 2013 and does not in any way represent the reality on the ground in 2024; it being

⁹⁶ Marko Begović, *Sports Law in Montenegro: Origins and Contemporary Development*, 19 ENT. & SPORTS L. J. 1, 1 (2021).

⁹⁷ Gomes, Leandro, *The Abuse of Migrant Workers by World Cup 2022 Hosts, Qatar: A Case to Be Made for Alternative Dispute Resolution*, CJCR Blog Post 15 (2021), <https://larc.cardozo.yu.edu/cjcr-blog/15> [<https://perma.cc/AC3S-YYJD>].

clearly an isolated incident which Qatar categorically does not want to see again. This is particularly true since there is no publicity on any similar case since, CAS arbitration is now common for such disputes in Qatar, and the fact that the Belounis case was highly publicized in Qatar at the time.⁹⁸ However, the fact that this is a relatively old incident perhaps also serves as testimony that it is isolated and that while labor reforms were not specifically adapted to sports professionals, incidents of such severity have been eliminated.

The participants were also asked about their involvement in policy making, including in the development of action plans or long-term strategies. The overwhelming majority indicated that they were not sure of their existence. John stressed that: “our position is simple—we are a manual labor force, with the difference that we do not work in construction. We are coaches working with kids.” Others seem to corroborate this statement. Adam complemented John’s position by highlighting that in his fifteen-year long career in Qatar, he was never really asked about planning of activities. Rather, “our supervisor or manager simply gives us a schedule of activities without further explanation. Besides sport-related tasks, I [Tiba] was given responsibility in the HR sector as well.” Tiba further indicated that no specific employment policy has been in place and the hiring procedure (at least during my short experience), was limited to General Manager without any consultation with HR or individuals that manage sport programs to fire or hire sport professionals. Mohamad continued by not only confirming Tiba’s claims, but also highlighted the cases of sport professionals who are formally employed within a company. However, without any known sport-related engagements, “[u]sually, those are either sport managers, head coaches or supervising positions.” Kim concluded that it “was not realistic to expect that any of us would even have an opportunity to be involved in planning, as they only expect from us to deliver on and off the court and whenever is needed.” The kafala system still prevails, and without the NOC, the employee cannot change jobs.⁹⁹ Moreover, the sponsor may decide to cancel the employee’s visa, and little can be done.

As Kim concluded, “our contract and residence would be terminated immediately without any explanation.” According to all participants, unilateral alterations to contracts are frequent and can substantially vary from the original agreement, including working in a completely different industry. “For a period of six months, I [Adam] was forced to work as a driver for nurses or my contract and residence would be terminated.” Further, Kim continued “many of my colleagues are either leaving the country or starting freelance engagement, as they cannot sustain the pressure associated with this instability.” Such unilateral variations to contracts are not only prohibited under Qatari contract law, but render these contracts void or voidable, depending on whether the variation was the result of coercion.¹⁰⁰ Although the Ministry of Culture and Sport and the courts would entertain such contractual claims by sports professionals, the latter do not generally escalate such claims. The system is therefore perpetuated by

⁹⁸ See Peter Kovesay, *French Footballer Zahir Belounis Secures Exit Permit*, DOHA NEWS (Nov. 27, 2013), <https://dohanews.co/french-footballer-zahir-belounis-secures-exit-permit/> [https://perma.cc/84LR-EPDG].

⁹⁹ Mustafa El-Mumin, *The GCC Human Rights Declaration: An Instrument of Rhetoric?*, 34 ARAB L. Q. 86, 94 (2020).

¹⁰⁰ *Art. 137*, Qatari Civil Code; equally *Art. 140* of the Civil Code regarding contracts voided as a result of exploitation.

the absence of judicial action. The establishment of a sports-related arbitral chamber in Qatar with jurisdiction over all disputes arising between sports professionals and their employer would go a long way to changing abusive behaviors.

