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OCTOBER 2026 | IN THIS EDITION

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IN FOCUS

Beyond the pitch: Manchester City’s verdict and its wider ripples

Announced 29 September 2026 · Premier League Independent Commission

On 29 September 2026, the Premier League announced that an Independent Commission had found Manchester City guilty of all charges relating to serious breaches of the League's financial rules across nine seasons, from 2009/10 to 2017/18. The Commission also upheld three of the four alleged breaches of the club's duty to co-operate with the League’s investigation. Richard Masters, Chief Executive of the Premier League, described the case as the most significant disciplinary case in Premier League history.

The findings: The Commission found that the club arranged 'sham' commercial deals with a number of its sponsors as part of a disguised funding scheme. Under the scheme, those sponsors paid only a portion of the sponsorship fees, and the club's owner, Abu Dhabi United Group Investment & Development Ltd (ADUG), funded the rest. The Commission found that these schemes were intended to inflate the club’s revenues and reduce its costs by more than £900 million, so it would appear to comply with financial rules. It also found that, had all of the relevant agreements been reported accurately, the club would have been in breach of both the Premier League’s Profitability and Sustainability Rules and UEFA’s Club Licensing and Financial Fair Play Regulations by a very substantial amount.

Status: The sanction will be decided at a separate, private hearing before the Commission. On 2 October 2026, the Premier League confirmed that the club had appealed against the Commission’s decision. The club has denied any wrongdoing.

Beyond football: The club is owned by ADUG, a private investment company belonging to Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Vice-President and Deputy Prime Minister of the UAE. The case has therefore prompted discussion of what it might mean for UK–UAE diplomatic and trade relations, including investment.

Why it matters: Ownership of sports clubs increasingly involves cross-border investment, so regulatory outcomes in sport can matter beyond the sport itself. In this case, the verdict has led to discussion of UK–UAE diplomatic and trade relations, not just its sporting consequences. With the sanction and appeal still pending, investors, clubs and regulators will be watching how the process plays out. They will also be watching whether it is seen to run independently of those wider interests.

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Sports Governance

REGULATIONS · FEDERATIONS · GOVERNANCE REFORM

KEY DEVELOPMENT

Dakar 2026: Delhi HC upholds Equestrian selection but calls for clearer criteria

17 and 24 September 2026 · Delhi High Court · W.P.(C) 12760/2026; LPA 760/2026

In a judgment dated 17 September 2026, the Delhi High Court declined to interfere with the selection of India's show jumping rider for the Youth Olympic Games (YOG), Dakar 2026 (31 October–13 November 2026), the first Olympic event to be held in Africa. The 16-year-old petitioner was ranked second in the original selection of 6 August 2026 but dropped to third (Reserve Rider 2) on review. She argued that the Equestrian Federation of India (EFI) had retrospectively narrowed the window from 8 November 2025–25 July 2026 to 8 May–25 July 2026, excluding seven of her earlier qualifying scores. The Court found that no eight-month window had ever been fixed: under the EFI Statute, criteria operate only once promulgated and uploaded on the website (8 May 2026), and both selection decisions had assessed results from that date plus one Certificate of Capability (COC) result per rider.

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QUICK TAKES

Federation elections under the National Sports Governance Act

AITA (27 November) · IOA (5 December) · AIFF (20 December)

Three major national sports bodies have now fixed election dates under the National Sports Governance Act, 2025 and the National Sports Governance (National Sports Bodies) Rules, 2026. Rajeev Sharma, a member of the National Sports Election Panel, is the electoral officer for both AITA and AIFF.

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IOA allowed to retain 16-member Executive Council

Gazette notification · Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports

Section 4(1)(b) of the National Sports Governance Act, 2025 caps a national sports body's Executive Committee at 15 members, including ex officio members. By gazette notification, the Sports Ministry invoked its powers under Section 37(2) of the Act to clarify that Section 4(1)(b) will not apply to the IOA to the extent necessary to accommodate the IOC Member(s) in India.

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Business & Commercial

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KEY DEVELOPMENT

Uptick in cricket M&A: Rajasthan Royals buyout gets CCI nod

17 September 2026 · Competition Commission of India

On 17 September 2026, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) approved the acquisition of three professional cricket franchises — Rajasthan Royals (IPL), Paarl Royals (SA20, South Africa) and Barbados Royals (Caribbean Premier League) — by Westview Cricket Limited and Poonawalla Sports and Fitness Private Limited. The deal is reportedly valued at around $1.65 billion. Once completed, the transaction will give the new investor group control of cricket teams competing across three major T20 markets — India, South Africa and the Caribbean. The CCI's approval clears the competition-law hurdle; the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and the IPL Governing Council must still approve before the ownership transfer can be completed.

Why it matters: The deal highlights growing investor interest and rising valuations in IPL franchises, now among the most valuable properties in global sport. It follows the CCI's approval on 30 June 2026 of the acquisition of Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) by a consortium of the Aditya Birla Group, the Times of India Group, Bolt Ventures and Blackstone, at a reported valuation of $1.78 billion. These benchmarks are already shaping the market: the Sanjiv Goenka-led RPSG Group is reportedly exploring the sale of a 15–20% stake in Lucknow Super Giants (LSG), acquired for ₹7,090 crore ($800 million) in 2021, at a valuation of $1.5–2 billion, though the company has stated in an exchange filing that it has no proposal, plan or decision to sell any stake at this point.

