

BLOG

Impact of Private Equity Investment in Cricket to Enable Secure Digital Growth



[Extract preview below]

Transformational private equity funding is on the rise in English cricket

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The deal reflects the global sports industry trend which suggests sport is an increasingly attractive market for private equity (PE) firms. A recent survey highlighted 61% of executives from the global sports industry expect accelerated growth in private investment over the next 5-7 years¹. This is fundamentally changing the very nature of franchise ownership and cricket is now 'in the mix' for further private equity investment.

¹ [Survey sees increased private investment in global sports market | Daily News | IBC](#)

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GMR's appetite across the global cricket landscape is impressive. Their investments include a 50% stake in the Delhi Capitals (IPL and Women's Premier League), the Dubai Capitals (International League T20) and South Africa T20 side Pretoria Capitals (SA20) as well as investing in USA Major League Cricket club Seattle Orcas.

GMR will initially acquire a majority stake in Hampshire Sport & Leisure Holdings Limited and then take 100% ownership within 24 months. The deal includes an immediate but undisclosed cash injection to reduce Hampshire's debt position and improve facilities at the stadium, the adjoining hotel and golf course, which are owned by Hampshire Sport & Holdings Group Ltd.

Leadership statements on the day of the deal announcement, highlight the bold commercial ambition to compete in an increasingly crowded, globalised cricket landscape:

"This is an exciting time for Hampshire, and I'd like to welcome GGPL [GMR Global Pte Ltd] to cricket in England and Wales. This announcement also demonstrates the global interest in investing in cricket in England and Wales, and underlines the continuing appeal of county cricket."

ECB CEO Richard Gould

"Becoming the first English cricket club to join an international cricket group will open exciting new opportunities as we embrace the globalization of this great sport."

Hampshire's majority shareholder Rob Bransgrove

"With this acquisition, along with our investments in the US, Dubai, and India, GMR is focused on engaging and connecting with the global youth. We are committed to financial prudence, value creation, and creating opportunities for young talent."

Grandhi Kiran Kumar, chairman of GMR Group

Increasing investment opportunities as sport embraces digital, data and AI

In today's digital, data-driven economy, cricket mirrors other sporting codes in accelerating cloud-native ecosystems and GenAI adoption as they seek new digital revenue streams, invest in innovative hyper-personalised engagements with sports fans, upgrade stadium physical infrastructure to digital 'smart venues', and pursue player competitive advantage.

² [Survey sees increased private investment in global sports market | Daily News | IBC](#)

As Gen Z and Alpha sports fans mature, they are projected to continue their heavy online media consumption. Young, digitally-confident sports fans no longer want to watch linear feeds of live sporting events. Instead they seek immersive, personalised experiences whether at the live game or streaming at home.

By digitally recreating live sporting events, franchises, rights holders and broadcasters have seemingly limitless creative possibilities.

- ★ **57%** of sports fans report browsing the internet while tuning in to sporting events³.
- ★ The demand for in-venue experience at sporting stadium events to match the fans' streaming video experience at home is increasing dramatically.
- ★ **80%** of Gen Z & Millennials want to watch replays or watch the live game from different camera angles on their mobile device whilst at live stadium sporting events⁴.
- ★ **44%** of fans look up player or team statistics during a match, a figure which increases to 51% among Gen Z audiences⁵.
- ★ According to Ericsson, **47%** of 5G users are engaging with augmented reality (AR) apps, 360 degree video and multi-view broadcasts, whilst their daily consumption in these formats has increased 50-60% in the last three years⁶.

In light of this trend, **more than 70% of sports executives view diversifying content offerings beyond live events, enhancing live media experiences, and customising content and recommendations as crucial strategies to boost fan engagement**⁷. Hyper-personalization and AI-augmented digital offerings will become key for competitive edge.

Cricket accelerates towards digital, data and AI adoption with private equity

Private equity investment into UK cricket, particularly in the form of The Hundred franchises and Hampshire Cricket County, has the potential to revolutionise the sport and drive innovation in the way cricket is consumed and monetized.

It will fundamentally transform the way coaches, cricketers, journalists, and fans experience all forms of cricket in the next 2 years. Secure 'data-at-scale' will be the 'lifeblood' of this new cricketing reality.

Digital and cybersecurity headwinds drive risk

Whilst there is bold optimism on the digital growth potential for increasing data-driven outcomes, based on AI-augmentation and cloud-native ecosystems adoption, there is also growing concerns about the increasing cybersecurity risk exposure with the consequential expanding attack surface at every sporting franchise. This concern is compounded by the increasing volume and ever-increasing complexity of AI-augmented cyber criminal attacks, and the impact and cost of data breaches which can potentially erode investor returns. This is no longer a reactive, compliance-focused 'cost game'.

³ [2023 Global Sports Survey | Altman Solon](#)

⁴ [In-stadium experience | Deloitte Insights](#)

⁵ [How Vodafone's AI-enhanced live match centre attracted six months of users in one week - SportsPro \(sportspromedia.com\)](#)

⁶ [A year of grand events and three fan archetypes - Ericsson](#)

⁷ [2023 Global Sports Survey | Altman Solon](#)

The criticality of a robust network cybersecurity posture to protect against the cybercriminal and enable 'data at scale' for new monetisation opportunities, is not yet fully recognised, which is creating significant business risk.