The focus group moderators initiated this part by asking to what degree participants were familiar with the sport-related regulatory framework. The majority indicated that they did not have any knowledge, nor had they been informed or discussed about regulatory frameworks in the field of sport. Moreover, save for sport-related rules, all participants were unsure if there were any internal regulations. Sandy indicated that coaches in the private sector “are just money-making machines . . . we are objects and we do not have a stake in our companies.” There is a consensus that within the mid-level management, changes of staff are very frequent, and Kim pointed out that “it is hard to adjust every 4-6 months to the new manager or supervisor.” The role of supervisors is particularly interesting. Sam stressed the following, “I believe that I am talking for all of us here; they are usually reluctant to communicate with us or to engage in any segment of sport-related operations.” Joshua said, “[t]he biggest challenge for us is that we don’t know what is expected from us, as goals are not clear, or they are subject to frequent changes.” The participants noted that although they had heard or seen owner(s) or senior management, they had never been in a position to talk with them. “There is a wall between them and us,” said John.

Most participants were former athletes, and the discussion echoed the fact that the instability of their sporting careers had endured in their post-playing professional/coaching life. One participant stated that, “I [Joshua] strongly believe that competencies are not the most important for determining salary scheme nor to enable advancement in your career—everything is decided ad hoc and if there is an opportunity to lower your salary or to replace you with someone less skilled but cheaper, my manager will not hesitate to take action.” Another noted, “I [Andrew] have my friends working for NSF, and for basically the same working hours and less demanding work he is receiving double my salary because it is a state job.” Salah shared that in his previous company, “[t]he salary was basically the same for all of us, despite the different educational levels, working experience or performance. We were all the same, below average income in Qatar.”

Tiba specified that she had been with the same company for more than a decade. “I [Tiba] saw many coaches coming and leaving, I have a master’s degree, but I had never an opportunity to receive an upgrade of my salary or overall working conditions.” Sam provided us with a sobering account on challenges faced when his son was born. “Since I am an expat, I wanted to go to Europe to visit my parents and celebrate with my family, but my company didn’t want to issue me a salary certificate to apply for a visa. Then I found a travel agency that could apply in my name, but they needed a letter from my company about my experience; yet, once again my company declined to issue it without any explanation.” The same participant observed that “[t]his is just the tip of an iceberg. As per the terms of my contract, I was entitled to transportation allowance and yearly round-trip ticket to my home country. When I purchased my own car, the company stopped paying the transportation allowance. Soon after they amended my existing contract, which now said that I am entitled to an annual round trip ticket every two years. Since I came here, my rights have slowly been degraded and if I decided to leave the company and as a result, I am

sure that I will not get an NOC.” Some of the participants confirmed similar experiences.

Kim mentioned an issue with the accommodation as per the contract and it appears that most of the participants who were working or still working for companies are experiencing the same problem. The quality of accommodation is below any decent level, especially in terms of sanitation. Tiba said, “[i]f you request change or an equivalent allowance, you will be mostly like fired, as happened to my colleague.” “During summer, and you know how hot and humid this can be in Qatar, the air conditioning didn’t work in the apartment. I [Andrew] asked for maintenance as this is a company-owned property. Not only was I declined, but next month I received my salary with 30 per cent deduction without any written notice. I didn’t complain, as I do not believe that anything can be changed here.” “In the last five years our status has been significantly downgraded, and that is why most of my [Joshua] colleagues left the country.” Regarding accommodation, the majority of participants confirmed that sports companies always provide shared apartments where many of the workers share toilets, the kitchen, and even bedrooms.