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Gaming & Esports

REAL-MONEY GAMING · PREDICTION MARKETS · ESPORTS

KEY DEVELOPMENT

India's new online gaming law: No game registered, 201 complaints received

As of 1 September 2026 · Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology · Central Information Commission

No online game has yet been registered by the Online Gaming Authority of India (OGAI), while 201 complaints relating to online gaming had been received as of 1 September 2026, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) informed the Central Information Commission (CIC) in an RTI matter. When the Rules were notified, MeitY Secretary S Krishnan indicated that no category of online social games had been notified for mandatory registration, and described the framework as intentionally 'regulation-light'.

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QUICK TAKES

Gameskraft probe: ED provisionally attaches fresh assets

25 September 2026 · Directorate of Enforcement, Bengaluru Zonal Office

The Directorate of Enforcement (ED), Bengaluru Zonal Office, issued a provisional attachment order on 25 September 2026 under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA), attaching assets worth ₹442.35 crore in the probe against online gaming company Gameskraft. The latest order brings the total value of proceeds of crime attached, frozen and seized to about ₹2,843 crore.

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Rogue websites using RIL's Jio trademark ordered to be suspended

7 October 2026 · Delhi High Court · I.A. 26103/2026 in CS(COMM) 1043/2026

On 7 October 2026, the Delhi High Court ordered the suspension of over 120 websites and domain names on Reliance Industries Limited's plea alleging infringement of its registered trademark "JIO" by such rogue websites in relation to lottery, gaming, payment-related and allied services. Accordingly, the Court restrained the use, adoption, operation and promotion of the impugned marks. The matter will be heard next on 30 November 2026.

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Global Sports Law

OLYMPIC MOVEMENT · ANTI-DOPING · INTERNATIONAL FEDERATIONS

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

2036 Olympics: Next steps for host selection out, India unveils its vision

6 October 2026 · International Olympic Committee

In a much-awaited development, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has unveiled the next steps for selecting the host of the 2036 Olympic Games. The handbook for potential hosts, released on 6 October 2026, sets out the full pathway towards the host election and the requirements for interested parties to be considered to progress through each stage of the selection process. The IOC's press release also confirmed India as one of the seven countries with a stated interest in hosting the 2036 Olympics. The other contenders are Germany, Hungary, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, South Africa, and Türkiye.

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2027 WADA Prohibited List: What changes?

Effective 1 January 2027 · World Anti-Doping Agency

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has published the 2027 List of Prohibited Substances and Methods, effective from 1 January 2027. S0. Non-approved substances: Peptides are now named as examples. S8. Cannabinoids: There's a shift from a blanket ban on all cannabinoids towards a more specific THC ban, including semi-synthetic and synthetic cannabinoids that mimic the effects of THC. GLP-1 receptor agonists, including semaglutide and tirzepatide, stay permitted in 2027.

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ICC Playing Conditions: Key changes

1 October 2026 · International Cricket Council

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has introduced new Playing Conditions for men's and women's international cricket, applying to all series starting on or after 1 October 2026. In men's cricket, time-wasting by batters will now draw a warning, then a final warning, and then five penalty runs to the fielding side for the third and each subsequent offence.

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LEGAL PLAYBOOK

5 things athletes and support teams should check before the 2027 Prohibited List applies

From 1 January 2027, WADA's 2027 List of Prohibited Substances and Methods replaces the current List. Use this list to update medication, supplement and education checks.

01 Re-check cannabinoid products ☐

The ban now targets THC and semi-synthetic and synthetic cannabinoids that mimic its effects; listed examples include delta-8 and delta-10 THC and hexahydrocannabinols (HHC). Cannabidiol (CBD) itself is not prohibited, but CBD derived from cannabis plants can carry varying levels of THC, which remains banned. Treat such products with caution.

02 Screen peptides and unapproved substances ☐

Many peptides not approved for human use fall under S0 or other classes (such as S2 or S4), and WADA warns that unnamed peptides may also be prohibited. WADA advises utmost caution, as such peptides may also be harmful to health.

03 Review current medications ☐

Check prescriptions against the new examples, including eplerenone and finerenone (S5) and imlunestrant, seladelpar, SLU-PP-332 and SLU-PP-915 (S4). Note that vaginal administration of glucocorticoids is now a permitted route.

04 Track weight-loss drugs ☐

Semaglutide and tirzepatide remain permitted in 2027 but stay on the Monitoring Program while WADA studies their effects on athletes. Athletes and support teams should keep an eye on developments in this area.

05 Update education before 1 January ☐

The List underpins strict-liability anti-doping violations. Refresh athlete and support-personnel briefings, supplement-screening protocols and team medical records before the 2027 List takes effect.

This checklist is a practical starting point, not legal advice on any specific arrangement.

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