



Sports Law & Taxation

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PUBLISHER

Nolot
P.O. Box 206
5270 AE Sint-Michielsgestel
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EDITORIAL

It is with much pleasure that we welcome readers to the December 2025 edition (citation: *SLT 2025/4*) of our ground-breaking journal *Sports Law and Taxation (SLT)* and online database <https://sportslawandtaxation.com>.

The regulation of sport and the challenges which that engenders has been a particular feature of the past year. For example, the establishment of the new Football Regulator in the United Kingdom and the intertwining of sport and politics manifesting itself in the ban on fans of the Israeli Football Club, Maccabi Tel Aviv, attending their club's Europa League tie with Aston Villa FC at Villa Park in Birmingham in November, as a result of the Israeli-Gaza conflict. So, we asked Ian Felice and Matthew Torres, partners in the leading Gibraltar international law firm of Hassans, to report on the regulation of sport in Gibraltar, which also presents some issues. Here is their report:

“Sports regulation in Gibraltar

The regulation of sport in Gibraltar faces a unique set of challenges.

These stem from its political status; limited land and resources; increasing professionalisation; current and aspirational membership of international governing bodies; and the drive to maintain high standards across a fast-evolving sporting landscape. At the heart of the debate are questions of governance; facility allocation; cross-border collaboration; safeguarding; financial sustainability; and the impact of international obligations. All of which amidst the always tenuous line between amateur and professional – or, at least, semi-professional – sport.

The Gibraltar sporting model

Gibraltar sport regulation is defined by its hybrid approach: local associations run largely by volunteers with limited budgets coordinate closely with government bodies, such as the Gibraltar Sports and Leisure Authority (GSLA), whilst simultaneously answering to international federations, such as FIFA, UEFA, ICC, and the wider global sporting family. This interconnectedness brings both opportunity and strain, as local governing bodies must constantly balance domestic, largely recreational needs, with their respective international obligations. Despite its small size, Gibraltar has developed a diverse and passionate sporting ecosystem, encompassing football, hockey, basketball, netball, rugby, athletics, esports and many more. Notably, Gibraltar's esports scene has grown quickly, aided by government support and a flexible regulatory

approach, which has helped to transform leisure associations into recognised sporting bodies, with access to dedicated facilities and international competitions. The potential economic benefits, including increased tourism and investment through event-led sports development, are clear drivers of government policy, most recently illustrated during the hosting of the Netball World Youth Cup 2025. However, expanding infrastructure and regulatory oversight has revealed the limits of Gibraltar's resources.

Facility constraints and allocation disputes

Perhaps the most obvious challenge is the allocation of sporting facilities. Land scarcity means all sports – indoors and outdoors – must share limited venues. This results in frequent scheduling conflicts, especially during international events, and has led to public debate about fairness and child safeguarding. The government has asserted that robust frameworks are in place to protect young athletes, but that facility sharing is an unavoidable reality. Still, parents and coaches across different sports have expressed frustration at interruptions during peak training periods. Sporting successes, such as the qualification by Lincoln Red Imps FC to the group stages of the UEFA Conference League football competition, place even greater strain on resources, as the Gibraltar current principal outdoor venue is effectively out-of-bounds to everyone else during the days around the hosting of home fixtures. The situation is exacerbated by the inevitable need to undertake major redevelopment projects, such as the transformation of Victoria Stadium into the new Gibraltar FA National Stadium. Such undertakings, whilst boosting Gibraltar's international profile, can temporarily undermine local access and disrupt commercial interests. A recent dispute involving a bar at the Stadium has recently become a constitutional challenge – even featuring Lord Pannick KC!

Internationalisation: cross-border and treaty implications

Gibraltar sports associations frequently interact with national, provincial and local counterparts in Spain, the UK, and wider Europe. Gibraltar junior basketball players, for example, are this season participating in the neighbouring Cadiz province competition after an absence of 11 years. Many clubs and athletes rely on Spanish facilities, particularly for training, due to the lack of space at home – a situation likely to change, positively or negatively, with the ratification of the new UK-EU-Spain and Gibraltar Agreement currently under final drafting and negotiation. Provisions promoting cross-

border mobility for athletes may unlock new opportunities for collaboration, joint events, and resource sharing. However, regulatory details around competition rules, athlete movement, and sponsorship require clarification. The Treaty's promise of a generational shift in Gibraltar's cross-border relations offers hope for sports development but will likely introduce new regulatory challenges for sports associations and policymakers. Any change in freedom of movement, funding or access could render existing governance structures obsolete overnight, necessitating rapid adaptation.