Similar to the economic status, the quality of health insurance is unpredictable for sport professionals. All of the participants highlighted that although their contracts generally addressed health insurance “as per Qatari Labor Law,” in reality, except for covering expenses for medical examination fees related to getting a work visa, the company did not provide the type of insurance associated with the specificity of sport-related jobs. One participant noted that “[t]he fact is that when I was injured, I couldn’t afford to go to the hospital, and I couldn’t work. That month I didn’t get my full salary and for me it was clear that I needed to seek for alternative, rather freelance jobs.” Nick confirmed this by noting that “after I had a rupture of my hamstrings and received emergency care, I was not entitled to proper professional recovery (rehabilitation). I was expected to come back and work, although, I was not able to move without crutches. Luckily, my colleagues covered for me, but still, I received a deduction from my salary.” Most of the participants confirmed that they did not have a medical card that would cover risks associated with their occupation.

CONCLUSION

The commercial sector in Qatar seems to follow a pyramidal and exclusive organizational structure, with little or no opportunity for expatriate sport professionals to be engaged in decision-making bodies or processes. In this

patrimonial system, the process of institutionalization of sport is shaped by strong political influence. The findings indicate a need for in-depth research on governance and power relations in Qatar's sports ecosystem after the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Further, the findings suggest that there is a lack of formal path for procedures for career development.

Especially in the last five years, the overwhelming focus was dedicated to football, organization of the World Cup and to prove the organizational capacity and image of Qatar. This is not to say, of course, that the country has not achieved significant progress in labor standards and human rights more generally. This has occurred chiefly in the construction sector and in fields of employment directly controlled by the government and the public sector. The 'private' sector on the other hand, particularly sports entities set up under the patronage of the state or by influential figures, have failed to implement many of the labor reforms undertaken in other areas. Institutionalism, in its constructionist nature, suggests that major actors in the sport ecosystem in Qatar operate through informal regulatory regimes reflecting both normative and rational aspects of societal dynamics with ability to exist within broader institutional environments. While the status of labor rights in Qatar has increased manifold, there are certain sectors where improvement is not obvious and in fact is lagging behind other sectors. Complaints in these fields by employees, especially in the context of sports academies in the private sector may lead to retaliation by the employer/sponsor.

The interrelated nature of these actions is secured through concerted effort from different stakeholders aimed at maintaining institutional relationships shaped by informal regulatory regimes while at the same time sustaining the legitimacy of formal legal frameworks.¹⁰¹ This is important as the interdisciplinary approach employed in this paper observed a greater context that includes nature legal institutions and organizational structures. This particular case confirms the complexity of existing institutional settings shaped by cultural patterns from both Qataris and expatriates that unfolds into calculated decisions from the latter to conform or to coerce to decisions from the former, as compliance is part of informal practices. The implementation of the sponsorship system prevails (while positive in many respects) against sport professionals in a manner that is generally arbitrary and the wider labor reforms have not improved labor standards for sport professionals despite the Qatari government's (and the Emir personally) sincere efforts to better regulate the 'private' sector. Many participants confirmed that the labor system in place still significantly limits or denies freedom of movement, especially where sponsors arbitrarily refuse to issue NOCs, which allow an employee to find other employment under a new sponsorship. Consequently, the reaction from participants enables and facilitates institutional isomorphism. The challenge is reflected in a conservative understanding of formal legal regimes affecting institutions, given that the latter tend to subdue its actors through institutional isomorphism within broader, socio-political (including cultural) frameworks. The loopholes and lack of oversight are part of institutional ambiguity and reflect the relationship between public and non-public actors with strong taken-for-

¹⁰¹ Susan Burgess, *Beyond Instrumental Politics: The New Institutionalism, Legal Rhetoric, & Judicial Supremacy*, 25 *POLITY* 445-59 (1993).

granted norms in place, thus making regulations irrelevant to the non-governmental, private sport sector.