Sporting entities will continue to shift to cloud-based solutions, yet cloud remains the dominant attack vector for the cybercriminal. In the last 12 months, **80% of data breaches occurred on cloud assets**⁸.

Cyber threats appear in various forms, including attacks on spectator experiences, ticketing systems, and online scams aimed at stealing customer or athlete data and financial information. Plus the digital evolution of sporting venues, characterised by interconnected networks and devices, has exposed stadium infrastructure to new vulnerabilities.

This new reality, in emerging **digital vulnerability in the sports industry**, is not just about the theft of sensitive data but extends to financial fraud, manipulation of competition outcomes, and even the safety of players and fans in stadiums through disruptions of physical, connected stadium infrastructure.

SASE will securely monetise new digital cricket revenues

One key area where this investment can make a significant impact is in the adoption of **Secure Access Service Edge (SASE)** technology. SASE is a new approach to network security that combines network security functions with wide-area networking capabilities to support the dynamic secure access needs of organisations.

By implementing SASE, cricket franchises can securely and confidently grow their digital fan base and unlock new digital revenue streams. In this blog, we will explore how private equity investment can catalyse the adoption of SASE in UK cricket franchises and provide five relevant use cases for how SASE can benefit these organisations.

1. Secure remote access for players and staff:

With the rise of remote work and the increasing reliance on digital tools, it is essential for cricket franchises to provide secure remote access for players and staff. SASE can enable secure access to critical resources and applications from any location, ensuring that players and staff can collaborate effectively and securely, regardless of where they are located.

2. Secure access to fan data:

Cricket franchises collect a wealth of data on their fans, from ticket purchases to merchandise preferences. This data is valuable for understanding fan behaviour and preferences, but it must be protected from cyber threats. SASE can provide secure access to fan data, ensuring that it is protected from unauthorised access and misuse.

3. Secure access to streaming services:

Many cricket franchises offer streaming services to fans who are unable to attend matches in person. These services are a key revenue stream for franchises, but they must be protected from cyber threats. SASE can provide secure access to streaming services, ensuring that fans can enjoy high-quality content without compromising their security.

⁸ [PaloAlto Networks Unit42 ASM Threat Report 2023](#)

4. Secure access to e-commerce platforms:

E-commerce platforms are an important revenue stream for cricket franchises, allowing fans to purchase tickets, merchandise, and other products online. SASE can provide secure access to e-commerce platforms, ensuring that fan transactions are protected from cyber threats and fraud.

5. Secure access to social media platforms:

Social media platforms are a powerful tool for engaging with fans and building a digital fan base. However, they also present security risks, such as phishing attacks and data breaches. SASE can provide secure access to social media platforms, ensuring that franchises can engage with fans securely and confidently.

The C-suite can pivot confidently to new sporting digital business models with an effective SASE strategy

A SASE strategy is fundamental in reducing cybersecurity risk by ensuring C-suite ownership and awareness on the risk to the business. It is crucial to increase top-level buy-in to address the evolving cybersecurity threat landscape, especially with the transition to digital enterprise and next-generation technologies. Many sporting organisations are ill-prepared to respond to the evolving AI-augmented threats, including 3rd party supply chain risks, necessitating the need for the C-suite to elevate network cybersecurity as a senior leadership priority.

By making SASE and network cybersecurity a board-level agenda item, with proper oversight and governance, companies can align their leadership, their investment priorities and commit to enhancing digital resilience against the AI-augmented cybercriminal risks, including supply chain risks, through improved cybersecurity capabilities and gap identification.

This strategic alignment and prioritisation of risk-based controls, based on business understanding, are essential components of a SASE strategy to effectively manage network cybersecurity risks at the C-suite level.

A comprehensive SASE strategy will impact all areas of the sporting value chain. This can be effectively delivered through an holistic SASE consulting engagement which will consider technology, operational processes, talent, leadership, risk and business impacts to assess current state, future target state and how to transform.

Conclusion

Private equity investment into UK cricket franchises has the potential to catalyse the adoption of SASE, enabling franchise C-suites to grow their digital fan base securely and confidently grow new digital revenue streams. By implementing SASE, cricket franchises can ensure secure remote access for players and staff, protect fan data, secure access to streaming services, e-commerce platforms, and social media platforms. This will not only enhance the digital immersive experience amongst Gen Z and Alpha cricket fans but also enable innovation and new digital revenue growth in cricket.

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David is the Founder & Lead Partner at TIAKI, where he collaborates with bold and determined leaders in the sports ecosystem to define their data, AI and cybersecurity strategies to deliver sustainable value.

TIAKI is a niche consulting practice helping executive leadership in sport make confident, informed decisions on their risks, investments and business outcomes powered by secure 'data-at-scale'.

TIAKI empowers CEOs, management teams, broadcasters and investors in the global sports industry with strategic advisory frameworks to deliver secure, pioneering digital fan experiences and new ecosystem business models to achieve breakthrough returns.

David has over 20 years of strategy and technology enabled business transformation experience, providing consulting expertise in cloud native technologies, data strategy, digital business enablement and cybersecurity strategy. He is passionate about helping talented leadership teams succeed in securely growing their differentiated business models in the data-driven, digital sports economy.

Based in Stockholm, David previously worked for IBM Consulting, EY, Accenture Strategy and Orange Business. He studied Chemistry at Durham University and holds an MBA from Trinity College, Dublin Business School.

