

Future-proofing football will require innovation and leadership

By Omar Berrada

Football is the best sport in the world. The thrill of victories, diversity of play on the pitch and international scale have made it massively popular and accessible, but football should be about more than just winning. Teams are dialed into the minutiae of operations to give them an edge over rivals and dedicate countless resources to advance their league standings, but not enough to minimize their environmental impact on our planet.

As football grows, we must evolve our approach to sustainability. We must reevaluate our roles in mitigating the severe effects of the climate crisis by directing our efforts to actions off the pitch, building sustainable systems to protect the very planet where we play our matches. Clubs should incorporate sustainability at every level of operations, from the stadium to the supply chain.

Leading by Example

The [2028 Los Angeles Olympics](#) is poised to be the most sustainable Games in history, with commitments to zero waste and carbon neutrality. By centering sustainability in its operations, LA28 has understood more than most clubs and organizations that the only path forward for the future of athletics is sustainable and has set an example for all to follow.

As the pinnacle of club football and the most-watched sports league in the world, the Premier League should be leading the charge to address climate change. The league has made progress, including introducing a new [Environmental Sustainability Strategy](#), which builds on league-wide standards of environmental actions to reduce emissions. Despite these strides, the Premier League is still playing defense where climate change is concerned, falling short of demanding large-scale change from clubs league-wide to truly move the needle on climate change and holding these same clubs accountable with actionable consequences when they fall short of standards.

Innovation as a Path Forward

One Premier League game is estimated to [emit approximately 1,700 tCO₂e](#). In the 2022/23 season, the total carbon emissions footprint in the Premier League was [36,821 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent \(tCO₂e\)](#). There is no one-size-fits-all solution, but stadium operations represent an opportunity. [13 clubs have electricity](#) from 100% renewable sources across their stadiums and facilities, with six having onsite clean energy creation. These efforts are a good start, but clubs should take sustainable initiatives even further. In contrast, Forest Green Rovers in the National League were the first UN-certified carbon-neutral club years ago, with a fraction of a Premier League club budget. Moving the needle is about more than money; it is also about innovation.

Creating a Cultural Movement

Football's role in the cultural conversation is unmatched. Millions watch and attend Premier League matches. With such a significant audience, clubs have an opportunity to expose fans to the breadth of sustainable efforts within football. Normalizing sustainable behavior and systems in stadiums and team operations can bring awareness to the climate crisis and encourage behavior change.

There is no thriving football without a thriving planet. Although no club has all the answers and change will not happen overnight, it starts with collaboration. We have been a high-emissions source behind climate change for years. It is time we become leaders in finding a solution.

Omar Berrada is CEO of Manchester United, a football club in the Premier League, the highest level of the English football league.