Therefore, it is obvious, as indicated by the participants themselves, that decisions are often not a product or based on efficiency; rather they represent a sort of a natural reflex. Moreover, these decisions display a formal structure that operates in a rather *pro forma* regime as part of a larger ceremonial or symbolic institutional setting that a country such as Qatar with strong values stands for.¹⁰² With the present ambiguities inherent in the institutional relationship between public and private sport providers, pressures in place more often than not culminate in a selective application of existing legal regimes. This suggests that that cultural setting has led to a concerted effort toward aligning regulatory frameworks with institutional dynamics. This conjures a number of impacts at the macro level with new regimes being articulated, formulated, and institutionalized. The operationalization of the latter is exercised through mimetic, coercive or normative impetus, or a combination of all of these. It further leads to collective compliance from sport professionals as it is practiced more as a cultural pattern. Moreover, sport professionals are often engaged in enforcing this behavior within the relevant organizational structures keeping these practices institutionalized and surrounding pressures less transparent.¹⁰³ This state of affairs is laid against the backdrop of leadership by strong individuals (sponsors) with high level of societal autonomy within a particular sector.

It was noted by the participant in respect of the issue of exit visas, that all actors from all levels played their role in aggravating access to justice or toward predictable rule of law situations, by adapting their interpretation of the existing regulatory regime in accordance with the sponsor's interest. This may well be seen as a sort of institutional contradiction, as its underlying rationale is not often related to market demands or maximization of institutional potentials where isomorphism dominates and shapes institutional environment. There is no doubt that the human rights and labor legacy of the 2022 FIFA World Cup will have a dramatic impact on changes in the sports arena, especially if Qatar continues with the same vigor its outlook on mega sports events and invests in the sporting capacity of its expatriate workforce. This of course will take time, as there is a need for adopted legislative framework to be incorporated and effectively enforced despite conflictual cultural patterns embedded in institutional ecosystem. That said, the transformative potential of new legal regime will require perhaps new institutional actors. The authors suggest that the establishment by law of a specialist arbitral chamber with compulsory jurisdiction over sport labor-related disputes would go a long way to alleviating many of the problems identified in this article.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² The cultural setting is embedded into institutional ecosystem. See Barry Levitt, *Political Culture and the Science of Politics*, 40 *Latin Am. Rsch. Rev.* 365, 368 (2005) (book review); JAN-ERIK LANE & SVANTE ERSSON, *CULTURE AND POLITICS: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH* (2002).

¹⁰³ It is not a new phenomenon that the behavior from decision-makers being translated into rules or even structures. See generally, MARCH, JAMES G. & JOHAN P. OLSEN, *ELABORATING THE "NEW INSTITUTIONALISM"* (2011).

¹⁰⁴ See Ilias Bantekas & Michael A Stein, *Why Arbitration in Business and Human Rights Disputes Enhances Labor Rights*, CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS: FIFTEEN EIGHTY-FOUR (Sept. 8, 2021), <http://www.cambridgeblog.org/2021/09/why-arbitration-in-business-and-human-rights-disputes-enhances-labor-rights/> [<https://perma.cc/2WB4-KECF>].

In 2019 the Qatar Sports Arbitration Foundation (QSAF) was established, in the form of an independent organisation with the primary purpose of resolving sport-related disputes within Qatar through arbitration and mediation. It was made possible through the cooperation of Qatar Olympic Committee, the Qatar Football Association, the Qatar Stars League, and the Qatar Players Association.¹⁰⁵ For this purpose, the QSAF has set up the Qatar Sports Arbitration Tribunal (QSAT). The QSAT recently adopted an award that is relevant to the relationship between sports professionals and their clubs. It held that contracts between players and their clubs are governed by labor law and specialist regulations.¹⁰⁶ Its impact is yet unknown, and one hopes that similar disputes between coaches and clubs will be encompassed in the ambit of the QSAT.

¹⁰⁵ Qatar Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, Overview, <https://www.qsaf.qa/en/overview/> [<https://perma.cc/VET8-XM2D>].

¹⁰⁶ QSAT Award No 3/2019, https://www.qsaf.qa/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/-حكم-2019-003-القضية-التحكيم-التحكيم_Redacted.pdf [<https://perma.cc/4TJB-HKEM>].