Governance, financial regulation and club sustainability

One of the most pressing regulatory concerns in Gibraltar sport is financial governance – a sector under increased scrutiny since the Gibraltar Football Association admissions into UEFA and FIFA. The recent sanctioning of Manchester 62 FC, with the unprecedented docking of league points for licensing and wage payment breaches, highlights the stakes. The licensing framework aims to enforce compliance with wage payments, tax declarations, and overall financial sustainability but monitoring remains difficult. These sanctions, whilst potentially damaging in the short term, reflect an emerging commitment to club sustainability and international credibility. FIFA and UEFA require national associations to enforce rules strictly and the Gibraltar FA efforts to strengthen oversight and ensure player welfare are critical steps forward. However, systemic challenges remain: smaller clubs struggle with financial planning, and there is a lack of a dedicated National Dispute Resolution Committee to adjudicate wage issues and contractual disagreements. The government and Gibraltar FA are working to improve these systems, but success will depend upon whether clubs can adapt. Many sports associations are reviewing their constitutions and governance mechanisms, prompted by stricter annual registration procedures and the GSLA renewed focus on Key Performance Indicators and safeguarding. The risk is that overregulation might deter grassroots growth and stretch smaller organisations beyond their means.

Safeguarding, child protection, and inclusion

Safeguarding is an area where Gibraltar sporting associations have invested significantly, developing one of the most robust frameworks in Europe according to government statements. Associations are required to comply with stringent child protection criteria, with failure resulting in denied funding – a mechanism designed to reinforce compliance and accountability. An ongoing challenge, however, is balancing inclusivity and access with security and fairness. The GSLA coordinates safeguards across recurrent spot checks and an independent panel, but questions persist over the practicalities of enforcing these rules across multiple venues and disciplines. Sharing facilities among divergent sports sometimes generates friction, with parents and coaches demanding more dedicated space for priority training. The government's stance points to a need for community-wide compromise, but the underlying tension reflects broader questions about how best to regulate sport in a resource-limited jurisdiction. At the same time, Gibraltar regulatory authorities have spearheaded innovative campaigns promoting

equality and inclusion in sport, extending opportunities to underrepresented groups and encouraging participation from all sectors of society.

Match-fixing, integrity, and professionalisation

Gibraltar also faces the universal threat of match-fixing and sporting integrity breaches. Regulatory education programmes, such as those run by the Gibraltar FA, have targeted both players and staff, aiming to stamp out underground betting and fraudulent behaviour. These efforts are part of wider international collaborations, with the CAS (Court of Arbitration for Sport) jurisprudence helping to guide disciplinary cases but vigilance must be relentless as professionalisation deepens and financial incentives increase.

The esports phenomenon: regulation and future growth

A notable development in the Gibraltar sporting landscape is the rise of esports. Driven by government encouragement and a flexible licensing environment, esports has moved from informal gatherings to an established association with access to world-class facilities at the Europa Sports Complex. Regulatory issues here mirror those in traditional sports: copyright, licensing, data protection and possible overlaps with gambling legislation. The Gambling Act 2005 and the imminent enactment of the Gambling Act 2025, originally crafted for online gaming, now plays a crucial role in shaping esports oversight. If Gibraltar can maintain its balanced approach – supporting innovation whilst ensuring compliance with local and EU data privacy law – it will continue to attract new investment and global recognition. However, as with other disciplines, the rapid pace of change raises questions about whether regulation can keep up with new business models and technologies.

Policy recommendations and future outlook

To ensure sustainable growth and compliance, Gibraltar must continue to evolve its regulatory frameworks. Key recommendations include:

- expanding and upgrading sports facilities to minimise scheduling conflicts and ensure adequate space for all major sports;
- investing in club sustainability, not merely through sanctions but education, support, and financial planning resources;
- establishing a National Dispute Resolution Committee to streamline the adjudication of contractual and safeguarding disputes;
- continued review of association constitutions, governance models, and annual registration procedures, with particular focus on safeguarding and inclusion metrics.
- leveraging cross-border relations to open new avenues for training and collaboration whilst actively monitoring potential regulatory pitfalls.

Above all, Gibraltar must retain its core value of fair play, blending pragmatism with ambition in the face of local challenges and international pressures.

Conclusion: navigating complexity

Regulating sport in Gibraltar reveals the delicate balancing act required in a small jurisdiction with big ambitions. Whilst the government and the local sports bodies have

built a robust foundation – marked by a commitment to safeguarding, international standards, financial oversight and innovative growth areas – resource constraints, facility allocation, and club sustainability continue to challenge the regime. The ongoing evolution of cross-border agreements, rising professionalisation and expansion into new domains, like esports, present further opportunities and hurdles. Gibraltar's sporting community finds itself at a pivotal juncture, where responsive regulation and bold policymaking will define its future. Success will require not just strict adherence to rules but thoughtful engagement with stakeholders, adaptability to emerging trends and a willingness to invest in both infrastructure and people. If these ideals are realised, Gibraltar can become a model of effective sports regulation for micro-jurisdictions worldwide."

Some ongoing challenges, indeed, ahead for Gibraltar!